

## How to Read the Gospel

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The title says Gospel, not Gospels! If we want to understand the story of Jesus so that we can know him better, how do we do that? The gospels can be read lengthwise (separately chronological—our usual method of reading), or they can be read crosswise so that corresponding and parallel sections are identified and compared.

Here are five suggestions for reading the Gospel story. These will provide a checklist to help you pay attention to important details from the very start. Five things to be aware of as you read or hear the story of Jesus: structure, purpose, background, main characters, storyline and climax.

First, look for **clues about the structure of the story**. What is the story about? How is the story presented? How is it developed? How is the story arranged?

The video study helps with a pie chart that organizes the story like a clock. The story begins with a short pre-introduction that tells of the birth and childhood of Jesus. The story continues with the early ministry of Jesus--choosing disciples, attracting followers, identifying opponents. The Gospel story begins with an extended introduction—almost a third of the story is introduction.

The Bible speaks to this structure with Luke's prologue—writing to put everything in certain order, John introducing two worlds in conflict, and Mark with amazing works and words that attract followers and irritate Jewish religious leaders.

Second, ask **why the story was written**, why it is important, what the author hopes for the reader.

The videos note that many in the first century did not have eyes to see or ears to hear. Understanding the Gospel story depends on seeing Jesus' identity as it is revealed in various ways.

The gospel story mentions Luke's desire to provide certainty for faith and John's claim that Jesus is God among us. Matthew is more subtle in mentioning the name Emmanuel (God with us).

Third, pay special attention to the **background and context**. Where, when, why, how? These are important.

The video study helps by noting numerous markers.

The gospel story does it by naturally, but we must pay close attention to the where, when, why and how.

Fourth, people remember a story by **identifying the who, the characters in the book**. The gospel story includes Isaiah, John the Baptist, Jesus, disciples, followers, Jewish leaders, Pharisees, Nicodemus, Judas, and more.

The video study points to the who by focusing on the identity of Jesus, noting the identity stories, and observing that identity stories lead either to follower stories or conflict stories.

The gospel story works with historical references, minute details, and a variety of identity stories—what is done and what is said.

Finally, find the **storyline, events, happenings, and plot**. What is the main point? What climax is anticipated?

The videos focus on details of various events during the early ministry of Jesus. The storyline is still in development throughout the first third of the gospel story.

The gospel story works with subtle plot indicators. There are two intertwining storylines. Some are plotting to kill Jesus. Jesus continually tells his followers that he came to be killed and resurrected.

May we find fresh eyes and ears to understand the story of Jesus!