

THE FOUR GOSPELS

The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—tell us about the life of Jesus. Yet they are not true biographies. They say little about Jesus’ family background and youth, and nothing about His physical appearance. They concentrate almost totally on the three years of Jesus’ ministry, but even here they do not give enough information to reconstruct a complete history of those years. Rather, attention is focused on the Person of Jesus and His teachings, and all four Gospels climax with Jesus’ death and resurrection, and the events associated with them.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the “Synoptic Gospels.” The term “Synoptic” means they view the life of Jesus from a common perspective. After introducing Jesus in different ways depending on their purpose, they record the ministry of John the Baptist, the baptism and temptation of Jesus, His ministries in Galilee and in Judea, His final week in Jerusalem, His death and resurrection. In the Synoptic record Jesus characteristically refers to Himself as the Son of Man, and He proclaims the kingdom of God.

Despite the similarities in the Synoptic accounts, these Gospels vary in what material they include and in the arrangement of specific events. Furthermore, each Gospel was written to emphasize certain aspects of Jesus’ Person and work. Matthew emphasizes that Jesus is the true Messiah and the object of Old Testament prophecy and expectation. Mark’s fast-moving account was written to appeal to Roman Christians, and Luke’s Gospel is addressed to a cultured Gentile and stresses Jesus’ concern for all kinds of people.

The Gospel of John differs from the Synoptics in a number of ways. It tells more about Jesus’ early ministry in Judea. John also records long thematic discourses by Jesus instead of the shorter sayings typical of the Synoptic accounts. In John, Jesus refers to Himself as God’s Son and speaks of salvation as eternal life. More than the Synoptics, John includes theological reflection on the meaning of Jesus’ life and death.

Why Four Gospels?

Gospel	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Audience	Jews	Romans	Hellenists	Greek World
Portrait of Jesus	Jesus is the Messiah/King who fulfills Old Testament prophecy and expectations	Jesus is the authoritative Son of God	Jesus is the perfect Son of Man who came to save and minister to all people through the power of the Holy Spirit and prayer	Jesus is the fully divine Son of God in whom we should believe to receive eternal life (the “I AM” of God)
Key Verses	Matthew 1:1; 16:16; 20:28	Mark 1:1; 8:27; 10:45; 15:34	Luke 19:10	John 20:31
Key Words	Fulfilled	Immediately	Son of Man	Believe; Eternal Life

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

Miracle	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
1. Cleansing a Leper	8:2	1:40	5:12	
2. Healing a Centurion's Servant (of paralysis)	8:5		7:1	
3. Healing Peter's Mother-in-law	8:14	1:30	4:38	
4. Healing the Sick at Evening	8:16	1:32	4:40	
5. Stilling the Storm	8:23	4:35	8:22	
6. Demons Entering a Herd of Swine	8:28	5:1	8:26	
7. Healing a Paralytic	9:2	2:3	5:18	
8. Raising the Ruler's Daughter	9:18, 23	5:22, 35	8:40, 49	
9. Healing the Hemorrhaging Woman	9:20	5:25	8:43	
10. Healing Two Blind Men	9:27			
11. Curing a Demon-Possessed, Mute Man	9:32			
12. Healing a Man's Withered Hand	12:9	3:1	6:6	
13. Curing a Demon-Possessed, Blind and Mute Man	12:22		11:14	
14. Feeding the Five Thousand	14:13	6:30	9:10	6:1
15. Walking on the Sea	14:25	6:48		6:19
16. Healing the Gentile Woman's Daughter	15:21	7:24		
17. Feeding the Four Thousand	15:32	8:1		
18. Healing the Epileptic Boy	17:14	9:17	9:38	
19. Temple Tax in the Fish's Mouth	17:24			
20. Healing Two Blind Men	20:30	10:46	18:35	
21. Withering the Fig Tree	21:18	11:12		
22. Casting Out an Unclean Spirit		1:23	4:33	
23. Healing a Deaf-Mute		7:31		
24. Healing a Blind Man at Bethsaida		8:22		
25. Escape from the Hostile Multitude			4:30	
26. Catch of Fish			5:1	
27. Raising of a Widow's Son at Nain			7:11	
28. Healing the Infirm, Bent Woman			13:11	
29. Healing the Man with Dropsy			14:1	
30. Cleansing the Ten Lepers			17:11	
31. Restoring a Servant's Ear			22:51	
32. Turning Water into Wine				2:1
33. Healing the Nobleman's Son (of fever)				4:46
34. Healing an Infirm Man at Bethesda				5:1
35. Healing the Man Born Blind				9:1
36. Raising of Lazarus				11:43
37. Second Catch of Fish				21:1

The Parables of Jesus Christ

Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke
1. Lamp Under a Basket	5:14-16	4:21, 22	8:16, 17; 11:33-36
2. A Wise Man Builds on Rock and a Foolish Man Builds on Sand	7:24-27		6:47-49
3. Unshrunk (New) Cloth on an Old Garment	9:16	2:21	5:36
4. New Wine in Old Wineskins	9:17	2:22	5:37, 38
5. The Sower	13:3-23	4:2-20	8:4-15
6. The Tares (Weeds)	13:24-30		
7. The Mustard Seed	13:31, 32	4:30-32	13:18, 19
8. The Leaven	13:33		13:20, 21
9. The Hidden Treasure	13:44		
10. The Pearl of Great Price	13:45, 46		
11. The Dragnet	13:47-50		
12. The Lost Sheep	18:12-14		15:3-7
13. The Unforgiving Servant	18:23-35		
14. The Laborers in the Vineyard	20:1-16		
15. The Two Sons	21:28-32		
16. The Wicked Vinedressers	21:33-45	12:1-12	20:9-19
17. The Wedding Feast	22:2-14		
18. The Fig Tree	24:32-44	13:28-32	21:29-33
19. The Wise and Foolish Virgins	25:1-13		
20. The Talents	25:14-30		
21. The Growing Seed		4:26-29	
22. The Absent Householder		13:33-37	
23. The Creditor and Two Debtors			7:41-43
24. The Good Samaritan			10:30-37
25. A Friend in Need			11:5-13
26. The Rich Fool			12:16-21
27. The Watchful Servants			12:35-40
28. The Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant			12:42-48
29. The Barren Fig Tree			13:6-9
30. The Great Supper			14:16-24
31. Building a Tower and a King Making War			14:25-35
32. The Lost Coin			15:8-10
33. The Lost Son			15:11-32
34. The Unjust Steward			16:1-13
35. The Rich Man and Lazarus			16:19-31
36. Unprofitable Servants			17:7-10
37. The Persistent Widow			18:1-8
38. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector			18:9-14
39. The Minas			19:11-27

Harmonizing the Gospels

A precise historical chronology, both internal and external, for the events described in the Gospels is difficult to determine. There is some uncertainty with regard to both the external historical events and the relationships between some events depicted in the Gospels themselves. For this reason, the Harmony of the Gospels presented here, together with the historical dates assigned, should be regarded as approximate.

Such uncertainties should not surprise us, however, for the Gospels do not pretend to be complete biographies of Jesus. The Gospel writers do give some historical markers, but their primary intention is to present the saving Person and work of Jesus Christ. While we may have full confidence in the historical character of the events described, there is much that the Gospels do not tell us (cf. John 21:25).

Traditionally, the life of Jesus was dated from 1 B.C. to A.D. 33. More recently, the birth of Jesus has been reckoned by many scholars c. 5–6 B.C. Suggestions for the date of Jesus' death range from A.D. 27 to A.D. 33, with the Passover period of A.D. 30 being perhaps the most probable.

The birth of Jesus probably took place a year or two prior to the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C. (cf. Matt. 2:1–23). There is considerable uncertainty regarding the census under Quirinius (Luke 2:2), usually dated c. A.D. 7. Some have suggested that Quirinius may have governed Syria twice, or that the census which took place at the time of Jesus' birth was the initial registration stage of a census completed during the time of Quirinius.

Luke 3:1 dates the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry to the "fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar," a date of some uncertainty (either A.D. 26 or 29, depending on the system of reckoning). According to Luke 3:23, Jesus began His ministry when He was "about thirty years of age." While the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' ministry could take as little as a year, the record in John of Jesus' Passover visits to Jerusalem indicates a ministry length of about three years (though some argue for a two-year period of ministry). Thus, if Jesus' ministry began in A.D. 27, a three-year ministry yields a date for the crucifixion and resurrection in A.D. 30.

The Herodian Dynasty

Herod was the family name of several Roman rulers who served as provincial governors of Palestine and surrounding regions during New Testament times.

The first Herod, known as Herod the Great, was the Roman ruler of Palestine during the days of the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus when Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1; Luke 3:1). All the other different Herods mentioned in the New Testament were the sons or grandsons of this Herod.

Herod the Great (ruled 37–4 B.C.), was known as a master builder, organizer, and developer, although his policies were considered cruel and ruthless by the Jewish people. His most notable achievement was the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem—a project that required almost fifty years. He also rebuilt and enlarged the city of Caesarea into a port city on the Mediterranean Sea. Caesarea served as the Roman provincial capital for Palestine during the New Testament era. The magnificent aqueducts that he built at this city are still visible today.

Herod's son Antipas succeeded him as Roman governor of Galilee and Perea (Matt. 14:1). Antipas was responsible for the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist (Luke 3:19, 20; Matt. 14:1–12).

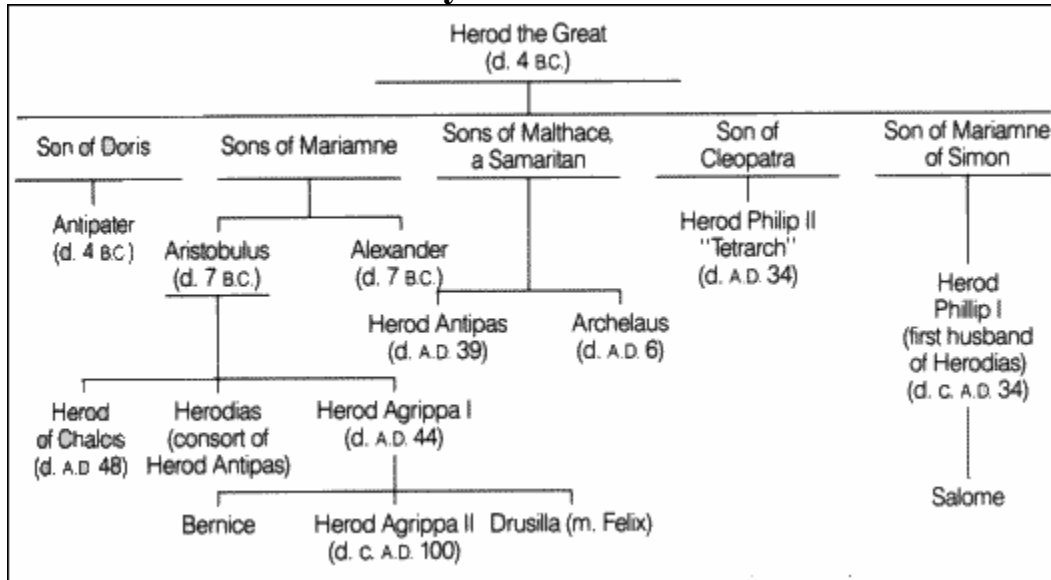
Herod the Great's grandson Agrippa was named ruler over all of Palestine by the Roman emperor Caligula. Agrippa is known as a persecutor of early Christians. He had James put to death and had Peter arrested. Because of his cruelty and blasphemy, Agrippa was slain by an angel of the Lord (Acts 12).

In A.D. 50, Agrippa's son, known as Agrippa II, was made ruler of the king of Chalcis's territory. Later he was given Abilene, Trachonitis, Acra, and important parts of Galilee and Perea. The only reference to this Herod in the New Testament occurs in Acts 25:13–26:32, which deals with Paul's

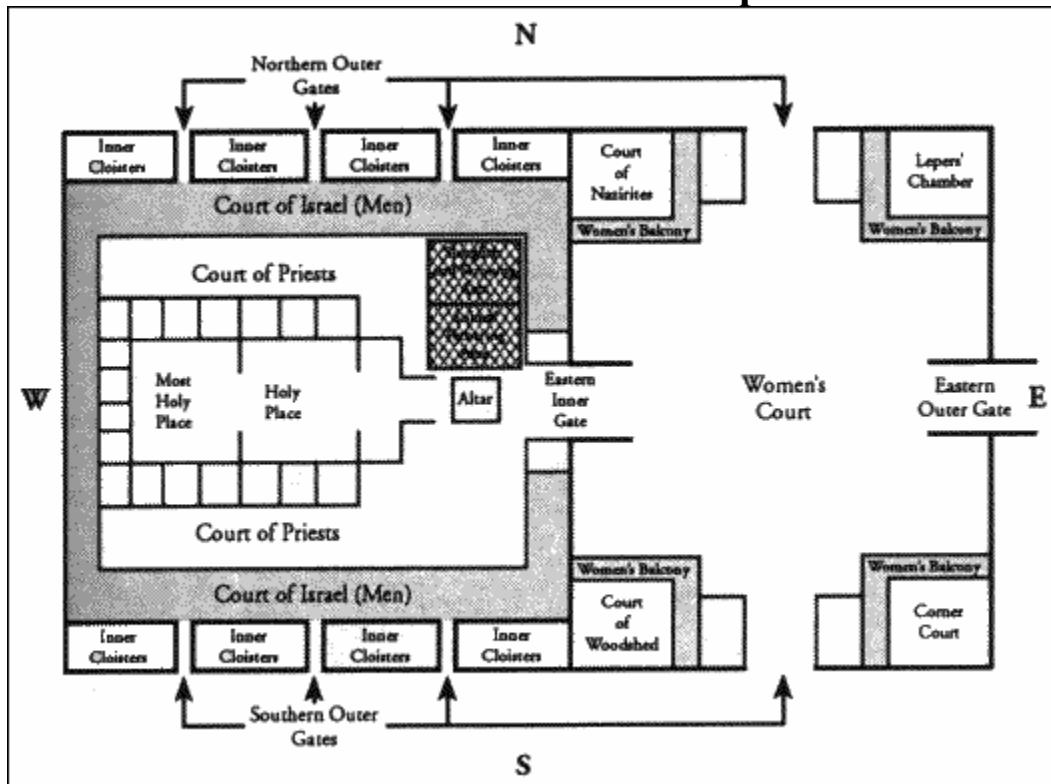
imprisonment in Caesarea. Agrippa listened to Paul's defense, but the apostle appealed to Rome. Agrippa had no power to set him free.

The other two Herods mentioned in the New Testament are Herod Archelaus (Matt. 2:22) and Herod Philip (Luke 3:1). Both of these rulers were sons of Herod the Great; they ruled parts of the territory previously administered by their father.

Family Tree of Herod



The Plan of Herod's Temple



New Testament Political Rulers

Roman Emperor	Rulers of Palestine		
	Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.)		
	Judea	Galilee and Perea	Other Provinces
Augustus Caesar (31 B.C.–A.D. 14)	Archelaus (4 B.C.–A.D. 6)	Herod Antipas (4 B.C.–A.D. 39)	Herod Philip II (4 B.C.–A.D. 34)
Tiberius Caesar (A.D. 14–37)	Coponius (A.D. 6–8)		
Caligula (A.D. 37–41)	Ambivius (A.D. 9–12)		
	Annius Rufus (A.D. 12–15)		
	Valerius Gratus (A.D. 15–26)		
	Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26–36)		
	Marcellus (A.D. 37)		
Claudius (A.D. 41–54)	Herod Agrippa I (A.D. 37–44)		
	Cuspius Fadus (A.D. 44–46)		
	Tiberius Alexander (A.D. 46–48)		
	Ventidius Cumanus (A.D. 48–52)		
	M. Antonius Felix (A.D. 52–60)		
Nero (A.D. 54–68)	Porcius Festus (A.D. 60–62)		
	Clodius Albinus (A.D. 62–64)		
Galbo, Otho, Vitellius (A.D. 68–69)	Gessius Florus (A.D. 64–66)		
	Herod Agrippa II (Began to rule in A.D. 34 in other provinces and in A.D. 39 in Galilee and Perea.)		
	Jewish Revolt (A.D. 66–70)		
Vespasian (A.D. 69–79)			
Titus (A.D. 79–81)			
Domitian (A.D. 81–96)			

¹*Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts : Old and New Testaments.* electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996.

MARK

Mark, the shortest of the four Gospels, tells us more about the actions than the teachings of Jesus. Most of the events recorded also appear in Matthew and Luke, but Mark narrates them with greater detail and vividness. His direct, fast-moving style carries the reader swiftly to the central event of the gospel—Jesus' death and resurrection.

Author

Mark's Gospel, like the other Gospels, is technically anonymous in that the author does not identify himself. However, the clear testimony of the early church fathers is that this book was written by John Mark, whose family figured prominently in the early Jerusalem church (Acts 12:12). Mark was a companion of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:13). Although Paul refused to take Mark on his second journey (Acts 15:37, 38), Mark was later reconciled to Paul (Col. 4:10) and associated with Peter (1 Pet. 5:13).

Date

Many scholars believe that Mark was the first of the four Gospels, but there is uncertainty over its date. Because of the prophecy about the destruction of the temple (13:2), it should be dated before A.D. 70, but early traditions disagree as to whether it was written before or after the martyrdom of Peter (c. A.D. 64). The probable range for this book is A.D. 55–68.

Mark was evidently directed to a Roman readership, and early tradition indicates that it originated in Rome. That may be why Mark omitted a number of items that would not have been meaningful to Gentiles, such as the genealogy of Christ, fulfilled prophecy, references to the Law, and certain Jewish customs found in the other Gospels. Mark also interprets Aramaic words (3:17; 5:41; 7:34; 15:22) and used a number of Latin terms in place of their Greek equivalents (4:21; 6:27, 42; 15:15, 16, 39).

Themes and Literary Structure

Mark structures his Gospel around various geographical movements of Jesus, which are climaxed by His death and subsequent resurrection. After the introduction, Mark narrates the public ministry of Jesus in Galilee (1:14–8:30), on the way to Judea (8:31–10:52), and in Jerusalem (11:1–13:37), culminating in the passion (14:1–15:47) and the resurrection (ch. 16).

The shortest and simplest of the four Gospels, Mark gives a vivid and fast-moving account of the ministry of Christ. The distinctive word of this book is the Greek term *euthus*, translated “immediately” or “straightway,” and it appears more often in this brief Gospel than in the rest of the New Testament books combined. Christ is constantly moving toward a goal that is hidden to almost all.

Mark highlights the power and authority of Jesus, the eternal Son of God, as a teacher (1:22), and over Satan and unclean spirits (1:27; 3:19–30), sin (2:1–12), the Sabbath (2:27, 28; 3:1–6), nature (4:35–41; 6:45–52), disease (5:21–34), death (5:35–43), legalistic tradition (7:1–13, 14–20), and the temple (11:15–18).

Almost forty percent of this Gospel is devoted to a detailed account of the last eight days of Jesus' life, climaxing in His resurrection. In many ways, Mark emphasizes the passion and resurrection as the gauge by which the whole of Jesus' ministry may be measured.

Mark at a Glance

FOCUS	TO SERVE			TO SACRIFICE	
REFERENCE	1:1 _____	2:13 _____	8:27 _____	11:1 _____	16:1 — 16:20
DIVISION	PRESENTATION OF THE SERVANT	OPPOSITION TO THE SERVANT	INSTRUCTION BY THE SERVANT	REJECTION OF THE SERVANT	RESURRECTION OF THE SERVANT
TOPIC	SAYINGS AND SIGNS			SUFFERINGS	
	c. 3 YEARS		c. 6 MONTHS	8 DAY	
LOCATION	GALILEE AND PEREA			JUDEA AND JERUSALEM	
TIME	c. A.D. 29–33				

The “Messianic Secret” in Mark

On several occasions in the Gospel of Mark Jesus tells someone not to tell, either who He is or what they have seen that would demonstrate who He is. This is called the Messianic Secret. Why did Jesus want to keep His identity as the Messiah a secret?

- To avoid being considered just a “miracle worker.” Note that many of these commands follow miracles. Jesus did not want people to follow Him just to see Him do tricks. He came as the Son of God to bring salvation and forgiveness from sin, not just physical healing and miracles.
- To avoid undue publicity which would hinder His mobility and ministry to His disciples. Note the result of the leper’s disobedience in 1:45.
- To avoid the mistaken notion of the type of Messiah He came to be. He came to suffer and serve and sacrifice Himself, not simply to display His power (cf. 10:45).
- To avoid the premature death that increased popularity could bring.

Following His transfiguration, which displayed His glory to the disciples, Jesus tells them not to speak of this event “till the Son of Man had risen from the dead” (9:9). Following His resurrection and vindication, the identity of Messiah and the character of His mission is properly understood in its full scope. After the resurrection, all believers are sent into the world “to tell” (cf. Matt. 28:7, 8, 18–20; Mark 16:7; Luke 24:9, 44–47).

OUTLINE OF MARK

Part One: The Presentation of the Servant (1:1–2:12)

- I. The Forerunner of the Servant 1:1–8
- II. The Baptism of the Servant 1:9–11
- III. The Temptation of the Servant 1:12, 13
- IV. The Mission of the Servant 1:14–2:12
 - A. The Work of the Servant 1:14, 15
 - B. The First Disciples Are Called 1:16–20
 - C. The First Miracles Are Performed 1:21–2:12

Part Two: The Opposition to the Servant (2:13–8:26)

- I. The Initial Opposition to the Servant 2:13–3:35

- A. Controversy over Jesus' Friendship with Sinners 2:13–22
- B. Controversy over Sabbath-Work 2:23–28
- C. Controversy over Sabbath-Healing 3:1–5
- D. Pharisees Counsel to Destroy Jesus 3:6–12
- E. Selection of the Twelve 3:13–19
- F. Opposition of His Friends 3:20, 21
- G. Scribes Commit the Unpardonable Sin 3:22–30
- H. New Relationships Are Defined 3:31–35
- II. The Parables of the Servant 4:1–34**
 - A. Parable of the Soils 4:1–20
 - B. Parable of the Lamp 4:21–25
 - C. Parable of the Growing Seed 4:26–29
 - D. Parable of the Mustard Seed 4:30–34
- III. The Miracles of the Servant 4:35–5:43**
 - A. The Sea Is Stilled 4:35–41
 - B. Demons Are Cast into Swine 5:1–20
 - C. Jairus Pleads for His Daughter 5:21–24
 - D. A Woman with Issue Is Healed 5:25–34
 - E. Jairus's Daughter Is Healed 5:35–43
- IV. The Growing Opposition to the Servant 6:1–8:26**
 - A. Jesus Is Rejected at Nazareth 6:1–6
 - B. Twelve Are Sent to Serve 6:7–13
 - C. John the Baptist Is Murdered 6:14–29
 - D. Twelve Return 6:30, 31
 - E. Five Thousand Are Fed 6:32–44
 - F. Jesus Walks on Water 6:45–52
 - G. Jesus Heals at Gennesaret 6:53–56
 - H. Pharisees and Defilement 7:1–23
 - I. Withdrawal to the Gentiles 7:24–8:9
 - J. Pharisees Seek a Sign 8:10–13
 - K. Disciples Do Not Understand 8:14–21
 - L. A Blind Man Is Healed 8:22–26

Part Three: The Instruction by the Servant (8:27–10:52)

- I. Peter's Confession of Christ 8:27–33**
- II. Cost of Discipleship 8:34–38**
- III. The Transfiguration 9:1–13**
- IV. Demon-Possessed Son Is Delivered 9:14–29**
- V. Jesus Foretells His Death 9:30–32**
- VI. Jesus Teaches to Prepare the Disciples 9:33–10:45**
 - A. Attitude of Servanthood 9:33–41
 - B. Warning About Hell 9:42–50
 - C. Marriage and Divorce 10:1–12
 - D. Children and the Kingdom 10:13–16
 - E. Wealth 10:17–31
 - F. Coming Crucifixion 10:32–34
 - G. "Whoever Desires to Become Great" 10:35–45
- VII. Blind Bartimaeus Is Healed 10:46–52**

Part Four: The Rejection of the Servant (11:1–15:47)

- I. The Formal Presentation of the Servant 11:1–19**
 - A. The Triumphal Entry 11:1–11
 - B. A Fig Tree Is Cursed 11:12–14
 - C. The Temple Is Cleansed 11:15–19
- II. The Instruction on Prayer 11:20–26**
 - A. Power of Faith 11:20–24
 - B. Necessity of Forgiveness 11:25, 26
- III. The Opposition by the Leaders 11:27–12:44**
 - A. Question of Authority 11:27–33
 - B. Parable of the Vineyard Owner 12:1–12
 - C. Question of Taxes 12:13–17
 - D. Question of the Resurrection 12:18–27
 - E. Question of the Greatest Commandment 12:28–34
 - F. Jesus Questions the Leaders 12:35–37
 - G. Jesus Condemns the Leaders 12:38–44
- IV. The Instruction on the Future 13:1–37**
 - A. Questions from the Disciples 13:1–4
 - B. The Tribulation 13:5–23
 - C. The Second Coming 13:24–27
 - D. Parable of the Fig Tree 13:28–31
 - E. Exhortation to Watch 13:32–37
- V. The Passion of the Servant 14:1–15:47**
 - A. Leaders Plot to Kill Jesus 14:1, 2
 - B. Mary Anoints Jesus 14:3–9
 - C. Judas Plans to Betray Jesus 14:10, 11
 - D. The Passover Is Prepared 14:12–16
 - E. The Passover Is Celebrated 14:17–21
 - F. The Lord’s Supper Is Instituted 14:22–25
 - G. Jesus Predicts Peter’s Denial 14:26–31
 - H. Jesus Prays in Gethsemane 14:32–42
 - I. Judas Betrays Jesus 14:43–52
 - J. Jesus Is Tried 14:53–15:14
 - K. Jesus Is Beaten 15:15–23
 - L. Jesus Is Crucified 15:24–41
 - M. Jesus Is Buried 15:42–47

Part Five: The Resurrection of the Servant (16:1–20)

- I. The Resurrection of Jesus 16:1–8**
- II. The Appearances of Jesus 16:9–18**
- II. The Ascension of Jesus 16:19, 20**

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²Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts : Old and New Testaments. electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996.