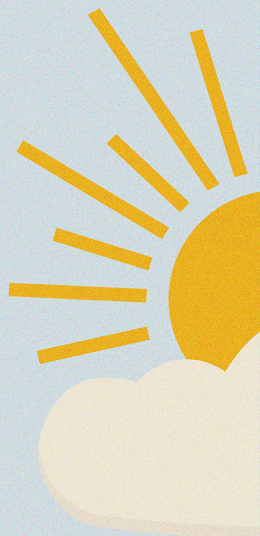
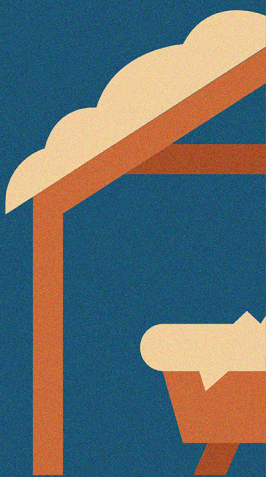


A JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

# FOUR GOSPELS EXPLAINED



SHEPHERDCHURCH



# Lesson 12: The Four Gospels Explained

## Welcome

**Using 7 words or less, write a sentence that tells people about God's love.**

Hopefully, your Life Group members will already have this done by the time they show up for your Life Group, but if not, give a few minutes for people to write something or review/revise what they have written. Below are some examples of what they could write (share if needed to inspire your Life Group members of what to write):

- God's love never fails or gives up.
- His love reaches deeper than our sin.
- Nothing can separate us from His love.
- God's love restores what's been broken.
- His love pursues even the lost soul.
- God's love is stronger than our fears.
- His love remains constant through everything.

## Worship

**This week, let's center our hearts around the person and work of Jesus through the worship song "King of Kings" by Hillsong Worship. You can find it on YouTube, Spotify, or any music platform. As you listen, reflect on how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus changed your life—and the whole world. After the song, spend a few minutes in group prayer, thanking Jesus for who He is and asking Him to help you see Him more clearly through the Gospels.**

Budget about 10 minutes for this section of your Life Group time.

*There are 10 questions/prompts in the WORD section. Your Life Group doesn't have to cover every question below. Life Group Leaders may select the ones that best fit your group. You can also use the remaining questions as personal reflection throughout the week.*

## Word

**Please watch the video lesson before your Life Group meets.**

**The word, *gospel*, means "Good News" (the good news about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus). The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are ancient, Spirit-inspired biographies that tell the story of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. Each Gospel is written by a different author, offering a unique perspective for a specific audience.**

# Lesson 12: The Four Gospels Explained

**Matthew, a Jewish tax collector turned disciple, wrote to a Jewish audience to show that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah who fulfills Old Testament prophecy (likely written in the 50's-60's A.D.). Mark, believed to be a companion of Peter, wrote his Gospel with Roman readers in mind, emphasizing Jesus as the suffering servant who came to act and to save (many scholars believe Mark could be recording Peter's exact words). Luke, a Gentile physician and student of Paul, wrote for a Gentile audience, portraying Jesus as the perfect Son of Man and Savior for all people. Later, he wrote the Book of Acts. Finally, John, the beloved disciple, wrote much later (likely in the early 90s AD, before he wrote Revelation), focusing on Jesus' divine identity and inviting readers to believe in Him for eternal life.**

**The first three—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are called the Synoptic Gospels (from the Greek synopsis, meaning "seen together") because they share a similar structure, content, and sequence of events. They include many of the same stories and sayings of Jesus, though often with slightly different details or emphases (e.g., all 3 contain The Parable of the Sower). John's Gospel, however, is quite distinct. It contains more theological reflection, longer discourses, and unique material not found in the Synoptics—such as the "I Am" statements and extended conversations like Jesus with Nicodemus or the Samaritan woman. Together, all four Gospels offer a full and beautifully multifaceted portrait of Jesus—fully God, fully man, the promised Savior and risen Lord.**

**1. In the video lesson, Shawn Walden mentioned how each Gospel paints a different "portrait" of Jesus. Which portrait of Jesus most resonates with you right now & why?**

Shawn explains how each Gospel paints a unique portrait of Jesus, like four different artists capturing the same person from different angles.

- Matthew shows Jesus as the promised Messiah and King of the Jews, the fulfillment of prophecy, and the rightful heir to David's throne.
- Mark portrays Jesus as the Servant of the Lord, emphasizing His actions and compassion more than His words.
- Luke presents Jesus as the perfect Son of Man, the Savior who seeks and saves the lost.
- John reveals Jesus as the eternal Son of God, focusing on His divine nature and His identity as the Word made flesh.

Each Gospel adds depth to our understanding of who Jesus is, and together they form a complete and unified picture of His mission and character. Ask Life Group members to share which portrait they resonate with the most. Share that it doesn't matter why they resonate with that portrait (they could resonate with one portrait in this current season more than they did another season).

# Lesson 12: The Four Gospels Explained

## **2. Take a moment to examine how each of the four Gospels begins. What stands out about their differences, and what might each introduction tell us about the author's purpose or audience?**

Here are some examples of how your Life Group members might answer this question/prompt. Feel free to share these as examples if needed, but let your Life Group come up with their own answers:

- Matthew kicks things off with Jesus' family tree to show that He's the Messiah the Jews were waiting for. Mark dives right into the action (with no backstory), which fits the immediate audience (the Romans). Luke sounds like a careful historian writing to help someone understand the facts. John starts way back (John 1:1, "In the beginning") to show Jesus has always been God. Each author's introduction aligns with their intended audience.
- Matthew starts with Jewish history, Mark jumps right into Jesus' ministry, Luke writes like an investigator, and John opens with deep theology. It's like each one has a different goal: Matthew is proving Jesus is the Messiah, Mark's showing His power, Luke's explaining things clearly, and John's helping us see who Jesus really is.
- Matthew's genealogy connects Jesus to Abraham and David, which is something Jewish readers would really care about. Mark skips all that and jumps into John the Baptist's story, which feels fast-paced and exciting for Roman readers. Luke's opening feels polished, like a historian writing for educated people. And John—his beginning sounds almost poetic, showing that Jesus is God Himself.
- Only Matthew and Luke talk about Jesus' birth, but even they tell it differently. Matthew tells it from Joseph's side, and Luke tells it from Mary's. This makes sense because Matthew's focus was on Jewish tradition, while Luke is showing how God works through ordinary people, including women, outsiders, and Gentiles.
- What jumps out is the tone: Matthew feels serious and rooted in history, Mark is quick and full of energy, Luke is calm and thoughtful, and John is deep and spiritual. It's like four different people describing the same story from totally unique angles.
- You can really see their different purposes right from the start: Matthew wants us to see Jesus as the King. Mark shows Him as a servant who gets things done. Luke presents Him as fully human and caring. John shows He's God Himself. Each intro sets the tone for what's coming.
- Luke says he "carefully investigated everything." That shows he's done his homework. And then John's "In the beginning was the Word" can easily give us the chills because Jesus wasn't just born—He always existed.

# Lesson 12: The Four Gospels Explained

## 3. In **Mark 4:35-41**, Jesus calms the storm, but first asks, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” How do fear and faith compete in your life?

In Mark 4:35-41, Jesus and His disciples are crossing the Sea of Galilee when a sudden storm erupts, threatening to sink their boat. The Sea of Galilee is known for its unpredictable weather patterns, due to its low elevation and surrounding hills, which can trigger violent windstorms without warning. As the waves crash over the sides, seasoned fishermen panic, believing they are about to drown, while Jesus sleeps calmly on a cushion. When they wake Him, terrified, He rebukes the wind and the waves with the words “Quiet! Be still!”

- This is translated from the Greek **σιῶπα** (siōpa) and **φिमώ** (phimōō), meaning “be silent” and “be muzzled.” These are the exact words Jesus often uses when casting out demons, suggesting His authority extends over both the natural and spiritual realms.

The disciples’ fear is met with Jesus’ penetrating question: “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

- The Greek word used for “afraid” is **δειλός** (deilos), which carries the idea of cowardice or timidity rather than healthy caution.
- Jesus contrasts this fearful reaction with **πίστις** (pistis), the Greek term for “faith,” which implies trust, confidence, and loyalty.

In essence, He is challenging them to consider why their trust in Him vanished so quickly in the face of danger. Their fear wasn’t just about the storm—it revealed their misunderstanding of who Jesus truly was. They had seen His miracles, but they still viewed Him as a great teacher or prophet, not as the Creator who commands the wind and waves.

*Fear and faith cannot occupy the same place, so they often compete for the same space in the human heart.*

Well-known mystery author Agatha Christie has the perfect definition for fear: “Incomplete knowledge.” We’re naturally afraid when we don’t know what’s going on or feel threatened. The antidote to fear is faith, because we can lean into our relationship with God, who knows everything and holds all power. In this sense, the disciples’ fear silenced their faith, but Jesus’ authority over nature was meant to awaken it. His command over creation mirrors the power of Yahweh in the Old Testament, which proves the same God who parted the Red Sea and calmed the chaos at creation.

In today’s world, storms look different but feel just as threatening. Financial pressure, health crises, or cultural turmoil can stir the same sense of helplessness the disciples felt.

*When fear dominates, it drowns out faith.  
When faith is active, it reframes fear  
through trust in God’s sovereignty.*

The story of Jesus calming the storm reminds believers that peace is not found in the absence of chaos but in resting within the presence of Christ (aka, faith).

# Lesson 12: The Four Gospels Explained

## 4. What do **Luke 5:31-32** & **19:10** reveal about Jesus' heart for the lost?

In Luke 5:31-32, Jesus responds to the religious leaders who criticized Him for eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus responds by saying, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." This statement captures the heart of His mission. The Pharisees (the Jewish religious leaders of the day) often separated themselves from those considered "unclean" or morally corrupt. Tax collectors, in particular, were despised for collaborating with the Roman Empire and often exploiting their own people. Instead of merely associating with them, Jesus also shared meals with them (an act in Jewish culture that symbolized acceptance and fellowship). His words revealed that He saw humanity's sin problem not as something to condemn from a distance, but as a sickness requiring divine healing (Matthew 9:13).

The language Jesus uses is deeply compassionate:

- The Greek word for "repentance" is **μετάνοια** (metanoia), which literally means "a change of mind" or "a turning around." It's not merely feeling sorry, but completely reorienting one's life toward God.

In this passage, Jesus positions Himself as a physician who seeks out those who are spiritually sick and offers transformation rather than rejection. His mission stands in stark contrast to the Pharisees' attitude, which viewed righteousness as separation from sinners. Jesus redefines righteousness as mercy in action: *going to where brokenness is found and extending grace*.

In Luke 19:10, Jesus reinforces this same truth when He declares, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

- The word "seek" comes from the Greek **ζητέω** (zēteō), meaning to actively pursue or search with intention. It implies effort, compassion, and determination.
- The "lost," **ἀπολωλός** (apolōlos), refers not just to those wandering physically, but to those spiritually disconnected from God.

This statement comes at the end of His encounter with Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector who climbed a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus (Luke 19:1-10). After meeting Jesus, Zacchaeus' heart is changed, leading him to repentance and restitution. Jesus' declaration in this moment isn't a side comment—it's a summary of His entire earthly purpose.

In a world that often divides people into categories of "worthy" & "unworthy," Jesus' approach remains countercultural. Jesus never waits for people to clean up their lives before approaching them. He always meets them in their mess and calls them to change through grace. Jesus' example challenges us to move toward those society overlooks or condemns. Whether it's someone battling addiction, shame, or isolation, Jesus' heart still beats for the broken, and as Christians, we're called to reflect that same heart by seeking & loving those who need Him most.

# Lesson 12: The Four Gospels Explained

## 5. After reading *John 1:1-5* and *John 20:30-31*, what stands out to you about how John opens and closes his Gospel?

John begins his Gospel with a deep theological statement: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Greek term for "Word" is **λόγος** (logos), which in both Jewish & Greek thought carried deep meaning. Here's how the Greek word, logos, developed from around 470 BC until the end of the first century when John wrote his gospel:

- Around the late 400s BC, Socrates and Plato used "logos" to mean the thoughts, reason, truths, and opinions from the gods that flowed down to humanity.
- The Stoics, led by Zeno around 300 B.C., viewed "logos" not just as divine reason but as a divine force: what the gods willed or spoke took actual physical form in the world.
- Certain Greek cults took it a step further, connecting "logos" to communication with the gods. In other words, when a god spoke to humans, "logos" meant revelation, but when humans talked to a god, "logos" meant prayer.
- Sometime between 30 and 50 A.D., Philo, a Jewish theologian influenced by Greek philosophy, blended the two ideas. He described "logos" as a bridge between God and the physical world. This bridge was a divine mediator, a force that moved between heaven & earth.

For the Greeks, "logos" meant the filtered thoughts of a god expressed through human philosophy. For the Jewish people, it was God's spoken word made real in the world. John combines both views—Logos is the wisdom and power of God made flesh in Jesus Christ.

By echoing the opening words of Genesis, John presents Jesus as eternal, divine, and active in creation: "Through him all things were made." The following verses, describing Him as the source of life and light, **φῶς** (phōs), portray Jesus as the One who brings truth and restoration to a dark, fallen world.

- The Greek word for "life" is **ζωή** (zōē). While there are specific Greek words for biological and psychological life, zōē refers to the wholeness of life (a combination of its psychological, emotional, biological, and spiritual aspects).

In contrast to the other 3 gospels (which all begin with Jesus' earthly birth or ministry), John starts before time itself. He declares that Jesus is not simply a messenger from God but God Himself. John writes, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

- The Greek word for "overcome" is **καταλαμβάνω** (katalambanō), which can mean "to grasp," "to understand," or "to overpower."

This suggests that darkness (symbolic of evil, ignorance, and sin) cannot extinguish God's light. John wants us to understand that Jesus' coming into the world is God's unstoppable act of redemption. Even in our dark world, His light continues to shine.

In John 20:30-31, the purpose of the entire book is revealed: "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

- The Greek word for "believe" is **πιστεύω** (pisteuō), meaning "to trust, rely on, or place confidence in." This word appears nearly 100 times in John's Gospel, showing that faith is not mere intellectual agreement—it's an active trust that leads to eternal life.

# Lesson 12: The Four Gospels Explained

John's closing verses connect back to his opening statement: the eternal logos who gives life now invites all people to receive that same life through faith.

Together, the opening and closing of John's Gospel form a perfect circle. The story begins with Jesus as the eternal Word who gives life, and it ends with an invitation to experience that life through believing in Him. In today's world, filled with spiritual confusion and competing "truths," John's message is still clear: Jesus is not just another teacher or prophet—He is the source of all life, light, and truth. His Gospel opens the reader's eyes to who Jesus truly is, and closes by calling every heart to respond with faith that transforms both the present and eternity.

## **6. John 1:14, 17 say that Jesus came full of grace and truth. How did Jesus model living in the tension between grace (being compassionate and loving) and truth (telling people what God says)? What would it look like for us to do the same in today's culture?**

In John 1:14 and 1:17, the apostle describes Jesus as the Word who became flesh, "full of grace and truth."

- The Greek words **χάρις** (charis) & **ἀλήθεια** (alētheia) carry deep meaning. Charis refers to unearned favor, kindness, & compassion, while alētheia means truth, reality, or what is genuine.

While first-century Judea was marked by hypocrisy, legalism, and judgmental religion, Jesus embodied both the mercy of God and the message of God. He didn't compromise truth to show love, nor did He withhold love to proclaim truth. For example, when He met the woman caught in adultery (John 8:2-11), He showed *charis* by refusing to condemn her, yet *alētheia* by saying, "Go now and leave your life of sin." Throughout His ministry, Jesus consistently modeled what living out grace and truth looked like:

- He ate with sinners, touched lepers, and treated outcasts with dignity.
- He confronted hypocrisy, corrected false beliefs, and called people to repentance.

The Pharisees emphasized rules without relationship, while many sinners sought relationship without accountability. Jesus brought both together. Living out both grace and truth wasn't a problem for Jesus to solve but a posture He perfectly maintained. However, while Jesus lived out a perfect balance of grace and truth, we humans experience a tension between trying to live out both. For us, living out grace and truth is a tension to be managed, not a problem to be solved.

Living out grace and truth means reflecting Jesus' heart in a culture that often swings to extremes (either rejecting truth in the name of love or rejecting love in the name of truth). Christians are called to hold both with humility. In conversations about morality, identity, or justice, grace without truth can lead to empty tolerance, while truth without grace can lead to cruelty. The example of Jesus calls believers to speak truth gently, listen compassionately, and act mercifully. To live "full of grace and truth" is to love people as they are, while pointing them to what God created them to be—a balance that continues to shine light in a world still wrestling with darkness.



# Lesson 12: The Four Gospels Explained

## 7. According to **Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35**, why did Jesus speak in parables and what is their purpose? Which parable is your favorite?

Jesus often taught in parables. It might be important to define what a parable is:

- A parable is a simple, relatable story with spiritual meaning. Parables had the following elements:
- Fictitious story
- Exaggerated elements in the story
- Aspects of the story usually shocked people
- The audience is often woven into the story
- God is always a character in the story (whether up front or in the background)
- Found in the first three gospels (though John has allegories/metaphors)
- Reveals the hearts of those who embrace truth and those who resist truth

In Matthew 13:10-17 (also recorded in Mark 4:10-12; Luke 8:9-10), the disciples ask Jesus why He teaches in parables, and His answer reveals both compassion and discernment. He explains that the ability to understand “the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” has been given to some but not to others.

- The Greek word for “secrets” is **μυστήρια** (mystēria), meaning divine truths once hidden but now revealed by God.

Those with open hearts would understand the deeper truth of parables, while those hardened by unbelief would only hear a story. Quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, Jesus taught that many people had dulled their spiritual senses (they saw but did not perceive, and heard but did not understand).

Matthew 13:34-35 adds that Jesus spoke to the crowds only in parables to fulfill prophecy, showing that this method was part of God’s plan. Matthew quotes Psalm 78:2, which speaks of revealing “things hidden since the creation of the world.”

- The Greek verb **ἀποκαλύπτω** (apokalyptō), meaning “to uncover” or “to reveal,” captures the purpose of Jesus’ teaching—to unveil eternal truths in everyday language.

Parables invited listeners to engage their hearts, not just their minds, turning familiar images such as seeds, soil, and treasure into windows into the kingdom of God. Even today, people are flooded with information yet starving for wisdom, parables still serve the same purpose: they draw people in, challenge assumptions, and help spiritual truth take root in ordinary life for those willing to listen with faith.

Ask your Life Group members about their favorite parable (or a parable that speaks to them) and why. Below is a list of most (if not all) the parables in the gospels:

- The Lamp under a Basket – Matthew 5:14-16; 4:21-25; 8:16-18
- The Wise and Foolish Builders – Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49
- The New Cloth on an Old Garment – Matthew 9:16
- The New Wine in Old Wineskins – Matthew 9:17
- The Sower – Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; Mark 4:3-9, 13-20; Luke 8:4-15
- The Weeds and Wheat – Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
- The Mustard Seed – Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19

# Lesson 12: The Four Gospels Explained

The Yeast – Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21  
The Hidden Treasure – Matthew 13:44  
The Pearl of Great Price – Matthew 13:45-46  
The Net – Matthew 13:47-50  
The Owner of a House – Matthew 13:52  
The Unforgiving Servant – Matthew 18:23-35  
The Workers in the Vineyard – Matthew 20:1-16  
The Two Sons – Matthew 21:28-32  
The Wicked Tenants – Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19  
The Wedding Banquet – Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24  
The Fig Tree – Matthew 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-31; Luke 21:29-33  
The Faithful and Unfaithful Servants – Matthew 24:45-51; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 12:42-48  
The Ten Virgins – Matthew 25:1-13  
The Talents – Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27  
The Sheep and the Goats – Matthew 25:31-46  
The Sower – Mark 4:3-9, 13-20  
The Growing Seed – Mark 4:26-29  
The Barren Fig Tree – Mark 11:12-14, 20-25; Luke 13:6-9  
The Two Debtors – Luke 7:41-43  
The Rich Fool – Luke 12:16-21  
The Watchful Servants – Luke 12:35-40  
The Tower Builder – Luke 14:28-30  
The Warring King – Luke 14:31-33  
The Lost Sheep – Luke 15:3-7; Matthew 18:12-14  
The Lost Coin – Luke 15:8-10  
The Prodigal Son – Luke 15:11-32  
The Shrewd Manager – Luke 16:1-9  
The Rich Man and Lazarus – Luke 16:19-31  
The Unworthy Servants – Luke 17:7-10  
The Persistent Widow – Luke 18:1-8  
The Pharisee and the Tax Collector – Luke 18:9-14

**8. Read [Mark 8:31](#); [9:31](#); [10:33-34](#). Jesus predicted His death multiple times. What does this teach us about the intentionality of the cross? Why is it important to believe that Jesus' death was not an accident?**

In Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33-34, Jesus repeatedly predicts His suffering, death, and resurrection, showing that the cross was not a tragic accident but the centerpiece of God's plan. Each time, the prediction grows more specific.

- In Mark 8:31, He teaches that "the Son of Man must suffer many things," using the Greek word **δεῖ** (dei), meaning "it is necessary" or "it must happen." This word conveys that Jesus' death was not optional or unforeseen but required for God's redemptive purpose.

# Lesson 12: The Four Gospels Explained

While people in the first century viewed crucifixion as shameful and reserved for criminals, Jesus was telling His followers that the path to glory would come through humiliation. By predicting His death long before it happened, He revealed both His awareness of His future suffering and complete submission to the Father's will.

In Mark 9:31, Jesus again says, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men."

- The Greek word **παράδοται** (paradidotai) means "to be handed over" or "betrayed." This verb is used throughout the Passion narrative, not only for Judas' betrayal but also for how human sin and divine purpose intersect.

While evil men conspired to kill Jesus, it was ultimately God's sovereign plan being fulfilled. Jesus' use of paradidotai underscores that He was not caught off guard or powerless. He willingly placed Himself in the hands of those who would crucify Him. His calm, prophetic tone reveals that He was in control of the story even as He walked toward suffering.

By the time we reach Mark 10:33-34, Jesus adds precise details: that He would be condemned, mocked, flogged, and killed, and that He would rise again on the third day. These details highlight His foreknowledge and His determination to fulfill God's mission. The idea of a "suffering Messiah" was deeply offensive to Jewish expectations because they anticipated a conquering political savior, not one killed by the Romans.

Jesus redefined messiahship through self-sacrifice

The world sees suffering as meaningless, but the cross is not a failure! God brings purpose out of pain. The cross fulfilled Isaiah 53:1-12, which is Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant! Every prediction in Mark shows that Jesus intentionally chose the cross as the pathway to redemption.

Believing that Jesus' death was not an accident is essential because it affirms that salvation is not a random event but the result of divine love and purpose. If Jesus' death were merely a tragic misunderstanding, there would be no assurance of forgiveness or victory over sin. Instead, the cross proves that God's plan was intentional, motivated by grace, and perfectly executed through Christ.

## 9. What does Jesus say about the Church in **Matthew 16:13-20**? How is Peter's confession in these verses a foundation for the Church?

In Matthew 16:13-20, Jesus and His disciples are in the region of Caesarea Philippi, a place known for pagan worship and devotion to many gods. Surrounded by altars and idols, Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answers with a declaration that stands at the heart of Christian faith: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

In a setting filled with false gods, Peter's confession sets Jesus apart as the one true Savior and King. Jesus responds by blessing Peter and saying, "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

In the Old Testament, the Caesarea Philippi area was known as Baal-gad ("Master Luck") and marked the northern boundary of Joshua's conquests (Josh. 11:17; 12:7; 13:5). In the first century, Caesarea Philippi was one of Jesus' favorite locations. Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15), a pivotal question preceding His journey to the cross.

# Lesson 12: The Four Gospels Explained

The Greco-Roman god Pan (also known as Faunus), believed to rule over nature and shepherds, was thought to have been born in a cave just north of Caesarea Philippi. The site, set at the base of a cliff with spring water flowing from it, was infamous for immoral rituals. A sanctuary was built there, where pagan worshipers offered sacrifices at the cave's entrance. They considered the cave a gateway to the underworld (Hades), a place where fertility gods dwelt (human sacrifices were once offered there). Thus, the place came to be known as "The Gates of Hades."

The location's significance is striking: it was a center of idolatry, with temples to Baal, Pan, and Caesar. Amid a landscape devoted to false gods, Jesus revealed His true identity and spoke of building His Church "on this rock." It's as if He contrasted the massive rock of pagan worship with the living faith of Peter, the "small rock," upon which His Church would stand. Today, the ruins of Caesarea Philippi are a reminder that the "gates of Hades" cannot prevail against Christ's Church.

Jesus' statement that "the gates of Hades will not overcome it" carries a powerful image. In the ancient world, city gates represented authority and defense. The phrase means that death and the powers of evil will never prevail against Christ's Church. This assurance would have been significant to the disciples, who would soon face persecution and hardship. The Church's foundation is not fragile—it's grounded in divine truth and protected by Christ's authority. The reference to "the keys of the kingdom" and the power to "bind and loose" symbolizes the Church's responsibility to proclaim forgiveness, truth, and discipline in alignment with God's will.

The Church has never been defined by buildings, traditions, or leadership structures but by its confession that Jesus is Lord. Just as Peter's faith distinguished the true God from idols in Caesarea Philippi, believers today are called to confess Christ in a culture filled with competing "gods" of success, comfort, and self. The Church stands firm when it keeps Christ at the center and relies on His power rather than human strength. The same promise remains true: no opposition, no cultural change, and no spiritual darkness can overcome a Church built on the unshakable truth that Jesus is the Son of the living God.

**10. How do you share the Good News with people as Jesus commanded in [Matthew 28:19-20](#)? Share your answer with your Life Group and then write down how your fellow Life Group members share the Good News to see if you can learn anything from their methods.**

While this is a very subjective question, it's designed to tie together many of the concepts discussed in this lesson. Try not to skip over it, and allow some time for your Life Group members to respond. This question/prompt will help them process what they learned in the lesson.



# Lesson 12: The Four Gospels Explained

## Witness

**Using the YouVersion Bible app or biblegateway.com, ask some group members to read [Matthew 28:18-20](#) from 5-7 different Bible versions (e.g., NIV, NLT, NCV, NKJV, The Message, etc.)... regardless of the version, notice the mission still remains the same. Pray as a group for people you know who need to encounter Jesus in a fresh way. Ask God for opportunities to share your story and the hope found in the Gospels.**

Give about 5-10 minutes for your Life Group to discuss the WITNESS section. If you have time, ask your Life Group members to share about the note they sent to someone this past week (see previous Life Group lesson).