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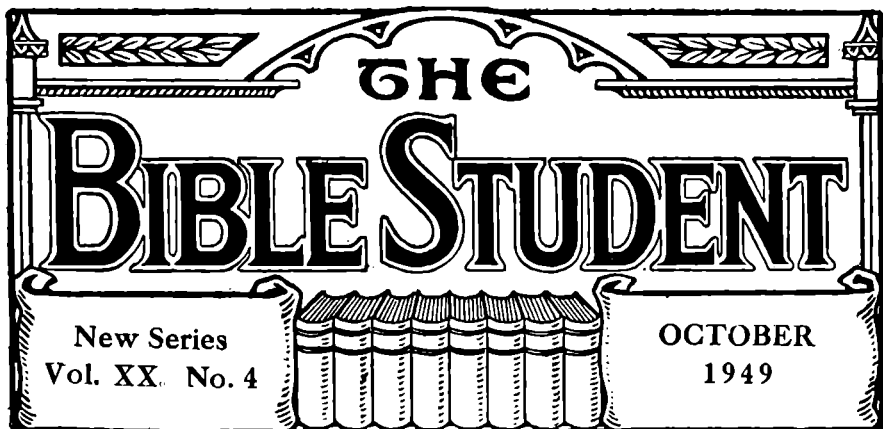
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*"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"*

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*Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD*

Kingdom rights and glories of the Lord. But with this we must connect the complementary dual titles in chap. 22:16, "the ROOT and the OFFSPRING of David", where we also get the relation to Israel, but in addition the truth that, as *Root* of David He is *Divine*, as *Offshoot* He was a *man* of David's race (see Isaiah 11:1-5, 10. R.V.). "Made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power" (Matt. 22:45; Rom. 1:3, 4).

It is hardly possible to close without reference being made to the last title of all; "*the Bright, the Morning STAR*"—for the "I AM" connects all three (Rev. 22:16). This is His special title for His Church, His Bride. For her He will come before ever He assumes His kingly administration on earth, even before, as the "Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings", He arises to Israel in noon-day splendour (Mal. 4:2).

"He which testifieth these things saith, Yea: I COME QUICKLY. Amen: come Lord Jesus"! (Rev. 22:20.).

## CHRIST IN THE FOUR GOSPELS

### I. WHY FOUR GOSPELS

BY A. NAISMITH, M.A.

The Scriptures contain four records of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth. Each and all four provide a basis for our faith, present Jesus of Nazareth as a Divine Saviour and Teacher and proclaim that in Him alone is the way of life. They tell the same story in different ways. But why four Gospels? Would not one fuller biography have sufficed? Irenaeus, one of the early Church elders who lived in the second century A.D., thus answers our objection:—"Since there are four regions of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, and since the Church is spread over all the world and the Gospel is the pillar and ground of the Church, it is fitting that the Church should have four pillars, breathing out immortality and imparting life to men". F. W. Grant in his *Numerical Bible* shows that the number 4 speaks of earthly completeness and universality, citing as proof the four beasts of Dan. 7, which "sum up the Gentile Empires, with their sovereignty over all the earth". The four Gospels, therefore, present to all the world Him Who is the Saviour of the world.

The first mention of 'four' in the Bible occurs in Gen. 2: 10-14, where we read of one river flowing out of Eden, with four heads, to water the Garden of God. Early Christian writers saw in this a symbol of the Four Gospels. Earthly fruitfulness and prosperity in the days of man's innocence were supplied by one river with four tributaries. Heavenly blessings, in this day of grace and redemption, flow from one glorious Person, presented to the world in four ways, with four distinct offices or relationships.

In Exodus, with reference to the Tabernacle in the wilderness, which is a type of Christ as the Word Who "became flesh and tabernacled among us" (John 1:14), are found many groupings of four.

*The Ark* had four rings in its four corners so that staves might be inserted when it was carried on the priests' shoulders (Ex. 25: 12). Typically, the Ark whose place was in the Holiest of all foreshadows "the only begotten Son Who is in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18). While this is the aspect of truth that characterizes the Fourth Gospel, it is emphasized in the narratives of all four evangelists and is essential in every presentation of Jesus Christ to the world.

*The Table of Shewbread* (Ex. 25:26) also had four rings for the same purpose, and prefigures Him Who alone could claim to be the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35).

*The Golden Lampstand* had four bowls filled with oil for illuminating the interior of the Holy Place. The glories of our Lord Jesus as "the Light of the world" and "the Light of men" shine out in all four Gospel records.

*The Vail* between the Holy Place and the Holiest of all hung on four pillars, each of acacia wood overlaid with gold (Ex. 26: 32), the emblems of our Lord's perfect manhood and perfect deity. The writer to the Hebrews interprets the vail as Christ's Incarnation,—“the vail, that is to say, His flesh” (Heb. 10:20). The four pillars represent the Son of God in the four aspects in which He is introduced to us in the Gospel narratives.

*The Brazen Altar* in the Tabernacle court had four horns to which the sacrificial victim was bound (Ex. 27:2). "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar" (Ps. 118: 27). In all four Gospels there is an account of our Lord's sacrificial death as 'the Lamb of God': yet the different details recorded suggest that each evangelist writes from a different viewpoint.

The Prophet *Ezekiel*, in his vision of the *Cherubim*, and *John* in his celestial vision in the *Apocalypse*, describe four living creatures to which, from the time of Irenaeus, the four Gospels were likened. Dr. W. Graham Scroggie in his *Guide to the Gospels* tells us that there are traces of this comparison in Christian art as far back as the fifth century. The careful student will observe that the order in *Ezekiel* differs from that in *Revelation*. The prophet *Ezekiel* records his vision in the prophetic order of the Old Testament, for the promised Messiah had not yet come. He must be born in Manhood, be proclaimed King, labour as a Servant and ascend to the glory of the Father's right hand. *Ezekiel* saw four living creatures, each with four faces. To him there appeared first the face of a man, then that of a lion, then that of an ox and finally that of an eagle (*Ezek.* 1:10). *John* also saw four living creatures, the first like a lion, the second like a calf, or young ox, the third like a man and the fourth like a flying eagle. The order of vision is different because the promised Deliverer had come. The order of the appearances of the cherubim to *John* is the order of the presentation of Christ to the world in the four Gospels.

In Matthew He appears as a King—with the face of a lion:

In Mark He appears as a Servant—with the face of an ox:

In Luke He appears as a Man—and perfect in His Manhood:

In John He appears as the Son of God, the Lord from Heaven—with the semblance of a flying eagle.

The great prophecies of *Daniel* concern "the times of the Gentiles", in the course of which four successive empires held sway over the world. In chapter 2 these are represented by four metals and in chapter 7 by four great beasts. Thus the number 4 is again associated with the idea of universality.

This use of the digit in Scripture leads to the inference that we have, in the Gospels, a universal presentation of the Saviour to the four chief classes of readers in the world at the time the Gospels were written.

There are only two possible combinations of digits in simple addition that make four. These are 3 + 1 and 2 + 2. In the *first* combination, 3 + 1, the Fourth Gospel written by the Apostle *John*, stands apart from the other three. Critics all recognize the uniqueness of *John's* account. The first three Gospels are generally called the Synoptics because they view the life of the Lord Jesus from a common viewpoint. *John's* is called the Fourth Gospel,

not only because it comes last in order and was written at least 25 years after all the others, but also to distinguish it from the other three. Chronologically, Mark's Gospel was written first, then Matthew's, then Luke's. In Synoptics the emphasis is on our Lord's humanity: John emphasized His Deity. Again, the first three Gospels were written for those who represented the world's three great languages and branches of culture. Those were the Hebrew, the Roman and the Greek races, the representatives of religious thought, imperial power and philosophic wisdom. It was they who crucified the Lord of glory, as we may infer from their languages appearing in the inscription of the cross of Jesus. The fourth Gospel was particularly for the Christian Church, that is, for those whom our Lord, in His intercessory prayer, describes as sent into the world yet "not of the world". The Church has no distinctive language and its very name in the Greek implies its separateness.

The *second* combination, 2 + 2, may serve to distinguish the content of the Gospels in other ways. It may indicate the twofold relationship of our Lord Jesus—to God the Father and to man.

In Mark Jesus is the Servant of God: in John He is the Son of God: In Matthew He is portrayed as the Ruler of men:

In Luke as a Man, yet unique among men.

Or again, it may mark the distinction between the records of His *official* glories and those of His *personal* glories:

Matthew and Mark depicting Him as King and Servant respectively:

Luke and John as Son of man and Son of God respectively.

In each Gospel Jesus of Nazareth is the pre-eminent Person. His apostles, His friends and His enemies, the people He met and taught and healed and blessed, the rulers and officials of His day, and all others have a very insignificant place in the historical outline. Christ is the centre of every portion of the narrative.

Each of the three Synoptists provides a suitable title for his history. Matthew calls his record "the book of the generation of Jesus Christ":

Mark designates his account "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ":

Luke's is "a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us".

John furnishes us with no such title but makes it clear from the beginning that his theme is "the WORD that was made flesh

and dwelt among us". Toward the close of his Gospel he discloses the purpose of the book (20:30-31).

The transition from the final verses of Matthew to the beginning of Mark's Gospel is beautiful and appropriate. So also is the transition from the worshipping disciples in the closing verses of Luke to John's supernal description, in his opening paragraph, of the Eternal Word Who was the Object of their worship.

Renan described Matthew's Gospel as "the *most important book* ever written," and Luke's as "the *most beautiful book* ever written". Mark's Gospel might with truth be called "the *most concise book* ever written", and John's "the *most heavenly book* ever written".

Matthew tells us what Jesus *said*: Mark tells us what He *did*: Luke tells us what He *felt*: and John tells us what He *is*.

To serve as a mnemonic, someone has suitably put the principal themes of the Four Gospels into verse, as follows:

"Matthew—Messiah, Israel's King, sets forth, by Israel slain:  
But God decreed that Israel's loss should be the Gentiles' gain.

Mark tells us how in patient love this earth has once been trod,

By One Who, in a Servant's form, was yet the Son of God.  
Luke, the physician, writes of a more skilled Physician still  
Who gave Himself, as Son of man, to save us from all ill.  
John, the beloved of Jesus, sees in Him the Father's Son,  
The everlasting Word made flesh, yet with the Father One".

[Next issue: "The 4 Gospels and their Writers"]

#### THE SECRET OF BIBLE STUDY IN FIVE SENTENCES

1. Study it through. Never begin a day without mastering a verse.
2. Pray it in. Never leave your Bible until the passage you have studied is a part of your very being.
3. Put it down. The thought God gives you, put in the margin of your Bible or your notebook.
4. Work it out. Live the truth you get through all the hours of the day.
5. Pass it on. Seek to tell somebody what you have learned.

—J. Wilbur Chapman.