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## Questions of Faith

### What is your favorite book of the Bible?

Pastors often have a special affinity for Romans and love to teach it. Genesis and Creation are foundational to all of the rest of Scripture. Without sin coming into the world through the fall of Adam and Eve, there is no need for Christ to come and save us from our sin. Indeed, since Paul says that sin always results in death and death is always the result of sin, if God used death to create, then God used sin to create. If that was true, then sin was there before Adam and Eve, and Christ wasted His time in suffering on the Cross to save us from our sins. So, all should dearly love Genesis.

We should also feel affection for all of the eschatological books, such as Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelations—for heaven is where our citizenship is now. Heaven is used almost more than any other word in the Bible. That is because we need to remember in our times of temptation, peril, suffering and death that heaven is our focus, the hope and reason to endure.

As Jews through faith in Christ, we also should love the entire Old Testament and how it is fulfilled in and often referred throughout the New Testament. God gave us dozens and dozens of prophecies in the Old Testament pointing to the Messiah, and then proved that Jesus was the One by the testimonies of hundreds in the New Testament. Without that, we would be without the certainty that it gives.

But, most have as an all-time favorite one of the Gospels. Each Gospel presents a unique portrait of who Jesus is and what His life, death and resurrection meant for His followers. Luke was known to be in close association with Paul and may have also used him as another source. Matthew was a disciple of Jesus and so at least for some of his accounts he was probably an eyewitness. By tradition, Mark was mentored by Peter and so Peter may have been the primary source of Mark's writings. Each author believed that Jesus was the solution to the problems of their audience.

Mark presents an action-oriented account of the life of Jesus. It was written to the Romans, so it stresses power and is short on teachings. There is little of His Judaic history, but Mark explains Jewish customs where necessary to understand the plot. It uses a similar genre to that of a mystery novel. Who is Jesus and what did He do? Again and again his readers are made to readjust their comfortable expectations in the light of unexpected and difficult information about who Jesus really was. Mark stresses that Jesus is a suffering Messiah which opens a new way of relating to God as the beginning of the good news (1:1), because following Jesus might mean persecution and perhaps even death. Jesus is also the obedient Servant of the Lord, constantly on the go, serving others throughout the Gospel, until finally performing the ultimate act of service: death on a cross for the sake of others.

Luke wrote for the Greeks (Gentiles). He stressed Jesus' perfect humanity because of the Greek high view of man. To emphasize Jesus' humanity, Luke traces His genealogy all the way back to the very first man, Adam (3:23-38). Jesus is further identified as "*the Son of Man who has come to seek and to save that which was lost*" (19:10). As one of us, He shows compassion on women, children, and the downtrodden of society. He highlights the healing and prophetic work of Jesus in order to provide energy and purpose for following Jesus into a world-wide mission. Jesus was a compassionate prophet whose teachings and suffering gathered everyone, especially the poor, to Him in a new universal fellowship of service to

others as a new action of God for salvation. His careful investigations and detailed recounting of the various people's feelings towards Jesus was as inspiring to these Greeks as his enumeration of the wide variety of those who followed Him. Luke wanted them to know that this really happened.

Matthew was a Jew writing to the non-Hellenic Jews about Jewish concerns with Jesus. Jesus is the authoritative rabbi bringing new teachings for life in a right relationship with God. He uses the Old Testament as a lens to view the New Testament promises (9 times—'it is written'; 14 times—'that which was spoken'; 129 references to Old Testament verses or allusions. Jesus is the Messiah of the Old Testament prophecy fulfilled. The Gospel even opens with the genealogy of Jesus, traced back to Abraham (the forefather of all Jews) and to David (Israel's great king). Thus, Matthew's pattern was event followed by teaching. He avoids using language that would offend his audience, such as the Jewish prohibition against using God's name for fear of doing so with less respect than it should be accorded. His tome is thematic and theological.

Many choose John because it was written to Christians who already had the other three Gospels and therefore he omits many of the events in Jesus' life. John's emphasis is on the divinity of Christ. He focused on Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, the Jewish feasts, Jesus' private conversations with individuals, and His preparation of His disciples (chapters 13–17). John selected seven signs or miracles that demonstrate that Jesus was the divine Messiah (chapters 2–12). He also recorded the discourses that Jesus gave following these signs that explained their significance. Moreover he stressed Jesus' claims of divinity that occur in the unique "I AM" statements (6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5). He also shows how faith in Jesus overcomes sin, death and the devil, and gives us life, righteousness and salvation. It is quite an evangelistic Gospel and is often recommended as a starting point to those who are new in the faith (followed then by Romans and Galatians). God's grace shines through every page of John's Gospel.