

# The Composite Gospel Index

*The Composite Gospel Index (CGI) combines the four  
Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus into a single unified view.*

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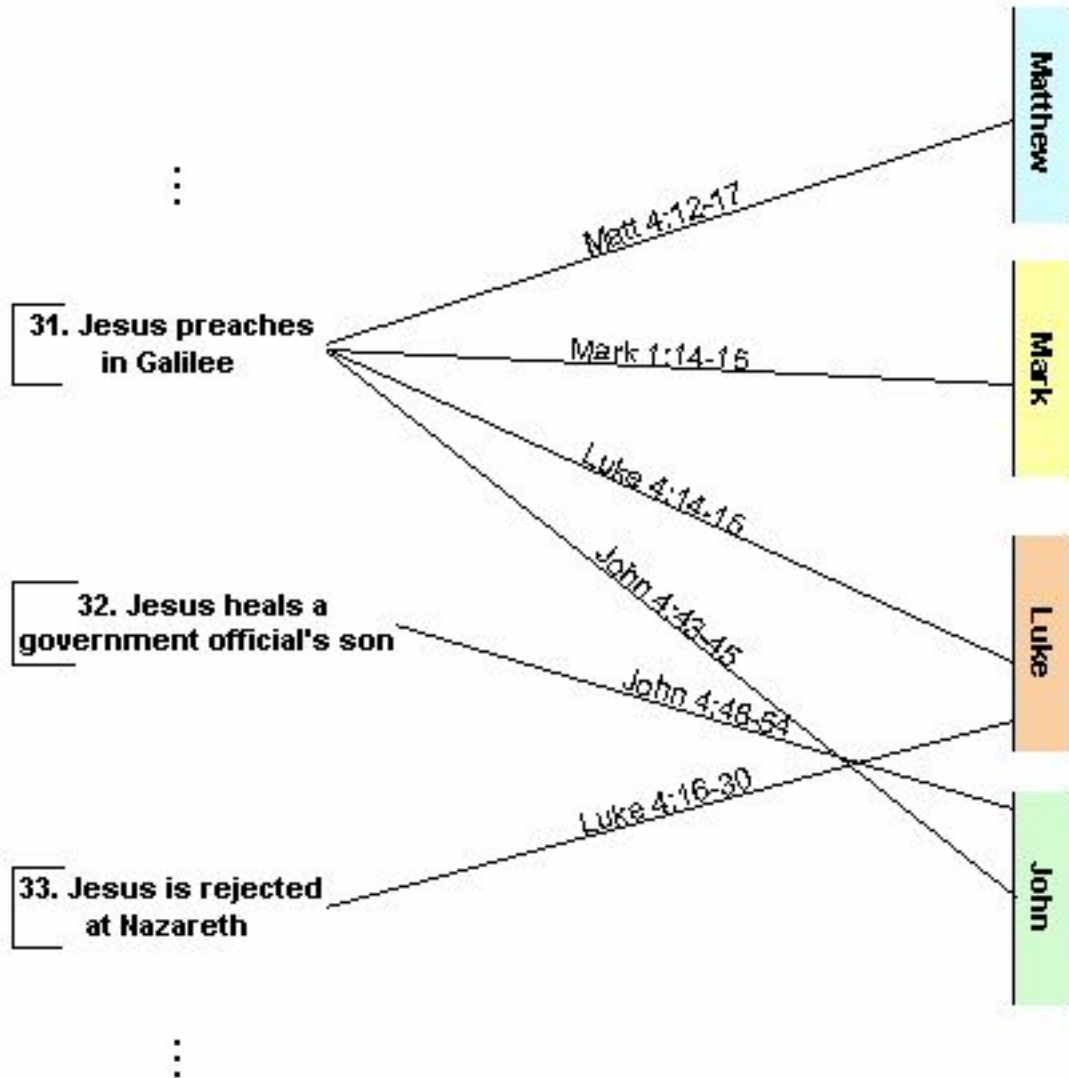
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## 1 A New Look at the Story of Jesus

The Composite Gospel Index (CGI) combines the four Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus into a single unified view. Instead of the traditional book/chapter/verse organization, it divides the texts into about 350 *pericopes* (puh-RIH-kuh-pee), each of which describe an event, a teaching, a parable, an interaction, or some other cohesive piece of text. Each pericope has a unique numeric identifier along with a brief descriptive label (e.g. #235, "Jesus speaks to a rich young ruler"), and each is indexed to one or more Gospel passages that it represents, as illustrated here. Every verse of every Gospel is represented by one and only one pericope: no verses are omitted or duplicated.

## The Composite Gospel Maps Pericopes to Gospel Passages

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Attempts to harmonize or unify the Gospels into a single account go back at least as far as [Tatian's Diatessaron](#) in the 2nd century. The goal of the Composite Gospel Index is primarily to bring together accounts which are common to one or more Gospels, and provide a natural arrangement of the meaningful units of the events, settings, and teachings of Jesus. It does

not particularly aim to reconcile the different accounts of the Gospel authors, or provide a more chronological order of events.

## 2 An XML Index

An additional distinguishing feature is that the CGI is expressed in XML, using [OSIS](#) identifiers. That means the CGI supports automated processing: each pericope can be mapped onto its source verses (given OSIS-encoded texts). For example, i've written an example program that retrieves the source texts for a pericope from the [ESV web service](#) ([here's some background information](#)) and presents them in an HTML table. The goal of the Composite Gospel Index is primarily to bring together accounts which are common to one or more Gospels, and provide a natural arrangement of the meaningful units of the events, settings, and teachings of Jesus. It does not particularly aim to reconcile the different accounts of the Gospel authors, or provide a more chronological order of events.

The Composite Gospel Index is intended to be a reusable *abstraction layer* on the Gospels. Because it's independent from the text of any particular translation, you can use it with whatever version you prefer. The pericopes can be organized into higher-level structures by theme (parables, miracles, teachings), topics (faith, the Kingdom of God, eternal life), by chronological order, or other arrangements. From this perspective, it is a reference system, rather than an attempt to construct a single narrative out of four parts.

## 3 Looking With Fresh Eyes

It's my hope that the Composite Gospel Index will provide a useful new perspective on the whole story of Jesus which is more integrated and topical, rather than structural and linear. It is no substitute for viewing the material in each Gospel in its own larger and distinctive context. But it may provide fundamental units which better match the way we think about and remember things: as stories, not chapter and verse references.

A fuller description of the CGI with background, justification, and comparison to similar approaches can be found in [this longer story](#).