

HISTORICAL RELIABILITY OF THE GOSPELS

by James M. Arlandson

Arlandson's defense of the historical reliability of the four Gospels, presenting evidence from archaeology, manuscript testimony, and internal consistency to demonstrate that the Gospel accounts are trustworthy historical documents.

15 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 01 - Chapter 01
2. 02 - Chapter 02
3. 03 - Chapter 03
4. 04 - Chapter 04
5. 05 - Chapter 05
6. 06 - Chapter 06
7. 07 - Chapter 07
8. 08 - Chapter 08
9. 09 - Chapter 09
10. 10 - Chapter 10
11. 11 - Chapter 11
12. 12 - Chapter 12
13. 13 - Chapter 13
14. 14 - Chapter 14
15. 15 - Chapter 15

01 - Chapter 01

Chapter 1. The Historical Reliability of the Gospels

Introduction

Christianity has always been the religion of the Book, the Bible. More specifically for this series, all Christians of all denominations cherish the four Biblical or canonical Gospels. But there is no pleasant way to put this. In the past decade - but also several before that - the Gospels have been assaulted by liberal scholars and other critics.

Two Gnostic scholars, Willis Barnstone and Marvin Meyer, strip the historical and narrative (story) aspects in John and turn it into a sayings Gospel (The Gnostic Bible, New Seeds, 2006); in their Gnostic Bible they place John next to the pseudonymous Gospel of Thomas (not written by the Apostle Thomas), a sayings "gospel." Denying genres (kinds of literature) is common in postmodernism (see a series on Postmodernism and the Bible, below).

Next, the Jesus Seminar was founded by Robert Funk in 1985. It consists of a group of scholars who meet twice a year to debate over the historical Jesus. They conclude that Jesus said only eighteen percent of the words found in the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), and John comes out worse (Five Gospels, Pomeroy, 1993, the fifth being the Gospel of Thomas). So what are the critics attacking? Historical reliability. Before the Gospels were written in their final form - the ones we have now (to simplify things) - how did the earliest Christians transmit the traditions (to be defined in a future article) about Jesus? That is the subject of much of the entire series. It also explains that the Gospels are founded squarely on eyewitnesses - many named - from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry to the very end and beyond.

It is no longer feasible - if it ever was - for web readers and TV viewers to ignore these criticisms, since they come across the mass media and the web seemingly from one month to the next. Anyone who watches the television sees eager scholars - eager for the spotlight - throw all kinds of doubt onto the Gospels.

Readers and viewers who take Scripture seriously can get confused. Many of them do not know how to research the right books so they can counter the destructive media messages. And when they find the right books, the jargon is technical - the scholars really write for other scholars, only sometimes with an eye on the wider public. Laypersons do not know how to sort out what they are reading, but they hear the negative messages clearly enough. So the series is intended for anyone who has access to the mass media. Ordinary believers, home Bible study leaders, Sunday school and catechism teachers, high school and college students, pastors, and priests may find something of value in the series. But mainly it is written for the laity or nonspecialist, so I use the Question and Answer (Q & A) format, for clarity and ease of understanding. I hope I have boiled down complicated issues into understandable language and vocabulary. So what is the purpose of the series? One is to bring onto the worldwide web scholarship that counters the critics. I hope libraries are not things of the past, but more ordinary people get their information first from the web

than from books. And I do not see enough articles that uphold traditional Gospel scholarship available on the information superhighway.

Suffice it to say here that the earliest Christians passed on the traditions reliably and accurately, according to the historical standards of their time. In fact, they did the same deeds that Jesus taught them to do - an often overlooked fact in the study of the transmission process from his ministry to their writings about him (see the series on miracles, below). Historical reliability is the thesis I endeavor to demonstrate in the series. If readers would like to investigate the opposite thesis, then they can find plenty of other articles and media claims elsewhere. In addition to transferring onto the web the counterbalancing scholarship in a way that is understandable to web readers, I also provide a "References and Further Reading" section at the end of each article. Web readers who are also book readers will then know where to look first.

Other purposes of the series go directly to the content of the articles. Since the future articles are put in a Q & A format, it is used here. The articles seek to answer these questions and more: Do the four Gospels have any support from archaeology? Did Jesus even exist? Does John share any or many similarities with the other three? Do they cohere together in a unified storyline? Is the Gospel of John so far different from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke that John has little or no historical value? Are there contradictions among the Gospels?

How do theology and history interact in the four Gospels? Can we trust them if they have a strong point of view and seek to persuade their readers or listeners?

What is the so-called Q "gospel"?

If it existed, what is its theology? Are the Gospels based on eyewitness testimony?

If so, aren't eyewitnesses notoriously unreliable?

How is eyewitness testimony disclosed, if it is, in the four Gospels? Are the eyewitnesses whose traditions that feed into the written Gospels anonymous or named?

What is the role of the Twelve in securing the traditions about Jesus?

What is a tradition? Were the traditions passed on orally or literarily (in writing)? Are there cultural analogies that show how they were transmitted?

Most importantly, are the four Gospels historically reliable? Can we trust them, historically speaking, in addition to their theology?

One minor purpose of the series is to keep one eye on how the historical reliability of the four Gospels compares with the Gnostic texts. So a review of Gnosticism is in order. The word gnosticism comes from an ancient Greek word for knowledge. A Gnostic is "someone who knows" or a "knower." But what does he or she know? She or he knows secret teachings that lift him or her above the mundane and the all-too-human (to use a phrase anachronistically). In the Mediterranean world many decades after Jesus lived and the church grew rapidly and the four canonical Gospels were written down, who was more qualified than Jesus himself to be the Ultimate Gnostic? (Canon means "measuring stick" or the "standard" by which we evaluate other writings; in our case it consists of the books in the New Testament.) So what are the basics of

Gnostic teaching? Jesus came to reveal hidden truths and secret knowledge. He discloses a way of escape from the world and the human body, if only a few special people would come to know this. The Gnostic authors often borrowed the names of Jesus' disciples to attach to their texts, such as the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, and the Gospel of Mary. The Gospel of Judas has been discovered, restored, and published most recently. Using the disciples' names or other Biblical names gives the appearance of authority, but it is deceptive. The original disciples or Bible characters had nothing to do with these writings. The teaching of Jesus, the names of his disciples, and the four Gospels traveled well. Gnostics capitalized on this fame.

All of these (late) Gnostic documents would not be a concern to anyone but a few specialists. Yet some scholars, who have access to the national media and who write their books for the general public, imply that Gnostic texts should be accepted as equally valid and authoritative as the four canonical Gospels, or stand a step or two behind the Biblical Gospels. At least the Gnostic scriptures, so these scholars say today, could have potentially been elevated to the canon, but were instead suppressed by orthodox church leaders. (Orthodox literally means "correct or straight thinking," and here it means the early church of Irenaeus and Athanasius, to cite only these examples). This series challenges the claim that the Gnostic texts should be canonical or even a step or two behind the four Biblical Gospels. The Gnostic texts were considered heretical for good reason. This series has two other features. Each article ends with these questions: What is the bottom line for the historical reliability of the Gospels? And what does all of this mean to the Church of all denominations? Those questions and answers serve as a conclusion and an application. The series is not about establishing the inerrancy or infallibility or inspiration of the Gospels. I leave those doctrines to theologians. Instead, the goal is to establish the historical reliability of the Gospels. If we cannot establish that, then how can we even begin to discuss their inerrancy, infallibility, and inspiration, as those terms have been traditionally understood and defined?

I learned a lot while writing the series, which was much more difficult than I had thought. But, as noted, I hope that I will make complicated issues and scholarship understandable to nonspecialists, so they no longer have to feel under siege.

Knowledge and information are the best antidote to confusion. The entire series first appeared at markdroberts.com.

References and Further Reading (annotated) I have found these books to be very helpful while writing the series.

Paul Barnett. *Is the New Testament Reliable?* 2nd ed. Intervarsity, 2003. This one is intended for beginners. Start here second; go first to Roberts' book and blog articles (see below), and my own series perhaps?

Richard Bauckham. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Eerdmans, 2006. I will refer to this excellent book very often. It has inspired this series. He was kind enough to correspond with me, offering encouragement and suggestions on my article on the Gospel of Mark. His book goes a long way to upset overly skeptical scholarship that has exerted a lot of influence on New Testament studies for a long time. But his book is not for beginners, unless web readers first read Roberts' (see below) and my series (?) and have a lot of time to work

through Bauckham's.

Craig Blomberg. *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*. 2nd ed. Intervarsity, 2007. This furthered Bruce's efforts and set a new gold standard. He is a fine exegete.

---. *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*. Intervarsity, 2001. Very helpful for my articles on John.

F. F. Bruce. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 6th ed. Eerdmans, 1981. From a superior scholar, the early gold standard, and short, too. A fifth edition can be read online.

D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. Zondervan, 2005. Excellent introduction from a conservative point of view. For me, the arguments in favor of traditional conclusions, such as the authorship of the four Gospels, are stronger than against, thanks in large part to this book. Highly recommended. Both are fine exegetes.

Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd. *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Traditions*. Baker Academic, 2007. This has quickly become the best book on the historical reliability of the synoptic Gospels, but it can get very technical. Inexperienced readers may work their way through it after reading Roberts' book and my series, perhaps? However, note the next entry:

---. *Lord or Legend?* Baker, 2007. I discovered this belatedly. It's written for the laity. It's a clarification of their more academic book, noted in the previous entry. Definitely get it.

Birger Gerhardsson. *Reliability of the Gospel Tradition*. Hendrickson, 2001. The best (and shortest) on the specific topic of the oral stage before the Gospels were finalized in their written forms. At first, his earlier works - some of which are summarized in this book - were not well received, but now the tide has turned.

Donald Guthrie. *New Testament Introduction*. 4th ed. Intervarsity, 1990. Very good introduction from a conservative perspective. Highly recommended.

Mark D. Roberts. "Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?" 2005. His blog series has been turned into a book.

---. *Can We Trust the Gospels?* Crossway, 2007. Start here and his blog to be introduced to the issues - along with my own series, perhaps? Roberts has been a pastor for a number of years, so he has a good "ear" for the laity. His book and blog is for them - for you.

Lee Strobel. *The Case for the Real Jesus*. Zondervan, 2007. I discovered this book belatedly. It is definitely worth getting. It is written for the laity. It will also lead you back to his earlier books, which are excellent. For students of the Old Testament - I have only glanced at these two books, since they do not relate directly to my series. But they appear to be excellent, not least because they are written by two superior Old Testament scholars who respect Scripture.

Walter Kaiser. *The Old Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?* Intervarsity, 2001.

K. A. Kitchen. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Eerdmans, 2003.

Lee Strobel. *The Case for the Real Jesus*. Zondervan, 2007. I discovered this book belatedly. It is definitely worth getting. It is written for the laity. It will also lead you back to his earlier books, which are excellent. As for the Gnostic writings, go to the latest edition of the Nag Hammadi collection. Reading these texts will only confirm how different and outlandish they are compared with the four Biblical Gospels. My modest scholarly contribution, though not directly related to the historical reliability of the Four Gospels, is here:

Women, Class, and Society in Early Christianity: Models from Luke-Acts. Hendrickson, 1997.

02 - Chapter 02

Chapter 2. Archaeology and the Synoptic Gospels: Which way do the rocks roll?

Archaeology and the Bible have an uneasy relationship. Many textual scholars have little use for archaeology. Discoveries happen often, so the data change, whereas the written text is stable, by comparison. Plus, the stones, so to speak, are sometimes difficult to interpret in relation to the text.

Nonetheless, let's bring onto the web what archaeologists are saying in their books. That is one of the main goals of the series, after all. Though I'm far from being an archaeologist, I decided to include some findings that are more or less stable (but see some of the examples, below). For me, the Biblical text and its historical reliability have been demonstrated again and again, so I don't put myself on an emotional rollercoaster of extreme highs and lows, depending on this or that discovery.

Still, though, the coherence and correspondence between the text and "the rocks" are encouraging for serious students of the Bible. This is Part Two on the historical reliability of the Gospels. The series has nothing to do with the inerrancy or inspiration of the Gospels, because if we cannot establish their historical reliability, then how can we move on to discuss their inerrancy or infallibility, as those two doctrines have been traditionally understood? But nothing in this article contradicts those doctrines. The goal of the series, including this article, is to bring onto the web what scholars say in their books, specifically, scholarship that upholds a traditional view of Scripture. The series is intended for the laity, so I use the Q & A format, for clarity.

Before we begin, recall that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a lot of passages in common, so they are called the synoptic Gospels (synoptic means viewed together). The authors are sometimes called synoptists. Slashes // mean parallel passages among them. The writers of the four Gospels are also called evangelists.

Hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these. You may create two more windows with a map of Israel and a map of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. If the links in this article go dead, please type in a keyword in a search engine.

1. So how does archaeology relate to the Synoptics?

Let's begin with a sad example - sad, but true. Jesus grieved over his prediction (cf. Matthew 23:37 // Luke 13:34).

(1) Destruction of Jerusalem

Luke 21:20 says, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near" (see Luke 19:42-44; cf. Matthew 24:15-20; Mark 13:14-19). Rome destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70. The suppression was led by Roman general Titus, son of the Emperor Vespasian (ruled 69-79), and Titus later ruled 79-81. This article on the Arch of Titus has several images. Look for a replica of the Menorah (and more) sculpted on it, taken as booty from

Jerusalem. Bible-history.com has a good image and a quick write up.

(2) Inscription about Pontius Pilate

He is mentioned in all four Gospels, particularly at the trial of Jesus, but the inscription is dealt with here because the synoptic Gospels mention him. He authorized Jesus' execution. In the inscription at Caesarea Maritima, on the Mediterranean coast, he is referred to as the prefect of Judea, which is the southern region that encompassed Jerusalem.

Craig Evans cites an archaeologist's suggestion ("Excavating," p. 336):

[NAUTI]STIBERIEUM [Seaman's]s Tiberieum [PON]TIUSPILATUS [Pon]tius Pilate,
[PRAEF]ECTUSIUDA[AE]E [Pref]ect of Jude[a] [REF]E[CIT] [restor]e[s ...

Facing the Challenge has a good image and write up.

(3) The boy Jesus in the temple In Luke 2:41-50, he is in the temple dialoguing with the rabbis. He impressed them with his wisdom. Where did this dialogue take place? The discovery of a stairway south of the southern wall of the Temple Mount makes it clear that it was here that the young Jesus amazed the rabbis by his knowledge. A fragment of an inscription found on the stairway, along with another fragment ... mentions the elders (zeqenim). Probably a place was allotted to them. The Talmud refers to three tribunals in Jerusalem. One of these "used to sit at the gate of the Temple Mount ... engaged in deliberations and expounding" (Barhat, p. 307) But the most interesting evidence says in the Talmud (t.Sanhedrin 2.6) that Rabban Gamaliel (probable teacher of Paul) and the elders were sitting on the stairway, along with a scribe. Then the tractate goes on to reference the people of upper Galilee and lower Galilee (Dan Barhat, p. 307). The Jerusalem Archaeological Park is well worth exploring. This is a good article at the website, on the monumental staircase. The site also has a cyber-image of the staircase. Urban Simulation Team has a first-rate section on Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

(4) A winepress, stone-walled terraces, and three towers In all four Gospels, Jesus is called "Jesus of Nazareth." In the Parable of the Tenants, he says that "a man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower" (Mark 12:1 // Matthew 21:33 // but Luke 20:9 omit most of the elements). Since the 1990s these textual data have been confirmed by archaeology "less than half a mile from the center of first-century Nazareth" to the west "A winepress has been exposed, and beautifully constructed stone-walled terraces are now visible. Most importantly, three circular stone towers only about fifty feet [about 16m] apart now rise majestically above the rocky terrain" (Charlesworth, "Jesus Research," p. 38). This webpage about Nazareth is maintained by the Franciscans. The Jewish Virtual Library has a good, quick write up.

(5) The farmers in the Parable of the Tenants In this parable (Matthew 21:33-46 // Mark 12:1-12 // Luke 20:9-19), the landlord rents out his land to farmers. When he sends his servants to collect some of the produce or profits, the farmers beat them and eventually killed the landowner's son. So were the farmers peasants? From the larger contexts of rabbinic traditions, Greek papyri, a true-life story from Cicero himself (106-43 BC), and the Old Testament, it is clear that they were not necessarily poor peasants who were oppressed, so that they were in some sense justified in taking the land. Some of the evidence in the papyri parallels Jesus' parable remarkably closely. A landowner leases his land to a farmer (the same Greek word both in the New Testament and the

papyri). The landowner sends servants to collect the profits. The farmer assaults them and runs them out of the village (Evans, pp. 245-47). So instead of being dispossessed peasants, the farmers in the parable could be the powerful who were greedy for profit and the acquisition of more land. Thus, the farmers and their actions are consistent with the ruling priests in Jerusalem, according to Jesus' assessment of them, as the end of the parable indicates.

Craig A. Evans, "Are the Wicked Tenant Farmers 'Peasants'?" pp. 231-50.

(6) Peter's house in Capernaum? This fishing village on the north shore of the Lake of Galilee, populated with about 1,000 to 1,700 people, was Jesus' "own town" (Matthew 9:1). He taught in the synagogue and set a man free of a demon after he interrupted Jesus' sermon. Then Jesus went immediately afterwards to Peter's house and healed Peter's mother-in-law, who was sick with a fever. She got up and cooked them dinner. Finally, "the whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons" ... (Mark 1:21-34). A house has been excavated there, and it is possible that it may have been Peter's. James Charlesworth reviews six parts of the puzzle that fit together and indicate that the house was Peter's (pp. 49-50). Jerome Murphy-O'Connor says that no evidence contradicts the identification of the house with Peter (p. 220). Von Wahlde writes: "Almost all scholars now espouse this view" that the house belonged to the apostle (p. 546).

See Bible Places for a good photo of the dig. The Franciscans have an excellent webpage about the town and an article about Peter's house.

(7) First-century synagogue in Capernaum?

All four Gospels mention a synagogue at Capernaum. Impressive remains of a fourth-century synagogue stand near the shoreline of the Lake of Galilee. Excavations around it have revealed an earlier layer underneath the fourth-century synagogue. "Given the custom of building one synagogue immediately upon the site of the previous ones, the earlier building is almost certainly the synagogue in which ... Jesus taught on the day of the multiplication of loaves" (John 6:59) (von Wahlde, p. 546). As we saw in the sixth example, Jesus ministered there on other occasions.

See the Franciscan website and its article on the synagogue.

(8) The Galilean boat

Misleadingly called the "Jesus boat," it has no clear connection to Jesus or his disciples. It was found in the mud on the northwestern shore of the Lake of Galilee. "It is poorly crafted and represents the possession of ordinary people. Perhaps about thirteen men could be crowded into it." It has a shallow draft and sat low to the water, so fishermen could easily pull up a net with fish trapped in it. The boat's low profile means that it would fill up with water quickly in a storm (Charlesworth, pp. 41-42). Recall that James and John, sons of Zebedee, and Peter were partners (Luke 5:6, Luke 5:10). They owned at least two boats. Though the Galilean boat has no firm connection to the disciples, it at least sheds some light on what life was like for fishermen. The Jewish Virtual Library has a short article and titles the boat accurately. It is housed in the Yigal Allon Center, which has a photo and short article. Bible Walks has photos in an article with references to the Gospels.

(9) Herod Antipas: a reed shaken by the wind?

Matthew 11:7-9 and Luke 7:24-26 discuss John the Baptist's prophethood, after he was in prison. Jesus asks the people whether John was a "reed shaken in the wind." The answer is no; he was a prophet. But why would Jesus choose that image? A possible explanation appears on local coins.

Herod Antipas minted coins with reeds on them because reeds symbolized cities on a river or lake, specifically the city of Tiberias. A "'shaken reed' could have become a name for the king who swayed with and survived many a political wind, who wavered between wives, and even between Sepphoris and Tiberias as his place of residence ... The vivid phrase goes back to Jesus himself and reflects local color of the day, as he contrasts the uncompromising prophet with the 'shaking reed' of a kinglet from the Hellenistic Roman power elite" (Reumann, p. 672). The connection between the passages in Matthew and Luke and the coins is not absolutely fixed. But it receives support from the textual context. Jesus also asks whether John was "a man dressed in fine clothes?" "No," Jesus replies, answering his own question, because "those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces" (Matthew 11:8 // Luke 7:25).

(10) Qumran writings and table fellowship The Essenes, probable writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran, were extra-scrupulous about whom they invited to table fellowship and the assembly or the community of the last days. James D. G. Dunn quotes several passages from these texts. They show the kinds of persons who were excluded: the unclean, the paralyzed in their feet or hands, or the lame or the blind or deaf and mute or the blemished. In contrast, in Luke 14:12-13 and 21, Jesus says these people are acceptable for his table fellowship:

12 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind ... 21 "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' (Luke 14:12-13, Luke 14:21) The wording of the excluded persons is similar to the Qumran texts: lame, blind, and crippled. This last word is a different Greek and Hebrew word from the Greek and Hebrew of "lame." "Crippled" should be translated more generally, maybe as "seriously disabled" or possibly "blemished" or a range of physical disabilities. Now what about the poor? In the Synoptics, they receive ministry from Jesus, but in the Dead Sea scrolls that Dunn cites the term applies to the Essenes themselves, even though many may not have been poor.

Dunn draws the obvious conclusion: "In the Palestinian Jesus movement the table of God was open to all the poor, and not least to the disabled, the lame, and the blind - those specifically excluded by the self-styled 'poor' of Qumran" (p. 267).

2. What does all of this mean in comparison to the Gnostic "gospels"? That question will be discussed in the next article on archaeology and the Gospel of John. But suffice it to say now that the Gnostic writings cannot stand even in the same league with the four Gospels. The Gnostics seemed not to have cared one bit about rooting their religious truth claims in first-century Israel, four decades before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. No one can be sure - to say the least - that Jesus really said and did what the Gnostics claim about him.

3. What does all of this mean for the historical reliability of the Synoptics? The Synoptics and Scripture as a whole have often been shown to be right in matters of history. In fact, that's what's so remarkable about Scripture. Its authorship spans about 1,500 years. They lived in different regions and cultures and flowing, changing history, so the chances of their being wrong are high. However, list in Column A on a sheet of paper the number of things Scripture gets right. Include even simple things like where Jerusalem is located or the village of Capernaum being located on the Sea of Galilee, or the name of the god Baal or of a ruler like Pontius Pilate or Nebuchadnezzar. Then list in Column B on your sheet of paper the puzzles or unanswered questions. Column A would far outnumber Column B - by a long way.

4. What does all of this mean to the Church of all denominations? In the Introduction to this article I said we should not put ourselves on an emotional roller coaster of extreme highs and lows, depending on this or that discovery. What would happen to your faith if a few historical assumptions inside the Gospels were not to match up precisely with history outside the Gospels? (See Mark D. Roberts' discussion of El Kursi [scroll down a little]; see also this discussion on it at another website.) If this imprecision were to exist, not even then should we give up on Scripture. The correspondence and coherence of history and archaeology and the written Gospels are very frequent. We must not believe in the "all-or-nothing" or "black-or-white" fallacy. "If there is even one problem text, then the whole Bible collapses!" say the unreasonable critic and the fearful believer. But that's too stringent and narrow.

Inerrantist Wayne Grudem writes:

... Our understanding of Scripture is never perfect, and this means that there may be cases where we will be unable to find a solution to a difficult passage at the present time. This may be because the linguistic, historical, or contextual evidence we need to understand the passage correctly is presently unknown to us." (Systematic Theology, Zondervan, 1994, p. 99)

He wrote those words in the context of supposed contradictions in the Bible. But they can apply to archaeology and history and the Bible. His humility about our imperfect understanding of Scripture is refreshing.

However, the historical facts and data outside of the Gospels go a long way to support their historical reliability, and establishing this is the main goal of the series. The New International Archaeological Study Bible confirms this about the Gospels (and the rest of the New Testament and the Old Testament). Critics of Scripture must work their way through this resource that was put together by a team of scholars. Believers should buy it too.

It is not the goal of the series to prove the inerrancy or inspiration of Scripture, though nothing in this article disconfirms those doctrines. Rather, the goal is to provide historical data that support the historical reliability and credibility of the Gospels. In numerous cases there is a good match up between the facts inside and outside of the Gospels, so their historical reliability is affirmed, quite easily too. This article has two companion pieces:

Archaeology and John's Gospel: Is skepticism chic passé? Did Jesus Even Exist? Can you have an effect without a cause?

References and Further Reading Rami Arav. "Bethsaida." In Charlesworth, Jesus and Archaeology, pp. 145-66.

Archaeology and the Bible. An apologetics website presents an overview of the data. ("Apologetics" means the "study or science of defending a faith or religion.") If a believer must have an absolutely perfect connection between archaeology and the Bible, then this site works hard at reaching that goal, though the proprietors seem to concede that there are uncertainties.

Dan Barhat. "Jesus and the Herodian Temple Mount." In Charlesworth, Jesus and Archaeology, pp. 300-08.

David Couchman. "Real People, Real Places: Evidence from Archaeology for the Reliability of the Bible." An overview article from an apologetics website

James H. Charlesworth. Jesus and Archaeology. Eerdmans, 2006. Excellent book. You may look inside at the link. Many of its articles are cited in this present online article. But the book is written without regard to a conservative, apologetics perspective.

---. "Jesus Research and Archaeology: A New Perspective." In idem, Jesus and Archaeology, pp. 11-63.

Digthebible has excellent links.

James D. G. Dunn. "Jesus, Table-Fellowship, and Qumran." Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Ed. James H. Charlesworth. Doubleday, 1992. Pp. 254-72.

"Archaeology and Geography as Related to the Gospel of John." Catholic resources on the Gospel of John

Craig A. Evans. "Are the Wicked Tenant Farmers 'Peasants'?" Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity, and Restoration. Brill, 1997. Eds. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, pp. 231-50.

---. "Excavating Caiaphas, Pilate, and Simon of Cyrene." In Charlesworth, Jesus and Archaeology, pp. 323-40.

Jerusalem Archaeological Park. Well worth exploring.

John McRay. "Archaeology and the Bible: How archaeological findings have enhanced the credibility of the Bible." Article at a Southern Baptist website Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. Oxford Archaeological Guides: The Holy Land. 4th ed. Oxford, 1998.

New International Archaeological Study Bible. Zondervan, 2005. Excellent. Critics of Scripture on the basis of archaeology and geography must work their way through this resource.

John Reumann. "Archaeology and Early Christology." In Charlesworth, Jesus and Archaeology, pp. 660-82.

Mark D. Roberts. "Does Archaeology Support the Reliability of the Gospels?" He has a photo of the bones of the "crucified man." He also has other articles in the series (go first to this last link).

Urban C. von Wahlde. "Archaeology and John's Gospel." In Charlesworth, Jesus and Archaeology, pp. 523-86. Excellent overview of archaeology and John's Gospel Urban Simulation

Team has a first-rate section on Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

03 - Chapter 03

Chapter 3. Archaeology and John's Gospel: Is skepticism chic passé?

John is known as the spiritual Gospel because, among other reasons, it has extended metaphorical discourses, such as the bread of heaven (John 6:25-59), and a long, one-on-one dialogue with the religious leader Nicodemus about deep truths (John 3:1-15).

Until recently, much of scholarship did not take seriously the topographical or historical details in John's Gospel. Scholars ignored them or preferred to see them as symbolic because surely John was not concerned with mundane matters. The more skeptical said that it was wrong in many cases. So it may come as a surprise to readers that many archaeological discoveries match up with the historical assumptions in this spiritual Gospel. Many scholars now take John's topography and other down-to-earth matters seriously. Archaeology seems to have turned the tide. This is Part Three on the historical reliability of the Gospels. The series has nothing to do with the inerrancy or inspiration of the Gospels, because if we cannot establish their historical reliability, then how can we move on to discuss their inerrancy or infallibility, as those two doctrines have been traditionally understood? But nothing in this article contradicts these doctrines. The goal of the series, including this article, is to bring onto the web what scholars say in their books, specifically, scholarship that upholds a traditional view of Scripture. This article also has many links to websites, for further study. The series is intended for the laity, so I use the Q & A format, for clarity.

Before we begin, recall that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a lot of passages in common, so they are called the synoptic Gospels (synoptic means viewed together). The authors are sometimes called synoptists. Slashes // mean parallel passages among them. The writers of the four Gospels are also called evangelists.

Hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these. You may create two more windows with a map of Israel and a map of Jerusalem in the time of Jesus. If the links in this article go dead, please type in a keyword in a search engine.

1. How does archaeology relate to this Gospel?

These findings represent others. The most important entry is the last one in this list.

(1) Bethsaida

John 1:44 says that Philip, Peter, and Andrew were from this city that functioned as a capital north of the Sea or Lake of Galilee. (Apparently, Peter and Andrew later moved to Capernaum). Peter and Andrew were fishermen. Archaeologists discovered a "plethora of fishing implements" in a house in Bethsaida, so they call it "the Fisherman's House." Data suggest that there may have been a small industry of making fishing gear, since the archaeologists found a fishhook that was not yet bent (Rami Arav, "Bethsaida," pp. 160-61).

Bible Places has good photos in an article. The University of Omaha has a superb webpage on the excavations.

(2) Cana Where did Jesus perform the miracle of turning water into wine, not wine into water (John 2:1-11; cf. John 4:46; John 1:43-45 with John 21:2)? There is a tourist shop at Kefr Qana (or Cana or Kenna), northeast of Nazareth. However, since 1998 excavations in another Cana lead archaeologists now to believe that Kherbit Cana, on a hill a hundred meters high, eight kilometers across from the capital Sepphoris, south-southwest, is the town of Jesus' miracle. (But Kefr Cana still fits the requirements of John's Gospel). In Kherbit Cana "in the lower village, halfway down the hill, a cave complex with two in situ stone water pots (and room for four more) was venerated in the Byzantine period" (Richardson, p. 139). He does not say in his article how many gallons the pots could hold (John 2:6 says twenty to thirty gallons or 75-115 liters), but the bigger point is that Cana had storage facilities for water pots.

Incidentally, Josephus (c. AD 37 to post-100), a Jewish historian, mentions Cana (Life 86). Richardson writes: "The Cana of Josephus is no doubt the same site as New Testament Cana" (p. 120).

Richardson, pp. 120-44. New International Archaeological Study Bible, p. 1723; von Wahlde, pp. 538-42. Bible Walks has a brief article and photos.

(3) Mt. Gerizim

Only John mentions "this mountain" (4:19). Its identity is clear. Mt. Gerizim was considered sacred to the Samaritans, and it has a stormy history. For example, when Greece dominated the region, they renamed the temple of the Samaritans as the temple of Zeus, Friend of Strangers. John Hyrcanus, a Hasmonean priest-king, destroyed the Samaritan temple in 128 BC. In the fourth century AD, the Samaritans produced a document called the Memar Marqah, which reflects earlier traditions, possibly to the first century. Passages express their Messianic hope, like this one: "Let the Restorer come safely and sacrifice a true offering. The Restorer will come in peace and reveal the truth and will purify the world" The Samaritan woman at the well asked Jesus about the Messiah, and he replied, "I who speak to you am he" (4:25-26).

New International Archaeological Study Bible, p. 1727; see also Zangenberg, pp. 421-26, for the religious history of the site. Von Wahlde, pp. 556-59, has a short write up on Gerizim and the next two entries in this present article. Bible Places introduces us to the territory.

(4) Sychar

John 4:4-6 says that Jesus came to a town called Sychar, in Samaria. Most scholars identify this town with al-Aschar (or al-Askar or Sakir), which ancient texts attest (von Wahlde, pp. 557-58; cf. Zangenberg, pp. 416-18).

Walking in Their Sandals has a profile of the town. Christian Answers has a few lines about it.

(5) Jacob's well The patriarch Jacob gave a field to his son Joseph as his portion (shechem) (Genesis 33:18-20). Joseph is buried there (Joshua 24:32). The well is located about 250 feet from the ruins of the town of Shechem, along a north-south road. John 4:6 uses the Greek word for "running spring," but vv. 11 and 12 use the word for "dug out well." "The well near Shechem is just

such a combination of dug-out well and running spring” (von Wahlde, p. 557).

Edward Fudge Ministries introduces us to the topic via Sychar (I don't know him, but the one article looks good). This article introduces us to the well via Shechem.

(6) Pool of Bethesda

John 5:2 describes a pool called "Bethesda" in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate. The pool had five colonnades. After a lengthy discussion, von Wahlde writes: The discovery of the pools proves beyond a doubt that the description of this pool was not the creation of the Evangelist but reflected accurate and detailed knowledge of Jerusalem, knowledge that is sufficiently detailed to now be an aid to archaeologists in understanding the site. The Johannine [adjective of John] account speaks of (1) its location near the Sheep Gate; (2) the name of the pool as Bethesda; (3) the fact that it has five porticos; (4) the fact of intermittent turbulence in the water. All of these details are corroborated through literary and archaeological evidence of the site. (p. 566) Bible-History has a computer image and a brief write up.

(7) Tiberias

John is the only one to identify the Sea of Galilee as also the Sea of Tiberias (6:1; 21:1), and he alludes to a boat landing (6:1). In addition to the lake, a city near its shore was named after the Roman Emperor Tiberius (ruled AD 14-37). Its population is estimated to have been 24,000, a sizeable city indeed for the region. Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (r. 4 BC-AD 39), moved the capital from Sepphoris to Tiberias in about AD 24 (von Wahlde, pp. 566-68).

Jewish Virtual Library offers an overview. See a short article on the Sea of Galilee or Lake Tiberias. This page has a map of first-century ports on the Lake, with a brief article.

(8) Praetorium

John 18:28, John 18:33; John 19:9 mention this place. It had been thought that the prefect, at that time Pontius Pilate, lived in the Antonia Fortress. However, this fortress, nearer the temple, was the lodging place of the troops. At this location, they could monitor the temple. But the Praetorium is found in the Herodian palace. It was situated against the western wall, in the northwest corner of the city. Then the palace extended southward (von Wahlde, pp. 572-75).

Bible-History has a short write up on the Antonia Fortress, stating that perhaps the trial of Jesus took place at the Herodian palace, instead. The page also links to Standard Bible Encyclopedia. Another article at Bible-History has a brief write up of Herod's Palace, with a computer image.

(9) Pilate's judgment seat In John 19:13, Pontius Pilate brought Jesus to the judge's seat "at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha)." The Aramaic word means "ridge" or "height" or "raised" place. It was adjacent to Herod's Jerusalem palace. The entrance is paved with stone. "It is clear that the section of the city that housed the Herodian palace was indeed not only the highest place in the city but was founded on bedrock rather than on fill" (von Wahlde, p. 572-75). This fits the description of the Stone Pavement and the Gabbatha.

Jewishmag.com offers an article on the discovery of Herod's palace. This older edition of a Jewish Encyclopedia still has good information on "Gabbatha." This short entry by New Advent discusses

the optional locations of the Gabbatha, but the article does not seem to be up to date with scholarship.

(10) The tomb of Jesus?

All four Gospels, of course, include in their story about Jesus the empty tomb. But John has a few more and fuller details that the Synoptics do not (e.g. the tomb's location outside the city walls). So the empty tomb is discussed in this article, rather than the article on archaeology and the Synoptics.

Also, this section has nothing to do with the popular claims that some have found the ossuary (bone box) of Jesus. Rather, this Q & A comes from sound archaeology, not sensationalist archaeology that bypasses many specialists, who deny the claims about Jesus' alleged bone box.

Some of the details about the real tomb: Jesus was placed in a new tomb cut out of rock (Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53), which was in a garden near the crucifixion site (John 19:20). The entrance was low and sealed with a stone (Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46; John 20:11). One could sit where the body had been placed (Mark 16:5; John 20:12). "Based upon the Biblical description and upon other known first-century tombs, the tomb of Jesus can be reconstructed as having had a small forecourt, a low entry passage and a burial chamber with benches or 'couches' on the three sides for the placement of the deceased" (New International Archaeological Study Bible, p. 1615).

Josephus references tombs for important people nearby (Jewish Wars 5.6.2.229 and 5.6.3.330). Tombs datable to the first century had been cut into a rock quarry that was once outside of Jerusalem. Next, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, built in 330 AD, retains the Christian tradition of Jesus' burial from the very beginning. Hadrian (ruled 117-138 AD) constructed a temple to Jupiter and Venus on the site in AD 130 / 131. In AD 325 Constantine (r. 324-337 AD) ordered its demolition and found a tomb beneath it, remarkably. The site was an old quarry, part of which was a garden (John 19:41). A quarry had to be outside of the city walls, though the Old City encompasses it today. At least four tombs cut into the rocks have been located, and one of them matches the description of the type in which Jesus was buried. . . . "The evidence points to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher as being the actual site of Jesus' tomb" (New International Archaeological Study Bible, p. 1615).

Von Wahlde concludes: "The significance of this for our appreciation of the historical accuracy of John's reports is considerable . . . the Johannine [adjective of John] account contains remarkably accurate knowledge that the Gospel is in fact able to serve as a source of unique knowledge about the crucifixion and burial of Jesus" (p. 582).

New International Archaeological Study Bible, p. 1615; von Wahlde, pp. 581-82. As for the alleged family tomb of Jesus, this scholar refutes the popular claims that the ossuary (bone box) of Jesus was found. Her article is not written from a conservative Christian point of view or a Christian viewpoint at all. Ben Witherington, a front-ranking New Testament scholar, has a blog on the topic, saying the "evidence" for a family tomb of Jesus is wrong. For what it's worth, I have written an article on the topic.

2. What does all of this mean for the historical reliability of John's Gospel?

Two bloggers believe that the Gospels are theological books, not history books. So why waste our time with the "nonsense" about archaeology and history, as if to prove the Bible? In response, do we need to have such a sharp dichotomy between the history and theology? Cannot both be valid enterprises at the same time? Plus, my goal, contrary to what they imply, is not to prove the Bible (whatever that word means). But my goal is to counter the "nonsense" about the Gospels being infamously unreliable on an historical level. If the bloggers wish to see texts that have little or nothing to do with history, they should read the next Q & A.

It is true that John's Gospel is very theological. However, "the survey reveals no credible evidence to suggest that any of the twenty sites [examined in his article] is simply fictitious or symbolic. While some secondary meaning is possible in some instances, the intrinsic historicity and accuracy of the references should be beyond doubt" (von Wahlde, p. 583).

Von Wahlde goes on to say that sixteen of the twenty sites examined in his article are certain. Then, "of the remaining four, two can be narrowed to within a relatively restricted locale: the place in the Temple precincts for the keeping of animals and the Lithostrotos" (ibid). The last two sites are still being debated: Aenon near Salim and Bethany beyond the Jordan. The more details an author mentions about a location, the greater the chance of his being proved wrong, especially in texts from the ancient world. However, von Wahlde counters: "Yet in fact [John's Gospel] has done just the reverse and demonstrates the full extent of the accuracy and the detail of the Evangelist's knowledge. It is precisely those places described in the greatest detail that can be identified with the greatest certitude" (p. 584).

John is a spiritual Gospel that has its own stated theological agenda (John 20:31). But the Gospel is also rooted in history because the life of Christ was located in time and place, in Israel about four decades before the destruction of the temple in AD 70 by the Roman General Titus (in that link see an image on the Arch of Titus of the Menorah, and more, triumphantly being carried through Rome).

3. How do these discoveries relate to Gnostic "gospels"?

We can compare the discoveries with all the Gnostic texts, not just the so-called gospels, in the latest edition of the Nag Hammadi collection. We can also include the synoptic Gospels in our discussion, in addition to John's Gospel. The Biblical Gospels anchor their truths in time and place, in the life of Jesus, who lived in Israel, about four decades before the fall of Jerusalem. It is true that sometimes the Biblical Gospels follow a thematic strategy and sometimes deliberately diverge from or omit the data that are necessary to work out a detailed chronology of the life of Christ. However, we are not talking about mythical Middle-earth in the Lord of the Rings trilogy. The discoveries listed in this present article and in Archaeology and the Synoptic Gospels and the historical assumptions in the four Gospels correspond to each other and cohere together. And that's good news for the historical reliability of Scripture. On the other hand, the disembodied truth-claims in the Gnostic texts seem deliberately to distance themselves from the true, real-life story of Jesus, who lived down here on earth in a Jewish context. According to the Index of Proper Names and a count of names that (should) appear throughout the collection, Pontius Pilate, who ordered Christ's execution, is not mentioned at all. Galilee appears only once, the Gnostic text Wisdom of Jesus Christ saying that the Mount of Olives is in Galilee in the north. But the Mount is actually quite visible quite near Jerusalem in Judea, in the south. By contrast, in the much shorter

four Biblical Gospels, Pilate appears a little under sixty times in the last few chapters of each Gospel (many in parallel passages). Galilee is mentioned about sixty times (many in parallel passages). All four Gospels clearly say that the Mount of Olives is near Jerusalem.

Further, in all the Nag Hammadi Gnostic texts, Jerusalem is found only sixteen times, and one text says that demons helped David and Solomon to build it (see Testimony of Truth 69-70, 24-70; pp. 626-27). "Gnostic Jerusalem" seems to float, as it were, in the background of a Medieval painting done by an artist who had never seen the Holy City. So his depiction of it is otherworldly or just plain outlandish. But in the four Gospel narratives, Jerusalem is listed nearly seventy times (many in parallel passages). As we shall see in future articles, the Gospels were written by or based on eyewitnesses, so the Holy City is down-to-earth and real in their accounts (cf. Matthew 21:12-16 // Matthew 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-47; and John 2:12-16; Matthew 24:1-2 // Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6; Luke 21:1-4; John 2:20; Luke 21:20). The Gospels never say or imply that demons helped to build it. The point of listing these names and places is to show that the pseudonymous authors of the Nag Hammadi texts seem to delight in omitting time and place, except for a few ethereal locations and persons, whereas the Biblical authors thought the life of Jesus in history was important. The pseudonymous authors and the final collector(s) of the Nag Hammadi gospels had a tin ear for storytelling, particularly stories rooted in history. Because of the absence in the Gnostic gospels of a basic, down-to-earth correspondence between the texts and history and for many other reasons, we should not at all be confident that Jesus and his followers actually taught and did what is in the Gnostic gospels, though they contain some sayings and traditions that are derivative off of the Biblical Gospels.

4. What does all of this mean to the Church of all denominations?

I have already discussed our reaction to the possibility that the historical assumptions in the four Gospels may not correspond precisely to the historical data outside of the Gospels: Archaeology and the Synoptic Gospels (in that link scroll down to Q & A Four). However, the match up between the historical data inside and outside the Gospels happens so often that no one should abandon Scripture if uncertainties remain. Unreasonable critics and fearful believers would be . . . well . . . needlessly unreasonable and fearful, if they did.

I like what Mark D. Roberts says about all four Gospels: they are "Truthful History Motivated by Theology" (Can We Trust the Gospels? Crossway, 2007, p. 121).

Again, the goal of the series is not to establish the Gospels' inerrancy or inspiration, though the facts examined in this article certainly do not disconfirm those doctrines. But I'll leave the doctrines to the theologians.

Here, however, in numerous cases there is a close coherence between the facts inside and outside the Gospel of John and the Synoptics, so their historical reliability is affirmed, quite easily, too. This article has two companion pieces:

Archaeology and the Synoptic Gospels: Which way do the rocks roll? Did Jesus Even Exist? Can you have an effect without a cause?

References and Further Reading Rami Arav. "Bethsaida." In Charlesworth, Jesus and Archaeology. Pp. 145-66.

James M. Arlandson. "Jesus Called It 'Israel.'" American Thinker. July 2007.

Archaeology and the Bible. An apologetics website presents an overview of the data. ("Apologetics" means the "study or science of defending a faith or religion.") If a believer must have near-absolute perfection and complete inerrancy in a match up between history inside and outside the Bible, then this website goes a long way to get there. But the proprietors seem to acknowledge that uncertainties remain.

David Couchman. "Real People, Real Places: Evidence from Archaeology for the Reliability of the Bible." An overview article from an apologetics website

James H. Charlesworth. Jesus and Archaeology. Eerdmans, 2006. Excellent book. You may look inside it at the link. Many of the articles are cited in this present article.

Digthebible has excellent links.

"Archaeology and Geography as Related to the Gospel of John." Catholic resources on the Gospel of John Jerusalem Archaeological Park. Well worth exploring.

John McRay. "Archaeology and the Bible: How archaeological findings have enhanced the credibility of the Bible." Article at a Southern Baptist website Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. Oxford Archaeological Guides: The Holy Land. 4th ed. Oxford, 1998.

New International Archaeological Study Bible. Zondervan, 2005. Excellent. Critics of Scripture on the basis of archaeology and geography must work their way through this resource.

Mark D. Roberts. "Does Archaeology Support the Reliability of the Gospels?" He has a photo of the bones of the "crucified man." He also has other articles in the series (go first to this last link).

Urban C. von Wahlde. "Archaeology and John's Gospel." In Charlesworth, Jesus and Archaeology, pp. 523-86. Excellent overview of archaeology and John's Gospel Urban Simulation Team has a first-rate section on Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

Juergen Zangenberg. "Between Jerusalem and Galilee: Samaria in the Time of Jesus." In Charlesworth, Jesus and Archaeology, pp. 393-432.

04 - Chapter 04

Chapter 4. Did Jesus Even Exist? Can you have an effect without a cause? In the last article, Archaeology and John's Gospel, I asked whether skepticism chic is passé. Maybe I should have used the term hyper-skepticism. Is it waning? No. Did Jesus even live? Personally, I have no doubt that he did. But we should take a moment to provide resources that counter hyper-skepticism. When you throw a rock into a still pond, ripples radiate outward. The rock is the cause, and the ripples are the effect, to keep things simple.

Let's apply the rock-into-the-pond image. Jesus is the Rock. His disciples and his movement and the written Gospels are the ripples. His "splashdown" in his home country Israel caused or produced ripples that went around the Mediterranean world. They are still going strong throughout the world today. In Part Four here in a long series, we're supposed to be talking about the historical reliability of the Gospels. But those title questions take us into the realm of hyper-skepticism and far away from the commonsense world of time and space and history that we are used to. To counter the nonsense about the non-existence of the historical Jesus, it is customary to analyze what non-Christian sources say about him. I will do this, up to a point. I mention only passages that the vast majority of scholars rarely doubt. In the References and Further Reading section, I provide links to books and websites that discuss more than these passages mentioned here. Finally, this article returns to the main purpose of the series, mentioning other persons who appear both inside the Gospels and in texts other than the Gospels, non-Christian sources, in other words.

Hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these.

1. Where do questions like those in the title come from? The larger context of hyper-skepticism: René Descartes (1596-1650) sat alone in a room and conducted an experiment, of sorts. He wondered how far he could get if he were to doubt everything - and I mean everything: his five senses; the existence of his own body; the truths of mathematics and science; God's existence; whether Descartes was awake or asleep, dreaming; and whether a malicious deity were deceiving him.

What did he come out with? He is a thing that thinks. "I think, therefore I am." Even when he doubts, his mind exists. Even if he lives in a dream, then his mind exists. Even if he is deceived by a malicious deity, then there is a mind that can be deceived. He can even be a disembodied thinking thing. To his credit, however, he tried to rebuild secure knowledge in the rest of his Mediations, but today's philosophers conclude that he was naïve in his rebuilding project. He let the hyper-skeptical genie out of the bottle.

Descartes is considered the founding father of modern philosophy, and the hyper-doubt goes on today.

So, to ask whether an historical figure like Jesus even existed is child's play for the hyper-skeptics, if they can doubt basic and commonsense truths right in front of their faces, before their eyes. At

the end of this article, see a series on postmodernism, which further analyzes the origins of hyper-skepticism, among other things.

2. So what do these non-Christian sources say about Jesus?

They are numbered for clarity.

(1) Josephus (c. AD 37 to post-100), a Jewish historian, records some interesting comments about Jesus and James, the half-brother of Jesus. We quote from his book Jewish Antiquities, his second major work (Jewish Wars is the first), written in the early 90s. The first passage has sparked controversy because it is widely believed that a Christian scribe interpolated (inserted) some clauses. But here is an expurgated version:

Around this time lived Jesus, a wise man. For he was a worker of amazing deeds and was a teacher of people who gladly accept the truth. He won over both many Jews and many Greeks. Pilate, when he heard him accused by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, [but] those who have first loved him did not cease [doing so]. To this day the tribe of Christians named after him has not disappeared. (from Jewish Antiquities 18.3.2; quoted in Van Voorst; readers may read the fuller version here, scrolling down to Chapter 3)

Scholars agree that Josephus wrote a passage on Jesus. Most scholars would agree on this restored version. When they don't agree, they usually make Josephus a little more hostile (Bruce, p. 39). This excerpt corroborates some elements in the Gospels. Specifically, Jesus was a wise man, though the Gospels do not use that description in those exact terms. He worked amazing deeds. He was a teacher. He won over many Jews. Leading men accused him. Pilate had him crucified. His followers did not cease loving him. They continue up to the time of Josephus, who was writing in Rome, where a Christian community flourished. As for the observation that Jesus won over many Greeks or Gentiles, Josephus was simply retrofitting his present day with the ministry of Jesus, for the Gospels say Jesus' outreach to Greeks or Gentiles was minimal. But one thing is certain: Josephus does not doubt that Jesus existed. Van Voorst writes: "[the excerpt] . . . affirms the existence of Jesus. If any Jewish writer were ever in a position to know about the non-existence of Jesus, it would have been Josephus. His implicit affirmation of the existence of Jesus has been, and still is, the most significant obstacle for those who argue that extra-biblical evidence is not probative on this point" (p. 99).

Josephus was a careful enough historian to have noted whether the Jesus movement had been built on a fraud, on a zero, on a nothing, on the complete absence of a real person. Josephus could have written: "The followers of this non-existent Jesus say he existed, but no one ever saw or heard him." But Josephus didn't write that.

(2) Next, Josephus recounts the execution of James, the half-brother of Jesus. Josephus intends Ananus the high priest in Jerusalem to appear bad because the Romans replaced him. Since Ananus behaved rashly, the Romans were justified in their policy.

[Ananus the high priest] assembled the sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned. (See Jewish Antiquities 20.9.1; scroll down to Chapter 9) The

majority of scholars agree that this passage is authentic, without interpolations. Josephus recognized that James the (half) brother of Jesus was an important leader of a new religious movement (earliest Christianity) in Jerusalem, important enough for Josephus to recall his name and execution. His passage indeed corroborates the Gospels because some verses mention James as the Lord's (half) brother (Matthew 13:55 // Mark 6:3).

(3) Tacitus (c. 56-120) was considered one of the most careful of Roman historians. He makes a passing reference to Jesus in the context of Nero blaming Christians for the fire in Rome, a fire that began on July 19, AD 64. He wanted to deflect blame from himself. The following portion of his Annals was written about AD 112.

Tacitus writes with a clear note of contempt: But neither human resources, nor imperial munificence, nor appeasement of the gods, eliminated sinister suspicions that the fire had been instigated. To suppress this rumor, Nero fabricated scapegoats - and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called). The originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilatus. But in spite of this temporary setback the deadly superstition had broken out afresh, not only in Judaea (where the mischief had started) but even in Rome. All degraded and shameful practices collect and flourish in the capital (Annals 15.44.2-3; trans. by Michael Grant, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, Rev. ed. Penguin Classics, 1977, p. 365; online) The rest of the passage in Tacitus describes the torture that the Christians suffered. They were covered in animal skins and torn to pieces by wild dogs; they were crucified; or they were turned into human torches, in Nero's gardens, though there seems to be a textual problem with the "torches" (Van Voorst, p. 42. note 59).

Tacitus corroborates the Gospels on the following points: Christ was the originator of the religion ("deadly superstition"); he was executed during the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius (ruled AD 14-37); he was executed by Pontius Pilate (ruled in Judea AD 27-37); there was indeed a temporary setback after Christ's death, as the Gospels indicate; but the religion flamed back up. It made it to Rome (Christ predicted that it would go into all the world in Matthew 24:14; Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 13:10). Tacitus mentions Judea as the place of origin. This probably reflects the fact that Christianity was centered there after the death of Jesus.

3. Were Josephus and Tacitus eyewitnesses to Jesus?

No. But they were careful historians - at least careful enough to affirm that Jesus existed and was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Eddy and Rhodes explain why Tacitus himself would look into the existence of Jesus, and not depend on Christian hearsay, but possibly on official records (pp. 182-84). J. P. Holding has an excellent online article on Tacitus ("Nero's Scapegoats"). Hyper-skeptics must work their way through key books and articles in the References and Further Readings section, below.

4. What about other New Testament figures in non-Christian sources? This article is really about the historical reliability of the Gospels, not just the bare existence of Jesus, corroborated by non-Christian sources. Again, these references are numbered for clarity.

(1) There is another important person who appears in all four Gospels and Josephus: John the Baptist. The lengthy account in Josephus' history and the four Gospels agree on some main

points. John is called the Baptist; he was a good man who commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, in righteousness to man and to God, and in piety; John commanded them to come to baptism in water; crowds came to him, for they were moved to hear him. Herod the tetrarch made him a prisoner and put him to death (read the account here). The differences in Josephus and the Gospels are mainly political. Herod kills John because the ruler feared John's influence over the people, for he might raise a rebellion against Herod. But the Gospels say that Herod executed John because Herod feared John and because John condemned the ruler for marrying his brother Philip's wife, Herodias (Josephus alludes to these things, too). Both can be true. Herod feared John's influence and was angry at his denunciation.

Since the excerpt on John the Baptist is long, I won't quote it here. Readers are invited to go to Jewish Antiquities 18.5 (scroll down to Chapter Five).

(2) Josephus mentions Annas and Caiaphas the high priests during the ministry of Jesus or close to his timeframe (Jewish Antiquities 18 and 20; do a control-F search on their names or Ananus). The Gospels also mention them: Annas (Luke 3:2; John 18:13, John 18:24; cf. Acts 4:6) and Caiaphas (Matthew 26:3, Matthew 26:57; Luke 3:2; John 11:49; John 18:13-14, John 18:24, John 18:28; cf. Acts 4:6).

(3) Finally, as noted, Josephus discusses Pontius Pilate in several places (Jewish Antiquities 18 and Jewish Wars 2; do a control-F search on Pilate). He is referenced about fifty-eight times in the four Gospels (many in parallel passages), three times in Acts, and once in 1 Timothy 6:13.

We could do a study of these persons, both in the Gospels and Josephus. But we do not have the space (see Evans, pp. 166-75, for a good study on Pilate; Evans explains the differences between Pilate in Josephus and the Gospels). Suffice it to say here that Josephus does not doubt the existence of John the Baptist, Pontius Pilate, and the two high priests. So why should we? The Gospels and outside written sources cohere together often. Even if they do not cohere with perfect precision, I still see no reason or need for hyper-skepticism about the existence of Jesus and of others mentioned inside the New Testament and in texts outside the New Testament (see Q & A Nine).

5. Are there more non-Christian sources?

Yes, and I provide links to online articles and books that discuss those sources (see especially J. P. Holding, References and Further Reading, below). But perhaps the question is - why are the unambiguous and solid sources so few? Also, why are there not more unimpeachable sources that are contemporary with Jesus? These questions can be answered in seven ways.

First, Roman histories that were contemporary with Jesus or nearly so have perished. Second, the ancients did not live in the world of satellite hookups. So there was a time lag between the events and writing them down. Third, earliest Christianity was not on Rome's radar screen, so to speak, until the religion was perceived to be a threat or at least interacted strongly with life in Rome. Thus, when Jesus was perceived to be a threat in small, outlying regions called Galilee and Judea, he was executed by the Roman authorities stationed in Jerusalem. End of story, for elite Romans living in the largest city in the Mediterranean world - Rome. By analogy, Pontius Pilate is such a minor figure that he is nowhere mentioned in the Roman histories, except when they bring up Jesus, specifically only in Tacitus (see Q & A Two, above).

Fourth, Roman historians, in treating of religions, do not delve into their origins in any detail. The historians cared only about the religions now, and how they may influence Roman society. For example, Tacitus does not explore the origins of Judaism, not even Abraham, Moses, or David, but Tacitus does examine the Judaism of his day. Fifth, the first full Gospels were not written and shared among communities until about AD 70 and later. So it should not be expected that the Gospels would come into the hands of first-century historians. Rather, it is the second-century historians who take Christianity seriously, as it spread around the empire. And the historians still did not have access to the written Gospels, in all likelihood - in the age before printing presses, after all.

Sixth, a less-than-observant reading of the Gospels may give the impression that Jesus' ministry impacted the whole known world right after a miracle happened, beamed live by satellite into ancient Gaul (modern France). It is true that his ministry impacted Israel, particularly Galilee, but it did not yet spread much beyond his homeland and its capital, Jerusalem. Roman historians probably would not have heard of him. Seventh and finally, if elite Roman historians had heard of him, there is no reason to expect that they would have written about him. During his ministry, many self-proclaimed prophets and self-styled messiahs wandered around the ancient world. From a comfortable Roman's point of view, Jesus would have been one voice among many. To repeat, Roman historians took notice of the Jesus movement-turned-church, only when it came across their "radar screen" several decades after he was resurrected. By then he was not on earth to be interrogated.

Personally, I'm surprised that the historians and other authors refer to Jesus specifically as often as they do, and accurately, too, in the main. These seven explanations fit the logic of history in the ancient Roman world, at least to me they do.

See Van Voorst, pp. 70-71, and Eddy and Rhodes, p. 168.

6. Do the Gospels count as historically reliable testimony?

Yes, and that's what the entire series endeavors to establish. I see no reason to accept, a priori, the notion that when a Gospel disagrees on a detail with a non-Christian text, the Gospel is automatically wrong. In any case, the series is really about the historical reliability of the Gospels, without entering the world of hyper-skepticism to prove that Jesus existed. He enjoys the support of historically reliable Christian and non-Christian sources. For me, that's enough.

7. But weren't the Gospels written by partisans, so the texts cannot be trusted?

I like how one scholar frames the answer. Craig Evans writes: . . . "if Jesus really said little of lasting significance and was unable to train his disciples to remember accurately what little he did say, then we must really wonder why the Christian movement emerged at all" (p. 47). For our purposes, this quotation means that you cannot have an effect or result without a cause. So even though the Gospels were written by authors with a strong point of view, that does not imply that Jesus never lived. Many Greek and Roman authors who intended to write faithful or even fanciful accounts of an actual person also wrote from a strong viewpoint. See these texts about Socrates, not written by him: *Apology* (Defense) by Plato; *Clouds* by Aristophanes; and *Memorabilia* and *Apology* by Xenophon. Some texts are more accurate than others. But does that mean we should doubt Socrates' existence, at a bare minimum? Of course not. And so the Gospels fit into their

larger literary context.

Today if an extra-cautious rationalist does not believe in the Gospel miracles or believes that the Gospels are built on a legend, then he outwits himself by half if he denies the mere existence of the historical Jesus. Inaccurate and accurate accounts were built up around Socrates, but he still existed, in history (see Q & A Nine).

Mark D. Roberts assesses all four Gospels in a reasonable way. They are “Truthful History Motivated by Theology” (Can We Trust the Gospels? Crossway, 2007, p. 121).

8. How does all of this relate to the Gnostic texts?

Some scholars look for passages in the Gnostic and apocryphal texts, particularly in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, to find out whether they may be early and independent sources for the existence of the historical Jesus. These scholars believe that they may have found some passages. But their goal is the same as my cause-and-effect comment, below, in Q & A Ten. They believe that a few parts of the Gnostic texts did not emerge in a vacuum, but have a real, historical Jesus standing behind them, if only remotely. However, on the whole, the Gnostic and apocryphal texts are clearly derivative or stray far from the historical Jesus.

Readers may see the References and Further Reading section for more information, looking especially for Bruce, Van Voorst, and France.

9. So should we doubt the existence of Jesus, as hyper-skepticism says, or not?

Not. Hyper-skepticism demands too much of me. It requires me to believe that the apostolic community perpetrated a hoax on society. All of the earliest disciples conspired together to create a religious movement from a fraud - a massive prank. They supposedly engineered Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. The disciples supposedly did this even though they never gained any riches or lived a comfortable life. Hyper-skepticism requires me to believe that the written Gospels are based on an absence or a zero. Hyper-skepticism requires me to believe that the Jesus movement spread like wildfire because of a nothing, a non-existent person.

Maybe it is widely (and inaccurately) believed that Christianity rose to power without any trouble, from the first day, so it was the Christians who harassed people with torture and prison, including martyrdom. Just the opposite. The early Christians were the hunted and the persecuted and the martyred, just as we saw in Tacitus. It is one thing to die or suffer persecution for something that you believe is true (though it really isn't). But it is quite another to die or suffer persecution for a belief that you know is false. The members of the Jim Jones cult drank poison because they believed in their leader, not because they followed a messiah they knew to be false. Maybe a few really extreme and deluded lunatics would die or suffer persecution for a belief that they know to be false, but surely not a huge number, spread out over the Roman Empire. It seems that at least a few of the earliest disciples, suffering from persecution and martyrdom, would reveal to the authorities that the whole Jesus movement is a fraud and he never existed at all. However, the disciples did not do this, and they do not fit the profile of deluded lunatics. Rather, they were honest, rational, and coherent, intellectually.

It is difficult to imagine that the disciples really believed and professed absurdities like these, if only among themselves: “We follow a non-existent person who never spoke and never did any

miracles! We never saw him! We are a mushroom cult that hallucinates! We suffer from large-scale delusions! This complete non-human / human zero is why we never suffer persecution and martyrdom! We manufacture those reports about our persecution and martyrdom! We're actually getting rich and living in mansions! Thank you, non-existent Jesus! Now let's go out there and deceive people! Can I get a witness?" "No," should come the wise reply.

Delusion is not a "psychological miracle."

10. What does your cause-and-effect title mean? In the world we live in, up here above quantum fluctuations, we cannot have an effect without a cause. We cannot get something out of nothing. As noted in the Introduction to this article, when you throw a rock into a still pond, ripples go outward in concentric circles. To put things simply, Jesus of Nazareth is the cause. He is the Rock. At a minimum, the apostolic community and the written Gospels are the effect. They are the ripples that go outward from Israel and into all of their known world.

Therefore, it is more plausible to believe that the historical Jesus existed than to believe that he did not. He is the one who got the whole movement started. And at a maximum, it is still going around the world, just as Jesus predicted and commanded (Matthew 24:14; Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 13:10). I expect that it will continue to flourish and grow. The ripples can get stronger, not weaker, today.

11. So what's the bottom line on all of this?

Much - not all - of this article got sidetracked into the nonsense about the non-existence of Jesus and away from the main goal of the series: the historical reliability of the Gospels. For me, in this specific article, it is remarkable how many times the Gospels enjoy corroboration from Greek and Roman and Jewish sources: Jesus; James his (half) brother; John the Baptist; Pontius Pilate; Ananas and Caiaphas; many Herods (the Great and his offspring and their wives or husbands); the Pharisees and Sadducees; and, to step outside the Gospels, Gamaliel in the Mishnah, Paul's teacher (cf. Acts 5:34, Acts 22:3), and others. The corroboration could be extended into non-Christian sources not discussed in this article (see below for links, particularly J. P. Holding). The Gospels reflect their historical context. They may go in directions that are not strictly sequential with the events in Jesus' life, taking instead a thematic or theological direction. But the Gospels are still rooted in history -- in the life-story of a real person who lived in Israel, about four decades before the destruction of the temple in AD 70, by the Roman General Titus (in that link see an image on the Arch of Titus, of the Menorah and more, triumphantly being carried through Rome). The evidence in the series is mounting: the Gospels are trustworthy on an historical level.

12. What does all of this mean in the big picture?

Hyper-skeptics seem to believe that if they can trash Christianity and somehow spark a mass defection, then all the world will be better off. But apparently they do not realize that a competitor religion has entered the marketplace of ideas, with some force (pun intended). When people defect from Christianity, they may not turn secular. They may join a religion (can you guess which one I'm hinting at?) that denies basic freedom of expression and thought - the very freedom that the hyper-skeptics depend on to attempt to eviscerate Christianity. But if this competitor religion were to win the day, its leaders will not permit the hyper-skeptics to attack its holy book and its founder. Imprisonment or death may be imposed on the hyper-doubters and scoffers.

Sometimes I sit back to figure out why people make outlandish claims - about history (no need to talk about miracles now). But I cannot figure out why hyper-skeptics overreach and wish to tear down a religion that harms no one today with a holy war or death by stoning for adultery (usually adulteresses), for example. I have read the personal stories of some hyper-skeptics, and they indicate that in their youth they got burned by a church. I concede that too often, sadly, the meanest people are in church, but a lot of normal people have unpleasant personal experiences with a religion; yet they leave things alone without saying that Jesus never existed.

Anyway, for further reflection . . .

13. So what does all of this mean to the Church of all denominations?

It is doubtful whether you will come in contact with a hyper-skeptic. If so, you may use the resources, below, in the References and Further Reading section. Maybe this article will help, too. I suggest that you give very little time to true-blue hyper-skeptics. They will never be satisfied. If there are three high-quality references to Jesus and many references to other New Testament figures outside the Gospels, then the hyper-skeptics will clamor for more, always more. But if I may counsel you members of the Church wherever it is found - in the unlikely event that you were to meet a hardcore hyper-skeptic who tells you that Jesus may not have existed, you tell him that the four Gospels are reliable enough for you. Writings other than the Gospels corroborate again and again the existence of persons - not only Jesus - inside the Gospels. All of the sources cohere together and correspond to each other. Jesus existed, and so did a lot of other New Testament figures. Not even a hyper-skeptic can have an effect without a cause. Jesus is the cause, and his religious movement - even today - is the effect. The ripples are still going strong. The hyper-skeptics overreach. If I may counsel them for a moment, they should acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth lived. They can then move on to attack the content of the Gospels themselves, like the miracles. (That's irony, folks!) This article has two companion pieces:

Archaeology and the Synoptic Gospels: Which way do the rocks roll?

Archaeology and John's Gospel: Is skepticism chic passé?

References and Further Reading An asterisk indicates that the entry should be read or purchased first.

* Paul Barnett. *Is the New Testament Reliable?* 2nd ed. Intervarsity, 2003. Pp. 22-34. For beginners. Go for this one and Roberts' first.

Darrell Bock. "Extra-Biblical Evidence for Jesus: Signs of His Presence from Outside Scripture." Bible.org. A list of (mostly) non-Christian sources, but no analysis.

* F. F. Bruce. *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*. Hodder and Stoughton, 1974. An old standard from a first-rate scholar, and he seems to have the laity in mind, but start with Barnett and Roberts.

Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd. *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Traditions*. Baker Academic, 2007. Pp. 165-200. This is excellent, but it is for the advanced; again, start with Barnett and Roberts.

---. *Lord or Legend: Wrestling with the Jesus Dilemma*. Baker, 2007. Their smaller book here is designed for the laity, but it can still get technical for the true beginner. But definitely get it.

* Craig A. Evans. *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels*. Intervarsity, 2006. Pp. 158-79. Excellent on Josephus. For the laity, but it can get technical for the true beginner.

---. "Jesus in Non-Christian Sources." In *Studying the Historical Jesus*. Eds. B. Chilton and C. Evans. Brill, 1994). Pp. 443-78. He provides a classification of the Greco-Roman and Jewish sources: Dubious Sources, Sources of Minimal Value, and Important Sources.

Louis H. Feldman. "The Testimonium Flavianum: the State of the Question." In B. Chilton and C. Evans. *Studying the Historical Jesus*. Brill, 1994. Pp. 179-99. Feldman is currently the "dean" of Josephus studies.

* Richard T. France. *The Evidence for Jesus*. Regent College, 1986 (reprinted 2006). He respects the Gospels but does not whitewash the difficulties. Get this book, along with Bruce's and Van Voorst's, but after Barnett's and Robert's.

Gary R. Habermas. *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*. College Press, 1996 (1999). Written from a very conservative viewpoint. For the mid to advanced.

Murray J. Harris. "References to Jesus in Early Classical Authors." In *Gospel Perspectives: The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels*. Vol. 5. Ed. David Wenham. Wipf and Stock, 2004 (1984). Pp. 343-68. Scholarly, for the advanced.

* J. P. Holding. "Shattering the Christ-Myth." Tektonics.org. This article at an apologetics website has a good discussion and links to other articles on Greek and Roman and Jewish writings; the articles are well researched. But I cannot vouch for the rest of his website, though it seems well worth exploring.

* ---. "Nero's Scapegoats." Tektonics.org. Good article on Tacitus.

* J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace. *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Misperceive Popular Culture*. Kregel, 2006. Written from a conservative point of view, for the laity.

* Mark D. Roberts. *Can We Trust the Gospels?* Crossway, 2007. Pp. 139-50. Start here and Barnett.

* ----. "Do Historical Sources from the Era of the Gospels Support Their Reliability?" October 2005. He quotes a few more sources than I do in this article.

Graham H. Twelftree. "Jesus in Jewish Traditions." In *Gospel Perspectives: The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels*. Vol. 5. Ed. David Wenham. Wipf and Stock, 2004 (1984). Pp. 289-342. Scholarly, for the advanced.

* Robert E. Van Voorst. *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence*. Eerdmans, 2000. This is the best treatment. If you are inexperienced in these issues, look into Barnett and Roberts first; then get this one.

Edwin M. Yamauchi. "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What Is the Evidence?" In *Jesus under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*. Eds. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland. Intervarsity, 1995. Pp. 207-30. Scholarly, for the advanced.

Craig A. Evans thought of the rock-in-the-pond image first.

Since this article deals with hyper-skepticism, I decided to embed a series that analyzes postmodernism. The series seeks to explain why, in part, we have breathed in hyper-skepticism that influences our interpretations of the Bible, in a negative, destructive way. These articles appear at americanthinker.com and were written by yours truly.

Part One:Postmodernism and the Bible: Introduction Part Two:The Origins of Postmodernism Part Three:Postmodern Truth Soup Part Four:Deconstruction: A Primer Part Five:The Deconstructed Jesus Part Six:The De-deconstructed Jesus Part Seven:Alternatives to Postmodern Hyper-Skepticism Part Eight:Postmodernism and the Bible: Conclusion

05 - Chapter 05

Chapter 5. The Gospel Traditions: Melt in your mouth? With this article (Part Five) we turn a corner away from archaeology and non-Christian written references to Gospel persons (the last three articles). Now we discuss the preservation of Jesus' ministry -- his words and activity -- after his crucifixion (and resurrection) and up to the time when the Gospels were written. This article (and the next three) explores a subject that most Gospel readers take for granted or overlook (I certainly did). The disciples were keeping careful track of what Jesus was saying and doing during his ministry, but for simplicity, here is the gap that the next three articles will cover:

Jesus' ministry | | Written Gospels

Those little vertical bars do not signify hard, fixed barriers. Rather, they simply work well from an ordinary keyboard! The disciples were transmitting and handing on the teachings and deeds of Jesus during his ministry -- recall their first mission without him in Matthew 10:1-42, Mark 6:1-56, and Luke 9:1-62 and 10. Jesus was training them to go out on their own. Eventually, some of his teachings and deeds were written down in the Biblical Gospels. So the questions are -- How was the ministry of Jesus passed on for a few decades until they were written in the Gospels we have now? What was this process like during that timeframe? Was the process stable and reliable or fluid and haphazard?

Scholarship and journalism that tear down Scripture can be found everywhere in the popular media. The stage between the ministry of Jesus and the written Gospels has been attacked in scholarship since about 1920. Certain scholars claim that much of what Jesus said and did was invented by the later church for its own needs; perhaps a kernel was preserved reliably. This claim has permeated many seminaries and churches. Some who crave the media spotlight gleefully reinforce it. On the other side, more recent scholarship balances out - overturns? - hyper-skeptical starting points. We need to keep up with the new scholarship.

Knowledge is the best antidote to confusion that comes from assaults on the Gospels by the media and certain schools of scholarship. So the goal of this article (and the entire series) is to summarize and to bring onto the web the best of scholarship that supports the historical reliability of the Gospels. Two very important scholars indeed are highlighted in this article, Birger Gerhardsson and Kenneth Bailey. This article is designed for beginners. I hope I can keep things simple and readable, so that's why I use the Q & A format.

Here in Part Five, I do not deal with the doctrine of the Gospels' inerrancy or infallibility or inspiration, but with their historical reliability by the standards of their own times.

Before we begin, recall that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a lot of passages in common, so they are called the synoptic Gospels (synoptic means viewed together). The authors are sometimes called synoptists. The writers of the four Gospels are also called evangelists. Slashes // mean parallel passages among them.

Hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these.

Let's get introduced to the subject by getting right to the definition of a key word.

1. What is a tradition? A good working definition in the early Christian context comes in four parts.

First, the what or the content: it encompasses both the oral teachings and the demonstrated deeds or activities of Jesus (see the fourth part of this definition).

Second, who passed on the traditions? The earliest followers cherished them and wanted to live by them and pass them on. Many of them followed Jesus from the beginning (John 15:27; Luke 1:2-3; Acts 1:21-22). Those who pass on traditions are called "transmitters," "traditioners," and "tradents" in scholarship.

Third, the significance of Jesus and the motive of the disciples are factored into the definition. They followed Jesus because, among other reasons, they saw something significant happening. Their awareness of his charismatic presence, authoritative teaching, and miracles strengthened their motive to carefully observe his deeds and attentively listen to his words and retain them. This new beginning, which would change their lives forever, was not ordinary or run-of-the-mill. The fourth part of the definition is the how of passing on traditions, sometimes called the "traditioning" process or "transmitting." The disciples passed on stories about Jesus' words and deeds, in performance. Specifically, the disciples recounted them as narratives (stories), in a community. Indeed, his actions, such as healings, were actually done by the disciples in imitation of him and in obedience to his commands (cf. Matthew 10:1-42; Matthew 28:16-20; the entire Book of Acts).

Eventually, the oral teachings and visual deeds of Jesus were written down. It was up to the Gospel writers to sift through the traditions and to include or exclude some of them from their Gospels (John 21:25).

2. Does the New Testament mention traditions and related terms?

Yes, in many passages. We don't need to quote them, for that would take up too much space. Instead, hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these.

Tradition or traditions: Matthew 15:2; Mark 7:3, Mark 7:5; 1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:6

Passing on or receiving traditions: Mark 7:4, Mark 7:13; 1 Corinthians 11:23; 1 Corinthians 15:1, 1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:9; Php 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:6

Holding to traditions: Mark 7:3, Mark 7:8-9; Matthew 15:2 ("transgress" the tradition); 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 Corinthians 11:2; 1 Corinthians 15:1; 1 Timothy 5:21, 1 Timothy 6:14, 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14

"Thus Paul and the evangelists are conscious of the fact that the Jews of their time have a tradition - consisting of many traditions - which they scrupulously maintain" (Gerhardsson, *Reliability*, p. 15). Again Gerhardsson writes about Paul's letters: "In Paul's time, there exists a conscious, deliberate, and programmatic transmission in the early church" (p. 16, emphasis original).

3. Why is the historical context of traditions important? The historical context is always important when we study Scripture or the process that supports Scripture, namely, the tradition process. It can be clarified, first, by looking at the Jewish environment, with a quick look at the Greco-Roman context. Then we will step out of the ancient context and touch on oral culture(s) in the Middle East in modern times. How was transmitting traditions done by them?

4. What is Jesus' historical context?

Jesus and the disciples lived in first-century Israel about four decades before the destruction of temple in AD 70. (Go here for an image of the Arch of Titus, and look for the Jewish Menorah and more sculpted on the Arch, taken as booty from Jerusalem.) But the methods of passing on traditions (see the next Q & A) apply before and after this extremely significant event. Jesus and his disciples lived in a religious environment that treasured teachings from leaders. Their disciples passed on their teachings in ways that excel our own age; the ancients lived before camcorders and tape recorders, but the followers retained what they heard and saw, using deliberate methods. This is particularly true when disciples were following a very significant person, in their eyes.

5. How was passing on traditions done in this context? In the *Reliability of the Gospel Tradition*, Birger Gerhardsson lists some of the methods by which the teachers and their disciples passed on and received oral teachings. These practices and methods are general enough to occur throughout the development of the oral traditions in Jewish laws and stories (p. 10). This last sentence means that we do not need to overemphasize the destruction of the temple in AD 70, as if these practices and methods suddenly appeared in a vacuum after that date (see the previous Q & A).

Memorization: this was essential before the art of writing became common. It was “not some sophisticated academic specialty but rather a decidedly popular means of retaining articulated knowledge” (p. 10, emphasis original).

Text and commentary: “First of all, an oral text must be, as it were, written on the student’s memory; only then can exegesis begin. The principle was: First learn, then understand” (p. 10).

Brevity: teachers must not be wordy, but teach tersely and incisively (p. 10).

Poetic and didactic devices: teachers made use of them to clarify their ideas, such as “picturesque or pointed formulations” (p. 10). The teachers often used parables (meshalim in Hebrew) (p. 43). . . . “Everything suggests that devoted disciples memorized [parables and logia (pithy sayings or legal rulings)] already at the time their master taught them during his ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem” (p. 45).

Repetition: “the teachers would repeat their points word by word, several times, and the students would then reiterate those same points over and over until they knew them by heart” (p. 11). “In light of the ancient Jewish methods of teaching, it seems clear to me that Jesus presented such a saying two or more times in an effort to impress it upon the minds (‘hearts’) of his hearers. Among the rabbis we can see how evident it was that a teacher would repeat the texts until his pupils knew them by heart; four repetitions seem to have been common” (p. 44). See Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Joshua 1:8; and Psalms 1:1-2.

Recitation: this was not done in an ordinary way, but rhythmically and melodiously. In the ancient world, reading was normally done out loud with special intonation (p. 11). The art of writing: the Pharisees and the teachers of the law distinguished the written Torah (first five books of the Bible) from the oral torah or traditions (the interpretations and opinions on the written Torah). The Pharisees and teachers of the law did not accept any written books containing oral torah in New Testament times, before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. But they did make “private notations of material found in the oral tradition” (emphasis original). Private notations were also taken in the schools or intellectual circles in the Hellenistic world (pp. 11-13). If I may add a comment, the larger Hellenistic world takes our study out of the Jewish context. But this strengthens the claim that at least some of the earliest followers of Jesus likely wrote things down, if only in notes, for the followers were fitting into their larger historical context. Indeed, it would be strange if they did not write things down, particularly since they believed that Jesus spoke words of the utmost importance, of life and death. All of this will be clarified in a future article (go now to Part Eight).

Struggle against lifeless knowledge: a student should enter into the study of tradition, so that he understands and is in agreement with it. He lives according to it. “A living bearer of the tradition is to be like a torch which has been lit by an older torch, in order that it might itself light others” (p. 14).

See Gerhardsson, pp. 72-74, for cautionary notes on over-applying these methods. In the next article, however, we shall see that Richard Bauckham advances or finds additional evidence to support some of Gerhardsson’s conclusions (go now to Part Six).

6. What’s the bottom line on Gerhardsson’s study?

He writes his overall conclusion in the preface of his book: For my part, I have become convinced that we can hear the voice of Jesus himself in the Gospels. His pronouncements and the narratives about his actions have been interpreted and clarified by his disciples, but they reach us nevertheless in reliable form. These small texts have been handed down to posterity by devoted and faithful adherents who wanted nothing other than to receive the message of their master, and that in such a way they would be able to preserve it and clarify it for others, so that they might know as much as possible about Jesus Christ, the crucified, resurrected, and living Lord of the church. (p. xxiv)

Gerhardsson also writes about the wording of Jesus, as remembered by his disciples: “Even with regard to the wording of the Jesus tradition - and here primarily that of the sayings tradition - the Gospels reflect the fact that the material has been preserved with respect and care” (p. 50).

7. What about storytelling cultures in the Middle East today?

We can move forward from the ancient world and take a quick look at cultures in the Middle East that tell stories as a means to stake out a social group’s identity and to provide edification and instruction. Rev. Dr. Kenneth Bailey was formerly Theologian in Residence in the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East (Cyprus) and Research Professor of Middle Eastern NT Studies (Jerusalem). He has had extensive experience with Middle Eastern life. He says that village life has not changed much in two thousand years, except for some modern gadgets. I refer to his article “Informal Controlled Oral Traditions and the Synoptic Gospels” (see link, below).

Specifically, he observed villagers and their storytellers who gather together to tell stories and recite poetry. He lays out two main alternatives on how they preserve and tell their stories and ensure their accuracy: informal controlled oral traditions and formal controlled oral traditions. (We do not need to examine the informal uncontrolled model, which he does not apply to the Gospels.) But he applies one of the two models to the oral traditions lying behind the synoptic Gospels.

He defines informal controlled traditions, thus: “By informal we mean that there is no set teacher and no specifically identified student” (p. 6, emphasis original). The gathering is informal. But there are elders and gifted men and the socially more prominent who tend to do the reciting. The storytelling is also controlled by the seated community (p. 7). If the storyteller is going off track, he will be corrected. But the storyteller is allowed a small degree of flexibility, particularly in parables and recollections of historical peoples and events. This model is contrasted with a formal controlled oral tradition. The material that is passed on “is controlled in the sense that the material is memorized (and / or written), identified as ‘tradition’ and thus preserved intact” (p. 4). As to the persons, “in the recitation of formal controlled oral tradition there is a specifically identified teacher with a recognized title and a specifically identified student. The two of them often meet in a special building, a school or college” (p. 6, emphasis original). Here the traditions have no flexibility while being transmitted.

8. Which model does Bailey apply to the Synoptics?

He applies the informal controlled model, but he also says that there are no absolute categories (p. 10). He goes on to affirm that perhaps “the pedagogy [teaching and training] of the rabbinic schools may well lie behind some of the material” in the synoptic Gospels (p. 10). This agrees in spirit with Gerhardsson’s study (see Q & A Five, above).

Richard Bauckham insightfully connects Bailey’s findings with Gospel eyewitnesses in retelling and controlling the traditions, particularly in Jerusalem, not only in Israel’s villages (pp. 252-62; 269-71; 298-300). See Bailey, “Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels” (pp. 366-67). Plus, in the next article, we shall learn how Bauckham argues, successfully, for a formal and controlled (but somewhat flexible) tradition process leading up to the written Gospels (go now to Part Six).

9. Isn’t storytelling like this a lot like playing “Telephone”? That game is intended to be humorous. A group of people whisper a few words or lines to each other, one person at a time. By the time the last person receives the phrases or words, they have been altered significantly. But this game is not even close to how oral cultures pass on their sacred stories. The cultures exert controls over the telling process, unlike Telephone. Bailey quickly dispenses with this comparison in “Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels.” He clarifies how Western youth leaders played the game with Middle Eastern students. “To the amazement and dismay of the western guest, the story emerges almost intact at the end of the game. In such cases what is passed on is irrelevant material” (p. 366). But in the informal gatherings of villagers in the Middle East, the material is highly significant. So this means that the storytellers take extra-care in transmitting a story.

Also see Mark D. Robert’s link, below, for more discussion on “Telephone” as contrasted with storytelling in the Middle East.

10. So what’s the bottom line on Bailey’s study?

Here are two key excerpts from a long concluding paragraph. Bailey writes:

Thus, in summary and conclusion, here we have observed a classical methodology for the preservation, control and transmission of tradition that provides, on the one hand, assurance of authenticity and, on the other hand, freedom within limits for various forms of that tradition. Furthermore, the types of material that appear in the Synoptic Gospels include primarily the same forms that we have found preserved by informal controlled oral tradition such as proverbs, parables, poems, dialogues, conflict stories and historical narratives . . .

. . . In the light of the reality described above the assumption that the early Christians were not interested in history becomes untenable. To remember the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth was to affirm their own unique identity. The stories had to be told and controlled or everything that made them who they were was lost. (p. 10, emphasis original) But one problem with his study is that it is anecdotal, without a large enough sample of stories and storytellers. You may read Bailey's study online, linked below. As noted, in the next article, Bauckham will strengthen and clarify parts of Bailey's study (go now to Part Six).

11. Do you have an example of oral traditions being passed on and received?

You are invited to go to Young's Literal Translation at Bible Gateway; then type in these two references on the Last Supper: Luke 22:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Recall that neither Luke nor Paul (author of 1 Corinthians) sat at the table on the night Jesus was betrayed. Also, Paul's letter was written before Luke's Gospel, so Paul probably received his tradition orally. They agree almost entirely, but they have small variations.

12. What's the bottom line for the historical reliability of the Synoptics? In my opinion, the eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word from the beginning (Luke 1:2-3) were careful to preserve and pass on accurately the traditions about Jesus. Their smaller, briefer traditions were woven together in a skillfully crafted whole and integral storyline. Yet the transmitters were allowed some small variations or flexibility in retelling the story. But they recounted them within firm limits. It is not as if a storyteller or author could change the ending (i.e. the resurrection) of the Easter story, for example. Nor could he or she change essential elements even in a small passage or pericope (unit or section).

13. What does all of this mean to the dates of the Gospels? The "dating game." Many scholars date the synoptic Gospels after the destruction of the temple in AD 70. More traditional scholars may agree on this, but they want to stay as close to that year as possible. And some date them, especially Mark, before then. However, the oral traditions lead us back long before the destruction of the temple in AD 70. So the "dating game," though important, takes second place, in my opinion. In the Gospels the very words (especially short sayings) and voice of Jesus have been treasured and reliably remembered and eventually recorded.

14. What does all of this mean in comparison to the Gnostic "gospels"? No one can be confident that Jesus said or did what the Gnostic authors claim about him. Their writings are indeed imaginary inventions and fictions. Not-so-paradoxically, this is the exact accusation leveled against the Biblical Gospels, but now we can see that the accusation is wrong. It is the Gnostic texts that can stand accused. Next, the Gnostic texts come much later, with perhaps a few earlier traditions found in one or two texts, clearly derived from the Biblical Gospels. So, it is the Biblical Gospels

that take us back to the authentic words and voice of Jesus, not back to the inventive imagination of the disciples.

15. What does all of this mean for the Church of all denominations?

Gospel traditions? Who knew? All of this may seem weird to web readers who take Scripture seriously. (I certainly learned new things while writing this article.) Like me, you may prefer to read the Gospels in their final form or what we have now. That preference is normal - and wise. That's what we learned in church. But the articles in this series need to get onto the web, not only for average web readers, but especially for high school and college students, for pastors and priests and Sunday school and catechism teachers and home Bible study leaders. The historical reliability of the Gospels - and therefore the Gospels themselves - has come under attack over the popular media and the worldwide web, just a click away.

Education is the best antidote to these attacks. This article has three companion pieces in the series:

6. Reliable Transmissions: the Gospels without a breakdown?

7. What Is the 'Q Gospel'? The Gospel According to 'St. Q'?

8. Did Some Disciples Take Notes during Jesus' Ministry?

References and Further Reading

Nearly all of these entries are technical, so I again recommend Roberts' book and blog to get you started; then go on to Gerhardsson's Reliability. After that, get Bauckham's long book.

Kenneth E Bailey. "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels." The Expository Times 106 (1995) 12:263-67. This is the later, shorter version

---. "Informal Controlled Oral Traditions and the Synoptic Gospels." It is online at www.biblicalstudies.org.uk. This is the earlier, longer version; read this for the more thorough analysis.

Richard Bauckham. Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony. Eerdmans, 2006. The antidote to skeptical starting points in scholarship over the past several decades, but the book is for the advanced.

Michael F. Bird. "In Defence of Gerhardsson." Euangelion July 13, 2007. Clicking on that link, go to his article in Westminster Theological Journal 67 (2005) 113-94.

Samuel Byrskog. Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority and Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism & the Matthean Community. (Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series, No. 24). Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994.

---. Story as History, History as Story: the Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History. Brill, 2000.

James D. G. Dunn. Jesus Remembered. Vol. 1. Eerdmans, 2003. Pp. 173-254, especially, pp. 205-10.

Birger Gerhardsson. *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Tradition in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*. Rev. ed. Eerdmans, 1998. It has a generous foreword by the Talmudic scholar Jacob Neusner. At first he did not agree with Gerhardsson, but later changed his mind. The foreword is a way to correct his earlier opinion.

---. *Reliability of the Gospel Tradition*. Hendrickson, 2001. See especially the first chapter. Get this second, after Roberts.

Mark D. Roberts. *Can We Trust the Gospels?* Crossway, 2007. See Chapter 6. Get this first.

---. "Storytelling and Early Christianity." Markdroberts.com. September 21, 2005. Read his blog; get his book, and then read Gerhardsson's *Reliability*.

---. "Was Oral Tradition Like Playing Telephone?" Markdroberts.com. September 22, 2005.

William O. Walker. *The Relationships among the Gospels: an Interdisciplinary Dialogue*. Trinity: 1978. An emailer told me that Homer and the oral epic is the best model for understanding Gospel transmission. His email assumed that I had not studied Homer, though I used to be able to read him in original Greek. I took a graduate seminar on him at UCLA, with this guy. (Homer is my favorite author in ancient Greek literature.) Anyway, a Greek oral epic poetry model is not the best way to understand Gospel transmissions; hardly any New Testament scholar today would advocate that notion. This dialogue has already taken place in 1978, with A. B. Lord, a notable Homerist, as a keynote speaker. But I concede that I have not yet looked into this book on Mark and the Homeric epics.

N. T. Wright. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Augsburg Fortress, 1997. Pp. 133-37.

06 - Chapter 06

Chapter 6. Reliable Gospel Transmissions The Gospels without a breakdown? As noted in the previous article, we are talking about this gap:

Jesus' ministry | | Written Gospels

Those two vertical bars are not meant to be firm barriers, as if the disciples did not learn or observe anything during Jesus' ministry and carried it forward past the first bar. But the question still remains: How were the teachings and deeds of Jesus handed on during the gap? Reliably or not? Did the Gospels come about from the imagination and needs of early Christian communities, who substantially changed the traditions about Jesus, except a kernel, long after his ministry? Or were the Gospels founded on very early and reliable eyewitness testimonies and reports that were stably transmitted? How do we determine this? The goal of the series, including this article (Part Six), is to bring onto the web what scholars say in their books, that is, scholarship that upholds a traditional view of Scripture. The series is intended for the laity, so I use the Q & A format, for clarity.

More specifically, the goal of this article is to zero in on two scholars: Richard Bauckham and Samuel Byrskog. Bauckham clarifies and improves on the findings in the previous article, particularly Kenneth Bailey's study. Byrskog examines Greco-Roman literature to find certain analogies between them and the Gospels. We also look briefly at Paul Eddy's and Gregory Boyd's book, and Roberts' book and blog as well (see References and Further Reading section, below).

Before we begin, recall that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a lot of passages in common, so they are called the synoptic Gospels (synoptic means viewed together). The authors are sometimes called synoptists. The writers of the four Gospels are also called evangelists. In this article, I have the Synoptists in mind, but some of these principles may apply to John. This series has nothing to do with the inerrancy or inspiration of the Gospels, though nothing in this article contradicts those doctrines. For a working definition of tradition, readers are invited to go to the previous article and scroll down to Q & A One.

Hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these.

1. What is the evidence for the stability of passing on the Jesus traditions? The clearest evidence of formally passing on the traditions about Jesus comes from Paul's epistles. So that's our focus for the next three Q-&A's.

Recall that Paul did not follow Jesus from the beginning, but Paul is still considered an apostle, though "abnormally born" and "the least of the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:8-9). For the passages in his epistles, see the previous article and Q & A Two. From those passages in that link, it is obvious that Paul borrows the technical vocabulary for receiving and passing on or transmitting and keeping and retaining traditions from his training as a former Pharisee (Php 3:5). Accurately handing on traditions was very important for the Pharisees (or Rabbis) and others (see the

previous article and Q & A Five).

2. How were the traditions handed on? The transmitter had to “possess” them, and the recipients also had to “possess” them. This may not always require verbatim memorization, but possession does mean a process of teaching and learning accurately and faithfully (Bauckham, p. 265).

3. From whom did Paul receive traditions?

Various important sources.

1 Corinthians 15:3 says that Paul received and passed on a tradition of “first importance,” specifically, the resurrection appearances. He and the other apostles were unanimous on this tradition because he first received it from the Jerusalem apostles. According to Galatians 1:18-19, he spent two weeks with Peter and James (Galatians 1:19) in the Holy City. Paul was getting thoroughly familiar with the teaching formulated by the Twelve, “learning from the leader of the Twelve,” namely Peter (Bauckham, p. 266).

Next, in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 Paul distinguishes between his ideas and the Lord’s on divorce and marriage. Maybe Paul received traditions on this issue from an early source.

Finally, 1 Corinthians 11:23 says that Paul received from the Lord what he hands on to the Corinthian Christians, specifically, a tradition about the Last Supper. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 are very close to Luke’s Last Supper (Luke 22:14-21), as we saw in the previous article (see Q & A Eleven in that link). A tradition “from the Lord” probably does not mean a direct revelation, but the teaching from Jesus himself, once again, as formulated by the Twelve in Jerusalem. Paul “therefore envisages a chain of transmission that begins from Jesus himself and passes through intermediaries to Paul himself . . . The intermediaries are surely, again, the Jerusalem apostles . . . Given Paul’s concern and conviction that his gospel traditions come from the Lord Jesus himself, it is inconceivable that Paul would have relied on less direct means of access to the traditions” than the apostles (Bauckham, p. 268, emphasis original).

4. To whom did Paul transmit the traditions?

Paul says that certain persons were expressly designated as teachers in his churches (Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Galatians 6:6; Ephesians 4:11). Paul of course also taught the people, but they may not have learned his teachings with great care, as the designated teachers did. Then these teachers also transmitted his teachings to the people.

Parallels are seen in his contemporary Jewish and Gentile schools. Both had successors who were qualified to pass on the teachings of the leaders or the “fathers.” These clearly identified teachers and settings bring in an institutional or semi-institutional context, which fulfills Bailey’s requirement for the traditions to be transmitted in a formal and controlled way (Bauckham, p. 293; for Bailey, see References and Further Reading section). This means that the transmitters and recipients took extra-care to get things right, but the authorized transmitters were permitted to shape the traditions, only somewhat.

5. Why did the early Christians want to faithfully preserve the teaching of Jesus? At this point we can look at other oral cultures. They distinguish between tales and historical accounts. Tales are fictional and can change greatly from one performance to the next. On the other hand, historical

accounts are regarded as truthful about the past. They may have slight variations, but they are fewer and happen much more slowly. So why make the distinction between tales and historical accounts? “It is when past history matters in a particular cultural context that historical accounts are preserved with a real intention and effort to insure an important degree of stability and continuity” (Bauckham, p. 275).

Further, the early church was concerned about salvation. Jesus fulfills the “salvation history” or plan of God begun in the Old Testament, offering salvation to the world.

Thus, the early Christians had a keen sense of the importance of the past, just as much as or more keenly than Christians do today. Hundreds of millions of us today revere and honor Scripture. We want to know what Jesus said and did, and then to spread his message. Were the early Christians any different?

6. Do you have an illustration of the early Christians’ faithful preservation of the Jesus traditions?

Yes. The title “Son of Man” is used only once outside of the four Gospels (Acts 7:56). But it is used about eighty times in the four Gospels, mostly in the Synoptics. In Mark 8:31 and 9:9 the title is used indirectly by Jesus in two summaries. In Luke 24:7 an angel quotes him using the title about himself. And in John 12:34, the crowd borrows it in the context of Jesus who had used the term just before they did. But in all cases other than the four verses just now explained, Jesus alone uses the title and only about himself. Evidently, the churches did not use the title in their community life and worship, as seen by its nearly complete absence in the New Testament outside the Gospels. But the traditioners recalled that Jesus used it about himself, so the authors preserved it in the written Gospels. Oral transmission in oral communities is resistant to novelty, but was intended to be faithful (Eddy and Boyd, p. 303).

7. Were the traditions about Jesus pliable or fixed?

Older scholarship said that the traditions were very pliable, so the early church substantively changed the teaching of Jesus, according to the church’s needs. But all the previous Q-&-A’s demonstrate that the teachings and reports were much more fixed, though passages in the Synoptics have moderate variations. But one thing is certain: the traditions were transmitted independently of the need of the church for the most part; they were not so supple that Paul, for example, could not distinguish between his teachings in his epistles and the Jesus traditions that he received from the earliest, authoritative transmitters.

8. Did the authoritative transmitters memorize the teachings of Jesus?

Jesus and his disciples lived in an oral culture without video cameras and tape recorders. Comparisons with the rabbis and the Hellenistic philosophical schools demonstrate that some level of memorization took place, in degrees. Students, at least in the philosophical schools, could vary, abbreviate, and expand speeches, for example. So the memorization was not slavish. “Thus memorization would not always entail completely verbatim learning by rote, but some degree of memorization was indispensable to any deliberate attempt to learn and transmit tradition faithfully. It was the necessary alternative to trusting the unreliable vagaries of undisciplined memory” (Bauckham, p. 281). Clearly, the Gospel authors’ collection and incorporation of traditions into their narratives match up, in a large way, with this description of memorization, on some level.

9. Do you have an example of traditions? An example is the close verbal parallels between Luke 22:14-21 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, as noted in Q & A Three, above. You are invited to go to Young's Literal Translation at Bible Gateway and type in those two references.

"In short, memorization was a mechanism of control that preserved the Jesus traditions as faithfully as the early Christians required. It was exercised to the extent that stable reproduction was deemed important and in regard to those aspects of the traditions for which stable reproduction was thought appropriate" (Bauckham, p. 287).

Eddy and Boyd summarize a good case against skepticism on the accuracy of memory (pp. 275-86). Also see Bauckham's lengthy chapters twelve and thirteen.

10. Does an effective teacher make his teaching memorable?

Yes, most definitely. Two examples are aphorisms and parables. An aphorism is "a concise statement of a principle or terse formulation of a truth or sentiment," says Webster's Dictionary ("he who has ears to hear, let him hear" [Mark 4:9, Mark 4:23; Luke 8:8; Luke 14:35] or "he who has ears, let him hear" [Matthew 11:15, Matthew 13:9, Matthew 13:43]). Do you remember a concisely spoken truth from your favorite teacher or coach or another inspirational figure? He or she trimmed down a big truth into a pithy saying, so you would remember it. The parables of Jesus also seem streamlined for easy memorization.

What if you followed Jesus twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week? Wouldn't he repeat some of the aphorisms throughout his ministry? Wouldn't you remember them, since he was so significant, being a founder of a new movement in your country and working miracles?

Begin a series on miracles, here.

11. Is there Scriptural evidence for some level of memorization? In Luke 9:44a, Jesus says: "Listen carefully to what I'm about to tell you." That verse reveals at least careful remembering. Also, Jesus sends out the Twelve and then the seventy-two on missions (Matthew 9:36-38; Matthew 10:1-42; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6, Luke 10:1-16). They preached his message while they went about Israel. In those passages, the authors of the Gospels characterize the Twelve's message succinctly. So is it impossible that they memorized or carefully remembered, on some level, much of Jesus' teaching up to that point in his ministry, so they could communicate it reliably and accurately to the people? The larger context of the Jesus movement points towards the possibility of memorization.

12. Then what explains the variations in the synoptic Gospels?

There are five main factors (Bauckham, pp. 286-87).

First, Jesus used varying versions of his sayings on different occasions.

Second, translating from Aramaic to Greek may account for the differences.

Third, in oral performance, variations happen. Many elements remain fixed, but others are flexible; some were memorized verbatim, other not.

Fourth, authorized transmitters were qualified to be flexible in the traditions, particularly the sayings of Jesus. And the Gospel writers were authorized to be flexible, as well.

Fifth, the Gospel writers were qualified to write up a narrative about Jesus and to integrate the material in their own way. One needs only look at the treatment of John the Baptist's imprisonment, questioning of Jesus through John's disciples, and then John's death, to see how the Gospelists expand (but not in the sense of make things up), abbreviate or omit the details (Matthew 4:12; Matthew 11:2; Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 1:14; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 3:19-20; Luke 7:18-35; Luke 9:7-19).

13. Were the teachings of Jesus written down? The early disciples lived in both an oral and literate (or writing) culture, particularly in first-century Israel, whose religious community valued the Book. In their immediate culture, orality and literacy were not mutually exclusive, but complementary. Writing was not intended to replace oral traditions but to aid in memory, including the "interpenetration" of oral and written compositions behind the Mishnah" (Bauckham, referring to another scholar, p. 288).

Further, notebooks were widespread in the philosophical and religious settings in the Greco-Roman world. 2 Timothy 4:13 refers to Paul's parchment notebooks. It could very well be the case that Matthew, a tax collector, took notes of some kind. Weren't the Biblical Gospels written down, for this reason, among others - to preserve the words and works of Jesus? Luke says in his preface that many undertook to draw up an account of the life and ministry of Jesus (1:1-4). So why is writing, if only in notes, even during the life of Jesus, ruled out as impossible? Granted, Luke is referring to "accounts," not notes, but surely some of the accounts were written. That's the main point.

Eddy and Boyd list an impressive array of scholars who favor the possibility that writing or note-taking of some sort was done during Jesus' ministry (pp. 241-52, especially note 54.) We will discuss all of this in more detail in a future article (go now to Part Eight).

14. Do Greek and Roman and Jewish historians provide examples of how the Synoptists worked through their sources?

We now turn a corner to find out what Samuel Byrskog says about the Gospels. He studied ancient Jewish, Greek, and Roman historians and their effort to acquire historical accuracy and to judiciously use living eyewitnesses. He applies his findings both to the oral traditions and the Gospels as written documents.

However, it may be objected from the outset here that the Gospel writers were not working in the genre (kind) of history, but Greco-Roman biography. In reply, however, Byrskog is attempting to discover the commonality between historiography (history writing) and storytelling via biography (note the title of his book). Plus, the border between history writing and biography writing was not fixed (see this book and its fourth chapter). The next four points are taken from Byrskog's *Story as History, History as Story*. In addition to Byrskog on the intentions and methods of ancient historians, see Eddy and Boyd, pp. 330-36.

15. Were the best eyewitnesses distant observers or direct participants? The ancient historians preferred that their eyewitnesses be participants in the events, not passive observers. Byrskog

writes: "Involvement was not an obstacle to what [the historians] perceived as historical truth. It was rather the essential means to a correct understanding of what really happened" (p. 154).

16. But would an eyewitness' personal involvement in the events taint historical objectivity? The ancient historians were aware of this and watched out for it. This "challenged them therefore sometimes to insist more clearly and emphatically on the importance of truth" (p. 180, emphasis original). It is true that the historian himself could not always be a part of the events, so he depended on eyewitnesses and reliable sources, whenever he could. In the Introduction to the entire series (Part One), it was asked whether eyewitness testimony is reliable. In modern court cases, it is infamous for being unreliable. A crime or auto accident happens in a few seconds, and the eyewitnesses are wrong. However, that is not what we're discussing in regard to the Gospels. These eyewitnesses lived twenty-four hours, seven days a week with Jesus. So participatory eyewitness testimony was reliable.

17. But weren't ancient historians "sloppy" about the truth? The ancient historians often assert that they knew the difference between historical and factual truth on the one hand, and false and inaccurate claims, on the other. "Some ancient historians guided their actual research with an uttermost concern to find out the factual truth of history" (p. 183, emphasis original). The implication of Byrskog's book is that the Gospel writers also had an "uttermost concern to find out the factual truth of history."

18. Does the goal of persuasion take away from the ancient historians' credibility? The ancient historian knew of the orator's craft and tried to imitate it. The historian, like the orator, sought to persuade his readers. The historian's case was all the more persuasive if he rooted his work in things as they happened, and not in fictions and fabrications (p. 210).

I like how Mark D. Roberts assesses all four Gospels: they embody "Truthful History Motivated by Theology" (Can We Trust the Gospels? Crossway, 2007, p. 121). The Gospels fit into their larger historical context. All ancient texts have a strong point of view, and so do most modern ones.

19. What if ancient historians were inaccurate? In other words, what if they only said that they were searching for eyewitness testimony, but really were not? In reply, this must be taken case-by-case. Many historians were accurate and were themselves eyewitnesses. Or they based their histories on eyewitnesses, if the historians were not on the scene. Certainly the Gospel authors intended to be accurate about Jesus' ministry, miracles and all.

20. What's the bottom line for the historical reliability of the Synoptics?

What Bauckham and Byrskog have in common is their emphatic insistence that many Jewish, Greek, and Roman authors - including the Gospel authors - valued very highly eyewitness testimony as the foundation of their writings, during the authors' lifetime.

Byrskog points out that "ancient [Greco-Roman] historians exercised autopsy [visual means to gather information] directly and / or indirectly, by being present themselves and / or by seeking out and interrogating other eyewitnesses" (p. 64).

Bauckham says, right after quoting Byrskog from p. 64: "In their close relationship to eyewitness testimony the Gospels conform to the best practice of ancient historiography. For ancient historians this relationship required that good history be contemporary history, written in the

lifetime of the eyewitnesses. So the Gospels were written over the period, from the death of Peter to that of the Beloved Disciple [the professed author of John's Gospel], when the eyewitnesses were ceasing to be available" (p. 310).

Finally, the relatively short period of oral transmission between Jesus' ministry and the written Gospels means that we are in the realm of oral history, not exclusively oral traditions, which are passed on over several generations. Oral history takes place during the life span of the narrator (Eddy and Boyd, p. 289, note 72). In the previous quotation from Bauckham (p. 310), that's his main point.

Bottom line for this bottom line Q & A: the Gospels are reliable according to their own historical context, in comparison with other written sources and oral traditioning, whether Jewish, Greek, or Roman.

21. What does all of this mean in comparison with the Gnostic texts?

See Part Five (Q & A Fourteen) and Part Eight (Q & A Seven) for the discussion. But it doesn't look good for these texts.

22. What does all of this mean to the Church of all denominations?

If anyone has been listening to the news media or been educated in Western universities in religion courses, he or she has heard that the Gospels do not reflect the teaching and deeds of Jesus, except a kernel. Instead, they reflect the distant and faint musings of anonymous disciples, according to their needs. This heavy-handed skepticism comes from nearly a century of scholarship, particularly of the Protestant variety that had been heavily influenced by the Enlightenment (see this article and the first section). Hyper-skepticism has penetrated many seminaries and churches for decades.

Now, however, the tide may be turning, not least because of the books selected in the Reference and Further Reading section, next. The Gospels are founded on eyewitness testimony and reports about the ministry of Jesus, in Israel, around four decades before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 AD. The Gospels are not rooted in the faint memories of disciples who lived long after that timeframe and far away from Jesus' home country. The Gospels were not written by disciples who felt free substantially to change the traditions, according to their current needs. Rather, the Gospels, taken within their cultural literary context, accurately embody the teaching and activity of Jesus.

It may be true that the earliest Christian communities had the need to understand the teaching of Jesus within their own context. However, the eyewitnesses passed on his words and activities, reliably, faithfully, and skillfully. The qualified transmitters sometimes adapted and interpreted - not fabricated or substantively changed - the Jesus traditions. But the transmitters maintained and conformed themselves to these traditions. The Jesus traditions came first, authoritatively and firmly. The transmitters were reverent about them, as we saw in Paul's epistles in Q & A One to Three, above.

Thus, web readers who also revere Scripture do not need to feel nervous about listening to skeptical claims bandied about in the popular media, nor do students who take Scripture seriously need to feel intimidated in their religion courses at colleges and universities. The Gospels

transmissions are reliable, without a breakdown, in their own historical and literary context. This article has three companion pieces in the series:

5. The Gospel Traditions: Melt in your mouth?
7. What Is the 'Q Gospel'? The Gospel According to 'St. Q'?
8. Did Some Disciples Take Notes during Jesus' Ministry?

References and Further Reading

Nearly all of these entries are technical, so use with caution. But see Roberts' book and blog, linked below. They are written for the laity.

Kenneth E Bailey. "Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels." *The Expository Times* 106 (1995) 12:263-67. This is the later, shorter version.

---. "Informal Controlled Oral Traditions and the Synoptic Gospels." This is the earlier, longer version; read this for the more thorough analysis.

Richard Bauckham. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Eerdmans, 2006.

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Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd. *The Jesus Legend: a Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Traditions*. Baker Academic, 2007. Pages 235-306.

---. *Lord or Legend: Wrestling with the Jesus Dilemma*. Baker, 2007. Their smaller book here is designed for the laity, but it can still get technical for the true beginner. But definitely get it.

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Mark D. Roberts. *Can We Trust the Gospels?* Crossway, 2007.

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07 - Chapter 07

Chapter 7. What is the Q 'Gospel'? The Gospel According to 'St Q'?

Q Será Será? Or Right on Q (and other Qt puns) In this article (Part Seven) and the previous two, we explore what was happening between Jesus' ministry and the written Gospels. Here we turn our attention mainly toward so-called Q. This article is a Q & A on Q. The question is - is Q OK?

Once again, this article deals with this gap:

Jesus' ministry | | Written Gospels The disciples were learning and observing important aspects of Jesus' ministry while it was fully active. The disciples transmitted their observations and lessons to the earliest churches after his ministry. So the little vertical bars are not intended to be firm.

Concerning that gap, though, we can still ask these questions: Do sources, such as so-called Q, feed into the Gospels? Did these sources exist at all, or are they hypothetical? If they existed or still exist in some way, where do scholars find them? Do the sources secure the Gospels' historical reliability? After all, don't other Greco-Roman authors use sources?

We focus mainly on Matthew and Luke, from which scholars extract Q. This article may be unsettling for some readers. Maybe by now they have clicked out of it. "Not for me!" However, skeptical scholars seem to ache to bring up these issues on television and radio and in popular print. And note how Dr. Mark D. Roberts' post refutes Christopher Hitchens' error about Q in Hitchens' best-selling book. Why would Hitchens bring up Q, if not to challenge the reliability of the biblical Gospels in the national media? So the Church of all denominations should not avoid these questions and challenges. We should be confident about Scripture, for solid reasons, not blind faith. I learned a lot while writing this article. My faith has been built up. Education really is the best antidote to popular confusion and challenges. As usual, here are my reminders: Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a lot of passages in common, so they are called the synoptic Gospels (synoptic means viewed together). The authors are sometimes called synoptists. Slashes // mean parallel passages among them. The writers of the four Gospels are also called evangelists. This article (Part Seven) in a long series is on the historical reliability of the Gospels. The series has nothing to do with their inerrancy or inspiration, though nothing in this article contradicts those doctrines.

Hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these.

1. What does "Q" mean?

It certainly has nothing to do with a character in a James Bond movie or a saint, as in "the Gospel According to Saint Q." Rather, it comes from the German word Quelle, which means "source." It was abbreviated to Q, which was widely accepted as the designation of special material.

2. What special material? When you read the synoptic Gospels, you see many similarities. And on a more careful reading, you can also observe verses that Matthew and Luke seem to share, but Mark does not. The common material only in Matthew and Luke is called Q. It's that simple, for our

purposes. To go beyond this point leads us into complications.

3. Is Q a Gospel? That depends on whether we are talking about genre (kind of writing) or definitions. In Greek, euangelion means “good news.” So according to that definition, Q may be considered a gospel, for as we shall see in Q & A Ten, below, it teaches good news like the anointing of Jesus at his baptism, his power over Satan, and Spirit baptism.

However, if we are talking about genre, then the four Biblical Gospels are narratives or stories, and stories, incidentally, do not have to be fictional, but they can be true. As a whole, Q is not a flowing narrative (see Q & A Seventeen, below, for the implications of this). In that sense, Q is not a Gospel, because it is made up of sayings with one or two short narratives. However, at least one scholar sees a narrative framework for Q (Stephen Hultgren), but the framework is nevertheless harder to detect than that in Matthew and Luke.

4. Did Q even exist?

Some scholars doubt that it ever existed, but many conclude that it did. Extracting verses out of Matthew and Luke, John Kloppenborg put together the standard (simplified) reference on the Q sayings (see References and Further Reading section, below). Only in that derivative, extracted sense does Q exist today. This apologetics website provides some examples of parallel passages in a very short article. The writer also answers whether Q takes away from the inspiration of Scripture. Q does not. But since my article is not about inspiration, let’s move on.

We shall see in Q & A Nine that Q, if it existed, may have also been transmitted orally, or it may have been transmitted both in oral and written forms, at different stages or at the same time. The history of a hypothetical document can get complicated!

5. Are the parallel passages exact? In Kloppenborg’s compilation, he underlines the exact wording between specific parallel passages in Matthew and Luke (see the link in the previous question for examples). However, more often than not, the wording is not exact. In fact, one of the extraordinary features of the Q passages is how infrequently the parallel verses are identical. In “The Lost Gospel of Q: Fact or Fantasy?” Eta Linnemann tabulates the percentages of the exact parallels in Q’s wording. The results are not high. For that and other reasons she concludes that Q is a fantasy. The article is written in English.

6. How many passages are extracted from Luke and Matthew?

Matthew and Luke have around 230 verses in common, but the number can vary (scholars do not agree on the details). Scholars have arranged the verses in topics. One list of topics adds up to forty-nine, with several verses under any one topic (Chilton and Craig, pp. 11-12). Kloppenborg’s reference work comes up with sixty-eight sections or pericopae (plural of pericope or unit or marked-off passage). Several or many verses fit under each section. Only a few of these topics cluster together thematically. So much of Q appears disjointed.

7. What is the case for Q?

Three reasons, among others not dealt with here, point toward the existence of Q. The verbal agreements between parallel passages in Matthew and Luke are close, at times identical (see Q & A Four and the link there). Many scholars say that the similarities cannot be coincidental. They

certainly do not believe that it comes from divine inspiration. (Even basic Christian doctrine says that the authors' minds were intact while the authors wrote; inspiration is not mechanical). Plus, there are too many other factors at work, such as the differences in the details. The second is the order that Matthew and Luke share in their use of Q. "In at least 85 percent of the Q traditions it is possible to ascertain the common order or to determine which Evangelist disturbed the common order" (Stanton, p. 645).

Another document, which supports the existence of Q by analogy, of sorts, is the so-called Gospel of Thomas, not actually written by the Apostle Thomas, so it is pseudonymous. It is a collection of sayings, not a flowing story as the four Gospels are. The Thomas collection of sayings looks somewhat like Q. However, Thomas comes much later than Q and is derivative from the Biblical Gospels. So this parallel support is tenuous.

8. What is the case against Q?

Two major factors work against Q's existence or at least its existence as a written document.

One is the two-Gospel hypothesis, to be distinguished from the two-document hypothesis (see Q & A Sixteen). This two-Gospel hypothesis says that Matthew was written first, and Luke used Matthew, and Mark was dependent on both, though our focus is on Luke's use of Matthew. Thus, the need for Q evaporates. However, the two-Gospel hypothesis is not as simple a solution as one might expect. To cite only two examples challenging the claim that Luke used Matthew, Matthew has the long Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), whereas Luke has the shorter Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49). Other passages in Matthew's sermon are scattered throughout Luke. If Luke used Matthew, it is difficult to explain why he would omit so much of the sermon and place other verses from it elsewhere. As to the second example, in Matthew 10:1-42, Jesus sends out the Twelve on their first commission to preach. But those verses are scattered in seven different chapters in Luke. Many other examples could be offered, and so could the replies to the objections, but all of this shows that the two-Gospel solution may not be the best one; it certainly is not simple (see Carson and Moo, Guthrie, and Stanton, for more discussion). A second objection to Q challenges whether it originated and remained in a written form. The objection compares the Gospel material itself. In *Jesus Remembered*, New Testament scholar James D. G. Dunn places parallel passages side by side for many pages (pp. 210-54). The differences - not the similarities - between the pericopae can best be explained by the oral process of passing on traditions, so he says. If Matthew or Luke had a written source in front of him, the differences would not be as frequent and pronounced as Dunn indicates, even after we factor in the Synoptists' theological purposes that lead to variations.

Dunn does not deny the existence of a written Q or perhaps other written documents in the earliest Christian communities (p. 237), but such sources are not the whole picture. Nonetheless, an oral tradition process diminishes the existence of a self-contained written source, unless scholars assume that Q also originated and remained in oral form, in addition to its written form, until Matthew and Luke incorporated it. This is indeed what some scholars assume (see Q & A Nine, next). For more objections, see the link in Q & A Five, above.

9. So was Q passed on in oral and written forms?

Very probably, if it existed, as such. Some scholars conclude that Q was intended to be delivered in oral performance (see Horsley, below). Some scholars assume that pericopae of Q may have been handed down orally, but other passages were written down early. One scholar applies chronology to the problem: "Without disputing Q's existence in a fixed written form, we must allow some influence of the oral tradition between the time of its crystallization and its use by the two Synoptists" (Vassilides, p. 143). He also concludes that by the time Matthew and Luke used Q, it existed "in a fixed written form" (p. 160, emphasis original).

James M. Robinson is one of the foremost scholars on Q (see References and Further Reading section, below). For him, it is not a question that Q existed in written form. "The history of the synoptic tradition is no longer dependent only on the forms of oral transmission, but now has a series of written texts bridging much of the gulf back from the canonical gospels to Jesus" ("A Written," p. 61) 10. What does Q teach? The Q material supports many aspects of the gospel, but it is impossible to reduce Q to only a few themes or purposes because the content of Q is so diverse. Here is a representative, partial list. Scholars follow Luke's order ahead of Matthew, so the first set of references comes from Luke, the second set from Matthew.

Empowerment for ministry: The Holy Spirit anoints Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:21-22 // Matthew 3:16-17)

Divine relationship: Father's proclamation of the Sonship of Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:22 // Matthew 3:17); unique intimacy between the Father and the Son (Luke 10:21-22 // Matthew 11:25-27) Spirit baptism: Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:15-17 // Matthew 3:11-12) Title: The Son of Man (several passages; for example, see the last item, below)

Jesus' power over Satan: Jesus' victory during temptation (Luke 4:1-13 // Matthew 4:1-11); power to cast out demons (Luke 11:14 // Matthew 12:22) Beatitudes (Luke 6:2-26 // Matthew 5:1-12)

Discipleship: love of enemies (Luke 6:27-36 // Matthew 5:39-42, Matthew 5:44-48; Matthew 7:12); hearing and doing the words of Jesus (Luke 6:47-49 // Matthew 7:24-27); no anxiety (Luke 12:22-32 // Matthew 6:25-34); losing our life, picking up our cross, and following him (Luke 14:27; Luke 17:33 // Matthew 10:38-39) Healing: the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1-10 // Matthew 7:28 a: Matthew 8:5-10, Matthew 8:13)

Summary of Jesus' miracle ministry: the blind see, lepers are cleansed, deaf hear, dead are raised, poor are given good news (Luke 7:22 // Matthew 11:4-5) Prayer: asking, seeking, knocking, and getting good answers (Luke 11:9-13 // Luke 7:7-11)

Public confession of a disciple: Jesus acknowledges before the Father those who acknowledge him before humans (Luke 12:8-9 // Matthew 10:32-33)

Eschatology: Coming of the Son of Man (Luke 12:39-40 // Matthew 24:43-44; see also Luke 17:23-24, Luke 17:26-30, Luke 17:33-35, Luke 17:37 // Matthew 24:26-28, Matthew 24:37-41; Matthew 10:39) This selective list supports the miracles and divinity of Christ and key teachings in the Gospels. What is most interesting is an early expression of Trinitarianism, though the Q passages do not detail the doctrine (see the first two items). The passages, as written, certainly do not deny the Trinity, but show the Father and the Holy Spirit blessing the Son at his baptism. Also, Q says that Jesus will baptize his followers with the Holy Spirit - Spirit baptism, perhaps

shockwaves of Pentecost. Finally, the Son of Man “in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other” (Luke 17:24 // Matthew 24:27). This saying reveals a divine figure coming back from heaven. So why wouldn't these items cohere with other Biblical teachings, especially in the Gospels? Didn't Luke and Matthew (allegedly) incorporate Q, thereby approving and endorsing it? Didn't Luke say in his preface that he researched other accounts? Granted, Q as such is not an “account,” but Luke's preface shows that other information was circulating about Jesus. So who's afraid of big bad Q?

11. What's missing from Q? The most conspicuous absence is the passion and resurrection narrative (but see Q-&-A's Twelve and Thirteen, below). “Passion” in this context means “suffering.” “Narrative” means “story,” and a story does not have to be fictional. It can be true. (In this and the next two Q-&-A's, I do not distinguish between narrative and kerygma or preaching for my purposes here.)

Anyway, in the synoptic Gospels, the passion narrative begins with the plot to arrest and kill Jesus; it reaches a high point in his crucifixion; and it ends with his burial (Matthew 26:1-75; Matthew 27:1-66; Mark 14:1-72; Mark 15:1-47; Luke 22:1-71; Luke 23:1-56). The post-Easter narratives, of course, end the Gospels. We can see them as one narrative, for our brief purpose here.

Although assuming a community or communities stood behind Q is tenuous, these questions have been asked: Does the silence on the crucifixion and resurrection in Q reflect the views of certain earliest communities? Did they not believe that Jesus was crucified? Did they not believe that he was resurrected?

Some scholars say yes. But that's a classic argument from silence. Also, even New Testament scholars like Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), who was more radical than most, disagree. The proclamation of the cross and the post-Easter story was much too widespread for communities neither to believe in the crucifixion (and resurrection) nor know about them. This is one reason that the four Gospels end in Jerusalem, at the foot of the cross and at the empty tomb, proclaiming Jesus' resurrection. The cross and resurrection were also proclaimed, for example, in Corinth (1 Corinthians 15:1-8); Galatia (Galatians 1:1, Galatians 4:4-6); Jerusalem right after Pentecost (Acts 2:22-24); Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:10); Rome (1 Peter 1:19-21). Paul and Barnabas taught in Antioch (Acts 11:19-30). Athens heard about the resurrection from Paul (Acts 17:16-34). Peter traveled throughout the country of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, and his message included the crucifixion and resurrection (Acts 9:31-35; Acts 10:34-43). By analogy, in the Easter narrative, Luke's mentions the ascension (Luke 24:50-53), whereas Matthew and John do not in their Easter narratives. The later ending in Mark does (Mark 16:19). All four Gospels mention the resurrection. Does this variation mean that these different “communities” (except the Lukan “community” and later-ending-Markan “community”) did not believe in the ascension, but only in the resurrection? Of course not. The Gospels that do not explicitly mention the ascension merely focus on other things. In a Christian context about the resurrection, the ascension is assumed, unless it can be shown, historically, that early Christian communities believed that the resurrected Jesus was still down here on earth somewhere, up to the time that these communities existed. This cannot be shown. It is very tricky indeed to draw conclusions from silence. So it is highly unlikely that any early Q communities, if Q existed and if they existed around it, did not believe or did not know that the crucifixion (or resurrection) happened; the communities may have simply assumed them. After all,

Q says that the Son of Man will return extra-dramatically, like flashes of lightning, visible for all. So this implies that he was raised up to heaven. His being raised up implies his prior suffering or at least his death. Q, if it existed, simply focuses on other matters, such as Spirit baptism (echoes of Pentecost) and discipleship. Apparently, they were interested in the teachings of Jesus before the Passion actually took place. Christian communities are allowed to do this, without our drawing conclusions from their silence about other issues and beliefs.

12. Does Q embody pure and original Christianity? This question seems innocent enough, but it implies more than Q can bear. On a more dubious perhaps sinister note from some scholars today, the question assumes that Q communities did not believe in or were unconcerned about the death (and resurrection) of Jesus, as we just discussed in the previous Q & A. Perhaps the communities did not even know about them. Some scholars assume that certain early Christians were "myth-makers," and Q confirms this by not building up "myths" -- never mind that Q teaches that Jesus shall return in flashes of lightning from the sky for all to see.

Since this skepticism circulates widely on the web, let's deal with it here and in the next Q & A. Let's allow a very prominent scholar to tackle the question. James D. G. Dunn points out three flaws.

First, some scholars assert that the Q document assumes that only one community had it. In reply, however, Dunn says that it is a fallacy to believe in one document per community. "It simply will not do to identify the character of a community with the character of a document associated with it." And "the Dead Sea Scrolls should surely have banished forever the idea that communities possessed and treasured only one document or only one genre [kind] of tradition" (p. 150). Finally, "the absence of various themes from Q (e.g. purity issues and Torah) should not be taken necessarily as evidence of the Q community's limited concerns, but may rather indicate that Q does not represent the whole concerns of the Q people" (p. 151)

Second, Dunn mentions the argument from silence, as we noted in the previous Q & A. "Of course it is incredible [not believable] that there were groups in Galilee who cherished the memory of Jesus' teaching but who either did not know or were unconcerned that Jesus had been executed. In fact, Q does show awareness of Jesus' death" (p. 151). Then Dunn references 6:22-23 // 5:11-12; 13:34-35 // 13:37-39; 11:49-51 // 11:34-36; 14:27 // 10:38.

Third, it is a fallacy to assume that "communities of disciples were isolated from one another and that documents were written only for the use of the scribe's own community . . . But the evidence of our earliest sources is that communities maintained communication with one another; and it is more probable that tradition was written down in order to facilitate communication at a distance" (p. 152). Thus, Matthew and Luke had access to Q, and these Gospels were written at different times and places. For me, what Dunn says here makes sense. In the next Q & A, let's work out his points in a little different direction.

13. Do the Passion narratives throw any light on Q?

Indeed the narratives do. Many scholars believe that the Passion narratives existed in their own right and were used as sources earlier than AD 40; they were possibly written in some form, quite early. Eventually, they were assimilated into the Gospels. In a careful study of the four Gospels, Etienne Trocmé says that the Passion narratives originated in Jerusalem (pp. 83-89). He also

concludes that they were used liturgically during the Passover pilgrimages of earliest Jewish-Christians.

Now let's put some facts together.

It is speculated that Q communities were based in first-century Galilee.

Jewish-Christian pilgrims traveled up to Jerusalem during Passover and heard the Passion story from the church in the Holy City, says Trocmé (pp. 83-89). For example, Paul visited with Peter in Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18-19).

Paul says that he received and handed on the tradition that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised from the dead on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Clearly, Paul's receiving of this tradition occurred in Jerusalem (see Part Six and Q & A Three in that link). This confirms that the Passion traditions were early and essential and originated in Jerusalem. So what do these facts mean? The Passion traditions are every bit as ancient as hypothetical Q is, even more ancient. I see the message of the suffering, death, and burial (and resurrection) of Jesus as shockwaves radiating out of Jerusalem, being part and parcel of the earliest traditions. The Q communities, if they existed, heard about the suffering, death, and burial (and victory) of Jesus during their pilgrimages and very likely took this message back to their communities. (The repetition of the message by ordinary pilgrims does not take away from official teachers' role of preserving the traditions; see Part Six and Q & A Four in that link). The shockwaves from Jerusalem influenced the entire early church -- even outside Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee.

So, as Dunn noted in the previous Q & A, we should not draw questionable conclusions from the silence of hypothetical Q on the Passion traditions. Again, communities, if they existed around Q, are certainly allowed to focus on other doctrines for their own purposes. And Q surely does not represent the Q people's entire concerns. Apparently, Q shows that they were interested in the teachings of Jesus before his passion actually took place. Indeed, we may draw the conclusion that the earliest communities in and around Israel heard and handed on and lived by the Passion story, whether they were connected to Q in some way or not. We should not believe the one document per community fallacy.

14. What's the bottom line to the three previous Q-&-A's?

We took some time with the issue of Q's teachings and absent teachings because serious challenges to the Gospels' integrity and to essential events in Jesus' life have been launched in books and on the web. Here are the bottom line points:

Let's not forget that Q is a hypothetical document.

Arguments from silence are too risky on which to build far-reaching conclusions.

Assuming Q existed, we should not fall prey to the one document per community fallacy. The Passion traditions were deeply ingrained in the earliest Christian communities in and around Israel and beyond.

Q alludes to Jesus' death and says he will return with flashes of lightning. Death and return imply resurrection in an early Christian context.

Therefore, the communities of hypothetical Q assumed the crucifixion and resurrection and merely focused on aspects of Jesus' teachings that were delivered before his passion actually took place. So I see no reason that critics can rightly use Q as a weapon against traditional Christianity.

15. Is Q the only source that feeds into Matthew and Luke? In addition to hypothetical Q and the Passion narratives, some scholars postulate the existence of "M" or material unique to Matthew (hence the abbreviation "M"). An example is the Infancy narrative (1:18-2:23). They also speculate that material unique to Luke may have existed in its own right, which they label "L" for Luke. The Infancy narrative about John the Baptist and Jesus is an example (Luke 1:5-80; Luke 2:1-40). The future article on Matthew will hold out the possibility that Joseph himself may have originated parts of the Infancy narrative. And the future article on Luke will assert that Mary may have originated parts of the Infancy narrative.

See the link to Roberts' blog, below, for a short summary and flow chart of sources.

16. What's the bottom line for the historical reliability of Matthew and Luke?

We are examining the Gospels in their historical context, according to the standards of their own times.

It does not matter so much that hypothetical Q traveled down through earliest church history orally and then ended up written, or that it was oral and written at the same time. If it existed as such and if Matthew and Luke used it, then they approved and endorsed it, incorporating it into their Gospels or stories about Jesus. Q's teachings cohere with the Gospels (see Q & A Ten). If Matthew and Luke used it, are we wiser than they? Under these conditions, if Q is not hypothetical, it can strengthen the reliability of Matthew and Luke.

Greco-Roman authors used sources, so why wouldn't Matthew and Luke (and Mark and his sources) incorporate Q, M, L, and the Passion narratives, if these latter sources existed in their own right (written or oral or both)? All of this coheres together with and corresponds to the historical context of Greco-Roman texts, which incorporated sources.

17. What does all of this mean to the Church of all denominations? The Church should reply to the charges -- or at least not fear them -- that Q embodies pure and original Christianity, and it does not teach the crucifixion and resurrection, so these doctrines are later (mythical) additions. In reply, the Passion traditions are earlier than Q. Also, Jewish-Christian communities in Israel were not isolated. They shared their beliefs. Q indeed is aware of the death of Jesus and says he will return like flashes of lightning. Return implies death by crucifixion and the resurrection in an early Christian context. Finally, the communities in Israel were not limited to Q. They knew about and celebrated the passion and the resurrection. The evidence throughout the New Testament and in other early sources demonstrates that these two traditions were deeply ingrained in all of earliest Christianity. So who's afraid of big bad Q? No one needs to be afraid of big bad Q, but there's a problem with it as it relates to the Church. Scholars extract verses out of the integrated stories of Matthew and Luke to compile Q. This extraction atomizes the two Gospels. I get the impression that Q specialists are not all that concerned or sensitive to integrated stories, which are how all

four Gospels now stand. I concede that studying these tiny, ripped-out fragments making up hypothetical Q may be a valid academic exercise; and Q may (or may not) have some sort of narrative framework on its own.

However, I hope we will not lose sight of the big picture. Though this article or series is not about inspiration, readers may uphold the doctrine; if so, then narrative is how and what God used and intended to communicate the life story of his Son in the four Gospels. And we can have no doubt that they exist. They are not hypothetical.

Sensitivity to full, flowing stories - not speculation about disjointed shreds - is what's needed. In my opinion, it is best to read the Gospels in their final form, not in small, out-of-context pieces. It is best to read the Gospels as integrated stories that were intended to report things as they really happened, miracles and all. But at least written documents existing prior to the synoptic Gospels secure the Jesus traditions. This article has three companion pieces in the series:

5. The Gospel Traditions: Melt in your mouth?

6. Reliable Transmissions: the Gospels without a breakdown?

8. Did Some Disciples Take Notes during Jesus' Ministry?

References and Further Reading I recommend the linked books and articles, particularly those with double asterisks.

John S. Kloppenborg. *Q Parallels: Synopsis, Critical Notes, and Concordance*. Polebridge, 1988. This is the simplified reference of the Q sayings, but it is still very technical.

James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffman, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds. *The Critical Edition of Q*. Fortress, 2000. This is the definitive edition

F. W. Burnett. "M' Tradition." *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Eds. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight. Intervarsity, 1992. Pp. 511-12.

** D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. Zondervan, 2005. Pp. 98-103.

James D. G. Dunn. *Jesus Remembered*. Vol. 1. Eerdmans, 2003.

Mark Goodacre. *The Case against Q*. Trinity Press International, 2001.

J. B. Green. "Passion Narrative." *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Eds. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight. Intervarsity, 1992. Pp. 601-04.

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Stephen Hultgren. *Narrative Elements in the Double Tradition*. De Gruyter, 2002.

** Eta Linnemann. "The Lost Gospel of Q: Fact or Fantasy?" *Biblicalstudies.org.uk*. 1996. Her article, like her other work, is hard-hitting.

** Mark D. Roberts. *Can We Trust the Gospels?* Crossway, 2007.

** ---. "What Sources Did the Gospel Writers Use?" September 2005. Get the book and read this short blog entry for a good summary.

G. N. Stanton. "Q." *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Eds. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight. Intersity, 1992. Pp. 644-50.

Etienne Trocmé. *The Passion as Liturgy: A Study in the Origin of the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*. SCM, 1983.

Edited anthologies have a wide range of perspectives:

Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, eds. *Authenticating the Words of Jesus*. Brill, 1999.

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David E. Orton, ed. *The Synoptic Problem: Studies from Novum Testamentum*. Brill, 1999.

James M. Robinson. "A Written Greek Sayings Cluster Older than Q: A Vestige." *Harvard Theological Review* 92 (1999) 61-67.

Petros Vassilidies. "The Nature and Extent of the Q-Document." In Orton, pp. 138-62.

08 - Chapter 08

Chapter 8. Did Some Disciples Take Notes During Jesus' Ministry?

Securing the Gospel Traditions: the 'write' stuff? This is a question that must be explored. The three previous articles analyzed how the traditions about Jesus were handled and handed on during this gap:

Jesus' Ministry | | Written Gospels This article explores a possible way the traditions were treasured during Jesus' ministry, with a glance at afterwards, during the gap. Were at least some of the traditions about Jesus written down, if only in notes, before the four Biblical Gospels were written? Strong circumstantial evidence says yes. Maybe - just maybe - nearly direct evidence affirms this possibility, also. The goal of the series, including Part Eight here, is to bring onto the web what scholars say in their books, specifically, scholarship that upholds a traditional view of Scripture. The series is intended for the laity, so I use the Q & A format, for clarity.

Here are my reminders again. I repeat them in each article, since readers may look at only one article, not the whole series. Recall that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a lot of passages in common, so they are called the synoptic Gospels (synoptic means viewed together). The authors are sometimes called synoptists. The writers of the four Gospels are also called evangelists. This is Part Eight on the historical reliability of the Gospels. The series has nothing to do with the inerrancy or inspiration of the Gospels, though nothing in this article contradicts those doctrines.

1. So what are scholars saying about early written Jesus traditions?

Here are some representative scholars, whose publications have been numbered for clarity. They are placed in chronological order of their publication.

(1) Edgar J. Goodspeed uses analogies in the larger Greco-Roman world and the Jewish environment in Israel to compare to Matthew's Gospel. Goodspeed says that Matthew the tax collector may have written down some of Jesus' teachings. Indeed, it would have been strange if Matthew had not. Plus, Goodspeed writes: "[Jesus] now has a secretary, a recorder, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah had, to such tremendous advantage!" (p. 10). A little later Goodspeed writes: "Tax collectors were not only proficient in writing but many of them knew shorthand, in Jesus' times and a hundred years before. While we cannot say that Matthew used it in taking down Jesus' utterances . . . even without it dictation could be taken down with great speed" (p. 17).

(2) Jewish scholar Saul Lieberman, an expert in Talmudic literature, offers a brief summary of the possible practice of Jesus' disciples. Lieberman writes:

Now the Jewish disciples of Jesus, in accordance with the general rabbinic practice, wrote the sayings which their master pronounced not in a form of a book to be published, but as notes in their . . . codices [plural of codex or early book], in their note-books (or in private small rolls). They did this because otherwise they would have transgressed the law. In line with the foregoing we would naturally expect the logia [sayings] of Jesus to be originally copied in codices. (p. 205

emphasis original)

What Lieberman means about transgressing the law is that the Pharisees and the rabbis were careful not to publish formally the oral law in books, in case they were confused with the Law of Moses. But notes and notebooks or codices (early forms of the book) for note-taking of the oral law were acceptable.

(3) E. Earle Ellis comes up with several factors that indicate that “some written formulations of Jesus’ teachings were being transmitted among his followers during his earthly ministry” (p. 243). Some of these factors include the education of Jewish children, particularly in the synagogues that were located in Israel’s villages. “The picture of Jesus’ followers as simple, illiterate peasants is a romantic notion without historical basis. Unless it can be shown otherwise, it must be assumed that some of the disciples and / or their converts were capable of composing written traditions” (p. 243).

Next, Ellis notes that the Qumran community had no inhibitions about written commentaries and interpretations of sacred texts. Apparently the early rabbinic (Pharisaic) transmission was inhibited about writing their interpretations in case they may get confused with the Torah (first five books of the Bible) (pp. 243-44).

Further, Ellis connects some level of writing with the early mission of the Twelve during the ministry of Jesus and afterwards. The villagers and townspeople encountered growing opposition, so they were in need of teaching. Their social need called for some writing. “It is more plausible [than just oral teaching] to suppose that at least some written paradigms of the Lord’s pronouncements would be left with those who received his message of the kingdom” (p. 245).

Finally, Ellis says that some of Jesus’ travels took him into more or less Hellenized regions. For example, some of his disciples had Greek names: Andrew and Philip. They were from Bethsaida, a town located north of the Lake of Galilee and having a Gentile presence (or perhaps they were from the Bethsaida on the Lake of Galilee). The Decapolis was also influenced by Greek culture and language. “If he attracted such followers, he must have been concerned to mediate his teachings - and they to have them - in their own language” (p. 246). So this language need is a factor in producing early written documents in some form. Ellis reaffirms this factor in a later article (1999, pp. 53-54).

(4) Werner Kelber works hard at defending the oral nature of the pre-Synoptic traditions, but he concedes that their orality does not preclude written data. He writes: “The concept of a predominantly oral phase is not meant to dispense with the existence of notes and textual aids altogether. The Q tradition, other saying collections, anthologies of short stories, parables, miracles, and the like could well have existed in written form” (p. 23).

(5) Harry Y. Gamble takes up the topic of books and readers in the early church. Christianity grew out of Judaism, and the earlier religion valued literacy and the Book. The earliest followers of Jesus were Jews, and his followers preached to their fellow Jews. So those “who sought to persuade fellow Jews to their faith necessarily developed scriptural arguments, and there is every reason to suppose that the primitive church turned immediately to the study and interpretation of scripture and began to adduce those texts” . . . (p. 23).

Gamble points to Qumran texts in which Old Testament proof texts are compiled or strung together, so this provides the background for earliest Christianity to do the same (pp. 26-27). "There is, then, at least a strong circumstantial probability that collections of testimonies [proof texts] were current in the early church and should be reckoned among the lost items of the earliest Christian literature" (p. 27). In short, Gamble's study demonstrates that the earliest Christians were attuned to the current exegetical and interpretive methods of their day. Eventually, their skills made it into the written synoptic Gospels that we have now.

(6) James M. Robinson is one of the foremost scholars on the hypothetical Q source and the Gnostic texts in the Nag Hammadi collection. He says that the pre-Synoptic traditions were not entirely oral: "The history of the synoptic tradition is no longer dependent only on the forms of oral transmission, but now has a series of written texts bridging much of the gulf back from the canonical [Biblical] gospels to Jesus" (p. 61). Thus, in his complicated study, he provides near-direct evidence that Q was written down, short of actually having an ancient manuscript in front of us.

(7) Samuel Byrskog explores the interrelations between the Gospels and histories, biographies and oral history. He also says that oral and written traditions were important for the earliest followers of Jesus. Spoken or written traditions are not mutually exclusive. Byrskog writes:

Oral and written transmission are not mutually exclusive alternatives and do not follow the logic of first oral and then written. In fact even ancient scribes, who were among the most literate in their society, can be seen as performers, not merely copyists, of written texts, being deeply influenced by their oral culture in which they lived. (pp. 139-40, emphasis original) In the bigger picture, the disciples of Jesus would have breathed in, so to speak, this ethos or general character of the Greco-Roman world, particularly in the development of Q (material common in Matthew and Luke, but not Mark).

(8) In this list of scholars so far, Alan R. Millard did the most thorough study of reading and writing in the time of Jesus. Millard shows that Galilee was not an illiterate backwater. He summarizes an impressive array of material evidence. Key areas and cities in Galilee in the north match up well in Judea in the south, which has more evidence, since Jerusalem is the capital. For example, coin hoards in Galilee reveal the need for records and the existence of robust trade, along the trade routes. So what does Millard conclude? The previous chapters [in his book] have shown the ubiquity of writing in first-century Palestine, the variety of writing material and scripts, and the range of circumstances in which people wrote. The last chapter made a case against the heavy emphasis placed upon oral tradition . . . This is not to say the Evangelists began to compose the Gospels in Jesus' lifetime, but that some, possibly much, of their source material was preserved in writing from that period, especially accounts of the distinctive teachings and actions of Jesus. (pp. 222, 223-24)

(9) Birger Gerhardsson has done the most valuable pioneering work on the possible parallels between the rabbinic (Pharisaical) outlook and practices and the ministry of Jesus. Gerhardsson is careful to distinguish rabbinic (Pharisaical) practices before the destruction of the temple in AD 70 by the Roman General Titus, and afterwards. Gerhardsson had suffered from criticism for supposed simplicity, notably from Talmudic expert Jacob Neusner, but Neusner has since changed his mind and says so in a generous Foreword. But instead of using that linked book, I cite

Gerhardsson's later one, which puts together key articles. He writes on the possibility - or probability - of writing before the Biblical Gospels were written:

I still maintain that the Pharisees and their scribes distinguished between written and oral Torah already in New Testament times, and that they did not accept any official books containing oral Torah. But - and this is the point here - this practice did not prevent their making private notations of material found in the oral tradition. In other words, a distinction was made between official books and private memoranda. In the rabbinical tradition we can glimpse records of various kinds: "scrolls of secrets," notebooks, and other memoranda. Such probably appeared among the students of Hillel and Shammai as early as Jesus' time. Private notations of this kind were found above all in the schools of the Hellenistic world . . . (pp. 12-13, emphasis original, links added). So both in rabbinic schools and the Hellenistic schools, notations were made. Gerhardsson's point is clear. Would Jesus' disciples fail to take notes on at least a few things?

(10) Peter M. Head adds a note to his earlier review (2002) of Alan Millard's book *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*. In 1999 archaeologists found a Hellenistic building with a storeroom of clay jars and 1,800 stamped bullae, which were used to seal and identify official documents written on papyri. The room served as a kind of archive and as storage for pottery. The location of the storeroom, dating from the mid second century BC, is a mere twenty miles from Capernaum, at Tel Kedesh in Upper Galilee. Head writes: . . . "This new piece of evidence offer a good fit with the broader picture that emerges from the wealth of evidence amassed by Millard, and as the jig-saw takes shape the emerging picture suggests that the production of written records would have had a place in the cultural milieu of the Galilean disciples of Jesus" (p. 345).

(11) Graham N. Stanton, in his study of the codex (an early form of the book) and the Christians' use of it, shows how a modern scholar reasons by circumstantial evidence. He writes:

We know very little about the 30s and 40s of the first century, but we have enough evidence to confirm that in those decades Christian missionaries or teachers did not always have ready access to local synagogues in order to consult rolls of the Scriptures . . . Making their own copies was time-consuming and expensive. And carrying handfuls of rolls of favorite Christian Scriptures such as the Psalms and Isaiah on their often arduous journeys was not easy. So in all probability some kind of notebook was used for Scriptural excerpts which were prominent in early Christian preaching and teaching. (p. 182) Then Stanton tells us: The widely held view that the followers of Jesus were either illiterate or deliberately spurned the use of notes and notebooks for recording and transmitting Jesus traditions needs to be abandoned. Oral and written traditions were not like oil and water. They could exist side by side; orally transmitted traditions could be written down by the recipients - and written traditions could be memorized and passed on orally. (p. 189)

(12) In addition to Gerhardsson and Byrskog, no one explains the transmission process of the Jesus traditions as clearly as Richard Bauckham does. After describing the notebooks that the rabbis used, he expands the cultural context to the ancient world: "Such notebooks were in quite widespread use in the ancient world (2 Timothy 4:13 refers to parchment notebooks Paul carried on his travels). It seems more probable than not that early Christians used them" (p. 288).

Next, but still under the twelfth point, Millard says, as noted, that literacy was fairly high in first-century Israel, but Bauckham acknowledges that this is a debated point; literacy may have

been low. Still, though, Bauckham points out that “we should also notice that the followers of Jesus, both during his ministry and in the early church, were drawn from all classes of people. There would undoubtedly be not only members of the educated elite but also professional scribes and copyists” (p. 288). He then drops a hint that Matthew the tax collector would have been just such a professional (see Goodspeed, above). To sum up this lengthy Q & A, for a long time in New Testament scholarship these opinions had been laughed out of court. Hardly anyone is laughing now. The practice of writing or note-taking during the ministry of Jesus and immediately afterwards must be taken seriously.

2. Is there Scriptural evidence for notebooks (of sorts) and for writing?

Yes, some direct pieces of evidence, others indirect, based on our knowledge of the historical context.

We already noted in the previous Q and A and the section on Bauckham that Paul used parchment notebooks (2 Timothy 4:13). Next, Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, called for a small tablet to write down his son’s name (Luke 1:63). The tablet was close at hand. Further, in the Parable of the Shrewd Manager the manager used written bills to settle his accounts (Luke 16:6-7). In this parable Jesus assumes that his listeners would take this kind of writing for granted, as if it is not unusual or outlandish. Also, Matthew or Levi (Matthew 9:9-13) and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) are named as tax collectors, and, according to the historical context, they recorded sums and figures. Next, Cuza is named as the manager of Herod’s household, and, according to the historical context (see my book) notes and documentation were required to keep business in order (Luke 8:3). Finally, the scribes or teachers of the law, Pharisees, Roman government officials, and centurions would be used to writing, the Romans through assistants and secretaries. Millard concludes: To imagine any of these people going out with papyrus roll, pen and ink to take down the words of a traveling preacher would be absurd. To imagine some of them opening note-books they carried for their day-to-day business, perhaps hung at the belt, and jotting down a few key striking sayings that they had heard, or writing a summary of what they had experienced while it was fresh in the memory is quite feasible. (p. 223) 3. Are these early possible notes and notebooks proto-Gospels?

No. Bauckham is on target when he writes: “Such notebooks would not be a wholly new factor in the process of transmission through memorization . . . They would simply have reinforced the capacity of oral transmission itself to preserve the traditions carefully. They should not be imagined as proto-Gospels” . . . (p. 289). Thus, they were used only in the transmission process, both oral and literary (written) traditions.

4. Do you have any examples of early writings that feed into the Synoptics? The orality and literality of the traditions interpenetrated so deeply that we may not be able to uncover or distinguish the differences, in general (Bauckham, p. 289). But this scholar says:

If we take seriously the possibility that Jesus traditions were transmitted both orally and in written form, then an explanation [for the variations between parallel passages in material common to Matthew or Luke, but not Mark] is to hand. Q passages where there is close agreement may come from a written document or from more than one set of notes; where the level of agreement is low, oral traditions may have been used. (Stanton, p. 188) He then cites these references for close

agreement: Matthew 11:2-27 and Luke 7:18-35; Luke 10:12-15, Luke 10:21-22.

You are invited to go to Young's Literal Translation at Bible Gateway, and then type in those references. They also provide nearly direct evidence of written traditions.

5. Do written traditions mean that oral traditions never existed? Not in the slightest. Each of these scholars clearly affirms the reality of oral traditions. Parts Five, Six, and Seven already discussed how they were handed on - very carefully and scrupulously. The truth is, both written and oral traditions existed, but orality is the most common way that the traditions were handed on.

6. What does all of this mean for the historical reliability of the Synoptics? With the practice of writing described in this article, we are very close to the historical Jesus, even during his lifetime. Writing secures the traditions before they were included in the synoptic Gospels. Security implies reliability and stability in the transmission process.

However, if no disciple jotted things down during Jesus' ministry, then the Gospel traditions were handed down orally, for a while. And we have already seen that this oral process was reliable (click on Parts Five to Seven). But I see no reason to exclude the possibility -- perhaps probability -- that at least one disciple (possibly more) jotted a few things down. This would fit into the immediate Jewish and larger Greco-Roman cultures and schools, in regards to teachers and their students or disciples.

7. How does this information compare with the Gnostic texts? The closer we get to the origins, the more we achieve accuracy as to what Jesus really said and did. Proximity to the source, among honest conveyers of information about it, implies reliability. On the other hand, the farther one strays from the source, the more likely it is that one lurches into error. Coming late (except for some passages that obviously derive from the Biblical Gospels), the Gnostic texts stray far from the source, so they lurch into errors. Therefore, they are much less accurate and reliable as to what Jesus really said and did.

It can be that simple.

8. So what does all of this mean to the Church of all denominations? For many decades (from about 1920), hyper-skepticism has dominated the academic world in New Testament studies. To this day, it permeates many seminaries and churches. It leads to the conclusions, for example, that the words and deeds of Jesus were transformed or invented freely according to the needs of the later church. His words and deeds could not be attributed to him with any confidence. And the miracles were supposedly pious myths.

However, quite simply, with the advent of newer scholarship, it is clear that the synoptic Gospels reach back to the ministry of Jesus. When we read them, we can be sure that we hear his voice and his words. The Synoptics accurately convey his ministry. This article has three companion pieces in the series:

5. The Gospel Traditions: Melt in your mouth?

6. Reliable Transmissions: the Gospels without a breakdown?

7. What Is the 'Q Gospel'? The Gospel According to 'St. Q'?

References and Further Reading I recommend the books that have been linked, but they are for the advanced.

Richard Bauckham. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Eerdmans, 2006.

Samuel Byrskog. *Story as History, History as Story: the Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*. Brill, 2000.

Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd. *The Jesus Legend: a Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Traditions*. Baker Academic, 2007. They cite other scholars, not mentioned here due to space, who believe that some of the traditions may have been written down.

---. *Lord or Legend?* Baker, 2007. I discovered this book belatedly. It's written for the laity. It's a clarification of their more academic book, noted in the previous entry. Definitely get it.

E. Earle Ellis. "New Directions in Form Criticism." In *Ellis, Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity: New Testament Essays*. Mohr, 1978. Pp. 237-53.

---. "The Synoptic Gospels and History." In *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*. Ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans. Brill, 1999. Pp. 49-57.

Harry Y. Gamble. *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*. Yale, 1995.

Birger Gerhardsson. *Reliability of the Gospel Tradition*. Hendrickson, 2001.

Edgar J. Goodspeed. *Matthew: Apostle and Evangelist*. John C. Winston, 1959. This book has no link to amazon.com, but I recommend it if you can find it.

Peter M. Head. "A Further Note on Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus." *Evangelical Quarterly* 75 (2003) 343-345.

Werner Kelber. *The Oral and the Written Gospel*. Fortress, 1983.

Saul Lieberman. *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*. The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962.

Alan R. Millard. *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*. NYUP, 2000.

James M. Robinson. "A Written Greek Sayings Cluster Older than Q: A Vestige." *Harvard Theological Review* 92 (1999) 61-67.

Graham N. Stanton. *Jesus and Gospel*. Cambridge, 2004.

09 - Chapter 09

Chapter 9. Authoritative Testimony in Matthew's Gospel Mission, Possible! This article rounds a corner from the traditions transmitted before the Gospels were written to the Gospels themselves, as we have them now. Do they enjoy eyewitness testimony at their foundation? A rich Gospel like Matthew has multiple purposes working at the same time. But surely a main one is the mission of Jesus and his commission of the Twelve and some key women, particularly Mary Magdalene.

Matthew is keen on showing us that the Twelve and certain women embody authoritative, participatory eyewitness testimony. They receive their special status by their proximity to Jesus, while he trained, discipled, and commissioned them. This article is Part Nine in a series on the historical reliability of the Gospels. The series has nothing to do with their inerrancy and inspiration, because if we cannot establish their historical reliability, then how can we move on to discuss their inerrancy and inspiration, as those two doctrines have been traditionally understood? But nothing in this article contradicts the two doctrines.

Two quick comments before we begin. I use the designation "Matthew" without referring to questions of authorship (but see Q-&-A's Twenty, Twenty-One, and Twenty-Two, below, for more discussion). Second, recall that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a lot of passages in common, so they are called the synoptic Gospels (synoptic means viewed together). The authors are sometimes called Synoptists. The authors of the four Gospels are also called evangelists. Slashes // mean parallel passages among them.

1. How are the disciples presented in Matthew's Gospel? That question goes right to authoritative testimony in Matthew. And that testimony goes to reliability. So we will spend the next several Q-&-A's looking into the question. Their discipleship, though long lasting, is concentrated in their first mission, which is based on the authority of Jesus. It is in this context that Matthew inserts the official list of the twelve apostles (Matthew 10:2-4). After giving them special authority (Matthew 10:1), Jesus then instructs them on how and where to minister (Matthew 10:5-42). He sends them to preach the good news and heal diseases and cast out demons. After their first commission ends, Matthew reiterates in Matthew 11:1 that Jesus had instructed the twelve disciples. So the words twelve or twelve disciples cluster together. This is known as the first commission.

However, it is not as though the disciples are on a mission by themselves, after the first one is accomplished. But the main point here is that after they are endowed with authority in Matthew 10:1, their discipleship becomes more intense. The second commission is found in the last four verses of the Gospel, called the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). Jesus tells the Eleven (minus Judas) that all authority is given to him (Matthew 28:18; cf. Matthew 10:1). They should "therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). The twelve disciples and the eleven disciples link the two commissions together (Matthew 10:1 and Matthew 28:16-18).

It must be conceded from the outset that Matthew's Gospel is concerned primarily with the twelve men. In the Easter narrative, however, they depend on the women to hear about the resurrection

and the subsequent Great Commission. Matthew implies that without the women, the Eleven would have never ignited and spread the gospel. He intends for us to draw the conclusion that women also have an authoritative role to play in spreading the gospel.

2. Are there differences in the Twelve's discipleship before and after the first commission?

Hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these. That may clarify any confusion about all the verses.

If my thesis about the first commission is correct, then the thesis should be clear before and after this first commission, beginning in Matthew 10:1; namely, do the disciples receive more intense training, testing, and growth after the first commission than before it? How significant is Jesus' impartation of his authority to the Twelve? What does this mean to the traditions that feed into the other written Biblical Gospels, not just Matthew?

Let's imagine that we are filming the Gospel of Matthew and following the text to the letter, before Matthew 10:1 and after it, but including verse one (from here on, when I say after 10:1, I include verse one. This saves me from the clumsy in and after Matthew 10:1). It is true that the number of chapters is larger after the first commission than before it, but the data should yield some interesting conclusions, in before-and-after footage.

3. What about Peter and other disciples?

Before Matthew 10:1, Simon Peter is mentioned once at his calling (Matthew 4:18) and once at his mother-and-law's house (Matthew 8:14). James, John, and Andrew are referred to only once at their calling (Matthew 4:18-22). Matthew himself fills out the picture (Matthew 9:9-13). However, after Matthew 10:1, Peter has more close-ups and interacts and gets involved more deeply in the ministry of Jesus. Peter has two close-ups with James and John and seven with the cameras focused only on him, in the following passages:

Peter's walk on water (Matthew 14:28-29); his question about a parable (Matthew 15:15); his great confession and rebuke (Matthew 16:16-23); Jesus' transfiguration, with Peter, James and John, as observers (Matthew 17:1-8); Peter's questions about temple tax (Matthew 17:24-27); his question about forgiveness (Matthew 18:21); his question about discipleship (Matthew 19:27); his declaration of faithfulness (Matthew 26:31-35); his falling asleep in Garden of Gethsemane, with James and John (Matthew 26:37-46); his being in the courtyard of high priest; (Matthew 26:58, Matthew 26:69); his denial of Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75).

James and John apart from Peter have one scene, their mother asking about privileged seating in the future kingdom (Matthew 20:20-28). Yet James and John still triple their camera time after Matthew 10:1, if we factor in their scenes with Peter. But more important than the number of appearances is their discipleship and the lessons they learn after Matthew 10:1.

We can direct the cameras at the disciples and Peter in two more quick before-and-after scenes in storms (Matthew 8:23-27 and Matthew 14:22-33). Before Matthew 10:1, the disciples, undistinguished from each other, wake Jesus to save them; after Matthew 10:1, the cameras focus on Peter walking on water in the second storm, for he wants to follow Jesus who was also walking on water (Matthew 14:28-31). If in the first storm the disciples express wonder ("even the winds and waves obey him!" [Matthew 8:27]), then in the second storm they recognize that Jesus is the

Son of God and worship him (Matthew 14:32). In a quick comparison with Mark and Luke, an unknown man who was not a formal follower of Jesus was driving out demons in Jesus' name, but the disciples tried to stop him, for he was not one of them. But Jesus approved of the man's action (Mark 9:38-40 // Luke 9:49-50). Matthew omits this passage. Authority had to be vested only in the Twelve, without ambiguities. So now we can ask what Mark 6:6-13 happened to Andrew and Matthew, after Matthew 10:1. They get absorbed into the Twelve. Even Peter himself sometimes gets absorbed into them, in comparison with Mark (Matthew 21:19 // Mark 11:21; Matthew 24:3 // Mark 13:3; but see Matthew 15:15 // Mark 7:17). In Matthew's Easter narrative, Peter is not named, but gets incorporated into the Eleven, though the other three Gospels name him in the culmination and climax of the four Gospels.

After Matthew 10:1, being imperfect, the disciples still make mistakes (Matthew 18:1-4; Matthew 19:20-28) and misjudgments (Matthew 16:21-23) and have too little faith on one occasion (Matthew 17:14-21). But that is part of their discipleship.

Bottom line for this Q & A: Matthew's big point is to authorize, in a special sense, the disciples or the Twelve after the first commission. Peter may represent them in key scenes (see Q & A Eleven, below, for a further discussion on authority).

4. What about Peter in Matthew and Mark?

Peter really comes alive when we compare his scenes in Matthew after the first commission with those scenes in Mark, assuming that Matthew borrows from Mark, which seems likely. As noted in the previous Q & A, Matthew 14:32 says that the disciples acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God and worship him, after he stilled the second storm. Peter even walked on water with Jesus. By comparison, in the second storm, Mark 6:45-52, after the commission in Mark 6:6-13, does not say that Peter walked on water; and the disciples still merely marvel because they did not understand the loaves of bread, shortly after the miraculous feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14:13-21 // Mark 6:30-44). But Matthew says nothing about the disciples' misunderstanding because of the loaves. In Matthew 16:16, Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, whereas in Mark 8:29, Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, omitting the last title (Luke says "the Christ of God" in Luke 9:20). Only Matthew records Jesus' declaration that Peter is the rock on which Jesus will build his church (Matthew 16:18).

During the transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17:1-13, Peter says that he should put up three shelters. In comparison, in Mark 9:2-13, after his first commission in Mark 6:6-13, Peter makes the same suggestion to put up shelters, but Mark adds the comment that Peter did not know what to say because he was so frightened. In Matthew's version, then, Peter's motive of fear behind his offer is omitted. So his offer does not seem so out of place.

However, as we saw in the previous Q & A Peter does not always have the spotlight shine on him. He may get absorbed into the Twelve. In Mark 11:21, Peter asks about the withered fig tree, but in Matthew 21:9, it is the disciples who ask. In Mark 13:3 Peter, James, John, and Andrew ask about the End Times, yet in Matthew 24:3, the disciples ask. In Matthew 28:16-20, Peter is not named, but is included in the Eleven, whereas in Mark 16:1-8 Peter is named in addition to the disciples. But see Matthew 15:15 // Mark 7:17, in which Peter asks for an explanation of a parable in Matthew, whereas the disciples ask in Mark.

Bottom line for this Q & A: in key scenes, despite the exceptions referenced in the previous paragraph, Peter's discipleship and growth come into clearer focus in Matthew than in Mark, after the first commission. When he gets absorbed into the Twelve in Matthew, then the author is highlighting the role of the Twelve as a group, and this authoritative role is very important in his Gospel, as the next few Q-&-A's will show.

5. What about the crowds and the disciples?

Now we consider the disciples as a group contrasted with the crowds, before and after Matthew 10:1.

Let's quickly analyze some sheer numbers in a word count. In Matthew 4:12-25; Matthew 5:1-48; Matthew 6:1-34; Matthew 7:1-29; Matthew 8:1-34; Matthew 9:1-38, the words crowds and people occur 12 times, for an average of 2.0 times per chapter. In the same stretch of text, the words disciple or disciples (of Jesus, not John the Baptist) appear 9 times, for an average of 1.5 times per chapter. Per contra, after Matthew 10:1, the words crowds or people appear 49 times, for an average of 2.58 times per chapter. In the same stretch of text, the words disciple or disciples (of Jesus, not John the Baptist) appear sixty-four times, for an average of 3.37 times per chapter. The numbers for the crowds increase a little, whereas the numbers for the disciples more than double.

However, we must not over-interpret these numbers, for the disciples and crowds always seem to be in the background and sometimes the foreground. Also, the numbers do not separate out the long teaching sections before and after Matthew 10:1. But the numbers reflect an emphasis or more camera time for the disciples, after the first commission. Yet what is more important than the quantity is the quality time given to the disciples, as opposed to the crowds.

6. What's the bottom line on the crowds?

Matthew separates off the disciples from the crowds. In nearly every instance when the words crowds and disciples are used, they are not merged. For example, the disciples and the crowds - the two groups are distinguished - hear the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1 and Matthew 7:28). However, in Luke 6:17 "a large crowd of his disciples" listens to the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49).

Before Matthew 10:1, the crowds, not only serving as the background, must get their fair share of camera time. But after Matthew 10:1, the cameras focus on the disciples, while the crowds stand only in the background, maybe getting a few close-ups. The crowds were part-time eyewitnesses of the words and deeds of Jesus. And maybe some told their story of what they saw (cf. Matthew 9:30-31; Mark 1:45; John 5:15; John 9:7-12), particularly in Jerusalem where the church was based at first, after Easter.

Jesus gladly ministered to the crowds, but they come and go. They were not with him twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, so it was not possible that they would have the same level of knowledge of him and his day-to-day training, as the disciples enjoyed. The crowds do not have the same epistemological status as the disciples do (epistemology is the study of knowledge, how we acquire it, and so on). Therefore, they are not part of the Twelve, on whom Jesus bestows his authority.

7. What is a summary of the data about the disciples? The disciples are the Twelve in Matthew (but see Matthew 8:21). They are not a “large crowd of his disciples” as we found in Luke 6:17. Nor does Matthew record the commission of the seventy-two, as Luke does (Luke 10:1-24). Matthew omits the short passage about an exorcist who was not a formal disciple of Jesus, though Jesus approved of the man’s efforts (cf. Mark 9:38-40 // Luke 9:49-50). Succinctly stated, it is far from clear that when the word disciples (plural) appears in Matthew, it means more than the Twelve.

Before Matthew 10:1, Peter, James, and John have a few camera shots together, when they are called. Peter has an additional scene at his mother-in-law’s house. But after Matthew 10:1, they have more. This follows the earliest traditions that these three (or two after James was martyred in Acts 12:1-2) played a significant role in the early church, cohering with the Book of Acts (1-5; Acts 6:1-7; Acts 9:32-43; 10:1-11:18; Acts 12:1-19; Acts 15:1-35) and Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians (1:17-2:10), for example.

Matthew intends that the disciples’ growth should appear stronger after the first commission than before it. Before Matthew 10:1, all of this growth is merely implied or potential or small, about to surge upwards. But this does not mean that the disciples did or understood next to nothing before Matthew 10:1. They heard the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7). They observed Jesus doing the works of the kingdom. Yet they received his special authority to do the works of the kingdom and to apply what they learned after Matthew 10:1, particularly during the first commission.

After Matthew 10:1, the cameras focus on the disciples’ training. Despite their misjudgments and misunderstandings, they are put on a trajectory or storyline to witness everything that Jesus says and does, up close and personal, with God’s special authority given during the first commission. This authority sustains and feeds the disciples’ growth.

8. What’s the bottom line on the disciples in Matthew? The word disciples (plural) occurs far more times than disciple (singular). This means that Matthew is interested in the Twelve as an authoritative group of eyewitnesses. Revealing this chain of authority or chain of command is one main purpose in Matthew’s Gospel, though not the only one. The first commission is exceedingly important in Matthew’s Gospel, laying the foundation for the Great Commission. Eventually, the Eleven (minus Judas) will go out to all nations, proclaiming the gospel. This flow of the narrative is confirmed, not only in the other three Gospels, but also in the Book of Acts. (Mark is a special case; see Q & A Fourteen, below, and the next article or Part Ten.) 9. Does Jesus’ authority given to the disciples boost their confidence?

Yes! The narrative or storyline throughout Matthew conforms to a psychological fact that many experience. When anyone is invested with authority from a legitimate leader, the recipient changes, develops new perspectives, and enjoys more confidence, whether rapidly or gradually. This is what the disciples experienced after they received authority for the first commission and during their training after it. They will grow in their authority even more, after Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47). I have no doubt that the author of the Gospel of Matthew experienced this, too. He certainly observed it during Jesus’ ministry (if we take the traditional view that Matthew wrote this Gospel); he certainly observed it in the growth of the Jesus movement and church after the crucifixion (and resurrection).

See Q & A Fourteen, below, for more discussion on authority.

10. Are Peter, James, and John sources of specific traditions in Matthew?

Samuel Byrskog convincingly argues that Peter was very important in the Matthean community/ies, particularly in Antioch (on the left side of the map, under Syria). We saw this when, for example, Peter was shown to walk on water (Matthew 14:28-31). Peter is also declared the rock on which Jesus will build his church (Matthew 16:18). Thus, in Matthew, the camera's focus is on Peter more than any other disciple. Byrskog writes:

. . . “there is . . . a cumulative likelihood that the oral history of the primary eyewitness of Jesus’ active ministry, as he is pictured in the New Testament, had developed into an oral tradition and re-oralized tradition of decisive importance in the Matthean community” (Story as History, p. 296, emphasis original).

Byrskog concludes this after a discussion of Peter in the rest of the New Testament. So Matthew coheres with much of the New Testament.

Next, we can consider the other two Synoptics, along with Matthew. It is likely that Peter, James, or John was responsible for transmitting and shaping at least some of the traditions that involved the three alone, such as Mark 5:22-24, Mark 5:35-42 // Matthew 9:18-19, Matthew 9:23-25; Luke 8:40-42, Luke 8:49-56; or Mark 9:2-13 // Matt. 17:28-36; Luke 9:28-36 (Gerhardsson, Reliability, p. 28). This is especially true about Peter, who stands behind Mark’s Gospel, as the next article will argue (go to Part Ten on Mark). If we assume Markan priority (it was written first and borrowed from), which is likely, then Matthew seems to have put about ninety percent of the Gospel of Mark in his own Gospel, but only after critical thought. So Matthew’s Gospel has Peter’s eyewitness testimony embedded in it (see Part Ten on Mark).

11. Are the Twelve as a group a source of specific traditions in the Synoptics? As for the Twelve generally, Richard Bauckham is on target: The Twelve are listed as the official body of eyewitnesses who formulated and authorized the core collection of traditions in all the Synoptic Gospels. They are named, not as the authorities for this or that specific tradition, but as responsible for the overall shape of the story of Jesus and much of its content. (p. 97; see also Gerhardsson, Reliability of the Gospel Tradition, pp. 37-38; 73; Byrskog, Story as History, pp. 233-35) That assessment fits the Twelve’s role in Matthew perfectly, and in Mark and Luke. But in Matthew along with Luke (Mark is a special case; see Q & A Fourteen, below), the Twelve (or Eleven, minus Judas) become future eyewitnesses and examples for us all, after they receive the Great Commission. They had received on-the-job training, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The Twelve’s proximity to Jesus bestows on them authority. From this authority, the Twelve, after a replacement for Judas is found (Acts 1:23-26), become the authoritative sources and transmitters of the traditions about the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. As they established a church base in Jerusalem and later fanned out into the world outside of the Holy City and Israel, their stories about Jesus were cherished, and so were they - maybe too much (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:12 and 1 Corinthians 3:22). The disciples’ transmissions and storytelling were written down, and evidence shows that this was done very early. It may have been done during Jesus’ ministry (see the previous article “Did Some Disciples Take Notes during Jesus Ministry?” or Part Eight). Matthew highlights this outreach, from his investigation of his sources and his knowledge of the flow of events in the early church, corroborated and confirmed by Luke and Acts (which scholars call Luke-Acts) and John, as future articles will show.

12. Does the disciples' first mission mean anything to passing on the teachings and doing the deeds of Jesus in his authority?

Indeed it does! We can be sure that the Twelve, while on their first mission, kept their message simple, namely, the basics of the kingdom of God. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 10:7). But surely they went a little beyond that specific declaration. Also, the Twelve did the deeds of Jesus. This is not to say that the disciples required the crowds and distant followers of Jesus to remember in an authoritative way that passes on what he was saying and doing. Rather, the Twelve themselves were remembering, teaching, and doing what he had taught and done. They were responsible for the message of the gospel. Surely they wanted to get things right. Surely they wanted to pass on accurately and reliably what he had said in the basics and to imitate closely what he did, in his authority. Jesus was training them to go out on their own, for the time when he would not be with them in his earthly life (Matthew 28:20). Does all of this mean that the disciples went out on a mission for the express and only purpose of learning how to pass on traditions? Of course not. They were on a mission to minister to people. However, to judge from the cultural interaction between a master and his students, the net result of the disciples' first mission is clear: they practiced how to repeat what he had said and to imitate what he had done, in his authority; then the traditions were handed on accurately and reliably and his deeds were imitated closely, after his crucifixion (and resurrection), on their second, lifelong mission.

13. What about the "Q gospel" as a source in Matthew?

Recall that this hypothetical document is derived or extracted from passages that Matthew and Luke share, but not Mark. We already examined this issue in the article on Q (What is the Q "Gospel"? or Part Seven). If it existed, then it only strengthens the historical reliability of Matthew, because it embodies a very early source. And Greco-Roman biographers and historians used sources in their writings. If Matthew incorporated it, then he saw nothing wrong with it, so why should we?

14. What does authority mean in the Synoptics?

Even though this article is on Matthew, we can gain a better understanding of its purpose if we compare it to Mark and Luke-Acts on the topic of authority; it gets us to the heart of the Gospels: mission. In Mark's commission passages (Mark 3:15, a summary; and Mark 6:7, an abbreviated commission), Jesus imparts authority (*exousia* in Greek) for the same purpose as in Matthew 10:1. But Mark does not have a commission at the end of his Gospel, in the best manuscripts. However, Jesus does predict that his Gospel shall be preached in all nations (Mark 13:10 // Matthew 24:14). (Go to Part Ten on Mark.)

Matthew and Luke-Acts cohere especially closely together. Specifically, in the context of commissioning, Matthew 10:1 says that Jesus gave the Twelve authority (*exousia*), and Matthew 28:18 repeats the word. Luke 9:1 says authority (*exousia*) and power (*dunamis* in Greek); Luke 24:49 says power; and Acts 1:8 says power. In both words, the reality comes out the same, for in Matthew and Luke-Acts the disciples drive out demons and heal the sick and preach the good news of the kingdom.

Next, the wording of the second commission's goal in both Matthew and Luke-Acts are exact or very close. Matthew 28:19 says that Jesus sends the Eleven to all nations. Luke 24:47 says all

nations. And Acts 1:8 says the ends of the earth. In all three global commands, the disciples depend on God's authority and power. At Pentecost, the birth of the church, the disciples receive even more power (and hence authority), in the fullness of the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). As we shall see in a future article, John also highlights eyewitnesses and their commission. So the four Gospels are unified on this point.

15. Do women provide authoritative testimony in Matthew? Their eyewitness participation is framed briefly, but significantly. Matthew 27:55-56 says that "many" women followed Jesus from Galilee, caring for his needs (cf. Luke 8:2-3). And Matthew 27:56 names Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (James and John). These three and "many women" are watching the crucifixion from a distance.

Next, Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary" are at the tomb (Matthew 27:61 and Matthew 28:1). Then an angel commissions them to report to the male disciples on Christ's resurrection (Matthew 28:5-8) and to tell the men to meet Jesus in Galilee.

Finally, Jesus meets the two women and repeats the angel's commission (Matthew 28:9-10). Their double commission corresponds to the double commission of the men. The women are the ones who first have to testify as eyewitnesses of the resurrection to the Eleven in Matthew (cf. Luke 24:9). Thus, to return to our cameras again, they focus on named individual women, whereas the eleven unnamed men are filmed as a group.

16. The women at the empty tomb: how does Matthew compare with Mark and Luke?

Mark 16:7 adds Peter's name to his account that parallels Matthew closely, but Mark does not have a second commission in the best manuscripts, though he says the gospel shall be preached to all nations (Mark 13:10). In Mark 16:7, an angel also commissions the women who fear and hesitate (v. 8). In Luke, the men do not think much of the women's testimony (Luke 24:11), but Peter runs to the empty tomb (Luke 24:11-12), and so do some others (Luke 24:24). Matthew omits the men's scoffing attitude. Maybe he does not include it because neither does Mark, but even Mark says the women hesitate to tell the men and ends there (Mark 16:8).

Bottom line for this Q & A: it is clear that only in Matthew does the women's report get the sequence of events moving forward without negative attitudes and the women's hesitation, though Matthew 28:8 says that the women were afraid, "yet filled with joy." But if not for the women's swift obedience to their double commission (they "ran to tell the disciples"), then the Eleven, so Matthew implies, would not have fulfilled the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20).

17. What's the big picture on the women's eyewitness participation? In Matthew, as in the other Synoptics, the Twelve "formulated and authorized the core collection of traditions in all the Synoptic Gospels . . . and were responsible for the overall shape of the story of Jesus and much of its content" (Bauckham p. 97). Now, however, the spotlight and cameras are on the women. The Twelve (or Eleven) and the women "formulated and authorized" and "were responsible" for the Easter narrative.

However, it must be conceded that the specific word authority is connected to the Twelve and then the Eleven. But we must not believe that only they receive authority, because surely other disciples did too, in the earliest church (Acts 2:1-4). Plus, the women's own double commission to

tell the Eleven surely reflects a greater and more expanded role as missionaries and ministers of the Word, serving in the early Christian communities. At the very least their participation in the Easter narrative and in following Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem would encourage them carefully and scrupulously to hand on the traditions that involved them. They embody authoritative testimony. The spotlight shines brightest on Mary Magdalene, so the cameras follow her. She appears in all three Synoptics (and John) in the Easter narratives. Byrskog draws the obvious conclusion:

Perhaps, therefore, the female eyewitnesses and informants did not, at first, consist merely of a collection of a body of women. The members of the early Jerusalem community might have realized that one woman in particular carried memories worthwhile telling and preserving. They knew to whom to turn for information. (Story as History, p. 81, emphasis original)

Byrskog does not omit mentioning the other women, in addition to Mary Magdalene. But it is clear that she has the lead role.

Thus, after the author of Matthew checked his sources, he included the women's story in his Gospel. His version esteems the women in a special way. This is all the more remarkable when we consider that, generally speaking, women did not have the same status and prestige as men did, in their own class (see my book, below, for more information). This also means that Matthew wanted to get things right, even if he goes against society's norm in his day.

18. Does Joseph provide authoritative testimony?

Joseph may indeed be a source of authoritative testimony. Matthew's version of the Nativity or Infancy narrative (1:18-2:23) focuses on Joseph and is told from his point of view (apart from the magi). The point of view of the main character, especially as focused as it is in the Infancy narrative, is significant in a story that intends to tell things as they really happened. What does this mean for originating and handing down this tradition? "It is not easy to think of a more likely explanation for this unusual interest in Joseph than the very traditional view that the stories derive ultimately from Joseph himself" (France, p. 256).

It may be objected that Joseph may have died early, so how could his story be known? In response, we have already learned in previous articles (Parts Five, Six, and Eight) that the earliest disciples were keen on preserving traditions as they stood, with very little alteration. Perhaps family members took it on themselves to keep Joseph's traditions alive, with great care. It is not difficult to imagine their motive for doing so.

Go to Rev. Dr. Mark D. Robert's website here to see a discussion of the historicity and similarities between Matthew and Luke in their Infancy narratives. See "References and Further Reading," below, for my series on the possibility of miracles generally, back then and now.

19. How does Matthew's Gospel compare to the Gnostic "gospels"?

If anyone would like to read a short Gnostic "gospel," then he or she may click on "The Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles," translated by two reputable scholars who do not push the Gnostic texts too far onto the public. The text's setting is ethereal and outlandish, not at all corresponding to Jesus' real-life world, in Israel, about four decades before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70. Some things in this Gnostic text are clearly derivative from the four Biblical

Gospels. This Gnostic writing, like the other ones, presupposes the Biblical Gospels. It may be true that some passages in the later "gospels" come from early sources outside the Biblical Gospels. But in the vast majority of instances, the Gnostics capitalized on the widespread fame of the Biblical Gospels and the Twelve, particularly Peter. On the other hand, the Gospel of Matthew enjoys the earliest authoritative testimony as its foundation. In the ancient world, quite often, the closer a report gets to the origins, the more reliable it becomes. This is particularly true when the account has eyewitness testimony embedded in it. With the Gospel of Matthew, we hear the words (e.g. aphorisms) and voice of the real Jesus. The Gnostic texts do not enjoy close proximity to the actual, real-life ministry of Jesus, so the texts lurch into errors and flights of fancy. It is clear that the Gnostic authors never intended to write a true-to-life gospel of the real Jesus, but to do their own thing, so they did not mind one little bit if they swerved into foreign and other-worldly ideas and scenes, compared to the Biblical Gospels.

Therefore, we as a Church should not mind one little bit if we consider the Gnostic texts as heretical; we can be confident that other claimants to the truth about Jesus in later generations must submit to and be judged by the authoritative Gospel of Matthew and the other three Gospels. The Gnostic "gospels" do not measure up at all.

20. What about Matthew's eyewitness testimony?

Personally, after research on the authorship of the Gospel of Matthew, I have reached the conclusion that the evidence for the Apostle Matthew's authorship is stronger than the evidence against it. The early church was unanimous that Matthew wrote the Gospel (and the fathers go beyond Papias' comments, for any scholar who may be reading this article). It seems odd that the church fathers would claim a somewhat obscure disciple as the author, unless they believed the tradition handed down to them that says he wrote the Gospel.

Incidentally, this is the exact opposite of the Gnostic texts, which proudly and loudly (and wrongly) place the names of the apostles on the front of their pseudonymous texts, such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, and the Gospel of Philip. In any case, however, it is far from clear that Matthew's point of view is presented in his own writing. It is not as if he writes, "Jesus and I went over there, and he talked to me privately." Nor does Matthew reveal himself in his Gospel in the same (intimate) way that the Beloved Disciple does (e.g. John 13:22-26). (Recall that the Beloved Disciple wrote the Gospel; see John 21:20, John 21:24). Rather, Matthew subordinates his perspective in deference to his sources. He highlights the importance of the Twelve, especially Peter. Recall, though, that the Easter narrative and the Great Commission never mention even the lead apostle Peter by name, but the Eleven as a group (minus Judas). It seems that Matthew was more interested in recounting the teaching and ministry of Jesus and the expansion of his movement than in hinting about Matthew himself (but see Matthew 9:9-13; Matthew 10:3 and possibly Matthew 13:52 and Matthew 17:24-27).

However, Peter is important in Matthew. Note Peter's camera time in Q & A Three and Four, above. And as we saw in Q & A Ten, the Matthean community/ies valued Peter's eyewitness testimony very highly. This explains, to a large degree, why Matthew, an apostle, would incorporate much of Mark's Gospel, not written by an apostle. It is probable that Matthew knew that Mark's Gospel was based on Peter's preaching. This partnership was widely known in the early church, just a generation or two after the apostles. And the post-apostolic community (and

after) received this tradition from the earlier generation. Peter and Mark knew each other in Jerusalem and Rome (Acts 12:12; 1 Peter 5:13).

21. So what are Matthew's sources that have priority over his own identity in his Gospel?

Since Matthew's identity is submerged in the larger story of Jesus, I do not pick up on or perceive Matthew's personal reminiscences in his old age, when we read his Gospel, in my opinion. (By comparison, we may indeed perceive some level of the [now elderly] Beloved Disciple's personal testimony in John.) Rather, I observe in Matthew a skilled author / apostle who understands his reliable sources and knows how to incorporate them into his Gospel.

How skilled? By comparison, Luke announces in his preface that he carefully researched everything from the beginning, including those who were, from the first, eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4). If Luke incorporates material unique to his Gospel, then so does Matthew for his own Gospel. If Luke incorporates Q, then so does Matthew. If Luke incorporates Mark's Gospel, then so does Matthew, up to ninety percent of it. If Luke skillfully arranges his material for chronological, theological, or literary purposes, then so does Matthew. Does this mean that Matthew or Luke borrowed from the other, depending on which source theory that one holds? Maybe. But that's not the main point.

Here is the main point: Matthew was a careful researcher and thinker and author, equal to Luke and his preface, except Matthew did not announce any of this in a preface of his own. Matthew wrote his Gospel while the transmitters of the traditions of Jesus, like the Twelve (including Matthew himself) and other lead disciples like Mary Magdalene, were still alive, but were perhaps about to die out. By the time Matthew wrote, it appears likely that the storyline of Jesus, seen in Mark (and Luke), was well established. Matthew fit his Gospel to the traditions that had achieved fairly fixed forms due to their being reliably transmitted. We shall explore this storyline in a future article on the large number of similarities in at least one Synoptic on the one hand and John on the other.

Using sources does not take away from Matthew's historical reliability. Biographers and historians in a Greco-Roman context borrowed or drew from sources. Thus, Matthew fits into his historical context very nicely.

Nonetheless, we shall see in the next three articles on the other Gospels that eyewitness testimony as such, even in Luke and Mark who were not eyewitnesses, is a clearer theme in them than in Matthew.

22. What's the bottom line on the authorship and date of Matthew? As discussed in the previous two Q-&-A's, authorship is important; and so is the dating of the Gospel. We should probably follow a reasonable date and put the Gospel in the AD 70's, after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70, but I'm open to an earlier date. Indeed, many scholars have supplied very convincing arguments for a time before AD 70.

However, I believe that authoritative testimony and the coherence of the Synoptics put the questions of authorship by an apostle and dates in second place. This is a genuine option for me, provided we do not adopt an excessively late date, like the late first century or the early second century, and provided we do not conclude that the Gospel emerged outside the apostolic

community. (Think of Mark and Luke who were not apostles, but who wrote when many or all of the apostles and other original eyewitnesses were still alive). As long as such testimony and coherence exist, then we have reached back as far into Jesus' ministry as necessary to hear his words (e.g. aphorisms) and voice. No Gnostic or other "Gospel" outside of the Bible can say that.

23. So what's the bottom line for the historical reliability of Matthew?

. . . "Never for a moment do the evangelists yield to the temptation to supplement what Jesus has to say with a speech of Peter or James or John. Their intention is to present Jesus and no one else" (Gerhardsson, *Reliability*, p. 28). Thus, the Gospel writers were scrupulous in recording the traditions about what Jesus said or did, not what the early church invented and then imposed on Jesus and his ministry, which semi-fictions eventually made it into the written Gospels. This point agrees with the main one in Q-&-A's Twenty to Twenty-Two. As the guarantors of the overall content of the story about Jesus, the disciples as a group are clearly distinguished from the crowds. Matthew's two-stage commission of witness, combined with the commissions in the other Gospels and Acts, and the reality of their God-given authority and power, is a seamless storyline. The Twelve safeguard it by their proximity to Jesus. The New Testament coheres together on this point. This coherence implies reliability; this can be seen by contrasting Matthew and the other Biblical Gospels with the Gnostic texts (see Q & A Nineteen).

During the disciples' first mission, they no doubt accurately and reliably repeated and did what Jesus had taught and done. They were in training to proclaim his message and do his works, after he was crucified (and resurrected). As noted in Q & A Twenty-One, Matthew draws or borrows from sources that he perceived were early and reliable. This strategy coheres with his own historical context, for biographers and historians also borrowed or drew from sources that the authors considered reliable.

24. What does all of this mean to the Church of all denominations today? In several Q-&-A's, we compared the three Synoptics and noted that one of the Gospels may omit some things, while the others may include them. A reader may wonder whether this calls into question the reliability of the Gospels.

Answer: it does not. Even the most conservative scholar recognizes that a Gospel writer is free to add and omit things, depending on his own purposes. (In a future article, we will look at the issue of [supposed] contradictions in the Gospels.) But biographies or histories in the Greco-Roman world writing on the same subject, like the life of Socrates, have variations, so there is no problem if the Gospels have them also, according to their own times. None of this threatens historical reliability. In the bigger picture, the Gospel of Matthew serves as an on-the-job training manual for the Church and its commission. The manual and commission are bigger than Matthew himself and even bigger than Peter, James, and John. The manual and commission are all about Jesus.

Following the storyline threaded through the early church, Matthew puts the disciples in the context of training and mission. They succeeded. Their authoritative and eyewitness testimony has gone around the globe, just as Jesus had commanded and predicted (Matthew 24:14; Matthew 28:16-20). Matthew is keen on our knowing this; that is one of the main purposes of his Gospel, though not the only one.

These human disciples - not just saints - in the Gospel of Matthew followed Jesus closely. He gave them a new life-story. Do individuals in the Church today have their new life-story, while they follow him? This article has three companion pieces in the series:

10. Eyewitness Testimony in Mark's Gospel: Was Peter a Portrait Painter?

11. Eyewitness Testimony in Luke's Gospel: Ready? From the Beginning Now!

12. Eyewitness Testimony in John's Gospel: The "Eyes" Have It!

References and Further Reading

See Part Two in the series: "Archaeology and the Synoptic Gospels: Which way do the rocks roll?"
Also see Part Three: "Archaeology and the Gospel of John: Is skepticism chic passé?"

Richard Bauckham. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Eerdmans, 2006.

Samuel Byrskog. *Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority & Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism & the Matthean Community*. (Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series, No. 24). Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994.

---. *Story as History, History as Story: the Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History*. Brill, 2000.

R. T. France. "Scripture, Tradition and History in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew." *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*. Ed. R. T. France and David Wenham. Vol. 2. (Wipf and Stock, 1981, reprinted 2003). Pp. 239-66. This article is one of the best on the historicity of the Infancy narrative in Matthew (see Q & A Eighteen). It is advanced, though.

Birger Gerhardsson. *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Tradition in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*. Rev. ed. Eerdmans, 1998.

---. *Reliability of the Gospel Tradition*. Hendrickson, 2001.

Mark D. Roberts. "Gospel Authorship by Mark and Luke: Some Implications." July 2006.

---. "Did the Gospel Writers Know Jesus Personally?" Section A.

---. "Did the Gospel Writers Know Jesus Personally?" Section B.

---. "Did the Gospel Writers Know Jesus Personally?" Section C. My contributions to the discussion on women in early Christianity:

Women, Class, and Society in Early Christianity: Models from Luke-Acts. Hendrickson, 1997.

Doubting the miracles in the Infancy narrative, for example, has to do with philosophical assumptions before studying a text or miracles that happened back then or today - miracles today that look a lot like the ones in the Gospels, particularly the healing ones. Here is my series on miracles and skepticism.

Part One: Miracles and New Testament Studies Part Two: Hume's Miracle Prison: How they got out alive Part Three: Fortifying Hume's Miracle Prison (2): Miracles and Historical Testimony Part

Four: Miracles and the Laws of Nature Part Five: Do Miracles Happen Today?

Part Six: Miracles and New Testament Studies: Conclusion This series has been updated and posted at biblicalstudies.org.uk (look under Hosted Articles, Authors A-B).

See Postmodern Truth Soup in a series on postmodernism. The link goes to a critique of Karen King's What is Gnosticism? (Harvard 2003), but the article explores other things too.

10 - Chapter 10

Chapter 10. Eyewitness Testimony in Mark's Gospel Was Peter a portrait painter? The evidence suggests that Peter was indeed a portrait painter, but he used words alone. Mark's Gospel is all about Jesus. But when we read it, we can also hear Peter's preaching and eyewitness testimony in the background, in small hints.

How?

Answering that one-word question is the subject of this long article on the historical reliability of the Gospels, not their inerrancy and inspiration; if we cannot establish the Gospels' historical reliability, then how can we move on to discuss their inspiration and inerrancy, as they have been traditionally understood? But nothing here contradicts those doctrines. The entire series is committed to bringing onto the web what scholars are saying in their books that support traditional conclusions about the Gospels; and in this article it is Richard Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Eerdmans 2006). We also consider two other scholars' book: D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. The series is intended for the laity, though I hope seminarians, church leaders, and scholars can find something beneficial in it.

Before we begin, recall that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a lot of passages in common, so they are called the synoptic Gospels (synoptic means viewed together). The authors are sometimes called synoptists. Slashes // mean parallel passages among them. The writers of the four Gospels are also called evangelists.

Even though I tried hard to simplify Bauckham's evidence and conclusions, I admit that this article may get complicated unless, perhaps, the readers look up some passages. Hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these.

1. What's the evidence for Peter's eyewitness testimony in Mark's Gospel?

Like the other Gospels, Mark is a story or narrative. Story does not mean only fiction. Mark intends to write a true story. It makes sense that he would use narrative strategies to show and tell the life of Jesus.

One strategy that has been generally overlooked in narrative analyses of Mark's Gospel is employed in Greco-Roman literature, such as Lucian's *Alexander* and Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*. This is not to say that Mark borrowed from either of them, especially since he lived before them. Rather, the strategy seems to be a topos or commonplace rhetorical tool.

2. What is that commonplace rhetorical tool? The common narrative strategy is called *inclusio*. Generally, *inclusio* is the literary technique of placing corresponding material at the beginning and end of a particular stretch of text (short or long) in order to mark off that section and to say something about the intervening section of text. *Inclusio* in this general sense is extremely common in ancient literature. So readers of Mark, even if they did not know of the specific device

of the inclusio of eyewitness testimony, would be very open to spotting inclusions. Even small inclusions were used within a Gospel or epistle (see Carson and Moo, pp. 226, 621, 689, for more examples).

Mark's inclusio makes Peter the principal eyewitness in the second Gospel. It just makes sense that a biographer would name his human sources early in his account and remind his readers of them at the end of his account.

3. How does the inclusio show Peter is the principal eyewitness in Mark? The following example may seem trivial to us today because we are not tuned into inclusions, as a common literary strategy. However, note that Mark repeats Simon's name in 1:16, before Jesus changes his name to Peter in Mark 3:16. Mark 1:16 reads: "And going along the Sea of Galilee, he [Jesus] saw Simon and Andrew, Simon's brother" . . . (my translation).

Most translations ignore the second "Simon" and instead translate it with the pronoun "his." But there is a particular emphasis on Simon. Mark could have used the pronoun "his," as he did in verse 19: "He saw James the son of Zebedee and his brother John" . . . (but see Mark 5:37, where Mark follows Mark 1:16 for James and John). Yet Mark does not always follow this practice, but he does for Peter. In any case, Simon is the first to be called, and he is spotlighted a mere sixteen verses away from the very beginning of Mark's Gospel. At the end of the Gospel Peter likewise plays a prominent role, thus framing Mark's Gospel. In Mark 16:7, the next-to-last verse, an angel tells the women at the empty tomb to inform "the disciples and Peter" that the resurrected Jesus is going on ahead to Galilee. Mark shines the spotlight on Peter as a leader of the disciples in the words of an angel.

Thus, the literary device of the more specific inclusio of eyewitness testimony at the beginning and end of Mark means that Peter is the principal eyewitness in this Gospel.

4. How does Mark's inclusio compare in Matthew or Luke? In our study of Matthew in the previous article, the Gospel does not seem to have an inclusio of eyewitness testimony, but maybe of authoritative testimony, from Matthew 10:1 to Matthew 28:20. But I decided not to analyze this Gospel through that narrative strategy, though Matthew may use one. So for a comparison, Luke is the relevant Gospel in this article on Mark.

If Luke borrows from Mark, which seems likely, then the literary technique is imitated in Luke. For instance, the calling of Peter occurs at the beginning of Luke, after the infancy, temptation and baptism narratives (Luke 4:38). And at the end of the Gospel, Luke names Simon (Peter) (Luke 24:34). "In thus imitating Mark's inclusio of eyewitness testimony with reference to Peter, Luke has acknowledged the extent to which his own Gospel is indebted to the Petrine [adjective of Peter] testimony he recognized in Mark" (Bauckham, p. 127).

Thus, both in Luke and Mark, Simon Peter is the first disciple called with specific emphasis and the last one mentioned with specific emphasis.

Bottom line for this Q & A: Luke follows Mark in the literary strategy of inclusio.

We will further explore Luke's use of it in the next article.

5. Does Mark's inclusio of Peter's eyewitness testimony get other support in Mark?

Yes, it receives support from two textual facts.

First, Mark names Simon (with reference to Peter) seven times and Peter nineteen times. This is considerably higher than in the much-longer Gospels of Matthew (Simon [with reference to Peter] five times and Peter twenty-four times) and Luke (Simon [with reference to Peter] twelve times and Peter eighteen times) (Bauckham, p. 125). In a Greek word count of the three Synoptics, Mark outnumbers the other two in the mention of Simon or Peter: Mark (one out of 432 words), Matthew (one of 654 words) and Luke (one of 670 words) (p. 126).

Second, not surprisingly, then, Peter figures very prominently and is actually present throughout large portions of Mark's Gospel from 1:16 to 14:72 (the only exceptions are Mark 6:14-29; Mark 10:35-40; Mark 14:1-2, Mark 14:10-11, Mark 14:55-65) (Bauckham, p. 126). This second point is particularly important. In addition to Jesus, Peter is the focus between Mark's inclusio. In all three Synoptics, Peter plays a big role, but it is bigger in the much-shorter Gospel of Mark.

6. Is there another strategy in Mark that shows Peter's eyewitness testimony?

Mark employs a nearly unique strategy in twenty-one passages: Mark 1:21, Mark 1:29-30; Mark 5:1-2, Mark 5:38; Mark 6:53-54; Mark 8:22; Mark 9:9, Mark 9:14-15, Mark 9:30, Mark 9:33; Mark 10:32, Mark 10:46; Mark 11:1, Mark 11:12, Mark 11:15, Mark 11:19-21, Mark 11:27; Mark 14:18, Mark 14:22, Mark 14:26-27, Mark 14:32.

He uses the third person plural subject or verb (e.g. "they") and then goes right to a singular subject or verb (e.g. "he"). This is called the "plural-to-singular narrative device." In almost all cases, it appears in passages describing movement from one place to the next.

7. What are some examples of this narrative device?

Bauckham lists these examples. I add the bold font to show the plural rapidly switching to the singular.

1 They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. 2 When Jesus got out of the boat . . . (Mark 5:1-2; NIV) 22 They came to Bethsaida, and some brought a blind man to him (Mark 8:22; my translation) 12 The next day, they left Bethany, and he [Jesus] was hungry (Mark 11:12; my translation) 32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples (Mark 14:32; NIV) See Q & A Eleven for the bottom line on this narrative device.

8. What is Mark's purpose in using the plural-to-singular narrative device? This is where things can really get complicated, if they are not already. The plural-to-singular narrative device, nearly unique to Mark, is designed to reveal point of view. Mark is especially concerned to distinguish the crowds from the Twelve, and to focus on a core of disciples, mostly Peter, James, and John. Recall that Peter is distinguished in the literary strategy of inclusio, and he is actually present in large portions of Mark. In all stories, whether modern or ancient, a point of view is presented. Often, it is the "omniscient" narrator who has control of the overall ideology and flow of the story. He can get into the minds of all the characters. He can change vantage points. He can present a passage from one character's point of view, and in the next (or even same) passage he can shift it to another character. In Mark, the so-called "omniscient" narrator is used. He provides information that characters in the story may not know about (Mark 5:3-5). He describes the thoughts and emotions of a character (Mark 1:41; Mark 2:6-8; Mark 3:5). He perches the reader from one

vantage point or another (Mark 2:2-5). Within this omniscience is an important strategy, called internal focalization, which views things from the vantage point of a character within the story (Bauckham, p. 162).

9. What does this internal focalization technique mean to Mark's plural-to-singular narrative device?

Bauckham writes: "The plural-to-singular narrative device in Mark meets the test for internal focalization . . . it is possible to rewrite the passage, substituting first-person forms for the third-person references to the focalizing character(s)" (p. 163). In other words, the narrative device in Mark can go easily from "they" to "we." And the "we" is Peter's point of view. Other than Jesus, Peter is the focus of Mark's Gospel. But Peter represents, not distances himself from, the Eleven or a core of disciples, such as James, John, and Andrew, or just James and John.

True, Jesus is included in the "we" (Bauckham, p. 159), but this is obvious. "We," changed to "they" by Mark who was not on the scene originally, is mainly Peter's point of view.

Bauckham says, "Mark does not usually shift internal focalization in passages introduced by the plural-to-singular narrative device [and] is further proof that he uses this characteristic narrative feature deliberately and with a view to its function for internal focalization" (pp. 163-164). Thus, the plural-to-singular device and internal focalization work well together and show, again, that Peter is Mark's principal eyewitness source.

Additionally, there is a correlation of the plural-to-singular narrative device with the many references to Peter and the core disciples. Table Fifteen in Bauckham's book is a list of plural-to-singular passages in one column and a list of references to Peter in a second column (p. 181). About this Table, Bauckham says that there is an emphasis on Peter around the early uses of the device and its final uses. The device and the references to Peter also cluster in the midpoint in the narrative (8:22-9:33) (p. 162).

Internal focalization can shift from one character to the next. In passages where this plural-to-singular narrative device is not used, the internal focalization can shift over to another viewpoint or more than one (e.g. Mark 2:2-12; Mark 3:1-6, Mark 3:20-34; Mark 5:21-43; Mark 6:1-6, Mark 6:47-52; Mark 9:14-29) (p. 163). But among the multiple points of view in Mark's Gospel, Peter is prominent, second to Jesus.

Finally, it should be noted to balance out the picture that Peter takes the lead in many passages that include the Twelve or the core, whether the plural-to-singular narrative device is used or not. Passages showing Peter's prominence but not using the device follow: Mark 1:16-20, Mark 1:35-39; Mark 5:35-37; Mark 8:27-30, Mark 8:31-33; Mark 9:2-8; Mark 10:23-31; Mark 14:54, Mark 14:66-72 (p. 165).

10. How does Mark compare to Matthew and Luke in this plural-to-singular device?

After a careful study of the parallel passages in the synoptic Gospels, Bauckham provides a table of the relevant passages in the three Gospels (p. 181). He concludes that "Matthew and Luke have a clear tendency to prefer a singular verb to Mark's plurals encompassing both Jesus and the disciples" (p. 157). Luke may have some interesting uses of the plural-to-singular narrative device, but "they do not alter the overall picture of the . . . device as overwhelmingly Markan" (p. 158).

11. So what's the bottom line on the plural-to-singular device?

Mark is writing a narrative that he is not in. So he cannot use "we." Instead, he uses "they" in a careful way in passages of movement from one place to the next. These passages imply the "we" of Peter's point of view. And who is included in the "we"? It is Peter and the eleven other disciples or the core of Peter, James, and John, and sometimes Andrew (Peter's brother). Bauckham says that "the literary function of the plural-to-singular narrative device in Mark makes it, in effect, Mark's way of deliberately reproducing in his narrative the first-person perspective - the 'we' perspective - from which Peter naturally told his stories" (p. 164).

Thus, Mark heard Peter preaching. The apostle probably said, "The next day, we left Bethany, and he [Jesus] got hungry." But Mark is writing a story from a distance, uninvolved in it personally. So he uses narrative devices like omniscient, third-person point of view and the plural-to-singular narrative device peculiar to him and not to Matthew and Luke, mostly. Therefore, Mark writes: "The next day, they left Bethany, and he got hungry."

12. Aren't the literary strategies of inclusio, the plural-to-singular device, and internal focalization farfetched?

No, they are not farfetched, if we understand that all stories use narrative strategies. Inclusions were common in Greco-Roman writings, specifically biographies, so Mark fits in with his own larger literary context. Next, every story has a point of view or multiple points of view. Finally, Mark's plural-to-singular device has been demonstrated with ample evidence (see the Biblical references in Q & A Six).

13. Is there more evidence of Peter's eyewitness testimony in Mark?

Here we leave behind Bauckham's findings, until Q & A Seventeen. We now look at Carson's and Moo's study. To answer the question directly - yes. In Acts 10:34-43, the author of Acts, whom scholars usually take as Luke, records one of Peter's speeches, probably in a summary. Our focus is on vv. 36-42. Here is a table of the similarities among Peter's speech and Mark's Gospel. 1

Acts 10:36-42

The Gospel of Mark

"Telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36)

"The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1)

"After the baptism that John preached" (Acts 10:37)

"Jesus . . . was baptized by John" (Mark 1:9)

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 10:38)

"Jesus . . . saw the Spirit descending on him" (Mark 1:10)

"Beginning in Galilee" (Acts 10:37)

The Galilean ministry (1:16-8:26)

“He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil (Acts 10:38)

Jesus’ ministry focuses on healings and exorcisms; e.g. “Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons” (Mark 1:34)

“We are witnesses of everything he did . . . in Jerusalem” (Acts 10:39)

“Jesus entered Jerusalem” (Mark 11:11); see chapters 11 to 14

“They killed him by hanging him on a cross” (Acts 10:39)

“And they crucified him” (Mark 15:24)

“God raised him from the dead on the third day” (Acts 10:40)

“He has risen! He is not here” (Mark 16:6)

“He was seen . . . by witnesses . . . by us” (Acts 10:41)

“Tell his disciples and Peter . . . ‘you will see him’” (Mark 16:7)

“He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify” (Acts 10:42)

See the first commission (Mark 6:6-13) and Mark 13:10

Both Peter’s speech and Mark’s Gospel follow the outline of Jesus’ life, but so do the other Gospels. What’s the difference? Peter and Mark give only the very basics, as their speech and narrative move from one thing to another, rapidly. This assessment takes into consideration that Luke probably records a summary of Peter’s speech. His other speeches follow brevity and are action oriented (Acts 2:14-41; Acts 2:12-26; Acts 4:8-12; Acts 5:29-32). By contrast, Paul’s speeches, though likely summaries as well, seem to be lengthy arguments, particularly since half of them in the following references were delivered in a legal setting: Acts 13:16-41; Acts 17:22-31; Acts 20:18-35; Acts 22:1-21; Acts 24:10-21; Acts 26:1-23. Outside a legal context, Acts 20:7 says that Paul spoke to a Christian gathering for a long time, until midnight. Paul was not brief! But the differences between Peter’s and Paul’s speeches in Acts are the subject of another article, so let’s move on.

Bottom line for this Q & A: The narrative style or flow of the Gospel of Mark and Peter’s speech in Acts 10:36-42 match up well.

14. What about Mark’s style compared with Matthew’s and Luke’s?

Mark uses adverbs that are translated as “immediately,” “at once,” “without delay” or “quickly” over forty times in his short Gospel. Matthew and Luke do not come close to this number in their long Gospels. Mark’s rapidity and inclusion only of the “bare bones” facts and themes make his Gospel and Peter’s speech parallel each other closely, as noted in the previous Q & A. In contrast, Matthew and Luke (and John) extend their Gospels, slowing them down to include major teaching sections of Jesus. They are not extra-small summaries.

15. What’s the bottom line on that table, the other Gospels, and Paul’s speeches?

Peter's speech and Mark's Gospel, in proportion to Paul's speeches and the other Gospels, respectively, are extra-small summaries of the full ministry of Jesus. Mark's Gospel is action oriented (Carson and Moo, p. 193), and so is Peter's speech in Acts 10:36-42. Those are the unique similarities between them. Mark's Gospel, following Peter's brevity, seems to be almost a learning manual of gospel essentials so witnesses can go around the world to preach the new message in its boiled-down simplicity.

16. This article is complicated, so will you please summarize things so far?

I agree that this article is complicated. But the basic facts so far are as follows:

One narrative device that Mark uses is called the *inclusio* of eyewitness testimony. It frames a narrative with an emphasis on the same character as an eyewitness at the beginning and end of the story. This participating eyewitness is Peter. Also, in between, he figures very prominently in Mark's Gospel, much more so than in the longer Gospels of Matthew and Luke. So this prominence coheres with the *inclusio*.

Next, Mark uses the plural-to-singular narrative device that mostly reflects Peter's perspective. It is probable that Peter preached, "We then went to this or that place, and Jesus said or did this." Mark was not part of the "we," so he writes "they" naturally. This device fits the strategy of internal focalization, which is the point of view of a character in a story. In this case, the viewpoint belongs to Peter or the disciples or a core of them, as opposed to the crowds. Internal focalization coheres both with Peter's prominence in Mark and the plural-to-singular narrative device.

Finally, Peter's speech in Acts 10:36-42 corresponds to Mark's Gospel. Both are brief, move rapidly, and are action oriented.

17. Are there other eyewitnesses in Mark's Gospel?

Now we again return to Bauckham's study. Have you ever wondered why some persons in Mark (and the other Gospels) are named, while others are not? A simple (not simplistic) answer is at hand. Let's lay out some basic facts in three sample categories, and answer the question as we go (see especially Bauckham, pp. 39-66, for this Q & A).

(1) Women at the cross and tomb: We already saw in the article on Matthew that Mary Magdalene figures prominently. She appears in Mark 15:40, Mark 15:47; Mark 16:1, and so does Salome (Mark 15:40 and Mark 16:1). "The naming [of the women] is surely more likely to reflect how very important for the whole story of Jesus were the events of which they were the sole witnesses" . . . (Bauckham, p. 49). In other words, women provided participatory eyewitness testimony, particularly at the cross and tomb - the culmination of all four Gospels.

(2) Simon of Cyrene and his sons Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21): Matthew and Luke omit the names of Simon's sons. But why does Mark name them? After reviewing several plausible explanations (e.g. the early church knew Alexander and Rufus), Bauckham narrows down the answer: "There does not seem to be a good reason available other than that Mark is appealing to Simon's eyewitness testimony, known in the early Christian movement not from his own firsthand account but through his sons" (Bauckham, p. 52).

(3) Recipients of healing, only three examples follow: Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:22-24, Mark 5:35-42 // Matthew 9:18-19, Mark 9:23-26; // Luke 8:40-42, Luke 8:49-56); Simon the Leper (Mark 14:3-9 // Matthew 26:2-16); Bartimaeus, former blind man (Mark 10:46-52 // Matthew 20:29-34; Luke 18:35-43).

Still under the third category, Mark and Luke, but not Matthew, name Jairus. Mark and Matthew name Simon the Leper (Luke 7:36-50 is another episode, in Bauckham's opinion). And only Mark names Bartimaeus. Most likely, the reason that the names of the recipients are included in the Gospels is that they were original eyewitnesses who testified while being members of the Jesus movement, perhaps mainly participating in it more fully after the events in Jerusalem (e.g. the crucifixion, resurrection, and Pentecost). As time passed, the eyewitness testimony of some people lasted because the participatory eyewitnesses themselves lived for a long time. Bauckham cites an early-second-century Christian apologist (defender of the faith), Quadratus, who says that some recipients of healings done by Jesus lived into the apologist's own time, presumably in the apologist's life span, not necessarily his adulthood (p. 53). In many cases, the named persons in the Gospel provide eyewitness testimony, as the three sample categories indicate. An unnamed character in Mark does not gain a name in Matthew or Luke. So the tendency is to eliminate names in the Synoptics. Unnamed persons in the Gospels either did not join the Jesus movement, even though they were healed or blessed in some way; or they did join the Jesus movement, but their names were unknown to a given Gospel writer at the time and place that he wrote, so they were dropped.

Bottom line for this Q & A: These early names indicate that we have original, eyewitness testimony. This kind of detail increases the historical reliability of Mark specifically and the Synoptics generally.

18. What does all of this mean for the Gnostic "gospels"?

We can quickly mention postmodernism, also. Proximity to the source as providing the greatest potential for accuracy is a commonsense and obvious truth. It contradicts the postmodern notion that origins have little or nothing to do with accuracy and reliability and truth. Mark the Gospel writer certainly valued proximity and origins. This commonsense and obvious truth also contradicts the claims made by some heavy promoters of the Gnostic texts. These scholars say that the texts (should) share an equal or near-equal footing with the four Biblical Gospels. However, the Gnostic texts appear much later (the second century and beyond) than the four Gospels (a generation or two after Jesus' ministry). And the Gnostic texts do not have the same high-level participatory eyewitness testimony to ground them in history - as things really happened in Jesus' ministry.

Therefore, the Gnostic texts are filled with flights of fancy and errors, compared to the storyline and the teachings of the four Gospels. The Biblical Gospels are the gold standard by which we measure all religious truth-claims masquerading as Christian truths.

See my Postmodern Truth Soup, which critiques, among other things, Karen King's What Is Gnosticism? (Harvard, 2003).

19. Does Mark mention mission and divine authority, as Matthew does?

Yes. Mark has a summary of the commission of the Twelve (Mark 3:13-19), mentioning that Jesus imparts authority to them (Mark 3:15). Then Mark has an abbreviated first commission (Mark 6:6-13), when Jesus actually imparts authority to his twelve disciples for a real mission (Mark 6:7). They indeed exercise their God-given authority during their ministry (Mark 6:13). Jesus predicts that the Gospel shall be preached to all nations (Mark 13:10). The second commission is implied at the end of Mark's Gospel, but not explicitly stated (Mark 16:6-7). A young man dressed in a white robe (an angel) commands some key women to tell Jesus' disciples and Peter to meet him in Galilee. However, the Gospel ends abruptly, saying that the women, fearing, said nothing to anyone (Mark 16:8). But the other Gospels fill out the picture and say that the women, apparently overcoming their fears, eventually told the men.

Therefore, in my opinion, it is unlikely that the Gospel of Mark would end on a verse (Mark 16:8) that stops the rest of the story: mission. The proposed verses at the end of many Bibles may not (or may) be the correct ending. But in this debate, I do not lose track of Jesus' prediction that the gospel shall indeed be preached to all nations (Mark 13:10). This mission was done by the ones who figure prominently in Mark's Gospel, notably Peter, James, John, some key women, and the Twelve, individually or as a group.

All four Gospels cohere together on the future witness of the disciples, in one storyline, though Mark in its ending takes the circuitous route or implies the future witness.

20. How does the first mission relate to handing on traditions? In Jesus' authority, the disciples, while on their first mission, surely wanted to pass on accurately what he had been teaching and to imitate closely what he had been doing. Though their message was basic, surely they wanted to get things right. Does this mean that the disciples were sent out for the express and only purpose of learning how to pass on traditions? No, of course not. They were sent out to minister to people. But to evaluate the interaction between a master and his students in Jewish culture, this training during the disciples' first mission surely honed their skills, as they continued to teach what the Master had said and to imitate what he had done, after he was crucified (and resurrected). The net result is clear: the Gospel traditions were accurately and reliably handed on during their second, lifelong mission.

Please see the article on Matthew's Gospel for clarification (in that link scroll down to Q & A Twelve).

21. What's the bottom line for the historical reliability of Mark's Gospel?

Bauckham provides evidence that, for me, is convincing. Peter is the main eyewitness source in Mark's Gospel. It is amazing to me that when we read Mark's Gospel, we hear Peter's portrait of Jesus. Imagine that!

Mark also includes eyewitness testimony from other persons in the Jesus movement. Mark is concerned to show that he wrote up his account from the best possible sources. For him, origins have everything to do with accuracy and reliability and truth. This fits in with Greco-Roman histories and biographies, which borrow or draw from sources, and the historians and biographers preferred reliable sources, for the same reasons we do today (see Part Six and Q-&-A's Fourteen to Nineteen in that link).

22. What does all of this mean to the date and authorship of the Gospel of Mark?

Questions of authorship and date are important. Bauckham and Carson and Moo present very strong evidence for the early church's view that Mark wrote the second Gospel, and Peter stood behind it. The church's view is all the more believable because the fathers did not succumb to the temptation of assigning the Gospel only to Peter, as if to "fudge" the truth a little by securing its authorship by the lead apostle. Instead, they held to Mark's authorship, a non-apostle. Tradition also says that Peter was martyred under Nero (ruled AD 54-68). So it is likely that Mark completed his Gospel shortly afterwards, though tradition also implies that he was working on it, in some form, while Peter was alive.

However, in my opinion, questions of authorship and dates, though important, take second place to eyewitness testimony. It is very clear to me now that Peter's eyewitness testimony is the main source of the Gospel, along with some other eyewitnesses.

23. What does all of this mean to the Church of all denominations? The Gospels are not the imaginative inventions and fictions - with only a kernel of accuracy - of much-later generations of anonymous disciples who never witnessed with their own eyes the ministry of Jesus in Israel and the events in Jerusalem (e.g. the crucifixion, resurrection, and Pentecost). This misleading scenario has permeated many seminaries and churches. Maybe it explains, to a large degree, why many segments of the Church no longer take Scripture as seriously as the Church once did, except of course those passages about peace and love and justice.

Rather, the Gospel writers took great pains to include eyewitness testimony from those who followed Jesus from the beginning. In fact, one of the reasons, among many, that the Gospels were written was to preserve eyewitness testimony before the eyewitnesses themselves died out. (The key criterion for the main eyewitnesses was that they were with Jesus from the beginning, as the next two articles on Luke and John will show.) These eyewitness participants in the Jesus movement cherished their Lord's teachings and activities, so they retained and recounted them scrupulously and painstakingly. In my view, for what it's worth, many parts of the Body of Christ need to find, again, the value of all of Scripture. The Gospels really do reflect Jesus' words and voice and ministry, according to the earliest and most reliable eyewitness participants. This article has three companion pieces in the series:

Authoritative Testimony in Matthew's Gospel: Mission Possible!

Eyewitness Testimony in Luke's Gospel: Ready? From the Beginning Now!

Eyewitness Testimony in John's Gospel: the "Eyes" Have It!

References and Further Reading See Part Two in the series: "Archaeology and the Synoptic Gospels: Which way do the rocks roll?"

Also see Part Three: "Archaeology and the Gospel of John: Is skepticism chic passé?"

Richard Bauckham. Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony. Eerdmans, 2006. I emailed Dr. Bauckham to make sure that I understood his arguments in my article here, and he was kind enough to correspond with me. I take his words seriously: "I think you've done an excellent job here." I hope that I have adequately incorporated his suggestions. I

added some things and revised portions after I incorporated them. So the final version is my responsibility.

D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. Zondervan, 2005.

Mark D. Roberts. "Gospel Authorship by Mark and Luke: Some Implications." July 2006.

---. "Did the Gospel Writers Know Jesus Personally?" Section A.

---. "Did the Gospel Writers Know Jesus Personally?" Section B.

---. "Did the Gospel Writers Know Jesus Personally?" Section C.

11 - Chapter 11

Chapter 11. Eyewitness Testimony in Luke's Gospel Ready? From the beginning now!

Luke was very much concerned to base his Gospel on the earliest and best eyewitnesses who went back all the way to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. This concern contradicts the widespread belief that the Gospel is built on the inventions of later anonymous disciples who substantially changed the words and life-story of Jesus, nearly beyond recognition, according to the needs of the later church. The goal of the entire series and Part Eleven here is to send out over the worldwide web scholarship that supports traditional views on the Gospels. The series is intended for the laity. Maybe high school students and undergraduates at universities can make use of it. Maybe it can help seminarians and church leaders, like home Bible study and Sunday school teachers. As usual, since people read these articles as stand-alones, I repeat the basic facts that true beginners to the Gospels may not know about. That's also why I use the Q & A format.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a lot of passages in common, so they are called the synoptic Gospels (synoptic means viewed together). The authors are sometimes called synoptists. The writers of the four Gospels are also called evangelists. Since we also quickly look at the Book of Acts, Luke-Acts is the shorthand way of saying the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Nearly all scholars conclude that both books were written by the same author, usually taken to be Luke.

Hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these.

1. What does eyewitness testimony mean in Luke's preface?

Luke 1:1-4 reads:

1:1 Since many have undertaken to arrange in proper order an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as from the beginning the eyewitnesses and those becoming ministers of the Word handed down to us, 3 so also it seemed good to me, accurately following and investigating everything from the first, to write to you in order (an account), most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the certainty of the words (of the gospel) you have been taught.* We can learn at least four things about the importance of eyewitness testimony in Luke's preface.

First, the key word is eyewitnesses, which in Greek is *autoptai* (plural of *autopt?s*) (Luke 1:2). Today we get the word *autopsy* from it. However, in Luke's preface it is not a medical term, nor does it have a legal meaning *per se*, but a historiographical one (history writing). It means those who are first hand observers. One scholar translates it as "those with personal / firsthand experience: those who know the facts at first hand" (Alexander, p. 120).

Another scholar also says that the notion of principal eyewitnesses having to go back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry was just plain commonsense. The Gospel of John also has the word *beginning* as a criterion for reliable and authoritative testimony (John 15:26-27) (Bauckham, p. 122). John writes in the relevant clause (Jesus speaking): "You also [in addition to the Spirit] are to

be witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:27). (See also John 6:64; John 8:25, John 8:441 John 2:7, 1 John 2:13; 1 John 3:8; 2 John 1:6). These parallel data in Luke and John indicate that “the principal eyewitness sources of [Luke’s] work were qualified to provide a comprehensive account of the events ‘from the beginning’” (Bauckham, p. 122).

Second, the eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word transmitted or passed on their participatory testimony about the events that had been fulfilled among them. The Greek word for handed down or passed on or delivered to in v. 2 (verb of paradosis or tradition) means to transmit tradition, not in a sterile sense, but in an active, living sense. As we have seen in the article Reliable Transmissions, this transmission process was done very carefully. And why wouldn’t it be? By the time the eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word were passing on their participatory eyewitness testimony, they understood that the Jesus movement had the backing of God. Jesus was raised from the dead. His movement was going around the known world. It was time for Luke to write his account while the eyewitnesses themselves were still circulating around the Christian communities, as living voices and transmitters.

Third, the words from the first (Luke 1:3) could be translated from way back. They signify that Luke is familiar with the earliest traditions, and this kind of historical source “was remarkably important for the way that the traditions about Jesus were transmitted and understood in early Christianity” (Bauckham, p. 124). Bauckham also writes: “The point in Luke’s preface is that, just as the scope of the eyewitness testimony was comprehensive, covering the whole story Luke’s Gospel had to tell (‘from the beginning’), so Luke’s thorough familiarity with and understanding of this testimony were equally comprehensive. Luke can tell the story ‘from the beginning’ because he is familiar with the traditions of those who were eyewitnesses ‘from the beginning’” (p. 124).

Fourth and finally, the certainty or truth (v. 4) of the words of the gospel is directly related to eyewitness testimony that exists from the beginning. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (third edition of BDAG, p. 147) says that *asphaleia* means “stability of idea or statement”; stability is the opposite of movement and slippage and change.

Bottom line to this Q & A: the earliest writers and tradition transmitters of the ministry of Jesus sought to nail down truth and certainty by proclaiming their eyewitness participation in the events or by passing on the stories of those who were eyewitness participants. Luke incorporated their testimonies and reports.

2. What were the criteria for selecting the successor of Judas? That question is important because it reveals, once again, how Luke clarifies who is authoritative in the transmission of the story about Jesus. After Jesus’ ascension, the eleven apostles selected a successor to Judas. This process is recorded in the first chapter of the Book of Acts. Luke writes in Acts 1:21-22 (Peter speaking):

21 Therefore, it is necessary that one of the men who accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus came and went among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us - one of these to become a witness with us of his resurrection. (Acts 1:21-22)

Here, then, Luke requires the same status for an eyewitness as he does in the preface to his Gospel. In order to qualify as the replacement of Judas, the candidate must be a close follower from the very beginning, in this case from the baptism of John. This timeframe does not mean the

exact moment when Jesus was baptized, but, rather, during the ministry of John. Also, the clause “came and went” means “comings and goings,” that is, Jesus’ entire ministry. The emphasis on during all the time and beginning echoes the same idea in Luke’s preface to his Gospel (Bauckham, p. 114, note 1). The candidate must have comprehensive knowledge of Jesus’ life and ministry.

Two other references in Acts indicate that witnesses with the fullest knowledge about Jesus are the ones who followed him for the longest duration. Time and participation and knowledge work together. In Acts 10:40-41 Peter expands on his ideas in Acts 1:21-22. Initially, God chose special witnesses, not just anyone, to see the resurrection appearances. Jesus ate and drank with his first eyewitnesses after he rose from the dead. This indicates intimate knowledge. The second reference is Acts 13:30-31. Paul tells his listeners that witnesses who followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem are still alive and are testifying about his resurrection. For Peter and Paul, these witnesses seem to have special authority. The events are so recent that they are fresh in the eyewitnesses’ memory.

Bottom line for this Q & A: All of this implies epistemological proximity (epistemology studies how we acquire knowledge and truth). In turn, this up-close-and-personal comprehensive knowledge implies the accuracy and stability of the Gospel traditions.

3. Does Luke use the narrative strategy of inclusio?

He does indeed.

Recall that this is a literary device that Greco-Roman authors used, such as Lucian in *Alexander* and Porphyry in *Life of Plotinus*. Bauckham spends many dense pages explaining how the device works in those two authors’ writings (pp. 132-45; 150-54). This is not to say that Luke borrowed from either of them, especially since he lived before them. Rather, the strategy seems to be a topos or commonplace rhetorical tool.

Generally, inclusio is the literary technique of placing corresponding material at the beginning and end of a particular stretch of text (short or long) in order to mark off that section and to say something about the intervening section of text. Inclusio in this general sense is extremely common in ancient literature. So readers of Luke, even if they did not know of the specific device of the inclusio of eyewitness testimony, would be very open to spotting inclusios (see the article on Mark’s Gospel for more explanation: Q-&-A’s Two and Three).

4. How does this inclusio involve Peter? By comparison with Luke, Mark uses this strategy to show that Peter is the principal eyewitness. In Luke, Simon (Peter) is the first disciple named, and with the repetition of the same name, Simon, not Peter (Luke 4:38). This chapter and verse (4:38) is quite a suitable point from which to begin material indebted to Peter’s witness. Before then, Luke has the birth and temptation and baptism narratives. But as soon as possible Luke mentions the lead disciple who is the principal eyewitness. Where does Luke’s inclusio end, and how does this compare with Mark’s Gospel? In order to create the appropriate end of the inclusio, Luke has to move the reference to Peter to a point later than in Mark, because Mark stops at the empty tomb. Otherwise, Cleopas would be the last disciple named in Luke’s Gospel. What matters is that Simon (Peter) should be the last disciple named in Luke’s narrative (Luke 24:34). This makes the inclusio itself just as striking in Luke as in Mark, though it is true that Luke doesn’t name Peter as

often within the inclusio.

Bottom line of this Q & A: the fact that Luke has created his own inclusio, not mechanically taken over Mark's, is good evidence that the inclusio was a recognized literary device. Luke must have realized what Mark was doing. If he had simply reproduced Mark's inclusio, we could easily suppose he had just accidentally taken it over in the course of incorporating Mark's narrative in his own. But Luke used this narrative device in his own way.

5. Do women have their own inclusio of eyewitness testimony?

Yes. Luke names three women: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, along with some unnamed women (Luke 8:2-3). They are juxtaposed to the Twelve (Luke 8:1). In Luke 24:10, Luke again mentions women by name: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and "others" (feminine plural). The latter Mary has replaced Susanna.

These specific names and their placement are unique to Luke, compared with Matthew and Mark. At the end of Mark's Gospel, he merely names some women and says they had followed Jesus from Galilee (Mark 15:40-41), and Matthew does the same with a slightly different list (Matthew 27:55-56). Neither author names women at the beginning of Jesus' Galilean ministry, next to the Twelve. Only Luke does.

6. What is the significance of Luke's inclusio of eyewitness testimony?

First, Peter takes priority as the principal eyewitness. Bauckham writes: "Following Mark, Luke has made sure that Simon Peter is both the first and the last disciple to be individually named in his Gospel (Luke 4:38; Luke 24:34), thus acknowledging the incorporation of the Petrine [adjective of Peter] witness" (p. 131).

Second, Bauckham says in the same paragraph that women are placed in their own inclusio. "But within the Petrine inclusio [Luke] has also placed another inclusio, that of the women, only somewhat less inclusive than Peter's; and it is surely significant that near the end of this inclusio Luke 24:6 reminds his readers that they have been disciples of Jesus attending to Jesus' teaching throughout his narrative since the opening of the inclusio in Luke 8:2-3. The implication is surely that Luke owed some of his special traditions to one (most likely Joanna) or more than one of them" (p. 131).

Bottom line to this Q & A: naming the same persons at the beginning and end of a narrative means that they are the principal eyewitnesses.

7. Are there eyewitnesses other than the Twelve? In Q & A Eleven in the article on Matthew's Gospel, we saw that the Twelve were responsible for the overall shape of the stories about Jesus. This is true in Mark's and Luke's Gospels. But have you, like me, ever wondered why some names are included in the Gospels and others excluded or anonymous? An example is Cleopas and an unnamed disciple (Luke 24:13-35).

It is clear from that reference that Luke takes up a large part of the Easter story with these two disciples, but why is only Cleopas named? Bauckham offers the answer that, to me, had been hiding in plain view: "There seems no plausible reason for naming him other than to indicate that he was the source of this tradition" (p. 47). But why was not the disciple with Cleopas named?

Probably because he dropped out of sight in the sources to which Luke had access in the early Christian movement, or the anonymous disciple did not play as prominent a role as Cleopas did. Who was Cleopas? Bauckham replies:

He is very probably the same person as Clopas, whose wife Mary appears at the cross in John 19:25. Clopas is a very rare Semitic form of the Greek name Cleopas, so rare that we can be certain this is the Clopas who . . . was the brother of Jesus' father Joseph and the father of Simon [not Peter], who succeeded his cousin James [half-brother of Jesus] as leader of the Jerusalem church. (p. 47; see church historian Eusebius [c. 265-c. 339 AD, but see link] History of the Church:3.11;4.22.4)

What was Jesus' uncle's role in the earliest Jesus movement? Again, Bauckham plausibly explains: "Cleopas / Clopas was doubtless one of the relatives of Jesus who played a prominent role in the Palestinian Jewish Christian movement. The story Luke tells would have been essentially the story Cleopas himself told about his encounter with the risen Jesus. Probably it was one of many traditions of the Jerusalem church which Luke incorporated in his work" (p. 47).

Zacchaeus is also mentioned in Luke alone (Luke 19:1-10). His call to discipleship took place in Jericho, which is at most within a day's walking distance from Jerusalem (Cleopas saw the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus, another town also at most within a day's walking distance from the capital). It is not at all improbable that Zacchaeus went to Jerusalem occasionally and told his story, which Luke collected directly or indirectly and put in his larger story about Jesus. Luke was quite familiar with the Jerusalem church, as all the names connected to it attest in Acts (Bauckham pp. 297-98).

Why didn't Matthew and Mark put the stories of Cleopas and Zacchaeus in their Gospels? Writing at different times and places, the two Gospel authors probably did not have access to these disciples' eyewitness testimony. It can be that simple.

8. Did Mary provide some traditions for the Infancy narrative?

Why would she not tell her story? It would be rather odd if she had remained silent! She was part of the Jerusalem church (Acts 1:14, with Jesus' half-brothers), and Luke had knowledge of this lead church. He somehow collected Mary's story and put it in his Gospel, just as he incorporated Cleopas' and Zacchaeus' eyewitness testimonies. The Infancy narratives in both Matthew and Luke have a huge body of scholarly literature behind them, so in an article like this one I would not dare to figure out which is the core of the story that Mary passed on, though these verses in Luke seem like good candidates for further study: Luke 1:26-56; Luke 2:4-7, Luke 2:19; Luke 2:21-49.

Also, as we already saw in an article on oral traditions in this series (Gospel Traditions: Melt in your mouth?), in Kenneth Bailey's very important study on transmitting oral traditions (here), poetic oral traditions were passed on precisely, with very few or no changes at all. Could it be that the prophetic songs of Mary and Zechariah were clearly remembered and accurately transmitted because their songs were poetic? Scholars seem to believe that the songs are half-fictions and half-commentaries on Old Testament passages, such as Hannah's Prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10). But can they not be both modeled on Old Testament songs and accurately embody Mary's and Zechariah's own songs? Does the nature of poetic oral transmission offer an alternative explanation to the half-fiction, half-commentary scenario, advanced by many scholars?

9. But what do the critics say about Mary's eyewitness testimony?

One of the foremost scholars of the New Testament doubts that Mary or Joseph is responsible for any part of the narratives in Luke (Mary's point of view) and in Matthew (Joseph's point of view) (Fitzmyer, vol. 1, pp. 304-08). Fitzmyer acknowledges that Matthew and Luke "both depend on a certain body of information in the tradition that existed prior to their writing . . . the details that they share must be regarded as derived from an earlier tradition" (p. 306). But he denies that Luke got his version even indirectly from Mary and Matthew from Joseph because Luke omits elements like the Magi and the flight to Egypt, and Matthew knows nothing of the census of Quirinius. In reply, however, figuring out why one Gospel includes or excludes data is endless. Luke and Matthew had access to different traditions, some of which surely came from different living transmitters, so of course there would be variations. Further, the storytelling strategy of Matthew and Luke differs. Luke alternates between the scenes of John the Baptist's and Jesus' births, but Matthew omits even one reference to John in Jesus' birth story. Though uncovering the why of omitting and admitting information into a Gospel is tenuous, this alternation between Jesus and John explains, perhaps, why Luke omits the flight to Egypt and the visit of the magi. Luke decided to focus on Jesus and John - and Matthew on Jesus alone. Thus, if Luke had depicted the holy family going down to Egypt, then this would disrupt the parallels, along with the parallels between Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25-38). In any case, at least a few scholars say that Mary passed on the birth story about her son: "Here at least, many feel required to posit an ultimate source for Luke's information (Mary herself, as the first witness) as well as intervening stages in the developing tradition" (Minear, p. 128). This is reasonable. In my opinion, it is very probable that mLuke 9:1-6 such of Mary's own story was retained and transmitted accurately.

10. Does Luke include mission and divine authority, as Matthew and Mark do?

Yes. Luke follows the same storyline developed in the other two and John. In fact, the Spirit and the commissioning of the disciples to be eyewitnesses is the key to the storyline. In John 20:21-22, for example, Jesus breathes on the disciples so that they receive the Spirit, in the context of Jesus' sending them on a mission. But the connection between Christ's own empowerment with the Spirit and his authority and power that he gives to the disciples is a theme - and reality - that is developed in Luke much more fully than in the other three Gospels. In Luke, the storyline begins at the birth of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit (Luke 1:35 and Luke 2:27). Then the storyline, in Luke and the other three, goes to Jesus' baptism, during which it is said that he will baptize with the Spirit (Luke 3:16). Now Luke develops the storyline more fully than the other three, recording Jesus' promise to send what the Father had also promised (the Spirit), so the disciples will be "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Jesus himself explicitly connects the Spirit with their being his witnesses: "and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his [the Christ's] name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:47-48).

However, in between Jesus' birth and baptism (beginning) and ascension (ending), he commissions the Twelve, who are the authorities and originators of the development and the overall shape of the grand story about Jesus; they first receive his "power" and "authority" and first preach his message (Luke 9:1-6). Next, only Luke has the commissioning of the seventy-two, who work the miracles of the kingdom, which are clear evidences that the Spirit is with them (Luke

10:1-24). Then, to go past the Gospel of Luke and into the Book of Acts, the Eleven fill the place vacated by Judas with another disciple who was an eyewitness from the beginning (Acts 1:12-26). Finally, the ascended Jesus empowers about one hundred and twenty disciples (Acts 1:15; Acts 2:1-4). They receive the Spirit at Pentecost. So here's the bottom line on this Q & A: Jesus calls the Twelve. They are the foundation in their eyewitness testimony and close proximity to Jesus, in his special call of them. Then the Eleven in Acts reestablish their number to twelve, in the context of Spirit-empowered mission and eyewitness testimony. Then in both Luke and Acts, the eyewitnesses are expanded to seventy-two (Luke) and about one hundred and twenty (Acts), all in the context of Spirit-empowered mission and eyewitness testimony, though perhaps many among the seventy-two and one hundred and twenty were not with Jesus from the beginning. But the Twelve form the authoritative foundation of Spirit-led leadership and eyewitness testimony.

11. Did the disciples' first mission train them how to pass on traditions?

Yes. Jesus sent out the Twelve (and seventy-two) without him. Surely this trained them to teach accurately what he had taught and to imitate closely what he had done. Surely they wanted to get things right. Does this mean that he sent them out for the express and only purpose of learning how to pass on traditions? No, of course not. Their mission was to minister to people. However, to judge from the cultural interaction between a master and his students, the net result is clear: the students accurately and reliably handed on his teachings and deeds - the Gospel traditions - during their first mission and then after his crucifixion (and resurrection and ascension) on their second, lifelong mission.

See the article on Matthew (Q & A Twelve in that link) for a fuller discussion.

12. So what's the bottom line for the historical reliability of Luke's Gospel? In this Q & A and the next, I include a brief comparison with the Gnostic texts. The Gospel of Luke is based squarely on the eyewitness testimony of the followers of Jesus from the beginning of his ministry in Israel, about four decades before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 AD. Also, the Infancy narrative is probably based in large part on Mary's testimony about her son's birth. So, the Gospel does not flow out of the collective imagination and faint memory of anonymous disciples who never witnessed Jesus' ministry, contrary to what more skeptical scholarship has asserted over much of the twentieth century.

Thus, in our analysis of Luke, we briefly looked at Acts and the Gospel of John (and see the article on the Gospel of Mark). Both John and Luke agree that eyewitness testimony has a special status in their Gospels. Why is Luke's and John's agreement significant? Bauckham answers that question:

Evidently in the early Christian movement, a special importance attached to the testimony of disciples who had been eyewitnesses of the whole ministry of Jesus, from the beginning when John was baptizing to Jesus' resurrection appearances. This was a necessary qualification for membership of the Twelve, but there were also other disciples who fulfilled the qualification and whose witness would have been especially valuable for that reason. (p. 116)

Luke follows the commonsense notion that the closer one gets to the source - in this case, to Jesus' ministry - the more likely this proximity works as a bulwark against error and for truth and reliability. Does this mean that a distance between the original events and a later account always

and necessarily implies error? No, but the danger of error seeping into an account increases, especially when a writer in antiquity does not have access to reliable eyewitnesses who participated in the remarkable and memorable events. In a corollary opposite way, the closer a concerned and honest researcher or follower gets to the original, the more accurate his or her testimony becomes, particularly when his or her testimony comes from his or her full participation; he or she is not the same as a casual bystander who may have seen a miracle or heard a teaching, for example, and then moved on down the dusty road. The Gnostic "gospels" and writings do not enjoy this privileged proximity to the first eyewitnesses and to Jesus himself, so these texts lurch over into flights of fancy and errors, compared to the four Biblical Gospels. Plus, the heretical (not in quotation marks) authors seem to have intended not to research the life-story of Jesus, but to go their own way and advance their own ideas derived from many sources other than Jesus' real-life ministry and reliably transmitted traditions.

13. What does all of this mean to the authorship and date of the Gospel of Luke? The evidence in the early church is very strong that Luke, a companion of Paul and a doctor, wrote the Gospel. The early church's opinion is all the more believable because the fathers did not assign the Gospel to a lead apostle or any original apostle, as if to "fudge" the truth just to secure the Gospel's authorship by a famous disciple. As to the date, we should probably place the Gospel in a timeframe that pleases most scholars: sometime in the AD 70's, after the destruction of the temple, but I'm open to an earlier one. Thus, if Luke wrote Acts in the 60's (shortly after Paul's death under Nero, who ruled AD 54-68), and if Luke wrote the Gospel before Acts, which seems likely, then the composition of the Gospel comes before the destruction of the temple.

However, I believe that questions of authorship and dates, though important, take second place to eyewitness testimony in the Gospel, provided we do not adopt really late dates, like the last decade of the first century and first decade of the second century. Luke did his homework. He valued the eyewitness testimony of those who had followed Jesus from the beginning. For me, that's enough to secure Luke's (and Acts') historical reliability, for we have traveled back to the earliest stages of the Gospel traditions, back to the words and voice of Jesus himself.

14. What does all of this mean to the Church of all denominations?

We need to be confident about Scripture. There is nothing wrong with telling anyone who inquires that the Gnostic texts do not measure up to the Biblical Gospels. Whoever authored and then collected the Nag Hammadi "gospels" and writings had a tin ear for storytelling, particularly stories rooted in history and in the reports of the earliest (and honest) eyewitnesses. In the big picture, though, discussing Gnosticism would not have been necessary if today's promoters of these texts had not pushed them too far onto the public.

Most importantly, from the beginning of Jesus' ministry - even from his birth for some eyewitnesses - his movement has expanded worldwide today, along a single storyline of the Spirit and the Commission. And each of the earliest disciples who were with Jesus from the beginning, such as the Twelve and many women, some named, in the Gospel of Luke, had their story to tell. Do you? This article has three companion pieces in the series:

Authoritative Testimony in Matthew's Gospel: Mission, Possible!

Eyewitness Testimony in Mark's Gospel: Was Peter a Portrait Painter?

Eyewitness Testimony in John's Gospel: the "Eyes" Have It!

References and Further Reading See Part Two in the series: "Archaeology and the Synoptic Gospels: Which way do the rocks roll?"

See also Part Three: "Archaeology and the Gospel of John: Is skepticism chic passé?"

All of these next references are scholarly, except, perhaps, Mark D. Roberts' blog entries, which are intended for the laity.

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---. "Did the Gospel Writers Know Jesus Personally?" Section A.

---. "Did the Gospel Writers Know Jesus Personally?" Section B.

---. "Did the Gospel Writers Know Jesus Personally?" Section C.

See my series *Miracles and New Testament Studies*:

Part One: *Miracles and New Testament Studies* Part Two: *Hume's Miracle Prison: How they got out alive* Part Three: *Fortifying Hume's Miracle Prison (2): Miracles and Historical Testimony* Part Four: *Miracles and the Laws of Nature* Part Five: *Do Miracles Happen Today?*

Part Six: *Miracles and New Testament Studies: Conclusion* This series has been updated and posted at biblicalstudies.org.uk (look under Hosted Articles, Authors A-B). My contribution to the discussion on women:

Women, Class, and Society in Early Christianity: Models from Luke-Acts. Hendrickson, 1997.

* Note to the translation of Luke 1:1 and 4 in Q & A One. I selected events (plural of pragma in v. 1) because BDAG (p. 859) cites that definition, as well as deeds for v. 1. Also, in v. 4, I selected the words of the gospel because BDAG (p. 600) says that the plural of logos is "also used gener[ically] of Christian teachings, the words of the gospel"; the lexicon then cites Luke 1:4. This makes sense. Theophilus, though his identity is unknown to us today, seems to have been already instructed (note the verb tense of "taught") in the basics of Christian teachings. But of the gospel

has been put in parentheses because they are not specifically in the verse in Greek. Thus, for both verses 1 and 4, I believe that a complementary pairing of words and deeds is intended, so translating the two different Greek words merely as things, as the New International Version does, does not catch the pairing.

12 - Chapter 12

Chapter 12. Eyewitness Testimony in John's Gospel The "Eyes" Have It!

Often the Gospel of John has been interpreted as having only spiritual truths that are not anchored in history, in time and place. It is also thought to be a strictly theological document, written by a disciple or a committee of disciples who really did not witness the ministry of Jesus. This article, Part Twelve, challenges those assumptions.

Since these articles in the series can be read as stand-alones, here are my reminders, for the true beginner to the Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a lot of passages in common, so they are called the synoptic Gospels (synoptic means viewed together). The authors are sometimes called synoptists. The authors of the Gospels are also called evangelists. Johannine is an adjective of John. This article may get complicated unless the readers look up some passages. Hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these.

1. How important is testimony in John? The Gospel frequently uses words that are usually translated as witness, testimony, to bear witness, or to testify. They come from the Greek words *martyros*, *martyria*, and *martyria*, which occur forty-seven times in John. This total outnumbers the other three Gospels by a long way. Combined, the Synoptics use those three words plus another one, *martyria*, twenty times. The one Book of Acts comes in second with those four Greek words plus *martyria*, using all of them twenty-nine times. The reader may detect the word martyr in the Greek words, for sometimes the epsilon or u in Greek is transliterated as y in English. We indeed get our modern word martyr from this Greek word group. It evolved early on into meaning anyone who remains true to his or her testimony about Christ, to the point of death. In the New Testament, however, it means those definitions noted in the previous paragraph. The number of these words in John does not spell out a specific theology, but the total demonstrates a major theme, more so than in all other individual books of the New Testament.

2. Does John use the inclusio of eyewitness testimony?

Yes. Recall that inclusio is the literary technique of placing corresponding material at the beginning and end of a particular stretch of text (short or long) in order to mark off that section and to say something about the intervening section of text. Inclusio in this general sense is extremely common in ancient literature, and so readers of John, even if they did not know of the specific device of the inclusio of eyewitness testimony, would be very open to spotting inclusios. The specific inclusio of eyewitness testimony occurs in two ways in the Gospel of John. The two-stage epilogue (20:30-31 and 21:24-25) is linked to the prologue (1:1-18). In 20:31 the Beloved Disciple writes "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." In 1:7 John the Baptist (though the Gospel never uses his title) "came as a witness concerning that light [life in Christ] to testify so that through him all persons may believe." Thus, through the Beloved Disciple's eyewitness account and John's eyewitness preaching, everyone should come to faith. As for the second stage of the epilogue, John 21:24 says that the Beloved Disciple testifies (present tense).

And in 1:15 John (the Baptist) testifies (present tense). His present tense testimony has been incorporated into the Beloved Disciple's written testimony, so both live on into the present, until the Parousia or Second Coming. As for the second way that the inclusio occurs in John's Gospel, John the Baptist and the Beloved Disciple in these four passages, one pair at the end, the other pair at the beginning, form an inclusio, which has been expanded a little because John the Baptist and the Beloved Disciple are different persons. But they are linked by the purpose of their eyewitness testimony and the present-tense of their eyewitness testimony (Bauckham pp. 366-67). At the beginning of John's Gospel, the first two disciples of Jesus are initially unnamed, but one is soon revealed as Andrew (1:35-42). At the end of John's Gospel, two unnamed disciples go night fishing with Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, and the two sons of Zebedee, whose names John and James are never cited in the Gospel, either (21:1-9). So the unnamed disciple in 1:35-39, according to Bauckham, is revealed as the Beloved Disciple in 21:1-7. He forms an inclusio of eyewitness testimony at the beginning and end of the Gospel (pp. 390-93).

Though Bauckham's analysis is insightful, he and I differ on one detail: the identity of the anonymous disciple in 1:35-39 and the Beloved Disciple in 21:1-7 and 20-23. For me, the evidence is stronger that the Beloved Disciple is John the Apostle. So the anonymous disciple and the Beloved Disciple are very probably the same; that means the anonymous disciple is John the Apostle. This works with the inclusio and the linguistic evidence that Bauckham brings out. However, Bauckham may be right about a Jerusalem disciple (turned Elder) who was an eyewitness and who wrote the Gospel, as seen in Bauckham's book here. In any case, Bauckham's central thesis is to demonstrate that the Gospel of John is based squarely on eyewitness testimony from the very beginning to the end of Jesus' ministry, past his resurrection. This direct testimony that comes from personal experience has been incorporated into the Gospel.

Bottom line for this Q & A: the important point about the inclusio of eyewitness testimony is that it is embodied in real people of real authority. In John they are the ones who are qualified to testify to their Lord's life and to pass on his teaching. Eyewitness testimony in the Gospel is not merely an abstraction or only a literary convention to give the Gospel a fake sense of authority (see Q & A Eight).

It just makes sense that an author would frame his text with his main human sources, especially himself, if he directly participated in his story. With this device, the author can then thread the eyewitness testimony of his main human sources throughout his narrative, in whole or in sections. John was following his literary context in his own time.

3. How else is testimony important in John?

John uses God's heavenly lawsuit motif in Isaiah 40:1-31; Isaiah 41:1-29; Isaiah 42:1-25; Isaiah 43:1-28; Isaiah 44:1-28; Isaiah 45:1-25; Isaiah 46:1-13; Isaiah 47:1-15; Isaiah 48:1-22; Isaiah 49:1-26; Isaiah 50:1-11; Isaiah 51:1-23; Isaiah 52:1-15; Isaiah 53:1-12; Isaiah 54:1-17; Isaiah 55:1-13. God calls the Servant of the LORD and his own people Israel, as witnesses. In John, this trial takes place against everyone who doubts the deity of his Son, who is vindicated. Jesus plays the witnessing role in place of the Servant of the LORD, and Jesus' followers take the role of Israel. The decisive verdict against the world is delivered on the cross. In the first phase of the heavenly trial in John, God calls on seven witnesses, a number that is significant in John (note the seven miraculous signs: 2:1-11, 4:43-54, 5:1-15, 6:1-14, 6:16-21, 9:1-41, 11:1-44). The witnesses

appear, in this order: John (1:7, etc.); Jesus himself (3:11, etc.); the Samaritan woman (4:39); God the Father himself (5:32); Jesus' works or signs (5:36); the Scriptures (5:39); and the crowd who testifies about Jesus' raising Lazarus (12:17). In the second phase of the heavenly trial in John, after the resurrection and ascension and beyond John's narrative (story), then the Paraclete (the Holy Spirit) and the disciples go out to testify about Christ's nature and works (15:26-27). To incorporate all of the witnesses, the Beloved Disciple wrote his Gospel. So now Jesus' testimony about himself, coupled with his Father's testimony about his Son (8:12-18), and Jesus' other supporting witnesses can live on in John's Gospel until Jesus' Second Coming (21:22-25).

According to Bauckham, this lawsuit motif is not simply a metaphor that has no relation to actual reporting from eyewitnesses. We have already seen that the entire Gospel is framed by the inclusion of human and real-life eyewitnesses, particularly John himself. Also, John's emphasis on such eyewitnesses looks very similar to Luke's, which we now discuss in the next Q & A.

4. What are the qualifications of the eyewitnesses?

John 15:26-27 says in the context of the Last Supper just before Jesus was arrested. He is speaking:

26 When the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father - that one shall testify about me. 27 You also are to testify because you are with me from the beginning. (my translation)

John uses the phrase "from the beginning" often enough (6:64; 8:44; 1 John 1:1; 2:7, 13, 14, 24; 3:8, 11; see also 2 John 1:6). The Spirit testifies and so do the Twelve. They also have direct experience with the ministry of Jesus within that timeframe. The reference to that phrase and to the Spirit is strikingly parallel to Acts 1:21-22 and 2:1-42. In the first chapter, Luke, usually considered the author of Acts, has the same qualification for the eyewitness to replace Judas. The eyewitness must have followed Jesus "from the beginning," during his "comings and goings," up to his resurrection and ascension. The phrase is also seen in Luke's preface to his Gospel (1:3) as a qualification of principal eyewitnesses (Bauckham, pp. 389-90).

Once the replacement for Judas is chosen, then in the second chapter of Acts the Spirit is sent, and Peter immediately testifies to the story of Jesus. "All of us are witnesses," Peter says toward the end of his speech (v. 32). The gift of the Spirit in Acts 2:1-47 parallels the promise of the Spirit in John 15:26-27. Recall also in Acts that the Greek words for testimony, witness, testify, and bear witness occur about twenty-nine times, second only to the Gospel of John.

Clearly, drawing from the same traditions on eyewitness testimony embodied in real people, John and Luke are keen to anchor the story of Jesus in living witnesses who are early, from the beginning, and who have direct experience with the ministry of Jesus. Origins serve as an anchor to truth and reliability.

Further, Matthew and Mark follow the same storyline of the Spirit's empowerment and the disciples' outreach mission of eyewitness testimony to the whole world. The coherence of this storyline increases the historical reliability of the four Gospels because they are staying with the basic outline of Christ's life and ministry (see Part Nine on Matthew and Part Ten on Mark).

5. Is John's Gospel historical or theological?

Both, but John follows Greco-Roman historiography more closely than do the Synoptists, in two ways.

First, ancient history writing placed emphasis on the historian's direct experience with the events. This differs from the modernist requirement of distant observation. The importance of direct eyewitness participation is seen in Josephus' introduction to *Against Apion* (who was Apion?). Josephus (c. AD 37 to post-100), a Jewish historian, writes: And for the History of the War, I wrote it as having been an actor myself in many of its transactions, an eyewitness [autopt?s] in the greatest part of the rest, and was not unacquainted with anything whatsoever that was either said or done in it. (*Against Apion* 1.10; the Greek may be read here; find paragraph 55)

Josephus may exaggerate the duration and depth of his participation, but this passage nonetheless shows the value that ancient historians placed on personal eyewitness participation. Another close parallel is seen in Luke's preface (1:1-4), which also uses *autopt?s*, but in the plural (v. 2). However, Luke was not an eyewitness participant, but he was researching those who were. John was a participating witness. In any case, his words in his epilogue (21:24) echo those in Luke and Josephus. But John draws from the *martur-* word group (see Q & A One), whereas *autopt?s* is used in Luke and Josephus. However, the meaning of the *martur-* word group in John is functionally very close to historical eyewitness experience (Bauckham, pp. 384-86).

Second, the Synoptists preserve their sources with little interpretation of the rich traditions from which they drew. Their story of Jesus comes in a whole and integrated plot and speeches, but the authors do not add very much to the tight structure of their sources. As Bauckham notes:

Though the writers of the Synoptic Gospels incorporate and fashion their sources into an integrated whole, a biography (*bios*) of Jesus, they remain close to the ways in which the eyewitnesses told their stories and transmitted the sayings of Jesus. (p. 410) On the other side, John keeps to a more detailed chronology. All of the discourses and debates between Jesus, Jewish leaders, and ordinary people and the clearly delineated plot "make possible the much fuller development of the author's own interpretation of Jesus and his story, just as comparable features of the works of Greco-Roman historians enable the expression of their own understanding of history" . . . (p. 410).

John's historical authenticity and anchorage in the fuller craft of the ancient historians give the author of the Gospel more leeway in his interpretation, a leeway which the Synoptists do not take as much, comparatively speaking. This challenges the notion in some scholarly quarters that the Gospel of John could not have been written by an eyewitness.

I like how Mark D. Roberts assesses all four Gospels: they embody "Truthful History Motivated by Theology" (*Can We Trust the Gospels?* Crossway, 2007, p. 121).

6. Does the Gospel show that the Beloved Disciple is an eyewitness participant?

Josephus says that he was a direct participant in the events about which he writes. Likewise, the Beloved Disciple says he was an eyewitness participant in the ministry of Christ. Does the Gospel of John offer any evidence of his direct experience in a special way? The Gospel does so by four means.

First, the Beloved Disciple has a special relationship with Jesus, as seen in the description “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” He and Andrew were recruited first (John 1:35-40) (see Q & A Two, the second point). It is true that the Beloved Disciple disappears from the narrative until the Last Supper (13:23-26). But in that scene his special intimacy is again stressed. This unique role of intimacy - or direct eyewitness testimony of a special kind - will last into the future after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, through the Beloved Disciple’s Gospel (21:20-25).

Second, the Beloved Disciple is present at key points in the narrative. As just noted, he is recruited from the beginning. And according to John 15:27, which uses the key phrase “from the beginning,” this chronology endows him with a special status, along with Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael (1:37-51). The Beloved Disciple is present during the Last Supper and observed a key event - Judas being exposed as a betrayer and his setting out on his mission of betrayal. The Beloved Disciple sees the blood and water flow from the side of Jesus on the cross (19:31-37). The Beloved Disciple observes that no bone was broken, which makes Jesus the true Passover Lamb, as announced by John the Baptist when he testified that Jesus was the Lamb of God (John 1:29). The Beloved Disciple saw the empty tomb and believes (20:3-10). And he figures prominently as a leader in the Christian community, when he was brought into the dialogue between Jesus and Peter (21:15-23). As noted in the first point in this section, the Beloved Disciple’s presence stretches from the beginning to the end of the Gospel, and in between he is specially positioned. And that is the function of the inclusio of eyewitness testimony.

Third, along with the previous point, whenever the Beloved Disciple appears in the narrative, seemingly unmotivated details are mentioned. In 1:39 the hour of the day is stated: about the tenth hour. In 13:26, the Beloved Disciple, next to Jesus, observes Jesus dip a piece of bread and give it to Judas. In 19:33-35, the Beloved Disciple observes that Jesus’ legs were not broken and that the spear’s thrust produced blood and water. In 20:6-7, Peter and the Beloved Disciple see how the linen wrappings used to enshroud Jesus were laid. And in 21:11, the exact number of the huge catch of fish is provided. However, we should not over-interpret such details, as if they are not the stock-and-trade of any storyteller. The point is rather that the Gospel portrays the Beloved Disciple as one qualified to give eyewitness reports of the occasions on which he was present. Although there is observational detail in other passages of the Gospel, what is notable is how consistently the appearances of the Beloved Disciple are accompanied by such detail. (Bauckham p. 398)

Fourth, the Beloved Disciple is a perceptive witness. His breakthrough to understanding the key events that lead to the death of Christ, such as Jesus’ betrayer, is spelled out at the empty tomb (20:8-9). Peter and the Beloved Disciple run to it. Peter goes inside first. But it is the Beloved Disciple, also going inside, “who saw and believed” (v. 8). The Beloved Disciple and Peter are paired together. Their interaction within the Gospel points to the future. Peter’s qualities make him the leader in the whole church, whereas the Beloved Disciple, through his lasting written Gospel, claims the “role of witness to the truth of Jesus for the whole church” (Bauckham p. 400).

7. What’s the bottom line for the historical reliability of John’s Gospel? The author of John was a direct eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus. His eyewitness testimony is everywhere presented and affirmed throughout his Gospel. The eyewitness (martur-) word group outnumbers its uses in the synoptic Gospels by a long way. Only Acts takes a distant second, and is key in understanding word group’s uses in John. The inclusio of eyewitness testimony supports the Beloved Disciple’s

eyewitness participatory testimony.

Eyewitness testimony from the beginning parallels Luke-Acts; duration of time for participatory eyewitnesses was important in the early church.

John parallels Josephus on eyewitness testimony. The Beloved Disciple is present in key scenes, where unmotivated details also appear, so we see things from his point of view. A reliable and honest author in the Greek and Roman world drew from reliable sources. John did this, too. The Gospel is not based on faint memories of anonymous collection of disciples who never witnessed Jesus' ministry.

8. But isn't John's Gospel historical fiction, a kind of fake history?

Circular reasoning: all eyewitness elements in John's Gospel are mere attempts at appearing like eyewitness testimony. Why? Because John's Gospel really isn't derived from eyewitnesses. Though this circularity is presented simply, it reflects the bigger issue of skepticism. So the circle keeps going round and round.

However, this article (so I hope) gets us out of the circle. Also, Paul N. Anderson has done the yeoman's work in providing more evidence of eyewitness testimony, which, in my view, breaks the circle (pp. 589-99). He hesitates to ascribe the fourth Gospel to John the Apostle, but Anderson helpfully points out that in Acts 4:20 the words often found in Johannine writings are used. John the Apostle says in Acts: "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (4:20; cf. John 3:32). This is a hint of independent corroboration inside the New Testament (other than Johannine literature) that the Apostle John may have written the Gospel.

Then Anderson lists the large number of verses in John's Gospel that use the five senses, particularly seeing and hearing: Words for seeing (ninety-eight times); hearing (thirty times); smell (twice); taste (once) (p. 599). He says that these words in his list of references are not used in a metaphorical or symbolic sense, but are empirical.

Anderson draws the obvious conclusion: The literary fact that John possesses more appeals to empirically derived information than any other Gospels - canonical [Biblical] or otherwise - seems to support . . . [the claim] that the Gospel embodies "the Evangelist's reflections on the ministry of Jesus and its implications for later generations. (pp. 599-600)

Thus, the weight of the empirical evidence should eventually make the circular reasoning crack under the pressure. The Gospel's author's hands-on experience, so to speak (cf. 1 John 1:1), is not merely a literary device or an abstraction. His Gospel embodies real and truthful testimony of real persons, in addition to himself.

9. What does this mean for the Gnostic texts?

Eyewitness testimony in John affirms the commonsense and obvious truth that the closer a story or account gets to the original sources (in this case to Jesus himself), then the more reliable and accurate the account or story becomes - true to things as they really happened. Origins and close proximity anchor belief and knowledge and truth, in Gospel studies. This commonsense and obvious truth about origins and proximity contradicts the claims made by some heavy promoters of the Gnostic texts. These scholars say that the texts (should) share an equal or near-equal footing

with the four canonical (Biblical) Gospels. However, the Gnostic texts appear much later (second century and beyond) than the four Gospels (a generation or two after Jesus' ministry). And the Gnostic texts do not have eyewitness testimony to ground them in history. Therefore, the Gnostic texts are filled with flights of fancy and errors, compared to the teachings in the four Biblical Gospels. Indeed, the Gnostic authors seem to delight in avoiding historical concerns and in going their own way with their outlandish (literally out-land-ish) mysticism and fictions about Jesus and the original disciples.

Proximity to the source also contradicts the notion in postmodernism that origins have little or nothing to do with reliability and accuracy and ultimately the truth (see Postmodern Truth Soup).

10. What does all of this mean to the date and authorship of the Gospel of John?

These questions are important in their own right. Evidence for traditional authorship (John the Apostle) is strong. As to the date, I see no problem with placing it in the 90's, which most scholars assume, also.

However, we have seen in the article on Archaeology and John's Gospel (see link, below), the three articles on Matthew, Mark, and Luke and in this article that authorship by an apostle and questions of dates take second place, in my opinion. In the Gospel of John itself, we have convincing evidence of eyewitness testimony as its source. We have historical facts as its anchor, though, of course, John teaches a lot of spiritual truths. All of this coheres together to secure the historical reliability of John's Gospel. The Gnostic and other "gospels" cannot come close to these historical facts and real eyewitness testimony.

11. What does all this mean to the Church of all denominations?

I hope individual church goers will not be pressured into accepting skeptical starting points and conclusions in their reading of the Gospel of John, as if it is a kind of fake history or as if it is strictly a spiritual writing that is not anchored in time and place and does not draw from eyewitness testimony.

I have read a blogger or two who say that connecting the Gospels with historical facts or archaeology, as if to prove the Gospels, is "tripe." In reply, however, in this series I'm not "proving" the Gospels, whatever that means. But they are historically dependable writings. Example: crucifixion in the Roman world is an historical fact. Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate, by the typical Roman method of execution. The four Biblical Gospels affirm that historical fact.

Therefore, I for one do not want to interpret the Biblical Gospels only and merely as disembodied spiritual truths. That's needlessly and heedlessly short-sighted and restricted. Both the historical and the spiritual are two sides of the same coin, at least for the four Biblical Gospels (but apparently not for the Gnostic "gospels"). Both readings can be done successfully and simultaneously in Gospel studies. The Church everywhere can enjoy confidence in the four Gospels. This article has three companion pieces in the series:

Authoritative Testimony in Matthew's Gospel: Mission, Possible!

Eyewitness Testimony in Mark's Gospel: Was Peter a Portrait Painter?

Eyewitness Testimony in Luke's Gospel: Ready? From the Beginning Now!

References and Further Reading See Part Three in the series: "Archaeology and the Gospel of John: Is skepticism chic passé?"

See also Part Two: "Archaeology and the Synoptic Gospels: Which way do the rocks roll?"

Paul N. Anderson. "Aspects of Historicity in the Gospel of John." In James H. Charlesworth. *Jesus and Archaeology*. Eerdmans, 2006. Pp. 587-618.

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Andrew Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: the Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel*. Hendrickson, 2000.

Mark D. Roberts. "Did the Gospel Writers Know Jesus Personally? Section A.

---. "Did the Gospel Writers Know Jesus Personally?" Section B.

---. "Did the Gospel Writers Know Jesus Personally?" Section C.

13 - Chapter 13

Chapter 13. Are There Contradictions in the Gospels? Or how to hold your nose and write at the same time When you read the first three Gospels, you are likely to observe countless similarities. And that is the dominant picture: the places, the names, the crowds, the rural setting, busy Jerusalem.

However, a closer reading reveals some differences in the details. Are these differences the same as contradictions? What is a contradiction? If there are any, can they be resolved? Are the Gospels reliable if some of the details are different among them? This article, Part Thirteen in a series on the reliability of the Gospels, is not at all intended to convince skeptics, but to provide some perspective for believers who take Scripture seriously and authoritatively. Writing this article has clarified my own thoughts.

However, I admit that I write it under protest. I believe that if we always reduce a good story to propositions, then we lose sight of - maybe damage - a good story and its literary devices. I wonder whether we should apply cold rationalism to narratives in the way I'm about to do in this article. Yet, since the following issues come up, let's proceed. For me, though, I'll get a clothes pin to clip on my nose.

Since these articles can be read as stand-alones, here are my standard reminders for true beginners of Gospel studies. Recall that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a lot of passages in common, so they are called the synoptic Gospels (synoptic means viewed together). The authors are sometimes called synoptists. Slashes // mean parallel passages among them. The writers of the four Gospels are also called evangelists.

Hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these.

1. What is a contradiction?

What we need is an everyday definition. Two sentences together are contradictory in this way: If one sentence is true, then other has to be false. It's either one way or the other. For example, this pair says: A computer is in my office. A computer is not in my office.

Imagine I have a computer in my office. Then the first sentence is affirmed, so the second one is denied, "automatically." To put this more philosophically, "the negation is true whenever the affirmation is false, and the affirmation is true when the negation is false" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Next, to keep things simple, we don't need to get into the law of excluded middle, but see the link to SEP at the end of this Q & A for more information.

Consider this example:

Today is Wednesday.

Today is Thursday. For us, we can regard this everyday example as a contradiction, though, technically, the pair is called a contrary because both cannot be true, but both can be false

("Today is Friday").

Those two pairs of examples merely serve as warm-ups to get us used to the other pairs here, but the entire topic can get complicated quickly! So, happily, we do not need to spot which passage in Scripture or which pair in this article is a contradictory or a contrary - or a discrepancy, conflict, disagreement, and so on. Regardless of the labels, all we need to do is resolve them in Scripture. Various solutions can apply to the troublesome passages, as we proceed. For further information, see Brooke Noel Moore and Richard Parker, *Critical Thinking*. Also go here for a glossary of terms. See the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and its definition of a contradiction, along with a contrary. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Book 4 (scroll down to Chapters 6 and 7) is for the very advanced.

2. Do you have examples in the Gospels?

Three come to mind right away. But these are only samples. Two can be resolved easily (A and C), the other not so easily.

A. Report or no report? The women reported the resurrection to the men (Matthew 28:8). The women did not report the resurrection to the men (Mark 16:8).

I have reworded this pair slightly, but it follows the texts carefully. The apparent contradiction is resolved because Mark is not finished. Verse 8 is the very last one, according to the best manuscripts. So we can stamp this "insufficient information in Mark." However, if readers prefer to believe that Mark appropriately ends at Mark 16:8, then the time factor resolves the seeming contradiction. It is not difficult to imagine that sometime after the women's initial fear, they reported the resurrection to the men. Thus, Matthew 28:8 says that the women "ran" to tell the men of what they saw and heard. So the parallel accounts can be harmonized (not a bad word) easily, without stretching things. Both sentences can be true at different times in the Easter narrative.

B. Staff or no staff? The context of this puzzle is Jesus' first commission of the twelve disciples as he sent them out to preach during his own ministry. We focus on the staff or walking stick, but the excerpted explanation, below, notes another difference. The disciples are permitted to take a staff (Mark 6:8-9). The disciples are not permitted to take a staff (Luke 9:3; Matthew 10:9-10). This one is a stickler (no pun intended), to be sure. But Walvoord and Zuck come up with an explanation. They write: The two concessions of a staff and sandals are unique to Mark. Both are forbidden in Matthew 10:9-10, and the staff is forbidden in Luke 9:3. Matthew used *ktaomai* ("to procure, acquire"), instead of *airō* ("to take"); so the disciples were not to acquire additional staves or sandals - but to use the ones they already had. Mark and Luke both use *airō*, "to take or carry along." But Luke says, "Take nothing for the journey - no staff (*rhabdon*)," presumably no additional staff; while Mark says, "Take nothing for the journey except (Mark 6:5) a staff (*rhabdon*)," presumably the one already in use. Each writer stressed a different aspect of Jesus' instructions (p. 128, emphasis original). So the apparent contradiction is resolved. Or the three passages do not add up to a contradiction, if they are read in their historical and textual contexts and according to their proper sense.

However, it is understandable that some readers may not be satisfied with the explanation in that excerpt. So the following comment on the three passages is worth taking to heart:

Only if one has a very legal mind is there a significant difference . . . Jesus normally speaks in the hyperbole of a wisdom teacher, not the legal precision of a Pharisee . . . These passages are also another reminder to us that we do not have all of the answers . . . these passages call us not to lose the forest for the trees. Jesus called his missionaries to travel simply, without the normal provisions for a journey. They had to depend on God for their support.” (Kaiser, et al., pp. 423-24)

I like how that team of scholars mentions “hyperbole.” That is an acceptable literary Scriptural device, which is an intentional exaggeration to draw attention to the main point. For example, Jesus uses a hyperbole when he says that we should not pull a speck out of our bother’s eye, while we have a big beam or plank in our eye (Matthew 7:3). Can we literally have a beam or plank in our eye? Can we rightly say, “There’s an error in Scripture, because no one can literally have a beam or plank in his eye!” However, the attitude behind the “gotcha” misses the literary technique of hyperbole. The same is true of the mustard seed. Is it the smallest seed (Matthew 13:32; Mark 4:31)? The question misses the point. Jesus was using hyperbole to encourage his followers. Even if our faith is very small - the smallest it can be - it can grow to benefit those around us. Plus, historically the mustard seed “was the smallest seed used by farmers and gardeners there and at that time” (NIV Study Bible, note on Matthew 13:32, emphasis added). So the hyperbole is resolved by the historical context - as if it our job to “fix” hyperboles. Nonetheless, time resolves the puzzle.

I also like the attitude of the team of scholars, noted above in this Q & A (Kaiser, et al). We will return to their balanced attitude and wider perspective at the end of this article (see Q-&-A’s Six, Seven, and Eight). I already referred to my own point of view in the Introduction, and will do so again in Q & A Seven.

C. One or two blind men?

Jesus healed one blind man (Mark 10:46 // Luke 18:35).

Jesus healed two blind men (Matthew 20:30). This pair of bulleted propositions is easily resolved. Matthew’s account simply provides more detail. Historically, the lame and sick and other “expendables” formed little groups within the larger society (cf. Luke 17:11-19; John 5:1-15). So there may have been more than two, but Matthew focuses on two, and Mark on one. It is likely that Bartimaeus’ name was remembered because he told his story to the persons who remembered it in some way (cf. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, pp. 45-46; 52-55). The other recipient(s) of healing were not remembered well enough to have his (their) names recorded. One commentator says that perhaps Mark focused on the one who did the speaking. The gist of the explanation about the one and two blind men can be applied to the one and two demoniacs who were helped (Mark 5:2 // Matthew 8:28; Luke 8:27). One and two angels appearing at the empty tomb do not make a contradiction, and their roles can be easily explained (Mark 16:5 // Matthew 28:2-3; Luke 24:4). See the Further Reading section, below, for the literature, particularly Gleason Archer’s book. In any case, the Gospel writers omit or admit details into their accounts as they saw fit. Not even the most conservative inerrantist denies this, simply because it is everywhere affirmed even in a casual reading of the Gospels. But these differences do not add up to genuine contradictions or contradictories or discrepancies or whatever. That is, they do not add up to ones that cannot be resolved with a little commonsense and knowledge of the meaning of words and the historical and textual contexts.

Now let's take a step back and look at the big picture. The Gospel authors are free to include or exclude some details as they saw fit. What about that? That question leads us to the next one.

3. In the big picture, what's at work in the authorship of the Gospels?

It is difficult to find a more scholarly yet accessible account of the apparent conflicts and the differences in the Gospels than Craig Blomberg's chapter on this topic in the *Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, (pp. 152-95). If we take into account the following factors and sometimes the missteps of scholars, then conflicts and discrepancies disappear. Readers, particularly critics, who are serious about this topic must get his book and read the chapter. It is excellent. They should also look into the books and articles listed in the References and Further Reading section, below.

Conflicting theology? This category says that the evangelists rewrote or reordered their material, true, but at the same time they (apparently) created conflicting theology. An example is Jesus' pronouncements on his disciples after he stilled the storm. "O you of little faith!" (Matthew 8:26) and "Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40). In reply to the common criticism, however, Blomberg explains the two passages:

What appear are different perspectives on the disciples' ever-wavering response to Jesus throughout his earthly ministry, with Matthew choosing to highlight the positive side as a model for the fainthearted among his readers and Mark underlining the more negative side for precisely the same reason - to encourage those in his audience who felt inadequate that they too could grow in their Christian lives . . . As with the accounts of stilling the storm, the theological perspectives are not identical, but they are complementary. (p. 155-56) So alleged conflicts in theology can be resolved with only a little effort. Plus, it is probable that Matthew incorporated ninety percent of Mark's Gospel into his. Let's assume this for a moment. That means Matthew saw the "little faith!" and "no faith?" difference. (How else could Matthew incorporate Mark's Gospel, if Matthew did not have Mark's Gospel in front of him? By memory? Maybe, but that does not take away from my comment that follows.) Did Matthew panic? "Oh my! I may be creating a formal contradiction?" Not in the slightest. What Blomberg says here is correct. Matthew has a higher, theological purpose. He also had a literary purpose (see Q & A Seven, below). If a critic of Scripture has a "gotcha" moment with these two verses or others, then so be it. But he must work his way through the scholarly literature, referenced below, before he can gleefully triumph. The practice of paraphrase. With our technology today, we can match passages word for word. In the ancient world, writers did not have qualms about paraphrasing and summarizing. "Even defenders of Scripture's infallibility freely admit that the evangelists usually recorded only Jesus' *ipsissima vox* (actual voice) rather than his *ipsissima verba* (actual words)" (p. 118).

Chronological problems. As far back as Augustine (AD 354-430), students of the Gospels recognize that the four evangelists did not intend a detailed itinerary of Jesus' life. Can we correctly fault them for what they did not intend? In fact, they achieved their intended goal quite well. From the birth to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the evangelists follow the broad outline of Christ's life perfectly. But these front-ranking, traditional scholars note: A fully satisfactory historical harmony of Jesus' life is impossible. It was simply not the evangelists' intention to provide us with the kind of data we would need for such an enterprise . . . The evangelists narrate historical facts, but they so select, arrange, and present these facts that little information of the kind needed to piece together a detailed life of Jesus is available. (D. A. Carson

and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 123, emphasis added) But these same two scholars also maintain: “Coherence at the historical level is . . . relatively easy to attain” (ibid.). The differences are in the details.

Omissions. The evangelists were writing biographies in their own age, in the Greco-Roman world. All these biographers and historians omit data, large or small. The four evangelists are no different (see the previous category in this Q & A). Do we rightly criticize them for writing texts that they intended? Do we rightly criticize them for not writing texts that they never intended? Instead, shouldn't we rightly take them in their historical context?

Composite speeches. Scholars see similar sayings in the Gospels, particularly Matthew and Luke, and these scholars assume that passages can be combined. For example, Matthew has five major teaching sections (chapters 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 24-25). They are largely unparalleled in Mark, and they are sometimes scattered throughout Luke. Scholars - even John Calvin (AD 1509-1564) the Reformer - place some of these sermons into one composite speech, such as the four beatitudes (Luke 6:20-22) and four more beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10), plus four woes (Luke 6:24-26), and so on. However, this is not a valid enterprise in all cases, for it rips apart the intentions of the evangelists who were writing a flowing narrative or story. But a careful look at the possibility of putting together a composite removes many difficulties. “Such practices scarcely discredited the historical reputation of ancient writers in the eyes of their contemporaries . . . so it is unfair to malign them today by applying anachronistic standards of historiography” (Blomberg p. 188).

Apparent doublets. Sometimes scholars see similarities in two passages and assume that they refer to the same event. Blomberg says an example is the anointing of Jesus in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50) and in the house of Simon the Leper (Mark 14:3-9 // Matthew 26:6-13). As one can see from the references, the first episode occurs early in Jesus' ministry, while the other occurs toward the end. If they are the same event, then this creates discrepancies. However, there are enough verbal dissimilarities in the passages that we should not hastily conclude that they refer to the same incident. Plus, Simon was the commonest name in Israel from 330 BC to 200 AD (Bauckham, p. 85). Jesus had two disciples with this name and a brother (so called). Thus, separating the two scenes resolves the discrepancies. Each apparent doublet needs to be taken case by case.

Variations in names and number. The best-known examples are the genealogies in Matthew and Luke. The differences can be accounted for by viewing Matthew's list of names as showing Joseph's family line and Luke's list as showing Mary's family line. As noted in the previous Q & A, I would add to his list literary techniques like hyperboles. A little sensitivity to storytelling can make apparent conflicts evaporate.

Thus, what is at work in the authorship of the Gospels is that the evangelists were free within limits to shape their traditions - written or oral - but to keep to the same flow of the narratives (see Part Five: "Gospel Traditions: Melt in Your Mouth?" for more information on freedom within limits). In the next article, I will list over one hundred and forty similarities in all four Gospels and over two hundred similarities in at least one synoptic and the Gospel of John. Therefore, in the big picture, the Gospels agree on the broad historical outline and ministry of Jesus. After all, the evangelists were following the methods of Greco-Roman biographers, and so the evangelists should be read in that broader context.

Blomberg then wraps up his chapter:

All of these observations add up to a strong case for the historical accuracy of the first three Gospels. Those who disagree may be invited to reconsider their methodology and to reflect on the possibility that they are treating the biblical documents more harshly than is warranted. (p. 195) 4. Can we solve all problem texts? Not to everyone's satisfaction. Three examples may be what we have already answered or tried to answer: "little faith, no faith"; "staff, no staff"; and "the smallest seed or not." But the vast, vast majority of problem texts have been solved more easily than we might expect at first. For me, the Gospels have a pretty good record (to put things modestly), and so does the rest of Scripture, considering it became part of history, not some ethereal, other world. If we give up on the reliability and inspiration of Scripture because of the few unsolved texts, then we have lost our bearings. Recall the scholars who said that we must not lose sight of the forest for the trees (see Q & A Two and letter C). As inerrantist Wayne Grudem writes:

. . . Our understanding of Scripture is never perfect, and this means that there may be cases where we will be unable to find a solution to a difficult passage at the present time. This may be because the linguistic, historical, or contextual evidence we need to understand the passage correctly is presently unknown to us. (Systematic Theology, Zondervan, 1994, p. 99) His humility about our imperfect understanding Scripture is refreshing.

5. Are these differences in the Gospels new territory for the Church? Not at all. We must consider the breathtaking fact that the Church has been dealing with these issues for many centuries. Here are two thinkers in the early church.

Tatian, who lived around AD 110-172, put together a harmony of the four Gospels in a continuous narrative, called the Diatessaron (literally "through four"). In that link, it has been translated from Arabic, though it was originally written in Syriac or Greek, and some say Latin. In any case, note the approximate date when he lived.

Irenaeus (around AD 115-202) is a rich source of Christian traditions. He was probably from Smyrna (look under "Asia" on the map), in Asia Minor, but eventually he became the bishop of a town now known as Lyons, France. He wrote a large-scale refutation of the heresies that were gaining momentum in his days. In the linked passage, he celebrates the differences and diversity in the four Gospels (Against Heresies 3.11.8). Scroll down to sec. eight, and note the four beings to which he assigns the four Gospels. So we must not lose sight of the historical perspective, as if we are the first ones to explore the territory and as if we should be shocked. The Church is still going strong.

6. Stranger Danger?

Children are taught to avoid strangers. At its core, the four Gospels are narratives or stories - true stories. Applying severe, rational logic onto literature, secular or sacred, or onto a good old fashioned story, may open the door for a stranger to enter the world of story. I concede that transforming truths and facts in a story into propositions can be done and maybe should be done at times, but in all cases? I doubt that it should, in the way I have done in this article, and in many other instances. For example, in the calming of the storm episodes, in Matthew 8:26, Jesus utters emotional words, in a vocative (direct address) and an interjection, almost ("interjection" means a word or phrase that expresses emotion and gets someone's attention). "O you of little faith!" In

Mark 4:40, he asks a rhetorical question, "Do you still have no faith?" Whatever grammatical labels we attach to the two expressions, they are literary devices denoting emotion.

I simply do not believe that we should boil them down to propositions and to a strict contradiction. Assuming, again, that Matthew borrows from Mark, I believe that when Matthew opted for "little faith!" after reading (or hearing) Mark's "no faith?" Matthew was not worried about a discrepancy. He intended to portray the emotion of Jesus in Matthew's own way. What we have here is the *ipsissima vox* (very voice) of Jesus, not his *ipsissima verba* (very words). Should we run roughshod over Matthew's intentional literary technique? I don't think so. It was not meant to be dissected with a sharp, steely scalpel.

However, if readers and scholars still insist on dissecting the Gospel stories with hard logic and rationalism and boiling them down to propositions, then count me out of most of the festivities, after this article. They should consult the literature in the References and Further Reading section, below.

7. What does all of this mean for the Church of all denominations?

I wrote this article for believers, not skeptics. Believers need to go out into the world, enjoying confidence in Scripture. If they hear the naysayers and nitpickers tearing it apart, then maybe this article and the References and Further Reading section will provide some good information. Knowledge is the best antidote to counter misleading public statements and personal confusion. The Church has known about these issues for centuries, and she is still going strong, because the four Gospels have nourished her. And they can still nourish you, too, if you keep an open mind. So happy reading!

References and Further Reading

Before believers get discouraged about a passage, they need to research the literature. And before critics celebrate any "gotcha!" moment, they too need to work through the literature.

Gleason Archer. *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. Zondervan, 2001.

William Arndt. *Does the Bible Contradict Itself? A Discussion of Alleged Contradictions of the Bible*. 5th rev. ed. Concordia, 1976.

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Craig Blomberg. *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*. 2nd ed. Intervarsity, 2007. See Chapter Four.

R. T. France. "Inerrancy and New Testament Exegesis." *Themelios* (1975) 12-18. He is a world-class scholar who respects Scripture. Incidentally, in that article, he explains the differences in the pericopae about the centurion (Matthew 8:5-13 // Luke 7:1-10). Did the centurion approach Jesus, or did the Jewish elders?

Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe. *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties*. Baker, 1992.

John W. Haley. An Examination of the Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible. Scholarly Publishing House, U Michigan P, 2005.

Walter Kaiser, et al. Hard Sayings of the Bible. Intervarsity, 1996. The New International Version Study Bible. It explains problem texts in the notes. Written by a large team of scholars, the NIV Study Bible is excellent for many other reasons, as well.

David E. O'Brien. Today's Handbook for Solving Bible Difficulties. Bethany, 1990.

Mark D. Roberts. Can We Trust the Gospels? Investigating the Reliability of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Crossway, 2007. See Chapter Nine.

---. "Are There Contradictions in the Gospels?" October 2005.

John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures. Vol. 2. Victor Books, 1983-1985. Sometimes they sort out the difficulties.

14 - Chapter 14

Chapter 14. Similarities among John's Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels Gospels for the World, Unite! Is there any historical worth to the Gospel of John? Does it stray so far from the actual life of Jesus that we can hope only for a pious but mostly fictional story of him? In the last four articles on the four Gospels, we discovered that they all share the same storyline, particularly in the context of mission. We should therefore be able to find this storyline in a comparison between John on the one hand and the Synoptics on the other. The list is built on the Gospel of John. If John and one other Synoptic share one similarity, then it is listed. Needless to say, if John and two other Synoptics share a common feature, then it is listed, too. I have not counted how many similarities there are among John and one or two other Synoptics. But a reader is invited to compile these totals.

What is surprising about this list is how many times all four Gospels share similarities (see Q & A Two, below, for the totals).

If readers see an omission, then email me with the Gospel references and the name or place or teaching, and so on. My email is available through my author page by clicking on "Bio" at the top of the page.

Hovering over the references below will bring up the NET Bible version on each of these. If readers spot a reference error, then email me, please.

1. So what are the similarities among John and the Synoptics? The items are derived from a wide range of similarities, from large themes, all the way to specific verbal agreements. The categories follow the life of Christ, since that is the strategy of the four Gospels. The order of each item under the categories follows John's references, as often as possible. Many items in this list have more than one Biblical reference, but they are sometimes omitted for brevity. His Political Context

Jesus ministers while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea from AD 26-36 (Matthew 27:2; Mark 15:1; Luke 3:1; John 18:29).

Caiaphas is the high priest (Matthew 26:3, Matthew 26:57; Luke 3:2; John 11:49; John 18:13-14, John 18:24, John 18:28).

Annas was high priest (Luke 3:2; John 18:13, John 18:24). His Family

Joseph is the father of Jesus (Matthew 1:18-24; Luke 1:27; Luke 2:4, Luke 2:16, Luke 2:22, Luke 2:39; Luke 4:22; John 1:45; John 6:42).

Jesus' mother is mentioned (Matthew 12:46-47; Mark 3:31-32; Luke 8:19-20; John 2:1-3; John 19:26-27).

He temporarily distances himself from his mother early in his ministry (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:20-21, Mark 3:34-35; Luke 8:19-21; John 2:4).

He has brothers (or half brothers), and they do not believe until later (Matthew 12:46-47; Mark 3:31-32; Luke 8:19-20; John 7:3-5).

He comes (is supposed to come) from David's lineage (Matthew 1:1; Mark 12:35-36; Luke 1:27; Luke 2:4; John 7:42).

Geography and Locations

Jesus first ministers in Galilee (Matthew 4:12-18; Mark 1:14-16, Mark 1:28, Mark 1:39; Luke 4:14; John 1:43; John 2:1-11).

He ministers in Bethsaida or to its citizens (Matthew 11:21; Mark 6:45; Mark 8:22; Luke 9:10; Luke 10:13; John 1:44; John 12:21).

He is called "Jesus of Nazareth" (Matthew 26:71; Mark 10:47; Luke 24:19; John 1:45).

Israel is the name of his country -- not Palestine, which the Greeks and Romans called it, but it is never called "Palestine" anywhere in the New Testament (Matthew 2:6, Matthew 2:20-21; Matthew 8:10; Matthew 9:33; Matthew 10:6, Matthew 10:23; Matthew 15:24, Matthew 15:31; Matthew 19:28; Matthew 27:9, Matthew 27:42; Mark 12:29; Mark 15:32; Luke 1:16, Luke 1:54, Luke 1:68, Luke 1:80; Luke 2:25, Luke 2:32, Luke 2:34; Luke 4:25, Luke 4:27; Luke 7:9; Luke 22:30; Luke 24:21; John 1:31, John 1:47, John 1:49; John 12:31).

He ministers in the town of Capernaum, by the Lake of Galilee (Matthew 4:13; Matthew 8:5; Matthew 17:24; Mark 1:21; Mark 2:1; Mark 9:33; Luke 4:23, Luke 4:31; Luke 7:1; John 2:12; John 4:46; John 6:17, John 6:24, John 6:59).

He ministers to entire towns and regions that come out to see him (Matthew 14:34-36; Mark 1:33; Mark 6:53-56; John 3:22; John 4:1-3; John 4:39; John 10:40-42).

He ministers in Judea or to Judeans (Matthew 4:25; Matthew 12:15; Matthew 14:13; Matthew 19:1; Mark 3:7; Mark 10:1; Mark 13:34; Luke 4:44; Luke 5:17; Luke 6:17; Luke 7:17; Luke 23:5; John 3:22; John 4:47, John 4:54; John 7:10).

He often ministers in Galilee and around its Lake (Matthew 4:18, Matthew 4:23, Matthew 4:25; Matthew 11:1; Matthew 15:29; Matthew 17:22; Matthew 28:7; Mark 1:28, Mark 1:39; Mark 3:7; Mark 7:31; Mark 9:30; Mark 14:28; Mark 16:7; Luke 4:31; Luke 8:26; Luke 17:11; Luke 24:6; John 4:3, John 4:43-47, John 4:54; John 6:1; John 7:1, John 7:9; John 12:21; John 21:2).

He is willing to minister to Samaritans, even though the relationship between them and Jews is tense (Luke 17:11-19; John 4:4-26, John 4:39-42). Restrictions are context-specific (Matthew 10:5-6; Matthew 15:24).

He is rejected in his home country (Matt. 15:54-58; Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30; John 4:44).

He teaches in the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:31, John 6:59).

He teaches in synagogues, stated retrospectively in John (Matthew 4:23; Matthew 12:9; Matthew 13:54; Mark 1:39; Mark 3:1; Mark 6:2; Luke 4:15-16; Luke 4:44; Luke 13:10; John 18:20).

Jerusalem is the capital, the holy city (about 18 times in Matthew 11:1-30 times in Mk.; 34 times in Luke 14:1-35 times in John).

He teaches in the temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 21:23; Mark 12:35; Luke 21:37; John 7:28).

Christ comes from Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1-8; Luke 2:4, Luke 2:15; John 7:42).

While in the temple, he teaches near the place where the offering were put (Mark 12:41; Luke 21:1; John 8:20). The Jordan River and eastward is important in his life (Matthew 4:15, Matthew 4:25; Matthew 19:1; Mark 3:8; Mark 10:1; Luke 4:1; John 10:40).

Bethany, a village just outside Jerusalem, plays a key role at the end of his life (Matthew 21:17; Matthew 26:5; Mark 11:1, Mark 11:11-12; Luke 19:29; Luke 24:50; John 11:1, John 11:18; John 12:1). This is not Bethany beyond the Jordan (John 1:28; John 10:40).

John the Baptist and Jesus

John is the “voice of one crying out in the wilderness” to prepare the way (Matthew 3:3; Mark 3:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23).

Religious leaders (Pharisees, priests and Levites) question John (Matthew 3:7; John 1:19).

John baptizes with water (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:26).

You don't know who (Jesus) stands among you (Luke 3:15; John 1:26).

John is not worthy to loosen a strap of Jesus' sandals or to carry them (Matthew 3:11; Mark 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:27).

Crowds go out to be baptized by John, who baptizes in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:5-6; Mark 1:5; Luke 3:3; John 1:28).

Jesus will baptize with the Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). The Spirit, in the form of a dove, is present on Jesus (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32-33).

John gathers disciples around him (Matthew 14:12; Mark 6:29; Luke 7:18; John 1:35).

John is put in prison (Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:20; John 3:24). The image of a bridegroom appears in the context of John (Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34; John 3:29).

Jesus must become greater, John lesser (Matthew 11:11; Luke 7:28; John 3:30). His Mission The theme and reality of glory in Jesus' ministry is stated (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 2:32; Luke 9:31-32; John 1:14; John 2:11; John 11:4, John 11:40; John 12:28, John 12:41; John 17:24).

There is the right time or hour in his life (Matthew 9:15; Matthew 26:18; Mark 1:15; Mark 14:35, Mark 14:41; Luke 19:44; Luke 22:14; John 2:4; John 7:6; John 8:20; John 12:23).

He enjoys the company of wine drinkers (Luke 5:29-30; Luke 7:34; Luke 15:1-2; John 2:1-11).

He has authority and power, which opponents sometimes question (Matthew 7:29; Matthew 8:9; Matthew 21:23-27; Matthew 28:18; Mark 1:22, Mark 1:27; Mark 11:28-33; Luke 4:32; Luke 5:24; Luke 20:1-8; John 2:18; John 5:27; John 10:18; John 13:3; John 17:2).

He will “go up” or “be taken up” into heaven (Luke 9:51; John 3:14; John 8:28; John 12:32).

He came to save people (Matthew 1:21; Matthew 10:22; Matthew 16:25; Matthew 19:25-26; Mark 8:35-36; Mark 10:26-27; Mark 13:13; Luke 2:11, Luke 2:30; Luke 9:24; Luke 18:26-27; Luke 19:9; John 3:17; John 4:42; John 5:45; John 10:9; John 12:47).

He has come or been sent by God (Matthew 9:13; Matthew 10:34; Mark 1:38; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32; Luke 7:16-20; Luke 12:49; John 3:19; John 5:43; John 6:38).

Salvation is from the Jews (Matthew 1:1-17, Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:30; John 3:23-36; John 4:22).

Jesus came not to do his own will, but the will of the one who sent him (Matthew 26:39-42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 4:34; John 6:38).

He is greater than Old Testament prophets (Abraham, Solomon, and Jonah) and the temple (Matthew 12:6, Matthew 12:39-42; Luke 11:29-32; John 8:52-58).

He lays down his life (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 10:11, John 10:15, John 10:17-18).

He predicts his own death (Matthew 12:39-41; Matthew 16:21-28; Matthew 20:17-19; Mark 8:31; Mark 9:44; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 9:22-27; Luke 11:29-30; Luke 18:31-33; John 12:20-26).

He successfully resists Satan during Jesus’ lifetime (Matthew 4:11; Luke 4:13; John 12:31; John 14:30). His Unique Relationship with His Father

Jesus teaches and acts as if he has a unique relationship with his Father (Matthew 6:9; Matthew 10:32-33; Matthew 11:26-27; Mark 14:36; Luke 10:21-22; Luke 11:2; John 1:14; John 3:35; John 10:15). To honor the Father is to honor the Son, and to honor the Son is to honor the Father (Matthew 10:40; Matthew 18:5; Mark 9:37; John 5:23).

He accepts worship or prostration (Matthew 14:33; Matthew 28:9; Matthew 28:17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38; John 20:28). A voice from heaven supports Jesus (Matthew 3:17; Matthew 15:5; Mark 1:11; Mark 9:7; Luke 3:22; Luke 9:35; John 12:28-30).

Jesus says receiving him means receiving the one who sent him (Matthew 10:40; Mark 9:36-37; Luke 9:48; Luke 10:16; John 13:20). His Titles

Jesus refers to himself as and accepts the title of the Son of God (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 1:32; Luke 3:22; John 1:34; John 3:16).

He refers to himself as or accepts the titles Rabbi / Teacher (Matthew 23:7-8; Matthew 26:25, Matthew 26:49; Mark 9:5; Mark 10:51; Luke 9:38; John 1:38, John 1:49; John 6:25).

He refers to himself as or accepts the title of the Christ (Matthew 1:16; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20; John 1:41).

He accepts the title of king (Matthew 27:11; Mark 11:10; Mark 15:2; Luke 22:3; John 1:49; John 12:13; John 18:33, John 18:37).

He refers to himself as or accepts the title of the Son of Man (Matthew 8:20; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24; John 1:51); in a clearly apocalyptic sense (Mark 8:38; Luke 12:8-9; John 5:27). In the vast majority of the 80-plus references to the Son of Man in verses in the four Gospels, Jesus alone uses this

title and only about himself He refers to himself as or accepts the title of Prophet (Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24; John 4:44).

He uses the clause "I am" (eg■ eimi) in a special, divine way, also according to some contexts in the Synoptics (see Brown, vol. 1, Appendix IV, pp. 532-38) (Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50; [cf. Mark 13:6]; Mark 14:62; Lk. [cf. Luke 21:8]; Luke 22:70; Luke 24:36; John 6:20; John 8:24, John 8:28, John 8:58; John 13:9; John 18:5).

He refers to himself as or accepts the title of Lord (Matthew 7:21; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5; John 6:23). His Disciples Jesus calls disciples early in his ministry (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:2-11; John 1:35-42).

Simon's brother is Andrew (Matthew 4:18; Matthew 10:2; Mark 1:16, Mark 1:29; Mark 3:18; Mark 13:3; Luke 6:14; John 1:40, John 1:44; John 6:8; John 12:22).

Simon's second name is Peter (Matthew 16:18; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14; John 1:42).

Philip is named (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; John 1:43-48; John 6:5, John 6:7; John 12:21-22; John 14:8-9).

Jesus chooses twelve main disciples (Matthew 10:1; Mark 3:13; Luke 6:13; John 6:67-71; John 15:16).

Peter is mentioned the most often of all the disciples (over 90 times in all four Gospels).

Thomas is named (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:8; Luke 6:15; John 11:16; John 14:5; John 20:24-28; John 21:2).

Jesus knows the Bethany sisters Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-57; John 12:1-8).

Martha is more active, Mary less so (Luke 10:40-42; John 11:20).

Peter is the one who asks for clarification (Matthew 15:15; Luke 12:1; John 13:36-38).

Jesus is anointed in Bethany (by Mary) (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8).

Someone (Judas) complains that the perfume or ointment could have been sold and given to the poor (Matthew 26:9; Mark 14:5; John 12:5).

Women follow Jesus (Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:41; Luke 8:2-3; Luke 23:49; John 19:25-27).

Mary Magdalene is named as a close follower (Matthew 27:56-66; Matthew 28:1; Mark 15:40, Mark 15:47; Mark 16:1, Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2; Luke 24:10; John 19:25; John 20:1, John 20:18).

James and John are brothers, or the sons of Zebedee are mentioned (Matthew 4:21; Mark 1:19; Luke 5:10; John 21:2).

Peter and the sons of Zebedee are called or described as fishermen (Matthew 4:21; Mark 4:19; Luke 5:6-10; John 21:3-8). Their Discipleship

Jesus says to follow him (Matthew 4:19; Matthew 10:38; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; John 1:43; John 12:26; John 21:19, John 21:22). The disciples do not understand many things before the ascension (Matthew 13:36; Matthew 16:9, Matthew 16:11, Matthew 16:22-23; Mark 4:13, Mark

4:33; Mark 6:52; Mark 8:7; Luke 9:45; Luke 18:34; John 2:22; John 12:16; John 13:7, John 13:28; John 16:18; John 20:9). The harvest is ripe and plentiful (Matthew 9:38; Luke 10:2; John 4:35).

Workers for the Lord may get different wages that seem unfair (Matthew 20:1-16; John 4:36-38). The disciples spiritually (or non-literally) partake of his blood and body or flesh (Matthew 26:27-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; John 6:53-59).

He is aware of his disciples' discussion or grumbling (Matthew 16:8; Matthew 26:10; Mark 8:17; John 6:61).

Disciples must judge aright (Matthew 7:1-7; Luke 6:41-42; John 7:24). His followers are like sheep among wolves (Matthew 10:16; Luke 10:3; John 10:12).

Greeks or Greek speakers need ministry (Mark 7:26; John 12:20).

Jesus teaches on loving one's life and losing it, and by losing it one will find it (Matthew 10:39; Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; Luke 17:33; John 12:25).

Synagogues will reject his disciples (Matthew 10:17-18; Mark 13:9; Luke 12:11; Luke 21:12; John 12:42; John 16:1-4).

He says to serve, and in John he washes the disciples' feet (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-30; John 13:17). The disciples through the Spirit (will) speak the right words and do the ministry (Matthew 10:20; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:12; John 14:26; John 15:26-27; John 16:13-15).

Jesus has been hated, and his disciples will be hated (Matthew 10:22; Matthew 24:9-10; Mark 13:13; Luke 6:22, Luke 6:27; Luke 21:17; John 15:18-19).

If people persecuted him, they will persecute his disciples (Matthew 5:10, Matthew 5:44; Luke 21:12; John 15:20). The disciples are witnesses (Matthew 10:18; Mark 13:9; Luke 24:48; John 15:27). The disciples' faith may be shaken (Matthew 24:10; John 16:1).

Some disciples will be put to death (Matthew 24:9; Luke 21:16; John 16:2). The disciples are commissioned after his resurrection (Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:47; John 20:21; cf. John 17:18). The disciples (will) receive the Spirit in their mission (Luke 24:49; John 20:22). His Hebrew Bible

Jesus quotes or honors the law of Moses (Matthew 4:4, Matthew 4:7, Matthew 4:10; Matthew 5:17-19; Matthew 19:8, Matthew 19:16-18; Matthew 22:29-32, Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 10:5-9; Mark 12:26, Mark 12:29-31; Luke 4:4, Luke 4:8, Luke 4:12, Luke 4:18-19; Luke 16:17; Luke 18:20; Luke 20:37; John 3:14; John 5:45-47; John 6:32; John 7:19, John 7:22-23; John 19:36).

He fulfills Isaiah's prophecies (Matthew 4:14-16; Matthew 8:17; Matthew 12:17-21; Matthew 13:14-15; Matthew 15:7-9; Mark 4:11-12; Mark 7:6-7; Mark 11:17; Mark 13:25; Luke 4:17; Luke 8:10; Luke 22:37; John 6:45; John 12:38-41).

He honors, quotes, or is prophesied in the Prophets (Matthew 10:35-36; Matthew 11:10; Matthew 13:13; Matthew 21:4-5; Matthew 24:15, Matthew 24:29; Matthew 26:31; Mark 1:2-3; Mark 11:9-10; Mark 11:17; Mark 13:14, Mark 13:24; Mark 14:27; Luke 7:27; Luke 23:30; Luke 24:25-27; John 10:12; John 12:15; John 15:25; John 19:37).

He honors, quotes, or is prophesied in the Psalms (Matthew 13:35; Matthew 21:9; Matthew 21:16; Matthew 21:42; Matthew 27:46; Mark 12:10-11, Mark 12:36; Mark 15:37; Luke 20:42; John 10:34; John 12:13; John 19:24; John 20:28).

He fulfills prophecy in many ways (Matthew 1:22; Matthew 2:15, Matthew 2:17, Matthew 2:23; Matthew 3:15; Matthew 4:14; Matthew 5:17; Matthew 8:17; Matthew 12:17; Matthew 13:14, Matthew 13:35; Matthew 21:24; Matthew 26:54, Mark 13:4; Mark 14:49; Luke 1:1; Luke 4:21; Luke 8:31; Luke 9:31; Luke 21:22, Luke 21:24; Luke 22:16, Luke 22:37; Luke 24:44; John 12:38; John 13:18; John 15:25; John 17:12; John 18:9; John 18:32; John 19:24, John 19:28, John 19:36). His Miracles Jesus heals crowds of the sick (Matthew 4:23-25; Mark 3:7-12; Luke 6:17-19; John 3:23; John 6:2). The miracles of Jesus point to a higher truth about himself and God than the miracles per se (Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:3-12; Luke 5:18-26; John 5:19-30). The lame, the blind, the crippled, and the paralyzed are listed as a collective (Matthew 11:5; Matthew 15:30-31; Matthew 21:14; Luke 7:22; Luke 14:13; Luke 14:21; John 5:3). On different occasions, Jesus says, "Pick up your mat and walk and go home" (Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:11; Luke 5:24; John 5:8).

He feeds thousands (Matthew 14:13-21; Matthew 15:29-31; Mark 6:32-44; Mark 8:1-10; Luke 5:16; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-17; John 11:54). On occasion, he healed in unusual ways (Mark 7:33; Mark 8:23; John 9:6).

He heals blind persons (Matthew 9:27-28; Matthew 11:5; Matthew 12:22; Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 8:22-23; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 7:21-22; Luke 14:13-21; Luke 18:35-43; John 5:3; John 9:1-34).

He raises the dead (Matthew 9:18-19, Matthew 9:23-26; Mark 5:21-24, Mark 5:35-43; Luke 7:11-15; Luke 8:40-42, Luke 8:49-56; John 11:1-44).

Peter's miraculous catches of fish (Luke 5:1-11; John 21:1-15). I believe these are two different events, but some don't, so the catches are included in this list. His Teaching Jesus is the light of the world (Matthew 4:16; Luke 2:32; John 1:4-7; John 3:19; John 8:12; John 9:5).

Angels minister (Matthew 1:20, Matthew 1:24; Matthew 28:2-5; Mark 1:13; Mark 8:38; Luke 2:15; Luke 9:26; Luke 12:8-9; John 1:51; John 20:12).

Jesus says to believe in him and his message and works (Matthew 9:28; Matthew 17:20; Matthew 21:22; Mark 1:15; Mark 5:36; Mark 11:24; Luke 8:50; Luke 17:5-6; John 2:11; John 3:18; John 5:38; John 6:29; John 7:31; John 10:38; John 14:11).

Beware of all men speaking well of you or of accepting their praise (Luke 6:26; John 2:24-25; John 5:41).

Jesus frequently uses the Hebrew word "amen" ("verily" or "truly") in his teaching (Matthew 5:18; Mark 3:28; Luke 4:24; John 3:3). The kingdom of God is a theme (Matthew 4:17, Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43; Luke 8:1; John 3:3-5; John 18:36). Being born again or becoming like a child to get into the kingdom of God is a theme; "the kingdom of God" in the Synoptics and "eternal life" in John are used interchangeably (Matthew 18:3; Mark 9:45, Mark 9:47; Mark 10:15, Mark 10:17, Mark 10:23-24, Mark 10:30; Luke 10:17; John 3:3, John 3:5). The spirit / flesh dichotomy is used (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38; John 3:6).

People are amazed and astonished at Jesus' words and ministry (Matthew 7:28; Matthew 8:27; Matthew 15:31; Matthew 21:20; Matthew 22:22; Matthew 27:14; Mark 1:27; Mark 5:20; Mark 15:5; Mark 15:44; Luke 4:22, Luke 4:36; Luke 8:25; Luke 9:43; Luke 11:14, Luke 11:38; Luke 20:26; Luke 24:41; John 3:7; John 4:27; John 5:20, John 5:28; John 7:15, John 7:21).

Eternal life is a theme (Matthew 19:16, Matthew 19:29; Matthew 25:46; Mark 10:17, Mark 10:30; Luke 10:25; Luke 16:9; Luke 18:18, Luke 18:30; John 3:15-16, John 3:36; John 4:14; John 5:24; John 6:27, John 6:40; John 6:54; John 10:28).

Humans have the capacity for evil (Matthew 12:35; Mark 7:21; Luke 6:45; John 3:19-20; John 5:29).

Jesus redefines the will of the Father (Matthew 12:50; Mark 3:35; Luke 8:21; John 4:34).

Jesus uses the image of bread positively (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21; John 6:32-33, John 6:35, John 6:41, John 6:48, John 6:50-51, John 6:58).

Satan or the devil exists and opposes God's people and plan (Matthew 4:10; Mark 1:13; Luke 10:18; John 6:70; John 8:44; John 12:31; John 13:27; John 14:30; John 16:11; John 17:15).

Jesus' teaching may harden hearts (Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 4:11-12; Luke 8:10; John 9:39; John 12:39-40).

He teaches in parables or figures of speech (Matthew 13:10-15; Mark 4:2, Mark 4:11-12; Luke 8:10; John 10:6; John 16:25-29). The image of a gate and gatekeeper is used (Matthew 7:13-14; Mark 13:24; John 10:1-9).

God or Jesus is like a shepherd, and the people are like sheep (Matthew 9:36; Matthew 25:32; Matthew 26:31; Matthew 10:6; Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:34; Mark 14:27; Luke 15:4-6; Luke 17:7; John 10:11-16).

Jesus says, "If I tell you, you won't believe me" (Luke 22:67; John 10:25).

He uses the verb "sleep" for "die" (Matthew 9:24; Mark 5:39-40; Luke 8:52; John 11:12-15).

Blessed are those who hear and keep and do the Word (Matthew 7:24-26; Luke 6:47-49; Luke 11:28; Luke 12:43; John 12:47; John 13:17).

There will be a day of judgment (Matthew 12:36; Luke 17:24-31; John 12:48). A servant or disciple is not greater than his master or teacher (Matthew 10:24-25; Luke 6:40; John 13:16; John 15:20).

He pronounces that a variety of persons and actions are blessed (Matthew 5:3-11; Matthew 11:6; Matthew 16:17; Matthew 25:34; Luke 6:20-22; Luke 7:23; Luke 11:28; Luke 14:14, Luke 14:16; Luke 24:50; John 13:17; John 20:29).

He teaches on asking and receiving in prayer (Matthew 7:8; Matthew 18:19-20; Mark 11:10; Luke 11:24; John 14:13-14; John 16:24).

He says his name has power (Matthew 7:22; Matthew 12:21; Matthew 18:20; Mark 9:38-39; Luke 9:49; Luke 10:17; John 14:13-14, John 14:26; John 15:16; John 16:23-24; John 17:11-12).

Don't be afraid (Luke 12:32; John 14:27).

Unproductive works will be thrown into the fire (Matthew 3:10-12; Matthew 7:19; Matthew 13:40; Matthew 18:8-9; Luke 3:9, John 15:6).

Love and commandments are themes (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:27-28; John 15:9-11).

Men disbelieve in Jesus despite the miracles he did, so these disbelievers are judged (Matthew 11:20-23; Luke 10:13; John 15:24). The Father's name is holy; may he give us bread and deliver us from the evil one or evil (Matthew 6:9-13; John 6:33; John 17:11, John 17:15). The disciples have authority to release sins (Matthew 18:18; John 20:23). His Popularity and Opposition Jesus clears out part of the temple courts (Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-47; John 2:13-16).

He refuses to perform miraculous signs to satisfy his opponents (Matthew 12:38; Mark 8:11; Luke 11:16; John 2:18; John 4:48; John 6:30).

He leaves a region due to opposition (Matthew 12:15; Mark 3:7; Luke 6:11-12; John 4:1-3).

Defying religious oral traditions, he does "unnecessary" healings on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9-13; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11; Luke 13:10-17; John 5:1-18; John 7:21-24; John 9:1-16).

If the leaders believed Moses, they would believe in Jesus, but they don't believe Moses (Luke 16:31; John 5:46-47).

Jesus is popular with the masses (Matthew 8:21; Mark 10:1; Luke 5:15; John 6:2). But he sometimes withdraws from them for solitude (Matthew 8:18; Matthew 12:15; Matthew 14:13-14; Mark 3:7-9; Mark 6:32-34; Luke 6:12, Luke 6:17-19; Luke 9:10; John 6:3, John 6:15).

He is accused of deceiving people (Matthew 27:63; John 7:12, John 7:47). The crowds guess at who he is (Matthew 16:13-14; Mark 8:27-28; Luke 9:18-19; John 7:40-43). Do Jews really have Abraham as their father (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8; John 8:33-39; John 13:28-29)?

Those who prevent him from fulfilling his mission to die at the right time are called children of the devil or are said to be motivated by Satan (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:33; John 8:37, John 8:40).

Opponents accuse him of being demon possessed (Matthew 9:34; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15; John 8:48-52; John 10:20).

There are aborted attempts to kill him (Luke 4:28-30; Luke 13:31; John 8:59; John 10:31-32; John 11:8).

He calls the religious establishment spiritually blind (Matthew 15:12-14; Matthew 23:16-26; John 9:39-41). The disciples fear to go up to Jerusalem (Mark 10:32; John 11:7-8). The Sanhedrin (the high court) and other religious leaders seek a way to get rid of Jesus and to trump up evidence (Matthew 26:59; Matthew 27:12; Mark 3:2; Mark 14:55; Luke 6:7; Luke 15:1; Luke 22:66; Luke 23:2; John 8:6; John 10:36; John 11:47).

He challenges the Jerusalem religious establishment, particularly Pharisees and chief priests (Matthew 21:45; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:9-19; John 11:47, John 11:57). His Triumphal Entry

Jesus enters Jerusalem triumphantly to conclude his ministry and life (Matthew 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-38; John 12:12-15). The people use branches to usher him in (Matthew 21:8; Mark 11:8; John 12:13)

During the entry, the crowds shout that he is blessed who comes in the name of the Lord (Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:9; Luke 13:35; Luke 19:38; John 12:13).

King or kingdom is used (Mark 11:10; Luke 19:38; John 12:13).

He rides a beast of burden (Matthew 21:5; Mark 11:7; Luke 19:33-35; John 12:14).

Zechariah 9:9 is quoted (Matthew 21:5; John 12:15). His Last Supper

Jesus celebrates Passover and eats the Last Supper with his disciples (Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13; John 13:1-38; John 14:1-31; John 15:1-27; John 16:1-33; John 17:1-26). The image of the vine and its fruit is used metaphorically (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18; John 15:1-8). The Betrayal

Judas is named as the betrayer, sometimes early in a Gospel for the readers' / listeners' sake (Matthew 26:14-16, Matthew 26:25, Matthew 26:49; Mark 3:19; Mark 14:10-11, Mark 14:43-45; Luke 6:16; Luke 22:3-6, Luke 22:47-48; John 12:4; John 13:2, John 13:26-30; John 18:2-5).

Satan prompts and / or enters Judas (Luke 22:3; John 6:70-71; John 13:2, John 13:27). At the Last Supper, Jesus states that someone will betray him (Matthew 26:21; Mark 14:18; Luke 22:21-22; John 13:21). The disciples ask who the betrayer is (Matthew 26:22; Mark 14:19; Luke 22:23; John 13:22-25).

Whoever dips into a bowl will betray Jesus (Luke says the hand of the betrayer is at the table) (Matthew 26:23-25; Mark 14:21; John 13:26-27).

Judas Iscariot leads an armed mob to arrest Jesus (Matthew 26:14, Matthew 26:47-49; Mark 14:43-45; Luke 22:47-49; John 18:2-5). His Arrest

Jesus agonizes in his spirit over his impending death (Matthew 26:38; Mark 10:38; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42-44; John 12:27-28). On the night he is arrested, he faces and resists temptation to avoid the cross (Matthew 26:37-46; Mark 14:35-36; Luke 22:46; John 12:27).

He and his disciples retire to the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley (Matthew 24:3; Matthew 26:30; Mark 11:1; Mark 13:3; Mark 14:26; Luke 19:29, Luke 19:37; Luke 21:37-39; John 18:1; cf. John 8:1). A disciple (Peter) cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant (Malchus) (Matthew 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50; John 18:10). The Denial

Jesus predicts that Peter will deny him three times (Matthew 26:34, Matthew 26:75; Mark 14:30, Mark 14:72; Luke 22:34, Luke 22:61; John 13:38).

Peter goes to the courtyard of the high priest (Matthew 26:58; Mark 14:54, Mark 14:66; Luke 22:55; John 18:15). A servant girl spots Peter and questions him, and he denies Jesus (Matthew 26:69-70; Mark 14:66-68; Luke 22:56-57; John 18:16-17). A second time, a similar question and denial (Matthew 26:71-72; Mark 14:69-70; Luke 22:58; John 18:25).

Yet another challenge and Peter denies Jesus a third time (Matthew 26:73-74; Mark 14:70-71; Luke 22:59-60; John 18:26-27). A crowing rooster reminds Peter of Jesus' prediction (Matthew 26:74; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:60; John 18:26).

He also predicts that Peter will be restored, and Jesus makes sure that Peter is restored (Luke 22:32 b; John 21:15-19). His Trial The chief priests of Jerusalem try Jesus and press for his execution (Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:66-71; John 18:12-14, John 18:19-24; John 19:6).

He is accused of saying that he will destroy the "temple" and rebuild it in three days (Matthew 26:61; Matthew 27:40; Mark 14:57-58; Mark 15:29; cf. John 2:19).

Pontius Pilate tries Jesus, hesitates to press the matter, but hands Jesus over to be executed (Matthew 27:14-24; Mark 14:6-10; Luke 23:4-6, Luke 23:14-16, Luke 23:20-22, Luke 23:24; John 18:18-40; John 19:1-16).

Pilate tries Jesus in Pilate's palace or Praetorium (Matthew 27:27; Mark 15:16; John 18:28, John 18:33; John 19:9).

Pilate asks him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" and Jesus answers in the affirmative with a qualification in John (Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 22:3; John 18:33, John 18:37).

Pilate declares Jesus' innocence three times (Luke 23:4, Luke 23:14-15, Luke 23:22; John 18:38; John 19:4, John 19:6).

Releasing a prisoner is a custom (Matthew 27:15; Mark 15:6; John 18:39).

Crowds and authorities clamor for the release of Barabbas (Matthew 27:20; Mark 15:11; Luke 23:13, Luke 23:18; John 18:38, John 18:40).

Barabbas is a rebel or insurrectionist (Mark 15:6; Luke 23:19; John 18:39-40).

Barabbas is released instead of Jesus (Matthew 27:15-21; Mark 15:7, Mark 15:15; Luke 22:18-25; John 18:40). A crowd clamors for his crucifixion: verdict by volume (Matthew 27:20-25; Mark 15:12-15; Luke 23:18-24; John 19:6, John 19:12, John 19:15). The Sonship of Jesus is one of the accusations leveled at him (Matthew 26:63-64; Mark 14:61-62; Luke 22:70; John 19:7). The Mockery Pilate's Roman soldiers are present (Matthew 27:27; Mark 15:16; John 19:2).

They weave or twist and put a crown of thorns on Jesus (Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2).

They throw a robe on him (Matthew 27:28; Mark 15:17; John 19:2).

They mock him (Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:19-20; John 19:3). They say, "Hail king of the Jews!" (Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:18; John 19:3).

They hit him (Matthew 27:30; Mark 15:19; John 19:3).

They lead him away to crucify him (Matthew 27:31; Mark 15:20; John 19:16).

Soldiers cast lots for his clothing (Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:23-24). His Crucifixion

Jesus' crucifixion has a higher purpose than an unfortunate martyrdom (Matthew 20:19, Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:28-30; John 10:10-18).

He is crucified on a cross at the Place of the Skull (Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22; Luke 23:33; John 19:17).

Two others (criminals) are crucified alongside him (Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27; Luke 23:33, Luke 23:40-43; John 19:18). A notice on the cross reads, "King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19).

Mary Magdalene and other women watch him on the cross (Matt. 25:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:49; John 19:25-27).

He is offered gall (Matthew 27:34, Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36; John 19:28-30). His Burial

Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate for Jesus' body and wraps it in linen cloth (Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:43-46; Luke 23:50-53; John 19:38-42). The tomb is new and / or has been cut out of rock (Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53; John 19:41). The body is laid in a tomb before the start of Sabbath (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:42). His Resurrection

Jesus is resurrected on the first day of the week before dawn or early in the morning (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1).

Mary Magdalene is the first at the empty tomb (Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1-10; John 20:1, John 20:10-18). The stone is discovered to be rolled away (Matthew 28:2; Mark 16:4; Luke 24:2; John 20:1).

Mary Magdalene is named as being blessed with the first divine appearances (Matthew 28:5-10; Mark 16:5-8; Luke 24:4-10; John 20:10-18).

Jesus says, "Peace be with you" (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, John 20:21, John 20:26).

He appears to men disciples (Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:13-35, Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-29; John 21:4-34).

After the resurrection, he shares bread and fish with his disciples (Luke 24:30, Luke 24:43-43; John 21:10-15).

Luke and John emphatically insist on a bodily resurrection (Luke 24:38-43; John 20:27; John 21:10-15).

2. So what's the bottom line for the historical reliability of the four Gospels? For me, the most surprising feature of this list is how often the four Gospels share similarities: about 149 out of a grand total of 226 items, which makes 66%. The four Gospels cohere together in a unified storyline and present the same characters in the life of Jesus, though, of course, an author like John omits some and highlights others. But Peter's life, for example, remains the same, in broad outline.

3. Why do the four Gospels share the same storyline?

Jesus' ministry and death are rooted in a life story, in history, in time and place, in Israel about four decades before the destruction of the temple in AD 70 by the Roman General Titus (in that link see an image on the Arch of Titus of the Menorah [and more] triumphantly being carried through Rome).

Broadly speaking, the chronology in this list follows the ministry of Jesus because he lived one day at a time - chronologically, historically, as we all do. So it is only natural that his life story would be recounted in the Biblical Gospels - from his spiritual encounter with John at the Jordan River to Jesus' resurrection.

4. But what about all the variations between the Gospels?

If a Gospel author varies the order of the story or omits characters - variations and omissions that all Greco-Roman authors used - then these decisions do not take away from the bigger chronology in the Gospels. Sometimes the authors emphasized theology and literary techniques, instead of a strict chronology or sequence. But this does not mean that they did not anchor their stories in historical events and a broad sequence. It is inconceivable, to cite absurd examples, that the death and resurrection would be placed before the triumphal entry into Jerusalem or before Judas' betrayal. But within the chronology of Christ's life, it is possible, for instance, to alternate the scenes of Peter's denials with the scenes of Jesus' trial, as John brilliantly - and touchingly - does (John 18:12-27). This long list demonstrates how stable the traditions were. To cite an example, when the author of John wrote his Gospel (probably) in the 90's, the Baptist's name was still known as John, not Simon or Jacob. We should not take these facts or this stability for granted.

Bottom line: coherence of the same storyline in four accounts implies stability. Stability means historical reliability. It's that simple.

5. So does the huge number of agreements between the four Gospels indicate a common "pool" of traditions about the life of Christ, or do they indicate eyewitness testimony? The answer is both. In John's case, I have reached the decision that it was written by an eyewitness. But he also had a stable "pool" of traditions from which to draw. The life of Christ presented in a broad, outlined story provides easy access to the common pool of traditions and remembrances and repetition by the tradition transmitters. This pool explains, in part, why Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree, even if we assume that Matthew and Luke borrow from Mark. There had to be a starting point. We already learned in the article on Mark's Gospel that Peter was the main eyewitness in this Gospel. Undoubtedly, he wisely decided that the best way to preach the gospel is to follow Jesus' life story, though of course he may have told short anecdotes in a context, and Mark put things in a broad storyline.

Another important feature of this long list is the category "Geography and Locations" near the beginning of the article. Even John, the so-called spiritual Gospel, anchors Christ's life in geography, as we observed in the article about Archaeology and John's Gospel. Jesus really did teach, for example, in the synagogue in Capernaum, which is confirmed in the Synoptics.

Back to the issue of storytelling and a storyline -- in my view, stories are easier to remember and repeat than is a list of facts or disconnected or barely connected pile of sayings. Stories provide a context and natural order that accurately jar the memory.

Years ago I attended the performance of a memory expert. He asked the audience to give him a list of digits or numbers, from zero to nine, one digit at a time. The audience randomly shouted out about thirty of them. He wrote them across the chalkboard, in the order (or disorder) we gave him. He turned his back on the board, faced us, and repeated the string of digits in the exact order on the board. How? Long before this performance, he had developed and assigned a comical character to each digit from zero to nine. As he wrote them on the board, he developed a story in his mind, from one random digit to the next in our string. He told himself the story according to the sequence and narrative interaction of the digits that were “characterized.” So the randomness of the series received order by story.

All analogies are flawed if they are pushed too far. This true anecdote is not to say that the Gospel tradition transmitters and the Gospel authors were modern memory experts (though they may have come close). Nor does the anecdote say that the Gospel authors always follow a strict and detailed chronology. Nor especially does it say that the Gospel traditions were randomly thrown onto “the chalkboard” of a transmitter’s memory. Sometimes sayings alone have value. But the anecdote is to say that a story is very helpful in remembering accurately, and a story also helps the storyteller’s memory of the main characters - the exact requirements and layout of both the above list and the memory expert’s technique. To cite the ultimate illustration, the Grand Narrative or Story of the Iliad surely helped Homer, an oral poet, in keeping track of the main plot and subplots and the many characters.

6. How does this list apply to the Gnostic gospels? The Gnostic gospels in the latest edition of the Nag Hammadi collection do not come anywhere near this detailed, unified storyline in the four Biblical Gospels. These heretical texts seem glad to engage in nothing but dialogues and discussions with very few references to historical facts. Gnostic teachings are disembodied and cut off from the real-life story of Jesus; no one can be confident that he or his disciples actually said or did those things in the Gnostic texts, except a few passages that obviously derive from the earlier Biblical Gospels. Thus, this long list provides us with hard evidence for our intuition that the Gnostic texts stray far from the life and teaching and works of Jesus, as they really happened. Therefore, the early church fathers were right to distance themselves and their churches from the Gnostic heresy. On a much smaller scale than the early church’s orthodox struggle with heresies, it is misguided to place the words orthodoxy or heresy in quotation marks as the heavy promoters of the Gnostic texts do nowadays. There really was a heresy and an orthodoxy back then; we can see the distinctions when we compare the teachings of the Biblical Gospels and the teaching of the Gnostic texts.

7. So what does all of this mean to the Church of all denominations? The Church needs to have confidence in this age of mass media mud slinging on the Biblical Gospels. Boosting the confidence of the Church has been the main goal of the entire series.

These things in this list were really done and spoken. They are reality. We need to tell the story of the unified, essential Gospel to whoever will listen to us.

References and Further Reading

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What really helped me the most was an exhaustive concordance. I look at each entry, each word, Matthew through John, one page at a time. I am so grateful that we have very many details about our Lord's life and ministry. They are not myths. We can confidently know what he said and did.

15 - Chapter 15

Chapter 15. The Historical Reliability of the Gospels: Summary and Conclusion

We come at last to the end of the series. Part Fifteen here can serve as a guide for which article the reader may need in the future. Let's get started.

1. Who should read the series? The series is intended for anyone who has access to the mass media. Ordinary believers, home Bible study leaders, Sunday school and catechism teachers, high school and college students, seminarians, pastors, and priests may find something of value in the series. But mainly it is written for the laity, so the series was put into a Q-&-A format.

2. What is the main goal of the series? To explore the thesis that the four Gospels are historically reliable and accurate - that is the main goal. I did not discuss their inerrancy or infallibility, for how can we go that far if we do not first find out whether they are historically reliable, as inerrancy and infallibility have been traditionally understood? I leave those two doctrines to professional theologians, who have worked out clever means to argue for them.

Still another goal: critics of the Bible get onto the mass media airwaves and throw mud on the Gospels, implying that these historical (and sacred) texts were imaginative fictions invented by anonymous disciples who did not witness the ministry of Jesus or who never or rarely incorporated eyewitness testimony into the Gospels. This series, however, contradicts that widespread belief that had been circulating after the first-fifth of the twentieth century (with seeds planted before then). To counter this belief, I brought onto the web scholarship that supports a traditional view of the Gospels. But rather than depending too much on the extraneous details of this high-quality scholarship, I chose those parts that uncover a lot of textual evidence (e.g. Richard Bauckham's books). This kind of evidence stands the test of time. Or I chose to bring onto the web the conclusions that have in fact stood the test of time (e.g. Birger Gerhardsson's books).

Finally, a theme that was threaded through all of the articles is coherence. The four Gospels cohere together remarkably closely (see Part Fourteen), despite the variations, which, it should again be noted, all histories and biographies have about an historical person in the Greek and Roman world. In fact, the coherence of the Gospels is much, much closer than various versions of the life of Socrates, for example (see Part Four and Q & A Seven in that link). Coherence is a good standard by which to measure truth and accuracy, but this criterion received only minor attention in the series -- but attention it did indeed receive.

3. So what is the summary of the series?

Here are annotations of each part in the series:

Part One: Historical Reliability of the Gospels introduces the series, asking these questions (and more). Do the four Gospels have any support from archaeology? Did Jesus even exist? Is the Gospel of John so far different from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke that John has little or no historical value? Are the Gospels based on eyewitness testimony? What is the role of the

Twelve in securing the traditions about Jesus? What is a tradition? Most importantly, are the four Gospels historically reliable? Can we trust them, historically speaking, in addition to their theology? The article has a brief section on Gnosticism, which I kept track of, in nearly all of the articles, indicating the essential differences between it and the teachings of the Biblical Gospels.

Part Two: Archaeology and the Synoptic Gospels anchors the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) in history, in time and place, in Israel about four decades before the destruction of the temple in AD 70 by the Roman General Titus (in that that link see an image on the Arch of Titus of the Menorah [and more] triumphantly being carried through Rome). This article and the next one are not intended to “prove” the Gospels (whatever that means). Rather, the four Gospels make historical assumptions because they are anchored in the life-story of Jesus, an historical person. So the two articles on archeology uncover these match-ups between the Biblical texts and the outside world.

Part Three: Archaeology and John’s Gospel shows that though it is a spiritual Gospel, it also assumes the geography and customs of first-century Israel. The vast majority of the cities and sites mentioned only in John has been found. This means that John is not another quasi-Gnostic “gospel” that has little or no concern for historical matters. (See also Part Fourteen, below, for John’s coherence with the Synoptics).

Part Four: Did Jesus Even Exist? was an (annoying) digression from the main goal of the series. No reputable New Testament or religious scholar seriously asserts that Jesus did not exist. You cannot have an effect without a cause; a rock hitting a still pond causes ripples (effects). Jesus is the rock that landed in Israel, and he made a big splash around the Mediterranean world, via his disciples. Sources outside the Gospels assume that Jesus existed, just as these same sources assume that other persons in the Gospels existed, like Pontius Pilate and James the (half) brother of Jesus. The next four articles round a corner and discuss what happened between the following time span, in handing on the stories about Jesus that eventually made it into the four Gospels:

Jesus’ ministry | | Written Gospels

Part Five: The Gospel Traditions asks (and answers) these questions (and more): What is a tradition? How does it relate to that time span? How did the Gospel material get transmitted during that gap? Was the transmission process historically reliable?

Part Six: Reliable Gospel Transmissions reinforces Part Five, exploring what happened during that gap. Part Six shows how important traditions were to New Testament authors. Then, it compares the four Gospels with the wider Greco-Roman literary, historical context, concluding that the four Gospels easily fit. We have no trouble accepting Greek and Roman texts, so why not accept the Gospels on an historical level? (Miracles are another matter, discussed in another series; see below.)

Part Seven: What Is the Q ‘Gospel’? The Gospel According to ‘St. Q’? explains this hypothetical source. Did it exist in some form, written or oral, or both? What does the source teach? This “gospel” has been used as a weapon against traditional Christianity and Gospel studies. But if it existed, and if Matthew and Luke incorporated it, then they saw nothing wrong with it, so why should we? Not surprisingly, it is quite orthodox - since it made it into Matthew and Luke! Greco-Roman authors used sources, so why wouldn’t Matthew and Luke? They were intentionally

fitting into their larger literary, historical context.

Part Eight: Did Some Disciples Take Notes During Jesus' Ministry? zeroes in on the time when Jesus was ministering and teaching, and a little afterwards. A large number of scholars have reached the conclusion that at least one disciple may have jotted down notes. This possibility fits into the immediate Jewish and wider Greek and Roman cultures and schools. If this happened, then it helps to secure the historical accuracy of the Gospel traditions. But if this did not happen, then the Twelve and other guardians of the Gospel traditions depended on the security of oral transmissions, which was much, much more reliable and accurate than today's game of "Telephone," for example. Not even close! (See Part Five and Q & A Nine, for a discussion of "Telephone" and oral transmission in the Near East). The next four articles round another corner and examine the evidence within the four Gospels for eyewitness testimony and other signposts of historical reliability. Greek and Roman historians and biographers valued eyewitness testimony, and so do the four Gospel authors.

Part Nine: Authoritative Testimony in Matthew's Gospel says that Matthew is keen on showing us that the Twelve and certain women embody authoritative, participatory eyewitness testimony. They receive their special status by their historical, real-life proximity to Jesus, while he trained, disciplined, and commissioned them. This means that the Gospel of Matthew is reliable because of its origins and coherence with Mark and Luke and John: all four Gospels anchor their themes and literary strategies in the real-life story of Jesus (see Part Fourteen, below).

Part Ten: Eyewitness Testimony in Mark's Gospel says that Peter is the principal eyewitness source of Mark's Gospel. It was widely known in the early church that Mark worked with Peter. Mark wrote down Peter's version of the story about Jesus. Though the Gospel is all about Jesus, the textual evidence is very strong, supported by many examples, that Peter's point of view and other literary devices indicating Peter's testimony provide the foundation of Mark's story. Mark also refers to other (surprising) eyewitnesses.

Part Eleven: Eyewitness Testimony in Luke's Gospel lays out the thesis that Luke and John have the same criteria for the authoritative persons to safeguard the traditions about Jesus, namely, those who were with Jesus from the beginning. Luke says this in his preface to his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4) and in the selection process of the successor of Judas (Acts 1:21-22). And John says the same in John 15:26-27. Luke also has some surprise eyewitnesses. Surely not Jesus' uncle! Click on the article to find out.

Part Twelve: Eyewitness Testimony in John's Gospel begins with numerical facts: John uses the Greek word group for witness far more times than all three Synoptics combined, by a long way. Later in the article, we find out that he also uses verb groups for seeing many more times than the other Gospels, over ninety times. These facts simply cannot be dismissed casually as a literary device with no bearing on actual eyewitness testimony. Further, one scholar helpfully points out that in Acts 4:20 some words often found in Johannine (adjective for John) writings are used. John the Apostle says in Acts: "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20; cf. John 3:32). This is a hint of independent confirmation inside the New Testament (other than Johannine literature) that the Apostle John may have written the fourth Gospel.

Before we move on to the annotations of the remaining two articles, we should take stock of the articles on the Gospels themselves. All four are about Jesus and are based on his life story, but they also have another unifying theme: the commissioning of the disciples, including women. They are to go and be his witnesses. No doubt that when the four Gospel authors were writing their stories about Jesus, they knew firsthand that the church was expanding rapidly, so they asked themselves - why? The answer was not difficult to find: Jesus had commanded this. So the life-story of Jesus is continued in the story of the earliest church. Coherence of the basic facts - even after factoring in normal variations in accounts - is a signpost of historical reliability. This coherence of the storyline means that the Gospel authors were recording things carefully, as they happened, and not going off on their own, as if to present only the teachings of Jesus in an esoteric manner, like the Gnostic "gospels" do. The Biblical Gospels incorporated the best and longest-standing eyewitness sources, just as the Greek and Roman authors did. Therefore, the Gospels fit into their larger literary, historical context.

Part Thirteen: Are There Contradictions in the Gospels? is another (annoying) digression, of sorts (see Part Four, above, for the other annoying digression). I did not enjoy writing this article because the Gospels are intended to be (true) narratives or stories, so we should not, in my opinion, reduce the content like parts of the parables or healing stories to out-of-context propositions. Authors in the Greco-Roman world omitted or admitted data into their stories, according to the best sources. They wrote their histories and biographies with variations on a single topic within their accounts, according to their literary and other strategies and purposes. The Gospel authors did the same. However, if readers would like to find out if there really are unsolvable "contradictions" in the Gospels, then they can click on the article.

Part Fourteen: Similarities among John's Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) serves as a balance to Part Thirteen. Critics of John say that it strays so far from the Synoptics that it is not historically credible. However, in the four articles on the Gospels (Parts Nine to Twelve), we discovered that they all share the same storyline about Jesus, particularly in the context of his and the disciples' mission. We should therefore be able to find this storyline in a comparison between John on the one hand and the Synoptics on the other. It surprised me to learn how many similarities that at least one Synoptic and John have. Can the reader guess how many? Over fifty? Over a hundred? Two hundred? Fewer than fifty? What surprised me the most was how often all four Gospels share common features, ranging from large themes to verbal agreements. To find out how many similarities there are, click on the article.

Part Fifteen: Summary and Conclusion (what you're reading now!) 4. How does all of this relate to Gnosticism?

I kept track of this question in nearly all of the articles in the series, though I wish I did not have to do that (see Part One for a brief definition and discussion of Gnosticism). But nowadays certain experts in Gnosticism have pushed these texts too far onto the public.

Gnostic texts come in the second century and later. They wander far from the Jesus and the disciples of the four Biblical Gospels. The authors of these odd and eerie Gnostic texts did not bother to anchor the vast majority of their discussions and dialogues in historical time and place, in Israel about four decades before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. In fact, they delight in repudiating the flow of Biblical history, salvation history. Jesus saw himself as being a part of it and

fulfilling it. He did not mock or knock it.

These Gnostic authors did not follow the commonsense and obvious truth that if they had researched the real-life Jesus more carefully, then the more believable their dialogues would have become. Rather, compared to the Biblical authors, the Gnostics seem not to care one little bit to find the real Jesus - the Jewish Jesus. So their texts lurch over into errors and take flights of fancy, not only because they repudiate Judaism and the Old Testament, but also because they had a strong agenda to teach their own esoteric doctrines. They have no grounding, certainly not like the Biblical Gospels do. (Click on Part Fourteen and find "His Hebrew Bible" to see how reverentially all four Biblical Gospel authors treat the Old Testament.) The Gnostics capitalized on the fame of Jesus and his disciples, as Christianity spread around the Mediterranean world over the centuries in the Roman Empire. They used names like Mary Magdalene, Andrew, Philip, Peter, and others. But no one can be confident that these disciples and especially Jesus really did and taught what is in the Gnostic texts. In fact, we can be confident that they did not teach or do what is in those texts, except a few passages that are obviously derived from the earlier Biblical Gospels.

Therefore, we today should not hesitate one little bit to call these outlandish (literally out-land-ish) Gnostic texts and Gnosticism heretical and unorthodox. We do not need to put quotation marks around those words. There are clear, unambiguous differences between the Biblical Gospels and the Gnostic texts. The latter are not orthodox (no quotation marks), even by a generous definition of orthodoxy (no quotation marks). After writing the series, it is clear to me why great church leaders like Irenaeus and Athanasius rightly considered them heretical fictions. These and other church leaders would have been derelict in their duty, if they had allowed Gnosticism to freely penetrate church life.

5. So are the four Gospels historically reliable? In case this Summary and Conclusion has not been clear already, let me state it categorically:

Historically speaking, the four Gospels are highly reliable and credible and accurate accounts, particularly measured by the standards of their own Greco-Roman and Jewish literary contexts.

6. What does the series mean to the Church of all denominations?

Confidence. The Church needs to be confident that the four Gospels are historically reliable. We do not need to be nervous about all the mud slinging on the national airwaves done by scholars who seem extra-gleeful to grab media attention in order to scare listeners who take the Gospels seriously, but who do not have a background in Biblical - Gospel - studies.

Simplicity. Despite the detailed analysis of the four Biblical Gospels done in this series, I strongly urge (for what my opinion is worth) the Church to read the sacred Gospels as written now, in their final form, as they are in our Bibles today. The vast majority of the Church does not need to concern itself with the background details, except for what a good and respectful commentary offers.

Further study. Let's Not take simplicity too far. I highly recommend this commentary for further study: The New International Version Study Bible. Written by a large team of scholars, the NIV Study Bible is excellent for many reasons, but mainly due to the notes on nearly all the verses, the numerous essays, and the introductions to each Biblical book. The commentary on the Psalms, for

example, has to be one of the best I have ever read, considering that the many notes are brief.

Education. It is the best antidote to confusion. Education can edify the Church. I certainly learned a lot while writing the series. My confidence in Scripture has been built up. This series of articles is dedicated to my father, who passed away on December 31, 2007.

References and Further Reading I have found these books to be very helpful while writing the series.

Paul Barnett. *Is the New Testament Reliable?* 2nd ed. Intersity, 2003. This one is intended for beginners. Start here second; go first to Roberts' book and blog articles (see below), and my own series perhaps?

Richard Bauckham. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony.* Eerdmans, 2006. I will refer to this excellent book very often. It has inspired this series. He was kind enough to correspond with me, offering encouragement and suggestions on my article on the Gospel of Mark. His book goes a long way to upset overly skeptical scholarship that has exerted a lot of influence on New Testament studies for a long time. But his book is not for beginners, unless web readers first read Roberts' (see below) and my series (?) and have a lot of time to work through Bauckham's.

Craig Blomberg. *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels.* 2nd ed. Intersity, 2007. This furthered Bruce's efforts and set a new gold standard. He is a fine exegete.

---. *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel.* Intersity, 2001. Very helpful for my articles on John.

F. F. Bruce. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 6th ed. Eerdmans, 1981. From a superior scholar, the early gold standard, and short, too. A fifth edition can be read online.

D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament.* 2nd ed. Zondervan, 2005. Excellent introduction from a conservative point of view. For me, the arguments in favor of traditional conclusions, such as the authorship of the four Gospels, are stronger than against, thanks in large part to this book. Highly recommended. Both are fine exegetes.

Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd. *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Traditions.* Baker Academic, 2007. This has quickly become the best book on the historical reliability of the synoptic Gospels, but it can get very technical. Inexperienced readers may work their way through it after reading Roberts' book and my series, perhaps? However, note the next entry:

---. *Lord or Legend?* Baker, 2007. I discovered this belatedly. It's written for the laity. It's a clarification of their more academic book, noted in the previous entry. Definitely get this one.

Birger Gerhardsson. *Reliability of the Gospel Tradition.* Hendrickson, 2001. The best (and shortest) on the specific topic of the oral stage before the Gospels were finalized in their written forms. At first, his earlier works - some of which are summarized in this book - were not well received, but now the tide has turned.

Donald Guthrie. New Testament Introduction. 4th ed. Intersity, 1990. Very good introduction from a conservative perspective. Highly recommended.

Mark D. Roberts. "Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?" 2005. His blog series has been turned into a book.

---. Can We Trust the Gospels? Crossway, 2007. Start here and his blog to be introduced to the issues - along with my own series, perhaps? Roberts has been a pastor for a number of years, so he has a good "ear" for the laity. His book and blog is for them - for you.

Lee Strobel. The Case for the Real Jesus. Zondervan, 2007. I discovered this book belatedly. It is definitely worth getting. It is written for the laity. It will also lead you back to his earlier books, which are excellent. For students of the Old Testament - I have only glanced at these two books, since they do not relate directly to my series. But they appear to be excellent, not least because they are written by two superior Old Testament scholars who respect Scripture.

Walter Kaiser. The Old Testament Documents: Are they Reliable? Intersity, 2001.

K. A. Kitchen. On the Reliability of the Old Testament. Eerdmans, 2003. As for the Gnostic writings, go to the latest edition of the Nag Hammadi collection. Reading these texts will only confirm how different and outlandish they are compared with the four Biblical Gospels. My modest scholarly contribution, though not directly related to the historical reliability of the Four Gospels, is here:

Women, Class, and Society in Early Christianity: Models from Luke-Acts. Hendrickson, 1997.

I have also written three series that are intended to interlock and support this present one and others that I may write on the Bible.

New Testament Manuscripts:

Part One: The Basic Facts Part Two: The Right Stuff Part Three: Discovery and Classification Part Four: The New Testament Is Reliable Review of Bart D. Ehrman's Misquoting Jesus Miracles and New Testament Studies:

Part One: Miracles and New Testament Studies Part Two: Hume's Miracle Prison: How they got out alive Part Three: Fortifying Hume's Miracle Prison (2): Miracles and Historical Testimony Part Four: Miracles and the Laws of Nature Part Five: Do Miracles Happen Today?

Part Six: Miracles and New Testament Studies: Conclusion The two series, above, have been updated and posted at biblicalstudies.org.uk (look under Hosted Articles, and then Authors A-B). The third series is on Postmodernism and the Bible. The series seeks to explain why, in part, we have breathed in hyper-skepticism that influences our interpretations of the text, in a negative, destructive way. This series has been posted at americanthinker.com.

Part One: Postmodernism and the Bible: Introduction Part Two : The Origins of Postmodernism Part Three: Postmodern Truth Soup Part Four: Deconstruction: A Primer Part Five: The Deconstructed Jesus Part Six: The De-deconstructed Jesus Part Seven: Alternatives to Postmodern Hyper-Skepticism Part Eight: Postmodernism and the Bible: Conclusion

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