Reliability of the Gospels

Abe Canfield

Table of Contents

Introduction

Written During the Time Period Of Eyewitnesses

Mark

Matthew

Luke

John

Comparing With Other Ancient Antiquities and Religions

Motive for Lying?

Miraculous Growth of Christianity

Variants, Contradictions, Doctrinal Alterations?

More objections

With some notes taken from Michael Jones's and Stephen Boyce's Youtube series:
"The Reliability of the Gospels"

My Apologetics Website:
https://spectacularabe.wixsite.com/zapologia

Introduction

<><><><

no different than it is today--especially when we consider how small our time frame on this earth is for our current generation, as well as the small area of observation we occupy while we're on it. Given the books in the Bible were written by different people at different time periods, this would result in gaps of decades, even up to hundreds of years between certain miracles in the Bible as some periods indicate that no miracles were active during these gaps of time. For example, Deuteronomy 34:10-12 gives us somewhat of an idea during the second millenium:

"And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses...none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt..."

Since it's more likely that Moses would not have been writing a passage as if he was already dead, it's more than likely this was written by Samuel who lived more than 300 years later and where we are told that, "the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision" (1 Sam. 3:1).

Does this mean we should likewise believe a story with a flying carpet and a talking bunny rabbit? This would be a false analogy as all of these stories we *legit* refer to as fairytales never even claim to be true in the first place, let alone contain any sort of contextual support, historical or archaeological evidence as there is with the Bible, as we'll see.

Consider the following scenario…

Marty has always been a good-natured man and been one to stay away from trouble. His family admits that he wouldn't hurt a fly!

Now consider the extraordinary claim that Marty brutally murdered his wife. Would we need *extraordinary* evidence to prove his guilt? Say we have multiple witnesses who claim they saw him do it. Say we even have unlikely people, such as his closest friends, who either admit Marty was not elsewhere from his girlfriend at the time of the murder or that they saw him do it.

But how do we know this wouldn't be a conspiracy? There are several indicators.

1. Collusion is often a sign of conspiracy. If a handful of people were to invent a story, it is most likely we would find close to perfect harmonization and agreement in all their accounts. According to the "Judicial Council of California Criminal Jury Instructions" CalCrim Section 105, the jury is warned:

"Do not automatically reject testimony just because of inconsistencies or conflicts. Consider whether the differences are important or not. People sometimes honestly forget things or make mistakes about what they remember. Also, two people may witness the same event yet see or hear it differently."

So in light of this, say each witness explains their view of what happened with different details while maintaining the claim that he did indeed, murder his wife.

2. Say each witness is reliable in the fact that they are accurate in regards to real, verifiable locations and places and not just making up some fairytale place that cannot be observed.
3. Say the witnesses add to reliability in the fact that all or some of them admit embarrassing things about themselves when being questioned.
4. Say the witnesses are reliable in the fact that there is no motive for lying about the murder (no evidence pointing to any kind of grudge against Marty, or money/gain to be obtained in any way from the arrest).
5. Say there is no other theory that could reasonably demonstrate how Marty's wife died.

Would this evidence be enough to convince you that Marty really *did* murder his wife? What if I were to say that the evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus passes all of this criteria, and *more?* Let's have a look...

For more on these particular subjects, see:

Reality Confirms the Bible (“Evidence of Miracles”)

Evidence of God’s Existence

Evidence of the Resurrection

Written During the Time Period of Eyewitnesses

<><><><

appeals to Jeremiah's oracle of the temple's destruction (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-46), spoke of the coming desolation (Luke 23:28-31) and that temple worship would cease (John 4:21-23). The temple destruction is also alluded to in the parable of the marriage banquet (Matt. 22:2-13). So if the tradition was made up during or after the Jewish War, it would have been added to multiple passages that ended up in the canonical gospels.

No mention of fulfillment However, notice there is no mention by the synoptics authors of the destruction of the temple in 70 AD as having been *fulfilled* from Jesus's prophecy of the event. Though an argument from silence, this still coheres with the framework that, given the accounts make mention of many fulfilled prophecies (aka: "for it is written"[2]), the synoptic accounts were more likely written before that time or it would certainly have been mentioned. One notable example that Luke mentions was regarding a famine that was foretold by Agabus, a believer, and specifically mentions in the same sentence that it was fulfilled "in the days of Claudius" (Acts 11:28), implying this was written after the fact. Another example can be seen of Judas. Oftentimes when the authors mention Judas, they include that he was the one "who betrayed him [Jesus]" (e.g. Matt. 10:2-4, 26:25; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:16; John 6:71) also implying this was written after the fact. This is not what we see with the temple destruction prophecies.

Irrelevant references Further references to such things as the field that Judas hanged himself in that "everyone in Jerusalem heard about" (Acts 1:18-19) would have been irrelevant to a scattered Jerusalem population, as well as the importance of the temple tax (Matt. 17:24-27), proper temple sacrifice (Matt. 5:23-24) and swearing oaths at the altar (Matt. 23:16-72) after the temple itself had already been destroyed, but it makes sense had the temple destruction not happened yet.

Lacks precise correlation Notice the wording Jesus uses to describe the destruction in that "there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (Mark 13:1-2). This is unlikely to be a fabrication because, while it correlates generally, it doesn't correlate *precisely* with how the temple was destroyed. This isn't to say the prophecy was falsified as these are merely taken to be generalized themes in which he most likely spoke of hyperbolically, but the point is--had these sayings been fabricated--they most likely would have been more detailed, identical descriptions matching exactly what had happened. The author also writes that Jesus said, "Pray that it may not happen in winter" (Mark 13:17-18), though we know the event happened in *summer*. Nor did the people in Jerusalem "flee to the mountains" as Jesus had suggested, but as Eusebius writes, fled to a city in Perea.[3] Again, these details wouldn't make sense had the author been putting these things in Jesus's mouth after the fact, but make more sense if these sayings go back to the historical Jesus.

[2] E.g. Matt.21:4-5, Mark 14:48-49, Luke 4:21, etc.
[3] Eusebius, *Church History,* 3.5.3

Consistent with first-century Jewish thought foretelling the destruction of the temple before it happened was consistent with first century Jewish thought. A fragmented text from the Qumran caves seems to indicate the Qumran Jews of the time thought Jerusalem would be destroyed (4Q179, frag. 1 Col. 1). Josephus also mentions a man by the name of Jesus bin Ananias who similarly predicts a judgment, or "voice" against Jerusalem and the temple (*Jewish Wars,* 6.5.3). Paul likewise writes in his letters--years before the temple destruction--of a wrath from God upon the Jews for their persecution and rejection of Christ (1 Thess. 2:14-16) which ties in with God's promise of wrath on his people for disobedience in the Torah (Deut. 28:15-68; Jer. 4:13-14, 13:27).

Closer to Jewish roots Lastly, as time progressed, the church movement became predominantly Gentile and less focused on its Jewish roots. Placing the synoptics after 70 AD, or any of the gospels too far from the early-mid first century places the gospels in a time when Christians were disconnecting from their Jewish roots. As we'll see with the textual evidence of the gospels in the coming chapters however, the text points to traditions deeply rooted in Jewish culture, and thus, an early dating is more plausible.

Written before 64 AD (within 31 years after Jesus)

Pre-Roman persecution An important thing to note in the synoptics and Acts indicates they were written in a time before Roman persecution. According to Suetonius and Tacitus, Christians were persecuted under the Roman Emperor Nero, beginning in 64 AD. As we know the book of Revelation came after 70 AD and shows signs of underlying disdain towards Rome, referring to it as a "beast" while mentioning Christian persecution (Rev. 13:1, 13:7, 17:9, 2:10)[4] which indicates it was written during or after a period of Roman persecution. In the synoptics and Acts however, we see a friendlier attitude towards Roman authority figures. A centurion is said to have more faith than anyone in Israel (Matt. 8:10). Pilate believes Jesus is innocent and wants to set him free (Luke 23:4). A Roman soldier rescues Paul from dying at the hands of Jews (Acts 21:32) and another treats Paul kindly (Acts 27:3). A Roman centurion at the cross believes in Jesus as the Son of God (Mark 15:39). Rome is never considered a direct enemy or threat in the synoptics and Acts and focuses more on Jewish sects who opposed Jesus and the church before Rome followed suit. Additionally, the gospel of John comes after 70 AD and has a lack of passages painting Romans in a positive light, which is what we would expect had the Christians no longer wished to portray Rome as an authentic authority figure.

No mention of Paul's trial before Caesar Near the end of the book of Acts, there is a buildup of climactic events leading to Paul being in custody and set to stand trial before Caesar in Rome (Acts 27:24). However, Acts ends with Paul arriving in Rome on the statement that he lived there two years at his own expense with no mention of his trial

[4] Rome was the city on seven hills, which Revelation refers to as a beast.

or if he was released. In other words, the climatic buildup ends abruptly with no payoff. We also know that Porcius Festus became governor in 60 AD and was the one who sent for Paul to Rome soon after he became governor (Acts 24:27, ch.25-27). So if Acts ends with Paul still waiting a few years in Rome for trial, around 62 AD is probably when Acts was completed or the author would have written about his trial.

No mention of Paul's and James's martyrdoms More evidence lies in the ignorance displayed in the accounts pertaining to Paul's *martyrdom*, as well as James's which occurred most likely around 62 AD (as recorded by Josephus and early church fathers). Given martyrdoms of the church were certainly recorded in the NT accounts (Stephen and James the brother of John in the book of Acts), it seems inevitable the martyrdoms of two other prominent church leaders would have been recorded as well, unless they hadn't happened yet. Though Luke also never mentions the Caligula crisis when Caligula attempted to erect his statue in the temple, this makes more sense since it had no direct effect or correlation with the church.

One might mention Paul's telling of the Ephesians that none "will see my face again" (Acts 20:25, 38) is a reference to his death, but this is mere speculation with no real grounding. When someone says you will never see them again, this doesn't necessarily imply their death--just that they don't plan on coming back. Likewise with Paul, his mission was great and he had yet to spread the Gospel to Jerusalem, Rome and Spain.

Though some suggest a later dating based on similar, shared vocabulary between the author of Acts with Josephus, this alone is not enough to suggest literary dependence. As scholars also note, it's more likely that Luke-Acts and Josephus used similar sources. As G.J. Goldberg says, "Josephus and Luke may have used similar or identical sources in composing their passages. This explanation appears to be the simplest."[5] This is further shown in the passages where Josephus and Acts intersect in that they actually *contradict* each other, which is something we wouldn't expect to see had Luke been using Josephus. For example, they both mention the revolt of Theudas, but Luke dates the revolt to before Herod the Great's death while Josephus places it in the 40s.[6] I. Howard Marshall notes, "There is, therefore, much to be said for the suggestions either that Josephus got his dating wrong or (more probably) that Gamaliel is referring to another, otherwise unknown Theudas. Since there were innumerable uprisings when Herod the Great died, and since Josephus describes four men bearing the name of Simon within forty years…"[7] Revolutionary thinking was common in the periods leading up to the Jewish War so it's possible that there were two revolts where the leader had the same name. Luke also said there were around 400 followers while Josephus said "the majority of the masses" followed him, and his account is also much

[5] Goldberg, *The Coincidences of the Emmaus Narrative of Luke and the Testimonium of Josephus.* Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha, 7(13), 59-77
[6] Acts 5:36-38 cf. *Antiquities* 20.97-99
[7] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts,* 129

shorter.

Karl L. Armstrong notes further reasons why Luke using Josephus as a source is unlikely: “It seems rather negligent of Luke to avoid the tantalizing detail of Theudas as a ‘certain imposter’ by Josephus given his proclivity to denounce sorcery throughout Acts (i.e. Acts 8:9-25; 13:6-12; 19:17-20). Surely, Luke would not have missed this aspect of Josephus’s account of Theudas. [Also] if we follow the transcriptional canon that the more difficult reading is to be preferred, the Acts account is more likely to be earlier given the possible anachronism of Theudas and Judas…since the Acts account is unquestionably brief as compared to Josephus’s, the shorter reading is to be preferred. [Last] given Luke’s interest in rulers and political details in Acts, it seems rather negligent that he would skip over the note ‘when Fadus was procurator of Judea.’”[8]

Earliest creeds (within a few years after Christ)

Even if the gospels seem “late,” we should keep in mind that many of the epistles of the New Testament pre-date the gospels and attest to the message of the Gospel of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. As we know, James wrote the earliest epistle which scholars typically date to around 45-50 AD, and Peter and Paul’s epistles around 48-67 AD. Most scholars posit the first letter to the Corinthian church, most likely written by Paul, to be dated around AD 55-56. What's significant about this letter is the creed contained in 15:3-8 which claims the risen Christ having appeared to the apostles, Cephas (Peter), a former skeptic (James, brother of Jesus), the writer himself (v. 8) and over 500 witnesses. It reads:

“For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received—that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as though to one born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

The real kicker comes, though, when the author states that most of these 500 witnesses were "still alive" at the time, indicating that this specific claim was able to be *verified* by the reader of the time regarding the extraordinary growth and spread of believers and those who claimed to see. The creed was also said to have previously been "delivered" and "received," which can be traced back to Paul's meeting with Peter and James in Jerusalem three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18) indicating this was originally an *oral* creed that was passed on. As New Testament scholar Gary Habermas

[8] Karl L. Armstrong, *Dating Acts in its Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts,* 91-92

points out, most scholars believe this oral creed that dates right back to the Resurrection *itself*--within months to a few years after (note: the creed itself, not the Corinthian letter), but some say even earlier.

Even the letter itself was written around 55 AD, and as we know from historian Josephus, James died around 93-94 AD[9] and according to the earliest church fathers, Peter died around 64-67 AD,[10] which means they, as well as many of the claimed eyewitnesses would have still been around to falsify his claims had they been untrue. So if Paul had blatantly lied, how is it that his letters gained the circulation, duplication and spread the way they did had nobody actually witnessed the risen Christ as Paul claimed? Why would people spread information they knew was false, let alone suffer and *die* for it with zero gain had they known it to be a lie? To the contrary, Peter in his own writing affirms the authority of Paul's letters (2 Peter 3:15-16). The fact that his letters gained the approval that they did and that Christianity spread the way it did only makes sense had there been all these eyewitnesses to verify with and had his letters really been true.

In light of all this, Christian scholar William Lane Craig writes, "The tests show that even two generations is too short to allow legendary tendencies to wipe out the hard core of historical fact."[11] This still may not necessarily prove the reliability of the NT for certain but gives us an idea of the likely time period these documents were written. Given they appear to be within the time of the events, this increases the likelihood of eyewitness testimony and authenticity.

Going further, the tradition regarding the new covenant in Jesus's blood (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20) also goes back prior to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (so pre-55 AD) where he writes that he had received it:

"For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Cor.11:23-26)

The wording here closely resembles Luke, but not as much with Mark or Matthew, indicating that Paul and Luke drew from a tradition independent from Mark and thus providing early, multiple attestation.

Aside from these, scholars note that belief in early-resurrection is also revealed in many other pre-Pauline creeds (e.g. Romans 1:3-4, 4:24, 6:4, 7:4, 8:11, 10:9; 1

[9] *Antiquities,* 20.197-203
[10] 1 Clement 5:1-4; Letter to the Smyrneans 3:1-2; etc.
[11] William Lane Craig. *The Son Rises* [Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 101

Cor.6:14, 15:12, 15, 20; 2 Cor.4:14; Gal.1:1; Eph.1:20; Col.2:12; 1 Thess.1:10; Acts 3:15, 26, 4:10, 5:30, 10:40, 13:30, 33, 37, 17:31; 1 Pet.1:21; Phil.2:1).[12]

Next, the author of Luke presents a saying of some disciples from Emmaus, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" (Luke 24:34). What's notable with this saying is that it refers to the independent appearance to Peter, which isn't narrated in Luke's gospel. It also calls Peter by his birth name, Simon, which is dissimilar to how Luke himself typically refers to him (e.g. Luke 8:51, 22:8). In other words, this seems to be an early formula that Luke records, attesting to the resurrection.

Luke also records sermons attributed to early church leaders, like James, Peter and Paul, in the book of Acts (e.g. Acts 2:24, 3:15, 4:10, 10:39-40). Scholars have noted that many of these do not resemble the way that Luke typically writes and are likely to be original Aramaic speeches. For example, Luke typically renders "Peter" or "Simon Peter" in its Hellenized form (e.g. Luke 4:38, 5:8) but in a speech given by James, he switches to the Semitic form "Simeon" (Acts 15:14) which James would have most likely used, given he was a native Aramaic speaker. The speeches also lack influence from Pauline theology or vocabulary, contain a high degree of semitism, and lack resemblance to the original written elements of Acts and Luke.[13]

F.F. Bruce notes, "For an author who could write such idiomatic Greek as the Prologue to the Third Gospel, the Greek of some of the speeches in Acts is surprisingly awkward."[14] For example, in Peter's sermon to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:36), he adds, "It is not Luke's best Greek, but it can be turned word for word into grammatical and intelligible Aramaic."[15] In other words, the sermon appears to go back to an Aramaic original. C.H. Dodd explains, "When we further observe that most of the forms of the kerygma in Acts show in their language a strong Aramaic colouring, we may recognize the high probability that in these passages we are in fairly direct touch with the primitive tradition of the Jesus of history."[16]

Luuk Van De Weghe adds an interesting point. In comparison with other historians he says, "Josephus is much more likely to embellish narratives and to inflate figures than Luke is. Speeches in Acts, likewise, are much shorter and show less rhetorical licence than speeches among near-contemporary historians such as Lucian and Dionysius; Josephus, again, as a case in point, places a lengthy speech on the lips of Abraham as he is about to sacrifice Isaac, and this is based only on a few words in Genesis 22:8 [cf. Ant.1.13.3]. Luke also resists pairing speeches--the rhetorical creation by an ancient author of a debate-like scenario between two speakers--and he places appropriate language on the lips of speakers at appropriate times. (see for example, the

[12] Mike Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus,* 221-223
[13] C.H. Dodd, *Apostolic Preaching and its Developments,* 19-27
[14] F.F. Bruce, *The Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles,* 8-9
[15] ibid.
[16] C.H. Dodd, *History and the Gospel,* 73

correspondence between Peter's kerygmatic preaching in Acts, esp. 10:37-41, and the outline of Mark's Gospel)."[17]

Why not *more* written accounts?

In other words: If Paul claimed there were over 500 witnesses, would we expect more writings from all these witnesses?

1. Again, many people were illiterate and it was an oral culture. Wealth of material, technology, and education wasn't like it is today.

2. Even if they could write, this does not take into consideration that the average Joe would write a book or article on a significant event like, say, 9/11. How many people do you know that witnessed the plane crash in New York or on the news, who wrote a book or article about 9/11?

3. Even if they *did* write down what they saw, it is possible that their works were destroyed, or they simply did not survive.

4. With all of this in mind cumulatively, it's also likely that more accounts weren't necessary anyways with the growth and spread of the Gospel message and conversions to Christianity already, as even the early stages are noted to have experienced rapid growth (Acts 2:41, 47, 4:4, 6:1). This actually makes sense had there been all these eyewitnesses because the more witnesses, the more the word of mouth would have gotten out and spread faster.

We may not have documents from more of these people, but their inclusion with fourteen eyewitnesses identified by name makes their seeing the risen Christ an unlikely invention, given most of them were mentioned as having still been alive at the time for verification.

Why not write the gospels earlier?

Some may be skeptical of the time gap between the writing of events that happened 20-40 years ago. However, historians today write accurately about events in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s by consulting their own memories, those of other eyewitnesses, and any other written sources from the time. This is the same case when it comes to the New Testament. Although there was somewhat of a gap of years between the time of events and the date of writing, biographies aren't typically written until after the person of interest has passed, as well as the historical context being primarily oral in terms of traditions. We must consider several things:

The culture of the writers. Written material was not nearly as commonplace as it is today and many people were illiterate. Communication was primarily oral. Memorization, even of entire books, was common and natural for them. Evidence for this shows up in the

[17] Luuk Van De Weghe, *Living Footnotes in the Gospel of Luke,* 4

many short sections of the New Testament that appear to be creeds-compact sayings that could easily be remembered and that were probably passed along orally before they were put into writing (such as 1 Cor. 15:3-8). So it is reasonable to suggest that the disciples of Jesus were committing to memory what they heard from Jesus, especially the teachings which ended up in their biographies. Some events tend to stick with us based on their significance and impact in our life and this was most likely the case when it came to the many intriguing acts, wonders, and sayings of Jesus witnessed and heard by his followers.

The writers were not alone in remembering. Also, the authors of the New Testament accounts would not have had the burden of memory committed solely to themselves alone. The place and time period made it convenient for communities to get together that most likely had connections. Villages were filled with Jesus people in Judea and Galilee and immigrating throughout the Jewish Diaspora--lots of people pooling and sharing their stories and accounts of what they saw of Jesus.

The writers could have taken notes before composing. Bible scholar Craig Evans points out that ancient authors relied heavily on notes they took before composing a final, orderly account. As ancient writer Lucian of Samosata wrote, “[The historian] first makes them into a series of notes, a body of material as yet with no beauty or continuity. Then, after arranging them into order, let him give it beauty and enhance it with charms of expression, figure, and rhythm.”[18] Greek physician Galen writes, “The principal purpose of these notes, of course, is for reminding of what had been heard.”[19]

Jesus' sayings were poetic. New Testament scholar Craig L. Blomberg points out that 80 to 90 percent of Jesus' words were originally in poetic form. "This doesn't mean stuff that rhymes," he cautions, "but it has meter, balanced lines, parallelism, and so forth--and this would have contributed to remembering easier."

The Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Jesus says:

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26)

If God is all-powerful, then He most certainly has the ability to give the writers the remembrance of what He said to them, especially in matters concerning His Book for the salvation of mankind.

Time and distance. Time and distance forced the New Testament writers to write it down. As Christianity spread all over the ancient world, writing became the most efficient means to communicate with the rapidly expanding church.

---

[18] Lucian, *How to Write History,* 47-48; (c. 125-180 AD)
[19] Galen, *De indolentia,* 30

Jesus' Second Coming. Since some of the New Testament writers had high hopes of Jesus returning in their time, they probably, at first, saw no immediate need to write it down. But as they aged, perhaps they had thought it wise to record their observations.

Other historical examples. Aristotle for example has no biographical accounts until *centuries* after his death (Diogenes), who merely drew from his philosophical writings. Even contemporary writings made during his time (Theophrastus) were not biographical accounts, but general lecture notes on philosophical thought. No biographical accounts of Abraham Lincoln were written until 130 years after his death. Regarding Alexander the Great, all of the history we have on him is from non-eyewitness sources centuries removed from his lifetime. These sources drew from writings of eyewitnesses, but these writings no longer exist, just as some NT accounts drew from actual eyewitnesses to Jesus (Luke 1:1-4). Muhammad has no biographical accounts until 136 years after his death (Ishaq). Yet, we know the sources these biographies drew from were the oral traditions passed down from his companions.

Though the original New Testament documents did not survive, this still poses no problem on the original message of the Gospel because we have other sources that attest to the original Gospel message based on their writings and quotations of it.

Earliest non-biblical attestation of the Gospel

Aside from the biblical texts, we have secular writings of the time which attest to the early Christian movement, as well as the writings of the early church fathers who quoted from the New Testament.

Non-Christian sources (within 20-107 years after Jesus died):

Phlegon, non-religious (AD 80-140) is quoted by church father Origen in which he mentioned the Christians claimed "he [Jesus] arose after death, and exhibited the marks of his punishment, and showed how his hands had been pierced by nails."[20]

Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (AD 37-101) wrote about Jesus, "Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross."[21] About Jesus's disciples he wrote that: "They reported that he [Jesus] had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive."[22] Although it is generally agreed among scholars that the latter quote was slightly doctored up by a Christian interpolator, his father was a respected high priest named Matthias, which not only places Josephus in Jerusalem right at the time of the flourishing of the new Christian church going on there (according to the book of Acts), but he would have been in a family that would have been acutely aware of a new religious movement that was seen as a threat to Judaism. He was in Israel until he went over to the Roman side after losing to them in battle when Rome invaded Israel in AD 66. It's likely during these decades in Israel that

[20] Origen "Against Celsus," *The Ante-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 4
[21] Josephus, "Antiquities of the Jews" 18:3
[22] *Antiquities of the Jews,* 18.63;

Josephus heard about Christianity and Jesus through a vast network of contacts, and he may have even heard some of the apostles preach in person. Therefore, he is not writing purely based on hearsay.

Regarding one of these contacts, scholars have suggested that, based on their overlapping social and political networks during the Jewish Revolt, it's likely that Josephus would have known Ananus II who was the son of Ananus I who interrogated Jesus, as well as the brother-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest who condemned Jesus and turned him over to Pilate. Josephus writes extensively on Ananus II in *The Jewish War,* making him a likely, strong and significant source from whom Josephus had obtained information about Jesus and James.

Tacitus (AD 98-138) makes reference to a "mischievous superstition" that came about in Judea and spread throughout Rome by the Christians.[23]

Suetonius (AD 70-160) was a Roman historian who, in his biography of Nero, mentions persecution of Christians by indirectly referring to the resurrection, saying, "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."[24]

Pliny the Younger (AD 61-113) made reference to Christians that "they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day,"[25] which is what they did every Sunday in commemoration worship of the Resurrection.

Christian sources (within 62-200 years after Jesus died)

- Clement of Rome, in *1 Clement* (c. AD 95-96)
- Ignatius in his *Letter to the Smymeans* (c. AD 107-115)
- Polycarp in his *Letter to the Philippians* (c. AD 110-140)
- Justin Martyr in his *On the Resurrection* (c. AD 150-160)
- Clement of Alexandria AD 150-212, Tertullian AD 160-220, Hippolytus AD 170-235, Origen AD 185-253/254, Cyprian d. AD 258, and many others.

In fact, the entire New Testament, except for eleven verses, can be reconstructed just from their quotations of it.[26]

Even without the New Testament, the non-Christian sources are still enough to give us the gospel message. So let's pretend we didn't have the New Testament or other Christian writings. Even without them, what would we be able to conclude about Jesus from ancient non-Christian sources and secular historical accounts? With all of the non-Christian evidence, we can still conclude that Jesus was a Jewish teacher; that many people believed he performed healings and exorcisms; that some people believed he was the Messiah; that he was rejected by the Jewish leaders; that he was crucified

[23] Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44
[24] Suetonius, *Vita Nero* 16.11–13
[25] Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10.96.1–7
[26] For a list of the early church writings, see: earlychristianwritings.com/index.html

under Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius; that despite his shameful death, his followers, who believed he resurrected and was still alive, spread beyond Palestine so that there were multitudes of them in Rome by AD 64; and that all kinds of people from the cities and countryside-men and women, slave and free-worshiped him as God. This is enough for the complete gospel message.

See also: Evidence of the Existence of Jesus in Reality Confirms the Bible

Telephone game?

(Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus,* 81) Most of us know the children's game of telephone where a message is spoken in the ear of a person and gets passed on that way from one person to the other. When it reaches the last person in line, the message they proclaim turns out a bit different from the original message. Now some relate this to the transmission of the New Testament, but this is not a valid analogy and here's why:

1. Cross-checks among the various streams of transmission. Rather than having one stream of transmission, we have multiple streams. Suppose you were to interrogate the last person in, say, three lines. All of them repeat the message they heard in their own line, and that message ultimately goes back to one source. There would certainly be differences in the resultant message, but there also would be similarities. By a little detective work, you could figure out much of what the original message was by comparing the three different reports of it.
2. *Written* records rather than oral. Rather than dealing with an oral tradition, textual criticism deals with a *written* tradition. Now, if each person in the line wrote down what he heard from the person in front of him, the chances for garbling the message would be remote--and you'd have a pretty boring game!
3. The examination of early generations of copies. The textual critic, or the person trying to reconstruct what the original message was, does not have to rely on the last person in the chain. He can interrogate several folks who are closer to the original source.

No original Aramaic manuscripts?

Although the original NT writings did not survive, over 25,000 copies have (5,800 of which are in the original Greek language). The earliest copies date back to the late second century - fourth century (e.g. John Rylands fragment, Chester Beatty Papyri, the Diatessaron, Codex Vaticanus, etc.). Based on the abundance of manuscripts, we're able to piece the original message together more accurately. As NT scholar Bart Ehrman says, "Scholars are convinced that we can reconstruct the original words of the New Testament with reasonable (though probably not 100 percent) accuracy."[27] In addition, we have even earlier sources from non-Christians and the church fathers'

[27] Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings.* p. 443

quotations and writings that confirm the Gospel message of the original time period. For example, Tertullian, who lived during the late second century-third century, explicitly claimed the original, apostolic autographs were extant during his time and listed off the churches who had them. He challenged those who were in doubt of the New Testament manuscripts:

"Come now, you who would indulge a better curiosity, if you would apply it to the business of your salvation, run over the apostolic churches, in which the very thrones of the apostles are still pre-eminent in their places, in which their own authentic writings are read…" (*Against Heretics*, 36)

Even though Tertullian's commentaries of the New Testament in his writings is enough to show that the message is the same as the originals, we still today have numerous extant manuscript copies from his time period to likewise prove this.[28] Still for some, this raises the following question: Why are there no original manuscripts specifically in the spoken tongue of Jesus, Aramaic? Instead, our earliest manuscripts are in the *Greek* language. However, how do we even know Jesus spoke Aramaic in the first place? The *Bible!* (Mark 5:41; Mark 7:34; Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; Mark 14:36; Mark 7:11). Skeptics may claim the Greek manuscripts are not the "originals" while at the same time, point to *Greek* verses in the Bible to "confirm" this (excluding the specific words of Jesus' Aramaic speech of course).

We could even go as far as asking: How do we even know Aramaic was the primary language of the Jews in general? Because they learned Aramaic from the Babylonians after being taken captive by them. So if the Jews change language based on captivity influence, then aren't we to follow through with the same logical conclusion that they learned *Greek* after being taken captive by the *Romans?*

I can see where this objection would be a problem had there been no Greek influence anywhere in the middle east at the time of Jesus, but we have abundant proof that the Romans, who ruled over the Jews at the time, were a Greek-speaking people. Because of this, there's no doubt that many Jews would have learned the language as we're told that during the Maccabean period after Antiochus enrolled Jason as the high priest, the Jews were hellenized and assimilated into the Greek way of life (1 Macc. 1:11-15; 2 Macc. 4:7-17). This is also confirmed in other historical writings and inscriptions that go as far back as the fourth century BC. According to biblical scholar Stanley Porter, 68% of all of the ancient Jewish inscriptions from the Mediterranean world are in Greek and that in Judea, it's estimated that 55-60% of them are in Greek.[29]

---

[28] P52 containing John 18:31-33, 37-38; P104 containing Matthew 21; P90 containing John 18–19; P137 fragment of Mark; P46 containing a collection of Paul's letters, including Romans, Hebrews, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians; P66 contains a large portion of the Gospel of John; P75 contains parts of Luke and John; P45 contains portions of all four Gospels and Acts; P32 contains Titus; P77 & P103 are fragments of Matthew; P48 contains portions of Acts; Majuscule 0189 is the oldest vellum fragment of Acts

[29] S.E. Porter, *Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?*

Ostraca in the region of Masada were likewise discovered to be prevalent in Greek over Aramaic or Hebrew. Also to mention that Jerusalem's ruling council, the Sanhedrin, was a Greek title (from synedrion). We have proof that Jews were writing in Greek as far back as three centuries prior to Christ with the Septuagint, as well as Jewish historian Flavius Josephus in his works during the first century. As P.W. van der Horst notes, "The first impression one gains from these data is that Greek was the language of the great majority among the Jews in the Imperial period, probably of more than two-thirds of them."[30]

Regarding historical context in the Bible, we're shown that Jews to some extent, as well as the early church, were bilingual with Aramaic and Greek. For example, Paul communicates with a Roman soldier after being asked if he speaks Greek. Then when he addresses the Jews, "When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet." The fact that they were taken aback by this shows that he wasn't speaking Aramaic previously, but Greek (Acts 21:37-22:2). In another instance, Jesus speaks Aramaic while on the cross and some bystanders don't even understand him! (Matt. 27:46-49). We have an account where Jesus speaks to a Greek woman (Mark 7:24-30), a Roman centurion (Matt. 8:5-13), the Roman leader, Pilate (Matt. 27:11-26), as well as an occasion of Greeks speaking to Philip and Philip consulting Andrew (John 12:20-22), Philip and Andrew also being Greek names. It's implied elsewhere that the Jews were familiar with his Greek teachings when they ask, "Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?" (John7:35). The Jerusalem church is also said to have included Greek-speaking Jews called Hellenists (Acts 6:1).

What's interesting is that Jesus is only recorded to have spoken Aramaic on a small handful of different occasions. If he was always speaking in Aramaic though, why make a special case to preserve the Aramaic for these particular sayings? This makes more sense had Jesus taken turns with Greek, depending on his audience, throughout the gospels or there would be no reason to preserve only these particular sayings in the Aramaic tongue had he *always been speaking it already.* As Stanley Porter posits, "If Jesus regularly taught in Aramaic it is difficult to explain why St Mark adopted the curious practice of reproducing only some, and not all, of his sayings in Aramaic…One would think that the evangelist's reason for reproducing this particular selection of transliterations is that, contrary to his usual way, Jesus spoke in Aramaic on these occasions. The reason why is not so clear, but on some of them he may have been addressing individuals whose sole language was Aramaic."[31]

The fact that the New Testament authors chose to write in Greek makes sense in light of their mission to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles of which Greek was the primary, understood language of the time. Though it may be a stretch to say that Jesus spoke *more* Greek as regarding Mark's gospel in particular, scholars have actually

[30] P.W. vander Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs,* 22
[31] Porter, *The Language of the New Testament,* 182

noticed the strange wording in the Greek of Mark's gospel, in that it has traces of Aramaic-style syntax, showing that Mark was most likely translating many literal sayings of Jesus into Greek from the actual Aramaic. As Maurice Casey says, "passages such as Mark 1:39-43 and 11:15-17 show a large amount of parataxis, and verbs placed near the beginnings of sentences. While both these phenomena occur in crude and/or Semitising Greek, in true stories about events in Aramaic-speaking communities they are more likely to be due to the translation of Aramaic sources."[32] He continues elsewhere, "All this would be to no avail if Mark's Gospel were really Greek fiction, or if all of it had been so heavily edited that Aramaic sources were irrecoverable. We have found substantial and decisive evidence that parts of Mark's Gospel are literal translations of written Aramaic sources."[33] This is not something we would expect to see had the author intended to fabricate these sayings for if this was the case, he would merely write from his own language. It *is* however what we would expect to see if the church tradition regarding Mark is correct that he was relying on Peter who primarily spoke Aramaic and would have heard Jesus when he taught in Aramaic.

There's also good reason to believe that Greek was common in Galilee, where Jesus lived. Matthew referred to it as a land of Gentiles (Matt. 4:15). Greek was used in the court of Herod Antipas, as well as in the nearby cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias to which Jesus and the Jews would have shared in cultural interactions and trade. As H.C. Kee says, "This means that for Jesus to have conversed with inhabitants of cities in the Galilee, and especially of cities of the Decapolis and the Phoenician region, he would have had to have known Greek, certainly at the conversational level."[34] Though his primary language was most likely Aramaic, there's good reason to believe that he and many of the Jews were multilingual. As Stanley Porter concludes, "The archaeological, linguistic and sociological evidence seems to indicate that the region was multilingual, including at least Aramaic and Greek in widespread and frequent use…Therefore, the likelihood that Jesus, along with most Gentiles and Jews, was multilingual himself is strong."[35]

Regarding the conversation that Jesus has with his disciples at Caesarea Philippi, Porter notes the way the conversation is worded suggests it was originally spoken by Jesus in Greek (Matt. 16:13-20). The wordplay surrounding the name of Peter as the rock makes sense in Greek (Peter is "Petros", rock is "petra") as well as the terms for "binding" and "loosening" and "Hades."[36] He also notes the grammatical structure of this passage is dissimilar to the way Matthew typically writes, which suggests it was not made up by a Matthean redactor but goes back to the historical

---

[32] Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel,* 85
[33] Ibid. 254
[34] *The Galilee in Late Antiquity,* 21
[35] Stanley Porter, *The Language of the New Testament,* 27
[36] S.E. Porter, (2004) *Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research.* United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic. 147-163

Jesus himself.[37]

Peter J. Williams also suggests that some of the statements from the Sermon on the Mount may have originally been uttered in Greek: “The first four Beatitudes begin with alliteration of pi (the Greek letter p), while the famous expressions ‘poor in spirit’ (5:3), ‘thirst for righteousness’ (5:6), ‘pure in heart’ (5:8), and ‘persecuted for righteousness’ (5:10) all involve alliteration and assonance, which seem to suggest that Matthew portrays Jesus as teaching (on this occasion) in Greek.”[38] Matthew also reports that crowds came to hear Jesus from Galilee and Decapolis. Since crowds came from regions that heavily spoke Greek, it could very well be the case that Jesus the sermon in Greek. Greek even had such a heavy enough influence on the region that Aramaic began incorporating Greek lone words.

Another example can be found with Matthew chapter 6. Maurice Casey notes the word for “hypocrite” in Greek is better translated as “actor” as it fits better with the context referring to overtly observant Jews who desired to obtain praise from their onlookers, while the Aramaic word doesn’t show up until much later texts. He says, “The sharper force of ὑποκριταὶ also fits the dramatic imagery of Matt. 6.2, 5, which clearly refers to the sort of behaviour found in cities. We should therefore conclude that Jesus used this Greek word polemically.”[39]

[37] Porter, (1993). *Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?* Tyndale Bulletin
[38] Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* 108
[39] Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark’s Gospel,* 82

Mark

<><><><

Evans says, “The important point here is that memoirs are not anonymous; they are linked to known personalities.”[40] The claim, “those who followed them” also presents further consistency regarding Mark and Luke’s gospels who were not apostles but “followed them.”

Irenaeus (AD 185) In *Against Heresies* 3.1, Irenaeus writes, “After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter.”

Tertullian (AD 200) In *Against Marcion* 4.5, Tertullian writes, “While that [gospel] which Mark published may be affirmed to be Peter’s whose interpreter Mark was.”

Anti-Marcionite Prologue (AD 160-180) The Prologue says, “Mark recorded, who was called Colobodactylus 1, because he had fingers that were too small for the height of the rest of his body. He himself was the interpreter of Peter. After the death of Peter himself, the same man wrote this gospel in the parts of Italy.”

Clement of Alexandria (AD 195-203) In *Adumbrationes in Epistolas Canonicas* on 1 Peter 5:13, Clement writes, “Mark, the follower of Peter, while Peter was publicly preaching the Gospel at Rome before some of Caesar’s knights and producing many testimonies about Christ, being begged by them that they should be able to record what was said, wrote the Gospel which is called the Gospel of Mark, from the things said by Peter.”

Origen (AD 220-248) In Eusebius’s *Church History* 6.25.5, Origen says, “The second Gospel was that according to Mark, who wrote it according to Peter’s instructions.”

Papias (AD 60-130) In Eusebius’s *Church History* 3.39.15, Eusebius quotes Papias saying, “And the presbyter said this. Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities (of his hearers), but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord’s sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took special care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements.”

Papias having made this statement is not generally disputed but more so the identity of his source (aka: the “presbyter”). Even so, the fact that he already assumes a particular Mark, his relationship to Peter and that he already heard this from another person clearly implies a developed tradition by this point in time.

Peter’s epistles Peter’s epistles are said to have been by him (1 Peter 1:1, 2 Peter 1:1) and that he’d likewise claimed to have written at least two epistles (2 Peter 3:1). This same pattern as *through dictation* can be seen through another named individual,

[40] Craig Evans, *Jesus and the Manuscripts,* 10

Silvanus, of whom Peter claims wrote his first epistle by his dictation (1 Peter 5:12), which would explain the different writing patterns between his epistles as scholars have noted had Peter been using different brothers with the likes of Mark and Silvanus to write for him. Furthermore, in 2 Peter 1:16-18, the author states:

"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain."

As the gospels say, Peter was one of the disciples who had witnessed Jesus and the Father's voice on the mountain (Mark 9:2-13; Matthew 17:1-8; Luke 9:28-36).[41]

Evidence of Aramaic authenticity

Scholars have noticed the strange wording in the Greek of Mark's gospel, in that it has traces of Aramaic-style syntax, showing that Mark was most likely translating many literal sayings of Jesus into Greek from the actual Aramaic. As Maurice Casey says, "passages such as Mark 1:39-43 and 11:15-17 show a large amount of parataxis, and verbs placed near the beginnings of sentences. While both these phenomena occur in crude and/or Semitising Greek, in true stories about events in Aramaic-speaking communities they are more likely to be due to the translation of Aramaic sources."[42] He continues elsewhere, "All this would be to no avail if Mark's Gospel were really Greek fiction, or if all of it had been so heavily edited that Aramaic sources were irrecoverable. We have found substantial and decisive evidence that parts of Mark's Gospel are literal translations of written Aramaic sources."[43]

This is not something we would expect to see had the author intended to fabricate these sayings for if this was the case, he would merely write from his own language. It *is* however what we would expect to see if the church tradition regarding Mark is correct that he was relying on Peter who primarily spoke Aramaic and would have heard Jesus teach in Aramaic.

Casey posits no later than 40 AD for Mark's gospel,[44] and further points out that some of the passages that have Aramaic originals reflect the concerns of Jews about the details of the law.[45] This indicates Mark preserved traditions that go back to a rabbi

---

[41] The skeptic might object that the epistles are forged in Peter's name by a student of Paul to promote Paul's teachings (2 Peter 3:15-16). This is ad hoc--notice where Paul is mentioned. If the author's intention was to promote Paul's authority, then out of the whole eleven paragraphs of the letter, why is Paul mentioned briefly at the *end* of it? This isn't the behavior of someone who's main focus is to promote Paul.

[42] Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel,* 85

[43] Ibid. 254

[44] Ibid. 259

[45] Ibid. 167

in Judea and Galilee who was dealing with Pharisaic disputes, rather than traditions reflecting concerns of later Gentile Christians. Thus, due to the Jewish, Aramaic nature of these passages, there is good reason to believe that Mark's gospel, or the material in it, is very early.

What do I mean by "material in it"? Craig Evans points out that ancient authors relied heavily on notes they took before composing a final, orderly account. As ancient writer Lucian of Samosata wrote, "[The historian] first makes them into a series of notes, a body of material as yet with no beauty or continuity. Then, after arranging them into order, let him give it beauty and enhance it with charms of expression, figure, and rhythm."[46] Greek physician Galen writes, "The principal purpose of these notes, of course, is for reminding of what had been heard."[47] In other words, Mark would have most likely written Aramaic notes during some of Peter's sermons before writing his Greek gospel.

Accuracy with Jewish customs

Jesus's fringe In 6:56, we're told that Jesus had a "fringe" of his garment. This fits in with the tradition in the Hebrew scriptures regarding the wearing of tassels on clothing (Numbers 15:38-39; Deut. 22:12).

Leper laws After healing a leper, Jesus sends the man to a priest and after, dwells in the wilderness to separate himself (1:44-45). This fits with Jewish purity laws in the Torah regarding repurification after touching a leper (Lev. 13-15).

Sabbath laws In some places, the Pharisees accuse Jesus and his followers of plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath (2:23-28). This is rooted in Jewish custom as we see in the Jewish Talmud in places which records the rabbis disputing what was lawful to do to obtain food on the Sabbath. As Maurice Casey says, "The dispute recorded in Mk 2.23-24 is very intra-Jewish."[48] Thus, it's unlikely a later Gentile Christian would have been familiar with such customs and written such a story.

Food and dishes The Pharisees accuse Jesus and his followers for eating food without washed hands, and Jesus mentions the Jewish custom regarding the washing of dishes (7:1-23). These practices are recorded in Jewish legal texts, as biblical scholar James Crossley says, "Mark's description of purity laws is an accurate portrayal of a Jewish practice…the presentation of Jesus in Mk 7.1-23 should be read wholly in the context of intra-Jewish halakhic disputes and this includes the controversial statement in Mk 7.19 declaring all foods clean."[49]

Capernaum's locale Mark records a whole group of tax collectors in Capernaum (2:15).

---

[46] Lucian, *How to Write History,* 47-48; (c. 125-180 AD)
[47] Galen, *De indolentia,* 30
[48] Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel,* 162
[49] James G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark's Gospel,* 204

This would be expected if one knew the area, as Capernaum was situated at a strategic point on the northern end of the Sea of Galilee and an important location for collecting taxes on what crossed the border of Herod Antipas's territory. Though a minor detail, this is what we would expect to find if Mark was working with eyewitnesses.

Jewish developmental usage of "Hosanna" Crowds praised Jesus as "Hosanna in the highest" (11:10). This is reminiscent of the Jewish scriptures in the Psalms where Hosanna means "to save," and later, used to express celebration. As scholar Peter Williams says, "This shift of the meaning of hosanna shows up in later Jewish sources. Thus, the writer shows knowledge not only of this word's use by Jews at a particular time but also of its development over time."[50]

Additionally, the word has a different form from that of the original Hebrew. Williams says, "the omission of the *i* sound represents a linguistic change over time, reflecting the Hebrew at the time of the New Testament, not when the psalm was written. The Gospel writers have the word exactly as it was pronounced in the first century even though this is not the sort of knowledge any author could obtain simply by consulting books."[51]

Political landscape of the religious community Mark accurately records the scribes as a distinct class from the Pharisees and Sadducees (7:1-5). The scribes are also said to come up to Galilee from Jerusalem (3:22), which is accurate in terms of group distinctions and where the scribes were headquartered. The term "scribe of the Pharisees" (2:16) is portrayed as someone who was an intellectual leader of the Pharisees. Mark also implies the Sadducees as absent in Galilee (ch.12) which corresponds to what we know about the time and region. He also differentiates between "elders," "chief priests," and "teachers of the law" (8:31, 10:33, 11:18, 11:27, 14:1, 14:10, 14:43, 14:55, 15:1-3, 15:10-11, 15:31). These distinctions ceased to exist after 70 AD, as we're told, "What makes this impressive, as [Martin] Hengel notes, 'After 70 this whole pluralistic political and religious landscape, which Mark depicts quite accurately in broad outline, was destroyed.' The fact that he gets it right, and does so in detail, seems to suggest that an A.D. pre-70 dating is more reasonable than an A.D. post-70 dating."[52]

Early censorship of certain names

NT scholars, such as Gerd Theissen, note that when we get to the Passion narrative in the synoptics, many of the individuals surrounding Jesus's arrest and trial are unnamed. For example, we don't know the name of the man who cut off the ear (14:47) or the one who fled naked (14:51-52). Theissen posits, "It seems to me that the narrative motive for this anonymity is not hard to guess: both of them (had) run afoul of the 'police'...Both these people were in danger in the aftermath. As long as the high priest's slave was

[50] Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* 84
[51] Ibid.
[52] Gregory A. Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God?* 240

alive (and as long as the scar from the sword cut was visible) it would have been inopportune to mention names; it would not even have been wise to identify them as members of the early Christian community. Their anonymity is for their protection, and the obscurity of their positive relationship with Jesus is a strategy of caution. Both the teller and the hearers know more about these two people."[53] As we know, by the time we get to John's gospel we are told it was *Peter* who cut off the ear (John 18:10).

As Richard Bauckham notes, other figures are also left anonymous who help with Jesus's triumphant entry (Mark 11:2, 14:3, 14:13) and could have been considered co-conspirators in attempting to make Jesus king. He also notes this to be the reason why the story of Lazarus may have been left out of the synoptics for *his* protection as well.[54] As we know, these details are explicitly named and mentioned in John's gospel (John 12:3, 18:10). This suggests that the synoptics were written early on when the church still needed to protect those close to Jesus's mission, as Thiessen posits between 30-60 AD.[55] There's no other literary reason why these people would have been left unnamed, given how central they are to the story.

Onomastic congruence

The names of people used in the gospels align well with the commonly known names from that period, known as onomastic congruence. Since Simon was one of the most popular names for a man from Judea in the first century, and Mary for a woman, we would expect a history of Judea during that time to contain people who were named Simon or Joseph, with unpopular names like Matthew or Annas appearing much less. And not only that, but also adding a descriptor to the name (e.g. "Simon the Zealot" Mark 3:18, "Simon of Cyrene" Mark 15:21, "Simon the leper" Mark 14:3, "Simon Peter" Mark 3:16) and for women ("Mary mother of James" and "Mary Magdalene" Mark 15:40, and "Mary mother of Joses" Mark 15:47) while leaving unpopular names as is (e.g. "Zacchaeus" Luke 19:2).

As Luuk van de Weghe says regarding onomastic congruence, it contains:

- 1. A relatively significant number of appropriate proper names.
- 2. A relatively increased level of detail in proper names.
- 3. Patterns of proper names reflecting 'the situation on the ground.'

He says, "Seldom will a non-historiographical work surveyed in our study contain any one of these three features; it never contains all three."[56] Aside from the gospels, the only biographies attaining onomastic congruence were Josephus's autobiography, Plutarch's *Lives,* and Suetonius's *Twelve Caesars.* Though he notes that lacking onomastic congruence doesn't necessarily mean a work is not historical or reliable, if a

[53] Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context,* 186-187
[54] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses,* 183-201
[55] Theissen, 188-189
[56] Luuk van de Weghe, *Living Footnotes in the Gospel of Luke,* 32-33

work does achieve it, it strengthens its overall reliability. He also notes that, while Josephus, Plutarch and Suetonius would have been able to consult archives, Mark would not have had any archives to consult with on the life of Jesus, and thus, his account would only make sense if he had really consulted with eyewitnesses to Jesus's ministry.

Inclusio of Eyewitness

Mark uses a literary device called "inclusio of eyewitness" where one refers to their primary eyewitness source at the beginning and end. In this case, Mark opens by referencing Peter as one of the first encounters of Jesus (1:16), and likewise ends with reference to Peter (16:7). We see this same pattern in other biographies:

- Lucian, in *Life of Alexander,* has a reference in the beginning to someone named Rutilianus (ch. 4), he mentions him throughout, and at the end (ch. 60). As Bauckham points out, "Just like the Petrine inclusio in the Gospel of Mark, Rutilianus is both the first character in the story, apart from Alexander, to be named and the last to be mentioned by name."[57]
- In Plotinus's *Life of Plotinus,* he opens by naming Amelius, his disciple (ch. 1). Apart from Plotinus and Porphyry, Amelius is mentioned the most and the last to be named in the biography (ch. 22).

Peter is also the most referenced individual in Mark's account:

- We see Peter as the one speaking on behalf of all the disciples (10:28, 11:21-22, 14:37).
- Peter's perspective is given more detail in comparison to other disciples (8:27-33, 9:5-6, 14:27-30).
- Peter's motives are disclosed to the reader (9:5-6)--something Mark could have only known had he heard from Peter himself.
- Peter is physically removed from other disciples and his story is told apart from the others (14:54-72).
- Peter understanding or having a misunderstanding often sets the tone for the narrative.
- Peter makes one of the greatest proclamations of the person of Christ, only to be called "Satan" by Jesus a few statements later due to his ignorance (8:29-33).
- Peter makes the bold proclamation of loyalty above all the other disciples (14:29).
- Peter denies Christ altogether (14:66-72).
- At the end, Peter is singled out from the disciples (16:7) though he himself was a disciple. This mirrors other common writing styles that singled out eyewitness sources (Laelius - Polybius 11.33.8).

[57] Ibid. 124-127

Bauckham says, “Mark’s Gospel not only, by its use of the inclusio of eyewitness testimony, claims Peter as its main eyewitness source; it also tells the story predominantly (though by no means exclusively) from Peter’s perspective.”[58]

The mention of other names as reliable tradents

Scott McNight notes in rabbinic texts, lists of disciples come with elaborations of their piety and legacy,[59] but that same dynamic is absent in the gospels regarding the twelve disciples of Jesus (Mark 3:16-19), showing no real narrative importance. Most of the disciples don’t even say anything or play a prominent role in Mark. This shows that the only reason they would have been mentioned is merely to preserve an authentic list of tradents who were responsible for passing on the information Mark obtained.[60]

Luuk van de Weghe also notes regarding the list of the twelve in Mark 3:16-19, “The authorial perspective clearly considers James the more prominent disciple, even qualifying John as ‘the brother of James’ (1:29, 3:17, 5:37) despite John’s rise to prominence after the death of James around 44 CE (cf. Gal 2:9).”[61] It’s unlikely it would have been worded this way had it been a later tradition after the death of James, given John’s rise to prominence thereafter. Matthew and Luke who came after Mark are also noted to have dropped this title for John (Matt. 10:2-4; Luke 6:12-16).

When Peter is dropped out of the narrative due to his absence from certain events by chapter 15, Mark includes other names to likely indicate his familiarity with them as eyewitness testimony. He names the women who witnessed and “saw” the death of Jesus and the empty tomb (15:40, 15:47, 16:1-7) and Simon the Cyrene who carried the cross for Jesus (15:21). He even adds that Simon was “the father of Alexander and Rufus,” which serves no purpose aside from naming reliable tradents who could confirm his story. Interestingly enough, it’s possible that Mark knew of Simon of Cyrene through his son Rufus while in Rome. As mentioned earlier, church father Clement of Alexandria had said that Mark was with Peter in Rome where many had urged him to write his gospel,[62] yet we also find, according to Paul in his letter to the Romans, that a “Rufus” was there in Rome (Romans 16:13). So it’s likely Mark mentions Alexander and Rufus because they were in Rome as well and could confirm the eyewitness testimony of their father and he expected many of his readers to know of them.

A case could be made for the numerous other names mentioned along with their descriptors, with the likes of Mary “Magdalene,” Mary “the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome,” and Joseph “of Arimethea,” (15:21, 15:40, 15:43, 16:1, etc.)

---

[58] Bauckham, 179
[59] e.g. Mishnah Pirkei Avot 2.8-14, cf. b. Sanhedrin 43a
[60] See: Scott McNight, (2001). *Jesus and the Twelve.* Bulletin for Biblical Research 11.2 203n1
[61] Luuk van de Weghe, 50
[62] Clement of Alexandria in *Adumbrationes in Epistolas Canonicas* on 1 Peter 5:13; also quoted in Eusebius’s *Church History,* 6.14.6-7

which is something we wouldn't typically see from someone who is inventing a story but instead, one who is writing a reliable biography because one would need to reference eyewitnesses and reliable tradents to confirm his report.[63] We find such biographical writing patterns reminiscent of the ancient world:

- In Plutarch's *Life of Caesar* chapter 32*,* he details Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon "voicing his doubts to those of his friends who were with him (who included Asinius Pollio)." There's no literary evidence that Asinius Pollio was present, other than that Plutarch was informing his audience that this was the eyewitness account he utilized to write accurate information about Caesar. As Christopher Pelling says, "The naming here almost serves as a source-citation."[64]
- Cornelius Nepos writes in *Life of Atticus* 21.4 that Atticus was dying and decided to end his life by starving to death. He wrote, "he gave instructions for his son-in-law Agrippa to be summoned, and Lucius Cornelius Balbus and Sextus Peducaeus along with him." Richard Bauckham notes that Balbus and Peducaeus play no role in the account but were likely included to function as witnesses to the event.[65]
- Josephus, in *Jewish War* 4.81-82, records the capture of the Jewish city of Gamla. He says, "Not a soul escaped save two women; these were nieces, on the mother's side, of Philip, son of Jacimus, a distinguished man who had been commander-in-chief to King Agrippa." Baukham notes, "Why does Josephus give this information about the nieces of Philip? Since readers of the War know little about Philip, the fate of two obscure members of his family would not seem to be notable enough to be mentioned for its own sake. The reason Josephus refers to the nieces is surely to identify them as the eyewitness sources on which (directly or indirectly) his narrative of events in Gamla during the siege was based."[66]

Undesigned coincidences

Among the evidence of Mark's independence also lies in the undesigned coincidences, or small details that unintentionally fill in plot holes from the other gospels and vice versa so that the fourfold Gospel narrative fits together like pieces of a puzzle. These differences from the other accounts attest to his authenticity while at the same time, show that he did not draw from them, supporting the notion that these differences were merely drawn from the memory of eyewitnesses. Here are a few examples regarding Mark:

Green grass and large crowds Mark's gospel mentions at the feeding of the 5,000 that the people sat on "green grass" and that, "so many were coming and going they had no

[63] See: Luuk van de Weghe, 30-31
[64] in *Plutarch on the Outbreak,* 319n10
[65] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses,* 533-534
[66] Ibid. 531

time to eat" (Mark 6:39, 6:31). Grass in the region of Judea was usually brown, so how was it green? John's account, however, mentions this took place near Passover (John 6:4). At the time of Passover, it's spring, so this explains the grass being green. Passover was also a time of pilgrimage for the Jews, which explains the hustle and bustle. This also might explain why only John's gospel mentions the boy with barley loaves in verse 9, since barley harvest occurred at Passover.

Time-stamps to Passover John records that Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before Passover, then the triumphal entry into Jerusalem happened five days before Passover (John 12:1-2, 12:12-13). Mark likewise records these events, though without time-stamps or mention of Passover (Mark 11:1-11), then says that the day after his entry, Jesus curses the fig tree and storms the temple (Mark 11:12-19), meaning, according to John's gospel, these things would have fell on *four* days before Passover. The next day, which would be *three* days before Passover, Jesus and the disciples see the withered fig tree and Jesus debates with the Jews in the temple (Mark 11:20-44). The next event that follows is the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:1-3) which likely occurred at sunset, en route to Bethany (John 12:1-1), and afterwards, Mark gives his first time-stamp in correlation to Passover, saying it was now "two days before the Passover" here (Mark 14:1), thus, showing a coherent line-up between Mark and John in chronology of events.

Miracles in Bethsaida In Matthew 11:21, Jesus rebuked a town called Bethsaida for their unbelief despite his miracles, yet we're given no pretext that Jesus had ever gone to Bethsaida and done works there. However, we find this in Mark where he is said to have gone to Bethsaida and healed a blind man (Mark 8:22-26; Luke 9:10).

Criteria of embarrassment

Mark contains embarrassing details about Jesus and the church founders. This is not what we would expect to see from an author who intends to fabricate since it paints all the founders in a bad light. Given this, one most likely would not admit such details unless it were the truth. For example, people Jesus knew from his hometown take offense at him and reject him (Mark 6:3). Even his family is said to call him out of his mind (Mark 3:21). Jesus is accused of having a demon (Mark 3:22). He is accused of breaking the Sabbath (Mark 2:24). A moment of weakness is recorded where we see Jesus asking the Father if it be possible to remove the burden of his crucifixion (Mark 14:36).

The apostles are presented as dim-witted and slow to understand Jesus at first (Mark 9:32). They fall asleep on Jesus twice when he asks them to pray (Mark 14:32-41). On top of that, they make no effort to give their friend a proper burial, but instead record that a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin-the people who sentenced Jesus to his death--took the matter of burial into his own hands (Joseph of Arimathea; Mark 15:43-47). They are cowards--all the disciples hide but one when Jesus goes to the

cross. Peter even denies him three times after explicitly promising, "I will never disown you" (Mark 14:29-31, 14:66-72). Meanwhile, as the men are hiding for fear of the Jews, the brave women stand by Jesus and are the first to discover the empty tomb (Mark 16:4-8).

Jesus foretells his death and resurrection on numerous occasions (Matthew 12:39-40, 16:21-23; 17:22-23, 20:17-19; 26:1-2, 32; Mark 8:31-33, 9:30-32, 10:32-34; Luke 9:21-22, 9:43-45, 18:31-34; John 2:19-22; etc.).[67]

On one occasion, something interesting happens:

"And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.'" (Mark 8:31-33)

The disciples were originally *against* the idea of a crucified Jesus and when Jesus foretells his death and resurrection here, Peter rebukes him, to which Jesus replies by calling Peter "Satan." If this was fabricated, why would the apostles include a story that casts themselves in an oddly, negative light, being opposed to the very idea that they likewise "fabricated" and subsequently called "Satan"? Maurice Casey says, "Neither Peter rebuking Jesus, nor this serious criticism of Peter would be found in Mark's Gospel if this did not represent approximately what happened."[68]

Aside from Mark, this same episode and saying is multiply attested in the parallels of Matthew and Luke (Matt.16:21-23; Luke 9:21-22). Scholars also note the language in Matthew's context for example, "Simon Barjona," "flesh and blood," "will not overpower the kingdom of heaven," (Matt.16:13-23) are Semitic elements inline with the criterion of cultural and historical congruency.[69]

In addition to all of this, the prediction meets the criterion of dissimilarity in that it is unlikely to have been invented by later Christians. This is indicated by Jesus's application of the title, "Son of Man" for himself. As we know, this is not a title that the later church used to describe Jesus. Craig Blomberg states, "Another substantial portion of the Gospel tradition widely accepted as authentic, at least in part, is the collection of sayings in which Jesus refers to himself as the Son of man. This expression is never used elsewhere in the earliest Christian literature except on the lips of Stephen just before he is stoned to death (Acts 7:56). It occurs in the Old Testament as a messianic title only in Daniel 7:13, and its meaning in intertestamental documents varies greatly, being applied for example to both Enoch and Melchizedek."[70]

---

[67] See: https://prnt.sc/RoVqWFwUa36Fhttps://prnt.sc/RoVqWFwUa36F
[68] Maurice Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth,* p.378
[69] Hans F. Bayer, *Jesus' Predictions of Vindication and Resurrection,* 183-187
[70] Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels,* 314

Jesus predicting his own death is also plausible with the surrounding context in that he had already garnered the attention of many who had wanted him dead and attempted to end his life prior to the crucifixion and that he had claimed that Jerusalem was known for killing the prior prophets (Luke 4:28-30, 22:2; John 10:31-33, 11:45-57, Mark 12:1-12; Matt. 23:29-39, 26:3-5). David Wenham explains, "Against this it may be argued that there is every probability that Jesus would have anticipated his own death. He knew John the Baptist and what had happened to him; he knew the dangers of leading popular religious movements in Roman-occupied Palestine; he could have foreseen his death, even without any supernatural insight."[71]

Furthermore, most, if not all of these predictions lack theologizing from the early church. At best, Jesus merely states that he will be crucified and rise on the third day to fulfill the scriptures--no evidence of a theological agenda attached.

One also finds it unlikely that he would merely predict his death without some form of vindication like the resurrection coming out of it. After all, we know he believed that his mission was significant, that the kingdom of God was at hand and that he was the fulfillment (Mark 1:14-15; Matt. 4:17, 5:17). But this leads to the question: When Jesus rose, why were the disciples initially in denial if this was to be *expected* (Luke 24:10-11; John 20:24-29)? One could actually argue that this *strengthens* the case on account of the criterion of embarrassment and that the church leaders are exposed for their early flaws in understanding Jesus. After all, people aren't always rational, *especially* during emotional trauma. This, in a way, makes sense because the disciples had grown a close bond with Christ and would most likely have experienced a form of this. I would be more skeptical of the Gospel narratives had it been written that everyone was perfectly confident and prepared without any hint of confusion or flaw, not the other way around.

This is also to consider the fact that a murdered Messiah was at odds with the general Jewish concept that he would come as a victorious warrior, freeing his people from the worldly powers at hand and prevailing over them. It would have been tantamount to working for a presidential candidate who, despite all of his popularity, claimed that he would lose the election. You most likely wouldn't take him seriously, or that he was utilizing a psychological tactic to trick his opponents. Likewise, a dying and rising Messiah saving the world from Satan through his death and resurrection was unlike anything a Jew would have expected at the time. We clearly see this indicated in the repeated narratives that the disciples "did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him" (Mark 9:31-32, etc.). So it's plausible that they were fixated on this mindset and were not able to break out of it initially.

In conclusion, Jesus predicting his death and resurrection meets the criterion of embarrassment, dissimilarity, historical and cultural congruence, plausibility, early attestation, and multiple attestation, thus providing a strong case that these are sayings

[71] David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* 139

authentically attributed to the historical Jesus. As Mark Waterman says, “The majority of scholars, therefore, see Jesus’ prediction as a genuine primitive tradition free from the post-Easter proclamation of the early church.”[72]

No embellishment

There is no embellishment with the gospels--something we would certainly notice had it been invented. Consider the rejected apocryphal work, the Gospel of Peter, which describes the resurrection with a large crowd gathering around the tomb, the heavens opening, the stone rolling away by itself and out coming an exceptionally large Jesus with two exceptionally large angels--of whom their heads reached heaven--and a cross that speaks! On the other hand, the gospels in the Bible tell us some women arrived at the tomb first, met an angel or two there (one of whom moved the stone himself), and that the body of Jesus was already gone (Mark 16:4-8; Luke 24:2-8; John 20:1-12; Matthew 28:2-7) and that he appeared to the disciples later on. If this is to be a mere fairy tale, it would seem like the author lacks a bit in the excitement factor.

Is Mark’s ending a “later addition”?

Mark’s ending regarding Jesus’s reappearance to the disciples (Mark 16:9-20) is commonly pointed out as a “later addition” to the text and even to some, as evidence of “corruption.” However, there’s historical evidence that this tradition existed prior to Codex Alexandrinus in 400 AD, its earliest appearance in today’s manuscript tradition. For example, it’s quoted by Irenaeus (AD 185; v.19 in *Against Heresies* 3.10.5), Justin Martyr (AD 155-160; vv.18-20 in *First Apology* 45), Tatian in the *Diatessaron* (AD 170; sec.53, 54, 55), and the *Epistula Apostolorum* (AD 160; v.15 and v.17 in ch.30; v.16 and John 20:23 in ch.42) prior to the earliest extant manuscripts to which it appears (Codex Alexandrinus in AD 400s).

Based on all of this, we could posit this was still part of the earliest tradition. We could say that a few texts without this ending were used and that a few texts with this tradition were used up to the time where it was copied onto the gospel manuscripts on stronger material and that the originals didn’t survive to today, in which case this would be seen as *keeping* these passages in scripture and would, if anything, *fulfill* Bible verses regarding preservation all the more rather than go against them.

Even granting all these passages not to be canon, let’s pretend these additions never happened and don’t exist--what are we left with now? We’re still left with a Gospel that teaches the death and resurrection of Christ, as well as all of his sayings that we point to that reference his divinity and the Trinity. The point being made: even without these additions we still don’t have a different Gospel, but the biblical Gospel. Those who want to claim that the Gospel message has been changed over time from the originals must present evidence of a manuscript(s) or tradition that tells us a different Gospel

[72] Mark Waterman (2006). *The Empty Tomb Tradition of Mark,* 196

message and at the same time, predates our earliest sources. No such manuscript or tradition has ever been found.

Contradictions and errors?

John the Baptist's execution. In Mark, King Herod Antipas's birthday banquet is held for "the chief men of Galilee" (Mark 6:21). We are told that during the festivities, Herod had John the Baptist beheaded and his head brought to the party (Mark 6:27). However, historian Josephus records that John the Baptist was being held in Macharerus, Herod's southern fortress over 100 miles away from his Galilean headquarters.[73] What this objection overlooks is that the author of Mark never specified the location of the banquet, merely the attendants. It's entirely possible that the men of Galilee traveled south to celebrate the king's birthday. As Richard Bauckham says, "The leading men of Galilee…whatever their real sympathies, would be obliged to honor the tetrarch by attending his birthday celebration."[74] This is also plausible in light of the fact that Herod had been at war with the King of the Nabateans and would have needed to remain at his southern fortress, which also makes sense that a military officer would carry out the execution since this was in a military fortress.

From Tyre to Sidon? Jesus is said to have traveled from the region of Tyre through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee in the region of the Decapolis (Mark 7:31). On a map, Sidon is north of Tyre and the Sea of Galilee is southeast of Tyre. Why is Jesus going out of his way to get to the Sea of Galilee? What this objection overlooks is that the 1,200 meter elevation of Mount Meron would have made for a significant obstacle due to its position between Tyre and the Sea of Galilee. Heading north through Sidon would have actually made more sense because it provided a place to rest and eat and there is a path that takes you around the mountain right to the Jordan River for water. Instead of an actual error, Mark presents us with a case that he actually understands Palestinian geography better than modern skeptics.

The smallest seed? Critics might accuse Jesus of being in error in one of his parables where he claims the mustard seed as the smallest seed (Mark 4:30-32; Matt. 13:31-32), which to some, is especially problematic if he's supposed to be a prophet, let alone *the all-knowing God himself*. As we know today, there are smaller seeds, such as the orchid seed.

What gets overlooked here is that Jesus had qualified the seed with the smallest seed "sown in the ground." The orchid seed is not typically sown in soil--that's the difference because they are too small and lack stored food (endosperm) so they cannot sprout on their own. We also have to keep in mind that Jesus often spoke using terms and customs familiar to the people of that region, especially the Jews. The black mustard seed was among the smallest seeds commonly sown by farmers in that region

[73] *Antiquities* 18.5.2
[74] Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Woman,* p.139

and commonly used in proverbs at that time to represent the smallest possible thing. The primary purpose of the parable was to teach a spiritual lesson about the growth of the Kingdom in terms of a smallest-to-biggest transformation dynamic. The mustard seed would have been a good example for this since it *was* the smallest seed used by farmers, yet sprouted into the biggest plant.

Take or keep a staff? In Mark, Jesus advises his disciples to take nothing except a staff and sandals (Mark 6:8-9) while Matthew and Luke appear to say to take nothing *including* a staff and sandals (Matt. 10:9-10; Luke 9:3). The issue is erased when we see each of the authors' own personal understanding of the word "take" and by looking at how they generally apply it in other areas. As we see, Matthew speaks in regards to *acquiring* a staff and sandals ("ktaomai"), meaning to take no staff *that isn't already in your possession.* Luke uses a different word for "take" ("airó") which is the same Greek word Mark uses, but Luke often uses this word in the sense of *acquiring* like Matthew (e.g. Luke 6:29, 17:31, 11:22, 52, 19:24, 26, 23:18).

Doesn't this still contradict Mark since Mark has Jesus saying to take *nothing else* yet, in this case, Matthew and Luke would mean they could bring other things "already in their possession"? This assumes that, aside from sandals and a staff, the disciples had other possessions on hand in the first place--which most likely wasn't the case. In first-century Judea and Galilee, traveling light was a practical reality for ordinary laborers and itinerant preachers. They did not own heavy luggage or spare luxury items. So in other words, Mark, Matthew and Luke all have Jesus saying basically the same thing, only with different wording: Take along what's already in your possession (sandals and staff) but acquire nothing extra (no money, no food, no more clothes, another staff and pair of sandals).

Gerasenes or Gadarenes? In Mark and Luke, Jesus and the disciples come to the other side of the Sea of Galilee where he is said to heal a demon-possessed man in the "country of the Gerasenes" (Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26) but the city of Gerasa was more than 30 miles south of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew notably records that this happened in the "country of the Gadarenes" (Matt. 8:28) which is 8 miles south of the sea. However, this is because the gospel writers say *country,* not city. In other words, this is a reference to a particular region and both of these cities were in the same province of the Decapolis. Mark and Luke were writing to a Gentile audience who would have been more familiar with Gerasa, whereas Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience who would have been more familiar with Gadara, the capital of the Decapolis.

Interestingly, there is actually a town in that region called Gergesa (or Kursi) which is right on the Sea of Galilee and fits the NT description elsewhere as having cliffs over the sea. So it is possible that this is where the event took place and that, due to language barriers, the town was mispronounced to sound like other cities in that region with similar sounding names. Many times languages will cause variations in how people spell or pronounce different cities or countries so these could actually be just different

linguistic ways of pronouncing a town. Nevertheless, the authors are still saying that Jesus was in that general region.

The washing of hands. The author of Mark says that the Pharisees "and all the Jews" do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders (Mark 7:3). Didn't the Old Testament say that only the priests had to keep hand washing practices (Exo. 30:18-21, 40:30-32; Lev. 20:1-16)? This objection overlooks the fact that the first-century Jews often added to the Mosaic laws, such as what we see in the Jewish writings of the time. We have evidence of this from certain texts like *The Letter of Aristeas* from 200 BC which states, "And as is the custom of all the Jews, they washed their hands in the sea and prayed to God" (line 305) as well as from the Mishnah.[75] Philo of Alexandria in 30 AD said, "The [law] does not look upon those who have even touched a dead body, which has met with a natural death, as pure and clean, until they have washed and purified themselves with sprinklings and ablutions."[76] We also have archaeological evidence. Susan Haber says, "The centrality of impurity to Jewish life in the Second Temple period is supported by archaeological evidence. The discovery of mikvaot in such diverse places as Gamla, Sepphoris, Herodium and Massada suggests that in Palestine the removal of impurity was not a rite reserved only for approaching the sacred precincts of the Temple, but was common practice for Jews of all walks of life."[77]

Judea beyond the Jordan. Jesus is said to have gone "to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan" (Mark 10:1). Doesn't the previous chapter say that he went from Capernaum (Mark 9:33)? Yet, Capernaum is already on the same side of the Jordan River as Judea so why would he have crossed it? However, the text clearly says Judea *and* beyond the Jordan River--in other words, Jesus went down to Judea *and then* beyond the river. This makes sense in light of the mention elsewhere that he crossed the river to the place where John had been baptizing which was in Bethany (John 10:40 cf. 1:28).

Do not defraud? When talking to the rich man, critics argue that Jesus claims "do not defraud" to be a part of "the commandments" (Mark 10:19). As we know, this is not in the Ten Commandments. Therefore: Error! The gospels should *never* be trusted. What's funny here though is that the critic seems to assume the word "commandments" is automatically associated with the specific Ten. Nowhere is this indicated. That's because this was a commandment from the Torah in general (Lev.19:13; Deut.24:14-15), and as we know, the whole corpus of the Torah and Mosaic law contained *many* commandments--much more than merely ten. Elsewhere, Jesus actually seems to correlate "commandments" with all of the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17-19). In another place, when asked about the greatest "commandment," his

[75] Yadayim 1.1-2.4; Hagigah 2.5-6
[76] Philo, *The Special Laws* 3.205
[77] Susan Haber, *Essays on Purity in Early Judaism,* pp.130-131

response is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:28-31) which is found in the Torah, but not specifically from the Ten (Lev.19:18; Deut.6:4-5).

Even so, one might argue that the command regarding defrauding is out of place among the other commandments Jesus listed that are all associated with the Ten. In answer to this we could say that Jesus adds this certain commandment tailored to a specific sin involving the rich man and that he acquired his wealth at the expense of the poor. This is confirmed by the fact that surpluses were rare in the ancient world and wealth was often gained at the expense of the poor and hired workers. The rich man claimed to have kept all of the commandments, but Jesus’s response that, “You lack one thing: go sell all that you have and give to the poor” would fit neatly in light of this context.

Also, a slight expansion of the Decalogue (the Ten) to drive home a specific point in regards to his situation was not unheard of in prophetic literature. For example, in the book of Malachi, God is said to mention “those who defraud” alongside Ten Commandment-breakers like adulterers and those who swear falsely (Malachi 3:5). This also makes sense in light of the fact that Mark alludes to Malachi in other places, showing that he was familiar with it (Mark 1:2-3 cf. Mal.3:1; Mark 9:11-13 cf. Mal.4:5-6).

Matthew

<><><><

apostolic churches will afford evidence to the other Gospels also, which we possess equally through their means, and according to their usage--I mean the Gospels of John and Matthew…"

Origen (AD 220-248) In Eusebius's *Church History* 6.25.4, Origen says, "Among the four Gospels, which are the only disputable ones in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the first was written by Matthew, who was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism, and published in the Hebrew language."

Eusebius (4th century AD) In *Church History* 5.10.3, Eusebius wrote, "It is said that he (Pantaenus) went to the Indians, and the tradition is that he found there that among some of those there who had known Christ from the Gospel according to Matthew which had preceded his coming; for Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached to them and had left them the writing of Matthew in Hebrew letters."

Apollinaris of Hierapolis (AD 100s) In *Chronicon Paschale* 13-14, Apollinaris regarding the early followers, makes reference to Matthew 26:17-19, saying, "And they say that on the fourteenth day the Lord ate the Lamb with the disciples, and he himself suffered on the great day of the feast of unleavened bread. They explain that Matthew says this, or so they think."

Papias (AD 60-130) In *Church History* 3.39.15-16, Eusebius quotes Papias saying, "And the presbyter said this…Therefore, Matthew put the sayings (logia) in an ordered arrangement in the Hebrew language, but each person interpreted them as best he could." Papias having made this statement is not generally disputed but more so the identity of his source (aka: the "presbyter"). Even so, the fact that he already assumes a particular Matthew and that he already heard this from another person clearly implies a developed tradition by this point in time.

Justin Martyr (AD 155-160) While he doesn't explicitly say, "Matthew," he writes in *Dialogue with Trypho* chapter 103 regarding Christ, "For in the memoirs which I say were drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them…" As Bible scholar Craig Evans says, "The important point here is that memoirs are not anonymous; they are linked to known personalities."[79] The claim, "those who followed them" also presents further consistency regarding Mark and Luke's gospels who were not apostles but "followed them."

Wasn't his writing in Hebrew?

As we're told from the church fathers, it appears that Matthew originally wrote something in Hebrew. Especially intriguing is the material attested to from Jerome who, around 392 AD, claimed that this gospel was first published in Judea in Hebrew and that

[79] Craig Evans, *Jesus and the Manuscripts,* 10

the Hebrew itself had been preserved up to his day in the library at Caesarea.[80] Interestingly, his quotations of the work differed from our canonical Matthew, and in other places, appears as though he also seemed to believe that what this book contained was associated material of the Nazarenes and Ebionites, though this is contested. A recent study in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* emphasizes precisely how late-antique authors blurred together traditions about an original Hebrew Matthew, translations into Hebrew-Aramaic-Syriac, and Jewish-Christian Gospel books.[81]

Consequently, modern scholarship generally does not accept Jerome's identification of this Gospel with the original version of canonical Matthew. However, Jerome's variant readings might put things into perspective when we remember the evidence for multiple Jewish-Christian Gospel traditions containing variants of stories also found in Matthew. One of these being the fire that appeared in the Jordan River during Jesus's baptism, which is attested to from Tatian's fourfold Gospel harmony--the *Diatessaron,* old Latin codices,[82] Justin Martyr,[83] as well as the Ebionite tradition,[84] which presents a similar dynamic with the Hebrew-Matthew-Ebionite text that Jerome referred to. Nevertheless, the origins of Matthew present a complicated textual tradition that remains inconclusive.

Though Matthew's Greek canonical gospel shows no signs of having been translated from another language, scholars posit another explanation in that Matthew originally wrote something in Hebrew or Aramaic, perhaps like a list of sayings resembling what scholars call the Q source. Then as the church was growing, Matthew published an official Greek gospel where he utilized Mark--since it came from Peter's eyewitness testimony--and combined it with material from his work in Hebrew to form something entirely new. As Craig Blomberg says, "Indeed, although it goes beyond anything we can demonstrate, it has been plausibly suggested that this 'first draft' of Matthew was what scholars call Q. Then either Matthew himself or some other Greek-speaking Christian would have later incorporated into this first draft elements of Mark along with more distinctive traditions ['M'] to create the Greek version of Matthew we now possess."[85] Though this is speculative, it does account for the available external evidence that Matthew did write the canonical Greek gospel, but originally wrote something in a Hebrew dialect.

One could also posit that Matthew's gospel itself *was* originally in Hebrew. Charles Quarles notes, "Although the fathers may have overstated the extent of the Semitic origin of Matthew, modern scholars sometimes exaggerate in their complete denial of the very possibility that even a portion or substratum of the gospel was first

---

[80] *On Illustrious Men* 3; *Against the Pelagians* 3

[81] Jeremiah Coogan, *The Ways that Parted in the Library: The Gospels according to Matthew and according to the Hebrews in Late Ancient Heresiology*

[82] Codex Vercellensis, Codex Sangermanensis

[83] *Dialogue with Trypho* chapter 88

[84] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.13.7-8

[85] Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels,* 154

composed in Aramaic."[86] Blomberg says, "Matthew's 'Q' passages regularly show signs of careful Semitic parallelism; Matthew is not without his Semitisms; and we need not argue that Matthew (or whoever) translated literally. Where we know that ancient sources have been translated from Hebrew into Greek (e.g., with some of Josephus's writings), there are also clear signs that the translator at times rendered his text freely and paraphrastically…if he were a tax collector who needed to be literate and well conversant with the Gentiles for whom he worked, could not have produced a document based on prior Hebrew and Greek sources in reasonably good Greek style."[87] In other words, a skilled author could translate a work freely enough to hide the original language, but even knowing that we still find evidence of Semitisms in Matthew's gospel.

It's also textually evident that the author knew Hebrew and Aramaic. Scholars W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison conclude, "The data given in the charts presented leads irresistibly to the conclusion: Matthew knew Hebrew. This follows from the following facts:

1. Matthew put forward a form of the shema which stands closer to the MT [Masoretic Text].
2. Several Matthean texts stand closer to Jewish tradition or interpretation in the Markan and Lukan parallels.
3. Matthew and Luke dealt in very different ways with the allusions in Mark and Q. Matthew generally preserved and expanded. Luke often omitted and shortened.
4. Several times Matthew brought his sources closer in line with the OT.
5. Matthew's redactional expansions or changes of allusions and his redactional allusions frequently depart from the LXX and often agree with the MT. For example, the gospel of Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 as, "Out of Egypt I called my son." This is the Hebrew rendering, contrary to the Septuagint which renders, "Israel is a child, and I loved him, and out of Egypt have I called his children."
6. Matthew's unique quotations show the same mixed text form as the synoptic allusions.
7. Some of the allusions unique to Matthew but with a non-allusive parallel in Mark or Q show agreement with the MT or Jewish tradition."[88]

   For example:

- In 1:21, the author of Matthew tells us the meaning of Jesus's name in that "he will save his people." Though from their sins, the name Jesus comes from the Hebrew "Yeshua," a shortened form of *Yehoshua*, which combines the divine name *YHWH* with the verb *yasha*, meaning "to save."

[86] Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew,* 6
[87] Blomberg, 155
[88] W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *Matthew 1-7,* 33

- In 2:23, the author says the Messiah was said to be a Nazarene in the scriptures. There is no specific prophecy of this, but what's interesting here is that, in Hebrew, one can find a connection with what appears to be a play on words with a particular messianic Hebrew scripture. In Isaiah 11:1, the Hebrew for "branch" uses the same Hebrew letters (NZR). In other words, the author would not have written this verse if he had not known Hebrew.[89]
- The author uses the term "heaven" in reference to God's kingdom throughout his account over 30 times (3:2, 5:20, 10:7, etc.). It's often in the plural, just as we see in the Hebrew Old Testament. This is a term unique to Matthew demonstrating the Hebrew origins behind the phrase. The other gospels merely render "kingdom of God" (which Matthew also uses, but only five times).

Craig Keener points out more examples:

- On 3:17, "Translating freely from the Hebrew, Matthew conforms the language of Isaiah 42 to God's praise of his Son in Matthew 3:17 ('my beloved…in whom I am well pleased')."[90]
- On 8:17, "Matthew bypasses the spiritualized reading in the Greek version and translates the Isaiah passage directly from the Hebrew."[91]
- On 9:13, "Jesus came to 'call' sinners--that is, to 'invite' them to God's final banquet (22:3, 14), a foretaste of which the present table fellowship with them may have represented (cf. Lk. 14:13-14, 23; as is often held…), Jesus' demand for mercy (translating directly the Hebrew of Hos. 6:6…) is so critical that it recurs in 12:7 (cf. 23:23)."[92]
- On 13:34-35, "Matthew cites the psalmist as a prophet in verse 35, recognizing that the psalmists were inspired (cf. 1:7-8; 1 Chron. 25:1-3; 2 Chron. 29:30; Acts 2:30…). He translates the text directly from the Hebrew…"[93]

It's also been noted that the author's genealogy of Jesus (1:1-17), which was written to show his fulfillment being in the line of David, uses the rabbinic technique of gematria. This is the practice of assigning a numerical value to a name. Gematria uses numerical values of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet to communicate messages. Matthew's genealogy is arranged in three sets of 14. In Hebrew, the name David is three letters and 14 is the numeric value of the name David. Charles Quarles points out, "By arranging Jesus's genealogy into three sets of 14 generations, Matthew shows that the genealogy shouts 'David! David! David!'"[94] The gematria doesn't work in the Greek gospel, however, so this only goes to show that the author was certainly familiar with

[89] It could also be referencing the Hebrew word "preserver" from Exodus 34:6 or Psalm 31:24.
[90] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 361
[91] Ibid. 273
[92] Ibid. 298-9
[93] Ibid. 389
[94] Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew,* 115

Hebrew.

We also see that the author often translated Aramaic words. For example, he frequently used the word for "after this" ("τότε"; 2:17, 12:38, 9:14, etc.) which appears over 90 times in Matthew, six in Mark, 15 in Luke and 10 in John. Over 50 of the uses in Matthew are parallel passages with Mark which means he introduces around 45 new uses outside of the Markan material. This would support the notion that the author knew Aramaic.

Why would he need Mark?

This leads us to another question: If Matthew's gospel was written by Matthew, why would he need Mark's gospel or any external sources if he already had his own eyewitness memory? This is true, but we need to keep in mind that Mark contained the eyewitness testimony of Peter, who was the leader of the disciples and closer to Jesus and present with him when the other disciples, such as Matthew, were not, such as all that had happened prior to Matthew's calling (4:18-9:8), the transfiguration (17:1-13), and Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane (26:36-46). This is typically what's done when you write a thorough biography of someone even when you know the person. There will always be events that you weren't there for, and people to consult for such events. If I wrote a biography of my father for example, and I knew my mother had already written one, I would utilize it for my work since she was closer and knew more about him, as well as regarding events prior to my birth. So it wouldn't be implausible if Matthew were to have used Mark's gospel for such a reason to get the teachings of Jesus and the gospel message spread as much as possible.

Quarles writes, "If Peter was indeed the authority behind Mark's gospel, then it is not surprising that Matthew would utilize Mark. Peter was a member of the inner circle of disciples, often served as their leader, and emerged as the most prominent member of the 12 in the history of the early church."[95]

Mix-up with Levi?

Mark and Luke say the tax collector that Jesus called was named Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27-28) but Matthew says it was actually Matthew (Matthew 9:9). How could Matthew get his own story wrong?

However, we have several examples of Jews having two Semitic names. As Josephus in *Antiquities* mentions, there was a Joseph Caiaphus (18.2.2, 18.4.3), a Joseph called Cabi (20.8.11), a John called Gaddis (12.6.1), a Simon called Matthes (12.6.1), a Judas called Maccabeus (12.6.1), an Eleazar called Auran (12.6.1), and a Jonathan called Apphus (12.6.1). As we know with Jesus's symbolic name changes with Simon to Peter (Matt. 16:18) and James and John to the Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17), it's plausible that Jesus likewise changed Levi's name to Matthew, meaning: "Gift

[95] Ibid.

of God," as a symbol of his conversion. This fits with Matthew's rendering in that he says that Jesus saw a man "called" Matthew, implying a nickname given, as we see with other people with nicknames like Saul who "was also called Paul," a Joseph who "was also called Barnabas" (see: Matt. 10:2, 27:16-17; Acts 4:36, 13:9, 15:22).

Additionally, St. John Chrysostom and St. Jerome suggested that Mark and Luke used Matthew's birth name of Levi to prevent association of his new name Matthew with his former life and protect his identity, whereas Matthew was fine with using his past as part of his testimony.[96]

One might question why Matthew would need another source like Mark for a story that he himself was already an eyewitness to. As mentioned, we know he would need other sources for stories he was *not* a witness to, but what do we do with *this* account regarding the calling of Matthew at the tax collector booth and his subsequent banquet? There are several plausible reasons for this.

For one thing, being an eyewitness doesn't mean someone must write exclusively from memory or that one necessarily remembers certain details of said event. As we know from the previous chapter, Mark drew from the apostle Peter's eyewitness testimony so Matthew could have used Peter to preserve the established wording of the account or corroborate his own recollection and incorporate Peter's perspective into his own narrative. At the same time during Matthew's banquet, only Matthew adds Jesus saying to the Pharisees, "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'" (9:13) which isn't found in the other accounts, which makes sense since an eyewitness would have recollection of such details.

One could also argue on account of Matthean priority in that Mark and Luke drew from Matthew instead. This is generally associated with the Griesbach hypothesis, or the Two-Gospel hypothesis, though Markan priority remains the dominant position in contemporary New Testament scholarship.

One might also ask: Why would the author refer to himself in third-person? Biblical scholar Richard Bauckham notes, "When ancient historians referred to themselves within their narratives as participating in or observing the events they recount, they commonly referred to themselves in the third person by name, as Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, Julius Caesar, or Josephus."[97] In other words, this was common in ancient antiquity. Even Jesus, as we know, commonly referred to himself in third-person as the Son of Man and the Son.

This is also to take into account that the goal of the authors was most likely to gain as much traction as possible with their written accounts and writing in the third person would prevent confusion regarding the identities in the narrative, especially considering there would be multiple different accounts. Skeptics themselves commonly argue that the authors are anonymous or that the early church did not know the authors

[96] Chrysostom, *Homilies* Matt. 30.1; Jerome, commentary of Matthew, 1.9.9
[97] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses,* second edition, 393

but even had that been true, had the accounts been written in first-person, the identities of the authors in the narratives would be nameless and left to interpretation.

Familiarity with coinage and monetary practice

The author of Matthew makes reference to coins and monetary issues more than any other gospel, which suggests the author had a special interest in this subject. He accurately describes different types of coins in ways the other gospel authors do not. This is what we would expect had the author been a tax collector, someone who dealt with money, such as Matthew.

"Coin for the tax" In the story of Jesus discussing paying taxes to Caesar, Mark and Luke use the generic term "denarius" (Mark 12:15; Luke 20:24) while Matthew uses the specific term "coin for the tax" (Matt. 22:19).

The "stater" Only Matthew records the story of the temple tax where men come to collect the two-drachma temple tax from Peter and Jesus (Matt. 17:24-27). In the story, Jesus tells Peter to go fishing and find the "stater" in the mouth of the fish he catches, which is a Greek coin worth four drachma.

"Kodranten" The author records Jesus describing someone in prison to pay off debt (5:26), to which he mentions a copper coin (kodrantēn) which is the smallest Roman coin, and fits with the precise totality of someone paying off every last cent before being released.

"Assarion" In 10:29, he mentions two sparrows being sold for an assarion (which is one-sixteenth of a denarius).

"Denarion" In 20:2, he accurately states a denarion, a Roman silver coin, is equivalent to a laborer's average daily wages.

Debt, loan and wages It makes sense that we see the author records the parables of Jesus regarding debt, loan and wages (18:23-25, 20:1-2). In other teachings in Luke where Jesus mentions "sinners" (Luke 6:32-34) Matthew's account renders "tax collectors" (5:46-47; 21:31-32).

Peter J. Williams notes, "Matthew was traditionally identified as a tax collector, and Matthew's Gospel shows the greatest level of financial interest, including numerous references to money and treasure that Matthew alone records:

- The magi, with their rich gifts (2:11)
- The parable about hidden treasure (13:44)
- The parable about the discovered pearl (13:45-46)
- The scribe compared to someone bringing out old and new treasures (13:52)
- The account of Peter and the temple tax collectors (17:24-27)
- The parable of the servant who was forgiven a huge debt of ten thousand talents and who refused to forgive a fellow servant a debt of a hundred denarii

(18:23-25)

- The parable of the workers in the vineyard, discontented with their pay of one denarius for a day because the same was given to late arrivals who had worked less time (20:1-16)
- The parable about talents (25:14-30)
- Judas's betrayal money (27:3) and what was purchased with it (27:7)
- The bribe given by the chief priests to the guards at Jesus's tomb (28:12)"[98]

Was he affiliated with rabbis?

Some scholars have noticed that the author of Matthew appears to have had formal rabbinic training in Beth Midrash. If so, it's unlikely the author would have also been a tax collector since no rabbi would take on a student in that line of work. However, this is exaggerated. Charles Quarles points out, "No feature of this Gospel requires or is best explained by the training of the author in rabbinic school. His training in the Beth Sepher, his instruction by rabbi Jesus (23:8, 10; 26:25, 49; cf. 8:19; 9:11; 10:24; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36), and his interaction with local synagogue leaders provide a sufficient background for the content of the gospel."[99]

Accuracy, semitisms and attention to detail in Matthew's gospel

Mark was likely a Gentile who took the preaching of Peter and tailored it for a Gentile audience. If Matthew was a disciple and eyewitness of Jesus, in utilizing Mark's gospel, we would expect him to take what Mark had and enhance it with more details and accuracy. And this is what we find when we read Matthew in comparison to Mark. As Michael Patrick Barber says, "In fact, that Matthew provides us with a more reliable portrait than Mark in certain places is not merely possible but *probable.* This is especially the case when it comes to areas involving Jewish concerns."[100] Craig Keener notes, "Matthew has re-Judaized Jesus based on solid traditions available to him. Some of these may be more Palestinian (e.g. 27:51-53) but not necessarily more historical than Mark; others may actually represent the original oral traditions behind Mark or some other materials shared with Luke."[101] For instance:

Phylacteries Matthew alone quotes Jesus mentioning phylacteries (23:5) which were in use in Jesus's day by the rabbis.

Temple laws Jesus emphasized the importance of the Jewish law (5:17) and elaborated on how to offer temple sacrifices (5:23-24) which are things we would expect a first-century rabbi, as Jesus, would mention.

Herod the tetrarch Mark merely mentions Herod while Matthew elaborates with Herod

[98] Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* 83
[99] Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew,* 9
[100] Michael Patrick Barber, *The Historical Jesus and the Temple,* 13
[101] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 13

"the tetrarch" (14:1). He also provides a more sensible context for why Herod did not originally kill John the Baptist (14:5).

Dishwashing customs Jesus's statement about cleaning the outside of the cup but not the inside is likely authentic as it's consistent with Shammai Pharisee purity laws that originated from prior to 70 AD when the Shammaites had more control in Galilee over the Hillelites. Jacob Neusner notes, "The Christian saying certainly originated from a knowledge of the Shammaite view of the law and at the time in which that Shammaite version was binding. So the NT saying, whether or not by Jesus, derives from the period of Shammaite predominance, that is, before 70."[102]

Tithing customs Jesus mentions the Pharisees tithing "mint and dill and cumin" (23:23). This lines up with rabbinic practices of the time, as Peter Williams says, "Jesus's saying about how the Pharisees were careful to tithe their mint, dill, and cumin shows specific knowledge of the rabbinic debates about tithing of dill and cumin."[103]

Blasphemy against the Spirit Jesus's sayings regarding the kingdom of God "coming upon you" by the Spirit of God, and blasphemy against the Spirit (12:28, 31) is likely authentic in that it mirrors ancient Israelite anthropomorphic language which equates the Finger of God with God's Spirit. As Craig Keener notes, "Early Christians had no other available source for the idea than Jesus himself. Yet it makes good sense: as the climax of history approaches, the forces of God's kingdom and the Devil's are arrayed in battle against one another."[104]

Not into the mouth, but out Scholars note that Jesus's saying regarding cleanliness of all foods is in Mark (Mark 7:18-19) but that Matthew's account elaborates further (Matt. 15:17-20). This would be expected if Matthew was present for this exchange and could clarify what Jesus said. As W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison state, "Its teaching is probably closer to Jesus's teaching than Mark's account."[105]

Scarlet robe Davies and Allison also point out the robe Jesus was clothed in by the Romans in that Mark says it was purple (Mark 15:17) and Matthew says it was scarlet (Matt. 27:28). The two colors are very similar and Mark's account is understood as a generalization, given people don't always see colors the same exact way sometimes. Matthew's account fits better here as it's in line with the garbs of Roman soldiers and thus, deemed historical.[106]

Simon's name change to Peter Only Matthew records Jesus changing Simon's name to Peter (16:17-18). This is likely to be early as we also see allusions to this in Paul's letters where he addresses the disciple as Cephas (Galatians 1:18; 1 Cor. 9:5) and also

---

[102] Jacob Neusner (1976). "First Cleanse the Inside." New Testament Studies. 22, pp. 486-495
[103] Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?* 81
[104] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 364
[105] W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *Matthew 8-18,* volume 2, 516
[106] W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, volume 3, 602

as Peter (Galatians 2:7-9). He's also referred to as one of the pillars, which is conceptually close to Peter being the foundational rock. Davies and Allison say, "Proof, to be sure, is lacking. But one cannot overlook Gal. 1-2 as a possible witness to the very early circulation of something very much like Mt. 16.17-19. C.K. Barrett has argued that 1 Corinthians [3.11] also shows Paul's knowledge of the gospel tradition about Peter…If Barrett is right, at least the primitive character of an important portion of Mt. 16.13-20 would be established."[107] This may have been left out of Peter's own eyewitness testimony in Mark as he was concerned it gave him too much honor.

Early usage of "Israel" The author often uses the term "Israel" to refer to the Jews. Around 80 AD, this term started falling out of favor after the temple destruction and the Jews started referring to themselves more commonly as just "Jews." Matthew uses "Israel" about 12 times whereas John uses it about four times. Matthew uses "Jews" around five times, whereas John uses it 65 times. This shows that Matthew was consistent with the early Jewish practice and is likely early, and as we know John came later.

Criteria of embarrassment

Matthew contains embarrassing details about Jesus and the church founders. This is not what we would expect to see from an author who intends to fabricate since it paints all the founders in a bad light. Given this, one most likely would not admit such details unless it were the truth. For example, people Jesus knew from his hometown take offense at him and reject him (Matt. 13:57). Jesus is accused of having a demon (Matt. 12:24). He is also accused of breaking the Sabbath (Matt. 12:2).

The apostles are presented as dim-witted and slow to understand Jesus at first. In one incident regarding Jesus foretelling his death and resurrection, Peter actually *rebukes* Jesus, in which Jesus rebukes him back, calling him "Satan"! (Matt. 16:21-23). They fall asleep on Jesus twice when he asks them to pray (Matt. 26:36-46). Peter even denies him three times after explicitly promising, "I will never disown you" (Matt 26:33-35, 26:69-75). On top of that, they make no effort to give their friend a proper burial, but instead record that a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin--the people who sentenced Jesus to his death--took the matter of burial into his own hands (Joseph of Arimathea; Matt 27:57-61). Meanwhile, as the men are hiding for fear of the Jews, the brave women stand by Jesus and are the first to discover the empty tomb (Matt. 28:1-10).

They are also doubters--despite being taught several times that Jesus would rise from the dead (Matt 12:39-41; 17:9, 22-23), the disciples are doubtful when they hear of his resurrection. Some are even doubtful after they see him risen! (Matt 28:17)

[107] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18,* volume 2, 610

No embellishment

There is no embellishment with the gospels--something we would certainly notice had it been invented. Consider the rejected apocryphal work, the Gospel of Peter, which describes the resurrection with a large crowd gathering around the tomb, the heavens opening, the stone rolling away by itself and out coming an exceptionally large Jesus with two exceptionally large angels--of whom their heads reached heaven--and a cross that speaks! On the other hand, the gospels in the Bible tell us some women arrived at the tomb first, met an angel or two there (one of whom moved the stone himself), and that the body of Jesus was already gone (Mark 16:4-8; Luke 24:2-8; John 20:1-12; Matthew 28:2-7) and that he appeared to the disciples later on. If this is to be a mere fairy tale, it would seem like the author lacks a bit in the excitement factor.

Resurrection of the saints?

The resurrection of the saints is alluded to from Matthew 27:52-53 in which tombs were opened and "many" corpses of the saints are said to have come back to life and appeared to "many" people in the city of Jerusalem. Skeptics may wonder why such an event is only attested to in the Gospel of Matthew, and no other historical account. It's a good question, but we also have to keep in mind that, like the 500 witnesses, literacy simply wasn't common at the time. Furthermore, the verses are not specific as to who exactly these "saints" are, so it's possible they could have been from a different generation in which case no one even knew them or recognized them from when they were previously alive. If this were the case, then the event wouldn't have as much of an impact as much had they even known these people. All in all, the major miracle resided in the resurrection of Christ, of whom that generation *did* know and recognize.

Contradictions and errors?

The birth narrative. See: Why the Birth of Jesus Narrative is Consistent With Itself and History

The genealogies of Jesus. It is commonly held that Matthew's genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17) is Joseph's line and Luke's genealogy (Luke 3:23-38) is actually *Mary's* line. Though this view is commonly claimed to originate from Annius of Viterbo in the 15th century, sources actually reveal that this view was held by many as far back as the 4th-5th century according to the Christian text *Pseudo-Hilary of Poitiers.*[108] Others with the likes of Clement of Alexandria and Victorinus of Pettau in the 2nd-3rd century also held this view, though they attributed Mary's lineage to Matthew.[109]

---

[108] Pseudo-Hilary of Poitiers, *Tractatus sancti Hilarii episcopi* published by Angelo Mai in 1852, *Nova Patrum Bibliotheca*, vol. 1, pp. 477–478

[109] Clement of Alexandria in *Stromata* bk.1,ch.21; Victorinus in *Commentary on the Apocalypse* ch.4,par.7-10; Another common view was that both genealogies were through Joseph but that Joseph had one father by natural generation and another legally/adoptively. This would have been a result of Levirate marriages occurring within Joseph's family tree wherein a man sires an offspring from his

Normally, genealogies followed the male line—fathers to sons. This is why Luke's genealogy begins with Joseph. But there are exceptions where names get shifted because of marriage, adoption, or legal standing. For example, priests are identified by their marriage connections when their ancestry was unclear (Ezra 2:61; Nehemiah 7:63). Also, Sheshan had no sons, only daughters. He gave his daughter to his servant Jarha, and their son is listed as Sheshan's descendant through the daughter (1 Chronicles 2:34–35). This shows ancestry could legally run through the maternal line when needed. This actually fits in with the context of Luke's gospel drawing more from Mary's side of the story pertaining to the birth of Jesus, while Matthew's gospel draws from Joseph.

Furthermore, sons and daughters in Jewish culture also pertained to in-laws. For example, Saul calls David "my son," though David is actually his son-in-law (1 Samuel 24:16). Naomi calls her daughters-in-law her "daughters" (Ruth 1:11–13). So Joseph as the "son" of Heli is most likely in reference to his being son-*in-law* of Heli. If Joseph married Mary, daughter of Heli, then Joseph could be called "son of Heli" in a legal, genealogical sense, even if Heli wasn't his biological father. That would make Heli Jesus's maternal grandfather.

Though early Christian sources like the *Protoevangelium of James* (2nd century) name Mary's parents as Joachim and Anna, rather than Heli. However, the *Protoevangelium of James* in chapter X.1 also records that, "the priests called to mind the child Mary, that she was of the **tribe of David** and was undefiled before God," indicating that either Joachim was a step-father and Heli the unmentioned biological father, Luke's genealogy skipped over a father or two or that Joachim was also called Heli.[110] Church father Ignatius likewise writes, "He was conceived in the womb of Mary, according to the appointment of God, of the seed of David, and by the Holy Ghost."[111] Apocryphal writings from the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary in Chapter 1 mentions, "The blessed and glorious ever-virgin Mary, sprung from the royal stock and family of David." It's also been noted among scholars in the manuscripts of Chagigah 2:2:6 in the Jerusalem Talmud a certain person had a dream in which he saw the punishment of the damned, to which some variants render that, "He saw **Mary the daughter of Heli** amongst the shades."[112]

---

deceased brother's widow. The purpose of these unions was to prevent the deceased's lineage being permanently cut off from the commonwealth of Israel (cf. Deut. 25:5-10).

[110] It wasn't uncommon for Jews to have more than one name, or nickname, and we have examples of this from Josephus and the Bible. *Antiquities* mentions there was a Joseph Caiaphus (18.2.2, 18.4.3), a Joseph called Cabi (20.8.11), a John called Gaddis (12.6.1), a Simon called Matthes (12.6.1), a Judas called Maccabeus (12.6.1), an Eleazar called Auran (12.6.1), and a Jonathan called Apphus (12.6.1). In the Bible, Simon is also called Peter, Levi is "called Matthew," a Joseph called Barnabas, a Judas called Barsabbas, among others (Matt. 10:2, 27:16-17; Acts 4:36, 13:9, 15:22; Mark 2:14 cf. Matt. 9:9).

[111] *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians* Chapter XVIII. - The Glory of the Cross

[112] John B. Lightfoot, *Commentary On the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* [Oxford University Press, 1859; with a second printing from Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1995], vol. 1, p. v; vol. 3, p. 55

Wasn't Mary a Levite in the line of Aaron though? Some might get this idea from Mary's relative, Elizabeth, who is said to be a daughter of Aaron (Luke 1:5). However, nowhere is Mary said to have been a Levite. This claim overlooks the fact that Elizabeth isn't necessarily a sister, but a "relative" of Mary (Luke 1:36), and even so, Elizabeth could be in the line of David from her mother's side which would explain the relation. Elizabeth was married to a priest, Zechariah, but even priests in the Bible were allowed to marry any virgin from Israel (Leviticus 21:13-14; Ezekiel 44:22). For example, Jehoiada the priest marries Jehoshabeath who was in the line of David through her father King Jehoram (2 Chronicles 22:10-11, 21:5-7). This is most likely the same case with Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Galilee or Jerusalem? After Jesus's resurrection, Matthew's account records Jesus and an angel telling the disciples to meet him at Galilee for the Great Commission (Matt. 28:10, 16-19) while Luke's account records Jesus telling them to stay in Jerusalem until Pentecost (Luke 24:49-53; Acts 1:1-5). This is answered by the writing method each author utilizes--simply that Matthew adds more details while Luke omits some and compresses his account, not necessarily that Jesus had claimed to stay in Jerusalem on the same day he reappeared (on Easter Sunday) but after they returned from Galilee.

Critics might argue that Luke frames the resurrection and ascension happening near Bethany and Jerusalem in a tight timeframe that leaves no room for a trip back to Galilee, but this is not entirely so. It would not have been an impossible undertaking and still would have fit fine within Luke's 40 day time frame. A trip from Jerusalem to Galilee was typically 4-7 days depending on what route was taken and 4-7 days to head back. This would leave at least three weeks for the remaining time that Jesus spoke with his disciples at the Great Commission. Going straight south through Samaria was the shortest option (about 4 days), but was sometimes physically demanding and tense due to cultural friction so to completely avoid Samaria, many travelers took an eastern path that crossed the Jordan River into Perea, wrapped around, and recrossed near Jericho. This safer, flatter route added extra miles and took 5 to 7 days.

This explanation also fits in accord with the gospel of John who records Jesus appearing in both Galilee and Jerusalem: first to his disciples in Jerusalem (John 20) and later at the Sea of Galilee (aka: Sea of Tiberias) where they are seen fishing and eating fish (John 21). While the Gospel of John ends in Galilee, the historical timeline picks back up in Luke's second book, Acts. The disciples traveled back south to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, which occurred 50 days after Passover. It is during this final window, just before his Ascension, that Jesus gives the command recorded in Luke 24 to "stay in the city" until the Holy Spirit arrives. Regardless of whether one wants to allege John chapter 21 to be a later addition, there is no contradiction.

Flat earth? In Matthew and Luke during the temptations in the desert, the devil is said to

have taken Jesus up a high mountain and "showed him all the kingdoms of the world" (Matt. 4.8; Luke 4:5). This would be impossible since the earth is round, so are the authors implying a flat earth? Not necessarily. Luke's account records that this was done "in a moment of time," seeming to suggest a spiritual vision, given the devil is a spiritual being who possesses spiritual powers. What then was the purpose of going up a mountain? This seems to fit in accord with Bible passages that repeatedly mention demonic rituals taking place on the "high places" (Lev.26:30; 1Kings 3:2, 12:31, 15:14), so this could be seen as Satan taking Jesus up to his spiritual ground, or throne, when attempting to bribe Jesus into worshiping him, thus demonstrating that Jesus can easily beat the devil on his own ground.

One could also say that the authors are just utilizing hyperbole in that Jesus is led up and shown a great stretch of land meant to represent all the kingdoms of the world, like climbing a mountain and claiming that you can see "everything" from up there. This same hyperbolic construct is seen elsewhere, for example, regarding Jesus's fame spreading throughout "all" of Syria, "all" of the city coming out to see him and "all" the sick being brought to him (Matt. 4:24, 8:34).

Two donkeys? Upon the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus is said to have been brought a donkey and a colt where "he sat on them" (Matt. 21:7). The argument states that Matthew is citing Zechariah 9:9 where the prophecy regarding the donkey is written with synonymous parallelism, a literary technique where the text restates what is in the previous line for emphasis, reading: "mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." It appears as though Matthew misread this into thinking that Zechariah said that there were two animals.

Scholars have answered this with the *garments placed on the animals* as the qualification for "them", not necessarily the animals. Robert H. Gundry says, "It is doubtful that he [Matthew] intends his readers to visualize a trick rider balancing himself on two animals at the same time. Therefore we are to think that the garments were draped over both animals, just as in modern Palestine both mother donkeys and their unridden colts trotting after them have garments put across their backs. Though Jesus sat on top of the garments only on the colt, the association of the garmented mother makes a kind of wide throne."[113]

Critics also point out that there seems to be perfect correspondence with Matthew's quote of the prophecy in verse 5 with the narrative he gives in verse 7, showing he linked the *two* animals with his understanding of the prophecy. Addressing this point, some scholars like W.D. Davies, Dale Allison and R.H. Gundry note that the similarity in his wording of verse 5 seems to mirror that of the Hebrew rendering of Zechariah which uses the male article and speaks of a male donkey that would be ridden, whereas in the narrative in verse 7 he writes with the feminine article for one of

[113] Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew,* p.410

the donkeys brought to Jesus in Greek as a *female* donkey (ὄνον).[114] In other words, this would mean that Matthew would have understood the prophecy to refer to one animal that the Messiah would ride (aka: the other one) since the donkey wouldn't be female. This is also plausible in light of the fact that Matthew shows signs of drawing from the Hebrew tradition in other places as well, such as Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15.[115]

Bringing the mother donkey along makes good practical sense if the colt was young and had never been ridden, as Mark 11:2 and Luke 19:30 specify as a young unbroken animal could be easier to lead calmly with its mother beside it. It's possible that Matthew's specific mention of the mother donkey was also utilized for a deeper, hidden meaning by drawing on passages from the Old Testament regarding the saints. The book of 2 Samuel records that two donkeys were brought to King David (2 Samuel 16:1-2). Rabbinic Judaism linked the traditions surrounding the donkey Abraham rode on to sacrifice Isaac (Gen.22:3) and the donkey Moses and his family rode on to Egypt (Exo.4:19-20)[116] as a similarity that would be fulfilled in Zechariah 9:9 with the Messiah (Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 31:4).

In the ancient near-eastern context, depictions of deities were often presented on top of two animals or on a throne carried by animals. Yahweh is depicted this way in several passages, riding the cherubim on his throne (2 Samuel 6:2; Psalm 18:10, 80:1; Isaiah 37:16; 1 Samuel 4:4; Ezekiel 10:1). This also lines up with the Septuagint where Habakkuk writes of God that, "thou shalt be known between the two living creatures" (Hab. 3:2). Likewise, as Robert Gundry notes, "Though Jesus sat on top of the garments only on the colt, the association of the garmented mother makes a kind of wide throne. Indeed, widening the throne to play up Jesus' royal majesty appears to underlie Matthew's importation of a second animal."[117]

Jesus is the nation of Israel? Matthew 2:15 links Jesus's exile from Egypt as a baby boy to Hosea 11:1's "out of Egypt I called my son." Yet, the following verse in Hosea says this son "sacrificed to the Baals" and "burned incense to images" (v. 2). So is Matthew saying that Jesus worshiped idols? As we know, the context in Hosea is referring to Israel. However, this overlooks the *further* context in that Jesus was meant to be the representative of Israel. Isaiah 49:1-7 speaks of two Israels, one of whom would bring Israel to God (aka: Jesus bringing Israel to God). Just as Matthew is the only gospel that mentions Christ's fasting in the wilderness for forty days (Matthew 4:1-2) which was meant to represent the Israelites being tested in the wilderness for forty years (Numbers 14:33-34; Joshua 5:6) each day representing one year, just as the case with Ezekiel

[114] W.D. Davies & Dale C. Allison, *Matthew,* p.122; R.H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel,* p.198
[115] contrary to the Septuagint which renders, "Israel is a child, and I loved him, and out of Egypt have I called his children."
[116] The Septuagint uses a plural form of the word "donkey."
[117] Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew,* p.410

bearing Israel's iniquities "a day for each year" (Ezekiel 4:4-6) and similar to Israel's in the wilderness "a year for each day" according to the number of days in which they spied out the land. Israel's mission was fulfilled in Christ because only Christ had succeeded where Israel had failed in not tempting God (Matt. 4:5-7 cf. Deut. 6:16; Psalm 106:14) and trusting that man does not live by bread alone, but by the word of God (Deut. 8:1-5; Matt. 4:1-4). All Matthew is doing here is applying this Israel-typology rooted in Isaiah 49.

Israel was one of the many typological things from the OT that symbolically foreshadowed Christ, as a *type* of Christ, as the NT teaches of Adam regarding the physical foreshadowing the spiritual. In the way that Adam brought forth worldly life, so Christ brought forth *spiritual* life (Romans 5:14-15, 1 Cor 15:45-47). Jesus quotes Psalm 41:9 in John 13:18, referencing the betrayal of Ahithophel to David foreshadowing the betrayal of Judas to Jesus. He also says regarding his death and resurrection, "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12:40) Yet, Jonah got mad that Nineveh repented and was forgiven (Jonah 4:1) while Jesus was glad they repented (Matthew 12:41). Likewise, Israel fled Egypt as Jesus fled Egypt, yet Israel committed idolatry while Jesus did *not* commit idolatry. Again, this is typology, just as first century Jews sometimes utilized (e.g. Philo, the Qumran pesharim texts, 4 Ezra). If Jesus had matched every single aspect of Israel then it would appear *too unlikely* and *then* more as a fabrication but the fact of these differences actually shows the veracity and authenticity of the narratives and how the NT authors merely found special similarities in certain aspects with types-of-Christ in the OT.

Bethlehem is in Ephraim? Matthew quotes a passage as a fulfillment of the slain infants in Bethlehem under King Herod (Matthew 2:16-18). The passage he quotes reads:

"Thus says the LORD: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." (Jeremiah 31:15)

However, the context of Jeremiah 31's Ramah is the Ramah in Ephraim (vv.6,9,18,20) where prophet Samuel was from (1 Samuel 1:1, 19-20, 7:17), not Bethlehem.

What's overlooked with this objection is Matthew's common utilization of typology, which, when examined closer, actually reveals his *knowledge* of scripture. For starters, we know there were two Ramahs in Israel. Interestingly, Matthew uses the mourning of Ramah in Ephraim from the Babylonian exile as a foreshadow of the mourning of Ramah in Benjamin (Joshua 18:21-25) because the origin of the Benjamites was at Bethlehem as descendants of Rachel who was buried there (Genesis 35:16-19). Elsewhere it's also indicated that Rachel's tomb had been moved to the tribe of Benjamin (1 Samuel 10:2). Though Bethlehem was in the tribe of Judah

who were descended from Leah, they often aligned with the tribe of Benjamin since they were both the southern region of Israel, and later the southern *kingdom* after the Solomonic division (1 Kings 12:21; 1 Chron. 12:16-18; 2 Chron. 11:1, 15:9; Psalm 68:27; Ezra 4:1). This puts things into perspective since Rachel had been buried in both places. In light of all this, Matthew's comparison with these events makes sense and shows all the more his knowledge of the time and setting and his attention to historical tradition.[118]

Jesus was prophesied to be a Nazarene? Critics object that the claim Matthew makes that there was a prophecy stating of the Messiah that he would be a Nazarene (Matt. 2:23) is nowhere found in the Old Testament. See: Messianic Prophecy: He would be a Nazarene?

[118] Jewish historical tradition holds that during the Maccabean Revolt, Judas Maccabeus is given a vision of two dead men, Onias and prophet Jeremiah, praying for the people of Israel (2 Maccabees 15:11-17). If the concept of deceased loved ones watching over Israel is recorded, it's possible that Jeremiah and Matthew may have believed Rachel, despite having died on earth, was literally weeping in spirit over the trials of Israel, as with Onias and Jeremiah in Judas's vision.

Luke

<><><><

Tertullian (AD 200) In *Against Marcion* 4.5, Tertullian writes, “For even Luke’s form of the Gospel men usually ascribe to Paul. And it may well seem that the works which disciples publish belong to their masters.”

Origen (AD 220-248) In *Commentary on Matthew* book 1, Origen says, “And third, was that according to Luke, the Gospel commended by Paul, which he composed for the converts from the Gentiles.”

The Muratorian Fragment (AD 170) It's known as the oldest known list of New Testament books and it testifies to the authorship of Luke’s gospel, saying, “The third Gospel book, that according to Luke. This physician Luke after Christ’s ascension (resurrection?), since Paul had taken him with him as an expert in the way (of the teaching), composed it in his own name according to (his) thinking. Yet neither did he himself see the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain it, so he begins to tell the story from the birth of John.”

Anti-Marcionite Prologue (AD 100-300) In the *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* it says, “Indeed Luke was an Antiochene Syrian, a doctor by profession, a disciple of the apostles: later however he followed Paul until his martyrdom, serving the Lord blamelessly. He never had a wife, he never fathered children, and died at the age of eighty-four, full of the Holy Spirit, in Boeotia. Therefore--although gospels had already been written--indeed by Matthew in Judaea but by Mark in Italy--moved by the Holy Spirit he wrote down this gospel in the parts of Achaia…And indeed afterward the same Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles.”

Author’s preface The author’s preface addresses a man named Theophilus (1:3). The context wouldn’t have made sense had knowledge of the author not been known by Theophilus and is unlikely that Theophilus would have received an anonymous biography of Jesus. As Simon Gathercole notes, “The dedication to Theophilus in Luke’s Gospel means that ‘the name of the author could hardly be omitted from the title,’ and Luke’s prologue demands a title with Luke’s name, or else the first person references in Luke 1.1-4 ‘would be left hanging.’”[120] Given Theophilus would have known who wrote to him as well as attestation from the early church that it was Luke and there was never debate or disagreement about the authorship, the simplest explanation is that the author of the Gospel was always known to be Luke.

Justin Martyr (AD 155-160) While he doesn’t explicitly say, “Luke,” he writes in *Dialogue with Trypho* chapter 103 regarding Christ, “For in the memoirs which I say were drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them…” As Bible scholar Craig Evans says, “The important point here is that memoirs are not anonymous; they are linked to known personalities.”[121] The claim, “those who followed them” also presents further consistency

[120] Simon Gathercole, *The Alleged Anonymity of the Canonical Gospels,* The Journal of Theological Studies, volume 69, issue 2. 2018
[121] Craig Evans, *Jesus and the Manuscripts,* 10

regarding Mark and Luke's gospels who were not apostles but "followed them."

A preface of historical intention and importance of eyewitness testimony

Despite Luke's removal from Jesus as an eyewitness, we still have good reasons to believe that he spent considerable time in Judea and interviewed the eyewitnesses. As we see, Paul mentions Luke as a worker alongside him in some of his letters (Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:24; 2 Tim. 4:11) as well as Luke himself claiming involvement with Paul in the book of Acts (notice his use of "we" pronouns: Acts 16:10-17, 20:5, 21:1-8, 27:1-28:16). As the author's preface to his gospel states:

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:1-4)

John Moles notes that the preface signals a conscious appropriation of the historical nature of works like that of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius.[122] In other words, Luke intended for his narrative to be read as any other Greek history and not as fiction. He further points out, "As many observe…not only is Luke, or Luke-Acts, narrative but it is some sort of historical narrative…that is, a series of past events, and a 'narrative' of past events, especially one 'drawn up'/'written up' 'accurately' and 'in order,' and with a beginning and an end, itself denotes historiography, history itself consisting of 'things that happened or that were done.' After this immediate generic 'signal,' readers must read the rest of the Preface historiographically, as the narrative broadly confirms."[123]

Additionally, Clare Rothchild analyzed the claims ancient historians made in their prefaces and found six claims were commonly made:

- The claim to truth
- The claim to accuracy
- The claim to research or to have a narrative from the beginning
- The claim to avoid style
- The claim to order

[122] Roman Rule in Greek and Latin Writing: Double Vision. (2014). Belgium. Brit.; see: Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War,* Book 1.1, "My conclusions have cost me some labour from the want of coincidence between accounts of the same occurrences by different eye-witnesses, arising sometimes from imperfect memory, sometimes from undue partiality for one side or the other."

[123] J. Moles, *Luke's Preface: The Greek Decree, Classical Historiography and Christian Redefinitions.* New Testament Studies, 57(4), 461-482

- The claim to rely on autopsy or eyewitnesses

Rothchild notes that the terminology was flexible and not every claim was always utilized, but even with that, Luke utilized five of the six claims (all except avoiding style).[124]

Though one might ask if this is the case, why weren't his sources linked to the claims throughout his writing, but only referenced at the beginning? As John J. Peters notes in his translation, historians like Thucydides also appear to only mention his sources and methods in his preface.[125] This was also most likely to keep the narrative flow without constant interruption,[126] as Peters says, "The critical point to highlight with Thucydides's handling of sources is that as a general rule, outside of the opening preface (and his second preface 5.26), he does not interrupt the narrative in order to cite, name, or discuss his sources. Equally important to note is that subsequent writers largely followed his convention of concealing the sources within their narratives."[127]

Luke Pitcher states, "Modern writers of history…usually let the reader see the process by which their narrative of events progresses. Ancient historians often do not. Like a swan, the narrative of a work of ancient history glides ever forward. But the processes which sustain its momentum remain submerged and invisible."[128] In other words, Luke was merely following the same pattern employed by the historians of his time.

Though elsewhere he does also make reference to the importance of accuracy and eyewitness testimony. In the story of Judas Isacariot's replacement he is said to be an eyewitness (Acts 1:21-23). He mentions the authenticity of Felix's knowledge of Christianity (Acts 24:22) of whom he had talked with Paul (Acts 24:26). He references Apollos who was knowledgeable in the scriptures but needed an update on baptism (Acts 18:24-26). As John J. Peters notes, "Luke's narrative repeatedly stresses examination of eyewitnesses in pursuit of the goal of 'secure' knowledge and 'secure' writing, so also Polybius stresses at critical moments the importance of 'secure' writing."[129]

This can further be seen in his other book, *Acts,* as Colin Hemer notes that the last 16 chapters of the book of Acts have shown to be archaeologically accurate on at least 84 points.[130] It's confirmed through discoveries which can be woven from the most intricate of details pertaining to natural crossing between correctly named ports (13:4-5), the best shipping lanes at the time (27:5), correct designations for the magistrates of the colony (16:20-23), the use of the correct Athenian slang word used to describe Paul

[124] Clare Rothchild, *Luke-Acts and the Rhetoric of History,* 69-70
[125] see: Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*
[126] John Maricola, "Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography" 80
[127] John J. Peters, *Luke Among the Ancient Historians,* 60
[128] Luke Pitcher, *Writing Ancient History,* 6
[129] Peters, 183
[130] For the complete list of discoveries, see: Colin J. Hemer's, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*

(spermologos, 17:18) and the correct depth of the water near Malta (27:27-28).

Some have also proposed that the "attempted" accounts that he claimed came before his were an error or inadequate. Since Mark was written before Luke, would this mean Luke was asserting he rejected the reliability of Mark? To the contrary, the language of the author seems to imply more of a following-suit behavior rather than a correcting one. As Craig Keener notes, "Many think that Luke thus finds fault with the works of his predecessors…But Luke's language is far less harsh than that of writers who genuinely criticized their predecessors."[131] Loveday Alexander elaborates, "The real difficulty with this reading lies not in the parallels or in the verb itself, but in its relation with the text as a whole, for in succeeding verses Luke (a) by implication enlists these same predecessors alongside himself as recipients of authentic tradition (verse 2), and (b) ranges himself beside them, not against them, with words 'it seemed good to me also…' (verse 3)."[132]

Furthermore, since Luke used Mark as a source, it's evident that he did not reject it outright but perhaps figured it to lack important additional information that he obtained from other sources. Though John Peters thinks Luke was claiming former accounts were inaccurate, he suggests that Luke is referring to the written accounts that he mentions later in the narrative of Acts which were those of Lysias and Festus.[133] Either way, there is no plausible evidence that Luke believed Mark, or even Matthew, were inadequate or inaccurate.

Semitisms in Luke's gospel

Elaborations of Mark Given the Gentile background of Luke, we would expect less Semitisms when he writes from his own perspective or as an editorial note and more Semitisms when he hears from eyewitnesses who witnessed the authentic Jewish background of Jesus's ministry. James Edwards found that the synoptic material independently found in Luke contained 400% more Semitisms and that whenever Luke adds or elaborates on stories in Mark it is significantly more Semitic. For example, Raymond Martin notes the author of Luke added to Mark's account of the transfiguration. He states, "The conclusions from the above study seem clear. When Luke follows Mark closely as in Luke 9:33b-35 (Mark 9:5-7), he is less Semitic than Mark--i.e. He improves Mark's Greek; but in verses 28-33a, where Luke differs radically from Mark, he is more Semitic than Mark and more Semitic also than normal Lukan style as seen in Acts 15:36-28:31. The most likely explanation for this phenomenon is that in these verses Luke is dependent on a Semitic tradition in addition to his Markan source."[134] This would be unexpected if Luke was merely adding fictional aspects, but expected had he relied on eyewitness testimony also aside from Mark.

---

[131] Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels,* 130
[132] Loveday Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel,* 115
[133] Peters, 186
[134] Raymond A. Martin, *Syntax Criticism of the Synoptic Gospels,* 71

Notice how when we read the author's prefaces and the "we" sections of Acts regarding his own eyewitness testimony of the early church, we find very few Semitisms and biblical allusions. This writing style fits with a Gentile author as Luke, who wouldn't contain Semitisms when writing *apart* from the eyewitness testimonies of Jesus, but on his own.

Jewish names Similar to Mark and Matthew, this material is also contained in the onomastic congruence of 28 of the 44 named individuals in Luke, and that names were also likely included to list some of the eyewitness tradents.[135] For example, he names some women and minor details about them (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna) who had followed Jesus, yet who bear no integral part of the narrative (8:1-3). Joanna is said to be the "wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager," which would explain how we have information on Herod's meetings with his servants (Matt. 14:1-2). He also writes "Simon Peter" in its hellenized form (5:8), yet switches to the semitic form when he's quoting James (Acts 15:14). He typically refers to Mary with a Semitic variant of her name (1:41, 56) but in 2.19 and Acts 1:14 he uses the Greek form of the name, indicating he used the Greek when writing his own editorial notes, distinct from the Semitic tradition he inherited.

Infancy narrative and hymns The infancy narrative (chapters 1-2) is also found with allusions and quotations to the Greek Septuagint. Stephen Farris notes this section of Luke's gospel, including the hymns, is very similar to the Septuagint while at the same time, having an apparent Semitic nature.[136]

Medical language and familiarity

As we know, the church tradition attests to Luke being a physician. If this is true, we would expect he would have written in a way that would subtly reveal knowledge of medical phrases and ideas. W.K. Hobart documented numerous instances of medical terms used throughout Luke-Acts,[137] though it was argued later that many of these medical terms that Luke used could likewise be found throughout other ancient works with the likes of the Septuagint, Josephus, Plutarch, and Lucian.[138] To compare Luke to these ancient corpuses is not a fair comparison however as these works contain far more material than the Luke-Acts books of Luke and are not proportioned the same in regards to the size-terminology ratio. Out of these, Lucian was less extensive but he was well educated and already had interest in medical subjects.[139]

---

[135] Luuk van de Weghe, *Living Footnotes in the Gospel of Luke,* 49-51
[136] Stephen Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives,* 57
[137] William Kirk Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke*
[138] Henry J. Cadbury in *The Style and Literary Method of Luke* lists off the Septuagint, Josephus, Plutarch, and Lucian.
[139] E.T. Withington says, "He spent part of his life as a traveling show-lecturer, ready to give a rhetorical exhibition on almost any subject, and he probably made a point of getting up technical terms, as well as

Though Hobart may have overextended his argument, this doesn't mean his argument is entirely useless because regardless if these terms are used elsewhere, it still coheres with the author being a physician and would thus fit in the mindset of an author who's knowledgeable in the medical field. In fact, the amount of medical language when compared to the other gospels is part of what makes Luke unique from them. As W.G. Marx says, "Commentators who followed Hobart, like Zahn, Harnack, Plummer and Creed all agree that Hobart over-extended himself, but they--after sifting Hobart's lists and sometimes finding new instances of medical language in Luke--all agree that there remain a number of good references demonstrating Luke's penchant for a physician's specialized vocabulary."[140]

Later on, Annette Weissenrieder updated the argument by claiming that Luke's mere usage of terms is not enough, but that we must also look at the way Luke writes and how he *used* the medical language. She states, "One thing we can say with certainty: The author of the Gospel of Luke had some knowledge of ancient medicine."[141]

Thomas Grafton conducted an extensive analysis of documentary papyri and came to the conclusion that, "By comparison, Luke's writings make more frequent use of named illnesses than what we find in the documentary papyri."[142]

Luuk van de Weghe states, "The Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (TLG), a searchable digital database of over 11,000 ancient Greek documents and 125 million words, now allows us to determine that some of Luke's words are indeed used exclusively by medical writers."[143] Let's have a look…

"Eye of a needle" In 18:25, he changes the Greek words for both "eye" (to "τρύπημα" or "trupéma") and "needle" (to "βελόνης" or "belones") from Mark 10:25. The combination of these words are only seen in three other ancient works: Galenus in *Vocum Hippocratis,*[144] Galenus in *An in arteriis natura sanguis contineatur,*[145] and Oribasius in *Collectiones medicae*[146]--all medical writings by physicians.

"Upper" At one point in Acts, in 19:1 Luke uses a Greek word for "upper" ("ἀνωτερικός" or "anóterikos"). All other uses of this word are only found in medical writings. Luke however, uses it in a non-medical context which could portray familiarity with the term where he used it without thinking.

Gospel preface In his preface, the author writes, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken

---

acquiring an encyclopedic education." from Some Greek Medical Terms with Reference to St. Luke and "Liddell and Scott." Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine, 12(Suppl), 122-132

[140] W.G. Marx (1980). *Luke, the Physician, Re-Examined.* The Expository Times, 91(6), 168-172

[141] Annette Weissenrieder, *Images of Illness in the Gospel of Luke,* 335

[142] Thomas Grafton, *Health and Healing in the Documentary Papyri,* 81

[143] L. Vandeweghe (2024). *Luke the Physician: Some Notes on the Internal Evidence.* Forthcoming

[144] Galenus, *Vocum Hippocratis* glossarium, Kuhn Volume 19, p. 115, line 10

[145] Galenus, *An in arteriis natura sanguis contineatur,* Kuhn Volume 4, p. 709, line 8

[146] Oribasius, *Collectiones medicae,* Book 44, ch. 21, sec. 12, line 1

to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us" (1:1-3). As mentioned, this preface mimics the style of other historians. However, what's striking is the bearing similarity--if not, identical wording this mimics especially with the ancient physician Hypocrates on how he opened one of his medical treatises. In Hypocrates's preface he writes, "As many as have undertaken to speak or to write concerning the healing art."[147]

"Physician" proverb Luke is the only one to record Jesus's statement, "Physician, heal yourself," (4:23) which is stated as a proverb that Luke would have most likely recognized.

Grace toward physicians He also shows grace toward his fellow physicians. Regarding the events surrounding the woman with the issue of blood, Mark writes that she suffered from many physicians and only got worse (Mark 5:25-26), while Luke is less harsh, merely stating of physicians' inability to heal her (8:43).

"High fever" In one place, Mark and Matthew only speak of a "fever" (Mark 1:30; Matt. 8:14) while Luke adds a descriptor, writing "high fever" (4:38), using similar terminology found in medical literature as it was common for physicians to distinguish between high and slight fevers.[148]

"Full of leprosy" While Mark and Matthew refer to a man as merely a "leper" (Mark 1:40; Matt. 8:2), Luke on the other hand uses diagnosed terminology, writing, "a man full of leprosy" (5:12).

Dropsy Only Luke records a man healed of "dropsy" (14:1-6), thus using the proper medical term.

Length of time In 8:26-29, he adds to Mark's text regarding the demon possessed Gadarene to include a comment about his going into the desert and living alone for a long period of time, which is in-line with comments from Aretaeus and Caelius Aurelianus about the disease of mania. He also mentions a woman being healed of an 18-year old back condition (13:11). In both of these accounts, he makes reference to the length of time for the illness which was important for diagnosing someone in ancient medical literature. As Weissenrieder says, "The Lucan author's emphasis on the duration of an illness through the mention of an uncertain period of time or a precise number of years is striking in comparison with the versions in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew…A statement of the duration of the illness--sometimes specifying a concrete number of years--is extremely relevant to the diagnosis of an illness in the Corpus Hippocraticum."[149]

---

[147] Marvin R. Vincent. Word Studies in the New Testament. Volume I: The Synoptic Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Epistles of Peter, James, and Jude. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887; 1911 printing
[148] E.g. Hippocrates De locis in homine, sec. 24, line 1; De mulierum affectibus i-iii, sec. 60, line 15; In-Sok Yeo, "Hippocrates in the Context of Galen: Galen's Commentary on the Classification of Fevers in Epidemics VI, Hippocrates in Context, ed. Philip van der Eijk (Brill; Boston, 2005, p. 439-442)
[149] Weissenrieder, *Images of Illness in the Gospel of Luke,* 314-315

Jairus's daughter Regarding the raising of Jairus's daughter among the synoptics (Mark 5:38-43; Matt. 9:23-26; Luke 8:42, 51-56), we see Luke especially arranges the account to fit an ancient medical description. He emphasized the age of the girl, the time she was given something to eat, and added the return of her spirit. This can be explained in Luke's understanding of the incident as a case of hysteria phenomena which was thought to impact women linked with virginity or widowhood. Symptoms were thought to include difficulty breathing, the inability to eat, and paralysis. Ancient doctors related anecdotes of patients being without breath for many days without passing away and a return of breath was not always linked to prior death. With all this in mind, it's likely that Luke may have taken Jesus's comment that she was "not sick but asleep" as being literally correct and that this wasn't a resurrection but a normal healing.[150]

W.G. Marx points out, "Luke's medical pneuma surfaces…in his report of the raising of Jairus's daughter. When Jesus said to her, 'Get up, little girl,' epestrepsen to pneuma autes (Lk 8:54-55), and incidentally, Luke reports that she got up at once (another clinical word) and that Jesus ordered some food for her--a feature of Greek medicine."[151] Weissenrieder says, "When we compare the descriptions in the illness narratives of the Gospel of Mark with those of the Gospel of Luke, we encounter not only a quantitative increase in illness and healing stories, but marked differences in the depiction of the symptoms and the associated affects as well."[152]

Elizabeth's pregnancy, Zechariah's muteness Weissenrieder notes that Elizabeth's pregnancy is described in three common medical stages and Zechariah's deafness and muteness are associated in ancient medicine with dreams/visions during therapeutic evacuation, which Luke shows instead to be an evacuation of unbelief.[153]

Models of epilepsy framework Weissenrieder continues, pointing out that ancient medicine has two models for epilepsy: one results in seizure, and the other, in paralysis. Mark combines both which would be considered a medical impossibility, but Luke redacts this to include only the former symptoms (seizure brought on by build-up of phlegm). An example of this is seen in 9:37-43 regarding the man's demon-possessed son of which Mark's account includes a form of paralysis (has a "spirit that makes him mute") along with the seizures (see: Mark 9:17-27), while Luke omits the paralysis (muteness) and keeps mention of the seizures.[154]

Undesigned coincidences

Among the evidence of Luke's independence also lies in the undesigned coincidences, or small details that unintentionally fill in plot holes from the other gospels and vice

[150] Ibid. 256-267
[151] W.G. Marx (1980). *Luke, the Physician, Re-Examined.* The Expository Times, 91(6), 168-172
[152] Weissenrieder, 358
[153] Ibid. 257-288, 360-366
[154] Ibid.

versa so that the fourfold Gospel narrative fits together like pieces of a puzzle. These differences from the other accounts attest to his authenticity while at the same time, show that he did not draw from them, supporting the notion that these differences were merely drawn from the memory of eyewitnesses. For example:

Healed ear The other gospels record that Peter had struck off the ear of a servant of the high priest with his sword (John 18:10-11, Matthew 26:51, Mark 14:47) and that Pilate still declared him innocent (John 18:38, Matt. 27:23, Mark 15:14). Wouldn't this be cause for arrest? Yet, Luke's account tells us that Jesus had healed the ear (Luke 22:51), thus destroying any false evidence.

The blindfold Matthew's Gospel says during Jesus' trial, the chief priests and members of the council struck him on the head and said, "Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?" (Matthew 26:67-68). Couldn't Jesus have just looked at who hit him? Yet, Luke's Gospel account answers this question, describing the same scene, only he says Jesus was blindfolded (Luke 22:64). Now this makes sense.

Bounty of fish In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus encounters Peter, Andrew, James, and John for the first time when they're mending their fishing nets. He says, "Follow me," and they spontaneously do (Matthew 4:18-22). Now doesn't it seem strange they would just drop everything and follow some stranger they never met before? Yet, Luke clears this issue up in Luke 5:1-11 which says Jesus got into Peter's boat and preached from it. Then he told Peter to put out his nets, and Peter did so even though they had worked all night and caught nothing. Miraculously, the nets emerge with so many fish that the nets begin to break, and the catch is enough to fill two boats. Luke says Peter and the others were astonished and Peter recognized Jesus as Lord. Now it makes sense.

Washing the disciples' feet At the Last Supper, John's gospel records that Jesus had washed the disciples' feet (John 13). This seems somewhat spontaneous with no pretext or provocation. Yet, Luke's gospel records that at this time, the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest. Jesus then teaches them that one who serves is the greatest and had said to the disciples, "I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27). Now we're given more context to the teaching lesson.

Criteria of embarrassment

Luke contains embarrassing details about Jesus and the church founders. This is not what we would expect to see from an author who intends to fabricate since it paints all the founders in a bad light. Given this, one most likely would not admit such details unless it were the truth. For example, people Jesus knew from his hometown take offense at him and reject him (Luke 4:28-29). Jesus is accused of having a demon (Luke 11:15). He is also accused of breaking the Sabbath (Luke 6:2).

The apostles are presented as dim-witted and slow to understand Jesus at first (Luke 18:34). In one incident regarding Jesus foretelling his death and resurrection,

Peter actually *rebukes* Jesus, in which Jesus rebukes him back, calling him "Satan"! (Luke 9:22). They fall asleep on Jesus when he asks them to pray (Luke 22:39-46). Peter even denies him three times after claiming he would die for Jesus (Luke 22:33-34, 22:54-62). On top of that, they make no effort to give their friend a proper burial, but instead record that a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin-the people who sentenced Jesus to his death--took the matter of burial into his own hands (Joseph of Arimathea; Luke 23:50-56). Meanwhile, as the men are hiding for fear of the Jews, the brave women stand by Jesus and are the first to discover the empty tomb (Luke 23:27).

No embellishment

There is no embellishment with the gospels--something we would certainly notice had it been invented. Consider the rejected apocryphal work, the Gospel of Peter, which describes the resurrection with a large crowd gathering around the tomb, the heavens opening, the stone rolling away by itself and out coming an exceptionally large Jesus with two exceptionally large angels--of whom their heads reached heaven--and a cross that speaks! On the other hand, the gospels in the Bible tell us some women arrived at the tomb first, met an angel or two there (one of whom moved the stone himself), and that the body of Jesus was already gone (Mark 16:4-8; Luke 24:2-8; John 20:1-12; Matthew 28:2-7) and that he appeared to the disciples later on. If this is to be a mere fairy tale, it would seem like the author lacks a bit in the excitement factor.

Contradictions and errors?

The birth narrative. See: Why the Birth of Jesus Narrative is Consistent With Itself and History

The genealogies of Jesus. See Matthew's section: The genealogies of Jesus

Galilee or Jerusalem? After Jesus's resurrection, Matthew's account records Jesus and an angel telling the disciples to meet him at Galilee for the Great Commission (Matt. 28:10, 16-19) while Luke's account records Jesus telling them to stay in Jerusalem until Pentecost (Luke 24:49-53; Acts 1:1-5). See Matthew's section: Galilee or Jerusalem?

The revolt of Theudas. Though not in his gospel but his other writing, the book of Acts, Luke records the revolt led by Theudas was followed by Judas the Galilean who came after him (Acts 5:36-37). Judas the Galilean would have been executed before or around 1 AD since Luke says his days were during the census, so Theudas's revolt would have happened prior to this. Also, this was the rabbi Gamaliel speaking in the narrative which would have happened before 37 AD. However, Josephus records that the revolt of Theudas occurred around 45 AD. In other words, Luke must have misdated this event, nor could Gamaliel have known this since it hadn't happened yet. Some might even argue that Acts relied on Josephus and was therefore, written late. Josephus's narrative of Theudas is written in book 20 which also mentions that the sons

of Judas the Galilean were slain.

Interestingly, Josephus records that the time after Herod the Great died was followed by many uprisings[155] so it's likely that Luke is referring to one of those that Josephus had failed to mention. We know that Origen stated that Theudas was active before the birth of Christ,[156] though it's unsure as to whether he was using another source or just drawing from the book of Acts. Theudas is a contraction of Theodotus and can be used as the Greek equivalent to the name Jonathan. Many Jews had this name and it was also the name of a famous Maccabean king, so it's plausible that there was another Theodus who rebelled against Judas the Galilean that Josephus failed to mention. Jewish ossuaries also show that the Greek name Theudas was given alongside other Jewish names like Nathanael, Mattathias, Hananias and Jehohanan,[157] so they could have shared the same Greek name but not the same Jewish names.

This is further supported by the fact that Luke said the first Theudas only had 400 men while Josephus said the later Theodus had a great multitude who followed him.[158] I. Howard Marshall explains, "There is, therefore, much to be said for the suggestions either that Josephus got his dating wrong or (more probably) that Gamaliel is referring to another, otherwise unknown Theudas. Since there were innumerable uprisings when Herod the Great died, and since Josephus describes four men bearing the name of Simon within forty years…"[159]

Furthermore, it's unlikely that Acts was relying on Josephus for a number of reasons: 1) The events of Acts 5 were common knowledge and would have been known to many; 2) For all we know, they could have been using similar sources; 3) It's odd to say that Luke copied Josephus in a place where he supposedly contradicts him; 4) If Acts copied Josephus it would have been written some time after 95 AD but other evidence suggests that Acts was written long before this; 5) The narrative purpose in the passage in Acts is very different than Josephus's purpose; 6) If Luke got his information from Josephus, it's odd that he didn't use the language of "certain imposter" given his habit of denouncing sorcery (Acts 8:9-25, 13:6-12, 19:17-20); 7) The Acts account is shorter and lacks evidence of embellishment; 8) Given Luke's interest in political details it is odd he left out the note "when Fadus was procurator of Judea" if he got his information from Josephus.

Did Paul's men hear or see? Also in the book of Acts, Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9) is documented to have had witnesses along with him of whom it is said that, regarding Christ's voice, "The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one." (Acts 9:7). One might object that this is contradicted by Acts 22:9 where Paul says, "And they that

[155] Josephus, *Ant.* 17.269
[156] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.57
[157] C.J. Hemer (1990). *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History,* 162-163
[158] *Ant.* 20.97-99
[159] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts,* 129

were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.” This is answered by the fact that in the Greek, the verb for "to hear" (*akouo*) can also mean hearing a sound physically without understanding the words being spoken. Nor is seeing a light a contradiction of “seeing no man.” In other words, this is plausibly harmonized by saying that they saw the light but not Jesus himself, and they heard a voice but didn’t understand what it said.

John

<><><><

Does Jesus mimic the author's own style of writing?

The Pericope Adulterae "addition"?

Other additions?

Aren't Christians supposed to do miracles like Jesus?

External (& some internal) evidence of John's eyewitness authorship

Regarding Jesus's crucifixion, we read, "He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe." (John 19:35). There's an eyewitness "testimony" mentioned here that is for the reader to believe, so it's implied that what we know as John's gospel is the subject of this verse.

It claims to be written by "the disciple whom Jesus loved." (John 21:20-24). Well this "beloved disciple" also hangs around Peter more than any other disciple (John 13:23-24, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20), just as John does in the synoptic gospels. John, along with Peter and James, formed an inner circle around Jesus (e.g. Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51; Gal. 2:9).

P66 manuscript title addresses the gospel to John; it dates to AD 200.

Anti-Marcionite Prologue (AD 100-300) Around 100-300 AD, the *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* says, "The Gospel of John was revealed and given to the churches by John while still in the body, just as Papias of Hierapolis, the close disciple of John, related in the exoterics, that is, in the last five books. Indeed he wrote down the gospel, while John was dictating carefully…"

Though the Prologue's mention of an altercation between John and the heretic Marcion is noted here which gives some scholars reason to give John a later date since Marcion's activity is typically dated after 140 AD. However, it's plausible to suggest that the author of the Prologue had mistaken such an incident, given John was known for combating heretics during his time--one example named Cerinthus as mentioned by Irenaeus[162]--and that Marcion was the more well-known heretic. In light of this, John's gospel is not typically dated this late because the chronology is hard to reconcile.

Polycrates (AD 190) and Acts of Peter and the Twelve (AD 200) It claims to be written by the disciple who, regarding Jesus, "had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?'" (John 21:20-24, 13:21-25). Eusebius in *Church History* quotes Polycrates who, around 190 AD, says this disciple was John when he said, "John, who reclined on the Lord's chest" (3.31.3; 5.24.3-4). Third century apocryphal writing *Acts of Peter and the Twelve,* also reveals this disciple was John when it says, "Peter was afraid to reply to him again. He motioned to the one who was beside Jesus, which was John: 'You speak this time.' In response, John said,

[162] Book 3, Chapter 11.1 of Against Heresies

‘Lord, we are afraid to say many words in your presence…’” (11.8.1).

Irenaeus, in AD 180, writes in *Adversus Haereses* 3.3.4, “John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on his breast, himself produced his Gospel while he was living at Ephesus in Asia." Irenaeus was the student of Ignatius and Polycarp (AD 69-155) who had been students of John. He also writes in *Adversus Haereses* 1.8.5, “They teach that John, the disciple of the Lord, pointed to the first Ogdoad, saying as follows, in these words: ‘John, the disciple of the Lord, wanted to describe the origin of all things, that is, how the Father emanated everything. Therefore he lays down a certain principle, namely that which was first begotten by God, which Being he has called both the only-begotten Son and God. In him, the Father emanated all things spermatically…”

Tertullian, in AD 200, writes in *Against Marcion* 4.2, “We lay it down as our first position, that the evangelical Testament has apostles for its authors…Of the apostles, therefore, John and Matthew first instill faith into us; whilst of apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterwards.”

Clement of Alexandria (AD 155-220), quoted in Eusebius’s *Church History* 3.24.1-13, states, “Of all those who had been with the Lord only Matthew and John left us their recollections, and tradition says that they took to writing out of necessity…John, it is said, used all the time a message which was not written down, and at last took to writing for the following cause. The three gospels which had been written down before were distributed to all including himself.”

Origen (AD 185-254) writes in *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 1.6, “For none of these plainly declared His Godhead, as John does when he makes Him say, I am the light of the world, I am the way and the truth and the life, I am the resurrection, I am the door, I am the good shepherd.”

Theophilus of Antioch (AD 180) in *To Autolycus* 2.22 writes, “Therefore the Holy Scriptures teach us, as do all those inspired by the Spirit, one of whom, John, says, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.’”

Heracleaon (AD 170) Origen quotes Heracleaon in *Commentary on the Gospel of John* fr. 3 writes, “The words, ‘No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.’ [John 1:18], were spoken, not by the Baptist, but by the disciple.” He makes reference to “the Baptist” who was also named John.

Ptolemy (AD 140-160) In *Against Heresies* Book 1 Preface (par.2), Irenaeus states that he writes in response to, “the disciples of Ptolemæus.” In 1.8.5, Irenaeus claims that the disciples of Ptolemy, “teach that John, the disciple of the Lord, indicated the first Ogdoad, expressing themselves in these words: John, the disciple of the Lord, wishing to set forth the origin of all things…” He continues by quoting John 1:1-4 and explaining their interpretation. Though the concluding clause, “Such are the views of Ptolemæus” only appears in our Latin manuscripts and are absent in our Greek manuscripts, the

claims by his own disciples can reasonably be traced back to Ptolemy himself who would have been their teacher.

The Muratorian Fragment (AD 170) It's known as the oldest known list of New Testament books and it testifies to the authorship of John's gospel. The beginning of it is missing, and the original dates back to AD 170 with the surviving copy (fragment) dating to the seventh century. It reads, “The fourth Gospel is that of John, one of the disciples. When his fellow disciples and bishops entreated him, he said, ‘Fast ye now with me for the space of three days, and let us recount to each other whatever may be revealed to each of us.’ On the same night, it was revealed to Andrew, one of the apostles, that John should narrate all things in his own name as they called them to mind.”

Justin Martyr (AD 155-160) While he doesn’t explicitly say, “John,” he writes in *Dialogue with Trypho* chapter 103 regarding Christ, “For in the memoirs which I say were drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them…” As Bible scholar Craig Evans says, “The important point here is that memoirs are not anonymous; they are linked to known personalities.”[163] The claim, “those who followed them” also presents further consistency regarding Mark and Luke’s gospels who were not apostles but “followed them.”

Doesn’t “we” mean more than one author?

One might note the author’s use of “we” in 21:24, as if to indicate more than one author. There are a few answers for this actually. First of all--though the Gospel is for everybody--the author may have had the church in mind and many believers who had likewise witnessed Jesus themselves in this particular verse. The author merely switched to a plural pronoun here as if to include himself among his own believing audience, as writers sometimes did at the time and as we sometimes do today. This pattern can be seen likewise in John’s epistles (e.g. use of “we”: 1 John 1:6-10, 2:1-5, 18-19, etc. use of “I”: 1 John 2:1, 7-8, 12-14, 21, 26; 5:13, etc.). In the conclusion of one of his works Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote, “I would have given you examples of what I have said but for the risk of becoming a bore, especially as it is you that I am addressing. That is all we have to say about the style of Demosthenes, my dear Ammaeus. If God preserves us, we shall present you in a subsequent treatise with an even longer and more remarkable account than this of his genius in the treatment of subject-matter."[164]

We could also posit that this was an editorial note written by a scribe whom John dictated his narrative to. Around 100-300 AD, the *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* says, “The Gospel of John was revealed and given to the churches by John while still in the body, just as Papias of Hierapolis, the close disciple of John, related in the exoterics, that is, in the last five books. Indeed he wrote down the gospel, while John was dictating

[163] Craig Evans, *Jesus and the Manuscripts,* 10
[164] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, The Critical Essays, vol. 1 (tr. S. Usher; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974) 455.

carefully…" The Muratorian fragment also reports that there were others with John when he wrote, including the disciple Andrew, so the "we" could simply be the others that the Muratorian fragment mentions. Interestingly enough, in line with this, the first disciple that the gospel of John introduces is Andrew, even before Peter (John 1:40-44). Though it's also said that the author is the disciple who has "written" these things, we can gather that--even with a scribe--John likewise did much of the writing.

Writes about himself in third-person?

One might also ask: Why would the author refer to himself in third-person? Biblical scholar Richard Bauckham notes, "When ancient historians referred to themselves within their narratives as participating in or observing the events they recount, they commonly referred to themselves in the third person by name, as Thucydides, Xenophon, Polybius, Julius Caesar, or Josephus."[165] In other words, this was common in ancient antiquity. Even Jesus, as we know, commonly referred to himself in third-person as the Son of Man and the Son.

The consistency with the synoptics in John's gospel

The skeptic may point to the evolution of the Gospel of John in theological narrative regarding the divinity of Christ compared to the synoptic gospels to confirm the idea that Jesus being God was a later, fabricated idea. However, this claim is false as the synoptics *do* contain hints of Jesus's deity, as well as some of the divine claims, just not as abundantly as John (e.g. Mark 2:28; Mark 16:17; Mark 14:61-64; Matthew 18:20; Luke 8:25; Luke 10:18; Matthew 25:31-46 etc.) Other similarities with the synoptics consist of Jesus's divine "ego eimi," or "I am" statement which is likewise shared in Mark and Matthew when he walks on the water (John 8:58; Mark 6:50; Matt. 14:27; John 6:20). Jesus attributes the common OT "bridegroom" title of God to himself (Matthew 9:14-15; Mark 2:19-20, Luke 5:34-35; John 3:29-30). The only way to the Father is through Jesus (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 14:6). He is also worshiped and called "Son of God" (Mark 3:11, 15:39; Matt. 14:33, 16:16, 27:54, 28:9; Luke 24:52-53; John 1:34, 49; 9:38, 11:27, 20:28). John comes baptizing "with water" and is not worthy to untie the sandals of Jesus (Mark 1:7-8; John 1:26-7).[166]

Furthermore, many of the epistles of Paul and Peter *predate* John and the gospels and also attest to the divinity of Christ (Philippians 2:5-6; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; 2 Peter 1:1; Hebrews 1:8; etc.).

Even granting the point of less explicit divine claims in the synoptics, historical silence on certain important events isn't uncommon and doesn't correlate with historical falsification. For example, the expulsion of Jews from Rome by Claudius in 41 AD is

---

[165] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses,* second edition, 393

[166] Notice that just as many verses that are pointed to regarding divine claims and parallels with the OT God, among many other proofs are synoptic gospel verses. See: Is Jesus God?

mentioned in Acts and Suetonius, but Josephus and Philo are silent. Marco Polo explores China, yet never mentions the Great Wall. Ulysses S. Grant's war diary omits the Emancipation Proclamation. Grafton's Chronicles records King John's reign but not the Magna Carta. Eusebius, in his biography of Constantine, ignores the deaths of his sons Crispus and Fausta.

Furthermore, this overlooks the fact that authors of a particular narrative tend to offer different details to emphasize different aspects for a certain audience. One could say that, since Jesus's followers believed he would return during their lifetime (1 Peter 4:7; James 5:7-9; etc.), the synoptics authors wrote more for the accommodation of the people of their time who would have already known of his divinity without the need for much scriptural reference. The author of John simply realized that a scriptural reference of more detail on the true identity of Jesus may be necessary for the *generations to come* when he aged and it appeared the Second Coming would not happen during the lifetime of the resurrection eyewitnesses.[167]

Even though his gospel may emphasize more claims of higher Christology, it's noteworthy to point out the mannerisms, character and demeanor of Jesus remains consistent with the synoptics, as well as many other of his statements. For example, in John, Jesus often doubles his "truly" or "amen" (aka: "truly, truly": John 1:51, 3:5, etc.), just as Luke reports his doubling with other words ("Simon, Simon" in Luke 22:31-32; "Martha, Martha" in Luke 10:41-42; "Jerusalem, Jerusalem" in Luke 13:34-35). Jesus foretold Peter's threefold denial (Mark 14:30; Matt. 26:34; Luke 22:31-34; John 13:36-38). Jesus claims to raise the temple (Mark 13:2, Matt. 26:61; John 2:19). Jesus is accused of breaking the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28, 3:1-6; Matt. 12:1-12; Luke 6:1-9, 13:10-16, 14:1-6; John 5:16-18, 7:23, 9:16). Jesus prays to his "Father," and labors over drinking the "cup" before him (Mark 10:38, 14:34; Matt. 20:22, 26:39; Luke 22:42; John 12:27, 18:11). Jesus says to "ask" in prayer and you will receive (Matt. 7:7; John 16:24). Jesus says you will always have the poor, but not Jesus (Mark 14:7; Matt. 26:11; John 12:8). Jesus is praised with "Hosanna" (Mark 11:9; Matt. 21:9; John 12:13). Jesus frequently visited the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36; Luke 22:39; John 18:1-2). Jesus seeks to prevent an uprising with the concealment of his identity as the Messiah (John 6:15; Matthew 12:14-21; Mark 1:43-44, 5:43, 7:33-36, 8:22-26, 8:27-30, 9:9).[168]

---

[167] Since Jesus preached of his second coming (Matthew 24) and he never came back, does this mean he's a false prophet? What people get wrong in these passages is that Jesus is not only talking about his Second Coming. In Matthew 24, Jesus is also talking about the destruction of the temple in AD 70, which was actually a fulfilled prophecy rather than a failed one. Elsewhere, he makes reference to his ascension (Matt. 16:28). (for more on this, see: Was Jesus Wrong About an Early Second Coming?)

[168] Though elsewhere in John's gospel he explicitly claims to be the Messiah to the Samaritan woman (John 4:25-26), this would likewise be historically accurate because the Samaritans had a different expectation and view of the Messiah than the Jews did. The Samaritans only followed the Torah and believed he would be the prophet like Moses, or the "Taheb" (Teacher) as Samaritan texts like Memar and Marqah explain, excluding a warrior king as the Jews viewed him. So Jesus could reveal his identity safely to the Samaritans with no concern of the crowds trying to make him a kingly messiah and starting a political uprising.

Jesus declares, “A prophet is not without honor except in his home town” (Mark 6:4; Matt. 13:57; Luke 4:24; John 4:44). Ascension and descension are associated with the apocalyptic Son of Man (Mark 14:61-62; Matthew 26:63-66; John 1:51). Jesus’s common invite, “Follow me” is said (Mark 2:14; Matt. 8:22; Luke 5:27; John 21:19). Jesus rebukes peoples’ desire for a sign (Mark 8:12; Matt. 12:39; Luke 11:29; John 4:48). Jesus refers to a dead person as being “asleep” (Mark 5:39; John 11:11). To receive Jesus and who he sends is to receive the One who sent him (Mark 9:37; Matt. 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 5:23-24, 6:29, 12:44-45, 13:20). Jesus commands the crowds to be seated in the grass (Mark 6:39; Matt. 14:19; John 6:10). The disciples comment on the expensive perfume of “three hundred denarii” used to anoint Jesus (Mark 14:5; John 12:5). The ear Peter cut off was a right ear (Luke 22:50; John 18:10).

Among many of the other examples are Jesus’s parable-like sayings, such as having spiritual “food” to eat, the spiritual “harvest” of souls, as well as other farming terminologies and references to judgment and surrendering oneself to him (4:32, 4:34, 4:35, 4:36-38, 12:24, 12:25, 12:26, 12:30-31, 12:35-36, etc.).

The character of others, with the likes of Mary and Martha in John’s gospel are likewise consistent with the synoptics. In the synoptics, Martha is portrayed as more active, worrisome and distracted with serving everybody while Martha is more contemplative and sat at Jesus’s feet (Luke 10:38-42). Likewise in John’s gospel, Martha runs to meet Jesus, worries about the odor at Lazarus’s tomb, and serves everyone at dinner (John 11:20, 11:39, 12:2) while Mary remains seated, falls at Jesus’s feet and anoints him (John 11:20, 11:32, 12:3).

Chronological “contradictions” with the synoptics?

What about the chronological inconsistencies in John’s gospel compared to the synoptics? For example:

The Temple cleansing. In the synoptics the Temple cleansing happens near the end of Jesus’s ministry (Matt 21; Mark 11; Luke 19) while in John’s gospel it happens near the beginning (John 2:13–22). Because of the way John sequences events (“After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside…” in John 3:22), John appears to be speaking chronologically. The Temple being said to have been built in 46 years presents another early chronological marker (John 2:20). The common response among the early church was that the cleansing from the synoptics and the cleansing from John are two separate events. This is supported by internal evidence.

For starters, this early cleansing fits the prophecy in Malachi 3:1 pretty well in that the “messenger” prepared the way for the Lord and that after this, the Lord “suddenly” comes to his temple. Since we know that the messenger was John the Baptist who prepared the way for Jesus at his baptism in chapter 1, Jesus approaching the Temple a little over a month after this event in chapter 2 matches the prophecy strikingly well (just days after the 40-day temptation period in the wilderness) as

opposed to only arriving at the Temple much later.

Also notable are the numerous differences between the cleansing of the synoptics and John's cleansing. For example, in the synoptics Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11, expels the sellers and buyers, prohibits anyone from carrying a vessel through the temple court, and the Jewish leaders plot against him while in John, the disciples remember Psalm 69:9, Jesus uses a whip to drive out the animals, tells the pigeon sellers to leave, sheep and oxen are mentioned, coins are poured out, and Jewish leaders demand a sign.

It's also unlikely that Jesus would neglect Jerusalem until the very end of his ministry, given the holy city was pivotal for Jesus's mission as the Messiah. It therefore makes sense that Jesus would begin his ministry with a focus on the Temple by signaling its fulfillment and completion in him as the beginning of the new age. Allan Chapple writes, "In John's account, Jesus is putting himself at the center of Israel's life, as the Messiah and the Father's Son. His words and deeds indicate that his death and resurrection will mean the end of the Temple and its sacrifices and will mark him out as the eschatological Temple. All of this is said and done in an indirect and veiled way that fits an early stage in his ministry. Such an inaugural visit to Jerusalem and the Temple makes a good fit with what we know of Jesus' messianic vocation and mission to Israel."[169]

Some might say that it would have been unlikely for him to have been allowed back to cause another disruption. In fact, cleansing the Temple was most likely one of the reasons why the Sanhedrin wanted him executed. However, in Mark's cleansing account Jesus returned the next day after cleansing the Temple and continued to teach there throughout the week (Mark 11:27, 12:35, 13:1). As we see at Jesus's trial, the main reasons for his arrest were on the basis of alleged blasphemy (Mark 14:63-64; John 19:7). Craig Blomberg mentions Randolph Richards and explains, "Richards points out that Jesus' behavior and teaching were challenged by the demand for a sign (John 2:18). When Jesus failed to produce the kind of sign the authorities requested, he would have been shamed in the eyes of all present. This, initially, was adequate punishment and would normally have served as a sufficient deterrent to any teacher pondering the replication of such a protest."[170]

A prior Temple cleansing also explains why the scribes in Jerusalem were quick to denounce Jesus and accuse him of possessing demonic power in Mark (Mark 3:22), and how Jesus was able to acquire the donkeys for the Triumphant Entry and the upper room for the Passover celebration (Mark 11:1-2, 14:13-15). Luke also gives indications that Jesus had already spent time in Judea and Jerusalem and was known to the people there (Luke 4:44, 6:17, 10:38-39). The accusation that Jesus claimed to destroy and rebuild the Temple is recorded in Mark (Mark 15:29) which echoes his saying from

[169] Allan Chapple, *Jesus' Intervention In The Temple: Once Or Twice?* JETS, 58(3).
[170] Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels,* p.218

John's cleansing (John 2:19). This misunderstanding is more likely to have resulted if it was something Jesus proclaimed a few years ago contrary to a few days ago, given it would have gained more traction over time.

There's nothing strange about similar events happening twice. As we know, history often repeats itself. For example, The Mongols attempted to invade Japan twice--once in 1274 and again in 1281--and both attempts failed due to a typhoon. France, Britain, and Russia fought two world wars against Germany. Both American presidents Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy, were assassinated while in office by being shot in the back of the head. Similarly, Jesus visited the temple twice during his ministry, and a third time at the judgment of 70 AD where the Temple was officially destroyed (Mark 13:24-26; Matt. 24:29-30). Some have suggested this dynamic mirrors the description of the cleansing of a leprous house in the Torah where the house would be visited by the priest three times and if it was still malignant after it had been cleansed it would be destroyed (Lev. 14:33-47).

Passover and the crucifixion. One of the most notable of these seeming contradictions involves the time markers in relation to Passover and the crucifixion. The synoptics present the case that the Passover meal is eaten at the Last Supper (Mark 14:12-21; Matt. 26:17-20; Luke 22:7-15) while John's gospel presents the case that the Passover was not eaten yet on the morning of Jesus's trial (John 18:28, 19:14). As we know in Jewish custom, the Passover lambs were to be slain on the 14th day of Nisan and eaten that night prior to the following morning (Exo. 12:6, 10). John also seems to fit this chronology when he indicates that the following day was the Sabbath (Saturday) (John 19:31), implying the trial and crucifixion was Friday, the 15th of Nisan.

However, we also know that Passover was *carried over* into the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the 15th day which lasted another seven days (Luke 22:1; Mark 14:1; Lev. 23:4-8; Exodus 12:1-28). First century Jewish historian Josephus likewise sometimes treated Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread collectively.[171] In light of this, "Passover" (*pascha*) can refer to the entire Passover festival, not merely the lamb eaten on the opening night. Thus John 18:28 could refer to eating festival sacrifices/meals later on 15 Nisan rather than the Passover lamb itself. There may also be a theological reason for John's chronology in that Jesus dies around the time associated with Passover preparation, reinforcing his portrayal as the Passover Lamb (cf. John 1:29; 19:36).

The hour Jesus was crucified. Doesn't Mark say that Jesus was crucified on "the third hour" (Mark 15:25) while John says he was crucified after the sixth hour (John 19:14)? In the Jewish calendar, days began at sunrise (6 am) and ended at sunset (6 pm), so the third hour in Mark would precisely be 9 am. Interestingly, this apparent issue goes all the way back to Eusebius in the early fourth century. It's widely been proposed that

[171] "Feast of unleavened bread called Passover" (*Antiquities* 17.213, 14.21); "the feast of unleavened bread is eight days" (*Antiquities* 2.15.1)

Mark and John are giving estimates of the daytime period in regards to quarters (3rd, 6th, 9th, 12th) and John's statement that it was "about" that time frame, just as we see throughout the NT (Matt.20:3, 5, 27:45-46; Luke 23:44; Mark 15:33; John 1:39, 4:6, 52; Acts 2:15, 3:1, 10:3, 9, 30, 23:23), basically understood as "roughly morning or midday." This actually fits the historical context given ancient cultures did not have watches and tracking the sun left open a more broad method of time-keeping. Regarding modern time measurements (hours/minutes), James W. Ermatinger states, "The ancients did not use either term precisely; rather they saw time as duration, a short time, or a long time, or no time."[172] In other words, in an ancient context, the meaning of the third hour would plausibly encompass the general duration of the morning. As Craig Blomberg states, "When one recognizes that the widespread lack of precise time keeping devices in the ancient world led to the practice of dividing the day into fourths so that people often did not worry about speaking any more specifically than this, it becomes plausible to interpret Mark's 'third hour' to mean anytime between 9AM and noon. John's 'about the sixth hour' will also then refer to sometime before midday, perhaps within an hour or so."[173]

Anointing at Bethany. Mark and Matthew state that it was two days before Passover, then give the narrative regarding Jesus's anointing at Bethany (Mark 14; Matt 26) while John says it was *six* days before Passover when Jesus went to Bethany and was anointed (John 12). This is because Mark and Matthew give us a topical overview of events. This is seen where the "two days" before Passover in Mark and Matthew is qualified with the religious leaders seeking to kill Jesus, not necessarily the event at Bethany. The incident at Bethany portrays a subject shift ("And while he was at Bethany"; "Now when Jesus was at Bethany."). This is not the case with John who explicitly qualifies the "six days before Passover" in contrast to the event at Bethany itself ("Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany").

Others. Other apparent issues are solved merely by the fact that they aren't contradictions but an addition of details, such as John's added Passovers, Andrew and Peter's ("Simon's") first meeting with Jesus (John 1:35–42) as a separate event from the later call of all the disciples (Mark 1:16–20), and Jesus ministering while John the Baptist is still baptizing in John (John 3:22–24) while his ministry is more emphasized after John the Baptist's arrest in Mark (Mark 1:14).

The independence of John's gospel

Scholars take note of these similarities, yet there is no evidence of literary borrowing in John's gospel like there is with Mark in Matthew's and Luke's for example, which provides, all the more, a strong case for John's gospel as an independent account solely from eyewitness memory. NT scholar, Luuk van de Weghe, notes, "First,

[172] James W. Ermatinger, *The World of Ancient Rome,* p.713
[173] Craig L. Blomber, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels,* p.228

commonalities between the Gospels of Luke and John are more substantial and more significantly patterned than Parker suggested, indicating a consistent preference by Luke for Johannine material over Markan material. Second, the Johannine material favored by Luke aligns with events in the Fourth Gospel allegedly experienced by the Beloved Disciple."[174] He also notes that, "the Third and Fourth Gospels side together against the First and Second Gospels 124 times."[175]

Despite these similarities, Luke and John could not have drawn from each other. As we know, Luke wrote his gospel first and John came after, yet John wouldn't have needed Luke because he already claimed to be an eyewitness. Scholar Pierson Parker says that, "Luke and the Fourth Evangelist, then, were men of widely different personality and training; and they wrote in complete independence of each other. Yet constantly they show knowledge of the same traditions, or allude to the same concepts. Oral tradition will account for this; but it must be an oral tradition much fuller, much more definitive, than that which relates John to the other gospels. There is one way in which the Luke-John relationship could have arisen, and it is difficult to conceive of any other. We must posit two evangelists, of quite variant temperaments, working long in the same areas, hearing the same words about their Lord, perhaps participating in the same discussions; then each, remembering these things in his own way and digesting them in his own way, put his record down. In other words, the Fourth Evangelist must somewhere, some time, have been associated with Luke in the Christian missionary enterprise."[176]

NT scholar Paul Anderson notes, "The Fourth Evangelist did not use Mark as a written source, at least not in the ways of Matthew and Luke did. Otherwise, there would be at least several identical connections rather than a broad similarity of some words, themes and patterns. Conversely, due to the large numbers of Johannine/Markan similarities, contacts probably did exist between the oral renderings of John's and Mark's traditions, and yet because it is impossible to determine which direction the influence may have gone, the relationship may best be considered one of 'interfluentiality'. It is also unlikely that it only went in one direction between two formative-yet-independent traditions."[177]

He continues elsewhere, "The fact that none of these contacts are identical makes it implausible to infer that John is dependent on Mark, or that Mark is dependent on the Johannine tradition."[178]

Undesigned coincidences

Among the evidence of John's independence also lies in the undesigned coincidences, or small details that unintentionally fill in plot holes from the other gospels and vice

[174] Luuk, van de Weghe, *Living Footnotes in the Gospel of Luke,* p. 125
[175] Ibid. 126
[176] Pierson Parker, [1963]. *Luke and the Fourth Evangelist,* New Testament Studies, 9[4], 317-336
[177] Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus,* 104-105
[178] Ibid. 133

versa so that the fourfold Gospel narrative fits together like pieces of a puzzle. These differences from the other accounts attest to his authenticity while at the same time, show that he did not draw from them, supporting the notion that these differences were merely drawn from his own eyewitness memory. Here are a few examples:

The temple taunt In the synoptics, the Jews from Jerusalem accuse Jesus of having a demon and accuse Jesus of claiming he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (Mark 3:22, 14:58, 15:29), yet there is no interaction of Jesus in Jerusalem in Mark yet and no pretext given for these strange accusations. John's gospel explains this however, that Jesus himself had gone to Jerusalem and claimed this in response to the Jews who asked for a sign of his prophethood, and that it was a metaphor alluding to his death and resurrection on the third day (2:13-19).

Why Philip? In John 6:5 during the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus asks Philip where to buy bread for the crowd (as a "test" in v.6). Why would he ask a minor disciple though, rather than Peter, or John or James, or Judas (who kept the money)? John doesn't fully explain this, though he *does* happen to mention that Philip is from Bethsaida (1:44, 12:21). Then we see in a different gospel account in Luke 9:10 that the feeding of the 5,000 *took place* in Bethsaida, so it makes sense now that Jesus asked Philip because he was a local and familiar with the area.

Green grass and large crowds Mark's gospel mentions at the feeding of the 5,000 that the people sat on "green grass" and that, "so many were coming and going they had no time to eat" (Mark 6:39, 6:31). Grass in the region of Judea was usually brown, so how was it green? John's account, however, mentions this took place near Passover (John 6:4). At the time of Passover, it's spring, so this explains the grass being green. Passover was also a time of pilgrimage for the Jews, which explains the hustle and bustle. This also might explain why only John's gospel mentions the boy with barley loaves in verse 9, since barley harvest occurred at Passover.

Time-stamps to Passover John records that Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before Passover, then the triumphal entry into Jerusalem happened five days before Passover (John 12:1-2, 12:12-13). Mark likewise records these events, though without time-stamps or mention of Passover (Mark 11:1-11), then says that the day after his entry, Jesus curses the fig tree and storms the temple (Mark 11:12-19), meaning, according to John's gospel, these things would have fell on *four* days before Passover. The next day, which would be *three* days before Passover, Jesus and the disciples see the withered fig tree and Jesus debates with the Jews in the temple (Mark 11:20-44). The next event that follows is the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:1-3) which likely occurred at sunset, en route to Bethany (John 12:1-1), and afterwards, Mark gives his first time-stamp in correlation to Passover, saying it was now "two days before the Passover" here (Mark 14:1), thus, showing a coherent line-up between Mark and John in chronology of events.

Bartimaeus knowing of Jesus Mark records that a man named Bartimaeus in Jericho pleads with Jesus to heal his blindness (Mark 10:46-48). How would a man all the way in Jericho know about Jesus if Jesus had done most of his healings in Galilee, days away from Jericho? However, John's gospel in chapter 9 explains this in that Jesus had healed a man born blind in Jerusalem, which was near Jericho, and that word had spread among the people there in that region (John 11:37).

Washing the disciples' feet At the Last Supper, Luke's gospel records Jesus saying to the disciples, "I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27). John's gospel gives us more context that resonates with his claim in that he had washed the disciples' feet (John 13).

How is Jesus innocent to Pilate? In Luke's gospel, Pilate asks Jesus whether he affirms the Jews' accusations that he claimed to be king. Jesus affirms it, yet Pilate still declares him innocent (Luke 23:2-4). Why? Wouldn't this be seen as a threat to Caesar? John's gospel gives more context in that Jesus claimed "my kingdom is not of this world" or else his followers would be fighting the Romans (John 18:33-38). So Pilate didn't find a spiritual kingdom or spiritual king very intimidating or cause for concern. Though the other gospels record that Peter had struck off the ear of a servant of the high priest with his sword (John 18:10-11, Matthew 26:51, Mark 14:47). Wouldn't this be cause for arrest? Yet, Luke's account tells us that Jesus had healed the ear (Luke 22:51), thus destroying any false evidence.

Why does Jesus ask Peter if he loves him more than the others do? In John 21:15, Jesus asks Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" What provoked Jesus to ask this question? Well, the synoptics record Peter's bold claim regarding the other disciples that, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." (Mark 14:29). This gives us more context which implies that Jesus was putting that bold claim to the test.

The historical accuracy and close attention to detail of John's gospel

Professor and lecturer Derek Tovey notes, "at every point where the beloved disciple appears…the narrative includes items of close detail which suggest 'on the spot,' eyewitness report."[179] NT scholar Richard Baukham says, "all events in John's Gospel are located, and most are located quite precisely--in a named town…As a general feature of the Gospel, its topographical precision is not primarily a matter of symbolism but of realistic historiography."[180] As NT scholar Paul Anderson says, "John has more archaeological, topographical, sensory-empirical, personal knowledge and first-hand information than all of the other gospels combined."[181] This is all clearly indicative of

[179] Derek Tovey, Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel, p.140
[180] Baukham, R. (2007). Historiographical Characteristics of the Gospel of John. New Testament Studies, 53(1), 17-36
[181] Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus,* 5

eyewitness testimony. Though each detail on its own doesn't amount to much, all of them combined provide a strong cumulative case that John's gospel is authentic and historically reliable.

The Jordan's Baptismal site Regarding the baptismal site of the Jordan river (John 1:28), Paul Anderson states, "What is confirmed by present archaeological investigations is the fact that a major traditional baptismal site has been discovered about a mile east of the Jordan River, across from Jericho, and everything about this site confirms the accuracy of the Johannine rendering of 1.28 and 10.40-2.1."[182]

Stone water jars Regarding the stone water jars at the wedding in Cana that Jesus used to turn the water into wine (John 2:6), archaeologists confirm that such vessels existed in the time period and were most likely used for purification rituals.[183] There was an early Christian tendency to embrace asceticism, the miracle of turning water into wine is unlikely to be a later invention and is more likely to be an early tradition handed down.

Time marker of the temple edifice At the Passover near the start of Jesus's ministry, the Jews say to Jesus that it had taken 46 years to build the temple (2:20). As we know from historian Josephus, Herod the Great began construction around 18 BC (*Antiquities,* 15.379-15.11.1-6). Forty-six years afterwards would place the time period of this passage around 26-27 AD. This lines up with Luke's and Suetonius's chronology because Luke states that Jesus began his ministry "in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar" (Luke 3:1). Roman historian Suetonius records that Tiberius began his reign as co-regent with Augustus around 12 AD (*Life of Tiberius,* 21), which places the start of Jesus's ministry in Luke around the same time as John's (27-28 AD).

John the Baptist's teachings Craig Blomberg notes that John the Baptist's teachings mirror that of the Qumran community who lived between 100 BC to 68 AD (compare: John 3:27-36 with 1QS 3:13-4:26), making these teachings unlikely later inventions and instead, tied to the culture of that time.

Jacob's Well John chapter 4 mentions a site known as Jacob's Well that existed in Samaria. This has been confirmed by archaeologists.[184]

Hostility with the Samaritans The reference to the feud between the Jews and the Samaritans (John 4:9) is likewise attested historically. As Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus writes, "After this there happened a fight between the Galileans and the Samaritans; it happened at a village called Geman, which is situated in the great plain of Samaria; where, as a great number of Jews were going up to Jerusalem to the feast [of tabernacles] a certain Galilean was slain."[185] The Samaritan hope in the Messiah

[182] Ibid. 157
[183] Reich, R. (1995), "6 Stone Water Jars," Jerusalem Perspective 48:30-33
[184] Hastings, J.; Driver, S. R. (2004). A Dictionary of the Bible: Volume II: (Part II: I--Kinsman). The Minerva Group, Inc.
[185] Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Wars,* 2.232

(John 4:22-26) is likewise accurate with the Samaritans who followed the Torah and were expecting a messianic figure called the Taheb. Craig Blomberg further notes that the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman doesn't mimic Jesus's later long speeches that he had with the Jews and that "it is more likely historical than redactional."[186]

Mount Gerizim In the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, she mentions the Samaritans worship "on this mountain" (4:20). We know from Josephus that the Samaritans did indeed worship God on a mountain, called Gerizim, considered the "holy mountain" and that their temple had originally been there, which was built in the Persian period and destroyed by John Hyrcanus I in 128 BC (*Wars,* 3.7.72, 3.291; *Antiquities,* 13.255-256).

The Samaritan worship Though the Samaritans had the Torah, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman regarding her ancestors, "You worship what you do not know…" (4:22). This fits the historical context where Josephus tells us that the Samaritans had rededicated their temple to the pagan god Jupiter Hellenius under the authority of Antiochous IV Epiphanes to avoid persecution in the second-century BC (*Antiquities,* 12.258-259, 264), indicating their tendencies of disloyalty to Israel's God.

Typography of Galilee Jesus is said to go "down" to Galilee (John 4:49, 51) which matches the typography regarding walking down in elevation and what the locals of that region would have known. Likewise after, he is said to go "up" to Jerusalem (John 5:1).

Pool of Bethesda Archaeologists confirm this pool, mentioned in John 5:2-9, existed in Jerusalem exactly as described in John.[187]

"My Father is always working" Regarding the saying of Jesus in John 5:17 where the Father is always working, and so is he, Craig Blomberg points out that, "a strong case can also be made for the authenticity of this saying. Already in the first century, rabbis were discussing how God could constantly work and yet not violate the Sabbath…making probable that similar discussions in later sources reflect earlier conversations..."[188]

The Jews' attempt to make Jesus king The Jews attempting to take Jesus by force and make him king (6:15) is authentic in that it matches the first-century Judaism outlook on messianic expectations of a kingly Messiah who would free them from Roman rule. Jesus withdrawing himself from the crowd to prevent this is also consistent with his behavior in the synoptics where he warns people to conceal his identity as the Messiah to prevent such an uprising (Matthew 12:14-18; Mark 1:43-44, 5:43, 7:33-36, 8:22-26, 8:27-30, 9:9).

---

[186] Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel,* 99
[187] Urban C. von Wahlde's "The Puzzling Pool of Bethesda," Biblical Archaeology Review, September/October 2011
[188] Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel,* 111

Though elsewhere in John's gospel he explicitly claims to be the Messiah to the Samaritan woman (John 4:25-26), this would likewise be historically accurate because the Samaritans had a different expectation and view of the Messiah than the Jews did. They only followed the Torah and Samaritan texts (e.g. Memar, Marqah) reveal that they believed he would be more of a teacher, or the "Taheb" as the prophet like Moses, excluding a warrior king as the Jews viewed him. So Jesus could reveal his identity safely to the Samaritans with no concern of the crowds trying to make him a kingly messiah and starting a political uprising.

Sea of Galilee The storm on the Sea of Galilee in John 6:18 matches known meteorological conditions for that body of water.[189]

"Eat my flesh" and "drink my blood" The saying of Jesus to eat his flesh and drink his blood (John 6:53-55) is an unlikely invention since later Christians were accused of cannibalism. It's unlikely they would describe the Eucharist in this extreme language after dealing with such a charge. Theologian Peder Borgen says these verses also fit with a Jewish rhetorical and literary form known as proem midrash and fits with the way a rabbi from that time would teach.[190] It's also unlikely this would be invented since Christians were concerned with winning souls for Christ, yet they record that some of the disciples took offense at Jesus for this saying and apostasized (John 6:61, 66).

Jewish custom of circumcision Jesus speaks of a Jewish custom where a newborn son could be circumcised on the eighth day even if it was the Sabbath (John 7:22-23). This custom is affirmed in Jewish texts (e.g. Hilchos Milah 1.9).

"Out of his heart will flow rivers of running water" In another one of Jesus's sayings, Jesus quotes scripture that he claims says, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of running water" (John 7:38). Craig Blomberg notes, "When the Jewish backgrounds are combined with the obvious awkwardness of having Jesus refer to a Scripture that cannot be identified, the case for authenticity appears strong."[191] Though Jesus is most likely paraphrasing passages like Zechariah 14:8 or Isaiah 58:11, the fact that the author of John does not make it obvious what the "scripture" being referred to here is points away from "theological agenda" and more towards authenticity.

Also, the context of John states that it was during the Feast of Tabernacles (7:2) and we know there was an important water-drawing ceremony called the Simchat Beit HaShoevah, that took place during this feast according to Jewish texts like the Talmud where water was taken from the Pool of Siloam and poured on the altar (Sukkah 4-5), so one could reasonably posit that Jesus's paraphrase was accommodated in reference to the water-drawing ceremony that was held at this time, making the case for this

[189] Third-century Greek philosopher Porphyry downplays this incident in his book *Against the Christians,* though he is not a reliable source because he was not from the area.
[190] Peder Borgen, *Bread From Heaven*
[191] Blomberg, 137-138

saying all the more stronger.[192]

Going deeper, we also see that in the same sermon he also claims to be the "light of the world" (8:12) which one could make a case for him alluding to the Festival of Lights that likewise took place with golden candelabra, and that Jesus was making parallels and analogies with his surrounding setting.[193] We know that the author was familiar with Jewish customs (e.g. 2:6, 4:9, 5:2, 19:40) so the only reason the author wouldn't have mentioned these specific things is he felt no need to mention them since his audience in Ephesus would not have been familiar with such references, especially after these festivals were no longer a thing due to the temple destruction in 70 AD and no longer around.

Contempt towards Galilee The Jews on several occasions show contempt towards people of Nazareth, which was a district in Galilee. In one place, Nathaniel says, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (1:46, also: 7:52). This reflects Judean contempt for Galileans as revealed likewise in the Jewish Talmud as portraying these people being "foolish," ignorant and slow of learning with the Torah (e.g. Erubin 53a:20-23).

Pool of Siloam The Pool of Siloam, mentioned in 9:7, is affirmed by archaeology.[194]

Division among the Pharisees It's mentioned that the Jewish leaders were mixed on their thoughts about Jesus, with some accusing him of breaking the Sabbath, while others pointing at the "signs" he did regardless (9:16). If the author's main intention was merely to get God on the cross to die for sins, this passage creates unnecessary complexity in the narrative that's unlikely to be fabrication but instead, concern for what actually happened or else it wouldn't have been necessary to mention. This also reflects the historical divide between the schools of Shammai and Hillel regarding what constituted as breaking the Sabbath.[195]

Put out of the synagogues for professing Christ Jonathan Bernier points out the fear that someone would be put out of the synagogue if they confessed Jesus as Christ (9:33-34) is likely authentic in that it was a valid way the Jews would have handled the followers of Jesus.[196]

Titles of Christ Bernier also states in regards to the man Jesus healed who calls him a "prophet" (9:17) and posits that a later Christian would have more likely put a more lofty title for Jesus in his mouth if it were fabricated. The same is said of Mary who refers to the risen Christ as "Rabboni" (aka: "Teacher", 20:16) rather than "God" himself. The author even preserves the Aramaic here, indicating this is most likely authentic.

Weather conditions during the Feast of Dedication It's mentioned that during the time of

[192] D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John,* 321-333
[193] The passage of the adulterous woman is placed here, though the manuscript tradition reveals--not necessarily that it's inauthentic--but that it was not originally placed here.
[194] The Siloam Pool: Where Jesus Healed the Blind Man, Biblical Archaeology Review 8/23/23
[195] Blomberg, 153
[196] Bernier, *Aposynagogos and the Historical Jesus in John*

the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, “it was winter and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon” (10:22-23). John is accurate with the Feast taking place during winter, and also with the reasoning of Jesus being in the colonnade. During winter in Jerusalem, east winds would sweep through, making it much colder and the colonnade would shield against these winds.[197] As Josephus mentions, the walls were four hundred cubits tall and roofed (*Antiquities,* 15.413, 15.11.5; *Wars,* 5.190, 5.5.2).

Distance between Bethany and Jerusalem Chapter 11 mentions “Bethany was near Jerusalem, about fifteen stadia off…” (11:18). This is confirmed to be the exact distance from what we know today.[198]

Jewish mourning and funeral customs Jews are mentioned consoling Mary and Martha in their house regarding Lazarus’s death (11:31). This fits the ancient Jewish custom of entire villages turning up to mourn a death (e.g. Wisdom of Solomon 19:3; Ketubot 4.4). Also, the description of Lazarus’s wrappings and face wrapped with cloth (11:44) fits Jewish burial customs.[199]

Meetings of the Sanhedrin The Sanhedrin being composed of Sadducees and Pharisees is historically accurate, and having allies from these groups, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38-42, 3:1-21; Matthew 27:57-60, Mark 15:42-46, Luke 23:50-53), can also account for how the author knows what was said in these meetings as they most likely relayed them (11:47-52).

Ephraim Jesus is said to retreat to a small town called Ephraim (11:54). The author does not indicate whether the town or its name had any symbolic meaning. Nor would a later writer in Ephesus (as Iranaeus stated where John lived at the time of his writing) have known about some obscure village unless he was familiar with and originally tied to the geographical setting.

Jewish purifying customs The Jews are mentioned to have purified themselves before Passover (11:55) which is an accurate depiction according to other Jewish historical sources (Josephus, *Wars* 1.229; Pesachim 9:1). Elsewhere, the priests refuse to enter the headquarters of Pilate for fear of becoming ritually unclean (18:28), also fitting in with Jewish purity laws.

Anointing with oil Jesus’s anointing with perfume (12:3) matches common customs performed with guests in the ancient world. Paul Anderson notes, “John also contains several details implying first-hand knowledge of the event. An empirical reference is made to the smell of the perfume filling the room, and statements are made about perceptions (wrong ones) of Judas’ intentions and actions…the particulars of the woman performing the anointing are known to the narrator…The Johannine

[197] Talbert, C.H. (1994). Reading John. United States: Smyth & Helwys Pub. 69
[198] Blomberg, C.L. (2011). The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: Issues & Commentary. United States: InterVarsity Press. 164-172
[199] Ibid.

presentation of the anointing of Jesus bears a remarkable degree of historical plausibility as compared to alternative presentations."[200]

Branches of palm trees Only John's gospel records that palm branches were used at Jesus's welcome entry into Jerusalem (12:13). This fits with the cultural context of the Hasmonean dynasty, a ruling family of the ancient Jewish state of Judea, reigning from 140 BC to 63 BC, as it harkens back to their custom of celebrating military victories and welcoming a king.

Jesus washes the disciples' feet Jesus pours water into a basin and washes the disciples' feet (13:3-9). This matches the ancient practice regarding a servant's duty to wash the feet of a guest. This is an unlikely invention, given how degrading this would have looked for Jesus, especially at that time. Peter's request to wash his whole body (v. 9) is also consistent with his impulsive nature seen in the synoptics (e.g. Matt. 14:28-30, 16:22-23; Mark 9:2-6; etc.).[201]

Peter's motion to John When Jesus declares someone would betray him, the author mentions that Peter motioned toward the beloved disciple to ask whom Jesus was speaking of (13:24). This is another detail that, if a "fabrication," would add pointless complexity to the narrative if the author could just have Peter or any disciple ask him directly. The mention of such details points more towards a recount of events that the author remembers had actually happened.

Giving to the poor at Passover During the Last Supper at Passover, the author mentions the original idea of the disciples that Judas having the moneybag was to give money to the poor, rather than betray Jesus (13:29). This is accurate with Jewish Passover customs as outlined in the Talmud (Pesachim 10; Tosefta) as well as Jewish historian Josephus who mentions beggars gathering at the temple gate (*Antiquities,* 18.2.2).

Onomastic congruence with Judas Simon, Judas, Joseph and John are repeated names in John's narrative which line up with the common Jewish names in ancient Israel for a man. In one place, the author refers to a Judas and clarifies, "not Judas Iscariot" (14:22). It's unlikely if one was inventing a character that he would almost confuse the reader unless the author is really recording actual events of actual people, let alone give him the same name as the worst disciple.

Woman giving birth analogy The analogy Jesus gives in his farewell discourse of the woman giving birth (16:20-22) has Jewish roots attached to it. NT scholar Barnabas Lindars finds a parallel in a Qumran text and says, "there is no reason to doubt that [Jesus] could have used this imagery in a similar way to express the arrival of the New Age."[202]

---

[200] Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus,* 169-170

[201] Blomberg, C.L. (2011). The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues & Commentary. United States: InterVarsity Press. 186-192

[202] Barnabas Lindars, *The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of John,* 509

Jesus's post-discourse prayer Jesus ends his discourse with a prayer looking up to heaven (17:1). Looking up to heaven was the standard way Jews would pray, as well as a way to end a discourse, as seen in other Jewish texts (Jubilees 22:28-30; Sirach 51:1-12, 29). John 17:2 also contains semitisms which suggest the prayer to have originally been in Aramaic that likely goes back to the historical Jesus. As Craig Blomberg says, "It seems far more likely that this prayer goes back at least to an early Aramaic-speaking Jewish-Christian community (thus almost certainly in Palestine), if not to the historical Jesus himself."[203]

Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas The author accurately identifies Annas as the father-in-law of Caiaphas (18:12-13).[204]

Roman authority Only John's gospel explains why the Jews handed Jesus over to the Romans for execution in that the Jews had no right to kill someone in this situation (18:31). Jewish historian, Josephus, confirms Jews had no right to put someone to death for something as this (*Wars,* 2.117; 6:124-126).

Release of the criminal, Barabbas The release of Barabbas (18:39-40) fits similar practices in the surrounding world regarding an overturn of prison sentence. We have documents that attest to this. For example, a papyrus from 85 AD (P.Flor 61) quotes a Roman governor over Egypt, "You were worthy of scourging…but I give you to the crowds." Pliny the Younger (Epistle to Trajan 10.31) mentions a group of people released from prison. An inscription in Ephesus (441 AD) mentions a decision of a proconsul to release prisoners because of the outcries of the people. Josephus tells us Herod Archelaus released several prisoners to appease his fellow Jews (*Antiquities* 17.204). When Albinus left his office over Judea he released all prisoners that were not worthy of death (*Antiquities* 20.215).

Even if this were a "fabrication," what point would this passage help in serving the "theological agenda"? It's merely an irrelevant point that would lend no credence toward the intention behind the fabrication, but makes more sense if the author was recording actual historical events.

Roman mockery The Roman soldiers mocking Jesus (19:2-3) is likewise historically plausible as we find something similar in Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria's writing *Against Flaccus* (6:36-39).

The judgment seat After bringing Jesus out from the scourging, Pilate sits on the judgment seat to seek counsel with the Jews of what to do with Jesus (19:13). Historian Josephus, as well as excavations have found a similar structure.[205]

The multi-lingual inscription The inscription on Jesus's cross, written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek (19:19-20) is historical, as Josephus notes that multi-lingual notices were

[203] Blomberg, 226
[204] Ibid 227-237
[205] Ibid. 245-256

often used (*Antiquities*, 14.191).

The Roman Quaternion John's account mentions the garments of Jesus were divided into four parts, one for each Roman soldier (19:23). This is accurate with what we know of the Roman Quaternion, or guards, in that, Greek historian Polybius in his book *The Histories,* records they consisted of four men (6.33), and is likewise confirmed in the author of Acts (Acts 12:4).

Onomastic congruence with Mary The common names of the time for a woman were Mary. We see this near the cross of Jesus of whom stood his mother Mary, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene (19:25). If one is inventing characters to a made-up story, this makes no sense and creates unnecessary confusion, contrary to spicing up the names. The simplest explanation is that the author is recording actual events of actual people which fits the culture of the time.

The breaking of crucified victims' legs The Roman soldiers' breaking the crucified criminals' legs who were crucified with Jesus (19:31-32) is accurate with what we know from archaeology. One such discovery is the well-known bone remains of Yehohanon ben Hagkol, a crucified victim in Judea who had one leg fractured and the other leg smashed into pieces.[206]

The blood and water out of Jesus's side After Jesus dies, he is stabbed in the side with a spear by a Roman soldier to ensure his death, and we are told that there came out blood and water (19:34). We know that water doesn't typically come out of a dead person though since the blood congeals, yet the author in the next sentence feels the need to interrupt the narrative by saying, "He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe." The insistent intention behind the interruption of the narrative here indicates he most likely was familiar with this fact so this most likely wouldn't have been fabricated by the fact that the author would not have claimed such a thing or he would have blown his cover too easily with the ancient world--that is, unless it *actually* happened. And it most likely did because studies today now show to confirm the authenticity of this report from what we know to be a natural result of a victim who suffered severe beatings and blood loss. We now know that shock and blood loss can lead to the body losing its ability to clot blood, known as trauma induced coagulopathy. Additionally, clear fluid would have accumulated in Jesus's lung from multiple beatings, so when his side was pierced, we actually would have *expected* blood and water to come out.

Burial customs The author notes that Jesus was buried in cloth and a mixture of myrrh and aloe spices (19:39-40). Historian Josephus confirms that spices were used for royal burials and that the Jews used linen cloths to wrap dead bodies (*Antiquities,* 17.199). Jesus being taken and buried in a tomb by a fellow Sanhedrin member (19:38-42) is

[206] A Tomb in Jerusalem Reveals the History of Crucifixion and Roman Crucifixion Methods. Biblical Archaeology Review, 8/16/22

also an unlikely invention since the Sanhedrin were the ones behind his death and a fabricator could have easily chosen an apostle to bury Jesus instead.

Use of "ὀψάριον" (opsarion) for "fish" The author of John uses a different Greek word for "fish" than the synoptics do: "opsarion" (21:9-10). NT scholar John A.T. Robinson notes that he uses it five times in his gospel and that this word is a "distinctive name for cooked fish in which the trade would have been conducted."[207] This shows familiarity with the fishing business, which is something we would expect since John 21 indicates the author was familiar with this line of work (21:2-7; he was a son of Zebedee and the "beloved disciple").

Rumor of John's immortality In 21:22-23, the author mentions a false rumor that was spread among the disciples that the beloved disciple would not die before Jesus returns, "yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?'" This is a good example that shows the author here believed he was under no obligation to invent sayings of Jesus or else he wouldn't have mentioned what Jesus said and felt the need to clarify the meaning. A fiction writer without writing limits could have simply made Jesus say that John wouldn't die before the Second Coming, so this shows that the author was actually concerned with historical facts rather than inventions. As Craig Blomberg states, "the need for clarification proves historically probable as well."[208]

The author used reliable sources for these details? Even granting he used other sources to get his knowledge, why would a fabricator go to the effort and waste time for such irrelevant detail in the first place if it lends no credence to his theological doctrine he intends to "invent"? D.A. Carson notes, "The verifiable Johannine accuracies ought to be given more weight than is common at present. I am referring to details of topography and the like. Of course one may say that John used reliable sources or reliable tradition at these points, and thus remove the credit for accuracy from the Evangelist himself. But that simply pushes the argument one step further back. If his sources and/or traditions are so good where they are verifiable, why should they be judged largely suspect where they are not verifiable?"[209]

Criteria of embarrassment

If John's gospel is a fabricated story of Jesus to make him God, we would expect the author to paint God consistently in a positive light so as to not make him look bad. Yet, there are numerous instances the author mentions that paints Jesus in a less than ideal lighting. This is actually where we see more examples of authenticity in that the author would not say such things unless he were speaking the truth.

For example, as mentioned, some of Jesus's followers take offense at him and

[207] John A.T. Robinson, *The Priority of John,* 117
[208] Blomberg, 279
[209] *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels,* vol. 2, 115

stop following him (John 6:61, 66). Even his brothers are said to have not believed in him (7:3-5). Jesus is accused of having a demon (7:19-20). He's also called a "Samaritan" (8:48), someone looked down upon in the Jewish setting. He is accused of breaking the Sabbath (5:16-18, 7:23, 9:16). He is also faced with attempts to stone him (8:58-59).

The disciples are also painted in a bad light. In one place, Peter is portrayed as a coward when he denies knowing Jesus three times to save his skin (John 18:15-18, 18:25-27). The apostles are presented as dim-witted and slow to understand Jesus at first (John 12:16). On top of that, they make no effort to give their friend a proper burial, but instead record that a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin--the people who sentenced Jesus to his death--took the matter of burial into his own hands (Joseph of Arimathea; John 19:38-42). As the men are hiding for fear of the Jews, the brave women stand by Jesus and are the first to discover the empty tomb (John 19:25-26). Thomas is also rebuked by Jesus for his doubt (John 20:24-29). One would not mention such details most likely unless it were the truth.

No embellishment

There is no embellishment with the gospels--something we would certainly notice had it been invented. Consider the rejected apocryphal work, the Gospel of Peter, which describes the resurrection with a large crowd gathering around the tomb, the heavens opening, the stone rolling away by itself and out coming an exceptionally large Jesus with two exceptionally large angels--of whom their heads reached heaven--and a cross that speaks! On the other hand, the gospels in the Bible tell us some women arrived at the tomb first, met an angel or two there (one of whom moved the stone himself), and that the body of Jesus was already gone (Mark 16:4-8; Luke 24:2-8; John 20:1-12; Matthew 28:2-7) and that he appeared to the disciples later on. If this is to be a mere fairy tale, it would seem like the author lacks a bit in the excitement factor.

Does Jesus mimic the author's own style of writing?

One might object that the high Christology in Jesus's sayings are intentionally based on the author's own theological dogma rooted in his explicit claim that "the Word was God" (John 1:1), thus, intending to make Jesus sound like himself. This is not a strong argument however, especially in light of all the textual evidence to the contrary that we've covered, as we could easily posit that the author merely paraphrased Jesus in his own writing style, which is a natural human tendency. This wouldn't mean John is unreliable or not staying true to what Jesus taught. NT scholar Mike Licona states that it could equally be the case that John's own style of writing was greatly influenced by how Jesus taught and that he actively tried to mimic *Jesus's* style.[210] This would be expected since we see that John had such a high view of Jesus.

[210] Michael R. Licona, *Jesus Contradicted,* 42-43

The gospels also mention that Jesus spoke in a different manner to crowds than the way he spoke privately to his close disciples (Matt. 13:10-13). This would explain some things as John records many private conversations Jesus had whereas the synoptics focus more on Jesus's public sermons. John is more likely recording another side of Jesus to give us a more well-rounded picture of who he is.

Craig Blomberg takes a different route by stating it's *not* the case that John and Jesus sound exactly the same. He notes, "No less than 145 words spoken by Jesus in John appear nowhere in the Evangelist's narrative material, and many of these are general enough in meaning that we might have expected them elsewhere."[211] Additionally, there is abounding similarity with the character of Jesus that we find in the synoptics. (See: consistency with the synoptics)

The Pericope Adulterae "addition"?

The Pericope Adulterae, also known as the story of the adulterous woman brought to Jesus (John 7:53-8:11) is commonly pointed out as a "later addition" to the text and even to some, as evidence of "corruption." However, there's historical evidence that this tradition existed prior to Codex Bezae in 400 AD, its earliest appearance in today's manuscript tradition. For example, it's referenced by Papias (AD 60-130) quoted by Eusebius (AD 260-341; *Fragments of Papias* VI), as well as the third century *Didascalia Apostolorum* instruction to bishops (near the end of ch.7) all before the extant manuscripts to which it first appears in Codex Bezae. Therefore, we could posit these were still part of the earliest tradition, written or oral--though not originally placed in John's gospel. We could say that a few texts containing this story were used for Codex Bezae and no longer survive, or that oral tradition was passed on up to the time where it was copied onto Codex Bezae, in which case this would be seen as *keeping* these passages in scripture and would, if anything, *fulfill* Bible verses regarding preservation all the more rather than go against them.

Even granting all these passages not to be canon, let's pretend these additions never happened and don't exist--what are we left with now? We're still left with a Gospel that teaches the death and resurrection of Christ, as well as all of his sayings that we point to that reference his divinity and the Trinity. The point being made: even without these additions we still don't have a different Gospel, but the Biblical Gospel. Those who want to claim that the Gospel message has been changed over time from the originals must present evidence of a manuscript(s) or tradition that tells us a different Gospel message and at the same time, predates our earliest sources. No such manuscript or tradition has ever been found.

Other additions?

Though doubt as to whether John's gospel is even authored by one person but multiple

[211] Blomberg, 52

individuals who progressively added to the text may be prevalent among some critics here, notably with chapter 21's continuation proceeding from 20's seeming conclusion (20:30-31), scholars like Richard Baukham have already pointed out that John 21 is an epilogue and that John 20:31 is the ending of the main body, as he explains, "The Prologue sketches the prehistory to the Gospel's story, while the Epilogue foresees its posthistory. Just as the Prologue goes back in time to creation, so the Epilogue previews the future mission of the disciples, symbolized by the miraculous catch of fish, and focuses especially on the different roles that Peter and the Beloved Disciple are to play in it."[212]

Bauckham also notes if we compare John's prologue and epilogue we find numerous points of contact. The prologue consists of 496 syllables, whereas the epilogue has 496 Greek words. This correspondence is expected, since the prologue is poetic, whereas the epilogue is narrative. Also, 496 is a triangular number and also the numerical value of monogenēs, the Greek word for "only" used in John 3:16. Ancient authors loved to use numerical values for hidden meanings. Matthew does this in his genealogy to point to Jesus being the heir of David. John probably used a similar method for his prologue and epilogue.

Additionally, in Jesus' last words he says, "until I come" which correspond to the first words of the prologue, "in the beginning." Nathanael is present at the beginning of the epilogue and introduced shortly after the prologue. He shows up nowhere else in the gospel.

Andreas J. Köstenberger says, "The postscript, vis-à-vis the preface, provides balance and symmetry to the structure of the Gospel. Both units form an integral part of the theological and literary fabric of the entire narrative. Among other things, John 21 resolves the relationship between Peter and the Beloved Disciple in terms of non-competition and identifies the latter as the fourth evangelist. Beyond this, there are many other terminological links between the final chapter and the rest of the Gospel."[213] She also draws attention to other similarities in style and language, like the similar language for taking and distributing the bread found John 6:11 (21:13), the use of the name "Sea of Tiberias," and the double "amen" formula.[214]

Next, we can compare the ending of chapter 20 with 21 and also find aspects that fit together. Both together speak of what has been written or not written. Both consist of 43 Greek words, if we follow the reading in 20:30-31 that omits "autou". The first ends with Jesus's disciples, and the second end focuses on the author, the disciple Jesus loved and his important role.

Leon Morris adds that in the chapter John often refers to Peter as Simon Peter, which is consistent with John's overall style. However, when Jesus speaks to Peter he

---

[212] *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses,* 364
[213] *Christian Origins and the Greco-Roman Culture,* Volume 1," 453-4
[214] *John: Baker Exegetical Commentary,* page 585

refers to him merely as Simon, which is unlike John's style.[215]

Craig Blomberg notes that many scholars today agree John 21 was written by John, as he states, "It is not nearly as unusual today as it was a half-century ago to find scholarly support for John 21 as an integral part of the overall gospel, composed by the same hand that was responsible for the majority of chapters 1 – 20."[216] In fact, Craig Bomberg cites de Solages and Vacherot, who evaluated the style and vocabulary of chapter 21 and found no significant variation from the language of the rest of the gospel.[217]

Interestingly, the end of chapter 14 tells us that Jesus had declared it was time to leave (14:30-31), yet the following three chapters (15-17) are met with more preaching and praying from Jesus, followed by a declaration of departure yet again at the start of chapter 18 (18:1). This seeming inconsistency has led some to suggest chapters 15-17 as a later insertion. However, this can easily be explained when one posits that John 14:31 is when they left the upper room where they were celebrating the Passover, and started walking to the garden to pray. As Craig Blomberg explains, "Interestingly, John 18:1 does not say that Jesus and his disciples left the house in which they had been staying, but rather, literally, that 'they went out beyond the Kidron ravine'. This could suggest that 18:1 refers to the point at which they crossed the valley, after already having been walking through the city and then down from Jerusalem, while Jesus taught and prayed what chapters 15 – 17 summarize. Given John's precedent of identifying the location of an episode, only after recording words that Jesus spoke there (6:59; 8:20). The absence of a 'proper' introduction to 15:1 proves less surprising."[218]

Further notable is the seeming inconsistency with Jesus asking the disciples why they don't ask where he is going (John 16:5) when they had already asked him prior to his lengthy speaking (John 13:36, 14:5, 14:8). We are met with an answer in the following verse when he says, "But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart." (16:6). In other words, Jesus's statement is meant to be a reminder for *that specific moment.* He is pointing out they are sorrowful, but basically that they should remember where He is going, which is to the Father. So he is basically saying, "Guys why are you sad, why don't you ask where I am going? Remember I am going to the Father." As C. K. Barrett explains, "It seems both necessary and justifiable to emphasize the present tense (ērōta); John does not write ērōtēse, which would involve a flagrant contradiction with Jn 13.36; 14.5. Here he is dealing simply with the disciples' immediate reaction to the words of Jesus. The thought of his departure fills them with grief; but if only they had asked where he was going, and grasped that it was to the Father, they would not have grieved but recognized that his departure was for their

[215] *Studies in the Fourth Gospel,* page 20
[216] *The Reliability of John's Gospel,* 273; see also: The Reliability of the Gospels
[217] *The Reliability of John's Gospel,* page 272
[218] Craig Blomberg, "The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel, 205).

advantage."[219]

J. Ramsey Michaels in similar fashion states, "The disciples have been silent for a long time (all the way back to Jn 14:22), and it would not be at all odd for Jesus to comment on their silence, and the reason for it. He could have said, 'I am going to the One who sent me, and none of you says anything,' but instead he builds on what they had been saying earlier: thus, 'none of you asks me—as you repeatedly did before—"Where are you going?"' The announcement, 'Where I am going you cannot come' (Jn 13:33), had prompted a string of questions. Now the announcement that 'I am going to the One who sent me' draws no response at all. The accent is not on their failure to ask a particular question, but on their failure to say anything at all. Why the long silence, after so many questions? What has happened in the meantime?"[220]

Aren't Christians supposed to do miracles like Jesus?

Jesus says:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12)

Jesus meant works in *deed* (greek: ergon), not miracles, as is implied in other places with the same word (Matthew 5:16; John 3:21; Mark 14:6; etc.); and greater in the sense of higher quantity because he said he was leaving to the Father and wouldn't be around on earth as long as the church. The word for miracles is "semeion," so this is not referring to miracles. (see: interlinear)

Furthermore, let's read the following verses (vv.13-14):

"Whatever you ask in **my name**, this **I** will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in **my name**, **I** will do it."

Notice it's still ultimately Jesus performing the miracles, though in heaven (because he's God).

[219] C. K. Barrett, "The Gospel According to John, 2nd ed." 485.
[220] J. Ramsey Michaels, "The Gospel of John" 831.

Comparing With Other Ancient Antiquities and Religions

<><><><

The New Testament

When one considers the manuscript evidence for the Bible, it is unsurpassed by no other ancient work in history. For the New Testament regarding Jesus, we have four biographies (gospels) that even liberals agree were written within 35-65 years after his execution, among other earlier sources possibly traced within the current generation as we've seen.

There exist over 5,800 copies of the New Testament that contain all or part of the Greek New Testament with copies dating as early as the second century (30-100 years from the originals). On top of this, there exist 8,000-10,000 Latin Vulgate manuscripts, plus a total of 8,000 in Ethiopic, Slavic, and Armenian. In all, there are about 25,000 - 30,000 extant manuscripts today.

Some of the earliest NT manuscripts we have are:

John Rylands (c. 125 AD) is the earliest known manuscript and it contains a fragment of chapter 18 in the Gospel of John (P52). It has five verses--three on one side and two on the other.

Chester Beatty Papyri (c. 200-250 AD) contains portions of the four Gospels and the book of Acts (P45 P46 P47) and dates within the 3rd century.

Bodmer Papyri (c. 175-300 AD) contains about two thirds of the Gospel of John (P66, P75, P72).

Oxyrhynchus Papyri (c. 150-500 AD) are thousands of Greek and Latin documents containing many different portions of the New Testament.

The Diatessaron (c. 170 AD) contains about 72% of all the Gospels in harmonized form.

Codex Vaticanus (c. 325-350 AD) is known as the oldest extant manuscript of the entire Greek Bible. Codex Sinaiticus (c. 350 AD) contains all of the New Testament.

Codex Alexandrinus (c. 400 AD) is another earlier extant manuscript containing most of the Greek Bible. Codex Ephraemi (c. 400 AD) contains material from every New Testament book except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John and six Old Testament books in Greek.

Codex Bezae (c. 450 AD) contains most of the four Gospels, Acts, and a small fragment of 3 John.

Codex Washingtonensis / or Freericanus (c. 450 AD) contains all material from the four Gospels.

Codex Claromontanus (c. 500 AD) contains all of the New Testament.
More: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_New_Testament_papyri

Note: Some of these manuscripts have spelling and punctuation characteristics that suggest that they are in a family of manuscripts that can be traced back to AD 100-150, even.

Factors that help determine the age of a manuscript are: materials used, letter size and form, punctuation, text divisions, ornamentation, color of the ink, texture and color of parchment, and carbon-14 dating.[221]

Of just the 5,800+ Greek NT manuscripts, there are more than 2.6 million pages. Combining both the Old and New Testament, there are more than 66,000 manuscripts and scrolls (and increasing). A stack of extant manuscripts for the average classical writer would measure about four feet high; this just cannot compare to the more than one mile of New Testament manuscripts and two-and-a-half-miles for the entire Bible.[222]

On top of the textual evidence derived from NT Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic has available the numerous scriptural quotations included in the commentaries, sermons, and other treatises written by the early church fathers within the first three centuries (see next chapter).

Biblical scholar, translator, and textual critic Bruce Metzger, in "The Text of the New Testament" (pg.34) cogently writes of the comparison between the NT and classical works:

"The works of several ancient authors are preserved to us by the thinnest possible thread of transmission. For example, the compendious history of Rome by Velleius Paterculus survived to modern times in only one incomplete manuscript, from which the editio princeps was made--and this lone manuscript was lost in the seventeenth century after being copied by Beatus Rhenanus at Amerbach.

Even the Annals of the famous historian Tacitus is extant, so far as the first six books are concerned, in but a single manuscript, dating from the ninth century. In 1870 the only known manuscript of the Epistle to Diognetus, an early Christian composition which editors usually include in the corpus of Apostolic Fathers, perished in a fire at the municipal library in Strasbourg. In contrast with these figures, the textual critic of the New Testament is embarrassed by the wealth of his material."

NT scholar J. Harold Greenlee writes in his "Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism" (pg.16) about the time gap between the original MS (the autograph) and the extant MS (the oldest surviving copy), saying,

"Since scholars accept as generally trustworthy the writings of the ancient classics even though the earliest manuscripts were written so long after the original writings and the number of extant manuscripts is in many instances so

[221] For a more in-depth look at these manuscripts: https://manuscripts.csntm.org/
[222] 107 Wallace, lecture at Discover the Evidence, Dec. 6, 2013

small, it is clear that the reliability of the text of the N.T. is likewise assured."

F.F. Bruce, eminent professor at the University of Manchester, England said,

"There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."[223]

Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director of the British Museum said,

"In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament."[224]

He concluded, "The last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed."[225]

Comparing with other religions

The fact is, we have better historical documentation for Jesus than for the founder of any other ancient religion. For example: Although the Gathas of Zoroaster, about 1000 BC, are believed to be authentic, most of the Zoroastrian scriptures were not put into writing until after the third century AD. The most popular Parsi biography of Zoroaster was written in AD 1278.

The scriptures of Buddha, who lived in the sixth century BC, were not put into writing until after the Christian era, and the first biography of Buddha was written in the 1st century AD.

Although we have the sayings of Muhammad, who lived from AD 570 to 632, in the Qur'an, his biography was not written until AD 767--more than a full century after his death. Despite its claims about Jesus and the crucifixion, the Qur'an itself did not come about until around 600 years after the event, giving it less credibility than the Bible's New Testament accounts which came within the lifetimes of those who actually witnessed the events and the earliest existing manuscripts dating within the following two centuries Furthermore, the New Testament has multiple, confirmed attestation; while the Quran has just *one* attestation (Muhammad).

In light of the New Testament being written during the lifetimes of the eyewitnesses, the situation with Jesus is unique, and quite impressive.

Number of different accounts

Skeptics may ask, "If Jesus actually did rise from the dead, shouldn't there be more

[223] F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1963), 178
[224] Frederic Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 5
[225] Frederic Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (New York: Harper, 1940), 288

accounts written about him than there is?" but we actually have *more* testimony than we might expect. Compare the nine eyewitness accounts (who wrote 27 documents; aka: the New Testament), the numerous non-Christian accounts (some of who were enemies against Christianity), and the 24 others from the proceeding church fathers (43 accounts total) of Jesus to Roman emperor Tiberius's 10 within 150 years of their lives! This is more than enough to establish historicity.

For those who still think there should have been more written about Jesus, New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg offers four reasons why that's not a reasonable expectation:

1. The humble beginnings of Christianity.
2. The remote location of Palestine on the eastern frontiers of the Roman Empire.
3. The small percentage of the works of ancient Graeco-Roman historians that have survived (which could be due to loss, decay, destruction, or all of the above).
4. And the lack of attention paid by surviving historical documents to Jewish figures in general.[226]

[226] Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1987], 197

Motive for Lying?

<><><><

forty lashes on five different occasions, beatings with rods on three occasions, a stoning once, a shipwrecking three times, environmental dangers to face as well as danger of the surrounding peoples, and sleepless, cold nights without food and water (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

He says in Phil. 3:7-10,

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings..."

In another place, he is found saying,

"For I am the least of the apostles and am unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." (1 Corinthians 15:9)

Considering he was at the top as a Pharisee before converting to Christianity, what other reason would he have had to want to be a Christian if turning into "the least" would be the outcome? First Corinthians 1:22-23 further helps us understand how unlikely it would have been for Paul to make up the story of Jesus. In particular, the crucifixion aspect of the story made missionary activity a challenge because of how it was received by Jew and Gentile alike: "Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles." If Paul's account of Christ were an invention, he would not have included details that would make his missionary work that much harder and lead him into being persecuted. Galatians 5:11 is another example:

"If I were still preaching that you must be circumcised as some say I do why am I still being persecuted? If I were no longer preaching salvation through the cross of Christ, no one would be offended."

Paul's martyrdom is then found in the extra-biblical accounts of the early church fathers (1 Clement, 5:5-7, c. AD 95-96; Ignatius (Letter to the Ephesians 12:2), Polycarp (Letter to the Philippians), Dionysius of Corinth (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 2.25.4), Irenaeus (Against Heresies 3.1.1), The Acts of Paul, and Tertullian (Scorpiace 15:5-6).

Martyrdom of Jesus' half-brother James

Regarding Jesus' half-brother James, Mark and John both report that none of Jesus' brothers believed in him (Mark 3:21, 3:31, 6:3-4; John 7:3-5). This is considered authentic based on criteria of embarrassment for both James and Jesus, considering

James' unbelief and the humiliation of a first-century rabbi (Jesus) not having his own family as his followers. We are then told that he later became a leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:12-21; Galatians 1:19) and later stoned to death according to secular historian, Flavius Josephus ("Antiquities," 20.197-203, c. AD 93-94). This makes sense in light of what one of the authors wrote about James and himself (most likely Paul) having witnessed the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). Unlike the "Testimonium Flavianum" (Antiquities of the Jews 18.3.3), this passage is largely undisputed by scholars. It allows the dating of James's execution to AD 62, since Josephus places his death between the terms of two Roman procurators, Festus and Albinus. According to this account, the high priest Ananus had James stoned to death. The death of James is also reported by Hegesippus (Eusebius, "Ecclesiastical History 2.23.8-18), Clement of Alexandria (Hypotyposes Book 7), The First Apocalypse of James (gnostic text), and the Pseudo-Clementines (Recognitions 1:66-1.71).

Martyrdom of Peter

The traditional view is that Peter was crucified in Rome during the reign of Nero between AD 64-67. The earliest evidence comes from John 21:18-19 which was written no later than thirty years after Peter's death, and possibly before AD 70. Other evidences can be found in writings such as Clement of Rome (1 Clement 5:1-4), Ignatius (Letter to the Smyrneans 3:1-2), The Apocalypse of Peter, The Ascension of Isaiah, The Acts of Peter, The Apocryphon of James, Dionysius of Corinth (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical history 2.25.4), Muratorian Canon, and Tertullian (Scorpiace 15, The Prescription Against Heresies 36).

Martyrdom of James, the son of Zebedee

There are only a few apocryphal accounts surrounding James, the son of Zebedee. The "Acts of Saint James in India" reports a tradition that he went to India along with Peter. "The Apostolic History of Abdias" (sixth and seventh centuries) tells a story of James and his interaction with two pagan magicians who eventually confess Christ. The most likely reason apocryphal accounts about James are rare is because his martyrdom in Judea (AD 44) was so firmly entrenched in the early church and limited the trajectory of such stories. His martyrdom is first recorded in Acts 12:1-2. The brevity of the account may be unexpected, but it does serve to strengthen its reliability.

Well, what about martyrs in *other* religions?

For example, what about the Jews who died believing Simon bar Kochba was the Messiah, or Muslim martyrs? Well, there is a difference here: these causes were martyred through warfare; Christians were martyred for professing Christ. As a Christian, standing your ground while up against your executioner most likely

guarantees your death. On the other hand in war, standing your ground while holding a weapon for defense guarantees more of a chance for survival.

Furthermore, these causes promised worldly gain, just as anyone is who gives their life in war. The Jews believed they would get their land back from the Romans. Muslims were likewise promised land gain and power by subjugating their victims (Q9:29; Bukhari 3146) as well as the hope that many beautiful virgin women would await them in the afterlife (Q44:51-54).

The Quran exhorts all the Muslims:

"Warfare has been prescribed for you, though it is repulsive to you. Yet it may be that you dislike something, which is good for you, and it may be that you love something, which is bad for you, and Allah knows and you do not know." (Q2:216)

None of these ideas apply to Christian martyrdom--there was nothing to gain.

The apostles would have *known* if they were dying for a lie or not.

In addition, the *apostles*--who are recorded to have seen Jesus die and come back to life; and then recorded elsewhere to have died professing this gospel--would have *known* if they were dying for a lie or not. Other religious people however, died through faith and conviction on what they were told.

Christian doctrine implications

Lastly, Matthew, Mark, and Luke say nothing of the theological implications tied to the Resurrection (like mostly Paul does; for example: going to heaven when you die, life after death, resurrection of Christ's people, etc.), and John reports those implications in only one sentence (John 20:31). This further demonstrates the Gospel writers were concerned about getting history correct, not inventing some new kind of theology.

Furthermore, why would the apostles invent a message that's offensive even to *themselves?* Typically when you lie, your purpose is to make yourself look better and make life easier, not worse, yet the Gospel message attests to the sin of mankind and man's need for God to be saved. Why would mankind invent a story that implicates condemnation on *all men* due to the sin of one man (Romans 5:18; Luke 13:2-5)? Why would man invent a rule book that goes *against* man's core desires (money, lust, ego, fame, etc.) to follow *God's* desires?[229] Why would mankind invent "no one is good except God" (Mark 10:17-18)? Sounds more like a message that would come from *God*.

[229] Even if critics wanted to make a point with Islam as well for this point, no one can admit that the level of strictness against these things is outmatched compared to other religions when it comes to Jesus's teachings which say that merely looking upon someone with lust is adultery. Muhammad never preached this and even ended up marrying his son's wife after seeing her with little clothing on, nor is the Islamic term for "adultery" the same as Christianity's but is overall, much more lenient. This is further shown with such laws in the Quran granting Muhammad special privileges and gain over his followers in regards to such things, so Islam is overall, an invalid comparison.

Miraculous Growth of Christianity

<><><><

historical figure of antiquity (by a long shot). And looking at today, Christianity happens to be the biggest religion in the world. Of course the size of a religion doesn't necessarily determine its truthfulness, but still; what is the "logic" behind all of this if there really was no resurrection?

One might say that the greatest man in history had no servants, yet they called him Master. Had no degree, yet they called him Teacher. Had no medicines, yet they called him Healer. He had no army, yet kings feared Him. He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world. He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him. He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives today! And His name is Jesus.

Prevailed over Jewish ideas and traditions

If the Jews were expecting a victorious ruler for their Messiah, why would the apostles (who were Jewish) fabricate the Jewish messianic expectation into being a crucified criminal?

Also, the Jews who believed in an afterlife believed in a general disembodied resurrection of all people at the end of history. The thing with Jesus was that it happened in history, it happened to one individual and He appeared in the same body that had been buried, only healed (internally). He revealed the wounds of the nails in His hands (John 20:24-31) and He ate food (John 21).

On top of this, the Jewish people prided themselves in the exclusive relationship they claimed to have with the Creator of the Universe as His chosen people and Christianity disarmed this exclusivity by elevating non-Jews into the circle more.

Furthermore, unless the Resurrection actually happened, why would so many Jews, almost immediately, stop observing the Saturday Sabbath and switch instead to Sunday worship? And in addition, give up circumcision, the Law of Moses, the centrality of the temple, the priestly system, the meaning behind Passover commemoration for the communion of the Lord's Supper, and other sacred traditions that had defined who they and their forebears were for nearly 2,000 years? Tradition is not something you normally just give up.

Islam may have changed a few things from the pre-Islamic Arabian world as well, but history shows that many pre-Islamic Arabian customs actually still remain within the religion of Islam, rather than having been prevailed over (such as the Hajj pilgrimage and fasting customs among other things). This offers further reasoning behind the appeal to that religion for many in the culture of the time.

Variants, Contradictions, Doctrinal Alterations?

<><><><

v.17 in ch.30; v.16 and John 20:23 in ch.42) prior to the earliest extant manuscripts to which it appears (Codex Alexandrinus in AD 400s).

The Pericope Adulterae (John 7:53-8:11) is referenced by Papias (AD 60-130) quoted by Eusebius (AD 260-341; *Fragments of Papias* VI), as well as the third century *Didascalia Apostolorum* instruction to bishops (near the end of ch.7) all before the extant manuscripts to which it first appears (AD 400 in Codex Bezae).

The Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7), only appearing in today's King James Bible translations, was quoted by Cyprian of Carthage (AD 251 in *On the Unity of the Church,* Treatise1,sec.6), Priscillian (385 AD),[232] Idacius Clarus (385 AD),[233] Vigilius Tapensi (484 AD),[234] Eugenius at the later Council of Carthage (485 AD), Fulgentius (527 AD), as well as the *Vetus Latina* and Vulgate manuscripts in the 6th century, all prior to the 16th century appearance in the later Greek manuscripts. In Codex Fuldensis in the *Preface to the Canonical Epistles* (546 AD), Saint Jerome (382 AD) makes explicit reference to the omission in the manuscripts.

Based on all of this, it's plausible that the omission is a variant reading and that the Johannine Comma was still part of the earliest tradition. We could also posit that Mark's ending and the Pericope Adulterae were still part of the earliest tradition, written or oral--though not originally placed in Mark and John's gospels. We could say that a few texts that contained these traditions were used but didn't survive to today, or that oral tradition was passed on up to the time where it was copied onto the gospel manuscripts on stronger material, in which case this would be seen as *keeping* these passages in scripture and would, if anything, *fulfill* Bible verses regarding preservation all the more rather than go against them. In other words, interpolation doesn't necessarily mean fabrication. Historians take into consideration that if the interpolation is supported by other independent sources, archaeology or earlier traditions then it's likely that a scribe merely expanded an earlier report or clarified an event already known that was preserved in written form later.

One example of this is seen with the later speech insertions in Roman historical narratives. In the speeches in *History of the Peloponnesian War,* Thucydides himself admitted he reconstructed speeches rather than recording them verbatim, yet historians still believe the events surrounding the speeches occurred, even if the exact wording was recreated or expanded later. This is also to take into consideration that these biblical interpolations are consistent with the overall scriptural theology and the character of Jesus.

Even if these additions were not authentic, it wouldn't discredit the gospel accounts as a whole. We have examples of interpolations in many historical works with the likes of Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews,* minor textual expansions in Tacitus's *Annals,* legendary embellishments in Alexander the Great's campaigns, copyist

[232] *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum,* Academia Litterarum Vindobonensis, Volume xviii, p. 6
[233] *Liber Apologeticus*
[234] *Contra Varimadum Arianum*

colophons in Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War,* scribal editorial note additions in Herodotus's *The Histories,* yet historians still deem these historical works authentic *minus* the additions.

So let's pretend these additions in the gospel accounts never happened and don't exist--what are we left with now? We're still left with a Gospel that teaches the death and resurrection of Christ, as well as all of his sayings that we point to that reference his divinity and the Trinity. The point being made: even without these additions we still don't have a different Gospel, but the Biblical Gospel. This is a valid point because we know what genuine textual development looks like and antiquity gives us examples of it. Gilgamesh is an unusually clear case, presenting us with significantly different narratives from its earlier Sumerian texts.[235] So those who want to claim that the Gospel message has been changed over time from the originals must present evidence of a manuscript(s) or tradition that actually tells us a different Gospel message and at the same time, predates our earliest sources. No such manuscript or tradition has ever been found.

Contradictions?

The accounts can still be reliable despite variances because it tends to show all the more cohesion and independent nature of the accounts. If they meshed too perfectly, it would be evidence of collusion, but that's clearly not what is seen here. The fact that we see a central theme in all four accounts (Jesus dies on the cross and is resurrected) yet, with these minor differences, goes to show the multiple attestation of Jesus and with a little patience and some careful reconstruction, the events can be harmonized with one another and pieced together to get a complete picture of what occurred. Numerous undesigned coincidences are found throughout the Gospels where something that isn't quite clear in one Gospel, gets explained in another Gospel, and these demonstrate evidence for multiple attestation.

Furthermore, the accounts of virtually any multiply attested event of secular history display discrepancies as great or greater than the alleged discrepancies in the Gospel narratives. For example, Greek historian Polybius and the Roman historian Livy seem to disagree in their description of Hannibal's route in crossing the Alps in Italy during the second Punic War. Yet, ancient historians do not question whether Hannibal made this trek. So, not that the Gospels are such, but even if a document contained errors or even genuine contradictions, it would not be rendered unusable for historical investigation because there are other criteria employed by historians that would still

[235] For example, in the standard Babylonian epic, Enkidu is a wild man rival-turned-companion of Gilgamesh but in the earlier Sumerian version, Enkidu is only Gilgamesh's servant. The standard Babylonian epic depicts only Enkidu accompanying Gilgamesh on his journey whereas the earlier Sumerian version has an additional 50 soldiers tag along. The standard Babylonian epic presents the decisive victory over Humbaba with divine assistance from Shamash but the earlier Sumerian version depicts it as the result of Gilgamesh's deception. Etc.

allow them to distinguish facts from falsehood.[236]

Doctrinal alterations?

Imagine a text is being copied from numerous transmitters. I'm one of the scribes, and while I'm copying onto my own manuscript, I change one or two of the verses by wording them differently. Does this mean all the other verses are likewise changed, let alone in all the other transmitted manuscripts from other scribes--and now the whole message is changed? Of course not.

Likewise, the evidence shows in some of the ancient manuscripts of the NT that some scribes altered the text, but this still has no bearing on the message of the Gospel, for even if there had been no alterations we would still have plenty of other verses *already* to sufficiently support these doctrines. In the Q&A section in some editions of *Misquoting Jesus,* Bart Ehrman himself admits that he and Bruce Metzger are in agreement on most points related to NT textual criticism and goes on to say that:

"The position I argue for in *Misquoting Jesus* does not actually stand at odds with Prof. Metzger's position that the essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament. What he means by that (I think) is that even if one or two passages that are used to argue for a belief have different textual reading, there are still other passages that could be used to argue for the same belief. For the most part, I think that's true."[237]

Other NT scholars explain that alterations, let alone doctrinal ones, were the exception rather than the rule in the transmission process. Stanley Porter and Andrew Pitts explain: "...we must allow that certain scribes may have had doctrinal agendas that impact their transmission of the text from time to time, this was the exception rather than the rule…Ancient scribes generally considered it their duty to copy rather than interpret or alter the text to suit their or others' doctrinal beliefs. This is not to say doctrinal alterations did not happen from time to time, but it certainly was not part of regular scribal practice…This is where [a skeptic like] Ehrman is inconsistent. He admits that doctrinally motivated alteration was the exception, not the rule, but builds his entire case upon variants that are often easily explained by using…standard transcriptional probabilities [aka: the intended alterations].[238]

Daniel Wallace claims: "In the last 130 years, there has not been a single manuscript discovery that has produced a new reading for the New Testament that scholars think is authentic…not a single manuscript that tells us a totally different story about Jesus. In about the second century BC the rules for careful copying and textual criticism were developed heavily in Alexandria, Egypt, which became the primary

[236] Regarding biblical "contradictions," see: Alleged Errors and Contradictions in the Bible (website)
[237] Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 252-3
[238] Stanley Porter and Andrew Pitts, *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism,* p. 119-20

scholarly city in the ancient world for book reproduction (before the New Testament was ever written). The New Testament manuscripts became benefactors of that approach."[239]

David Dockery says: "For most of the biblical text a single reading has been transmitted. Elimination of scribal errors and intentional changes leaves only a small percentage of the text about which any questions occur."[240] He continues: "It must be said that the amount of time between the original composition and the next surviving manuscript is far less for the New Testament than for any other work in Greek literature…Although there are certainly differences in many of the New Testament manuscripts, not one fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading."[241] Scott Carroll says: "No biblical discovery has ever undermined our confidence in scripture."[242]

The NT Gospels contradict the earliest source material? (Q Gospel)

Among the earliest source material of the Gospel, critics argue, is the theorized Q Gospel, which is purported to be a handful of the sayings of Jesus found in Matthew and Luke, but not found in Mark. Critics say it didn't contain any high Christology, nor the death and resurrection, and stands as the earliest theorized writing of the Gospel dating within the first decade or so after Christ. However, just because the Q gospel is proposed as a theory, it doesn't make it essential in the historical development of the gospels. For example, scholars also propose the Farrer Hypothesis which states that Luke copied from Mark and Matthew, as well as the Augustinian and Griesbach hypotheses, so in other words: this idea is based on mere hypothesis with zero extant manuscript evidence.

Let's grant that the Q gospel is something that actually existed though. Again, notice that we have no physical manuscript of Q. Based on this fact, we cannot know for certain the entirety of what this hypothetical text even contained. All we know is the sayings of Jesus found in Luke and Matthew but not Mark. Who's to say that there wasn't more material in Q pertaining to the crucifixion and resurrection that the NT gospel authors got their information, instead, from other eyewitnesses? How does the critic really know there was nothing about the crucifixion and resurrection in Q when we don't even have a manuscript of the text? The level of confidence and certainty of the contents of a non-extant text is astounding. Even granting a low Christological, crucifixionless, resurrectionless narrative, what's overlooked even *here* could very well be the intention of the author. It's plausible that Q could have merely focused on Jesus's ministry, moral teachings and precepts for daily living rather than a detailed historical account.

---

[239] Daniel Wallace, lecture at Discover the Evidence, Dec 3-4, 2013
[240] David Dockery *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation,* p. 176
[241] Ibid. 182
[242] Scott Carroll, lecture at Discover the Evidence, Dec 3-4, 2013

Furthermore, how do we really know the New Testament gospels are a corruption and that the gospels aren't, instead, merely adding and updating more authentic details about Jesus? For example, let's say a well-known celebrity passes away and some time after, a friend of his writes about him. Some time even later, a biographer goes around and interviews family members, co-workers, and other friends, adding more details in another written account. Would the biographer's writings be corrupted since it came some time after the earlier account written by the friend and contains more details that weren't previously known to the public? So how then does the critic determine whether the later New Testament gospel accounts are fabrications of the Q gospel rather than merely *building* on the Q gospel? After all, the Q gospel makes no mention of the crucifixion but the crucifixion account found in the *New Testament* is considered historically accurate. In order for Q gospel to work here, it would have to *contradict* the New Testament gospels on major themes, like portraying Jesus as *not* dying on the cross but dying a different way, *not* being God or *not* the Son of God.

Instead, we actually find *consistent* themes with the New Testament gospels. The Q Gospel is said to have contained the Beatitudes where Jesus says the believers "shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9), teaches believers to pray to God as "Father" (Matt. 6:9), Jesus claiming to be "the" Son, the Father as "my Father," that he has everything the Father has, that he knows the Father in the same way the Father knows him, and only he reveals the Father (Matthew 11:27). Q Gospel is also said to contain Matthew 12 where Jesus speaks of the sign of Jonah alluding to his death and resurrection (vv.38-40). Pointing to the epistle of James doesn't help matters either, for in 2:1, James explicitly writes, "our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" alluding to Yahweh in the Old Testament who was called, "the King of glory" and "God of glory" (Psalm 24:7-10, 29:3).

The apocryphal Gospel of Thomas might likewise be suggested by some in that it apparently contains nothing on the crucifixion or resurrection of Jesus and apparently traces all the way back to around 30-40 AD. However, this claim overlooks a few things. For starters, this is a minority viewpoint among scholars--the writing itself is typically dated mid-late second century due to many of the elements that mirror second-century gnosticism. The early dating comes from certain sayings of Jesus that some scholars see as a parallel with the hypothetical Q Gospel and fitting with an early date. However, again, silence on a particular subject does not equate to a contradiction. Just like Q, these proposed "early sayings" in the Gospel of Thomas prove to be nothing but *consistent* with the New Testament such as the kingdom of heaven from the parable of the sower (#57), a parable of leaven (#96) and an empty jar (#97) rendered as the kingdom "of the father." The real checkmate comes from the parable of the tenants (#65) which is widely known as a parable about God as the owner of the vineyard and his "son" who is killed, as Jesus being killed by the Jews. And how was Jesus killed by the Jews? *By his crucifixion.* As we can see, pointing to the early sayings in the Gospel

of Thomas is *not* silent on an implicit reference to the crucifixion and does nothing for this argument but instead, again, shows consistency with the New Testament.

Daniel A. Smith might be cited here who is known for arguing that Q portrays a Jesus who, while still crucified, does not resurrect but is assumed bodily into heaven while on the cross, similar to Enoch and Elijah. However, where does he get this idea? This is taken from an interpretation of Q13:35 (Matt.23:37-39, Luke 13:34-35) where Jesus laments over Jerusalem:

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

Smith suggests that the expression "you will not see me until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" can be understood as indicating Jesus's disappearance from the earthly realm through divine assumption which parallels the similar motif of foreknowledge, exaltation and vindication implicitly attributed to Enoch and Elijah in Wisdom of Solomon chapter 4 of whom, “while living among sinners were taken up” and that, “the peoples saw and did not understand, or take such a thing to heart, that God’s grace and mercy are with his elect, and that he watches over his holy ones.” (Wisdom 4:7-17).[243]

The problem here is that the conclusion drawn from this passage is insufficient if one’s attempt is to establish a contradiction with the NT gospels because the same passage in Q13:35 could just as well be interpreted as referring to the resurrection. As Harry T. Fleddermann argues in response to Smith, motifs of foreknowledge, exaltation and vindication of righteous figures are just as compatible with a resurrection narrative in light of the Markan material regarding the coming of the Son of Man in Mark 14:62 within Mark’s resurrection framework.[244] He continues to argue that Q's temptation narrative (Q4:2-13, Luke 4:1-13, Matthew 4:1-11) functions as a flashforward to Jesus's eventual death and resurrection in that, when tempted by the devil, Jesus refuses to exploit his status as God's Son to escape death.[245] He also argues that the concept of resurrection is not foreign to Q (e.g. Q7:22, Matt.11:5, Luke 7:22; Q3:8, Luke 3:8, Matt.3:9). Though these passages represent the righteous collective, Smith uses similar methodology when applying Jesus into the righteous collective of Wisdom 3:1-4 to substantiate his assumption narrative.

All in all, neither side should pretend that the hypothetical author of Q is clear on the matter though the circulation and widespread acceptance of the New Testament gives us a plausible reason for favoring the resurrection narrative.

---

[243] Daniel A. Smith, "The 'Assumption' of the Righteous Dead in the Wisdom of Solomon and the Sayings Gospel Q" (2000), *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 29, no. 3.
[244] Harry T. Fleddermann, *Jesus’ Temptations as a Flashforward in the Plot of Q*, pp.119–123, 115–150
[245] ibid.

More objections

<><><><

including those executed by crucifixion.

Writer Philo (25 BC) and Roman-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (AD 37) attest to Roman rule permitting Jewish customs during their rule. Josephus writes in *Antiquities of the Jews,*

"...it seemed good to me and my counsellors, according to the sentence and oath of the people of Rome, that the Jews have liberty to make use of their own customs, according to the law of their forefathers."[246]

As we know by Jewish custom, the execution of Jesus, and possibly the two men with him, was initiated by the Jewish Council (or Sanhedrin), meaning it fell to the council to have that person buried to protect the purity of the sanctuary, the temple precincts, Jerusalem, and the land as followed in Deuteronomy 21. As Josephus states in *The Jewish War,* "even malefactors who have been sentenced to crucifixion are taken down and buried before sunset."[247]

The New Testament again reaffirms this when Pilate accommodates Jewish custom on account of releasing a man on Passover (John 18:39).

Jesus never led a revolt. Furthermore, did Jesus lead a revolt of treason against Rome, unworthy of burial? Many secularists may claim he did (without any evidence), but if that was the case, why was it *his own people* who handed him over to be executed? Why were his own people mocking him on the cross?

On top of this, Jesus publicly proclaimed, "Give to God what belongs to God and give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar" (Mark 12:17). He said to Pilate "My kingdom is not of this world so my followers are not fighting" (John 18:33-38). Does Pilate object to this? On the contrary he says, "I find no guilt in him" (v. 38). In fact, since Pilate found Jesus innocent, why did he put Jesus to death in the first place? *Because of Jewish custom!*

One may point to the verse where Peter strikes the ear off of a Roman soldier with a sword (John 18:10-11; Luke 22:50-51), though Jesus heals it so Pilate still had no evidence with which to deny Jesus.

Archaeological evidence. Regarding archaeology, Scholar Craig Evans points out that beginning with the 1968 discovery of Yehohanan's remains (which date to about AD 20), archaeology has shown that individuals who were executed by crucifixion had been given proper Jewish burials. In referencing the archaeological record, Evans says:

"I refer to the discovery of dozens, perhaps more than one hundred, nails that have been received from tombs and ossuaries, some which bear traces of

[246] Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews,* 16:160-173; also in his *The Jewish War* 2.20 and *Against Apion* 2.73; and Philo, *Embassy* 299-300
[247] Josephus, *The Jewish War,* 4.317

human calcium. These nails, especially those with traces of calcium, were used in crucifixion and, strangely, were viewed as talismans. The presence of calcium, sometimes encircling the nail, indicates its use in crucifixion and suggests the corpse, still pierced by the nails, was buried and sometime later (when the calcium adhered to the nail) the nails were recovered and put to new use."[248]

Is the birth of Jesus narrative and the census ahistorical?

See: Why the Birth of Jesus Narrative is Consistent With Itself and History

Was Jesus wrong about an early Second Coming?

See: Was Jesus Wrong About an Early Second Coming?

Is the Sanhedrin trial ahistorical?

Regarding Jesus's trial (Mark 14:53–65; Matthew 26:57–68; Luke 22:63–71), the critic will list off the following objections for its apparent inaccuracy: the Jews had no power to arrest Jesus because that was Rome's job; the trial happened at night and the Sanhedrin were forbidden to hold trials at night; trials could only be held in the Temple, not at the house of the high priest; trials could not be held during Passover week; the priests would not have spit on and hit Jesus; there was a 24-hour waiting period before one could be sentenced; Jesus's entry into Jerusalem was probably during the Feast of Tabernacles because palm trees were not in bloom in the spring; and Jesus only claimed to be the Messiah, yet it was only blasphemous to claim to be God.

For starters, Rome did not run a nanny state or handle every administrative task. Due to the size of the Empire and the practicality of governing large territories, they left some local levels of authority at their own will to report back to Rome. Larry Overstreet states, "Generally speaking, Roman law allowed the local law of each province to be exercised without much interference."[249] Wolfgang Kunkel says, "Local administration, the administration of justice as between the natives of the provinces, and many other tasks were in general simply left to the political organs of the subject people."[250] First-century historian Josephus also records a later incident involving Jesus ben Ananias who was prophesying against the Temple, was arrested and chastised, and *then* turned over to the Roman authorities,[251] which is pretty much what happened with Jesus.

There is also no clear evidence that such precepts were established prior to the Temple destruction in 70 AD. These come from the Mishnah Sanhedrin which dates

[248] Evans, GBTER, 86
[249] R. Larry Overstreet, *Roman Law and the Trial of Christ,* p.325
[250] Wolfgang Kunkel, *An Introduction to Roman Legal and Constitutional History,* p.40
[251] Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* 6.5.3

over two centuries after Jesus. Even so, we don't know whether the Sanhedrin kept these rules in a strict sense. Josephus even cites instances, like the execution of James, where Jewish leaders took advantage of loopholes to execute their plans and desires.[252] Robert H. Stein says, "With regard to the legal prescriptions found in the tractate Sanhedrin it needs to be pointed out that these rules were written down after A.D. 200, and it is unclear whether they reflect rules that actually existed in Jesus' day or whether they reflect an idealized description of what such laws should have been like. Second, some of the rules found in this tractate conflict with Josephus's description of how things were in the first century."[253] Anthony Ernest Harvey affirms, "It is far from certain that [Mishnah laws] were in force before the fall of Jerusalem, or, even if they were, that they would have been observed in an emergency."[254] William Riley Wilson says regarding the Mishnah, "It is now certain that many of these rules were only idealistic and theoretical and do not reflect actual practice in any period."[255]

Palm branches and leaves were used at Jesus's entry. Palm branches don't bloom--palm *flowers* bloomed. His entry would not have depended on the flowers but the leaves which were available year-round. Nor was there a rule that the Messiah could only have used palm branches during the Feast of Tabernacles.

As far as Jesus being accused of blasphemy (Mark 14:60-64), notice he did *not* just claim to be the Messiah but went another step further, "I am, *and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven*." This was an allusion to the divine Son of Man figure from Daniel 7:13-14.[256]

Is the release of Barabbas ahistorical?

Another objection is in regards to the release of the criminal, Barabbas (Mark 15:6–15; Matthew 27:15–26; Luke 23:18–24; John 18:40). Critics assert that no other sources mention Pilate allowing such a custom and that Barabbas is said to have been arrested for insurrection against the Roman state. The Romans, therefore, would never have released someone who participated in the insurrection as a rebel against Rome. Furthermore, the name Barabbas means, "son of the father" which seems to be invented for literary reasons pertaining to Jesus as the Son of the Father God in that the Jews asked for the *sinful* son of the father to be released and condemned the *righteous* son of the father.

For starters, the claim that no other available sources mention the allowance of such a custom is an argument from silence. We *do* know, however, that Rome did not run a nanny state or handle every administrative task. Due to the size of the Empire and the practicality of governing large territories, they left some local levels of authority at

[252] Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.9.1
[253] Robert H. Stein, *The New American Commentary,* pp.568-569
[254] Anthony Ernest Harvey, *Jesus on Trial: A Study in the Fourth Gospel,* p.61
[255] William Riley Wilson, *The Execution of Jesus: A Judicial, Literary and Historical Investigation,* p.11
[256] See: Is Jesus God? Messianic Prophecy

their own will to report back to Rome. Larry Overstreet states, “Generally speaking, Roman law allowed the local law of each province to be exercised without much interference.”[257] Wolfgang Kunkel says, “Local administration, the administration of justice as between the natives of the provinces, and many other tasks were in general simply left to the political organs of the subject people.”[258]

We also know of similar cases. A papyrus from 85 AD (P.Flor 61) quotes a Roman governor over Egypt stating, “You were worthy of scourging…but I give you to the crowds.” Pliny the Younger, in *Epistle to Trajan* 10.31, mentions a group of people released from prison to explain how they were let out, saying, “It was asserted, however, that these people were released upon their petition to the proconsuls, or their lieutenants; which seems likely enough, as it is improbable any person should have dared to set them at liberty without authority.” An inscription in Ephesus (441 AD) mentions a decision of a proconsul to release prisoners because of the outcries of the people.[259] Josephus, in *Antiquities* 17.204, tells us that Herod Archelaus released several prisoners to appease his fellow Jews. He also mentions in 20.215 that when Albinus left his office over Judea, he released all prisoners that were not worthy of death. There might also be an allusion to this practice in the Mishnah Pesahim 8:6 which reads regarding the Passover lamb, “They may slaughter for one…who they have promised to bring out of prison.”

The Romans were also known for bending the rules when it was politically useful or convenient. Plutarch records that some of Caesar’s men, after killing two praetors named Galba and Cosconius, were merely censured as “citizens” rather than soldiers when he addressed them and were yet, given “a thousand drachmas and much allotted land in Italy.”[260] Josephus records that after the fall of Jerusalem, he made a special request to the Roman commander, Titus, to spare some of his family and former companions, as well as some of those who had already been condemned by crucifixion, and he was not denied.[261] So it’s likely that Barabbas was likewise released, though no longer seen as a threat.

Lastly, the name Barabbas does mean “son of the father,” but it doesn’t necessarily follow that this would make the incident a forgery. The name Barsabbas, meaning “son of the elder” appears on a Jewish ossuary.[262] It has also been demonstrated that “Abba,” which means “Father,” was at times, used as a proper name.[263] We also know of a Jewish rebel who led a revolt against Rome between 132-135 AD who was a leader named Simon, but by his surname “Bar-Kokhba.” So it is

---

[257] R. Larry Overstreet, *Roman Law and the Trial of Christ,* p.325
[258] Wolfgang Kunkel, *An Introduction to Roman Legal and Constitutional History,* p.40
[259] Adolf Deissmann, “Light from the Ancient East.” 2004, pp.269-270 n7
[260] Plutarch, *The Life of Julius Caesar* 51.2
[261] Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus,* 75
[262] Sukenik, E.L. “The Earliest Records of Christianity.” American Journal of Archaeology, vol. 51. No.4, 1947, pp.351-365., doi:10.2307/500006.
[263] Craig Evans, *Jesus and the Ossuaries,* Baylor University Press. 2003, p.86

not inconceivable that a Jew could have a surname as Barabbas, given the cultural context. Mike Licona, who studied the various spellings and uses of names in Plutarch, notes, "Ancient authors could select different components of a person's name to provide."[264]

Is Pilate's behavior ahistorical?

Critics argue regarding the portrayal of the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate in the gospels who is presented as sympathetic to Jesus's case and also unstable by giving in to pressure by the Jews who want Jesus dead. This portrayal, they argue, doesn't match his character as recorded by other historians like Josephus and Philo who describe Pilate as brutal, ruthless and without mercy towards the Jewish people.[265]

Such claims overlook the broader picture in these other written accounts, however, and what's overlooked actually reveals a Pilate who is very much like the Pilate of the Gospel narrative. For starters, Josephus reports that Pilate brought idols of Caesar into the city of Jerusalem to abolish the Jewish laws. Upon doing this, the Jews reacted with protest and demands to have them removed. Pilate denied the request and the Jews refused to leave so he surrounded them with soldiers ready to fight. The Jews were still unwilling to leave and willing to risk death for the sake of their law, so Pilate eventually relented and removed his idols of Caesar. We read that, "Pilate was deeply affected with their firm resolution to keep their laws inviolable: and presently commanded the images to be carried back from Jerusalem to Cesarea."[266] This fits similarly with the gospel accounts which tell of Pilate being reluctant at first to put Jesus to death, and then eventually succumbing to the demands of the Jews.

Philo's account mentions that when Pilate brought his idols to Jerusalem, Roman shields were also placed on Herod's palace which caused the Jews to protest. Pilate refused to remove them so the Jews reached out to Emperor Tiberius for help whereas an angry Tiberius ordered Pilate to remove the shields.[267] Critics are quick to point out that Pilate was described as, "exceedingly angry, and being at all times a man of most ferocious passions."[268] as well as a man of "briberies, insults, robberies, outrages… executions without trial…and ceaseless and supremely grievous cruelty."[269] In context, the Jewish king of Judea, Herod Agrippa I,[270] was writing to the Roman emperor Gaius (aka: Caligula) who was also his friend, advising him to depart from his decision to establish a statue of Zeus in the temple at Jerusalem. Part of this involved utilizing rhetoric with Pilate regarding the incident with the shields to discourage him and to follow the example of Tiberius who put an end to the incident. Brian C. McGing likewise

[264] Mike Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?* p.88
[265] Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 299-305; Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.3-4
[266] Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.3.1
[267] Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium,* 304
[268] Ibid. 303
[269] Ibid. 302
[270] His Roman name: Marcus Julius Agrippa

explains regarding Agrippa, “He also has a rhetorical purpose in blackening Pilate, to create an artistic foil for the benign Tiberius, who is being held up as a shining example for Caligula.”[271]

Helen K. Bend likewise explains, “Historically, Pilate may have been of a harsh, unyielding disposition, or at least may have appeared so in the Jewish eyes, yet Philo’s description of him is doubtless exaggerated in accordance with his own theological rhetoric.”[272] In other words, the events themselves may be substantially reliable while Philo's interpretation of Pilate's personality and motives is much more rhetorically shaped. She points out that Philo describes Pilate using essentially the same stock vocabulary that he uses elsewhere in *Legatio* and his work *In Flaccum* for people he presents as enemies or persecutors of the Jews—such as Flaccus, Gaius Caligula, and hostile Alexandrians.[273]

Still, it cannot be overlooked regarding other facets of Pilate from Philo which correlates well with Pilate in the gospels. In *Legatio* he writes of Pilate regarding the Jews that, “He feared least they might in reality go on an embassy to the emperor, and might impeach him with respect to other particulars of his government.”[274] This fits with the Gospel narrative where Pilate gives in to the demand to kill Jesus after the Jews imply that if he doesn’t condemn Jesus he is no friend of Caesar (John 19:15-16). In other words, Pilate worried about falling out of favor with the emperor, Tiberius. Interestingly at this time, Tiberius had uncovered a coup by someone named Sejanus and had undergone targeting anyone connected to him.[275] There is limited data that suggests any connection between Pilate with Sejanus existed however, and if so, it would have explained why Pilate would have been paranoid about falling out of favor with Tiberius.

Another incident in Josephus tells of Pilate building an aqueduct with Temple funds. The Jews then react with protest, given the Temple treasury was considered sacred. Pilate refuses their demand, the Jews refuse to leave, and Pilate has some of his soldiers disguise themselves amongst the crowd and start attacking the Jews, even killing some. However, Josephus noted that the soldiers had, “laid upon them much greater blows than Pilate had commanded them.”[276] So it appears that he didn’t want to kill anyone but merely create a little chaos to get rid of the crowd. The Jewish leaders would have likely also been to blame for the incident, given they held the Temple responsibilities. Craig Evans notes, “Pilate…could never have dipped into a temple treasury without permission. The public protest was in all probability as much directed

---

[271] Brian C. McGing, “Pontius Pilate and the Sources.” The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, vol. 53, no.3. 1991, pp.430-431
[272] Helen K. Bend, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation,* p.33
[273] Ibid. 32-33
[274] Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium,* 302
[275] Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 159-61; *Against Flaccus* 1; Eusebius, *Dem. Evangelica* 8.2.123, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.5.7
[276] *Antiquities*. 18.3.2

against the ruling priests, especially the captain of the treasury for allowing this sacrilege as it was directed against the Roman governor."[277]

What some might say to be a harsher climax was regarding a Samaritan prophet who had rallied some armed people on Mount Gerizim, claiming they would find buried artifacts of Moses.[278] After Pilate dispatched a unit to disperse them, a small battle broke out with the Samaritans fleeing, while others were taken as prisoners and the leaders put to death. After receiving an embassy from the Samaritan senate we see the Syrian governor Vitellius who accused Pilate of murder and violence and to go to Rome to answer before the Emperor regarding the accusations of the Jews.[279]

Interestingly, Mount Gerizim used to have a Samaritan temple which the Jews destroyed in the second-century BC. From the Jewish perspective, this could have been seen as an attempt to rebuild their temple and therefore, creating competition with the temple in Jerusalem. So it's possible the Jewish leaders could have stirred up Pilate like they did with Jesus, insisting that this was another attempt to rebel against Rome. Even so, Josephus mentions that the Samaritans were armed, which could easily have been understood as the start of a rebellion that needed to be addressed. This is plausible in light of the fact that other cases involved several civilians who would meet under a leader or alleged messiah in the wilderness and then initiate what seemed to be a revolt.[280]

Notice how Josephus combined with Philo records merely three highlighted incidents. This isn't much at all considering Pilate was in office for 10 years. Also notable is the fact that the high priest Caiaphas, who was appointed by Pilate's predecessor, retained his office the whole time while Pilate was governor. This seems to imply an overall peaceful time period with little strife with the Jewish leaders. McGing notes, "The High Priest Caiaphas appointed by Gratus in A.D. 17, remained in office throughout Pilate's governorship and was only deposed by Vitellius in 37; there must have been a reasonably satisfactory relationship between him and Pilate. And as we have seen, the affair of the aqueduct points strongly to cooperation between the governor and the temple authorities."[281]

In light of these less-than-ideal incidents of Pilate, one more caveat to all of this is that Pilate is not necessarily a saint in the gospels either. After all, he seemed to take no issue with the unnecessary mockery of Jesus as "King of the Jews" by his own men (John 19:1-3) as well as the refusal to change the inscription on his cross when prompted by a fellow Jew, given it was taken as offensive to Jewish messianic theology

---

[277] Craig Evans, *Fabricating Jesus,* p.170
[278] *Antiquities* 18.4.1
[279] Ibid. 18.5.2
[280] Brian C. McGing lists several examples of leaders like Judas son of Ezekias, Simon a former slave, Anthronges the shepherd, Judas the Galilean, Theudas, the Egyptian Prophet, Menahem, Simon bar Giora, and Jonathan in Cyrene. See: "Pontius Pilate and the Sources." The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, vol. 53, no.3. 1991, pp.416-438 www.jstor.org/stable/43718282
[281] Ibid. p.435

(John 19:19-21), indicating that he was not a compassionate person who cared much about the sensibility of Jewish beliefs.

Is Joseph of Arimathea ahistorical?

Among the list of objections one might come across the claim that the Sanhedrin figure Joseph of Arimathea did not exist and was a literary invention to get Jesus into a tomb. This is also tied to the fact that an actual town of Arimathea has never been externally attested to or found. The obvious response to this of course would be that this is arguing from silence. It's been proposed that the name "Arimathea" is possibly a variant term or pronunciation of the town Ramatha.[282] Even so, the loss of an ancient town in the modern age is nothing new--*hundreds* of towns and cities mentioned in ancient sources cannot be located today. For example, we still haven't found the capital city of Sargon of Akkad even though we have found several other cities in that region. We also lost the city of Asaak which was a contemporary of Arimathea despite the fact that kings of the Parthian empire were crowned there. Josephus mentions a Jewish town called Tarichaea where he built a wall to prepare for the Roman invasion,[283] yet today we're not entirely able to pinpoint where this town was either. In other words, just because we haven't found these places, it doesn't mean they never existed.

Furthermore, there would have been no good reason to invent Joseph of Arimathea. If the authors were merely trying to get Jesus in a tomb, why not have someone else put him there? It makes no sense for a member of the Sanhedrin, the very council who condemned Jesus to crucifixion, to have put him there instead unless it were accurate reports. Dale Allison notes, "One might suppose that 'Joseph of Arimathea' is historical memory, like other names in Mark, such as John the Baptist, Peter, Andrew, James, John, Judas, James the brother of Jesus, Mary the mother of Jesus, Herod Antipas, Pilate."[284]

Another critical argument points out that the earliest gospel, Mark, is deliberately ambiguous on Joseph's believing status and thoughts of Jesus, merely that he "was looking for the kingdom of God" (Mark 15:43). This overlooks the author's literary style because we know he used the same terminology "kingdom of God" as a specific reference to the ministry of Jesus (Mark 1:14-15). This indicates that the author did in fact recognize Joseph as a believer in Jesus. Aren't we told that "all" members of the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus though (Mark 14:64)? Only if you ignore the hyperbolic intent. At times, the authors spoke hyperbolically in other places, like "all" of the Sanhedrin asking if Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 22:70) or "all" of Syria hearing about Jesus and "all" the sick being brought out to him (Matt. 4:24).

Also notable is the account in Acts which says, regarding the Jews, that "they"

---

[282] Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.4.9 cf. 1 Maccabees 11:34
[283] Josephus, *Ant.* 14.20, 20.159; *Jewish War* 1.180, 2.252
[284] Dale C. Allison, *Resurrecting Jesus,* p.355

took him down from the cross, contrary to a particular person (Acts 13:28-29). However, notice this same passage also says that *he was laid in a tomb*. This also overlooks that the author had previously, in his own gospel, recorded the Joseph of Arimathea narrative (Luke 23:50-56). This also seems to parallel Mark's telling that "they" laid him in a tomb (Mark 16:6), of which we are told elsewhere that Joseph was assisted by Nicodemus and "they laid Jesus there" (John 19:38-42). So it's plausible that the author is merely giving a basic summary, not a detailed account.

One last argument posits an unlikely tomb burial based on the lack of any tomb veneration by the early church until the 4th century, given they were known to venerate other sites. This is explained by the fact that its remains most likely would not have been recovered from the fallout of Jerusalem at the Roman siege. Josephus writes, "Jerusalem…was so thoroughly razed to the ground by those that demolished it to its foundations, that nothing was left that could ever persuade visitors that it had once been a place of habitation."[285] We are also to take into account that Jewish Christians are said to have relocated to the city of Pella.[286] Jerusalem was left in ruins for about 60 years until the emperor Hadrian came and rebuilt on top of the ruins to wipe out any remains of the Jewish heritage.[287] Jews weren't even allowed in the city[288] and Christians suffered persecutions before they were ever allowed to establish holy sites in Jerusalem in the 4th century.[289]

Buying a linen shroud on Passover?

The objection states that, upon taking Jesus down from the cross, Joseph of Arimathea is said to have purchased a linen shroud to wrap the body of Jesus in (Mark 15:46). Critics assert that purchasing the shroud could not have happened on a festival day like Passover. The sun also was setting, meaning the Sabbath was approaching (Mark 15:42-43), and you definitely couldn't buy or sell on the Sabbath, nor would there have been enough time to perform the burial rituals since it would have taken time to see Pilate, verify that Jesus was dead, take the body down from the cross, obtain the shroud, get Nicodemus to provide spices and take Jesus to the tomb. Therefore, Mark made a mistake or Jesus was actually crucified a few days before Passover.

However, this objection fails to provide any Second Temple period sources that ever say buying a linen shroud on Passover or the Sabbath was not permitted. The Torah goes so far as to make a distinction between a regular Sabbath and a holiday Sabbath, saying that when it comes to a regular Sabbath, "no work" shall be done (Lev. 23:3) while on a holiday Sabbath, "no *ordinary* work shall be done" (Lev.23:7-8). This is also to consider the fact that there was debate among early Jews as to what was

[285] Josephus, *Jewish War* 7.1.1
[286] Epiphanius, *On Weights and Measures* 15
[287] Weksler-Bdolah, *Shlomit. Aelia Capitolina,* pp.51-60
[288] Mary T. Boatwright, *Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire,* p.197
[289] Joan E. Taylor, et al. *Christians and the Holy Places,* pp.113-117

permitted on the Sabbath if it fell on a festival day, some even arguing that certain work was to be carried out for the festival requirements itself.[290] One later source in the Mishnah argues that an individual could go to the Shabbat border before nightfall in order to attend to the affairs of a bride or of a corpse to bring him a coffin and shrouds.[291]

In other words, if preparations for the dead could be made during the Sabbath rest then they would have been permissible on a feast day. This is seen with the Mosaic command that anyone hanged on a tree was to be buried the same day (Deut. 21:23), similar to the argument Jesus makes regarding the law of circumcision being rightly carried out even if it happened to fall on a Sabbath day (John 7:22-23).

Even had Joseph obtained the body around 5 pm, it's still not entirely implausible or hard to see that he could have purchased a shroud, prepared the body and laid it in the tomb all within the hour--there's no real basis for assuming that this was a particularly long process. The synoptics also mention that the women, after seeing Jesus prepared and placed in the tomb (Mark 15:47; Matt. 27:61; Luke 23:55-56), went back again Sunday to anoint the body (Mark 16:1-2; Matt. 28:1; Luke 24:1-2), indicating that the initial burial process may have been rushed or the women wouldn't have seen the need to perform touch-up.

It's also possible that Joseph had already purchased the shroud prior to all of this and already had it available. The Greek word for "bought", "agorasas", is an aorist participle, meaning the sentence could just as well be read as "having previously bought" a linen shroud.

A round stone for the tomb?

For this objection, the critic will argue that, according to archaeological finds, most tombs utilized rectangular stones and did not use round disk-shaped stones for sealing the entrance and that these certain tombs only belonged to the royal and wealthy. Yet, Jesus is said to have been put in a tomb of which it is said that Joseph of Arimathea "rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb" (Matt.27:60; Mark 15:46; Luke 24:2). It's unlikely that Joseph would have owned one of the most expensive tombs in the area. Therefore, the gospels are "unreliable" and "should never be trusted."

However, Joseph of Arimathea was clearly said to be rich (Matt.27:57) so in light of this, it's plausible that a man who is "rich" would have been able to afford such a tomb. This fulfilled the prophecy of the Messiah in Isaiah 53:9 in that "he made his grave with the rich in his death." Even so, some have also argued that the term "rolling" is used elsewhere of things that aren't necessarily round (e.g. Mark 9:20).

Synagogues in Galilee?

[290] E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law From Jesus to the Mishnah,* pp.8-18
[291] Shabbat 23.4

The gospels teach that Jesus preached in synagogues in Galilee (Matt.4:23; Mark 6:2; Luke 4:15; John 6:59). Critics will object that there has been found no archaeological remains or evidence of synagogues having been in Galilee prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, with the exception of only about two. This objection, however, is misinformed as there is in fact both archaeological and literary evidence of synagogues in Galilee during the first century. Eric Meyers says, "Startling new discoveries at Gamla in the Golan, at Tarichaeae (Magdala) on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, and at Herodium and Masada in the Judean wilderness have established that the earliest synagogues in ancient Palestine existed in the 1st century C.E."[292] Adding to this, a recent discovery shows a rural synagogue that was found around Mount Tabor dated around 20-40 AD, as well as a first-century synagogue in Capernaum.[293]

Though it's true that there are not always plain indicators for these constructions, it would not be implausible to make the connection with synagogues based on the Jewish religious culture itself and historical reports. Aside from the gospels, Josephus reports that local places of prayer were used as schools,[294] for communal meals[295] and political meetings.[296] In the works of Philo, we see that these buildings could also be called synagogues.[297] Even so, P. Flesher says, "Literary sources from the time indicate that a variety of activities took place in synagogues, some religious and some secular. Synagogues are described as meeting places for worship services, schools, and councils of elders. They also served as banks, hostels for travelers, and large banqueting halls. So perhaps the image of the synagogue in Jesus' time was as a large, multi-purpose building whose religious function was just one of several roles it played in the community."[298] We also see this in the gospels and Acts where the synagogues are used for courts, public punishment and distributing charity money (Matt.10:17, 6:2; Mark 13:9; Acts 22:19).

Reports in the Talmud also reveal that people from Galilee were perceived as not as educated with the Torah, so one could also suggest that this could be due to there not being as many synagogues in the area.[299] Nevertheless, based on Jewish culture and history, it would not be implausible to accept the archaeological and historical evidence for at least a handful of synagogues having been in Galilee.

Pharisees in Galilee?

---

[292] Eric Meyers, *Ancient Synagogues in Galilee: Their Religious and Cultural Setting,* The Biblical Archaeologist, 43(2), 97-108. Doi: 10.2307/3209628
[293] J.F. Strange & H. Shanks, *Synagogue Where Jesus Preached Found at Capernaum.* Biblical Archaeology Review, 9(6), 24-31
[294] *Ant.* 16.43
[295] *Ant.* 14.214-216
[296] *Life of Josephus,* 276-289
[297] Philo, *Every Good Man is Free,* 81
[298] P. Flesher (2011, September), *What did a Synagogue of Jesus' Time Look Like?* https://bibleinterp.arizona.edu/opeds/fle358001
[299] Erubin 53a:20-23

Another supposed error regarding Galilee involves the presence of Pharisees (Matt.9:11; Mark 2:24; Luke 7:36), given Galilee was typically seen as uneducated with the law. The thing with Galilee is that there is not a lot of historical attestation prior to 70 AD. Nevertheless, scholars like Sean Freyne suggest there to be circumstantial evidence in the works of Josephus that Shammaite Pharisees were active in some parts of Galilee prior to the Jewish War and that certain events "reflect certain prescriptions of the 18 halakhoth stemming from the school of Shammai."[300] This is seen where Josephus records regarding the religious rulers in Jerusalem who decreed that Herod's palace be destroyed due to the animal statues there that profaned Jewish laws against idolatry. A group led by Jesus the son of Sapphias are suggested to be a part of the Shammaites in that they had accomplished the task and were brandishing the laws of Moses,[301] seeming to match the description of zealous Jews like the Shammaite Pharisees.

Another important note considers that prior to the Jewish War, Jews in Tarachia are said to have refused to grant asylum to Gentile refugees without the men being circumcised. Josephus records that he had to pacify the multitude of these men,[302] suggesting that this was not just an issue for a minority present but a larger number of the Jews that were present. We also have a report of John the son of Levi who is said to have provided pure oil for the Jews of Caesarea Philippi who were in need of oil.[303]

Although the evidence is not conclusive, Sean Freyne notes, "All three are significant in themselves, but taken together they seem to reflect certain prescriptions of the 18 halakhoth stemming from the school of Shammai, referred to in rabbinic literature."[304] He also points out that, "It is indeed striking that these three examples from Galilean life immediately prior to the great revolt suggest links with the more radical expression of Jewish separation which was the underlying support for the revolt."[305]

More evidence shows regarding a man from Galilee named Eleazar who convinced the king of Adiabene, Izates, to be circumcised sometime in the early 50s,[306] indicating zeal for the law as that of a Pharisee. During the days of Herod the Great, Judas the Galilean led a revolt and was also said to be zealous for the law.[307] Prominent Pharisees like Gamaliel II were active in Galilee immediately after the Jewish War, which would have been unlikely unless Pharisees already had a foothold in the region. In all likelihood, Pharisees in Galilee would have served as retainers for their religious elite in Jerusalem. This isn't to say that there were many in Galilee but that the evidence suggests that there were at least pockets of Pharisaic strongholds that Jesus would

[300] Sean Freyne, *Galilee,* pp.310-323
[301] Josephus, *Life* 62-67, 134
[302] Ibid. 112-114
[303] Ibid. 74; *Jewish War* 2.591
[304] Sean Freyne, *Galilee,* p.311
[305] Ibid. 314
[306] Josephus, *Ant.* 20.43
[307] *Ant.* 18.4; *Jewish Wars* 2.118

have encountered, especially given the news spread about him.

Some may point to Talmudic traditions bashing on Galilee for inept Torah knowledge such as the quote attributed to the Pharisee Johan ben Zakai, “Galilee, Galilee! You hate the Torah! Your end is to work in chains.”[308] Sean Freyne notes, “Presumably, Johanan went to Galilee as the representative of Jerusalem scribism rather than as an advocate for the Pharisaic sect, and we must be careful to keep the two separate no matter how much our sources tend to identify them, or how closely their views corresponded in practice.”[309] In other words, there were probably regional differences in religious traditions but it doesn’t necessarily mean that there were no Pharisees in Galilee. We know there were different sects of Pharisees like the Shammaites and Hillelites and that they did not always agree with each other.

The Gospel also reveals knowledge of Pharisaic customs, such as traditions regarding the cleaning of the outside of the cup but not the inside (Matt.23:25-26; Luke 11:40-41) which mirrors that of Shammaite purity laws from prior to 70 AD.

Real locations, fictional events/characters?

The critic might suggest the writing style to be a form of fiction where the characters and events are fictional but tied to real-life locations, like Marvel superheroes in New York City. In other words, just because the backdrop of a story is accurate with certain details, it still doesn’t make the primary story or characters in question to be true. This is granted as historical accuracy alone is not enough to establish authenticity (though it strengthens the overall cumulative case). However, this overlooks accuracy with even the most minute of details. This is not the style of writing we see with fictional stories like these which are accurate on the basics and more loosely flexible with details. For example, there is not a “Daily Bugle” or “Oscorp” in real-life New York City either. Nor are these fictional stories *attempting to convince the reader of true events in the first place* like the gospels claim to be doing. Nor are the characters and events in these fictional stories independently attested to by external sources like with the gospels.

As mentioned in the gospels in one place, the author refers to a Judas and clarifies, “not Judas Iscariot” (John 14:22). It’s unlikely if one was inventing a character that he would almost confuse the reader unless the author is really recording actual events of actual people, let alone give him the same name as the worst disciple. The same goes for “inventing” three women at the cross of Jesus who all have the same name, Mary (John 19:25). Or the water coming out of Jesus’s side if he was “lying” to convince an audience of the time (John 19:34). Or when Jesus declares someone would betray him, the author mentions that Peter motioned toward the beloved disciple to ask whom Jesus was speaking of (John 13:24) which would add pointless complexity to the narrative if the author could just have Peter or any disciple ask him directly. The

[308] Shabbat 16:8
[309] Sean Freyne, *Galilee,* 315

list goes on.

“Claims are not evidence!”

The skeptic can “claim” that “claims are not evidence” but this can sometimes prove to be just the contrary. Whenever a claim is made, we first have to take a step back and look at who’s even *making* the claim. Yes, people lie, but that’s also why we have ways of seeing and detecting whether the one making the claim is reputable and trustworthy, especially if they’ve been an eyewitness, in which case a claim can *certainly* be evidence. And what is some of this criteria in assessing witnesses as reliable testimony? As shown (and likewise with the Marty case), the New Testament presents us with no ordinary claims, but claims that are:

1) verifiable through archaeology,

2) within the time period,

3) corroborated by secular and opposing sources of the time,

4) pass the criteria of embarrassment,

5) reveal undesigned coincidences with no signs of collusion (evidence of independent, multiple attestation),

6) no embellishment, and

7) reveal no motive for lying except to "gain" persecution and death.

Other religions don't contain these kinds of claims, let alone verifiable ones like the Bible. These kinds of claims are what we consider as reliable testimony and what brings us our history!

We also have to recognize the way criminal cases are run in our everyday world. Since the beginning, government systems used eyewitness testimony as reliable evidence for putting a criminal away. We’re even told in ancient Israel:

"On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness." (Deuteronomy 17:6)

Furthermore, a case that took place in the distant past is not exactly going to present us with loads of easy-to-come-across evidence; a *historical* case presents *historical* evidence and we should take into consideration that cold cases have been solved before even without need for physical evidence. This is because anything of what we know from the facts pertaining to the mystery can be evidence, and without the Resurrection, none of these facts would make any sense.

Take the Michael Lubahn Clark case from 1981 where he was convicted of murdering his wife solely on the evidence of his claims and statements and the inconsistency revealed in them about the incident over the years. A witness can be

seen as highly suspicious when he makes inconsistencies in his testimony from claims he made in the past.

One question the jury is asked in regards to a witness according to the "Judicial Council of California Criminal Jury Instructions" CalCrim Section 105 is:

"Did the witness make a statement in the past that is consistent or inconsistent with his or her testimony?"

Michael Lubahn was the kind of person whom people least expected to commit such a crime, but this evidence alone proved true when Clark himself confessed to the crime after being convicted.

“Eyewitness testimony has proved to be unreliable”

A further objection may lie in the fact that eyewitness testimony has not always proven reliable in cases, but this is due to multiple contributing factors: The witness is usually caught off guard due to the presence of a weapon, the witness does not get enough time to examine the perpetrator accurately, or the perpetrator is wearing a mask.

This was not the case with the New Testament writers--most of whom knew Jesus *face to face* for *several years* and would have been able to recognize him; and on top of this, claimed that many remained with him in fellowship and for an additional forty days after his resurrection (Acts 1:3) and were willing to *die* for what they *knew* to be *true*.

Furthermore, if they were to have seen someone else who really wasn't Jesus, this would not explain Jesus' missing corpse.

“Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence!”

What does “extraordinary” evidence even look like? And if you found it, would it even lead you into a relationship with God?

There is no need for "extraordinary” evidence though because court cases presenting an extraordinary claim are solved with ordinary evidence, just like any other case. For the perpetrator's loved ones [aka: skeptics] -- *they* may require "extraordinary evidence" but this is tied to bias and simply not wanting to believe the truth rather than lack of evidence, and juries are typically called to remove any bias during a court session.

Yes, some superstitious claims may seem silly and absurd, but these kinds of claims are most--if not all of the time, never backed up with any kind of eyewitness accounts or verifiable claims, so it would be a mistake to put them on the same level as the Resurrection.

Of course there's the possibility that the perpetrator was *framed*, and therefore, we have *misleading* evidence; but this is usually tied to ulterior motives and it's not

likely, especially when there is no motive among any of the witnesses. And were there any motives for the apostles to have "invented" the Resurrection? Clearly not.

Again, the common retort among skeptics these days when it comes to this is that "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." However, is this really a reasonable, fair and sensical approach when we think about it? After all, when has a jury ever required "extraordinary evidence" to put a criminal away? Claims of the miraculous are only extraordinary to those who believe that a Creator God perfectly capable of enacting them, doesn't exist.

Likewise, the claim that the perpetrator murdered someone or stole something is most of the time certainly an extraordinary claim for the mother, the father and loved ones of the perpetrator based on their experience of him. Since it's so hard to believe for the family, does this mean that it's wrong for the jury to pronounce a guilty verdict on ordinary evidence, pointing to his guilt? Yet this is exactly what "skeptics" are saying when it comes to their requirements for the Resurrection. But as we know, someone's overly-skeptical bias has no effect on the evidence pointing us to a purely reasonable conclusion. In fact, when we examine the textual support for the New Testament compared to other ancient works, you have to admit that it *is* "extraordinary"!

If anything, the extraordinary claim is on the skeptic. Just how do you expect me to believe that the hundreds of precisely fine-tuned constants holding our universe together all came about through completely unguided and random processes? But of course, the "extraordinary evidence" myth doesn't apply here and there's no reason to be skeptical of that claim when you're a "skeptic."

Other historical resurrection claims?

But what are we to say about these *other* historical claims? Indeed we are left with claims that historical persons were either apotheosized (aka: taken to heaven and divinized; e.g. Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, Apollonius of Tyana and Antinous) or raised from the dead (Rabbi Judah, Kabir, Sabbatai Sevi, Lahiri Mahasaya and Sri Yukteswar). However, the general basis for rejecting these other reports is that there is either a lack of historical data, they’re reported far too late or they’re stories about mythical personages who never lived. If anything, these similarities in other accounts with regard to the Gospel don’t undermine the validity of the Gospel but really just tell us that God is at work in the world, revealing the truth to people and the inspiration they draw from it.

Regarding apotheosis, the stories are generally along the lines of the resurrected having been portrayed as a comet or a star which was believed to be the departed soul

of the hero.[310] One popular apotheosis claim is pulled from Apollonius of Tyana, a first-century Neo-Pythagorean philosopher, who was also said to be a worker of magic and was reported by Philostratus that Apollonius disappeared from a temple, was transported to heaven and divinized, and later appeared in a dream to a young man in order to convince him of the truth of immortality.[311]

Unlike the multiple attestation for Jesus, the basis for his reappearance only lies with *one* man and in a *dream*. Again, this is far different from the *physical* reappearance of Jesus to *many* different people who were *willing to die* because of it. In addition, Philostratus's account alludes to historical inaccuracies regarding the cities of Babylon and Nineveh as if they were existent during his time. The form of the text has led many critical scholars to infer that the story is meant to be romantic fiction, which was one of the most popular literary forms of the second century A.D.[312] Philostratus was also commissioned to write his work by Julia Domna, wife of Roman Emperor Septimius Severus, and it is popularly held by scholars that she did so 'as a counterblast to Jesus'.[313] Lastly, Philostratus's major source (Damis)--in regards to the miracles--used heavy embellishment[314] and was likely *not even a real person* as he is claimed to have been from the non-existent city of Nineveh, meaning much of the material on Apollonius comes from a source who's reliability is unknown in the first place![315]

As far as reliability concerning other historical resurrection claims such as Rabbi Judah and Kabir, we lack any early or eyewitness testimony regarding these events, as well as verifiable historical documentation. The writing process for Kabir in particular has been shown to mirror that of Indian legend[316] while we could also say that the story elements simply copied from Jesus's account.[317]

Did Justin Martyr attribute a non-canonical work to the apostles?

The following argument pertains to a target on the canonicity of the New Testament. In *Dialogue with Trypho* chapter 88, Justin writes regarding the baptism of Jesus:

---

[310] Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars,* translated by Robert Graves (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1957), 1.88; II.100; Dio Cassius, *Roman History,* 69.11.2. See David R. Cartlidge and David L. Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* (Cleveland: William Collins, 1980), p. 199; p. 198

[311] Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana,* translated by F. C. Conybeare, two volumes, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), especially vm.3i.

[312] For details, see Howard Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World New Haven*: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 253; Hastings, p. 699; S. A. Cook, editor, The Cambridge Ancient Histon. xn Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 611

[313] James Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 51. Cf. Cook, p. 613; Hastings, p. 610.

[314] see Conybeare's 'Introduction' to Philostratus' work, pages vii-x. Cf. Cartlidge and Dungan, p. 206.

[315] Ferguson, p. 182; Kee, p. 256; Charles Bigg, The Origins of Christianity (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), p. 306.

[316] Mohan Singh, *Kabir and the Bhagti Movement* (Lahore, 1934). See Archer (pp. 63-4) who summarizes Singh's demarcation of the steps by which legend appeared in the teachings about Kabir.

[317] For more on resurrection claims, see: https://www.garyhabermas.com/articles/religious_studies/rel_stud_res_claims_in_non-christian_religions.htm

"And then, when Jesus had gone to the river Jordan, where John was baptizing, and when He had stepped into the water, a fire was kindled in the Jordan; and when He came out of the water, the Holy Ghost lighted on Him like a dove, [as] the apostles of this very Christ of ours wrote."

Notable is Justin's mention that, "a fire was kindled in the Jordan" when Jesus stepped into the water. As we know, none of our fourfold canonical gospel accounts mention a fire in the water. Even so, some scholars have argued that "as the apostles wrote" refers specifically to the immediately preceding dove episode which *is* in the canonical gospels rather than to the fire necessarily.

Though some critics might allege Justin to have drawn from certain sources with the likes of the *Gospel of the Ebionites* and *Preaching of Paul*, Justin's baptismal fire by itself does not provide good evidence that he used either particular work because the fire motif circulated more broadly. This is indicated by the fact that we see this variant in, for starters, the *Diatessaron,* the earliest harmonization of a fourfold Gospel canon. Interestingly, the *Diatessaron* was composed by Tatian, a pupil of Justin's. Ephrem's commentary on the *Diatessaron* refers to, "the splendour of the light which appeared on the water" and Isho'dad later likewise attributes the "great light" to the *Diatessaron*. Old Latin witnesses likewise mentioned a great light in Matthew 3:15,[318] showing that the motif circulated in several Christian textual streams.

Aside from this, there are additional reasons to be cautious about identifying either of these particular non-canonical works as Justin's source. For starters, Epiphanius of Salamis quotes the Ebionite Gospel as saying, "Immediately a great light shone around the place."[319] This is slightly more vague and the motif exists in too many textual traditions to identify Justin's source merely from the presence of the miracle. This actually mirrors closer to the *Diatessaron* rendering, however, which has led some like William Petersen to note that Justin's "fire" and the "light" found in other witnesses to be variations within the same non-received baptismal tradition.[320]

Epiphanius himself regarded the Ebionite Gospel as a mutilated form of Matthew.[321] As we know, the gospel that the Ebionites used was different but at the same time, it was not entirely original and *drew from portions of the synoptic gospels!* In light of this, scholars like George Howard argue that it's quite plausible that various unusual readings in the *Gospel of the Ebionites* may have been drawn from a larger circulating pool of Gospel variants,[322] that Justin likewise quoted from. Andrew Gregory has similarly argued that the *Gospel of the Ebionites* can itself preserve evidence relevant to variant readings within the Synoptic tradition, which cautions against every

---

[318] Codex Vercellensis, Codex Sangermanensis
[319] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.13.7-8
[320] William Petersen, *Textual Evidence of Tatian's Dependence upon Justin's 'ΑΠΟΜΝΗΜΟΝΕΥΜΑΤΑ*
[321] ibid.
[322] George Howard, (1988). *The Gospel of the Ebionites,* pp. 4039, 4043, 4049.

unusual Ebionite reading being treated as a uniquely Ebionite creation.[323]

One also finds it unlikely that he would have ascribed the *Gospel of the Ebionites* to apostolic authorship when it clearly rejected central doctrines pertaining to the divinity of Jesus, sacrificial atonement and the virgin birth, a recurring theme in Justin's writings of Christ and what he claims the apostles likewise believed.[324] In one place, he even writes that the apostles preached a new form of circumcision,[325] but the Ebionites adhered to traditional circumcision under Mosaic law. This is in addition to the many times he quoted from the gospel of Matthew itself,[326] at least one of these times, explicitly attributing Matthean material to "the memoirs of the apostles."[327] This does not prove that Justin never encountered or used such a text, but it makes the identification of an Ebionite Gospel as one of Justin's authoritative apostolic memoirs considerably less straightforward.

While a direct interaction with Ebionites is absent in his writings, older editors[328] of his work *Dialogue with Trypho* attributed Ebionites to a reference he makes in chapter 48 regarding "some…who admit that He is Christ, while holding Him to be man of men; with whom I do not agree." In other words, these Ebionite-like Jewish-Christians accepted Jesus as the Christ while simultaneously denying his divinity, and here Justin explicitly said he did not agree with them.

Notable here, the author of the Islamic text, the Quran, typically attributed to Muhammad, is usually inferred in contemporary scholarly circles to have interacted with numerous Christian traditions opposed to his own Islamic theology. One such tradition involves an infant Jesus claiming to be the Son of God in the cradle, a narrative mirroring what we know of the medieval Arabic Infancy Gospel. Another relates that of Jesus breathing life into a clay bird, which is typically traced textually to the Infancy Gospel of Thomas through an evolving corpus back to the second-century.

The main difference here lies in the fact that we are unable to establish a steady stream of texts that Muhammad and his followers would have had access to for examination, let alone be able to *read,* unlike the circulating texts that Justin had in his possession, was able to read and clearly quote from. Historical accounts attest that Muhammad, to a degree, gathered his knowledge orally,[329] and the Qur'an presents versions of these traditions as true events without demonstrating awareness of the complete literary works in which related versions survive. Also at times, he believed that those who spoke to him would misrepresent their texts, or "distort the Scripture with

[323] Andrew Gregory, *Prior or Posterior? The Gospel of the Ebionites and the Gospel of Luke*
[324] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* ch.75-76, 100, 106, 111, 40, *First Apology* ch.22, 33, 50, 66
[325] *Dialogue,* 114
[326] *Dialogue,* 17, 35, 49, 51, 93, 99, 100, 103, 105, 122, 125; *First Apology* ch.15, 16, 19, 33, 38, 63
[327] *Dialogue,* 103; Matt.4:10 is in "memoirs of the apostles"
[328] See footnote 2097: https://ccel.org/ccel/justin_martyr/dialog_with_trypho/anf01.viii.iv.xlviii.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com
[329] Even Muslim scholar Husayn Haykal notes that Muhammad had some degree of influence from Jews and Christians growing up in Arabia, though this doesn't necessarily mean he was proficient in knowledge. We see this fact in the Quran that he merely had a basic knowledge of some of the stories.

their tongues" (Q3:78). This does not prove that such verses in the Quran refer specifically to Christian infancy traditions, but it shows that the Quran could accept material it regarded as authentic while explaining conflicting claims as human misrepresentation. This may explain why we see the Quran repeatedly taking material situated in a Christian narrative world and reshaping it according to quranic theology, whereas nothing about the baptismal fire itself in Justin's writing is distinctly Ebionite.

Also, many of these traditions contain substantially more distinctive narrative details in that a historical relationship to the earlier Jewish or Christian traditions becomes considerably more probable than independent coincidence. In other words, we can identify a distinctive post-biblical Jesus story that existed long before Islam that existed in one form, though evolving over time, to which the Qur'an reproduced the same unusual miracle. So while the infancy narrative also comes from a shared tradition, the shared tradition itself is an identifiable Christian apocryphal tradition. On the other hand, with the light-fire motif, we have multiple witnesses showing that it circulated independently with Justin, the Ebionites, the *Preaching of Paul,* the *Diatessaron,* and the Old Latin tradition.

In other words, appealing to shared tradition has different implications in the two cases. In Justin's case, the shared tradition is the baptismal light-fire motif itself, attested across several early Christian textual streams. In the Qur'anic case, the shared tradition can sometimes be historically located within an already developed body of post-biblical Jewish or Christian lore. Thus, shared tradition does not sever the Qur'an's historical relationship to Christian apocryphal tradition; it merely provides an alternative transmission mechanism to direct manuscript copying.

Lastly, while the *Gospel of the Ebionites* itself is typically dated prior to Justin around 130-150 AD, recent scholarship has specifically challenged early dating. Michael Kok, for example, argues that it should be dated no earlier than the late second century. Its chronological priority over Justin therefore cannot simply be assumed. Even so, this is all still roughly around the same time that we see the motif from Justin and these other sources, whereas the Quran comes in the early seventh century, several centuries after Christian infancy traditions had *already* clearly developed.

The *Preaching of Paul* is quoted by a mid-third century text, *On Rebaptism,* by an anonymous author. The date of the lost *Preaching of Paul* is uncertain, though what can be established securely is that the anonymous author of *On Rebaptism* knew and criticized it. In the very section regarding Jesus's baptism that Justin would have allegedly pulled from here is claimed to be in chapter 17 where we are also told that Jesus *confessed sin* and was *reluctantly persuaded by Mary* to undergo John's baptism. However, like the *Gospel of the Ebionites,* the shared light-fire motif by itself cannot establish Justin's dependence upon the *Preaching of Paul*, especially since the latter contained a substantially different baptismal narrative. At best, the two works attest related forms of a baptismal fire tradition.