

(From website Bibleoutsidethebox.blog)

***I have included an article here by Doston Jones,
To which I shall give comments.
This is really important to us believers.***

**Yes, the Four Gospels Were Originally
Anonymous:**

□□ Part 1

September 30, 2017 by □□ [Doston Jones](#)



In my previous article □□ [‘When Were the Gospels Written and How Can We Know?’](#), I remarked that “the [New Testament] Gospels are actually anonymous writings...the titles we are accustomed to seeing were likely added later by scribes.” Gauging from the initial feedback I received, this statement grabbed the attention of a number of readers – and understandably so. That the Gospels were penned by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is something that we have sort of dogmatically taken for granted in much the same way we take for granted that William Shakespeare wrote Hamlet or that President Abraham Lincoln gave the Gettysburg Address. The notion that we know who wrote the four Gospels is simply a given. Or, is it?

Admittedly, I had not planned on giving any attention to this topic. I intended to follow-up my inaugural post with an analysis of the literary inter-relationship between the Gospels (a discussion more interesting to □□ me). But, in view of the interest this subject has garnered among some readers, I have opted instead to delve a little further into the topic of whether the New Testament Gospels were likely composed bearing their traditional titles ...and what the answer to this question might tell us about the provenance and application of these texts in the formative early Church. I will do this in two parts. This post is ‘Part One.’ Shortly after completing my two-part discussion, I will round things out with an examination and cross-examination of the primary Patristic sources behind the canonical Gospel traditions – namely, Irenaeus of Lyon, Papias of Hierapolis, Tertullian of Carthage, and Eusebius of Caesarea.

Overview

That the Gospels were not originally composed bearing their traditional titles is now a well-established matter in New Testament scholarship. This mainstream view is conceded even among various conservative scholars such as Craig L. Blomberg, who stated: “It’s important to acknowledge that strictly speaking, the gospels are anonymous.” [\[1\]](#)

The age-old tradition that the canonical Gospels were authored by Mark the companion of Peter, Luke the physician to Paul, Matthew the tax collector, and John the Disciple comes down to us from the second century CE Patristic era of the Catholic Church. [\[2\]](#) Yet, even the Catholic Church now recognizes that those traditional titles are □ [pseudonymous](#). According to the [Catholic Encyclopedia](#), “the

first four historical books of the New Testament are supplied with titles (*Euangelion kata Matthaion, Euangelion kata Markon, etc.*), which, however ancient, do not go back to the respective authors of those sacred writings. [...] It thus appears that the present titles of the Gospels are not traceable to the evangelists themselves."

While it is prudent to underscore the prevailing view held by the majority of qualified experts in the field of Biblical studies, merely citing the prevailing view is not itself a substitute for a valid argument – lest we succumb to the fallacy of [argumentum ad populum](#). So, the question that we should be asking then is 'what is the basis for this widely held view?' In this two-part series I will endeavor to provide a survey of the reasons, evidence, and analysis that combine to support the mainstream scholarly consensus that the Gospels were most likely anonymous compositions. [\[3\]](#) Regardless of where you stand on this subject, I hope ultimately that this article will be informative and will serve to stimulate some critical thinking about some matters that are fundamental to New Testament studies.

Internal Anonymity of the Gospels

To start, there is the observation that not a single Gospel writer names himself within the text as composer of any New Testament gospel. This means that the Gospels are *internally* anonymous. The closest thing we have to a Gospel that identifies its purported author/source is the Fourth Gospel – the Gospel according to John. But even this Gospel is careful to not explicitly name its author, preferring instead to cloak the source's identity in veiled terms, referring to him only as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20,24). The reader is then left to speculate on whom this "Beloved Disciple" may be. Tradition stemming from Irenaeus of Lyon in the late second century asserts that the "Beloved Disciple" is none other than John. [\[4\]](#) Whether or not the Beloved Disciple is properly identified as John is an interesting topic for separate discussion. But suffice it to say that not one Gospel names its author within the gospel texts, including the putative Gospel of John.

It is also worth noting that the authorial anonymity of the Gospels stands out against the vast majority of other writings comprising the New Testament in which the writers *do* purport to identify themselves – namely, the epistles. Author self-identification within the body of the text was the conventional norm for ancient epistles. [\[5\]](#) Apart from the epistles, the New Testament Gospels are likewise divergent from numerous other Greco-Roman and Jewish works from antiquity in which the authors identified themselves within the body of the text. Ancient historians

and biographers such as Herodotus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Suetonius, Thucydides, and Jewish writer Flavius Josephus all named themselves as authors of their respective texts.[\[6\]](#)

From this contextual framework we can reckon that *if* the Gospel writers wanted their identities known and unambiguously associated with their individual gospel accounts, they could have simply followed conventional literary norms and provided that information within the body of the text – found most typically in the prologue or salutation of ancient writings. As Armin Baum explains, the Gospel writers probably viewed themselves as writing in a class of literature that did not require self-identification.[\[7\]](#)

Early External Sources Treat the Gospels Anonymously

Another indication that the Gospels were written anonymously is that the earliest external attestations to the Gospels refer to them *without* the traditional names attached. The Didache (an early Christian treatise), Justin Martyr (c. 155 CE), and possibly even Polycarp (c. 120 – 140 CE) and Ignatius (c. 115 CE) account for our earliest sources exhibiting awareness of writings that appear to correspond with the New Testament Gospels. However, each of the above-named sources treat the gospels anonymously.

Justin Martyr and the Memoirs

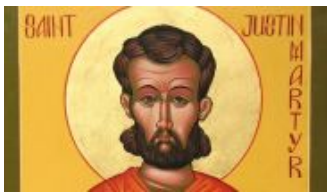
Justin is the first source to make repeated and unmistakable references to the content found in the Gospels. But not once does he name any of the four evangelists for authorship or source attribution when he quotes or cites to this material. Never. He instead refers to these writings as a single volume that he generically dubs the “memoirs of the apostles” – treating the ‘apostles’ as a unitary source (as opposed to Justin’s written source being readily distinguished into individually named/titled accounts).[\[8\]](#) In all of Justin’s voluminous writings he never delineates or otherwise distinguishes the memoirs by name. But as we shall see, Justin typically treats his *other* sources quite differently.

In Justin’s treatise, ‘First Apology’, he explains that the “memoirs of the apostles” were read communally on “the day called that of the sun” (Sunday) alongside the “writings of the prophets.”[\[9\]](#) So, by 155 CE these “memoirs” were being treated as liturgical or even scriptural instruction in the early Church. And while Justin always referred to the “memoirs” anonymously, it is telling that Justin *did* reference his *other* sources by name when discussing or citing to them. For example, Justin names Zechariah, Malachi, and the Psalms from Old Testament texts. Justin’s writings also specifically named non-Biblical sources such as Esdras and Jeremias from the pseudo ‘Letter of Jeremias’.

With regard to early Christian texts, Justin Martyr even mentions the 'Acts of Pilate' and treats it as a bona fide authoritative Christian text – notwithstanding that the Acts of Pilate is now known to be a spurious text and void of historical veracity. Finally, Justin directly references other ancient sources such as Plato and Pythagoras.

Still, whenever Justin quoted or otherwise referred to the content taken from his "memoirs of the apostles," he makes not a single mention of the names Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John as sources. This is peculiar, and it is evidence that those specific names were not yet attached to Justin's writings.

An important final remark on Justin Martyr: As I explained in my first article and as reiterated here, the common understanding among scholars and theologians is that Justin's "memoirs" were probably a compilation of the four Gospels. Yet, experts in the Patristics have noted that the "memoirs" feature some curious peculiarities. For instance, there are occasions where Justin repeats stories from the "memoirs of the apostles" to which the narrative content does not match any of the New Testament gospels. One of the more notable examples is when Justin cites the 'memoirs' as saying that the River Jordan caught fire when Jesus was baptized.



"And then, when Jesus had gone to the river Jordan, where John was baptizing, and when He had stepped into the water, a real fire ignited in the Jordan." (Dialogue. Chapter LXXXVIII)

Such a claim is not attested in ANY New Testament gospel. Nonetheless, Justin cites directly to the writings of the apostolic "memoirs" for this story. So, what do we have here? One possible explanation is that Justin did not actually possess our New Testament gospel texts (meaning: the "memoirs" were not bona fide proxies for the Gospels). Rather, he had some other liturgical writings resembling the gospel literature – yet *different* from the Gospels. Another related possibility is that the writings Justin possessed were primitive to our canonical gospels and were comprised of the same source material utilized in creating what became the orthodox version of the four Gospels. But, if we hold firm to the notion that Justin's "memoirs" were genuine Gospel texts, then Justin's remark about the River Jordan kindling ablaze at Jesus' baptism creates a discordant scenario and suggests that there must have been multiple renderings of the four Gospels in

circulation in the mid second century.

To this point, Dr. David Trobisch argues that the Gospels underwent intermittent redaction/revision until finalized into orthodox versions by members of the Patristic [proto-orthodoxy](#) around c. 150-170 CE, which is most likely when their titles were added as a way to impute specific apostolic pedigree to these writings (more on this shortly). [\[10\]](#) We are fortunate to have Justin's treatises because he was writing during or just before the traditional title attributions were added to the Gospels. So Justin's writings give us a glimpse into this transitional period.

The Didache

The Didache (pronounced *did·eh·kay*) is another example of an early Christian source from this period that treats the gospels anonymously. This treatise shares phrases and content found particularly in the Gospel of Matthew. In fact, chapter 8 of the Didache quotes the Lord's Prayer as written in Matthew [6:9-13](#), and indeed attributes the quote to a written source, but *not* to 'Matthew.' Instead, the Didache refers to its written source as "his [the Lord's] Gospel" – without providing attribution to the disciple 'Matthew' (see full quote footnoted here [\[11\]](#)). Elsewhere, the Didache refers to its written source as "the Gospel of the Lord" and as the "ordinances of the Gospel." [\[12\]](#) Again, anonymous attributions. Again, no mention whatsoever of the four traditional authors. This supports the view that when the Gospels were first circulated they were not originally credited to specific evangelists as authorial sources. Rather, they were written for early Church communities without concern for the authors who composed them. The original emphasis in labeling the Gospels was on the *subject*, Jesus, not on the author. [\[13\]](#)

Relevant Observations on Luke and Mark

Prior to Irenaeus in 180 CE providing the very first attestation to a Gospel attributed to 'Luke', a fellow named Marcion of Sinope (c. 140 CE) possessed a slightly shorter and simpler form of this same Gospel, which was not identified with Luke or any specific author. Rather, this gospel text was circulated with the title "Euaggelion Kuriou" ('The Gospel of the Lord'). [\[14\]](#) To reiterate, this Gospel was in circulation approximately 40 years before any source ascribed the name "Luke" as its author. Coincidentally, we just observed that a nearly identical title convention was used in the Didache in reference to its Gospel source. Although Marcion's "Gospel of the Lord" was a different text from the source that was quoted in the Didache, the fact that *both* Marcion and the Didache referred to their respective sources as "the Gospel of the Lord" demonstrates that this was the typical naming convention for Gospel texts before specific apostolic names

were attached.

Now with regard to Mark's Gospel, several Bible scholars have similarly concluded that the title 'Gospel According to Mark' was subsequently appended to this text mid to late second century CE. As further noted by Christian professor Raymond Brown, it is thought that the *original* title for this Gospel was actually the opening words of [Mark 1:1](#) – "The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). [\[15\]](#)

Important Note: In most contemporary Bible translations the opening verse of Mark 1:1 reads "The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." However, the more forthright translations will include a [footnote](#) to the verse explaining that the earliest and best manuscripts/witnesses of verse 1:1 do not contain the phrase "the Son of God" (in the Greek: υἱοῦ θεοῦ). This phrase appears only as a variant reading in later manuscripts, which was probably the result of scribal insertion or interpolation.

As mentioned, the phrase "the Son of God" in Mark 1:1 is lacking in several key ancient witnesses. Both the manuscript of Codex Sinaiticus (4th century CE) and Codex Koridethi (9th century CE) are lacking the phrase, as do numerous other Greek New Testament manuscripts. Patristic father Origen does not include υἱοῦ θεοῦ when he quotes from Mark 1:1 in the middle of the third century CE, and Irenaeus also fails to mention it in the second century CE. Several other church fathers do not attest to this phrase when quoting Mark 1:1, such as Cyril of Jerusalem, Asterius and Serapion during the fourth and second centuries CE. According to the United Bible Society's (UBS) *The Greek New Testament* in the fourth edition, a Coptic manuscript from the third century CE also lacks the phrase. Simply put, the phrase "Son of God" was not original to Mark 1:1, but was added in later manuscripts and copied thereafter. [\[16\]](#)

This was not an unusual phenomenon with New Testament literature (see, B. Ehrman's ['Orthodox Corruption of Scripture'](#) for in-depth treatment of this subject).

The manuscript evidence of alteration to the opening line of Mark's gospel serves to corroborate the view that the original text simply bore the title "the Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." And more generally, the variant reading of Mark 1:1 is a reminder that the textual content of New Testament writings was occasionally subject to alteration, interpolation and other redaction, sometimes in important ways.

Pursuant to these observations, the earliest indications are that the Gospels were at their inception affixed with an appellation in the vein of "the Gospel of Jesus" or "the Gospel of the Lord" or some close variation thereof. Specific authorial traditions came some time later in order

to impute apostolic authority to these Gospels, which was a consequence of numerous gospel texts being circulated in Christendom by competing Christian sects and communities. Authoritative pedigree then became paramount, and apostolic attribution and tradition became the main criteria for a gospel text being deemed "authoritative" scripture (i.e., written by an apostle or a close follower of an apostle).

A Striking Pattern Emerges With the Gospels

When we step back to take a panoramic view of Gospel literature, we can see a distinct trajectory develop with the four Gospels. From the middle to the end of the first century CE there was scant, if any, external attestation to the Gospels by Christian writers. Then, in the early to mid-second century CE, the earliest Christian sources who quote or allude to the Gospels do so without any reference whatsoever to their traditional titles, evincing that these texts were at first circulated anonymously. Papias of Hierapolis in the mid second century is the first to make authorial claims ascribing texts to Matthew and Mark (although his description of these texts do not correspond to our Matthean and Markan gospels, as noted in my prior [article](#)). Then finally, in the late second century Irenaeus is the first Patristic source to mention all four names Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in ascribing authorship to each of the New Testament Gospels.

Immediately after Irenaeus, an interesting phenomenon emerges. Once those names are unambiguously attached to the Gospels in the late second century, from that point forward those traditional names are suddenly cited with marked regularity when referenced or quoted by Christian sources. Church fathers in the late second century CE and into the third century such as Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, and Gaius follow after Irenaeus and constantly refer to these Gospel texts and to the evangelists by name. This invites the question 'why didn't their predecessors display the same awareness of these titles and authors?' An obvious answer is that prior to the middle and late second century, these texts did not have name attributions firmly attached to them. However, once these titles were attached, they were embraced and regularly used.

Now, in response to these facts, proponents of the traditional Gospel titles have suggested that "the further back we go, the less likely we should expect to see named citations of the gospels, even if the Patristic fathers knew who wrote them." However, that assumption is quite contrary to what we actually find in the literature from that period. Consider this excerpt from Matthew Ferguson's article ['Eyewitness Recollections in Greco-Roman Biography versus the Anonymity of the Gospels'](#):

"[B]iographers from the early Roman Empire tend to cite sources at a much higher frequency than what is seen in the NT Gospels. The biographer Suetonius, for example, cites [] literary and documentary sources in his *Lives* of Julius Caesar and Augustus... What is interesting about [Greco-Roman] biographies dealing with subjects dating close to the author's own lifetime, however, is that they tend to include [] *more citations* [] of the author's own eyewitness experiences, as well as discussion of his sources. Sometimes it is claimed that the authors of the Gospels do not explicitly discuss their own eyewitness experiences, nor cite their oral and written sources, because the Gospels were written close enough to Jesus' lifetime for such sources to be implicit for their audiences. This assumption is undermined, however, by surveying the Greco-Roman biographical literature from the same period. In fact, virtually every biographer from the early Roman Empire whose works are still extant—Cornelius [] Nepos, Tacitus, Plutarch, Suetonius, and Lucian—explicitly cites his own eyewitness experiences in biographies that deal with subjects dating to his own lifetime." (Matthew W. Ferguson)

Indeed, this is quite the opposite of what we find with Gospel literature and the earliest attestations to the Gospels. The Gospel writers never cite to their oral and/or written sources. Nor do they even claim to be eyewitnesses themselves. There is no first person discussion. The Gospels are composed completely in the third-person omniscient voice, a hallmark of Greco-Roman literary [] *novels* [] — but not biographical or historical literature. Those details have to be factored into how we understand and examine these texts within their immediate socio-cultural environment and how these texts would have been received by their initial reading audiences.

"The Gospel According To..."

The traditional titles that are affixed to our manuscripts of the Gospels contain the phrase [] εὐαγγέλιον [] κατὰ [] ('*The Gospel according to... [insert name]*'). Thus, we have the Gospel according to Luke, the Gospel according to Mark, and so on. This is quite the atypical title convention for that time. In fact, it is unheard of in all of antiquity, as no other authors in the entire history of the Greco-Roman or Jewish world self-titled their books "according to" in the manner found on Gospel manuscripts. This observation alone is compelling reason to suspect that perhaps those titles were not originally affixed to the Gospels by their authors. Furthermore, the Greek preposition [] κατὰ [] ("according to") is not [] *per se* [] understood as a claim to a specific individual's authorship, as the phrase "according to" in this context is best taken to mean "handed down from" a tradition or community associated with the attached name. For example, there is the Gospel according to the Nazarenes,

the Gospel according to the Ebionites, the Gospel according to the Egyptians, the Gospel according to the Hebrews, and many others. So, from these examples we can see that the phrase "according to" is not referenced to named individuals, but is a designation for sectarian groups.[\[17\]](#)

Finally, the Fourth Gospel (aka, Gospel of John) provides us with a glaring clue that this text was originally penned anonymously – namely, that the narrative goes out of its way to avoid explicitly identifying the author by name. Whoever wrote this Gospel employed a rhetorical technique to shroud the source's identity behind the moniker "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The purpose of this literary device was to prompt the reader to utilize textual and narrative signals within the story to discern the identity of this person. But why even bother with this coy rhetorical technique if "John" simply slapped his name onto the title of the Gospel? This would completely defeat his literary purpose.

So, What's In a Name?

As I noted above, specific authorial traditions for the Gospels came some time later to impute apostolic authority to these Gospels, which was a consequence of various gospel texts being circulated by competing Christian sects and communities. Theological disputes emerged between these communities, which had grown especially contentious throughout the second century CE. To be sure, there were many more Gospels in circulation than the four that became canonized in the New Testament (see footnote for a brief list of other gospels[\[18\]](#)).

Early on it was the norm for distinct Christian sects to use only one primary Gospel that correlated with their specific doctrines and teachings, as opposed to compiling numerous different gospel texts in a compendium set. As sects grew and postured for 'preferred status' in early Christendom, eventually it became necessary to distinguish these gospels from one another, and in so doing impute authority to these writings by establishing traditions that connected these texts to apostolic figures and other figures of high reputation in the early Church.

Irenaeus, in my view, unwittingly gives us some insight into where our four Gospels may have actually originated. Irenaeus claimed that each of the four gospels were taken by one of the 'heretical sects': Matthew's gospel was used by the Jewish Ebionites, Luke was favored by the docetic Marcionites, Mark was used by the Adoptionists, and John by the gnostic Cerinthians/Valentinians. This seems to be a kind of tacit admission of where these gospels actually came from. Evidence shows that at the earliest stages of the Church single gospels were preferred by distinct Christian communities. Furthermore, our early Christian literature indicates that Adoptionists and Ebionites were around late

first century, Cerinthus and his sect was active around 100 CE, and Marcionism was active in late 130s and 140s. [19]

And, of course, all the different sects were accusing each other of deviating from proper teachings and theology.

So, when Irenaeus shows up in 180 CE and says that each of the four Gospels belonged solely to his church community (i.e., the proto-Catholic church), and that each “heretical group” stole exactly one of each gospel from his sect, then I cannot help but to wonder if it is just as likely (if not more likely) that the proto-Catholic group to which Irenaeus belonged instead compiled and co-opted one gospel from each of the aforementioned ‘heretical groups.’

Consider this... how fluky is it that the Jewish-centric ‘Gospel of Matthew’ happened to align so well with the Torah-observant Jewish Ebionites, and that the christology of ‘Mark’ just happens to correspond with Adoptionism doctrines, and that Marcionites used a docetic-friendly version of Luke? And finally, how fortuitously coincidental that the Gnostic sects led by Cerinthus (and Valentinus) of Alexandria, Egypt used the Gospel of John – a gospel that contains Gnostic allusions and drips with Stoic rhetoric hearkening to Philo of Alexandria (a precursor to Gnosticism). Thus, it would appear that individual Gospels were written for and circulated among specific Christian audiences/communities – as opposed to having been written to a generic audience and widely circulated across early Christendom for general use. The trajectory of the evidence seems to point to the notion that in the mid to late second century, the proto-Catholic group came upon the idea of compiling, co-opting, and revising/adapting the gospels of these aforementioned doctrinal sects – which then results in the proto-Catholic church prevailing over its opponents and developing a more comprehensive ecclesiastical presence (indeed ‘Catholic’ means “universal”).

Bible scholars have taken similar note and remarked along the same lines. For example, with regard to the background and naming of John’s gospel, consider the following excerpt from pastor and New Testament scholar Ben Witherington:

“There was an increasing urgency about this conclusion for the mainstream church after the middle of the second century because the Fourth Gospel seems to have been a favorite amongst the Gnostics, and therefore, apostolic authorship was deemed essential if this Gospel was to be rescued from the heterodox. Irenaeus, the great heresiarch, in particular around A.D. 180 thus stressed that this Gospel was written in Ephesus by one of the Twelve– John the Apostle.” [20]

My thought is that when gospel literature first emerged as a genre within early Christian communities they were deemed “community property” and didn’t need any specific authorship attribution until the Gnostics and other heterodox groups began to expand and circulate their own literature,

including their own gospels. At that point, some kind of disambiguating line had to be drawn, if for no other reason than to differentiate texts, but also to co-opt texts and to impute authority to preferred writings by establishing the tradition that certain texts were written by apostles and their close companions.

All told, what is undeniably certain from this data is that Gospel literature was quite 'fluid' during this period of the early Church. And on this note, we are still only scratching the surface...

POSTSCRIPT on Gnosticism and Adoptionism

In my discussion concerning the provenance of the four Gospels I made reference to them in relation to various theological sects/doctrines in early Christianity that relied on these texts. I mentioned in particular the doctrines of Gnosticism and Adoptionism.[\[21\]](#) As an addendum to the discussion, I have provided below some pertinent background on these religious views in the context of their nexus to Gospel literature.

Gnosticism ("having knowledge") was an esoteric religious and philosophical movement connected with early Christianity in the first and second century CE. Gnostics believed that salvation was attainable through "gnosis" or special knowledge of and experience with the Divine. This knowledge was obtained through intellectual learning and also through inner truths that were conveyed through spiritual and mysterious allegorical teachings. The Gnostic movement has origins in non-rabbinical Jewish sects. And its adherents viewed the Gospel story of Jesus itself to be primarily allegorical, used as an introduction to "gnosis," rather than the Gospel stories being literally true in a historical context.

The Gnostic movement flourished in Alexandria, Egypt (among other places) and was greatly influenced by Platonic philosophy and also influenced by theological themes from the writings of Philo of Alexandria (25 BCE – 45 CE). Philo was a Hellenized Jewish philosopher from Alexandria who blended Judaic theology with Platonic/Stoic philosophy.

So, how did Philo's ideas factor into the early Christian context and influence Gnosticism in particular? Roughly a **decade prior** to the ministry of Jesus, Philo wrote an allegorical compilation now referred to collectively as the "Early Works of Philo" (circa 20-25 C.E.). In these works Philo explained that Plato was correct about there being a gap between imperfect matter and perfect Form, and therefore a celestial/heavenly intermediary divine being was necessary to bridge the enormous gap between God and us in the material world. According to Philo, this being was called the "Logos" (literally, 'the Word'). Philo explains in his writings that...

God created and governed the world through a mediator—his Logos (“the Word”); 2. The Logos is the firstborn Son of God; 3. The Logos is the very image of God; 4. The Logos is God’s spiritual agent of creation from which all things spiritual and physical emanate; 5. The Logos is “of light from light”, whereas divine light displaced darkness; 6. The Logos is God’s celestial high priest; 7. Melchizedek as high priest represents the Logos; and 8.□□ The Logos is “the true Adam.”

Philo’s notions of the ‘Logos’ played an important role in influencing strands of Gnostic thought. Gnostic leaders such as Cerinthus (active 90 – 100 CE) and his successor Valentinus were educated in the Judaeo-Philo school of Alexandria. But you might also notice that Philo’s rhetorical imagery, vocabulary, and themes sound a bit familiar, as they are featured in New Testament writings as well. There is no mistaking that Philo’s rhetorical influence can be found in passages such as Colossians 1:15-20, Hebrews 5:8-10, Hebrews 4:14, and elsewhere in the New Testament.

However, as it relates specifically to our discussion of the Gospels, we can notice striking parallels between Philo’s themes and the content found in the prologue of John’s gospel. John 1:1-5 reads:

“In the beginning was the Word (literally, “[the Logos](#)”) and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:1-5)

The imagery and vocabulary parallels between John’s prologue and Philo’s writings are too numerous and distinct to be mere coincidence. Whoever composed this Gospel knew and studied Philo’s works and was influenced by them.

So, what’s more likely here? That this book was written by the disciple John, an Aramaic-speaking, illiterate and uneducated fisherman from rural Galilee? (see□□ [Acts 4:13](#) and note that the actual□□ words in the Greek are□□ [‘agrammatoi’ and ‘idiōtai’](#), literally meaning unlettered/uneducated and ignorant) Or, is it more likely that this Gospel (written in high-level literary Greek prose), which features rhetoric and imagery analogous to Philo of Alexandria, and which was heavily circulated in and around Hellenized Alexandria, and which was favored among Gnostic sectarians whom were educated in Alexandria in the tradition of Philo... is it more likely that this gospel text was written by or among them? I’ll leave that to you, the reader, to answer for yourself.

Adoptionism refers to the theological view held by some early Christians that Jesus was born a regular human and then *became* the Son of God (i.e., adopted) upon his baptism when the Holy Spirit descended onto Jesus like a dove, imbuing him with divine presence and power, at which time God pronounces from the heavens “you are my beloved Son” – Mark 1:11 (in contrast to the belief that Jesus was born to a virgin as the incarnate Son of God). Indeed, there are early manuscripts among the Synoptic gospels that depict God’s pronouncement as saying: “you are my Son, *today I have begotten you*” (instead of “in you I am well pleased”). The statement that *today* Jesus became God’s Son is consistent with notions of Adoptionistic theology. We see this same phrase repeated even in [Hebrews 5:5](#).

Some scholars suspect that “*today I have begotten you*” was the original reading of those baptismal passages in the Synoptic gospels (Mark, Matt, Luke). Bart Ehrman notes that this phrase is quoted by Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and other Church fathers from the second and third centuries CE, suggesting that this was likely the predominant/original reading of this passage. Justin says the following when discussing Jesus’ baptism:

“but then the Holy Ghost, and for man’s sake, as I formerly stated, lighted on Him in the form of a dove, and there came at the same instant from the heavens a voice, which was uttered... ‘You are My Son: this day have I begotten You.’” (Dialogue. 88)

So, even though all the earliest attestations to this baptismal narrative quote God as pronouncing “you are my Son, this day I have begotten You”, it seems that our later Greek manuscripts of the Gospels have modified this passage to read “you are my beloved Son, in you I am well pleased.” And the latter is what we find in our New Testament. Could it be that these apparent changes were made in order to disassociate the Gospels from Adoptionistic implications?

As I noted in my previous article, Mark’s Gospel is the earliest of the New Testament Gospels, and both Matthew and Luke utilized Mark as a narrative template. Yet, Mark’s Gospel was presumably favored by Adoptionists because Mark *begins* his story with Jesus as an adult being baptized and then imbued by the Holy Spirit, which was the catalyst to Jesus being pronounced as the “Son of God” (followed by the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness to show his obedience to God and to his messianic mission while empowered by the Holy Spirit). Moreover, it is notable that Mark’s narrative does not attest to a virgin birth or claim that Jesus was born as the Son of God. The virgin birth is attested only in Matthew and in Luke (which some New Testament textual experts think is a redacted/revised version of Luke).

Mark’s gospel starts with the opening line “The Beginning

□ of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” This manner of introducing the narrative could be interpreted to mean that all facts germane to the Gospel concerning Jesus indeed□□ began□ where Mark starts his story – thereby precluding the relevance of anything prior to where Mark begins his story.

Several theologians have observed that an Adoptionist theology might also explain why Mary and Jesus’s siblings were trying to seize Jesus because they thought he’d gone mad when he started his ministry in Galilee (Mark 3:30-31). The observation noted by some theologians is that if Mark’s portrayal of Jesus assumes that he was just a regular man prior to his ministry without any supernatural origins, or miraculous birth, or virgin conception by Mary, then it makes perfect sense that Mary and Jesus’ siblings would think he had suddenly lost his mind at 30-years of age when he began his messianic ministry. Now, compare this to John’s gospel which was written some three decades after Mark’s gospel, where it is clear that John’s narrative presupposes Jesus’ divinity and presupposes that Mary is fully cognizant of Jesus’ messianic calling. Whereas in Mark’s gospel Mary and her family tried to corral Jesus because of his miracles and preaching, in John’s gospel Mary does no such thing. In John’s gospel, Mary clearly knows who Jesus is and what he is all about; and in fact she is the one who actually incites Jesus to commence his miracle-working ministry at the wedding in Cana ([John 2:1-5](#)).

Stay tuned for part two of this installment in which I will discuss the literacy (or lack thereof) among Aramaic-speaking Jewish commoners and tradesmen in first century Palestine, apostolic martyrdom traditions that conflict with Gospel authorship traditions, and competing authorship claims of New Testament texts as reported in early Christian sources, and more.

~ Doston Jones

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[1]□□ *The Case for Christ*□□ (Strobel, Lee) p. 23

[2]□□ Irenaeus of Lyon c. 180, see□□ *Against Heresies, Book III*

[3]□□ Though I will be arguing on behalf of the general scholarly consensus that the Gospels were anonymous compositions, for the sake of ease, I will continue to refer to the gospels as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

[4]□□ The belief that “the Beloved Disciple” (aka John) composed our 4th Gospel is tied to John 21:24, the second to last verse in the entire narrative. The verse reads: “This is the disciple who testifies to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.”

But rather than showing that John the disciple wrote this

Gospel, a careful reading of John 21:24 actually conveys something a bit different. Pay close attention to what it says, taking note of the pronouns. The disciple whom Jesus loved is said to have “testified to and written about these things,” and “we” know “his” testimony is true. In using the first-person plural (“we”) juxtaposed against the third-person singular (“his”), the author of the verse plainly distinguishes himself from the person who is said to have been the initial source testifying to the things Jesus had said and done. In other words, the author(s) of this Gospel is not the Beloved Disciple, nor is he claiming to be. The Gospel’s authors (plural) claim to have used a written source purportedly composed by an anonymous eyewitness under the moniker “the Beloved Disciple.” Numerous scholars hold the view that the authors of canonical John were likely part of an early Christian group now referred to as the ‘Johannine Community’ with ties to Alexandria, Egypt. In fact, the earliest extant Gospel fragment [Papyrus 52](#) is from the Gospel of John and was found in Egypt – and its textual form agrees with the Alexandrian base.

[5] See, e.g., [Galatians 1:1](#), [Romans 1:1](#), [1 Corinthians 1:1](#), [James 1:1](#), [Jude 1:1](#)

[6] For an excellent and more thorough treatment of this topic see article by Matthew W. Ferguson titled [‘Ancient Historical Writing Compared to the Gospels of the New Testament’](#). See also, [‘Review of Craig Keener, “Otho: A Targeted Comparison,” with Emphasis on the Citation of Eyewitness Sources and Textual Independence of Historical Biographers’](#) (M. Ferguson).

[7] See, ‘The Anonymity of the New Testament History Books’, p.142

[8] But which apostles? Some of them... all of them? There were at least twelve, and keep in mind that neither Luke nor Mark were apostles.

[9] *First Apology, chapter LXVII*

[10] See generally, *The First Edition of the New Testament* (Trobisch); *Who Published the New Testament* (Trobisch)

[11] “And do not pray as the hypocrites, but as the Lord commanded in his Gospel, pray thus: ‘Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, as in Heaven so also upon earth; give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into trial, but deliver us from the Evil One, for thine is the power and the glory forever.’ Pray thus three times a day.” (Didache 8:2-3)

[12] Didache 11:3 and 15:4

[13] Baum, p.142

[14] Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*; and Epiphanius, *Panarion*

[15] Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 128

[16] In addition, the long string of genitives in Mark 1:1 is grammatically awkward in the Greek and not found elsewhere in Mark's literary prose. This, among other reasons, combine to evince that this verse has been altered.

[17] Another reason that the phrase "according to" was not likely original to the Gospels is that the titles found on Greek gospel manuscripts do not always appear at the same place on the text, but appear at either the beginning, end, and other places on the manuscript. As well, the titles often use different grammatical forms such as "the Gospel according to Matthew," or "according to Matthew's Gospel," or simply "according to Matthew." These variations suggest that they probably do not go back to a uniform title attribution or back to an original manuscript that was copied consistently, but were added by later scribes. (credit: B. Ehrman, M. Ferguson)

[18] Other gospels and 'Acts' writings likely circulating contemporaneous to the New Testament Gospels include the Gospel of Peter (attested in the Clement Epistles), the Egerton Gospel, the Acts of Pilate (attested by Justin Martyr), and the Gospel of Thomas (manuscript P. Oxy 1 from the Gospel of Thomas is the third oldest fragment of ANY gospel). Also circulating during second century was the Gospel of the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Ebionites, the Gospel of James, the Preaching of Peter, the Revelation of Peter, the Revelation of James, the Gospel of Judas, and many others.

[19] Credit: Jefferey Querner

[20] B. Witherington, *Who Was the Beloved Disciple?* (benwitherington.blogspot)

[21] I also mentioned Docetism, but I will cover that in Part-Two."

END OF ARTICLE FROM Bibleoutsidethebox.blog.

EDITOR JAN LILLEBY'S COMMENTS ON THE 'GOSPEL CONFUSION'

I have mentioned this matter several times in some of my articles here on my web site. But not to such a length as this article above.

With Doston Jones' substantial historical quotations on the four Gospels, I can only go on as I already have, holding forth this important Biblical-Historical truth...as real true. It is not just a theoretical 'truth' – for it has been proven already.

If you read my articles, especially those in which I tell of

Paul as our only God sent teacher (his two epistles Ephesians and Colossians), you will notice a truth which Christendom has ignored for centuries: Paul had published his Grace-Gospel about **two decades before** any of the four Gospels were published and thus out on the market. Matthew came in 80-85 CE, Mark in 83 CE, Luke at the earliest 62-63 CE (disputed) – but probably after Israel's destruction, in 73 CE, and John in 93-94 CE.

You read above, that Doston Jones makes remarks...*that at the time prior to the Gospels getting names to them, there existed numeral OTHER Gospels, telling the story of Jesus and the disciples.*

Maybe there existed 40 Gospel stories, written by 40 unknown writers. But as time went on, we got delivered 10% of these, - which is four Gospels??? The naming of these occurred around 200 CE according to scholars/historians.

□□□

PAUL'S GRACE GOSPEL WAS THE ONLY
GOSPEL OF SALVATION GIVEN TO
THE WHOLE CIVILIZED WORLD

Paul had his 9 co-workers/ministers spread HIS Gospel already in 63-64 to 67-68 CE, as he administered this operation from his jail cell in Rome. That was when God revealed His Mystery to Paul, which he wrote in Ephesians and Colossians. His epistles are NOT anonymously written, for his name is noted in both. In Colossians he also names Timothy as if he was a co-writer, **Col. 1:1, 2,** NASB, *"1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,*

2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father."

□□

THE 'GOSPEL CONFUSION' MAKES PASTORS
AND PREACHERS USING THE FOUR GOSPELS AS
IF THESE ARE FAITH DOCTRINE FOR THE CHURCH

The grave and most fatal error inside Christendom today and for centuries back, is that one *constantly uses the four gospels* as if they are doctrine to the church.

They are not.

The Gospel **revealed** through Paul (Eph. 3:3) had nothing to do with the four historical writings *falsely called Gospels* – they are classified by most scholars as historic documents on same level as with the Book of Acts. Why didn't Acts got the title *"Gospel of Acts"*? Because this historical document is not a message like a Faith Doctrine.

But thus we see that the four Gospels are not really Gospels, with a salvation-message for the Church. They are four separate writings telling the history of Jesus Messiah, His birth, ministry to Israel, His death on the cross, and His resurrection and ascension. And they give partial quotations on what Jesus told His people, the Jews, to whom He was sent. We cannot ever use such quotations as if they are belonging to the Faith Doctrine of the Church.

The four Gospels and Acts simply gives us the **history recorded of Jesus and His followers**, the latter who continued the Gospel ministry established by Jesus, as told in Acts.

This was entirely regarding God's dealing exclusively with His nation Israel.

Mat. 15:24, NASB,

*"But He answered and said, "I was sent only * * * to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*

Rom. 15:8, NASB,

"For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers,"

Mat. 10:5, NASB,

"5 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans;

6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

This is *hard* scriptural evidence to the fact that the 12 apostles NEVER were told to go out into the world outside of Israel. Acts confirms this as well, since we cannot find any apostle (from the 12) who ministered outside the land.

Acts tells us they were all working inside the land. Mat. 28 and the 'Great commission' are misunderstood, as to the idea that Jesus told them to go *international and in world-wide mission!* But Acts 10 and Peter in Cornelius' house refutes such an idea. The Kingdom-Gospel the 12 preached was only to Israel. Peter had never had any fellowship with Gentiles, he said himself. This was 8-9 years after Acts 2 and Pentecost. He only went to Jews. As did the other apostles.

Only Paul had a calling of *going international*, **Acts 9:15**, NASB,

"But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;"

THE SO-CALLED CHURCH FATHERS MESSED IT
ALL UP, AS THEY IGNORED PAUL AND INSTEAD
THEY GOT ON WITH USING THE FOUR GOSPELS
AS IF PAUL'S TWO CHURCH EPISTLES DIDN'T EXIST!

Not only did these ignorant early Church leaders come up with ordinances and works for salvation (check Didache) – but actually did not understand that only Paul had been given the revelation of the Mystery, the 'One New Man' as told in Eph. 2:14, 15.

Thus they mixed in ordinances from the Law of Moses with these Gospel stories.

I have many articles and writings in which I expose the TV-Healers and Word of Faith and NAR-movement. Headed by such infamous preachers as Kenneth Copeland, Joel Osteen and many others.

As well as the early revivalists like Oral Roberts, William Branham, T.L. Osborn and the likes.

They all went forth with their grave heresies, basing their deceptive messages on a mixture of the Law of Moses, the four Gospels and Acts, as if these are faith doctrine to the Church.

Using Moses' words of *..I am the Lord, your physician...if you keep My Word I shall keep sickness away from you...* and all such desperate heretical preaching. The many preachers of today do not understand that we cannot take old promises given to Israel, as if these were given to the Church! The Church is NOT Israel, and vice-versa.

In Paul's free Grace Gospel, found inside Ephesians and Colossians, he does not teach of miracles and healings, no speaking in tongues, no water baptism, Holy Communion, Confession of sin, and such things. Col. 2:13-17 goes in details regarding the Law and ordinances,

13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-

17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."

Neither can we find the *Parousia*, Greek for the Second Advent. Neither can we find warnings against the Anti-Christ who shall come to Israel. And so on. Paul had a totally NEW revelation, the revelation of the Mystery – implying that Jews and Gentiles from now on, in faith in Christ, had been made into **'One New Man'**, the Body of Christ, the Church to which Jesus is the Head.

CONCLUSION

The four Gospels are titled in error.

They should have been titled something like, *The History of Jesus Messiah – His life and death and resurrection.*

None of the four Gospels has the salvation Gospel given to us through Paul's apostolic ministry! Only Paul was sent to us Gentiles, while the twelve were sent to Israel in their land.

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