

5. Dating the Gospels

Closely related to the Synoptic Problem is the dating of the Gospels. If as much doubt as possible is shed regarding the genuine authors of the Gospels, then those who have less authority and are far removed from the action of the time can be postulated as credible writers offering some credence to those who doubt the honest testimonies of the Gospel writers. I don't doubt that many scholars genuinely believe the grounds they have for holding later authorship by potentially other authors. However, I see little evidence for their arguments.

Martin Hengel in his "Studies in the Gospel of Mark," notes that all of the Gospels start with "Εναγγελιον κατα" or Gospel According to.....Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. This is contra the fashion of the day when all known documents of the day are usually the authors name, then any descriptive. All core manuscripts we have from the second century attest to this format. In the third century you get the short form with the Εναγγελιον or Gospel words taken out. However, all this does point out that right from the start there were Gospels being always copied in the same format as the four always are titled this way. There was no centralized church in the first century being able to declare what is or what was not authority, so they would seemed to have emerged from the body of witnesses and believers this way, right from their original authors. Although of course this is speculation, it is reasoned speculation in that the first Gospel writer, Matthew, must have known other colleagues were going to write, so he introduces this title to carefully distinguish his from the others to come. Herodotus never wrote his "Histories according to Herodotus," knowing more would come from his kind, but just "Herodotus, Histories." When writing the first Gospel, this chain of naming and titling implies a logic of cooperation. It also must imply early dating, well into the middle of the first century, as key Apostles/witnesses were dying out.

Word of mouth from eyewitnesses carries the most persuasive evidence of the life of Christ, as does any other form of witness testament today. In a court of law, for example, personal and written testimony are valid, but in the absence of verbal evidence, personally given, the written evidence is automatically held to be of lesser

weight. That said, after the death of witnesses, written evidence is indeed all we may have left.

So it is no surprise that it is generally believed that, towards the end of their lives, the Apostles who did put their testaments in writing did so to preserve the credibility of what they had seen and experienced. In the preface to Luke's Gospel, it is clear that others had written before him and that he had questioned them in person. We saw this in Luke 1:1-4, quoted above. John also states clearly that others had written before him:

This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.

And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.
John 21:24-25

We have seen how Paul, not himself a witness to the life and preaching of Jesus but an apostle chosen after the death of Christ, makes many references to the Gospels. That the Gospels were extant in the written form from the very first and second generation post Jesus is evidenced by the following;

2 Clement 8:5¹ Clement of Rome, (1 AD – 99 AD) writes..

For the Lord saith in the Gospel, If ye kept not that which is ^[1]_[SEP]little, who shall give unto you that which is great? For I say unto ^[1]_[SEP]you that he which is faithful in the least, is also faithful in ^[1]_[SEP]much.

Also, Ignatius to the Smyrnaeans 5:1² St Ignatius, (Approx 35 AD to 110 AD) writes..

But certain persons ignorantly deny Him, or rather have been denied by Him, being advocates of death rather than of the truth; and they have not been persuaded by the prophecies nor by the law of Moses, nay nor even to this very hour by the Gospel, nor by the sufferings of each of us severally;

& 7:2

It is therefore meet that ye should abstain from such, and not speak of them either privately or in public; but should give heed to the Prophets, and especially to the Gospel, wherein the passion is shown unto us and the resurrection is accomplished.

The Didache³ an early First Century Christian Book says in 8:2, (50 AD – 100 AD)

¹ <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/2clement-lightfoot.html>

² <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-smyrnaeans-lightfoot.html>

But let not your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week. Rather, fast on the fourth day and the Preparation (Friday). Do not pray like the hypocrites, but rather as the Lord commanded in His Gospel, like this: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.....

& 11:3,

But if he teaches so as to increase righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord. But concerning the apostles and prophets, act according to the decree of the Gospel.

& 15:3-4

And reprove one another, not in anger, but in peace, as you have it in the Gospel. But to anyone that acts amiss against another, let no one speak, nor let him hear anything from you until he repents. But your prayers and alms and all your deeds so do, as you have it in the Gospel of our Lord.

We also have a direct colleague of the Apostle John's, Bishop Papias of Hierapolis (A.D. 70-163) who writes around A.D. 115-125 and was also quoted above. By the early part of the second century, we see acceptance of the 'memoirs of the apostles' in Justin Martyr (approx. A.D. 100-165). It is clear that all four Gospels were counted as canonical by the end of the first century, or in the worst case by the start of the second century. Irenaeus, Ignatius, Clement of Alexandria (who cites others as well, but carefully distinguishes the apostolic ones), Clement of Rome and Tertullian all held the four canonical apostolic gospels to be the true and only ones. Tradition records the sequence of the Gospels as Matthew, Mark, Luke then John. These people were nearer in time to the truth than we are, though much modern criticism seems to differ. As discussed above, some 19th, 20th and 21st century writers now think that Mark was the earliest Gospel and was used by Matthew and Luke, who also used another source called the 'Q' source, and potentially others (both written and oral).

Dating Matthew's Gospel

Tillemont, in *Memories pour server a l'Histories Ecclesiastique*, dates it three years after the death of Christ. Why? Paul was in Jerusalem four years after the Ascension. Only Peter and James were there, implying all, including Matthew, had left the City. If Matthew *did* write in Jerusalem (which tradition suggests), it would seem that Matthew's Gospel must have been composed before Paul's arrival. This is generally

³ <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html>

believed to be inconclusive on its own, as it does not follow that just because Matthew did not see the others that they were not there.

Other evidence suggests earlier dating, such as the fact that Matthew's Gospel is targeted work to Jews: it was written to bolster the Jewish citizens' understanding of Jesus during a local Jewish persecution, hence it draws heavily from the Old Testament and Jewish custom and practise of the time. The Sanhedrin-led persecution of Jewish converts lasting until before 40 AD could place the date of authorship after AD 30 but before AD 40. Also, Herod was not disposed of by Caligula until AD 39. Matthew is very gentle in his handling of Herod's treatment of John the Baptist, as well as the harsh treatment of Christ on the morning of his execution. In writing this way, Matthew was surely deploying a self-preservation strategy. He always writes of Pilate as the then-governor of Judea. Tiberius required Pilate in Rome to answer some complaints about his administration. Tiberius died in AD 37. Pilate was then banished by Caligula, the successor emperor.

That Matthew wrote his Gospel first has always been attested to by the church since the beginning of its existence. Saint Pantaenus, the former Stoic philosopher from Alexandria, was alive in the early to late parts of the second century. After his conversion to Christianity, he noted that St Bartholemew — it is believed Eusebius mistranslates and this should be St Thomas, as the Indian Christians attest — takes the Gospel of Matthew, written in the Hebrew Letters to the Indians. This would mean that the Gospel must have been written before the parting of the ways of the Apostles from Jerusalem. The date of the exact dispersion of the Apostles is not known, but as noted above, it is within a handful of years of the death of Jesus. Certainly by the time of Paul's Epistles, it was clear that all the Apostles were on the move, especially after the martyrdom of James in Jerusalem, around the mid 40's. Thus we have more reason to assume a very early dating of Matthew.

A closer look at how Matthew refers to Pilate and how Luke does is revealing: 'And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor' (Matthew 27:2). Luke, however, in 3:1, very much places Pilate in a historical context:

'Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene [...]

Coupled with this, Tillemont is looking persuasive in his early dating. Other notable historians of antiquity similarly date Matthew very early. Irenaeus dates it after A.D. 60, when Peter and Paul were both in Rome.

From the earliest records in A.D. 125 it is assumed that this Gospel is written by Matthew. Importantly, Papias writes: 'So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able'.⁴

The term 'oracles' could just mean 'sayings', but when used in reference to Matthew, Papias is clear that he also means 'doings'. It is hard to think he is referring to anything other than the Gospel of Matthew. One might argue that since Matthew's Gospel was written in Greek, Papias is therefore clearly wrong, as he suggests it was written in Hebrew. On the other hand, it is quite possible he was correctly referring to how it had been written for the Hebrew Jewish Christians of the time, much as the Letter to the Hebrews had been written for the same audience — that is, in the Greek of the day, then translated, as Papias suggests: '[...]and everyone interpreted them as he was able'.

Eusebius also confirms in his *Church History*⁵ that Luke, being a Greek expert, actually translated it from Hebrew, making Papias correct. We will probably never know for sure; however, we can deduct from this the realistic possibility of a non-extant Hebrew original. Irenaeus, reported in Eusebius again, and Origen, continued to faithfully report that Matthew's Gospel came to them in the Hebrew:

'In his first book on Matthew's Gospel, maintaining the Canon of the Church, he testifies that he knows only four Gospels, writing as follows: Among the four Gospels, which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under, I have learned that the first was written by Matthew, who was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ,

⁴ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.viii.xxxix.html> Much doubt has been placed on the accuracy of this statement by Papias, as we only have copies of any of the Gospels in Greek. It is naturally assumed they were always written in Greek. This was not the case with at least one other book of the Bible, that of the Book of Tobit. Both Aramaic and Hebrew fragments were found in the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1952.

⁵ <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2501.htm>

and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism, and published in the Hebrew language'.⁶

The latter two Church Fathers, Irenaeus and Origen, were Greek-speaking and presumably had the Greek text of Matthew. It aroused no suspicion at the time, so one can only really deduce that they were viewing it as written for the Hebrew audience as intended by Matthew. Greek was the formal written language of that day, much as French was formally the language of diplomacy in the European centres of power from roughly the 12th to the 17th century. It would have been the norm, then, to have it ultimately rendered in Greek.

Matthew's Gospel contains many Old Testament references linking specific predictions made many centuries before which were regarded as scripture, These refer to the events of the day he witnessed in what we now call the New Testament. referring to the events of the day he witnessed in what we now call the New Testament. He writes to show the life of Christ as a fulfilment of prophesy of the Old in the New. He was writing for the Jewish audience of his time. Uniquely to Matthew, he gives some teachings of the church. Peter was to be given the keys to the heavenly kingdom with the authority to bind or loose (to give great authority, and to forbid): this was universally accepted by the church.

In this Gospel are set out five great discourse sections and five narratives. They form a commentary on the teachings and sayings of Christ, as well as his doings over time. There is much concordance, with the Passion narratives agreeing closely with the other two Synoptics: Mark and Luke. What is clear with all the Gospels is that they are not a biography of Christ as we would understand it today, but personal witness testimony designed to record the salient points of His Ministry. The three Synoptics – Matthew, Mark and Luke – track well and cover large parts of the same events. Even John, who expressly says he is not slavishly repeating what others have written, maintains this deep concordance.

Considering all we know about Matthew and his need to place Old Testament prophecy in the light of New Testament fulfilment, it does seem strange that the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 is not mentioned, especially since Christ predicted the event. Or the great Roman Christian persecution of Nero in A.D. 64, as this involved feeding masses of

⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25.3-6

Christians to the lions in Rome. If the Gospel was written after these dates, you might expect these events to have merited a mention. The former certainly would have been referred to because, as I have observed, Matthew is replete with mentions of the Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled by Christ, and this opportunity to include the destruction of Jerusalem would have been too good to ignore. All three Synoptics report this event, which would imply pre-A.D. 70 dating or possibly even pre-AD 64. John also reports this event (or the prediction of it), which presents us with an interesting possibility running counter to modern scholarly opinion: that John also dates before AD 70.

The first of the Temple quotes in Matthew are as follows:

‘Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down’. 24:1-2

And:

‘Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains’. 24:15-16

Matthew quotes Jesus, who in turn quotes directly from Daniel 9:27 and 11:31.

We have several choices here. Jesus might have been using the second quote to refer to the future Titus-led destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Or he may have been suggesting a future event, as Paul mentions in 2 Thessalonians 2-5 and John in Revelation 13:14-5. Some believe this past event is the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria, in 168 B.C. I must discount this, as Matthew clearly references Daniel’s prophecy to be something that had not yet come to pass. Either way, the Gospel writer, if writing after A.D. 70, would surely have concluded that Christ’s prediction of the Temple’s destruction indicated its actual destruction by Titus?

The language used by both Paul and John is much more apocalyptic, and John would lead one to believe he was pointing more to the reckoning at the end of times, which seems the central message of Revelation. I would also put Paul’s reference into this category as well. Certainly, what is not in dispute is that Christ *did* predict the actual

brick-and-mortar destruction of the Temple. There are various accounts of this event by participants in the Destruction of Jerusalem. The most notable being Josephus. He confirms in "War of the Jews" Book 5-7, the following;

1. As the Jews had barricaded themselves into the Temple Titus wanted to get them out of it so he could preserve it.
2. Titus ordered the Temple foundations to be ripped up, stone by stone when they consistently refused.
3. He wanted to preserve the city as well, even sending Josephus to negotiate with them.
4. The Jews then set fire the Temple with themselves in it. This was closely followed, but not by specific Imperial order, by a Roman soldier, who is reported to have thrown a burning implement into one of the Golden windows to really progress the fire.
5. Titus is seen instructing his men to extinguish the flame.
6. He wanted to preserve the Temple, but it was too late.
7. As Josephus confirms, the Temple was destroyed against the command of Rome.
8. Terentius Rufus, who was left in the command of the Roman army, post the destruction of the Temple, had then set about immediately to plough the very foundations to dust as if he were ploughing a field.

The prophecy of Micah 3:12 is fulfilled.

Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, And the mountain of the temple Like the bare hills of the forest.

The will of God had delivered Jerusalem, via the Roman authorities, to be totally destroyed as the Lord Jesus Christ had predicted. It is very hard to think that Matthew would not have used this as a great "told you so" example of not only Christ, but past scripture having forecast this terrible event. The Temple was so significant to the community he was writing to and for, it would have been a great opportunity to miss if he was writing post 70 AD.

Jesus had also said in Luke 21:11

And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

We know from Josephus the following

1. There were signs and prodigies before the taking of the city.
2. A star/comet, like a sword, hung over the city for a whole year.
3. In the night at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for half an hour, the altar was flooded with light and even more astonishingly a cow brought forward for sacrifice, birthed a lamb!
4. Chariots and armies were seen fighting in the sky over the city.
5. The Eastern gate which needs 20 plus people to move it, opens on its own accord.
6. At the feast of Pentecost, in the Inner Temple, a voice like the multitude was heard saying "depart hence."
7. Jesus son of Ananias is recorded for posterity in the following way

But, what is still more terrible, there was one Jesus, the son of Ananus, a plebeian and a husbandman, who, four years before the war began, and at a time when the city was in very great peace and prosperity, came to that feast whereon it is our custom for every one to make tabernacles to God in the temple began on a sudden to cry aloud,

A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the Holy House, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people!

This was his cry, as he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the city.

Jesus had predicted much the same in Matthew 24:27

For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

The Roman army entered from the east, continuing the conquest of Jerusalem westwards. Jesus was using his awesome power to guide the Roman army as His agent of destruction. I ask, why would Matthew, having reported these words of Christ not have joined up the dots and pointed out the predictive powers of the Lord unless he was writing pre 70 AD?

Likewise, Jesus says in Matthew 24:28

For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

The Roman army symbol was the eagle and it was devouring its prey, this was the death of the Jewish nation. I would have thought this would have been a too good and opportunity to miss making the obvious connection with the prophetic nature of Christ.

Likewise, the Roman historian, Tacitus in Histories, Book 5 verse 13 confirms

Prodigies had occurred, but their expiation by the offering of victims or solemn vows is held to be unlawful by a nation which is the slave of superstition and the enemy of true beliefs. In the sky appeared a vision of armies in conflict, of glittering armour. A sudden lightning flash from the clouds lit up the Temple. The doors of the holy place abruptly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to declare that the gods were leaving it, and in the same instant came the rushing tumult of their departure. Few people placed a sinister interpretation upon this. The majority were convinced that the ancient scriptures of their priests alluded to the present as the very time when the Orient would triumph and from Judaea would go forth men destined to rule the world. This mysterious prophecy really referred to Vespasian and Titus, but the common people, true to the selfish ambitions of mankind, thought that this mighty destiny was reserved for them, and not even their calamities opened their eyes to the truth.

No Christians were reported to have died or suffered at the Destruction of Jerusalem, as Jesus had predicted. They had all swiftly fled the City as in the case of Sodom and Gomorah. In Luke 21:18 *"But not a hair of your head shall be lost."* In Matthew 24:13 *"But he who endures to the end shall be saved."*

The Gospels themselves *all had to have been written prior to AD 70* as well for in Matthew 24:14, we have

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

If you read the prophecies concerning the “abominations of desolation” from Daniel as the Roman Army, then you can see another confirmation of a prophecy predicted by Jesus.

Daniel 11:31

And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation.

Matthew 24:15 alludes to this Old Testament prophecy

Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand),

Would Matthew have not reported the most terrible aspects of the Destruction of Jerusalem concerning the famine and the cannibalism of a child by a mother and other such activities? I think not. Matthew 24:19

But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

Josephus Book 6, Chapter 3:4 (This book and chapter 3 especially documents the terrible famine that engulfed Jerusalem)

She then attempted a most unnatural thing; and snatching up her son, who was a child sucking at her breast, she said, "O thou miserable infant! for whom shall I preserve thee in this war, this famine, and this sedition? As to the war with the Romans, if they preserve our lives, we must be slaves. This famine also will destroy us, even before that slavery comes upon us. Yet are these seditious rogues more terrible than both the other. Come on; be thou my food, and be thou a fury to these seditious varlets, and a by- word to the world, which is all that is now wanting to

complete the calamities of us Jews." As soon as she had said this, she slew her son, and then roasted him, and eat the one half of him, and kept the other half by her concealed. Upon this the seditious came in presently, and smelling the horrid scent of this food, they threatened her that they would cut her throat immediately if she did not show them what food she had gotten ready. She replied that she had saved a very fine portion of it for them, and withal uncovered what was left of her son. Hereupon they were seized with a horror and amazement of mind, and stood astonished at the sight, when she said to them, "This is mine own son, and what hath been done was mine own doing! Come, eat of this food; for I have eaten of it myself! Do not you pretend to be either more tender than a woman, or more compassionate than a mother; but if you be so scrupulous, and do abominate this my sacrifice, as I have eaten the one half, let the rest be reserved for me also.

One can't quite help thinking of Jesus' near final prophetic words in Luke 23:28

But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

For Matthew, knowing how attentive he was to linking prior prophecies or events to the actual sayings and doings of Jesus, it seems improbable he would miss this most grizzly of connections.

When reading Josephus on the Wars, it is clear there are other matters predicted by Christ. For example, once Titus had embarked upon the siege, there was no chance of escape as well as Jesus had predicted.

Luke 19:43

For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side,

Josephus, War of the Jews, Book 5, Chapter 12 (my bold and underlining)

That therefore his opinion was, that if they aimed at quickness joined with security, they must build a wall round about the whole city; which was, he thought, the only way to prevent the Jews from coming out any way, and that then they would either entirely despair of saving the city, and so would surrender it up to him, or be still the more easily conquered when the famine

had further weakened them; for that besides this wall, he would not lie entirely at rest afterward, but would take care then to have banks raised again, when those that would oppose them were become weaker. But that if any one should think such a work to be too great, and not to be finished without much difficulty, he ought to consider that it is not fit for Romans to undertake any small work, and that none but God himself could with ease accomplish any great thing whatsoever. These arguments prevailed with the commanders. So Titus gave orders that the army should be distributed to their several shares of this work; and indeed **there now came upon the soldiers a certain divine fury**, so that they did not only part the whole wall that was to be built among them, nor did only one legion strive with another, but the lesser divisions of the army did the same; insomuch that each soldier was ambitious to please his decurion, each decurion his centurion, each centurion his tribune, and the ambition of the tribunes was to please their superior commanders, while Caesar himself took notice of and rewarded the like contention in those commanders; for he went round about the works many times every day, and took a view of what was done.Now the length of **this wall was forty furlongs**, one only abated. Now at this wall without were erected thirteen places to keep garrison in, whose circumferences, put together, amounted to ten furlongs; **the whole was completed in three days**; so that what would naturally have required some months was done in so short an interval as is incredible. When Titus had therefore encompassed the city with this wall, and put garrisons into proper places, he went round the wall, at the first watch of the night, and observed how the guard was kept; the second watch he allotted to Alexander; the commanders of legions took the third watch. They also cast lots among themselves who should be upon the watch in the night time, and who should go all night long round the spaces that were interposed between the garrisons.

As Josephus was a Jew, there is no suggested Christian bias. In fact, it is generally viewed he was an accurate scribe of events. All these events, predicted specifically in Matthew, but also in other places in all the other Gospels, were far too real and of the moment if these works had been written post the Destruction of the Temple.

Matthew must be dated before this. When we examine Mark's Gospel in the next section, we will see that a date before A.D. 60 makes sense for Mark, which would then put Matthew somewhere in the mid to late 50s A.D., at the latest, but it could also possibly be only a few years away from the death of Christ, in the 30s.

We should also keep in mind, that the core part of the book known to us as 2 (or 4) Esdras (Ezra), was written before the end of the 1st Century AD. Whist it appears in the

Greek Orthodox bible, the Vulgate considered it apocryphal, so is not as well known to the majority of Christians. Interestingly the opening words of the Catholic Requiem Mass are taken from this book, "Grant them eternal rest O Lord." Leaving that aside, it did not make the Catholic or Protestant Canon. It repeatedly makes reference or alludes to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. It was a book whose key purpose was to remind the Jews, that despite their total subjection to the Romans, like their history with subjection to Babylon, if they kept to the Torah, the great eagle beast of Rome would eventually fall, to the benefit of the Jews. Naturally writing post the destruction of the Temple, and being a thoroughly Jewish text, no mention of Jesus and his prophecy of the Temple destruction is made. As it is an event in the past, it is certainly one of the main focuses of this book. If this was remiss from one of the Gospels, then maybe there is a case for dating post the Temple demise, but missing from all of them? No, I think that requires an unwarranted leap of faith based on flimsy evidence. Whilst the destruction of the Temple quote in John (quoted in the section on John in this chapter) is traditionally viewed as referring to the resurrection of Jesus in three days, I do personally believe it can also be read as the other three Gospels writers report: a prediction of the actual destruction of the Temple as well as His own bodily resurrection. If John, or any of the Synoptics were to write post 70 AD, with 2 Esdras being in circulation, it would be even more strange that this catastrophic event is not referenced. This is more evidence for an early dating of Matthew and indeed all the Gospels.

Mark

Up to the time of modern criticism (roughly, the last two hundred years), Matthew was considered the first Gospel. Mark is now considered the first Gospel. Mark is written as a moving drama with the sayings and teachings of Jesus set within the action depicted. Mark cuts straight to the chase of Jesus' ministry, then immediately proceeds to the Passion.

Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, the Muratorian Canon, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Jerome – the earliest of Christian writers, from the first to the fourth century, all attest to Mark as the author of the Gospel that appears under his name, and

that he is also the 'John Mark' of Acts, companion of Paul the apostle. He founded the Coptic Church, and this is how Coptic Christians understand it to this day.

Theologically, Mark's opening words define Christ as the 'Son of God' alongside his commitment to write an account of the good news of Christ. Four other times the title 'Son of God' is affirmed in Mark's Gospel. As in other gospels, Jesus is also recorded using the title 'Son of man', emphasising His human connectivity. Mark testifies that Jesus came as 'The Redeemer' as He declares He is the 'ransom for many'. The fullest exposition of The Passion narrative of all the Gospels appears in Mark.

Mark appears to be focusing on the Gentile reader due to the absence of repeated references to Jewish laws and practices. Mark is also happy to point out in detail the Apostles' lack of understanding of Christ, his family's rejection of His teachings, and the often violent responses made to Him. One can only assume Mark omitted the Birth narrative and the early history of Christ because Matthew already had developed these in his Gospel and considered them widely known. Luke then focuses on Mary's genealogy later in his Gospel as the male (adopted) line would have been presumed as known and Matthew had covered it in full.

For the Gentile audience, Mark explains Palestinian customs, whereas one can assume a native Jew would be fully cognisant of these. He translates Aramaic phrases into Greek. There is also a strong argument to suggest Mark wrote for a Roman audience. Bishop Papias of Hierapolis, a contemporary of John's, says that Mark was Peter's interpreter:

'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 normal or chronological 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 especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictional into the statements'.⁷

Peter's life ended in Rome with martyrdom in A.D. 64. Irenaeus, one or two generations later, writes that Mark wrote after the death of Peter — although the Greek word he uses, translated, could mean that Peter had departed the place where Mark was

⁷ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.14–16

writing. Clement of Alexandria, however, says it was written while Peter was still alive in Rome. The reference in 1 Peter shows Mark's connection with Peter in Rome, if we assume Rome is 'Babylon'. The use of Mark as a Gospel is evidenced by the testimonies from 1 Clement (last 1st Century) and The Shepherd of Hermas (early 2nd century), both of whom are heavily associated with Rome. Mark died in A.D. 68 in Alexandria, pulled by a rope around his neck until he was dead by pagans who resented his teachings. Therefore we have an end date for the latest writing of this Gospel.

'John Mark' is mentioned in the New Testament in Acts (three times) and as 'Mark' in Acts, Colossians, 2 Timothy, Philemon and 1 Peter. This links Mark to both Peter and Paul and situates him in the Roman area in the 50s or early 60s A.D. Acts can't have been written later than A.D. 62 as it stops with Paul in prison, yet does not inform us of the outcome. Large parts of Acts were about Paul, so it would seem very odd if it was completed any later.

The Church Father Origen (A.D. 182 to A.D. 254) tell us as follows:

'The second is by Mark, who composed it according to the instructions of Peter, who in his Catholic epistle acknowledges him as a son, saying, "The church that is at Babylon elected together with you, salutes you, and so does Marcus, my son". And the third by Luke, the Gospel commended by Paul, and composed for Gentile converts. Last of all that by John'.⁸

All modern scholars dismiss this statement and slavishly follow the modern convention of placing Mark first. I have no idea why.

It is reasonable to assume Mark wrote his Gospel before the siege of Jerusalem, as he refers to the 'abomination of desolation', when the Temple would be defiled:

'So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains'. Mark 13:14

The Jews did not like any form of symbolism as it was a potential idol, subject to false worship. Historically at the time of John the Baptist and Jesus, it was clear that the non display of Roman idols was observed by the Romans in key Jewish areas.

⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25.3-6

Josephus informs us;

1. That historically, the Governor of Syria Vitellius was petitioned by the Jewish leadership to take his forces around Judea, when he was going to fight the Arabian king, Aretas. The Governor complied with this request.
2. The Roman authorities, post the capture of the City placed their ensigns above the eastern Temple gate and sacrificed to them. As per Mark 13:14, “standing where it ought not.”

Yet it was predicted that this would not be observed at the destruction of the Temple. Once more, this would suggest a pre 70 AD writing.

Mark may well have been locating this prophesy well into the future; however, if the Temple of A.D. 70 had been destroyed, and if Mark was writing after this, I can't see why he would not reference such a trauma to avoid any confusion. I would also have thought it is reasonable to place the writing of Mark before the fire of A.D. 64 for the same reasons Matthew must be placed there, before the fall of Jerusalem and in the Peter/Paul Roman period. However, it might be possible to get an even tighter time line on this, as it was reported that Peter went to “another place” in Acts 12:17 in 42 AD, 12 years post the death of Christ. This location has a long tradition of being Rome for the start of his 25 year episcopate. By 57 AD with Paul's letter to the Romans, for sure we know that Rome has a well established Church. Justin Martyr tells us how this episcopate started in the 2nd year of Claudius.

Paul was expelled in 49 AD (as were all Jewish Christians), so it might well have been time for Mark to write down what he had been told. Mark was then off doing Missionary work with Paul and Barnabas, so I would think a pre 45 dating for Mark would be reasonable.

J O Callaghan⁹ in 1972 reported that he has discovered Mark 6:52 (parts of it) in one tiny fragment of scroll, 7Q5, in cave 7 of the Dead Sea Scroll finds. The Jury is still out on this tiny fragment, but no other part of the Old Testament or New fits it, which means

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/José_O%27Callaghan_Mart%C3%ADnez

this fragment must be taken as potentially good evidence to support a pre 68 AD dating of Mark as the Caves were physically cut off then. The fragment marked 7Q4 is very similar to 1 Timothy 3:16-4:3 and 7Q8 would seem to be part of James 1:23.

Thus, if the early Church Fathers were wrong, and if Mark was the first Gospel writer, I find no evidence to usurp the Church tradition of the following 1,800 years. This tradition, starting with Matthew, would still imply a late dating for Mark around the late mid 40's to the late 50s A.D.

Luke

This Gospel is the longest book in the New Testament. It starts with John the Baptist and some background about the young Christ, commonly called the Infancy Narratives. It ends with the Ascension, which is absent from Matthew and Mark.

Luke might be called a 'people person' (in contrast to Matthew, whose focus is on the Kingdom). As such, Luke includes many *named* personalities: cousin Elizabeth, the sisters Mary and Martha, the tax collector Zacchaeus, Cleopas and Zacharias, for example. He is keen to include social outcasts like the repenting robber, the prodigal son, the two debtors and the publican and, of course, the Samaritans whom Christ accepts via his parable of the Good Samaritan (as opposed to the contemporary Jewish tendency to shun them).

Thirteen women appear in the Gospel of Luke, two in relation to parables in which they are involved in much activity, and named women were with Jesus during His Passion and Resurrection. Social rituals, such as dinners involving breaking bread with people, are woven into Luke's testimony. The foolish rich are contrasted with the humble (and worthy) poor. Luke's nine prayers contain two which are unique to his Gospel. Luke is positive: there is much rejoicing in his Gospel. He also records what we know as 'the three Canticles': the Magnificat, the Benedictus and the Nunc Dimittis.

As I have mentioned before, Luke set out 'to write an orderly account', the implication being that he would be factual. It was not written specifically for a Jewish audience, as it is not replete with culturally specific Jewish material. Rather, it is concerned with explaining events and is written for a much broader audience than just the Jews in the Palestine area. Luke was not an eyewitness to all the events he reports,

as he states he got his information from others who were 'eyewitnesses and ministers of the word'. This information suggests he was in touch with first-hand witnesses of the events he reported. Early Christian Fathers and their works, The Muratorian Canon, the anti-Marcionite Prologue to Luke, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Tertullian all support Luke as the author of this Gospel in his name, and also the book of Acts.

As Luke's Gospel was accepted into the Canon, there is no debate about accepting Acts as well. In addition, as I mentioned when attempting to date Mark, both Luke and Acts are addressed to the same man: Theophilus. Acts refers to the first book which we can deduce as being the Gospel of Luke: 'The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach'. Acts 1:1

This suggests that it is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. Acts also starts where the Gospel stops. Whilst Luke may not have witnessed all the Gospel events, he writes in many passages in Acts as 'we', suggesting he was a companion of the apostle Paul. Other travelling companions are specifically mentioned by name and so can be put out of the frame as the author and travelling companion, leaving only Luke as a possible author. Paul, in Colossians 4:14, does refer to Luke as the 'beloved physician'. His Greek is that of an educated man of the time, adding further support to Lucan authorship of the Gospel.

Over the last two centuries, the conventional thinking about when the Gospel of Luke was written runs something like this:

1. Luke used Mark (assumption); therefore he must be post-Mark.
2. The earliest this could have been written would be the late 60s A.D., after the death of Peter. We have Irenaeus suggesting he wrote after Peter — which could mean after his death, or after his teaching ministry.
3. It follows that Luke's reference to Jerusalem's being surrounded by armies indicates that he knew what had happened in A.D. 70 — that is, about the destruction of the Temple and the suppressing of Jerusalem.

From this we may deduce that Luke's Gospel was written in the late 80s A.D. or after. However, careful reading shows he is talking about an event that is close to happening; for this reason alone a date before A.D. 70 makes more sense. Indeed, if

Luke was written before Acts (A.D. 60-62), a date for the Gospel in the late 50s A.D. is in order.

It is interesting to note that Eusebius reports in HE 3:32 that prior to A.D. 70 Christian residents of Jerusalem were packing their bags and moving to Pella.¹⁰ Christ was prophetic in this matter, as He was with the destruction of the Temple: all three synoptic Gospels report this, as does John. Matthew links it to the prophecy of Daniel. Luke links it to a specific military event, stripped of its Old Testament connotations, giving further support to the idea that this Gospel was a work made for gentiles. If Matthew was cribbing from Mark, he would not have alluded to the Book of Daniel as prophecy, but he would actually attribute it as prophecy fulfilled, in the way he does with other Old Testament sayings. His Temple narrative goes like this:

‘And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh’. Luke 21:20

Furthermore:

‘Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her’. Luke 21:21

Verses 22-24 graphically detail the fate of the people in a Masada-styled ending. It is clear, then, that Luke was writing before A.D. 70. Luke tells us of the fulfillment of Agabu’s prophecy of famine in Acts 11:28, but does not mention the destruction of the Temple. It would seem strange to mention one prophet’s vision and note its fulfillment, but not that of Jesus and the Temple Destruction, unless of course it had not occurred yet.

Acts, Luke’s second book, ends with Paul’s first Roman imprisonment, which suggests an early 60s composition, placing the Gospel of Luke either in the 50s or the first years of the 60s. Together with the Temple references, it’s fair to say that the earlier dating is far more likely than contemporary scholarship suggests.

¹⁰ ‘But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men’.

John

Irenaeus is the first to name John as the author of the Gospel in his name. Eusebius, in *Church Histories*, says he learnt of this from Polycarp,¹¹ a direct contemporary of John's. It was written in Ephesus, where John resided until Trajan's time. No other Church Father disputes his authorship. We have no reason to disbelieve that John is the authoritative and only author of this Gospel.

In Chapter XIX of *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius comments that John, being aware of the other Gospels, writes a 'spiritual gospel'. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, a direct contemporary of John's. In *Against Heresies* he writes:

'Afterwards John the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on His Breast,—he again put forth his gospel, while he abode in Ephesus in Asia'.¹²

John is often talked about as a Greek-influenced writer, since he presents abstract themes such as 'light', 'life', 'love', 'truth', and 'abiding love'. The pre-existent Logos, possessing the nature of God Himself and introduced at the outset of the Prologue of this Gospel, sets the scene for what follows. Indeed, it is commonly suggested that John picked up his Greek at a later date, while he was living in Ephesus, after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. At first blush, his introduction of the Logos is unmistakably Hellenistic; however, certain of The Qumran discoveries show a Jewish familiarity with concepts described above, such as light and truth.

So it is not inconceivable that John was likewise acquainted with some of the nuggets of Hellenistic wisdom of the time. Anyone who has read the mainly Solomaic Proverbs cannot fail to observe the connection with the 'wisdom' concept. In fact, we can add to that the whole of the 'wisdom literature' which was part and parcel of Jewish culture for an entire millennium. The suggestion that John the Apostle, as an uneducated fisherman, couldn't have written this Gospel would mean he was totally oblivious to his own traditions. In other words, we would be forced to assume he was a dullard. Why Christ would have hand picked him to be an Apostle will always remain a mystery – but it becomes even more mysterious if John was totally blind to his own cultural history.

¹¹ <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250104.htm> (Book 4, chapter 14)

¹² *The Five Books of S. Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons Against Heresies*, translated by The Rev John Keeble, M.A., James Parker and Co, Rivingtons, London, Oxford and Cambridge, 1872.

All of this should not overshadow John's roots in understanding the Old Testament Jewish prophecies that Christ came to fulfil. There is, in fact, much Jewishness in John. So he views the Jews as rejecting part of themselves when they rejected Him (John 1:11). It seems his testimony is as much Jewish in its focus as it is Gentile. Inside the Temple, John says Christ placed His authority over it in 2:16, and the Jewish Leader Nicodemus in 3:2 recognized Him for this reason. Although, of course, there are many other parts of this Gospel where Jesus is rejected: in 5:39, for example, where He seems content not to assert his authority (the Jewishness is clear). The feeding of the 5,000 is an obvious allusion to the Old Testament bread from heaven that fed Israel in the wilderness. John, in 7:38, has Christ appealing to scripture for His authority – which would be irrelevant for a gentile. In Matthew as in John, Christ comes into Jerusalem on an ass (12:15) in fulfilment of the Zechariah 9:9 prophecy. John, in 19:36, is the only one of the Gospel writers to reference the Old Testament that none of His bones would be broken, usually a part of crucifixion (see the prediction in Psalm 34:20, written 1,000 years previously). Jesus calls on the authority of Abraham, who was glad to see His day, in 8:56. Finally, John 3:14-15 shows Jesus using a Mosaic event to prefigure Jesus' death and Resurrection. There is a strong Jewish awareness and Old Testament thread to this Gospel.

Fundamentally, this Gospel is all about the ministry of Christ, spiritually interpreted. As in The Acts of the Apostles, John, in 7:39, states that the Spirit will come after the glorification of Jesus – or, simply put, after His death – in order to direct the Apostles. In the farewell discourses (chapters 14-16), the Spirit is named as the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, the Counsellor or Advocate or Comforter, with Christ indwelling the believer. He/it (the Spirit) will be witness to Christ and teach his followers to preach His sayings, guiding His people towards the truth. John's focus is to show the role of the Spirit.

John writes in the first person: 'we beheld his glory', for example, which would suggest direct witness testimony. Also, in 21:24-25, he claims to be a true witness: 'This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true'. There are specific details that suggest an eyewitness account, such as identifying the 153 fish caught. There is no hint of an allegory here but the reporting of a specific event. He records specific details, such as 'barley' loaves in 6:9, the 'odour-filled' house in 12:3, Peter's 'beckoning' in 13:24, the reaction to the arrest of

Jesus by the soldiers in 28:6 and the weight of spices used in the embalming in 19:39. Overall, John shows remarkable knowledge of the reactions of other disciples in 2:11, 4:27, 6:19, 12:16 and 13:22 and of Christ Himself in 2:11, 24 and 6:15, 61 and 13:1. This points to John's being there physically.

John uses his own terms to enable people to believe in Jesus Christ, so that, by believing, they may have life in his name. This is an evangelistic purpose. John uses the Jewish terms 'Messiah' and 'anointed one', suggesting he was still interested in speaking directly to his fellow Jews, but the Hebrew/Greek philosophical usage suggests his evangelical mission was cross-border. Naturally, this would have chimed well with residents of Ephesus, where he was residing when writing.

In addition, John's father, Zebedee, had servants, implying a modicum of wealth, which would usually indicate some education. Why, then, would we presume John to be a cultural ignoramus? And why assume a fisherman 2,000 years ago was just a humble, simple chap with a rod and a boat? Could he not be the equivalent of a prosperous merchant of today? His status, certainly with servants, would have signified he was one of the prime drivers of the Galilean economy. Over a period of decades John may well have educated himself to a stage beyond that which he had gained when he was chosen by Christ, prior to his move to Ephesus, where there was already a Christian community established by at least the mid-50s, and possibly before, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians while 'tarrying' there (16:8). So I strongly question any who dispute his authorship by disparaging his knowledge of Greek as too primitive; I also question any who say he was exclusively Hellenistic and therefore incapable of being the fisherman John the Apostle, handpicked for the task by Christ.

Confusion concerning authorship arises when Papias describes John as 'John the Elder'. Could it be Papias was simply referring to a venerable man who was indeed John the Apostle, having just been referred to as 'John' in his younger life? By Papias' time John was very elderly indeed. In the Second and Third Epistles, John does introduce himself as John the Elder. As these letters were written much later, this may also explain why he was referred to in such a way, and it shows a degree of respect for his age and status as an Apostle. For me, both nomenclatures denote just one person. I find no reason to doubt non-apostolic authorship.

Some say The Gospel of St John could be interpreted as an-anti-Gnostic tract, as Gnostics developed a view that God entered the man Jesus at Baptism and left moments prior to his death. But this would place the Gospel after the date of the extant papyrus copies we have (see below), as it would need to be late second century with the earliest extant copy of John dating to potentially as early as 110 A.D..

That said, belief in the Deity as immaterial and separate from the flesh, though appearing to us in corporeal form, may have been in the developmental stage. This hypothesis is called 'Docetic Gnosticism'. John repeatedly emphasises the human Jesus: being *weary* and *thirsty* in 4:6-7, *weeping* at the grave of Lazarus in 11:35, having real *thirst* on the cross in 19:28, and in 19:38 his real body flowing with blood and water. This stands in contrast to the concept of the pre-existing Logos ('the Word') and could be John's early contradiction of such an emerging viewpoint.

John also puts flesh on the bone in places where the Synoptics failed to do so. Philip and Andrew, for example, are named in the feeding of the multitude in 6:7. The Mary anointing Jesus in 12:3 is shown to be the sister of Lazarus. A name is given to the soldier whom Peter struck in 18:10. Much as we can see a large amount of harmonisation with the Synoptic Gospels there are many verbal differences between John and the Synoptics which suggest John was not taking from the three prior Gospels but expanding on them. It will remain a mystery as to why he omitted such tracts as the Virgin Birth, Baptism, Temptations, Transfiguration, demonic expulsion, parables and agony on the Cross, other than to say he may not have thought it necessary to do so. These were, after all, well documented in the other Gospels.

Nevertheless, the composition of the Gospel of John assumes a certain pre-existing knowledge of the Synoptic Gospels and, indeed, of Jewish wisdom teachings. This leads, I believe erroneously, to the suggestion that John must have used them to compose his own. He refers to the 'twelve' as if all readers will know what he means. He introduces non-historical themes, as we have seen, leading people to suggest that these innovations were proof that he was not a historical eyewitness and not that he wanted to build on what had already been said, despite his specific eyewitness comments.

Most scholars date the writing of John between A.D. 90 and A.D. 110. What is known as 'The Ryland's Papyrus of 457, The Gospel of John fragment', contains John verses 18:31-33. This hard evidence should put an end to any later dating. Clement of Alexandria suggests John wrote after the Synoptics. The testimony that John lived until

Trajan's time places John as being alive until the last decade of the first century. This would seem to be the latest possible date if it is to be held, as it should, that the Apostle John was this Gospel's author. John's Temple narratives would then place his writing before A.D. 70:

'So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

'Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up".

"Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

'But He was speaking of the temple of His body'. John 2:18-21.¹³

The physical body of Christ went through death and was resurrected in three days, as predicted by Christ himself. The Spirit lives on and new worship takes place not in the Temple of old, but in the new Church, which still, to this day, glorifies Him. The Herodian rebuilding of the Temple took 46 years, and only part of its outside foundations, the 'Wailing Wall', survived this destruction. So actually both events – the Resurrection in three days and the total destruction of the Temple – did take place. Now, if John were writing after A.D. 70 would he not have recognised the double meaning here, namely that Jesus made both predictions and that they had both come true?

Thus there is a good argument to be made that even John is written before the Temple destruction. The similarities with Paul – who I have established incorporated at least a quarter of his verses with material deduced from the other Gospel writers, and he was writing largely in the 50s – could well place John in the 50s.

As Paul builds on the understanding of what Christ taught, John does the same for that which the Synoptics testified. John adds a philosophical turn of understanding and phraseology that is unique to him, as well as some new practical detail, to the existing Gospel accounts. He wrote at about the same time as the other Gospel writers but, like Paul, interwove his deeper reflections about the significance of the events witnessed. In

¹³ All of the Gospel writers note the prophetic words concerning the Temple destruction. This was common currency as Acts mentions it as well (the reference is to the Temple) at the 'trial' of Stephen: "They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us"". Acts 6:13-14

this respect, even if we conclude that John was the latest Gospel writer, the terminal date for his Gospel would be before A.D. 70. I find his writing to be more in empathy with Paul. Both he and Paul are, in reality, the master builders of the start of the Christian Church. In one sense, they can both claim to be first apostles to establish the Church and last to write.

One other curious piece of hotly contested archaeological evidence also underscores an earlier writing of the four Gospels. What we know today as the "Unknown Gospel, or more formally as the Egerton Papyrus 2 was Bought by the British Museum in 1934. Palaeography establishes the "Unknown Gospel" to 150 AD, so some 40 odd years after the earliest Gospel Fragment, that of John 18:31-33 & 37-38 commonly known as the Papyrus Rylands 52. Parts from all the 4 canonical Gospels are mentioned¹⁴. That these writings never got traction in and of themselves gives us good grounds to believe that by the very early stages of the start of the second century (if not from the closing stages of the first century), the canon of the four Gospels was widely attested and new additions were not being accepted, even when they were clearly closely aping the original four. In section II, the quote from Isaiah (29:13) parallels the same quote in Matthew (15:8-9) and Mark (7:6-7), who seem to take it from the Septuagint, but not completely accurately. This would seem to imply that the author of this Egerton Papyrus 2 may well have copied from these Gospel authors.

In conclusion, the evidence is persuasive that all Gospels were written prior to A.D. 70. Moreover, there is a strong case to argue that all were composed between the 30s and mid-60s. All the writers were direct witnesses to the events, or so close to other direct witnesses that they could ask them for their testimonies. All were writing via

¹⁴ Section 1 has a lot of verbal parallels with the Gospel of John (from fragment 1, the verso 5:39, 5:45, 9:29, from the recto 8:59, 10:31, 7:30, 7:44, 10:39) . Sections II and III are incidents that are reported in the Synoptics with some deletions and some add-ons. Section II has the following verses, Matthew 8:2-4, Mark 1:40-44, Luke 5:12-14, Luke 17:14. Section III from fragment 2, has the following verses John 3:2, 10:25, Matthew 22:17-18, Mark 12:14-15, Luke 20:22-23, 6:46, 18:19, Matthew 15:7-9, Mark 7:6-7. Section IV is unrecorded by any of the Gospels.

their own lens and for their own target audience in order for readers to get the most out of what they wrote.

All testify honestly. In considering this, at all points I ask myself: what was in it for these writers? What did they have to gain by writing these things? It was certainly not material wealth, social status or acceptance into society, but rather almost certain ostracism, beatings, stonings, torture and ultimately with the exception of John, who did seem to live long and die of old age . So they might just have been honestly testifying to what they believed as a result of their witnessing, shocking as the supernatural parts may be and hard, very hard indeed, for the mind to accept, let alone understand fully.

Did Christ die? Was He raised from the Dead? This is the next area I examine in detail, as much of Christian faith falls away if this does not hold.