**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

**Sermon**

**The Incarnation – Part VIII**

***Harmony of The Gospels of Jesus Christ***

**January 21st, In the Year of Our Lord 2024**

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted – New American Standard Bible)

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The term “Harmony” means to bring into consonance or accord as in musical instruments joining together to make a song. In application to the New Testament, it is the harmony of the written and spiritual components and structure of words with respect to the composition and progression of the story of Jesus Christ. God is the orchestra leader commanding all the parts to move in one successive march through history. And like, within an orchestra. . . all the instruments have different parts and come in at different times, and yet, by themselves, are not complete in a musical arrangement that is being played. And so, in unison, each of the four Gospels of God, as Jesus, the Christ, is an assembly of words harmonizing to tell an eternal story reaching out through the centuries with the Good News that humanity has a Savior.

As we learn about the life of Jesus Christ, we are made aware that the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) were written before 70 A.D. with the Gospel of John written in the last decade of the 1st c. in about 95 A.D. The Gospels are the historical primary source documents from the ancient world that witness the life and teachings of God, as Jesus, the Christ. These letters bring forth the reality in the fulfillment of several hundred Old Testament Messianic prophecies.

Two of the Gospels letters are written by eyewitnesses. . . Matthew and John. Numerous early Church Fathers and leaders document that Mark’s Gospel source is the apostle Peter who was an eyewitness. And like Mark. . . Luke received his primary accounts from Peter, and, in addition, Paul, about the life of Jesus. Mark has also been referred to as John. This is why he is referred to as John-Mark. We see that all these men were together in the mission field. In the book of Acts, we learn the details of these relationships.

**Acts 12:12** And when he [Peter] realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

**Acts 12:25** And Barnabas and Saul [Paul] returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

**Acts 15:37-39 37** Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. 38 But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39 And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

**Colossians 4:10** Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you, his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him);

**Colossians 4:14** Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.

**2 Timothy 4:11** Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.

**Philemon 1:23-25** 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

**1 Peter 5:13** She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.

**Circle of Relationships of New Testament Writers**

It is worthy to note that the circle of relationships surrounding the four Gospels letters are the same men who wrote the vast majority of the New Testament. We have Paul, Peter, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all in a relationship for years. Matthew, Peter and John were one of the original twelve (12) disciples who were eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus. Paul wrote thirteen letters. Peter wrote two letters. Matthew and Mark wrote one each. Luke wrote what we consider two letters (Luke/Acts). And John is attributed to five letters. So, of the twenty-seven letters. . . twenty-four are written from this circle of relationships. This leaves James, Jude and the book of Hebrews off this list. But James and Jude are the half-brothers of Jesus and an eyewitness to Jesus’s life. This leaves one book off the list of known New Testament writers. . . Hebrews.

**Dating the New Testament**

**There are two dates that need to be known regarding dating the New Testament. The death of the Apostle John (98 A.D. – 101A.D.) and the Roman destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D.**

Now historians date John’s death to as late as 101 A.D based upon the writings of Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius. Online: Christianity Stack Exchange. <https://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/83754/what-is-the-basis-for-the-belief-that-the-apostle-john-died-around-ad-100>

There is a highly reasonable conclusion used to estimate the date of the three Synoptic Gospels. All three chronicle Jesus’ prophetic declaration that the Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. In fact, the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 AD. There is not any mention of Jesus’ prophecy coming true in the Three Synoptic Gospels, and, surely, the writers would have recorded the event. They all write as if the Jewish revolt of 66 A.D. had not occurred. I post a *Blue Letter Bible* website for a good source detailing the historical dating for the writing of the first three Gospels.

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/stewart\_don/faq/historical-accuracy-of-the-bible/question10-when-were-the-gospels-written.cfm

It is crucial to remember that every New Testament letter was written before the close of the 1st century. Most were written between the years 45 – 70 A.D. Considering that Jesus was crucified in 33 A.D., we have a remarkable record of the life of Jesus that was chronicled very recent to His Resurrection being seventeen (17) to thirty-seven (37) years from that time. Within forty years from the crucifixion, we have all three Synoptic Gospels written. In addition to the three Synoptic Gospels, by 70 A.D., we have Paul’s thirteen letters, Peter’s two, Luke’s book of Acts, Hebrews, James and Jude. That leaves John’s five letters to be added in the last decade of the 1st c. Therefore, twenty-two (22) of the twenty-seven (27) New Testament books were written before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. It is a miracle that we have any New Testament letters considering the life-threatening religious and political environment of the 1st century. Paul and Peter were martyred by 68 A.D. These two men wrote fifteen (15) New Testament letters.

The chart below lists the date of ancient documents and the date of earliest copies known.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Author2** | **Date Written** | **Earliest Copy** | **Approximate Time Span between original & copy** | **Number of Copies** | **Accuracy of Copies** |
| **Lucretius** | died 55 or 53 B.C. |  | 1100 yrs | 2 | ---- |
| **Pliny** | 61-113 A.D. | 850 A.D. | 750 yrs | 7 | ---- |
| **Plato** | 427-347 B.C. | 900 A.D. | 1200 yrs | 7 | ---- |
| **Demosthenes** | 4th Cent. B.C. | 1100 A.D. | 800 yrs | 8 | ---- |
| **Herodotus** | 480-425 B.C. | 900 A.D. | 1300 yrs | 8 | ---- |
| **Suetonius** | 75-160 A.D. | 950 A.D. | 800 yrs | 8 | ---- |
| **Thucydides** | 460-400 B.C. | 900 A.D. | 1300 yrs | 8 | ---- |
| **Euripides** | 480-406 B.C. | 1100 A.D. | 1300 yrs | 9 | ---- |
| **Aristophanes** | 450-385 B.C. | 900 A.D. | 1200 | 10 | ---- |
| **Caesar** | 100-44 B.C. | 900 A.D. | 1000 | 10 | ---- |
| **Livy** | 59 BC-AD 17 | ---- | ??? | 20 | ---- |
| **Tacitus** | circa 100 A.D. | 1100 A.D. | 1000 yrs | 20 | ---- |
| **Aristotle** | 384-322 B.C. | 1100 A.D. | 1400 | 49 | ---- |
| **Sophocles** | 496-406 B.C. | 1000 A.D. | 1400 yrs | 193 | ---- |
| **Homer (Iliad)** | 900 B.C. | 400 B.C. | 500 yrs | 643 | 95% |
| **New Testament** | 1st Cent. A.D. (50-100 A.D. | 2nd Cent. A.D.  (c. 130 A.D. f.) | less than 100 years | 5600 | 99.5% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

You can see from the above chart that the New Testament has a superior manuscript evidence and is 99.5 % accurate. This data is agreed upon by leading critics.

The above and below chart identifying the earliest copies of the Gospels.

Manuscript evidence for superior New Testament reliability

Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry (Norman Geisler)

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|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Important Manuscript Papyri** | **Contents** | **Date Original Written** | **MSS Date** | **Approx. Time Span** | **Location** |
| **p52** (John Rylands Fragment)3 | [John 18:31-33](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/John%2018.31-33),[37-38](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/John%2018.37-38) | circa 96 A.D. | circa 125 A.D. | 29 yrs | John Rylands Library, Manchester, England |
| **P46**  *(Chester Beatty Papyrus)* | [Rom. 5:17-6:3](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/Rom.%205.17-6.3),[5-14](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/Rom%205.5-14); [8:15-25](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/Rom%208.15-25), [27-35](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/Rom%208.27-35), [37-9](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/Rom%208.37-9):32; 10:1-11, 22, 24-33, 35-14:8,9-15:9, 11-33; 16:1-23, 25-27; Heb.; 1 & 2 Cor., Eph., Gal., Phil., Col.; [1 Thess. 1:1](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/1%20Thess.%201.1),[9-10](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/1%20Thess%201.9-10); [2:1-3](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/1%20Thess%202.1-3); [5:5-9](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/1%20Thess%205.5-9), [23-28](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/1%20Thess%205.23-28) | 50's-70's | circa 200 A.D. | Approx. 150 yrs | Chester Beatty Museum, Dublin & Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan library |
| **P66**  *(Bodmer Papyrus)* | [John 1:1-6:11](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/John%201.1-6.11),[35-14](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/John%201.35-14):26; fragment of 14:29-21:9 | 70's | circa 200 A.D. | Approx. 130 yrs | Cologne, Geneva |
| **P67** | [Matt. 3:9](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/Matt.%203.9),[15](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/Matt%203.15); [5:20-22](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/Matt%205.20-22), [25-28](http://bible.logos.com/passage/nasb/Matt%205.25-28) |  | circa 200 A.D. | Approx. 130 yrs | Barcelona, Fundacion San Lucas Evangelista, P. Barc.1 |

**Let’s look at Mark and Luke. They were not Disciples. So Why Them?**

We see that Mark and Luke are referred to a number of times in five books of the New Testament. Luke wrote the book of Acts, Peter wrote 1 Peter, and Paul wrote Colossians, 2 Timothy and Philemon. In addition, there are numerous early Church Fathers who identified this same Mark as the one who wrote the book ascribed to his name, because Mark spent years with Paul and Peter. Therefore, he learned the story of Jesus and wrote the book bearing his name. There are many online articles detailing the identity of Mark and his contributions to the early Church. Mark is also called *Mark the Evangelist* who founded the first Christian church in Alexandria, Egypt. https://overviewbible.com/john-mark/

Regarding Luke, he was believed to be born in a Gentile home and was not one of those who were from the circumcision (Colossians 4:11, 14). This is important because Luke was the only person who wrote a New Testament book who was not a Jew. We know that Luke was a fellow worker with Paul (2 Timothy 4:11), and Paul calls Luke the “beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14). In Paul’s letter to Philemon (24), he is mentioned. Therefore, Luke was an eyewitness to much of Paul’s missionary years recorded in the book of Acts. There are many passages in the book of Acts indicating that the author (Luke) is the “we” who personally records what he saw (Acts 16, 20, 21, 27 and 28).

In addition, many early Church sources confirm that the 3rd Gospel was written by Luke: The Muratorian Canon (late 2nd. c.), Irenaeus (late 2nd c.), Tertullian (early 3rd c.), Origen (mid-3rd c.) and Athanasius (4th century). This includes Jerome (4th c.) and Church historian Eusebius (early 4th c.). The earliest manuscript of the Gospel of Luke is dated to about 200 A.D. (P 75). http://glorybooks.org/the-authorship-of-luke-and-why-its-important/

**Harmony of the Gospels** (See attached chart)

Over the centuries, the Gospels have been forensically dissected many times by the leading historians and scholars. You do not have to be a scholar to come to some basic conclusions about the relationships between the Gospels.

1. All were written by men who gave their life for the Christ-centered mission they were called, and they were spiritually compelled to not abandon their call. They all witnessed the Resurrection (except Mark and Luke) or met the Resurrected Jesus, like Paul did. Every New Testament writer died a martyr’s death except the Apostle John. However, John was banished to the island of Patmos to die. He did not die but was released when the Roman government changed administrations.
2. All Gospels chronicle the main facts about the life of Jesus that can justify a person’s decision to surrender their heart to the Lord. His life, mission, teachings and Resurrection are all there.
3. All have been preserved for almost two thousand years without any change in meaning. The leading atheist New Testament critics agree that there is not one foundational teaching of Christianity affected by the numerous scribal errors. The New Testament is rated at ninety-nine (99) percent accurate. Yes, the known few verses added to the book of Mark 16 (verses 9ff), and the opinion that the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) were added. . . have no bearing on God’s eternal message.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

John 3:16

**AMEN**