

## Internal Evidence for the Truth of the Gospels and Acts

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2 Peter 1:16—For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

### *Review of the previous lectures*

“Who Wrote the Gospels?”

- Authenticity and genuineness
- The external evidence strongly indicates that our four Gospels are the genuine works of the people whose names they bear

“External Evidence for the Truth of the Gospels”

- The evidence of Josephus and Tacitus
- The familiarity of the Gospel writers with details of the Palestinian setting and the entire Greco-Roman context for the events of the New Testament

### *Our goals in this lecture*

- \* To review our map of the external and internal evidence bearing on the authenticity of the Gospels
- \* To explore some of the positive internal evidence for the truth of the Gospels; in particular,
- \* To build a cumulative case that the authors of the Gospels were well informed and habitually truthful

Two Questions

1. Why are there four Gospels?
2. Can we tell, by comparing two passages of Scripture with one another, that both are authentic, credible historical records?

The First Natural Answer

We can find passages where two different writers tell the same story, perhaps even in the same words.

(Yes, but ...)

A Skeptical Response

One of the documents might have been copied from the other one.

How can this possibility be ruled out on the basis of internal evidence alone?

### ***Undesigned Coincidences***

Sometimes two works by different authors interlock in a way that would be very unlikely if one of them were copied from the other or both were copied from a common source.

For example, one book may mention in passing a detail that answers some question raised by the other. The two records fit together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

Fictions and forgeries aren't like this.

- Why leave loose ends or raise questions that you do not have to?
- How can you control what other people will write to make it interlock with what you have written?

But we would expect to find such interlocking in authentic, detailed records of the same real events told by different people who knew what they were talking about.

### ***Twelve Undesigned Coincidences***

#### Example #1: Matthew 8:14-16

And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.

If the people believed that Jesus could truly heal the sick, why did they wait until evening to come to Him?

The Explanation: Mark 1:21, 29-32

On the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. ... And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, ... That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons.

The cumulative force of this evidence

One undesigned coincidence might be an accident—like having two unrelated pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fit together, just by chance. But if we discover numerous undesigned coincidences crisscrossing the documents, it becomes ridiculous to insist that they are all just accidental.

#### Example #2: Luke 9:36

And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

Why?

The Explanation: Mark 9:9

And as they were coming down the mountain, [Jesus] charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Mark gives us the command but doesn't say whether they obeyed it; Luke records their obedience but omits the command.

#### Examples #3 and 4: Mark 6:31, 39

The setting for the feeding of the 5,000:

And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass.

The Explanation: John 6:4

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

The weeks just before and after Passover are the growing season in Palestine. At Passover season the roads would be thronged with great crowds of pilgrims.

#### Example #5: Matthew 14:1-2

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, and he said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him."

Why is Herod talking about this matter to his servants? And how would Matthew know what Herod had said to his servants?

The Explanation: Luke 8:3

... and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

Example #6: Matthew 11:21

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."

What mighty works? Nothing Matthew has reported up to this point gives us any clue.

The answer to this is bound up with ...

Example #7: John 6:5

Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?"

Why Philip?

Putting the Pieces Together

Luke 9:10-11—On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. When the crowds learned it, they followed him, ...

John 12:21—So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee ...

Luke doesn't mention Philip in this context at all; John doesn't mention Bethsaida as the setting of the miracle. Only by putting them together can we understand why Jesus speaks to Philip in John 6:5.

The mighty works in Bethsaida: Luke 9:10 ff

Matthew, who often arranges his material thematically rather than chronologically, tells the story of the feeding of the 5,000 in chapter 14. Only by comparing Luke's account do we discover that the feeding actually took place before Jesus pronounced the woes over Bethsaida (Luke 10:13).

Example #8: Mark 14:58, 15:29

"We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'"

...

And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, ...”

Nothing in the Synoptic Gospels provides a pretext for this accusation.

The Explanation: John 2:18-19

So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

John gives us the original statement of Jesus but not its use as an accusation; the Synoptics give us the accusation but not the original statement. Neither of these is copied from the other.

Example #9: John 21:15

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

Why does Jesus ask Peter whether he loves him more than the others do?

The Explanation: Matthew 26:33

Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.”

Matthew records (though John does not) Peter’s boast that he was the most faithful of Jesus’ disciples.

Examples #10 and #11: Luke 23:2-4

And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.”

This sequence of events is completely baffling.

1. The Jews make a grave accusation,
2. Pilate questions Jesus on this very point,
3. Jesus admits to the charge, and
4. Pilate promptly declares him to be innocent!

The Explanation: John 18:33-38

Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” . . . Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. . . . Pilate . . . went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him. . . .”

### *Two Undesigned Coincidences*

In John’s account, Pilate’s question to Jesus seems to come out of nowhere.

Luke gives the accusation but not the full answer; John gives the full answer but not the accusation.

### Example #12: Malchus’s ear

John 18:10 tells us that Peter cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant.

In John 18:36, Jesus tells Pilate, “... If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews.”

Doesn’t cutting off someone’s ear with a sword count as fighting?

### The Explanation: Luke 22:51

But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him.

Peter could not be arrested for the assault, nor Jesus contradicted in his claim, because there was no remaining physical evidence of the struggle.

This talk is the third in a series:

1. Who Wrote the Gospels? (January 23)
2. External Evidence for the Truth of the Gospels (February 13)
3. Internal Evidence for the Truth of the Gospels (February 27)
4. Alleged Contradictions in the Gospels
5. Alleged Historical Errors in the Gospels
6. The Resurrection of Jesus

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