

Why Four Gospels?

Or

Too Good to Be Q¹

The Synoptic Problem

The word synoptic basically means “to see together with a common view” or “giving an account of events from the same point of view or under the same general aspect”.

It is unmistakable that the accounts in *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke* are very similar to one another in content and expression. As a result, they are referred to as the “Synoptic Gospels.”

But while they have many similarities, there are also some pretty distinct differences between them. The question of how to explain the similarities and differences among the Synoptic Gospels is called The Synoptic Problem.

The Q Hypothesis

Starting in the 1800s and on up to today, it seems pretty obvious to many that *Mark* was written first. It is shorter. It lacks features like the birth account of Jesus, or his genealogy. It looks obvious, then, that Matthew and Luke each had access to a copy of *Mark* before them as they composed their own gospels, which were produced to fill in some of the gaps left by *Mark*.

However, there are 200 verses or so that are included in both *Luke* and *Matthew* (with minor variations between them) that are missing in *Mark*. The most natural explanation for this would be that Luke had a copy of *Matthew* at hand when he composed his gospel.

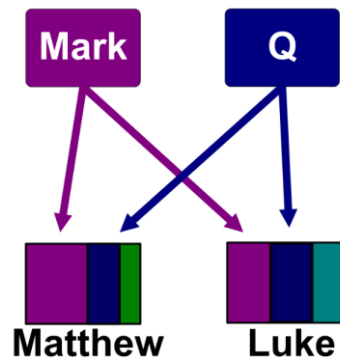
But for reasons outlined below, many of the members of the biblical studies guild in academia have rejected that notion, and decided that there must have been another document — in addition to *Mark* — that both Matthew and Luke made independent use of, and they were ignorant of each other’s writing.

This hypothetical “other document” has been called termed Q, for the German *Quelle*, meaning “source”. The Q hypothesis has also been called the two-source hypothesis, i.e. both Luke and Matthew used two different written² sources in composing their own gospel accounts.

¹¹ This sub-title is drawn from Mark Goodacre, <https://markgoodacre.org/Too%20Good%20to%20be%20Q.pdf>

² Since there are zero manuscript copies of anything resembling Q extant, some have proposed that Q was a well-developed oral tradition.

Two-source Hypothesis



What lies behind the idea of Q that makes it so compelling for some?

This appears to be based on the assumptions that a) miracles are impossible, b) the Resurrection never happened, c) Jesus was an interesting person. That said, d) the earliest Christians had almost no interest in the actual words or life of Jesus, and created no written accounts about him, and were hugely casual about the stories they passed on orally about him.

Creating gospel accounts a century after the death of Jesus, Christians wrote pretty much anything they wanted to about Jesus. Hence, subsequent accounts of the life of Jesus are rather like Rorschach Tests...telling us almost nothing about Jesus, but a good deal about the Christians who invented the stories.

Consequently, Luke didn't write *Luke*, nor Matthew *Matthew*. Rather, these gospels were composed in the second century by a two separate groups of editors who worked in isolation from each other in different locations. Further, the various editors who created *Luke* had no access to *Matthew* as they wrote, nor vice versa.³ So then, in light of the 200 verses that overlap between them, one must hypothesize another source from which both editorial groups copied.

This is the thinking that stands not just behind Q, but of the various quests for "the Historical Jesus". If you assume that we have zero eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus, and that the gospels were written by people who rather made it up as they went along, with little or no actual interest in history,⁴ then you can ask

³ A.H.N. Green-Armytage wrote, in *John Who Saw* (1952), "There is a world — I do not say a world in which all scholars live, but one at any rate into which all of them sometimes stray, and which some of them seem permanently to inhabit — which is not the world in which I live....In my world, almost every book...is written by one author. In that world, almost every book is produced by a committee, and some of them by a whole series of committees. In my world, if I read that Mr. Churchill, in 1935, said that Europe was heading for a disastrous war, I applaud his foresight. In that world no prophecy, however vaguely worded, is ever made except after the event. In my world we say, 'The first world-war took place in 1914-1918.' In that world they say, 'The world-war narrative took shape in the third decade of the twentieth century.'"

⁴ At the end of the day, this translates into little or no actual interest in Jesus himself.

the question “Are there any fragments of genuine knowledge here about what Jesus was like and who he was?”

So it was that in the 1990s, the “Jesus Seminar” had members voting, using black and white marbles, on what they thought were genuine sayings of Jesus, using as a filter the assumption that Jesus was an ordinary mortal, an itinerate Jewish sage and faith healer who performed no “nature miracles” at all, and who never rose from the dead. Once they assumed all that, the Jesus Seminar members said, “What is left? Let’s vote!”

It became an intellectual fashion in the 1800s to say that Homer didn’t write *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey*. Indeed, until Heinrich Schliemann unearthed the archaeological site of ancient Troy, it was alleged by some in academia that Troy never existed at all, and hence there were no Trojan Wars. Similarly, it was said that William Shakespeare wrote few if any of the (so called) Shakespeare plays.

Of this, C.S. Lewis says:

What I can say with more certainty is that that kind of criticism — the kind which discovers that every old book was made by six anonymous authors well provided with scissors and paste and that every anecdote of the slightest interest is unhistorical, has already begun to die out in the studies I know best. The period of arbitrary skepticism about the canon and text of Shakespeare is now over: and it is reasonable to expect that this method will soon be used only on Christian documents and survive only in...the theological colleges.

C.S. Lewis, "Religion Without Dogma?", *God in the Dock*, p. 135.

Problems with Q

There are four levels of problem associated with the Q Hypothesis. First, the unquestioned assumption that lies at the base of assuming *Mark* was written first.

Second, the hypothetical nature of Q itself.

Third, the total dependence of Q on internal, literary evidence, and the comprehensive ignoring of the external, historical evidence provided by early Christians who commented on how the gospel accounts came to be.

Finally, the dismissal of independent archaeological evidence that does not fit the hypothetical Q paradigm.

1. The Unquestioned Assumption at the Heart of Mark Being First

The idea that the shortest Gospel (*Mark* is just half as long as *Luke*) must be first is based on the 19th century philosophical idea of development from the simple

to the complex.⁵ The simple is smaller or shorter, the more complex is larger or longer. The idea that the grammatically improved texts of *Matthew* and *Luke* come after *Mark* is in accord with the nineteenth century theory of progress, according to which there is a tendency for things to get better, not worse; more sophisticated, not more simple.

B.H. Streeter, came close to admitting to his *a priori* assumption when he said in his 1924 book that fairly much defined the Q Hypothesis, “[It is powerful to make use of the] analogy between the method of these investigations and that of the science of Geology.”⁶

Once you decide, then, that *Mark* came first — deciding *a priori* to use Darwinian thinking as the guiding light in biblical interpretation — you *de facto* reject the unanimous reports of early Christian writers that *Matthew* came first, as well as internal literary evidence that *Matthew* came first. Hence, the compositional relationship between the Gospels becomes a “problem.”

2. The Hypothetical Nature of Q

In the first half of the 20th century, eleven different reconstructions of Q were made. But these reconstructions differed so much from each other that not a single verse of Matthew was present in all of them. Nonetheless, when I went to seminary in the 1970s, the existence of Q was casually assumed to be established fact.

Austin Farrer wrote an article 'On Dispensing with Q' back in 1955 with William Farmer raising the same issues in 1964 and Bernard Orchard in 1976. These were, however, more like the rumbling of distant thunder.

Not until the 1990s did the storm of skepticism about Q really break. While acceptance of Q is still the majority view, there is now a significant minority of people who question whether Q ever existed...but it took until 2020 for me to realize this.

Mark Goodacre, professor at Duke University, summarizes Farrer's 1955 article like this:

- The Q hypothesis was formed to answer the question of where Matthew and Luke got their common material if they did not know of each other's gospels. But if Luke had read *Matthew*, the question that Q answers does not arise.
- We have no evidence from early Christian writings that anything like Q ever existed.

⁵ Charles Darwin was so influential with his *Origin of the Species* that many academics tried to apply its basic suppositions to other fields: psychology, politics, biblical studies, etc.

⁶ Streeter, B.H., *The Four Gospels - A Study of Origins, The Manuscript Tradition, Sources, Authorship, & Dates* (London: MacMillan & Co), 1924.

- Christians developed a passion, from day 1, for copying and distributing Scripture. If Q ever existed, it is quite odd that not a single page of it has ever turned up.
- When scholars have attempted to reconstruct Q from the common elements of *Matthew* and *Luke*, the result does not look like a gospel.
 - They don't include an account of Jesus' death and resurrection. But from the earliest Christian writings, we see a strong emphasis on precisely the element that the hypothetical Q omits: Jesus' death and resurrection.
- Finally, there are many passages where the text of *Matthew* and *Luke* agree in making small changes to that of *Mark* (what is called “the double tradition”). This would follow naturally if Luke was using *Matthew*, but is hard to explain if he is using *Mark* and Q.

The most damning critique of the efforts to reconstruct Q come from two authors whose authoring process was “reconstructed” by literary critics during their own lifetimes: C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Here is what Lewis says about the efforts to hypothesize about his creative process.

All this sort of criticism attempts to reconstruct the genesis of the texts it studies; what vanished documents each author used, when and where he wrote, with what purposes, under what influences — the whole *Sitz im Leben* of the text. This is done with immense erudition and great ingenuity. And at first sight it is very convincing. I think I should be convinced by it myself, but that I carry about with me a charm against it. You must excuse me if I now speak for a while of myself. The value of what I say depends on its being first-hand evidence.

What forearms me against all these reconstructions is the fact that I have seen it all from the other end of the stick. I have watched reviewers reconstructing the genesis of my own books in just this way.

Until you come to be reviewed yourself you would never believe how little of an ordinary review is taken up by criticism in the strict sense: by evaluation, praise, or censure, of the book actually written. Most of it is taken up with imaginary histories of the process by which you wrote it...

Reviewers, both friendly and hostile, will dash you off such histories with great confidence; will tell you what public events had directed the author's mind to this or that, what other authors had influenced him, what his overall intention was, what sort of audience he principally addressed, why — and when — he did everything...

My impression is that in the whole of my experience not one of these guesses has on any one point been right; that the method shows a record of one hundred percent failure. You would expect that by mere chance they would hit as often as they miss. But it is my impression that they do no such thing. I can't remember a single hit....

And yet they would often sound — if you didn't know the truth — extremely convincing. Many reviewers said that the Ring in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* was suggested by the atom bomb. What could be more plausible? Here is a book published when everyone was preoccupied by that sinister invention; here in the center of the book is a weapon which it seems madness to throw away yet fatal to use. Yet in fact, the chronology of the book's composition makes the theory impossible....

Now this surely ought to give us pause. The reconstruction of the history of a text, when the text is ancient, sounds very convincing. But one is after all sailing by dead reckoning; the results cannot be checked by fact. In order to decide how reliable the method is, what more could you ask for than to be shown an instance where the same method is at work and we have facts to check it by?

Well, that is what I have done. And we find, that when this check is available, the results are either always, or else nearly always, wrong. The 'assured results of modern scholarship' as to the way in which an old book was written, are 'assured', we may conclude, only because the men who knew the facts are dead and can't blow the gaff....

Consider with what overwhelming advantages these [contemporary-with-me] reviewers start. They reconstruct the history of a book written by someone whose mother-tongue is the same as theirs; a contemporary, educated like themselves, living in something like the same mental and spiritual climate. They have everything to help them.

The superiority in judgment and diligence which you are going to attribute to the Biblical critics will have to be almost superhuman if it is to offset the fact that they are everywhere faced with customs, language, race-characteristics, class-characteristics, a religious background, habits of composition, and basic assumptions, which no scholarship of any man now alive will ever come to know as surely and intimately and instinctively as the reviewer can know mine. And for the very same reason, remember, the Biblical critics, whatever reconstructions they devise, can never be crudely proved wrong. St. Mark is dead. When they meet St. Peter there will be more pressing matters to discuss.

C.S. Lewis, "Fern-Seed and Elephants", *Fern-Seed and Elephants and Other Essays on Christianity*, pp. 111 - 118

Mark Goodacre has a vast array of very good material pointing out the difficulties with the Q Hypothesis at:

<http://www.markgoodacre.org/Q/>

<http://www.ntgateway.com/synoptic-problem-and-q/books-and-articles/>

<http://markgoodacre.org/articles.htm>

3. External Historical Data

The Q Hypothesis depends entirely on internal, literary analysis. But the NT documents themselves are not all that we have to go on.

There is a wealth of accounts by members of the early church, one of which was no further from the from the apostles and other eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus than I am from World War 2.

Papias, who lived near Ephesus from c. 60 to 130 A.D., got to hear stories told by the Apostle John, as well as others who were eyewitnesses to Jesus, in much the same way as I got to hear my dad's stories of his experiences of flying in Europe from 1943-45.

This is what Papias said about the *Gospel of Mark*:

Mark, having become the recorder [ἐρμηνευτής] of Peter, indeed wrote accurately albeit not in order whatever he [Peter] remembered of the things either said or done by the Lord. For he had neither heard the Lord nor was a follower of him, but later, as I said, of Peter, who used to deliver his teachings [διδασκαλίας] in the form of short stories [χρειαί], but not making as it were a literary composition of the Lord's sayings, so that Mark did not err at all when he wrote down certain things just as he [Peter] recalled them. For he had but one intention: not to leave out anything he had heard nor to falsify anything in them.

About Matthew's gospel he said:

So then Matthew composed the sayings [τὰ λόγια] in a Hebrew style [Ἑβραϊδί διαλέκτω], and each recorded them as he was able.

Irenaeus (c. 130–200) was one generation removed from the Apostle John. He had sat under Polycarp's preaching, and Polycarp had been (alongside Papias) a disciple of the Apostle John. Of the gospels Irenaeus said:

So Matthew brought out a written gospel among the Jews in their own style [ἐν τοῖς Ἑβραίοις τῇ ἰδίᾳ αὐτῶν διαλέκτω], when Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel at Rome and founding the church. But after their demise Mark himself, the disciple and recorder [ἐρμηνευτής] of Peter, has also handed on to us in writing what had been proclaimed by Peter. And Luke, the follower of Paul, set forth in a book the gospel that was proclaimed by him. Later John, the disciple of the Lord and the one who leaned against his chest, also put out a gospel while residing in Ephesus of Asia.

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) said:

The earliest written Gospels were those containing the genealogies.⁷

The Gospel of Mark had this arrangement:

When Peter had publicly preached the word in Rome and by the Spirit had proclaimed the gospel, those present, who were numerous, urged Mark, as one who had followed him for a long time and remembered what had been spoken, to record what was said. And he did this, handing over the Gospel to those who had asked for it. And when Peter got to know about it, he exerted no pressure either to forbid it or to promote it.

Clement goes on to include a very interesting account of the early history of Mark's gospel.

Mark, the follower of Peter, while Peter was publicly preaching the gospel at Rome in the presence of some of Caesar's Praetorian Guard and uttering many testimonies about Christ, on their asking him to let them have a record of the things that had been said, wrote the Gospel that is called the Gospel of Mark from the things said by Peter, just as Luke is recognized as the pen that wrote the *Acts of the Apostles* and as the translator of the *Letter of Paul to the Hebrews*.

Several manuscripts of *Mark* in Old Latin versions (150 to 200?) have a prologue that says:

Mark, who was also called Stubfinger because he had shorter fingers with regard to the other dimensions of the body. He had been the disciple and recorder of Peter, whom he followed, just as he had heard him relating. Having been asked by the brethren in Rome, he wrote this short gospel in the regions of Italy. When Peter heard about it, he approved and authorized it to be read to the church with [his own] authority.

But after the demise of Peter, taking this gospel that he had composed he journeyed to Egypt, and being ordained the first bishop of Alexandria he founded the church there, preaching Christ. He was a man of such great learning and austerity of life that he induced all the followers of Christ to imitate his example.

Last of all John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the Gospel, and being urged by his friends and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual gospel.

Origen (c. 185–254) said that he knew of:

...only four Gospels.... The first written was that according to the onetime tax collector but later apostle of Jesus Christ, Matthew, who published it

⁷ This indication that *Luke* and *Matthew* both preceded *Mark* is a bit out of sync with the rest of the external, historical data. Continue reading this essay for now, and I will address this on page 18, "Some Implications".

for the believers from Judaism, composed in Hebrew characters.⁸ And second, that according to Mark, composed as Peter guided.... And third, that according to Luke, the Gospel praised by Paul, *composed for those from the Gentiles*. After them all, that according to John. (Italics added.⁹)

Eusebius (c 260-340) wrote:

To such a degree did the flame of true piety illuminate the minds of Peter's hearers that, not being satisfied with having just one hearing or with the unwritten teaching of the divine proclamation, with every sort of entreaty they urged Mark, whose gospel it is reputed to be, being the follower of Peter, to bequeath to them also in writing the record of the teaching handed on to them by word [of mouth], nor did they let up before convincing the man. And by this means they became the cause of the Gospel writing that is said to be 'according to Mark.'

They also say that when the apostle learned what had happened, the Spirit having revealed this to him, he was pleased with the enthusiasm of the men and authorized the writing for reading in the churches.

Clement in the sixth book of *The Outlines* relates the story, and the bishop of Hierapolis, Papias by name, bears joint witness to him. He also says that Peter mentions Mark in his First Letter, and that he composed this in Rome itself, which they say that he himself indicates, speaking figuratively of the city of Babylon, by these words: 'The Elect [Lady] in Babylon greets you, along with Mark my son.'

Now they say that this Mark was the first to be sent to Egypt to preach the gospel that he had also committed to writing, and was the first to establish churches in Alexandria itself.

Augustine (c. 354–430) wrote:

Therefore these four evangelists, well known to the whole world, four in number, perhaps because of the four parts of the world, are said to have been written in this order: first *Matthew*, then *Mark*, third *Luke*, last *John*.... Of the four, *Matthew* alone is said to have been written in Hebrew.¹⁰

There is then a broad consensus of writers from:

- Italy,
- North Africa,
- Egypt and

⁸ Origen seems to be aware of what Papias said about the composition of *Matthew*, and understood Ἑβραϊδὶ διαλέκτῳ to mean not that Matthew wrote in the Hebrew style, to Jewish Christians, but that he actually wrote the Gospel in Hebrew, from which it would have been translated at some later time. If indeed *Matthew* was first composed in Hebrew, it would have been translated at a very early time, as there are early accounts of the *Gospel of Matthew* in Greek...and absolutely no copies of *Matthew* in Hebrew have survived.

⁹ I will come back to the reason why *Luke* was written further down below.

¹⁰ Augustine shared Origen's understanding, that Matthew was initially written in Hebrew.

- the Aegean,

...with the knowledge passed from master to disciple, about the history of our four gospel accounts.

If we are to take seriously *any* historical accounts from ancient times, for instance:

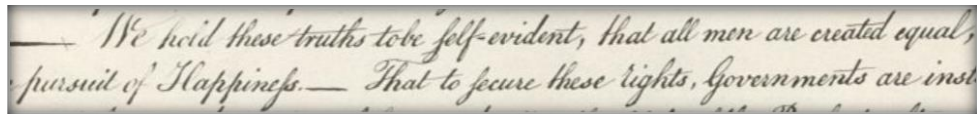
- the life and deeds of Socrates, Alexander the Great, or Julius Caesar
- the invasion of Greece by Xerxes and the defense by the 300 of the pass at Thermopylae
- the great fire of Rome during the reign of Nero, or
- the Sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410

...then we must surely take into account this broad and deep external evidence as to genesis of our four gospels.

4. Independent Archeological Evidence: Forensic Papyrology

Papyrology/paleography is the study of handwriting, particularly as it occurs on ancient papyrus-type paper. It has been used to date ancient documents, be they bits of kitchen recipes, Greek plays, or Latin epic poetry.

It is easy to observe the utility of paleography. Consider these two samples of handwriting.



We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equ.
pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are

Even without training of any sort, it would be easy for someone to say that the first example is older than the second. With a bit more background information, you could even date these to the nearest century.

In the first example, notice that the letter “s” looks like an “s” to us when it comes at the end of a word. But at the beginning or in the middle of a word, it looks rather like a calligraphy version of the letter “f”. This is particularly evident in the word “Happiness.”

The second example is of a sort of technical writing that was taught to engineers and draftsmen in the 20th century, for use in labelling blueprints.¹¹

¹¹¹ As recently as the 1960s, handwriting was taught in schools, with all students required to adhere to standard methods of forming letters. Perhaps the handwriting of the 21st century will be characterized by future generations of paleographers as that from a period where people were a) literate, but b) not taught handwriting in school and not held to any standards in the formation of characters.

So with just 60 seconds of thought, it will be no surprise to you that the top example is from the US *Declaration of Independence*, written in 1776, while the bottom example is a handwritten version of the same text, produced in the 20th century.

The so-called "long-s" used in 1776 was completely missing in the American *Declaration of War against Britain* in 1812.¹²

In the 21st century, with our use of even keyboards being minimized by emoji, it is hard for us to think of anybody's handwriting being consistent enough that you could date a document by it. It is well worth 9 minutes of your time to watch this video of a person doing the work of a scribe in a traditional fashion. It will give you a feel for why paleography can work.

<https://youtu.be/a5Brbqgngrc>

Further, if you Google "old blueprints", it is remarkable the degree of same-ness in the text labels.

¶64 — "The Magdalen Papyrus"¹³

Fragments of a manuscript of the Gospel of Matthew were found in 1901 by Charles Huleatt, a graduate of Magdalen College. He appears to have been a member of the Oxford Intercollegiate Christian Union (OICCU) and, along with many of his peers, committed his life to missionary service.¹⁴ He accepted a post as chaplain at the Thomas Cook hotel in Luxor, in southern Egypt, for the winter season each year for a decade. All of Huelett's papers were lost in the Sicilian earthquake that took his life in 1908, and in consequence we know very little of just how he acquired the papyrus fragments now known collectively as ¶64.

But what we know for sure, one way or another, is that when he came into possession of them, he sent them back to his alma mater. Shortly before Huelett's time, ancient papyrus documents were being burned in

¹² https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f5/1812_War_Declaration.jpg

¹³ The papyrus was stored safely, but in obscurity, at Magdalen College for decades. It was only in 1994, when German papyrologist Carsten Thiede was in Oxford for a family celebration, that he asked the assistant librarian at the college for a look at the fragments. What he saw astonished him, and eventually led to a front page article in the *The Times of London* which garnered world-wide attention.

While commonly called The Magdalen Papyrus, or even The Jesus Papyrus, in the world of New Testament textual studies, it has been designated as ¶64. Papyri are always designated with a lower case "p" using a Gothic font.

¹⁴ Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, *The Jesus Papyrus* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), 1996, p. 23.

During his career, Thiede served as a professor at the universities of Oxford, London and Geneva, the Staatsunabhängigen Theologischen Hochschule (Independent Institute of Theology) in Basel, as well as at the Ben Gurion University of Negev in Beer-Sheva (Israel)].

Cairo, because the locals “enjoyed the smell.”¹⁵ So these fragments, which looked unquestionably old, were sent back to Magdalen College in Oxford for safekeeping.



This was obviously from a manuscript that had been bound in book form, since there is writing on both sides of the three fragments, rather than a scroll with writing on only one side. The text on both sides of the three fragments is clearly from Matthew 26, verses 7-8, 10, 14-15, 22-23, 31, and 32-33.¹⁶

Even a cursory inspection by a paleographer would reveal that the handwriting in P64 is from the A.D. 200s or earlier.

But by a happy chance, we can do much better than that. Hunt and Grenfell discovered a papyrus at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, in 1899 which is almost a twin, stylistically, to P64. It is a letter written by an Egyptian farmer named Harmiysis to a civil servant named Papyskos and two of his colleagues at Oxyrhynchus stating that he had 12 lambs some time ago, and he wished to add 7 new lambs to that number.

The farmer and all three civil servants signed and dated the letter, declaring that it was the 12th year of the Emperor Nero's reign, i.e. 65/66 A.D.

Paleographically, P64 is a match, or even a bit earlier than the Harmiysis letter. Consequently, P64 is consistent with a date that is pre-A.D. 66.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid. p.29.

¹⁶ Ibid. p 80. There is a sister papyrus, unmistakably from the same physical document, that resides in Barcelona, and which has been designated as P67. It contains bits of *Matthew* chapters 3 and 5.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 111. This conclusion has been reinforced by the discovery of a similarly-styled document at Qumran, in Israel (which is dated at no later than A.D. 68, at which point the Romans invaded) as well as in a papyrus discovered in Herculaneum, Italy, which was buried in the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in A.D. 79.

Many whose background is in biblical studies rather than papyrology have objected to this dating—which is understandable, since this undermines the Q hypothesis. The Q hypothesis was developed,

Not only is this of interest in terms of the date-of-composition of Matthew, but it is evidence that Matthew had gained enough stature that it was in circulation around the Empire by A.D. 66.¹⁸

Matthew Loves Mango Juice: The MLMJ Hypothesis



This school of thought has been developed by David Allan Black¹⁹ and Bernard Orchard²⁰. It has several strengths.

1. It does not start with a 19th century, Darwinian presupposition about the inevitability of progress. It starts with an open mind, willing to go where the data leads it.
2. It takes the internal, literary evidence we find in the Gospels with great seriousness.
3. It also takes the external, historical evidence we find about the origins of the Gospels with great seriousness.
4. It is consistent with archaeological evidence regarding the appearance of gospel accounts around the empire.

however, without reference to the historical testimony of early Christians, and in isolation from any actual archaeological evidence of the physical manuscripts.

To those who come to the evidence without first having presupposed what their conclusions will be, it seems self-evident that the Gospel of Matthew was in circulation around the Empire by A.D. 66.

See also the addendum to this essay, which suggests that when the Apostle Paul composed the first letter to the Thessalonians, he had a copy of Matthew's gospel at his elbow.

¹⁸ That Matthew was written in Jerusalem and could be found in central Egypt by A.D. 66 will come as no surprise, given the efficiency of communications around the Empire.

By the first century, Rome maintained a network of 80,500 km of paved roads, with another 320,000 km of secondary roads. Both roads and ocean transport was used by the imperial courier service, available to government as well as the aristocracy. Private mail was carried by tabellarii, an organization of slaves available for a price.

Both services were capable of remarkable feats: from Corinth, Greece, to Puteoli, Italy, in five days was a normal delivery time. In good weather, it was possible to send a letter from Rome to Alexandria, Egypt, in just three days. The twenty-first century Canadian postal service is not able to meet these standards.

¹⁹ Black, David Allan, *Why Four Gospels? The Historical Origins of the Gospels* (Gonzalez, FL: Energion), 2010. In this essay, I shall quote extensively from Black without further attribution.

²⁰ Of the Gospel Research Institute in Ealing Abbey, London. There is an extensive list of Orchard's books and articles at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_Orchard#Works. Many of these touch on the MLMJ Hypothesis (which Orchard calls the "Two Gospel Hypothesis"). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-gospel_hypothesis

Matthew

The unanimous report of the early church was that *Matthew* was written first. In light of the history of the growth of the church (which started out in Jerusalem), this makes good sense.

While Matthew faithfully recorded the foreshadowing that Jesus' new Way would be worldwide in scope,²¹ his initial concern was to help new and potential believers who were Jewish understand that Jesus had fulfilled all the prophecies about the Messiah. He unpacked things that would be especially meaningful to Jewish people.

- Jesus' ancestry as a son of David.
- His being born of a virgin.
- His commendation by John the Baptist.
- His miracles.
- His teaching with authority in the Temple.
- His coming to fulfill the Law of Moses.
- His suffering like the Servant of Isaiah.
- His rejection by his own nation.
- His miraculous resurrection from the dead.

The Twelve entrusted this work to Matthew, not long after the resurrection.²² As a former tax collector, his education and life experience probably made him the best choice write a work in Greek. He made use of all five literary forms that were then considered the hallmark of good biographical writing in the Hellenistic world:

- The proverb
- The narrative
- The parable
- The anecdote (or short story *χρεία*)
- The reminiscence (or longer story *απομνημονευμα*)²³

The use of these Greek literary forms is an important internal, literary indication that Matthew composed his work in Greek. Greek was, in fact, the most appropriate language to use for a church that saw the whole world as its missionary field. As a result of the conquests of Alexander the Great, Greek was

²¹ Jesus healed the daughter of a non-Jewish Phoenician woman in Matt. 15:21 ff., and commands his followers to make disciples of people from every possible ethnicity in Matt. 28:11. There is also the saying in Matt. 8:11-12.

²² This is consistent with Carsten Peter Thiede's dating of 30-64.

²³ A *χρεία* differs from an *απομνημονευμα* mostly in length. The former is invariably short. The latter may be rather long.

Ancient Greece had a well-defined set of literary forms that were taught in schools of rhetoric. Translations of some of the textbooks used in these schools may be had from Kennedy, George A., *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Boston: Brill), 2003.

spoken all over the eastern Mediterranean, in Egypt, and out to Mesopotamia and into what is today Pakistan.

Indeed, while Latin was the language of government in Rome, the Emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote his personal diary in Greek. And when the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church in Rome, he composed it in Greek rather than Latin. So even in the heart of the Empire, Greek was the most commonly used language.

The *Gospel of Matthew* was the chronicle that each of the apostles needed to take with him to his own distant field of evangelization. It both supported and confirmed the preaching of the scattered Christians, as well as assuring a level of quality control/theological unity in their presentations about Jesus.

Paul almost surely took a scroll of Matthew with him on his own missionary journeys. He appears to have had Matthew 24 at his elbow as he wrote 1 Thessalonians 4-5.²⁴

Luke

Paul's missionary experience proved that the *Gospel of Matthew*, which he was faithfully using as a follow-up to his oral teaching, did not answer all the questions of his Greek and other non-Jewish converts had about Jesus.

He realized he needed to produce a version of Matthew's gospel that would better meet the needs of the Greek world.

Before he came to the end of his 3rd missionary journey, he had chosen the man for the task of authoring: Luke, a physician and his friend, who had joined him on the latter stages of his voyage back to Jerusalem.²⁵

Paul was detained by the Romans for more than two years at their headquarters in Caesarea. The upside of this was that it provided Luke with sufficient time to check the details in Matthew's account of the life of Jesus, to interview many of those who had known Jesus some 30 years previously (probably including Mary, the mother of Jesus), and to prepare a new gospel document closely modeled on Matthew's. He absorbed much of what Matthew wrote, plus added new material.

He omitted things which would have been of minimal interest to a Greek audience, such as:

- the relationship between Jesus and the Law of Moses, and
- Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy.

²⁴ See the addendum attached to this document.

²⁵ Luke and Paul both had a top-flight first-century education. In fact, Tarsus was a university town, rivalling Athens and Alexandria, and may have been where Paul and Luke first met. See the ICC volume: Plummer, Alfred, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Edinburg: T&T Clark), 1922, p. xxi.

He added material that was of interest to him, and which he thought would be of interest to his audience, such as:

- names, dates, and times
- a more extensive unpacking of the trans-cultural validity of Jesus²⁶ as savior²⁷
- how Jesus connected to members of society who were despised by most people²⁸
- the critical role of prayer²⁹
- how Jesus related particularly to women.³⁰

Matthew's teaching about divorce (19:3-12) was perhaps omitted by Luke because it was an example of rabbinic exegesis unfamiliar to Greeks. He substituted instead the very straightforward Luke 16:18.

By the time Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, he would refer to Luke's gospel as "Scripture", on par with the writings of Moses.³¹

²⁶ Matthew gives a genealogy of Jesus that goes back to David and Abraham, and stops there. As far as a Jewish person was concerned, Matthew had said all that needed saying about Jesus' family context. Luke's genealogy gets to David and keeps going, past Abraham, and all the way back to Adam...which would make Jesus a distant kinsman of not just every Jew, but every person in the world.

There are cultures even today where genealogy is very important. If somebody in Alberta asks "So who are you?" they are interested in hearing about the work you do and your hobbies. This is how Albertans fix a context for you in their minds. According to a CBC radio program years ago, in Prince Edward Island this question is very much more about "So who is your father, and your grandfather?"

Further to the trans-cultural validity and appeal of Jesus, see:

- Luke 2:14 Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth among people with whom he is pleased.
- Luke 2:32 A light that gives revelation to foreigners and glory to your people Israel.
- Luke 3:6 And every creature will see the salvation of God.
- Luke 4:25-27 Truthfully, I say to you, there were many windows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut for three years and six months when there was a great famine upon the whole land. But Elijah was sent to none of them, but rather to Sarepta in Sidon, to a woman there who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, but none of them were healed except for Naaman the Syrian.
- Luke 24:47 and that in his name repentance, which leads to the forgiveness of sins, should be proclaimed to every ethnic group, starting from Jerusalem.

²⁷ The words *savior*, *salvation* and *to save* are mentioned especially frequently with Luke.

²⁸ 7:37ff; 9:52ff; 10:33ff; 17:16; 19:1ff; 23:40ff

²⁹ In no other gospel do we find the Lord Jesus in prayer and speaking about prayer as often as in this Gospel (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28; 11:1; 18:1-8; 22:32; 22:40-46; 23:34; 23:46; 24:30).

³⁰ Luke mentions over ten women who are not talked about by any of the other gospel writers. During biblical times, if you look from Persia to Palestine to Greece to Italy, "the general rule...is that the further west we go, the greater is the freedom of women." TDNT I, p. 777. So anything that Jesus said or did that touched on the general theme of the emancipation of women would have more interest to Luke's initial audience than Matthew's initial audience.

³¹ 1 Tim. 5:18

Mark

To recap: The *Gospel of Matthew* had been in circulation for 20 years or so throughout the Christian world, both inside and beyond the Roman Empire. Paul arrived in Rome sometime in 61 or 62, accompanied by Luke, who brought with him the adaption of Matthew that he had compiled during Paul's detention in Caesarea.

Peter was living in Rome at this time,³² and was happy to give a public assurance that Luke's book dovetailed with his own, first-hand memories of Jesus, and to compare Luke's treatment of events with Matthew's accounts where he himself had been a participant.³³ Peter and Paul were on the same page when it came to their passion to spread the good news about Jesus far and wide.³⁴

Peter's plan appears to have been to give a series of talks in Rome about "The Two Gospels". The prospect of these talks excited the interest of the most influential Christians in Rome, including members of the Praetorian Guard, an elite unit of the Roman army

It was a common practice for public men to have their speeches recorded verbatim by shorthand writers,³⁵ and Mark arranged for people to write down Peter's words just as he spoke them.

Peter, with Mark in attendance, arrived on location armed with a scroll of Matthew³⁶, as well as a scroll prepared by Luke.³⁷ It looks as though he gave five talks, from 25 to 40 minutes each.

1. Beginning of ministry. Mark 1:2 to 3:19 (Matt. 3:1 to 5:1; Luke 3:1 to 6:19).
2. Early Galilean ministry. Mark 3:20 to 6:13 (Matt 5:2 to 13:58; Luke 6:20 to 9:6).

³² We know that Peter and Mark were in Rome when Paul was a prisoner there in 62 from 1 Peter 5:12-13.

³³ Probably, Paul had arranged for this prior to leaving Caesarea.

³⁴ The "Circumcision Group" inside the church remained a force to be reckoned with until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It may be that one motive for Peter's series of talks was to defuse any objections this group might have had to Luke's presentation of the life of Jesus.

³⁵ This had been done since the time of Cicero, a hundred years earlier. The ability to take dictation verbatim using shorthand was an essential skill for secretaries in our own culture until the release of the IBM PC somehow led to \$150K/year executives becoming their own typists.

³⁶ ...which Peter may well have had mostly memorized by now.

³⁷ Bruce Metzger, in *The Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1968, indicates that the maximum usable length of a scroll was around 33 feet. Part of the reason for dividing *Luke* and *Acts* in two books was that each, individually, would have filled a scroll of around 31 feet. Anything much longer than this would have been so heavy as to make it unusable.

By the end of the first century, Christians had discovered that books were a more convenient format for the Scriptures than scrolls, since you could easily get to a particular reference rather than having to roll through an entire scroll. There was also the economy of being able to write on both sides of the papyrus/vellum.

But in mid-century, Peter would almost certainly have still been using these books in scroll format. Using a scroll required two hands: the right-hand unrolling and the left-hand rolling, until the reader arrived at the particular column he or she wanted to refer to.

3. Later Galilean ministry. Mark 6:14 to 10:1 (Matt. 14:1 to 18:35; Luke 9:7-50).
4. Post-Galilean ministry. Mark 10:2 to 13:37 (Matt. 19:1 to 25:46; Luke 9:51 to 21:38).
5. Passion narrative. Mark 14:1 to 16:8 (Matt. 26:1 to 28:20; Luke 22:1 to 24:53).

Peter spoke, checking with each gospel as he went along, starting with Matthew's scroll, and then flipping into Luke's scroll, and then back to Matthew's, zig-zag fashion.

Here is an excerpt from the NET Bible's Synopsis of the Gospels:

Peter's Talk
↓

Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke
Stilling the Storm		4:35-41	8:22-25
The Gerasene Demoniac		5:1-20	8:26-39
Jairus' Daughter and the Woman with a Hemorrhage		5:21-43	8:40-56
Jesus is Rejected at Nazareth	13:53-58	6:1-6a	
Commissioning the Twelve		6:6b-13	9:1-6
Opinions regarding Jesus	14:1-2	6:14-16	9:7-9
The Death of John the Baptist	14:3-12	6:17-29	
The Return of the Apostles		6:30-31	9:10a
Five Thousand are Fed	14:13-21	6:32-44	9:10b-17
The Walking on the Water	14:22-33	6:45-52	
Healings at Gennesaret	14:34-36	6:53-56	

In this part of his talk, Peter is...

Reading from Luke's scroll

Reading from Matthew's scroll

Reading from Luke's scroll

Reading from Matthew's scroll

Reading from Luke's scroll

Reading from Matthew's scroll

One can observe this evidence of Peter's use of *Matthew/Luke* in a public speaking setting by looking at the way he moves from one scroll to the other, and never once doubles back to an earlier section of either scroll.



Presumably he went through both scrolls in advance and marked what he was going to include, what he would omit, and the exact point where he was going to switch from one scroll to the other.

Peter's talks were striking for the way he added in vivid details that reveal him to be an eyewitness, such as Jesus' being asleep on the cushion in the stern of the boat (Mark 4:38).

As a result of these public addresses, and Luke getting a visible seal-of-approval from Peter, Paul was able to publish Luke's gospel in the churches around the Aegean without further delay or question.³⁸

Those who listened to Peter were delighted, and asked Mark for copies of Peter's talks.³⁹ Peter saw no particular advantage to circulating his talks, since *Matthew* (for the last 20+ years) and *Luke* (as of very recently) were already in circulation. Though he probably never intended his talks to become a third Gospel, he did not forbid the making of copies.

Mark is not a book in the sense in which the ancient Greeks and Romans understood the term. It was simply the spoken word directly captured and set down on paper exactly as it was originally spoken.

And indeed, even though Peter's memories of his times with Jesus were highly prized in the church, they did not enjoy the kind of circulation that *Matthew* and *Luke* did. What we know now as the *Gospel of Mark* was rarely quoted by early Christians, and the first commentary on it was not composed until the 5th century.

The fact that the style of Mark's Gospel is vivid, colloquial and non-literary does not indicate that it was written first, but only that the Gospel's language and style reflect the author's purposes in and occasion of creation. It is a transcript of a live speech. Mark (the man) was not the author of the Gospel bearing his name, but the publisher of it.

A Speculation About the Longer Ending of *Mark*, Verses 9 to 20

When giving his talks, Peter just stopped when he reached the end, so to speak. Maybe he took questions from the crowd. But in any case, to us, expecting as we do a well-rounded conclusion to both books and articles, it seems unsatisfying.

After Peter died, Mark left Rome to plant a church in Alexandria, Egypt (67-69). It may be that he decided to publish an edition of Peter's talks, rounding them off with a summary of references to the Resurrection as recorded in *Matthew* and *Luke*.

³⁸ In 1 Timothy 5, Paul quotes *Luke* in the same breath as *Deuteronomy*, referring to both equally as **scripture**. "For the Scripture says, *Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain* (Deut. 5:24), and, *The worker deserves his pay* (Luke 10:7)."

This quotation, by the way, is another piece of evidence to support the general dating of *Luke* as being during Paul's lifetime, dovetailing nicely with the complete lack of interest in *Acts* regarding the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (which had not happened yet). It is also suggestive about the rapid circulation of *Luke*, and the acceptance of it as being authoritative scripture on par with the writings of Moses.

³⁹ Among Canadian Inter-Varsity people through the 1970s and 1980s, there was a hand-to-hand sharing of notes from talks given by John Stott, Neil Graham and Gene Thomas.

However, the private edition of Mark, which lacked these verses at the end, had already been in circulation for some years. So the manuscript evidence for the last 12 verses of Mark remains divided to this day.⁴⁰

John

According to Eusebius, John pastored the church in Ephesus, which Paul had planted, for many years. It was there that he wrote his gospel.⁴¹

After he, the last one still living from among the original 12 apostles, was released from exile on the island of Patmos (whence he wrote *Revelation*) and returned to Ephesus, younger Christians begged him to capture some of his great stories about Jesus on paper.⁴² For whatever reasons, he had been reluctant to do this over the years.⁴³

But clearly, some of the native Greek speakers from Ephesus told John that if he would talk, they would write it all down. John told stories as my father told stories of World War 2...starting with tales beginning in the middle of the war, then flipping back to stories about his basic training in Miami Beach, Florida. He then might tell about immediately post-war, when he flew the first commercial airline flight from Cairo to Rome, then back into the war period when he flew into Athens as the British airfield was being actively attacked by Germans and their allies among the Greeks.

What I had in my father's stories was not an orderly, chronological account of the unfolding of the war in Europe, but an unmistakably eye-witness account of events and people that gave you the feeling of "being there." This is just what John did in his eyewitness accounts of Jesus' ministry.

John did, however, have several themes related to Jesus—things he had reflected on for several decades—that he wove into the fabric of his gospel:

- The full deity of Jesus.
- The key word in John is πιστεύω (the verb, "to believe"). It appears 98 times. The noun form πίστις ("faith") appears not at all. "This phenomenon shows that John wanted to emphasize the importance of active, vital trust in Jesus.

⁴⁰ Farmer, W. R., *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1974.

⁴¹ Eusebius, 3:24:1, 3-8, Also see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3:1. Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200) had the chance to hear Polycarp speak, and Polycarp was a disciple of John's in Ephesus.

⁴² I have said that this gospel was composed after John returned from Patmos. But actually, the gospel could have been composed either *before* or *after* his exile on Patmos...but was surely after he had left Palestine and arrived in Ephesus.

⁴³ Not unlike some of our own parents and grandparents, who seem reluctant to commit any of their own stories to paper.

Other key words are witness, love, abide, the Counselor (i.e., the Holy Spirit), light, life, darkness, Word, glorify, true, and real."⁴⁴

93% of John finds no parallel in any of the other gospels,⁴⁵ which is why it is not included among the “synoptic” gospels.

Excursus: Contrasting the Greek of John’s Gospel with that of *Revelation*

When the Zealots drove the Christians out of the country in A.D. 66 or so,⁴⁶ John moved to Ephesus, where the language of the people was Greek.

He wrote *Revelation* while he was all on his own at Patmos, and his Greek was a grammatical mess. His was the Greek of a man who grew up in Palestine and spoke Aramaic for the first three quarters of his life. At the end of his life he was writing Greek but still *thinking* in Aramaic.⁴⁷

Reinforcing this tendency, John was a person who had spent several score years digesting and reflecting on the OT and had committed much of it to memory. This could not help but influence the way he wrote Greek when on his own: in a way strongly reminiscent of the LXX⁴⁸ translation of the OT, which was itself strongly influenced by Hebrew grammar.

Examples of John’s grammatical errors in *Revelation* (called “solicisms” by those who don’t want to use the word “errors” in any context when speaking of Scripture) include:

- In Rev. 1:4, John uses ἀπό followed, improperly, by a nominative case in ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (from the one who is, who was, and who is to come). Then in the very next phrase, he uses ἀπό correctly, followed by a genitive case καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων (and from the seven spirits).

⁴⁴ <http://www.ntgreek.ca/Q/ConstablesNotesOnJohn.pdf>

⁴⁵ Blum, Edwin A. "John." *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. (Wheaton: Scripture Press), 1983, p. 269.

⁴⁶ A blessing in disguise, since shortly after this the Romans would invade Palestine, first laying siege to Jerusalem and starving people out, then slaughtering those who were left and leveling the city.

⁴⁷ This is not unlike like any number of people today who immigrated to Canada late in life and never really made the transition to fluent English.

⁴⁸ The Septuagint, whose name (according to Wikipedia) was derived from the Latin phrase *Vetus Testamentum ex versione Septuaginta Interpretum* ("The Old Testament from the version of the Seventy Translators"), abbreviated with the Roman numerals for 70 ("LXX") was created by the rabbis in Alexandria, Egypt, as a result of their concern that the Jewish community there had lost their ability to read and understand the Scriptures in Hebrew. The translation was done by people who were either not very fluent in Greek, or by people who believed that producing a wooden, highly literal translation of Hebrew—even to the point of reproducing Hebrew grammatical structures—was the right thing to do.

- In 17:4, John has a genitive and an accusative joined by καὶ rather than by two genitives.
- In 14:19, John uses a masculine adjective “the great” τὸν μέγαν to modify the feminine noun “winepress” τὴν ληνὸν.

He does this same sort of mixing of gender in 4:1 where he has “the first voice” ἡ φωνὴ ἡ πρώτη, a feminine, taking a masculine participle “spoke” λέγων. See also 9:13f., 11:4, 11:15, 17:3

T. Cowden Laughlin outlines 15 categories of glaring grammatical errors that John makes⁴⁹ But also makes the point that *all* of these Greek solecisms would have sounded *perfect* had they been delivered in Hebrew.⁵⁰

Editorial Help for The Gospel of John

In contrast, the *Gospel of John* is such a model of good, clear Greek that it is often used to teach first year language students proper grammar. To me this says that John had serious help from some native speakers to compile his Gospel.

This may be similar to the role that Elizabeth and John Sherrill had in several of the biggest selling Christian authors from the last half of the 20th century. According to *Christianity Today* magazine, “John and

⁴⁹ Doctoral thesis, presented to Princeton University in 1902, pp. 11-21, available at <https://archive.org/details/solecismsofapoca00laugrich/page/n4/mode/1up>.

⁵⁰ Even though it was likely Hebrew that had been “washed” through the Greek of the LXX.

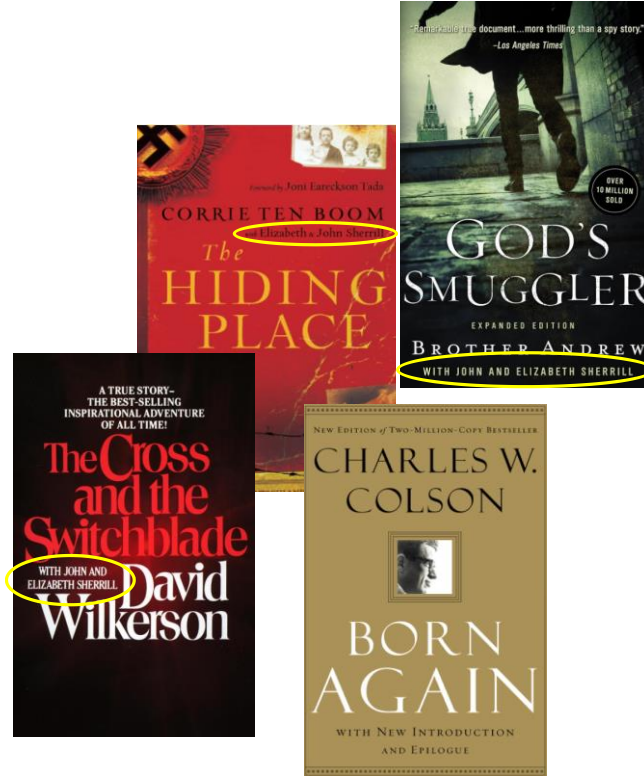
Rob Plummer of Southern Seminary in Louisville, KY, thinks all of the solecisms were intentional, calculated uses by John of Hebrew grammar from the OT. I think Rob does not take into sufficient account how exhausting it is to listen to somebody who habitually uses incorrect grammar.

When I went to Japan, I immediately started to study Japanese. I had been in the country for no more than 6 weeks before I started to find that it was less mentally taxing for me to speak rudimentary Japanese with people rather than to try to understand their efforts to speak English to me. When Japanese people would mix up singular and plural, masculine and feminine, omit definite and indefinite articles, mix up present and past tense in verbs, and sometimes simply use the wrong word, understanding what was being said became an exercise in “translating” from English to English. It was exhausting. Part of my reason for going sailing in my 13-foot boat on my days off was that I was guaranteed to be alone, and had to listen to nobody...neither in Japanese nor English.

What John did in his gospel was to use “Semitisms” — words and phrases intended to echo the OT. What he did in Revelation was to require his readers to “translate” from Greek to Greek what they thought he was trying to say.

This said, I completely understand John’s desperate urgency to communicate the contents of his vision from Jesus to his people. John had no time — and no language assistants — to help him polish what he wrote. There were individuals in his own group of little churches that were teaching that sexual immorality was OK, and people were wondering whether it was worthwhile to even continue to be Christians, when the cost seemed so high, and Jesus so distant. John had had a vision from Jesus, and the time to circulate it was *now*.

Elizabeth Sherrill may be the most influential Christian authors you know nothing about.”



Jeff Crosby, president of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association, told *Publishers Weekly*, “Elizabeth’s gifts as a manuscript stylist, editor, and publisher were enormous. She knew how to tell a story with power.” She “found a perfect calling,” according to Rick Hamlin, former executive editor of *Guideposts*, “in coaxing stories out of others and then helping them share their highly personal accounts of God at work in their lives.”

I am convinced that there was a group of Greek Christians who played a similar role for the Apostle John.⁵¹

¶52

While not entirely germane to the question of “Why Four Gospels?”, I want to take a small detour to discuss a fragment from Egypt, ¶52, that is nearly as old as ¶64. Handwriting analysis sets the date range for its composition at A.D. 94 to 138.

⁵¹ I sometimes imagine them as being named Ἰωάννης καὶ Ἰωάννα Ἐλάφου—John and Jane Doe.

Front Side

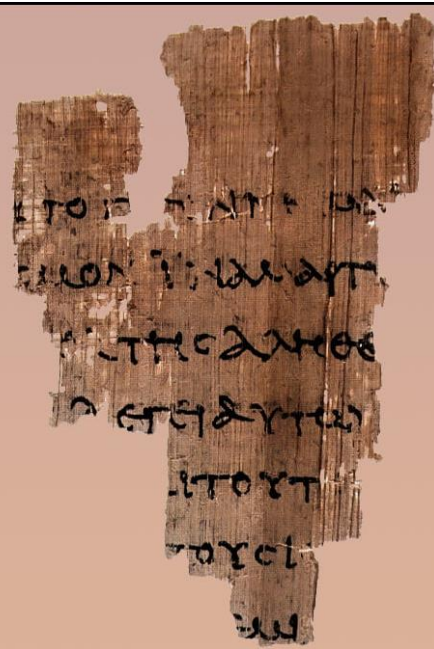


John 18:31–33

ΟΙ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ ΗΜΕΙΝ ΟΥΚ ΕΞΕΣΤΙΝ ΑΠΟΚΤΕΙΝΑΙ ΟΥΔΕΝΑ ΙΝΑ Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΙΗΣΟΥ ΠΛΗΡΩΘΗ ΟΝ ΕΙΠΕΝ ΣΗΜΑΙΝΩΝ ΠΟΙΩ ΘΑΝΑΤΩ ΗΜΕΛΛΕΝ ΑΠΟΘΗΝΗΣΚΕΙΝ ΙΣΗΛΘΕΝ ΟΥΝ ΠΑΛΙΝ ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΠΡΑΙΤΩΡΙΟΝ Ο ΠΙΛΑΤΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΦΩΝΗΣΕΝ ΤΟΝ ΙΗΣΟΥΝ ΚΑΙ ΕΙΠΕΝ ΑΥΤΩ ΣΥ ΕΙ Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΩΝ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ

the Jews, "For us it is not permitted to kill anyone," so that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spoke signifying what kind of death he was going to die. Entered therefore again into the Praetorium Pilate and summoned Jesus and said to him, "Thou art king of the Jews?"

Back Side



John 18:37–38

ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΕΙΜΙ ΕΓΩ ΕΙΣ ΤΟΥΤΟ ΓΕΓΕΝΝΗΜΑΙ ΚΑΙ (ΕΙΣ ΤΟΥΤΟ) ΕΛΗΛΥΘΑ ΕΙΣ ΤΟΝ ΚΟΣΜΟΝ ΙΝΑ ΜΑΡΤΥΡΗΣΩ ΤΗ ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ ΠΑΣ Ο ΩΝ ΕΚ ΤΗΣ ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑΣ ΑΚΟΥΕΙ ΜΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΦΩΝΗΣ ΛΕΓΕΙ ΑΥΤΩ Ο ΠΙΛΑΤΟΣ ΤΙ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥΤΟ ΕΙΠΩΝ ΠΑΛΙΝ ΕΞΗΛΘΕΝ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΥΣ ΚΑΙ ΛΕΓΕΙ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ ΕΓΩ ΟΥΔΕΜΙΑΝ ΕΥΡΙΣΚΩ ΕΝ ΑΥΤΩ ΑΙΤΙΑΝ

a King I am. For this I have been born and (for this) I have come into the world so that I would testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears of me my voice." Said to him Pilate, "What is truth?" and this having said, again he went out unto the Jews and said to them, "I find not one fault in him."

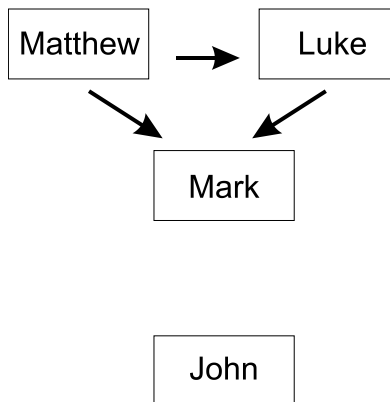
This is an enormously interesting bit of papyrus. Although only a fragment of John, this is rather like the single footprint that Robinson Crusoe found on his island. By itself, it wasn't much—but it pointed to the huge revelation that he was not alone on the island.

Similarly, this fragment indicates that a copy of the Gospel of John made its way down from Ephesus into Egypt *very* early on. Indeed, this could be from a first-generation copy of the original that John composed. This suggests that John's gospel (like that of Matthew and Luke) could have been accepted as "scripture" on par with Moses immediately upon completion.

Some Implications

It is easy to see why the church, from a very early date, placed Mark's Gospel between those of Matthew and Luke. There is an implicit recognition here that the initial function of *Mark* was to act as a connecting link between *Matthew* and *Luke*. The middle position has nothing to do with the chronological order in which the gospels were written, but with *Mark's* role.

This also accounts for the slight ambivalence of the external historical evidence for the order in which the Gospels were written. *Matthew* is universally agreed to have been first, and *John* last. I think *Luke* was composed ahead of *Mark*. But it may be that *Mark* achieved wider circulation more quickly than *Luke*.



Assessing MLMJ

At first glance, The MLMJ Hypothesis seems as fanciful as Q, and subject to the same critique that C.S. Lewis made on page 5 above. There are huge differences, however, between MLMJ and Q.⁵²

MLMJ attempts to take all the available evidence into account, and neither excludes evidence that doesn't fit the hypothesis, nor requires hypothetical documents.⁵³

And it is the job of a historian — like that of a Sherlock Holmes — to take disparate facts and infer a scenario that makes sense of all those facts. In this respect, MLMJ makes takes into account and makes sense of:

⁵² For example, The MLMJ Hypothesis would be taking seriously, so to speak, the claims to authorship of both Lewis and Tolkien, as well as what they have themselves said about their composition process. MLMJ would also take seriously the testimony of the Inklings as well as of Christopher Tolkien, J.R.R.'s son, about the influences and occasion of the composition of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. MLMJ would not discard all this external data and substitute hypotheticals in its place.

⁵³ As Mark Goodacre unpacks this in a delightful fashion in the article called *Q, Doctor Who, and the difference between "lost" and "hypothetical"* available at: <https://ntweblog.blogspot.com/2013/10/q-doctor-who-and-difference-between.html>

- The external, historical evidence that *Matthew* was written first, and *John* last.
- The external, historical evidence regarding the authorship of the various gospels.
- The forensic evidence of papyrology that *Matthew* was circulated around the Empire prior to A.D. 66.⁵⁴
- The internal, literary evidence that both Luke and Paul⁵⁵ used *Matthew*.
- Paul's equating of Luke's gospel and Deuteronomy as both being Scripture, in 1 Timothy 5:18.
- The internal, literary evidence that the *Gospel of Matthew* would have served Paul's missionary needs...but only imperfectly, since it included a lot of information that was highly relevant in Jewish evangelism, but largely irrelevant in Greek evangelism. Paul needed more suitable tool.
- The external, historical evidence that Mark compiled his gospel from a series of talks that Peter gave in Rome to members of the Praetorian Guard and others.
- The curious fact that we have three gospels to begin with which are so very similar in content.⁵⁶ How on earth did they come to be, and why?
- The even more curious, and otherwise inexplicable, zig-zag fashion in which pericopes in *Mark* move forward — always forward and never back — through parallel passages in *Matthew* and *Luke*.

Addendum: Bob's Raw Notes Highlighting Paul's Use of Matthew in 1 Thessalonians 4 & 5

As it turned out, at the same time I was reflecting on the Q Hypothesis, I was studying 1 Thessalonians in my daily quiet time. My thinking about the process by which we received our gospel accounts sensitized me to be alert to either *quotes* or *allusions* to Matthew in this letter of Paul's.

Following are the notes I made for myself,⁵⁷ which are a little technical in places. The conclusion is the thing that really matters:

⁵⁴ It has been a traditional caricature of theologically conservative Christians that they have set themselves against the findings of science. I say caricature, for the number of evangelical Christians in the natural sciences — chemistry, physics, electrical engineering, botany — has always been high. But the irony of the 21st century is that it is the theologically liberal branch of biblical studies that is now setting itself against the findings of science.

⁵⁵ See addendum to this essay.

⁵⁶ Tatian, a Christian from Mesopotamia (c. 120 to c. 180), thought that having four gospel accounts was redundant. He compiled all four Gospels together into a single, coherent narrative of Jesus' life and death called by the Diatessaron (so named from Greek διά ["across"] + τεσσάρων ["four"]). It was widely used by Aramaic speaking Christians for a couple of centuries until an influential Christian leader named Theodoret gathered up 200 copies of the Diatessaron, took them out of circulation, and replaced them with copies of the four Gospels. It has always seemed to me that Tatian had a great idea, and I wondered why our Scripture was built differently.

⁵⁷ I have noted for myself the words that are unfamiliar to me from these verses are used in the NT. This is in keeping with my goal of memorizing all of the vocabulary items that are used 30 or more times in the

These close verbal resemblances (and even when there are not verbal resemblances, there are resemblances in thought) suggest that *the words of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew were the source of Paul's teaching here.*

Notes made while translating:

*Bob's Enriched Analytic Rendering of the Greek New Testament
into Colloquial Canadian English
(also known as The Polar BEAR version).*



I Thess. 4: 15

τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ
κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ
περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ
κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς
κοιμηθέντας·

I Thess. 4: 15

**For by the word of the Lord we say
this to you, that we who remain
alive at the time of the return of the
Lord will definitely not go ahead of
those who have fallen asleep.**

Unfamiliar Words

περιλειπόμενοι: verb, present passive participle nominative plural masculine < περιλείπομαι remain, to leave over. In passive, to be left over, be left remaining, to survive.

φθάσωμεν: verb, 1st person aorist active subjunctive plural < φθάνω to come before, precede; approach, reach; arrive, come

κοιμηθέντας: verb, aorist passive participle accusative plural masculine < κοιμάομαι mid: to fall to sleep, go to bed

Observations and Comments

This is good news...GREAT news.

Not only are the dead in Christ OK...but they will join Jesus (slightly) ahead of those of us who are alive at his return.

παρουσία for the return of the Lord is the same word used in:

Mt 24:3 As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?"

New Testament. Memorizing words used less often than this (and there are 1,672 words used only *once*) is a waste of time. Just look 'em up when you run into them, and get on with life.

Mt 24:27 For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Mt 24:37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Mt 24:39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

παρουσία is the only word used for the second coming in Jesus' Olivet discourse.

It is only used by Matthew.

It is also the only word used for the second coming in 1 Thessalonians.

I Thess. 4: 16

ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ, καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον,

I Thess. 4: 16

For the Lord himself, with a loud shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Unfamiliar Words

κελεύσματι: noun, dative singular neuter < κέλευσμα shout, cry of incitement or of urging on, a call, summons; a shout which assembles; used of the shout which gave the time to the rowers that they might row all together (Æsch. Pers. 403). used of the call of a huntsman to his dogs that they might all assemble (Xen. Ven. 6, 20);

ἀρχαγγέλου: noun, genitive singular masculine < ἀρχάγγελος a chief angel:-- archangel.

καταβήσεται: verb, 3rd person future middle indicative singular < καταβαίνω step down, come down, go down, fall down

Observations and Comments

σάλπιγξ is a word often used in Revelation, and refers to the mighty war-horns that were used to give signals to troops in pre-radio-era battles.

ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ — also used in:

Mt 24:30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

ἀρχάγγελος — also see:

Mt 24:31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call.....

ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ — cf.

Mt 24:31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call

I Thess. 4: 17

ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ
περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς
ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς
ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα· καὶ
οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἔσόμεθα.

I Thess. 4: 17

**Then we who remain alive will be
carried off with them in the clouds
to a meeting with the Lord in the
air. And starting in just this way,
we will be with the Lord forever.**

Unfamiliar Words

ἔπειτα: adverb < ἔπειτα then [adverb and conjunction], afterwards, next, after that
(from, ἐπί upon or at, and εἶτα then)
(ἔπειτα is used 16 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

περιλειπόμενοι: verb, present passive participle nominative plural masculine <
περιλείπομαι remain, to leave over. In passive, to be left over, be left remaining,
to survive.

ἅμα: adverb < ἅμα adv.: at once, at the same time; prep. + dat.: together with

ἀρπαγησόμεθα: verb, 1st person future passive indicative plural < ἀρπάζω to
snatch away, carry off
(ἀρπάζω is used 14 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

νεφέλαις: noun, dative plural feminine < νεφέλη cloud

ἀπάντησιν: noun, accusative singular feminine < ἀπάντησις a meeting (with
someone)

ἀέρα: noun, accusative singular masculine < ἀήρ air (root "air")

πάντοτε: adverb < πάντοτε at all times, always
(πάντοτε is used 41 times in the NT. It is used 6 times in this book.)

ἔσόμεθα: verb, 1st person future middle indicative plural < εἶμί to be
(εἶμί is used 2,457 times in the NT...but not so commonly in the future tense.)

Observations and Comments

ἐν νεφέλαις — see also:

Mt 24:30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

I Thess. 4: 18

ὥστε παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις.

I Thess. 4: 18

So then, encourage each other with these words.

Unfamiliar Words

ὥστε: conjunction < ὥστε for this reason, therefore; so that

παρακαλεῖτε: verb, 2nd person present active imperative plural < παρακαλέω to urge or implore, to comfort or encourage (καλέω to call; παρά near; from beside, on account of). Lexical notes exist.

Observations and Comments

This is enormously encouraging, and stuff we need to hear and keep in mind, as we consider our departed loved ones.

This may also encourage us as we ponder our own situations...and not least if we are suffering from a chronic illness.

Looks like J.B. Phillips may be working from a slightly different version of the GNT in this verse.

I Thess. 5: 1

Περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν, ἀδελφοί, οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχετε ὑμῖν γράφεσθαι,

I Thess. 5: 1

As far as precise timing is concerned, brothers and sisters, you do not need for anything to be

Unfamiliar Words

χρεῖαν: noun, accusative singular feminine < χρεία need (χρεία is used 49 times in the NT. It is used 4 times in this book.)

Observations and Comments

τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν lit. concerning time and time

περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων — compare:

Matt. 24:36 περὶ δὲ τῆς ἡμέρας — But concerning that day and hour no one knows.....

I Thess. 5: 2

I Thess. 5: 2

αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἀκριβῶς οἶδατε ὅτι ἡμέρα
κυρίου ὡς κλέπτης ἐν νυκτὶ οὕτως
ἔρχεται.

**For you yourselves already know,
correctly, that the Day of the Lord
will come like a thief in the night.**

Unfamiliar Words

ἀκριβῶς: adverb < ἀκριβῶς exact, accurate, precise
(ἀκριβῶς is used 5 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

οὕτως: adverb < οὕτω(ς) (adv) in this way, in the same way, as follows; (adj) such,
of such kind (οὕτω or (before a vowel) οὕτως)
(οὕτω(ς) is used 208 times in the NT. It is used 5 times in this book.)

Observations and Comments

I wonder if they learned this during Paul's initial 3 week visit with them.

If so, then this teaching about the return of Jesus had to have been part of Paul's
core content.

Of course, if there was a significant Jewish component to the congregation, they
had probably spent their whole lives giving thought to "the Day of the Lord", just
as had Palestinian Jews. So it was perhaps not a huge innovation in thought→but
more just a refocusing, much as the Emmaus Road conversation helped the two
disciples refine their thinking about OT prophecy generally, and the Suffering
Servant of Isaiah in particular.

I Thess. 5: 3

ὅταν λέγωσιν· Εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια,
τότε αἰφνίδιος αὐτοῖς ἐφίσταται
ὄλεθρος ὡς περὶ ἡ ὥδιν τῆ ἐν γαστρὶ
ἐχούσῃ, καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐκφύγωσιν.

I Thess. 5: 3

**When they say, "Peace! Security!"
then destruction will come upon
them suddenly, like the pain of
childbirth comes upon a pregnant
woman...and there will be no escape.**

Unfamiliar Words

ἀσφάλεια: noun, nominative singular feminine < ἀσφάλεια security (literally or
figuratively):--certainty, safety.
(ἀσφάλεια is used 3 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

αἰφνίδιος: adjective, nominative singular masculine < αἰφνίδιος unexpected, i.e.
(adverbially) suddenly:--sudden, unawares.
(αἰφνίδιος is used 2 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

ἐφίσταται: verb, 3rd person present middle indicative singular < ἐφίστημι to stand
upon, i.e. be present (in various applications, friendly or otherwise, usually
literal); --assault, come (in, to, unto, upon), be at hand (instant), present, stand
(before, by, over).
(ἐφίστημι is used 21 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

ὄλεθρος: noun, nominative singular masculine < ὄλεθρος ruin, death,

punishment, destruction.

(ὄλεθρος is used 4 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

ὠδίν: noun, nominative singular feminine < ὠδίν pain, especially of childbirth
(ὠδίν is used 4 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

γαστήρ: noun, dative singular feminine < γαστήρ stomach (root gastric), womb -

ἔχω γαστήρ = to be pregnant

(γαστήρ is used 9 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

ἐκφύγωσιν: verb, 3rd person aorist active subjunctive plural < ἐκφεύγω to flee
out:--escape, flee.

(ἐκφεύγω is used 8 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

Observations and Comments

"They" have been around talking for a long time.

ἐκφύγωσιν aorist subjunctive often translates into a future tense in the Book of Revelation.

In the same way that a malware infection or hardware failure casts into instant prominence any failures of your data backup strategy -- from which there may be no going back -- so also the return of Jesus will cast into instant relief where you have invested your life.

There will come a time when you will experience the consequences of your decisions in life. And if you have chosen to reject Jesus, "destruction" is not too strong a word for what is going to happen to you.

αἰφνίδιος...ὄλεθρος — compare:

Mt 24:39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

ὠδίν — compare:

Mt 24:8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains (ὠδίν).

I Thess. 5: 4

ὁμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἐστὲ ἐν σκότει,
ἵνα ἡ ἡμέρα ὑμᾶς ὡς κλέπτῃς
καταλάβῃ,

I Thess. 5: 4

**But you, brothers and sisters, are
not in the dark, such that that day
can come on you as a thief.**

Unfamiliar Words

καταλάβη: verb, 3rd person aorist active subjunctive singular < καταλαμβάνω
win, attain; overtake, seize; catch; grasp, understand
(καταλαμβάνω is used 15 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

Observations and Comments

Just as your data backups need to be constantly, and totally up to date, so also your life needs to be constantly and totally invested in Jesus and in obedience to him.

You know that Jesus will surely return (as surely as you know that a day will come when your hardware malfunctions). So you are always living in a state of expectation and preparedness.

I Thess. 5: 5

πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς υἱοὶ φωτός ἐστε καὶ
υἱοὶ ἡμέρας. οὐκ ἐσμὲν νυκτὸς οὐδὲ
σκότους·

I Thess. 5: 5

**For you are all children of the
light...children of the day. We are
not children of the night or**

Unfamiliar Words**Observations and Comments**

We live wholesome lives, and we are in touch with truth. We do not live in the darkness of sexual immorality nor in the night of self-deception.

Re Semitism in this verse:

In Hebrew, the construct state is comprised of two nouns standing together, with the second noun (as genitive) modifying the first. Hence, what could be naturally said as "people who belong to the light" is expressed here by Paul as "sons of light".

David Alan Black, "New Testament Semitisms" (The Bible Translator 39/2 [April 1988], pp. 215-223)

I Thess. 5: 6

ἄρα οὖν μὴ καθεύδωμεν ὡς οἱ λοιποί,
ἀλλὰ γρηγορῶμεν καὶ νήφωμεν.

I Thess. 5: 6

**So then, let us not sleep like all the
others, but let us stay awake and be
clear headed.**

Unfamiliar Words

ἄρα: conjunction < ἄρα consequently, therefore (sometimes with εἰ or ἐπεὶ for emphasis) (Addn'l Lex Info)
(ἄρα is used 49 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

καθεύδωμεν: verb, 1st person present active subjunctive plural < καθεύδω to lie down to sleep, to fall asleep, to be asleep, to sleep
(καθεύδω is used 22 times in the NT. It is used 4 times in this book.)

λοιποί: adjective, nominative plural masculine < λοιπός remaining, the rest; hereafter, for the future, henceforth
at last, already; for the rest, besides, moreover, otherwise (Liddell says λοιπὸν

without the article before it has an adverbial sense)
(λοιπός is used 55 times in the NT. It is used 3 times in this book.)

γρηγορῶμεν: verb, 1st person present active subjunctive plural < γρηγορέω to be awake or wakeful
(γρηγορέω is used 22 times in the NT. It is used 2 times in this book.)

νήφωμεν: verb, 1st person present active subjunctive plural < νήφω to be self-controlled, clear-headed, to be sober, not intoxicated, to be vigilant, circumspect
(νήφω is used 6 times in the NT. It is used 2 times in this book.)

Observations and Comments

Subjunctive is used for exhortation (hortative). An imperative could have been equally appropriate.

γρηγορέω — compare:

Mt 24:42 Therefore, stay awake (γρηγορέω),

Mt 25:13 Watch (γρηγορέω) therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

I Thess. 5: 7

οἱ γὰρ καθεύδοντες νυκτὸς
καθεύδουσιν, καὶ οἱ μεθυσκόμενοι
νυκτὸς μεθύουσιν·

I Thess. 5: 7

**For those who live their lives, so to
speak, asleep, sleep at night. And
those who get drunk do so at night.**

Unfamiliar Words

καθεύδοντες: verb, present active participle nominative plural masculine < καθεύδω to lie down to sleep, to fall asleep, to be asleep, to sleep
(καθεύδω is used 22 times in the NT. It is used 4 times in this book.)

νυκτὸς: noun, genitive singular feminine < νύξ night
(νύξ is used 61 times in the NT. It is used 6 times in this book.)

μεθυσκόμενοι: verb, present passive participle nominative plural masculine < μεθύσκομαι to become drunk
(μεθύσκομαι is used 3 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

μεθύουσιν: verb, 3rd person present active indicative plural < μεθύω to drink to intoxication, i.e. get drunk
(μεθύω is used 7 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

Observations and Comments

If you are not living your life in faith and obedience to Jesus, you may be well and truly described as living your life in the dark, asleep.

μεθύσκομαι — compare:

Mt 24:48f. But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards (τῶν μεθύόντων).....

I Thess. 5: 8

ἡμεῖς δὲ ἡμέρας ὄντες νήφωμεν,
ἐνδυσάμενοι θώρακα πίστεως καὶ
ἀγάπης καὶ περικεφαλαίαν ἐλπίδα
σωτηρίας·

I Thess. 5: 8

**But we are of the day! Let us be
vigilant and wear the armor of faith
and love, and the helmet of
confidence in our salvation.**

Unfamiliar Words

νήφωμεν: verb, 1st person present active subjunctive plural < νήφω to be self-controlled, clear-headed, to be sober, not intoxicated, to be vigilant, circumspect (νήφω is used 6 times in the NT. It is used 2 times in this book.)

ἐνδυσάμενοι: verb, aorist middle participle nominative plural masculine < ἐνδύω dress, clothe, put on, wear (ἐνδύω is used 27 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

θώρακα: noun, accusative singular masculine < θώραξ the chest ("thorax"), i.e. (by implication) a corslet:--breast-plate. (θώραξ is used 5 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

περικεφαλαίαν: noun, accusative singular feminine < περικεφαλαία encirclement of the head, i.e. a helmet:--helmet. (περικεφαλαία is used 2 times in the NT. It is used 1 time in this book.)

ἐλπίδα: noun, accusative singular feminine < ἐλπίς expectation, confidence, faith, hope (ἐλπίς is used 52 times in the NT. It is used 4 times in this book.)

σωτηρίας: noun, genitive singular feminine < σωτηρία rescue or safety (physically or morally):--deliver, health, salvation, save, saving. (σωτηρία is used 46 times in the NT. It is used 2 times in this book.)

Observations and Comments

περι around, plus κεφαλαία cephalic (head)

1 Pet. 5:8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

The need to be vigilant and alert was a common theme for all the apostles (or at the very least, of Peter and Paul).

σωτηρία — compare:

Matt. 24:13 But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Conclusions: these close verbal resemblances (and even when there are not verbal resemblances, there are resemblances in thought) suggest that the words of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew were the source of Paul's teaching here. It could well be that Paul had a Matthew scroll at his elbow as he wrote his letter to Thessalonica.