

THE GOSPELS: ON WHOSE AUTHORITY?

Between the covers of your Bible is what is referred to as the 'corpus of Scriptures.' It is considered 'authoritative and standard.'

"The word 'canon' comes from the Greek *kanōn*, 'measuring stick.' By extension it came to mean 'rule' or 'standard,' . . . the word has come to be used with reference to the corpus of scriptural writings that is considered authoritative and standard."
The Anchor Bible Dictionary. NY: Doubleday, 1996, c1992.

The study of the canon of the Scripture, and how we came to have the Scripture is a very large subject. It is much more than we could ever look at in terms of one sermon.

Today I would like to look at one particular part of the Scripture, and bring some information to you. Let's have a look at the gospels, and, on whose authority? As the definition from the Anchor Bible Dictionary stated, it is considered 'authoritative and standard.'

So, in terms of the gospels, let's ask ourselves, on whose authority do we have FOUR gospels? That is a problem for people. We face some challenges today. We can provide answers from OUR perspective as to why there are four gospels. People have provided those definitions from time to time. Most of them have very little to do with the Bible itself or are very tangentially related to the Bible. One person said: "There are four, because there were four faces of beasts in Ezekiel's vision."

Another person said, "There are four elements in the universe, therefore there is one for every element." Others say it is because there are four directions of the compass. People come up with all sorts of ideas as to why there are four gospels.

We have to ask, what authority do we have for using those definitions for having four gospels?

We can have definitions, reasons that we can hold to ourselves, that may appear good to us. We may say, "They were written by apostles." But Mark and Luke weren't apostles.

Then you might say, "They were written on behalf of the apostles." There is some evidence to prove that.

But the problem with reasoning from that point of view is that most people don't accept the Bible as any authority at any rate! People ask questions about who brought the books together and established four instead of any other number. The latest I have heard is 80 different gospels. The question is, who made the choice? Who shaped the Bible the way it is?

I have a cutting from the University of Geneva who have made an announcement of the finding of yet another gospel in Tsahedik, an Egyptian language used by the Coptic Church. It is a gospel entitled the 'Gospel of Judas.' I am not quite sure which Judas it was who wrote. I will leave that to somebody else's imagination.

People are constantly coming up with things that are referred to as gospels. The number of gospels that are known to people is constantly increasing.

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There is confusion as to what makes something to be a gospel. So again I ask the question: the gospels, on whose authority? On whose authority do we have four gospels in our Bible? The answer can be established and I think it will be encouraging to you to be able to look at and appreciate some of these things.

Let's start with the Bible itself. I know people don't accept the Bible, but the Bible is a good starting point. What does the Bible say about itself? What is the internal evidence of the Bible?

A good place to start is where the apostle Peter makes a comment about the writings of Paul. Peter is drawing his second epistle to a close, and makes the comment:

***2 Peter 3:15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—
—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him,
has written to you,
16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are
some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist
to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.***

Peter says a lot of things here. He talks about the apostle Paul. He talks about the apostle Paul's epistles. He talks about what the apostle Paul speaks about in his epistles, but the most important thing for us in this subject, is the last two lines. Peter is apparently making a connection between Paul's epistles and Scriptures. He is equating the epistles that Paul has written with Scripture.

What was Scripture? What we refer to as the Old Testament today was considered to be Scripture. As Paul said to Timothy, all Scripture is given by divine inspiration. It is something that had been divinely inspired. It had been God-breathed.

Peter is making a connection here between the writings of Paul and that of the Scriptures.

Paul's comment about the Scriptures being God-breathed is not a light comment. There is support for that as well, because Josephus makes a comment about the Scriptures. Josephus was writing to counter the arguments of a Greek writer known as Apion. He wrote a book entitled, *Against Apion*. He talks about the Scriptures. He talks about the 22 books that today we refer to incorrectly as the Old Testament. Having talked about the 22 books, Josephus then carries on. He notes where the books come to an end. He said:

"It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes . . . but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time" *Contra Apion* I. 8.(41).

Up until the time of Artaxerxes there was a spirit of prophecy which had been given to Israel and Judah, which enabled Scripture to be written. But Josephus, writing at the end of the first century, said that they themselves recognised that the spirit of prophecy had been taken from them, and that the books that had been written subsequently, which are referred to today as being the *Apocrypha* or the *Pseudo-*

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graphical writings may be interesting books, but they are not on the same standard as those that record our history before that time which were inspired through the spirit of prophecy.

Josephus makes a connection between what we call the Scriptures and the role of the prophets. When Paul said that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, or is God-breathed, he was building on an understanding that existed at that point in time, that God was involved in the providing of Scripture.

Men may write wonderful books, have wonderful histories, but unless God is involved in it, it is not Scripture!

The apostle Paul built on this concept that Josephus provided. He spoke about the Church and upon what the Church is built. Speaking to the Church at Ephesus, where we will spend no small amount of time this afternoon, Paul said:

Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

The household of God is something that God is building. Upon what is it built?

***20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,
21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,***

Paul was saying to the Ephesians that the Church is built on a foundation. The foundation is provided by the prophets and the apostles, with Jesus Christ being the Chief Cornerstone. It is fitted around Jesus Christ.

As a result of being fitted together, it grows into a holy Temple in the Lord. That is a very important Scripture from Paul. But Paul lays claim to the prophets and apostles as the ones who lay the foundation for the Church.

Paul is clearly using the same ideas that informed Josephus, and that informed his instructions to Timothy in 2nd Timothy chapter 3. So if we look at internal evidence, the very first point is that:

- **1. Scripture is Established by Prophets and Apostles.**

They are the ones who are responsible for Scripture, through the inspiration of God and God's Spirit. So the very first point of internal evidence is that Scripture is established by prophets and apostles.

Let's look at another point of internal evidence. Let's now look at what Christ said to the disciples. It carries on this aspect of the apostles, and the role of the apostles in the laying of that foundation.

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At the Passover supper, with His disciples gathered round the table, Jesus talked to them about what was going to happen; how He was going to be taken from them, and that it was profitable that He be taken from them so that the Holy Spirit could be sent.

John 16 speaks of the Holy Spirit. In this passage, I have taken the liberty to change the pronouns to the neuter. Jesus said:

John 16:12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

13 "However, when [it], the Spirit of truth, has come, [it] will guide you into all truth; for [it] will not speak on [its] own authority, but whatever [it] hears [it] will speak; and [it] will tell you things to come.

14 "[It] will glorify Me, for [it] will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.

The disciples who were at that Passover with Jesus Christ were going to be recipients of revelation and understanding from God, through the agency of God's Holy Spirit. They were to understand and convey that.

John makes a similar comment right at the very period of time that Jesus had come to Jerusalem, for that last Passover. Various things had happened. He had ridden on the donkey into Jerusalem. The people had welcomed Him. He has had confrontation with the leaders in the Temple, and John records:

John 12:16 His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him.

John talks of things being called back to mind, memorised, and passed on for the benefit of the Church.

John himself, in his first epistle, makes a very important statement. He says:

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—

Note that three of the senses are referred to here – things which they had heard, had seen, and had touched.

2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

John was saying that he had been an eyewitness to these things. "These things are not idle speculation on my part. I have been there. My senses have been filled by the

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Man in terms of the vision, my hearing, my touch. I have tasted the food He has cooked!”

So he presents himself as being an eyewitness of Jesus and His ministry; as does Peter. Peter told the brethren ...

2 Peter 1:16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty (we saw His majesty!).

17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

... referring to the transfiguration (Matthew 17). Jesus Christ had been seen in His glory by Peter. Peter said, “We didn’t follow cunningly devised fables. This isn’t some cock-eyed story that we have created. We were eyewitnesses of His majesty. We have seen it. We understand it.”

So this is the second point in terms of internal evidence. Not only is Scripture established by the prophets and the apostles, but there’s also the aspect of being an eyewitness:

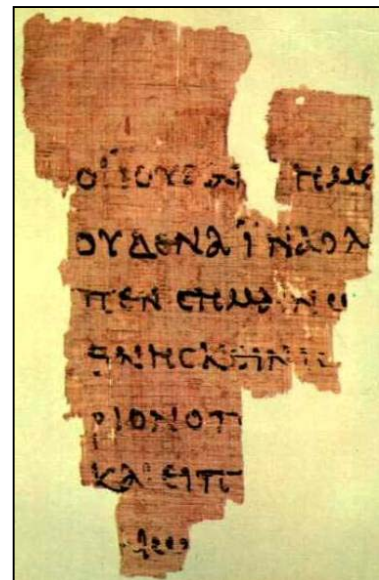
- **2. Scriptures was Written By Or on Behalf of Eyewitnesses**

In terms of our view, how we view the authority of the Scripture and the gospels in particular is that they are established by the apostles; they were written by or on behalf of eye witnesses, and thirdly, derived from that, they were written and circulated EARLY rather than late. People try and put the writing of the gospels way down at the end of the second century. But no, these were written by eyewitnesses, and they were established by the apostles. So they were written early.

- **3. Scripture was Written and Circulated Early Rather Than Late**

Let’s take that and ask is that view defensible? Let’s start from the bottom and work up. Let’s start with the concept of being written and circulated early rather than late. Let’s start at the end again. Let’s start with John. John is normally regarded as being the last gospel written – for good reason. It was probably written between 70 & 90 C.E. (maybe a little earlier than that). It was most likely written after the Temple had been destroyed.

What is the earliest copy of the gospel of John that exists? It is dated to the early 2nd century. On the right is a portion of the papyrus from John 18:31-33. On the reverse of it is more of chapter 18. It is written on both sides.



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In the picture below, two librarians in John Ryland's Library in Manchester are holding the piece of papyrus so that people can see the approximate size of it.



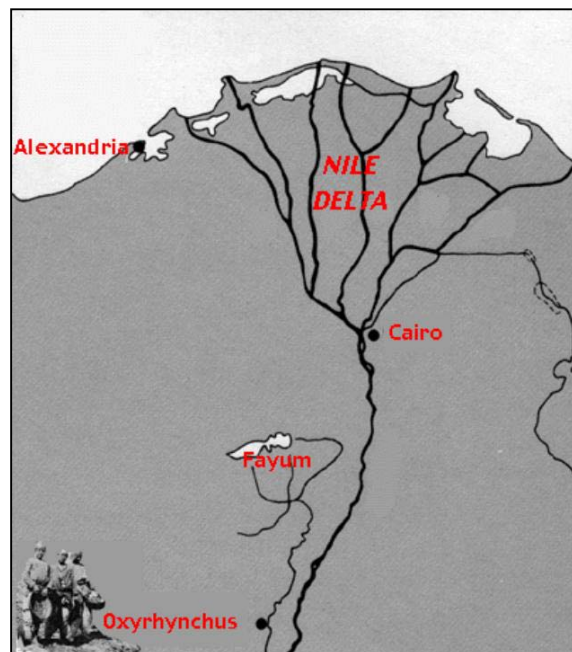
It is probably no more than six inches deep and perhaps three inches wide. It is clearly representing the gospel of John. It is dated about 120 C.E., and it came from a rubbish heap in Egypt – at a place called Oxyrhynchus (see map on right) – a village just off the Nile, right on the edge of the desert. The rubbish heap was unearthed by archaeologists at the end of the 19th century. They recovered something in excess of 5,000 papyrus fragments from it, dating from the first century, through the end of the second century.

This fragment of John was one of the fragments that came from there. It has been dated as being 120 C.E.

That is rather interesting because the gospel was probably written between 70 and 90 C.E., and this papyrus is dated about 120 C.E. John would have most likely written on parchment. So this is not the original! This is a copy of the original.

Copies of the gospels were being established in different parts of the world at that point in time, in a very short period of time from the time of writing.

So in Egypt they found archaeological evidence, including other references to John, but let's now have a look at another gospel – Matthew.



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Here are three little fragments of Matthew held in the Magdalen College Library in Oxford:



One papyrologist has dated these to about 55 C.E. at the latest. Not many people agree with him. This man is not a Church member, but on the basis of his professional skill he claims that this ought to be dated to 55/56 C.E.

This is not surprising, bearing in mind that John was the last gospel written. The book of John was probably written 70/90 C.E.

So there is support for the gospels being written early. There is hard physical evidence of the gospels having been written early rather than later.

What about the second point, the aspect of being written by eyewitnesses, or on their behalf? What proof do we have of that?

Let's go back to Ephesus. Let's spend a little time in the city of Ephesus, and look at the relationships that existed in Ephesus at the end of the first century, and the start of the second century - from about 90 C.E. through to about 150 C.E.

Why is Ephesus important? The apostle John is recorded as having died there. He lived out the rest of his life in Ephesus after his banishment to Patmos. It may well have been that he was also in Ephesus before he was banished to Patmos.

Mr Hulme recently referred to the worship of the emperor Domitian in Ephesus. The apostle John was combating that.

The apostle John spent a number of years in the area of Ephesus, finally dying there. His presence is recorded by a writer of the early second century, Papias. Papias wrote some five books about the Church, and he wrote especially about John as well.

So in Ephesus, firstly we have the apostle John. We also have a man by the name of Philip. People can't quite work out whether it is the apostle Philip or whether it is the Philip mentioned in Acts 6, and Acts 21 when Paul came to Caesarea, and Philip was there with his daughters who prophesied. There is some give and take as to which Philip it was. This person certainly had daughters who prophesied. That isn't to say that Philip the apostle didn't possibly have daughters as well. We have to be careful as to what we make assumptions upon.

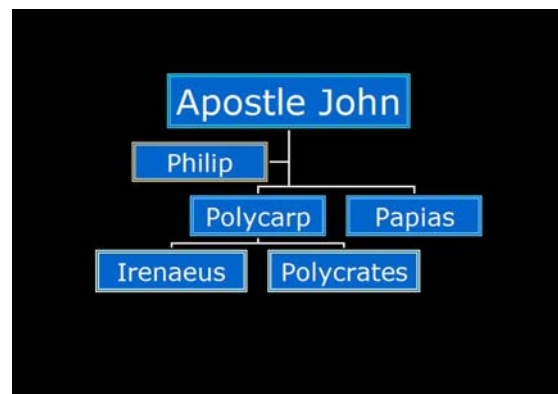
Papias also records another person besides himself in terms of Ephesus – and that is Polycarp. Many of you will have heard of Polycarp. He was a disciple of the apostle John. He was taught by John in Ephesus, and he eventually became the bishop of

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Smyrna, one of the seven churches. He was martyred in 156 C.E. There is a claim that he had lived some 86 years. I guess that whether this is 86 years as a Christian, or whether it is the entirety of his life is open to conjecture. But 86 years of age would have been an incredible age for a person of that day and time. It was not unusual in some ways, because the apostle John was clearly an elderly man by the time his life came to an end.

Polycarp lived firstly in Ephesus, and then in Smyrna as the bishop, the overseer of the Church. Alongside him was Papias. Papias claimed to have known John and to have been taught by John, and not only John but by numerous other disciples and people who had known the early Church.

Two other names can be included. These are disciples of Polycarp. The first is Irenaeus, and the other is Polycrates. Polycrates, Polycarp and Irenaeus were all very much involved in what was known as the *Quarto Deciman* controversy – as to whether the Passover should be taken on the 14th or, according to Rome, at Easter. All three of those men are recorded in history as being very much involved in supporting the 14th. So there was a family of people there, connected to one another. Irenaeus and Polycrates were taught by Polycarp. Polycarp was taught by John. Papias claimed to be taught by John. Polycrates ended up being the bishop, the overseer of Ephesus. Papias was the bishop or overseer of another city close by.



So Papias knew the apostle John personally and he had a great interest in meeting those who had had first hand experience of being with Christ. He became the bishop of Hieropolis. The Church in Hieropolis is mentioned in the book of Colossians (Colossians 4:13) together with the Church at Laodicea.

Ephesus is in a valley in Western Asia Minor. There is another valley just south of Ephesus which runs well inland. Notice the triangle on the map – at the junction of



a number of rivers. One each of those points of the triangle are some towns that you are familiar with. Laodicea is to the west of that point. Colossae is to the south. Hierapolis is to the north. Just over the ridge in the next valley to the north is a very important city – Philadelphia. We can start to see where these towns fit in the mail route. On the coast north of Ephesus

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is the town of Smryna. Southwest of Pergamum is Thyatira, and between Thyatira and Philadelphia is Sardis.

On the right is a picture of one of the gates of Hierapolis, one of the places where the Church was located. This was the gate that was dedicated to Domitian, the same emperor that was worshipped in Ephesus. This man had quite an impact in that environment.



The view above is looking down the main street of the town towards the gate of



Domitian in the background with all of the statuary and the colonnades of the main street still extant today. It was a place which worshipped Apollo.

To the right is a picture which shows the stele which has come from the Temple of Apollo, dedicating the Temple to Apollo.

The picture below shows the Temple of Apollo in the foreground, and the



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Amphitheatre, a very considerable amphitheatre in the background. These places were well documented and there is a lot of archaeological evidence relating to them.



It was in this ungodly environment that Papias undertook his role as an overseer of the Church, and wrote his five histories of the Church. If we look at the record of Papias, the first thing we have to recognise is that his writings are lost to history. So in what way can we use Papias as a defence for what we believe?

There is hope! His record was used and understood by every writer who speaks of the gospels from the second through to the fourth centuries. Everyone relies on Papias' record! If we just look at the second century, because that is probably the most relevant one to us, there is quite an incredible collection of people throughout the entirety of the second century who wrote about the gospels and who relied upon Papias for their information! We will get to see what Papias had to say.

There are writers of the second century who talk about the gospels. Tatian wrote what is known as the *Diatessaron*. Irenaeus wrote *Against Heresies* and various other works. We have a piece known as the *Muritorian Fragment*, so named because Muritori found it. We don't know who wrote it, but it is dated to the second century.

We also have Clement of Alexandria and Origen writing at the end of the second century and the beginning of the third. It is interesting to see what these people have to say.

Tatian's *Diatessaron* was the first attempt to make a harmony, a synopsis, of the gospels using all four accounts: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It was written in Greek round about the middle of the second century (ca 150 C.E.). Tatian was a Syrian. He went back to Syria round about 172 C.E., and translated it into the Syriac language.

So Tatian, not only in the use of the four gospels, but in some of the material that he provides in his *Diatessaron* relies upon Papias for his understanding.

Irenaeus became Bishop of Lyon, in Gaul round about 177 C.E. He had been in Gaul for some period of time before that. We don't know what took him there. As a

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writer, he attributed much of his understanding of the history of the Church to Polycarp – who had been taught by the apostle John, and who understood the Scriptures from the apostle John.

He also used the work of Papias as well. He wrote combating the Gnostics towards the end of the second century. As the end of the second century came, Irenaeus used Papias against the Gnostics, and against other writers of that period of time, supporting the four gospels.

He also wrote in support of those who kept the true Passover as opposed to Easter.

The Muratorian Fragment is a fragment, in Latin, that lists the Biblical books in order! As its name indicates, it is not all there, because it starts out by saying:

“The third book of gospel: According to Luke . . . The fourth gospel is by John, one of the disciples” followed by Acts of the Apostles.

It goes on to talk about the epistles of Paul, etc. This fragment is normally dated round about 170 C.E. – the second century.

We could look at the writings of those such as Origen or Clement of Alexandria. We don't need to get into those today. They have written at length. Origen talked about Matthew in two commentaries, one on Matthew and one on Luke. He wrote a book in which he talked about the gospels, the nature of the gospels and the number of the gospels.

What is the conclusion from history, or from looking at the second century? If we look at what these people say in detail, the conclusion from history is that the Apostle John established the number of Gospels!

When? In the first century. All of these people are in agreement that there were four gospels, that John wrote last, and that not only did John write last, but John vetted the other three before he added his gospel. John was very well aware of Matthew, Mark and Luke and he then provided his gospel.

Interestingly, the theological outlook of these writers are all over the theological scene. Some are very Catholic. Some are very non-Catholic. Some would be very way-out Catholics, like Origen and Clement of Alexandria. But they all agree with Papias. Without exception, they all accept Papias' account about John and the Gospels.

If we look at the location of these people, they are all over the map. It is as though God has provided us with a record from all ends of the Roman Empire of that day and age, supporting the apostle John in establishing the canon of the gospels:

- Irenaeus who was in Gaul (modern France). As Bishop of Lyon he was in the north of the empire, but he came from Asia Minor – from where Polycarp also came.
- The Muratorian fragment was written in Latin. It is obviously from the west.

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- Tatian went to Syria and eventually translated his work into Syriac. The record is in the east.
- Both Clement of Alexandria and Origen were Egyptians through and through.

It doesn't matter which part of the Roman world we go to. The record is the same. It is a consistent record throughout that period of time.

The same carries on into the third century with Hegesivius and into the fourth century with Eusebius, and finally some of the other writers who came after Eusebius.

The fact is that they were all depending upon Papias and upon Papias' record of what happened in terms of the gospels. It is quite incredible.

The important thing to realise is that there was no centralised authority at Rome to make a decision in the matter at the time when the decision was made. The decision was made by an apostle of Jesus Christ, not by some Pope in Rome, not by Constantine or some of his bishops in the fourth century as some people would like to say. Some people like to make the formation of the New Testament as late as possible because the first time they find a complete listing of all the New Testament books together is towards the end of the fourth century. But then you are talking about a different group of people with different standards, some time after God's Church had been forced out of the Empire (Revelation 12:4).

Rather interestingly, one of the last books of the Bible to be accepted by the false church was, in fact, the book of Revelation. Papias had no problem whatsoever with the book of Revelation. He made no bones about its importance and about who wrote it. It was the apostle John. Papias understood and appreciated the book of Revelation.

The record that has come down through history of some of the fragments of books is limited. We don't have all the story. We probably don't have all of the people who wrote about the gospels in the second century.

Who knows what will be dug up in a year's time? But the lesson from history at this point in time is very clear:

- That there is an incredible consistency throughout every writer of the second century.
- That there were four gospels by the name of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – in that order, and that that had been established by none other than the Apostle John himself. In fact, the Muratorian fragment says that John asked the Church to fast with him for three days before he started to record his gospel!

What was John's purpose in writing his gospel? One of the purposes was to confound the Gnostics. Papias records a rather interesting occasion that was passed on into a secondary source; the time when John went into a bath-house in Ephesus – only to find the leading Gnostic of the day, a man called Cerinthus in the bath-house. Apparently he said to Papias who was with him, "Let us go from here, lest heaven strike this place!" He was not going to bathe with this Gnostic! He wanted to separate himself from him. John was certainly seeking to confound the Gnostics.

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John was also seeking to clarify the life of Christ, something that we would never think of in this particular day and age because we have four gospels. But at a fairly early point, some people came to the conclusion that Jesus' ministry was only one year in length because there is only one Passover mentioned in the three synoptic gospels. John made it abundantly clear that there were other Passovers during the time of Christ's ministry. He clarified the life of Christ.

He also wrote to establish the Church. As an aside, let me give you some interesting homework to consider. As I said, John wrote to confound the Gnostics. If you look at the four gospels as we have them before us today, each gospel uses a different title to describe Jesus Christ.

Matthew refers to him as being 'the son of David' and 'the Son of God.' We find "the son of man." We find John using the term 'Logos,' and 'I am.' This is an interesting refutation of everything that was near and dear to the Gnostics – even in the titles that are ascribed to Jesus Christ throughout the gospels.

They also said something to the people who are not Gnostics. They said something to the Jews who also understood and appreciated the names. We don't want to get into Gnosticism in any great detail today, but in using the names that he did in terms of Jesus Christ being both the Logos and 'I am,' John very clearly created a problem for the Gnostics. He showed that Gnosticism was not the true way.

Were there other gospels? Yes, there were. The University of Geneva is about to publish 'The Gospel of Judas.' It is written in Tsaheidik and I don't think any of us understand that, so it will be a while before any of us get to spend any time perusing it!

Notice what Luke said:

Luke 1:1 Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us,

Obviously others had written about the events surrounding the time of Christ. What does it say though? It says that these are people were followers of Christ. These people are those who were witnesses in some way – perhaps eye-witnesses to Christ's life.

Yes, there were others, and there were others of different form. Let's look at Egypt again.

A number of scrolls were found in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945. They are identified as Gnostic writings. They have Gnostic gospels included with them. The impact of these writings is starting to be a challenge to traditional Christianity.

Let me read you a comment by one of the respected authorities in this land (from a major east coast university) on the Gnostic gospels. She said:

"What I find interesting is that [this book] raises a very important question. If they [the leaders of the Church] suppress so much of early Christian history, what else don't we know about? What else is there to be known? As a historian, I think it's a

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really important question because the answer means a good deal" (Elaine Pagels, Princetown).

What have they suppressed? Elaine Pagels has spent her life looking at the Nag Hammadi writings and the Gnostic gospels.

On the map of Egypt below, we can see Luxor. Moving north from Luxor, the Nile turns to the west, and almost flows southwest again. That is where Nag Hammadi is.

Oxyrhynchus which we looked at a little earlier (see page six) is in the area between Bani Suwayf and Al Minya alongside the Nile.

These scrolls have been found and deciphered. They are starting to have an impact.



One of the interesting benefits that comes from this is that people are starting to say, "There were multiple Christianities. There wasn't just the Roman Catholic Church after all." This is absolutely true. We have said that for years. People are saying, "Another group of Christians (so to speak) have been suppressed."

Yes, they were suppressed by the apostle John. John had no truck with them, nor did Peter and John when they met with one in Samaria (Acts 8).

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Acts 8:21 "You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.

At a very early time, the Church established a wall between itself and the Gnostics. Elaine Pagels says: "What has been left out? What don't we know?"

Look at what the apostle John said:

John 20:30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book;

We can't write everything!

31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

It ties back into what he said in 1st John 1, that our fellowship is to be with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. The whole purpose of writing these things is to bring us into a relationship with the Father and with His Son. We can have that proper relationship.

John acknowledges that he could have written a lot more. There were a lot more miracles. They were a lot of times in the gospels where what Jesus did is summed up in just one terse little statement, because God didn't see it necessary to inspire the gospel writers to detail every last thing. It wasn't required.

John 21:24 This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.

By the time you have been around the Church for sixty years or so, your testimony has a certain ring of truth to it. He was seen as being a true apostle of Jesus Christ. He had been 'through the wringer' in terms of hard knocks, setbacks, trials and tribulations in a way of which we probably have no comprehension. He had been imprisoned for the name of God. He had been exiled for the name of God. Some claim that he was put in boiling oil. We don't know all the things the apostle John went through. But when a man comes to the end of his life, having gone through all those things, there is a certain ring of voracity to what he says. It can be relied upon.

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

... so let it be. John brought the gospels to a conclusion. He sought to combat the Gnostics. He sought to dispel erroneous ideas that were rising within the Church. He was inspired by God to put a capstone on the gospels.

The fact that we have four gospels today, not only from the internal evidence of the Bible, but also from the evidence of history, from the early second century (Papias is normally credited with writing around 120 C.E.), is that the apostle John was instrumental in bringing the gospel accounts together and sealing them.

THE GOSPELS: ON WHOSE AUTHORITY?

If there were other gospel accounts written at that period of time, the apostle John had the opportunity to evaluate them and reject them. He made it abundantly clear in bringing us to the end of his gospel account, that in his opinion, as an apostle of God, enough information has been given so that we can have access to eternal life! That's the name of the game! That's the purpose of our calling! We don't have to go looking elsewhere for insights and understanding, and, as Elaine Pagels says, "see what has been left out – what these people avoided telling us about Jesus Christ." It is not necessary. It is not needed in terms of our eternal life. ❖