

All About Jesus
The New Testament
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Slide 1

1. This is the fourth presentation looking at the books of the Bible in their historical contexts and trying to determine who did and who didn't write them.
2. Today, we will look at the books of the New Testament, all of which deal in some way with the life, death, resurrection and teachings of Jesus.
3. As we saw when we looked at the books of the Old Testament, we will see that most of the authors are not known and some were almost certainly not written by the people with whom they have become associated.
4. Because of the traditional organization of the New Testament, we will begin our examination with the Gospels even though other books were written earlier.

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1. In 66 AD, after learning of what became known as the First Jewish Revolt, Emperor Nero sent 60,000 troops to Jerusalem to put it down.
2. In 70 AD, after a five-month siege, Roman troops under Titus broke down the walls of Jerusalem, entered the city and destroyed the Temple, taking the plunder from the Temple back to Rome.
3. Because Jesus had preached against the Temple authorities, his followers saw the destruction of the Temple as the sign that Jesus would soon return.

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1. As a result, Christian writers **“felt inspired to proclaim the messiahship of Jesus, whose mission, they believed, had been bound up with the temple.”** Armstrong, *The Bible* at 69.
2. Those writers created the four Gospels that begin the New Testament, each of which wrote **“from the point of view both of a particular Christian community or group of communities and of its own editor or author, who puts the story together in a way that reflects at once the life of that community and his own grasp of the sense of the Gospel.”** Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* at 33.
3. Although many Christians see the Gospels as reflecting consistent views of Jesus as the divine Son of God, **“[t]he development of Christian belief in the Incarnation was a gradual, complex process.”** Armstrong, *A History of God* at 81.

4. As we will see, successive Gospel writers more and more emphasized the divinity of Jesus and less and less emphasized his humanity, providing evidence that was later used to conclude that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine.

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1. Because Matthew, Mark and Luke include much of the same material, arranged in the same order, they are called “Synoptic Gospels” because they can be “seen together.”
2. **“Scholars have long recognized that Mark was the first Gospel to be written, and that both Matthew and Luke used Mark’s account as the source for their own stories about Jesus.”** Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus* at 135.
3. Most scholars agree that Mark was written in about 65 A.D.
4. The date is based on Chapter 13, in which Christians are **“arrested and brought to trial.”** *Mark* 13:11.
5. Even though the persecutions are described as predictions made earlier by Jesus, most scholars believe the persecutions being described were those begun by Emperor Nero in about 65 A.D.
6. Scholars believe the writer of Mark was quoting Jesus to encourage his followers to remain faithful in the face of those persecutions.
7. As was the custom of the time, the Gospels **“were written much as historical novels are today.”** Trickler, *Who Wrote the Books of the Bible?* at 211.
8. As a result, most scholars agree that New Testament writers sometimes put into the mouth of Jesus words they believed he **“would have said or should have said.”** *Id.*
9. As we will see, the Gospel writers had different views on what Jesus would have said that reflected their own understandings and objectives.

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1. Chapter 13 also quotes Jesus as advising those in Judea to **“flee to the mountains”** when they see the **“abomination that causes desolation.”** *Mark* 13:14.
2. Many scholars believe these words, again in the form of a prediction by Jesus, were in the context of the siege of Jerusalem.
3. There is a long tradition that Christians fled to Pella in what is now Jordan before the Romans finally entered Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and destroyed the Temple.
4. Consequently, many scholars believe that Chapter 13 was written **“as a warning to Christians in the battle zone.”** Trickler, *Who Wrote the Books of the Bible?* at 260.

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1. Since about 130 A.D., the Gospel of Mark has been attributed to John Mark, a companion of Paul in Antioch. *Acts* 15:36-41.
2. According to tradition, Mark recorded the recollections of Peter.
3. Today most scholars **“believe that we do not know who wrote the Gospel of Mark.”** Trickler, *Who Wrote the Books of the Bible?* at 257.
4. There is, however, nearly universal agreement that Mark was written for early Gentile followers of Jesus.
5. The best evidence for this conclusion is that the author parenthetically explains the Jewish custom of ceremonial washing (*Mark* 7:3-4), an explanation that would not have been needed if the intended audience were Jewish.

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1. Mark contains no accounts of Jesus’ birth or childhood.
2. Instead, the story of Jesus begins with his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist: **“As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”** *Mark* 1:9-11.
3. The first part of the statement is identical to that used by God in adopting a non-divine Davidic king by proclaiming on the day of his anointment: **“You are my Son; today I have begotten you.”** *Psalms* 2:7.

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1. As Karen Armstrong writes: **“Mark’s Gospel . . . presents Jesus as a perfectly normal man, with a family that included brothers and sisters. No angels announced his birth or sang over his crib. He had not been marked out during his infancy or adolescence as remarkable in any way.”** Armstrong, *A History of God* at 80.
2. Mark includes an extraordinary statement not found anywhere else in the New Testament: **“Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’”** *Mark* 3:20-21.
3. Mark quotes Jesus as saying: **“Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.”** *Mark* 6:4.
4. Mark describes Jesus as experiencing normal human emotions, such as having **“anger”** and becoming **“indignant.”** *Mark* 3:5; 10:14.

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1. Most scholars today believe that the Gospel of Matthew was the second of the gospels, written in about 80 A.D.
2. Matthew incorporates about ninety percent of Mark, often without change.
3. Since about 130 A.D., the writer of Matthew was thought to be the disciple of Jesus identified as a tax collector. *Matthew* 9:9-13.
4. Most scholars today believe an unknown author was writing for Jewish followers of Jesus who continued to obey the laws of Moses.
5. Evidence for this conclusion is found in a statement of Jesus to his disciples not found in Mark: **“Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.”** *Matthew* 10:5-6.
6. Matthew also includes the following statement from Jesus not found in Mark: **“For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”** *Matthew* 5:18.
7. Because Matthew was directed to a Jewish audience, **“it was important to provide links to Abraham and David and thereby to scriptural predictions of a messiah to come from David’s lineage.”** Trickler, *Who Wrote the Books of the Bible?* at 252.
8. Matthew includes a genealogy of Jesus, starting with Abraham and continuing through David to **“Joseph, the husband of Mary.”** *Matthew* 1:16.
9. Somewhat surprisingly, because the connection of Jesus to David was established through Joseph, Matthew also includes the earliest known reference to Jesus being conceived through the Holy Spirit when Mary was a virgin. *Matthew* 1:18-21.

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1. For the writer of Matthew, Jesus was literally the Son of God at the time of his baptism because of his divine conception.
2. Matthew, unlike Mark, suggests that John, who was not divine, was reluctant to baptize Jesus. *Matthew* 3:14.
3. Matthew also changed Mark’s account of what God said upon Jesus’s baptism.
4. In Mark, the voice from heaven announces: **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** *Mark* 1:11.

5. In Matthew, the voice from heaven announces: **“This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”** *Matthew 3:16-17.*
6. Since Matthew understood that Jesus was born divine, God spoke in the third person to an assumed crowd and not to Jesus in Mark’s language of adoption.

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1. Matthew makes other subtle changes to Mark’s text, which scholars believe reflects an evolving understanding of Jesus as the divine Son of God.
2. In both Mark and Matthew, Jesus asked Peter at Caesarea Philippi: **“But what about you?” he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’**” *Mark 8:29; Matthew 16:15.*
3. In Mark, Peter simply answers: **“You are the Messiah.”** *Mark 8:29.*
4. The author of Matthew supplements Peter’s reply: **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”** *Matthew 16:16.*

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1. In a passage in Mark about Jesus preaching in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, townspeople describe Jesus as **“the carpenter.”** *Mark 6:3.*
2. Matthew changes the passage so the same people now identify Jesus as **“the carpenter’s son.”** *Matthew 13:55.*
3. As a result of this change, many people assume that Jesus and Joseph were both carpenters, although many scholars believe that the author of Matthew saw the identification of Jesus as a carpenter as inconsistent with him being the Son of God.
4. The identification of Jesus as the son of a carpenter seems to contradict that conclusion, although it may simply suggest ignorance of the people of Nazareth.
5. Probably reflecting his conclusion that Jesus should not be portrayed as having normal human emotions, Matthew removes from the comparable passage in Mark the statement that Jesus was **“indignant.”** *Compare Matthew 19:14 with Mark 10:14.*
6. Matthew modifies Mark’s statement that a prophet is without honor in his hometown by eliminating Mark’s claim that Jesus’ relatives did not recognize him as a prophet. *Matthew 13:57.*
7. Because, as Matthew teaches, Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived, she and her family must have known he was special.

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1. Luke was the third of the gospels, probably written between 80 and 90 A.D.

2. The author of Luke also wrote the book of Acts, probably at the same time.
3. Because short sections of Acts are written in the first person (*e.g.*, *Acts* 16:10-17), the traditional view has been that both Luke and Acts were written by someone who traveled with Paul.
4. Since about 200 A.D., people have assumed that the traveling companion was Luke, identified in *Philemon* 24.
5. But most scholars today believe the first person sections of Acts were simply used by an unknown author, who expressly says his account is based on things **“handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses.”** *Luke* 1:2.

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1. The author of Luke is usually considered to have been a Gentile convert to Christianity, writing to a Gentile audience, which explains some differences from Matthew.
2. For example, when Matthew wanted to give a time frame for Jesus’ birth, he referred to **“the time of King Herod,”** known by the Jews. *Matthew* 2:1.
3. Luke dates Jesus’ birth by referring to Roman officials, Caesar Augustus and Quirinius. *Luke* 2:1-2.
4. A recent author writes: **“The emphatic use of Roman historical persons and events is also part of an emerging self-consciousness to place the Jesus movement on the world stage of the Roman Empire.”** White, *From Jesus to Christianity* at 258.
5. Luke contains a genealogy of Jesus that is irreconcilable with the one in Matthew, tracing Jesus lineage from David’s son Nathan, while Matthew traces Jesus from David’s son Solomon. *Compare Luke* 3:23-37 *with Matthew* 1:1-16.
6. The genealogies even differ on the name of Joseph’s father, with Matthew identifying him as Jacob and Luke identifying him as Heli. *Matthew* 1:16; *Luke* 3:23.
7. As one author writes, **“[a]t least one of them must be wrong.”** Trickler, *Who Wrote the Books of the Bible?* at 263.
8. Most modern scholars believe the Gospel writers constructed genealogies for Jesus to prove his connection to David, who lived 1000 years earlier.
9. It can be difficult for Christians to accept the idea that the Gospel writers may have invented facts to support their theological claims.
10. But it is important to keep in mind that those writers all believed that Jesus had risen from the dead and would soon return to rescue believers.

11. They used various rhetorical methods, common at the time, to persuade others of those facts, which they considered an urgent matter of life and death.
12. As I quoted Karen Armstrong in the first presentation: **“The life of Jesus had been a divine revelation, but the writers who recorded it were ordinary human beings, subject to sin and error.”** Armstrong, *The Bible* at 195.
13. We will talk more about the implications of that next week.

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1. Luke includes about 50 percent of Mark.
2. Like the author of Matthew, the author of Luke edited the words of Mark to support his theological positions.
3. Let’s look again at the story of the baptism of Jesus, this time as reported in Luke.
4. **“Herod locked John up in prison. When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the holy spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’”** *Luke* 3:20-22.
5. The statement about the baptism of Jesus is now **after** the statement that John the Baptist has been put in prison, suggesting that John did not baptize Jesus.
6. And nothing in Luke says that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River or even with water, both of which are clear in both Mark’s and Matthew’s version.
7. The text suggests this picture, in which Jesus is being baptized by the Holy Spirit.
8. Luke teaches that Jesus was conceived when the Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin Mary and was therefore free of sin from birth. *Luke* 1:35.
9. So Luke apparently edited the words of Mark to eliminate any suggestion that Jesus had to be baptized by John, who was **“preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”** *Luke* 3:3.

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1. Like Matthew, Luke edited Mark’s text to make Jesus appear less human.
2. For example, Mark reports a story in which Jesus **“looked around . . . in anger”** when people in a synagogue were critical of him for healing a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath. *Mark* 3:5
3. Luke’s version of the story omits the suggestion Jesus was angry. *Luke* 6:10.

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1. Luke further modifies the statement in Mark about a prophet being without honor.
2. Luke eliminates both the claim about relatives and the claim that persons in his house did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. *Compare Mark 6:4 with Luke 4:24.*

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1. Mark reports that as Jesus hung on the cross, “[a]t noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” *Mark 15:33-34.*
2. Using similar words, Luke reports: “It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. *** Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’” *Luke 23:44-46.*
3. Mark’s final plea to God has been replaced by words of acceptance.
4. Although Jesus’ death on the cross was an indisputable fact, many scholars believe his last words were added by human authors.
5. Both authors used quotations from Psalms to represent what they thought Jesus would have said based on their own understandings of his life.

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1. When Mark wrote his gospel, the followers of Jesus expected him to return in their lifetimes, driving out the Romans and establishing the kingdom of God on earth: “**I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.**” *Mark 9:1.*
2. By the time of the Gospel of Luke, 20 or 30 years later, Jesus had not returned.
3. Luke eliminated Mark’s words that the kingdom of God would come with power: “**I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.**” *Luke 9:27.*
4. Luke, unlike Mark and Matthew, quoted Jesus as saying that kingdom was already available because “**the kingdom of God is within you.**” *Luke 17:21.*

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1. For hundreds of years, people have noticed that Luke and Matthew include nearly identical material not found in Mark.

2. For example, look at *Matthew* 6:28-29: **“See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.”**

3. *Luke* 12:27 is nearly identical: **“Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.”**

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1. Most scholars today believe that Matthew and Luke obtained their common material from a book of the sayings of Jesus that has never been found.

2. That hypothetical book is called “Q,” for the German word *“quelle,”* which means “source.”

3. As Bart Ehrman writes: **“It is widely assumed that Q was an actual document, written in Greek, in circulation in the early church”** Ehrman, *Forged* at 57.

4. Scholars believe that Matthew and Luke took material from both Mark and Q and added their own material to that.

5. The validity of this so-called “two source hypothesis” has been strengthened by the discovery of the Gospel of Thomas, a book of sayings that we will discuss next week.

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1. There is general agreement that John was the fourth gospel, probably written in about 90 A.D.

2. John includes these famous opening lines: **“In the beginning was *Logos* (the Word), and *Logos* (the Word) was with God, and *Logos* (the Word) was God. . . . *Logos* (the Word) became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”** *John* 1:1, 14.

3. For the writer of John, Jesus is not just the Son of God from the time of his conception - he *is* God and has existed forever.

4. Like the Synoptic Gospels, John reports that **“the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain[ed] on [Jesus].”** *John* 1:32.

5. But unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John says nothing about Jesus being baptized.

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1. The Gospel of John has long been associated with John, the son of Zebedee, one of the original disciples of Jesus identified in the Synoptic Gospels. *Mark* 1:19.

2. This is largely because the Gospel of John never mentions John by name, but refers to the **“disciple whom Jesus loved.”** *John* 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7; 21:20.

3. The Synoptic Gospels also identify James as another son of Zebedee. *Mark* 1:19.
4. There is also no mention of James in the Gospel of John, which simply refers to unnamed “**sons of Zebedee.**” *John* 21:2.
5. Since James was thought to have died well before the Gospel of John was written, people assumed it must have been written by John.
6. Most scholars today believe that it is unlikely that John the disciple wrote the Gospel of John.
7. They point out that the Gospel of John is written in articulate Greek and, according to the Book of Acts, John the disciple was “**unschooled.**” *Acts* 4:13.

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1. The first verse of Chapter 6 of John states: “**Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee.**” *John* 6:1.
2. But for the entirety of the immediately preceding Chapter 5, Jesus is in Jerusalem “**for a feast of the Jews**” and nowhere near the Sea of Galilee. *John* 5:1.
3. Based on this and similar discontinuities, many scholars believe John was assembled from a collection of writings, perhaps by a group of John’s followers.

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1. The Gospel of John differs in many ways from the Synoptic Gospels.
2. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus’ ministry lasts for about one year and he is in Jerusalem only during the last week of his life.
3. In John, the ministry lasts for three years and Jesus is in Jerusalem on several occasions before the last week.
4. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John does not include any of the parables of Jesus or stories of him driving out demons.
5. Unlike the Synoptic gospels, John expressly equates the power of Jesus with that of God: “**Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.**” *John* 5:22-23.
6. John includes seven “**I am**” statements not found in the Synoptic Gospels. *John* 6:48; 8:12; 10:9; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1.
7. Many scholars believe these statements were intended to confirm that Jesus was God, who had identified himself to Moses as “**I am who I am.**” *Exodus* 3:14.

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1. As we noted in the first presentation, there is an irreconcilable difference between John and the Synoptic Gospels over the timing of Jesus' arrest and execution.
2. Matthew, Mark and Luke unambiguously say that Jesus was taken to the authorities **after** he had eaten the Passover meal with his disciples. *Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7-16.*
3. John says Jesus last met with his disciples "**before the Passover Feast**" and was taken into custody **before** the Passover meal. *John 13:1; 18:28.*

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1. Although some have suggested other explanations for the discrepancy, many scholars believe the author of John used his chronology to make a theological point.
2. John describes Jesus as the "**Lamb of God.**" *John 1:36.*
3. In explaining why Jesus' bones were not broken on the cross, the Gospel of John quotes from Exodus about the treatment of Passover lambs. *John 19:36.*
4. Passover lambs were ritually sacrificed before the Passover meal. *Luke 22:7.*
5. So, the author of John had Jesus die on the same day as the Passover lambs.

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1. Despite all these differences between John and the Synoptic Gospels, one striking similarity goes to the heart of Christian beliefs.
2. Like Matthew and Mark, John tells the story of Jesus walking on water to rescue his disciples during a storm on the Sea of Galilee.
3. The language that Jesus spoke to his disciples is identical in each of these versions – "**It is I. Don't be afraid.**" *Matthew 14:27; Mark 6:50; John 6:20.*
4. The Greek word translated "It is I" could also be translated "I am," suggesting that Jesus' claim to be God, the "great I am," was clear from the beginning.
5. For many Christians, then and now, this common claim by Jesus is more important than all the differences between John and the Synoptic Gospels.

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1. As we noted earlier, because a few sections of Acts describing the travels of Paul are written in the first person, both Luke and Acts have traditionally been attributed to a traveling companion of Paul named Luke.

2. But most scholars today have rejected that idea because of large discrepancies between the accounts in Acts and the accounts in Paul's letters.
3. For example, Acts says that Jews in Damascus were attempting to arrest Paul until he escaped in a basket. *Acts* 9:23-25.
4. But Paul writes that a pagan king named Aretas was trying to arrest him until he escaped in a basket. *2 Corinthians* 11:32-33.
5. Acts reports that after his escape, Paul **“stayed with [the apostles] and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.”** *Acts* 9:28.
6. On the other hand, Paul writes: **“I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.”** *Galatians* 1:16-17.
7. Most scholars believe if Acts had been written by a traveling companion of Paul, there would not be so many obvious differences in his accounts from those of Paul.

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1. With the possible exception of the Epistle of James, Paul's letters are the oldest books in the New Testament.
2. They were written from about 50 A.D. to 64 or 65 A.D., when Paul was executed in Rome.
3. Those letters include the earliest mention of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances and the earliest statements about what Jesus said during the Last Supper. *1 Corinthians* 11:23-26; 15:3-8.
4. Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians: **“I did not receive [the gospel that I preached] from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”** *Galatians* 1:12.
5. Early Christians saw Paul's letters as authoritative because Paul claimed to have seen the resurrected Jesus and learned the truth directly from him. *1 Corinthians* 15:8.
6. However, as Karen Armstrong points out, **“Paul did not think for a moment that he was writing ‘scripture’; because he was convinced that Jesus would return in his own lifetime, he never imagined that future generations would pore over his epistles.”** Armstrong, *The Bible* at 61.

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1. Fourteen books of the New Testament have been attributed to Paul at one time or another, although Paul's authorship of Hebrew has been rejected for hundreds of years.

2. There is little doubt among scholars that Paul wrote the first letter to the Thessalonians, the letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians and the letter to Philemon.
3. In the early nineteenth century, modern scholars began questioning the authenticity of other letters attributed to Paul.
4. One of the first letters scholars suspected was not written by Paul is the first letter to Timothy.
5. One of the tell-tale signs is a statement that a leader of the church **“must not be a recent convert.”** *1 Timothy* 3:6.
6. As one author recently noted, when Paul was alive, **“all Christians were recent converts.”** Trickler, *Who Wrote the Books of the Bible?* at 305.
7. Similarly, the author of 1 Timothy says that church leaders were required to be married. *1 Timothy* 3:2, 12.
8. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul advised his followers not to get married because Jesus would soon return. *1 Corinthians* 7:25-31.
9. For these and similar reasons, most scholars now believe that Paul did not write either of the letters to Timothy and did not write the letter to Titus, all of which were written after Paul’s death but in his name.

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1. In the first letter to the Thessalonians, the writer, identified as Paul, assured his readers that Jesus would return soon to rescue those **“who are still alive.”** *1 Thessalonians* 4:17.
2. That letter said Jesus would return unexpectedly, **“like a thief in the night.”** *1 Thessalonians* 5:2.
3. A second letter sent to the Thessalonians also says that it was written by Paul. *2 Thessalonians* 3:17.
4. This letter told the readers to ignore a **“letter supposed to have come from us”** predicting the imminent return of Jesus. *2 Thessalonians* 2:2.
5. Unlike 1 Thessalonians, in which Paul says that Jesus will soon return expectedly, the writer of 2 Thessalonians says Jesus will not return until after a long series of future events, including someone who **“sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.”** *2 Thessalonians* 2:3-4.
6. Either Paul wrote the second letter and correctly stated that the first was a forgery or Paul wrote the first letter and the second letter was the forgery.

7. Most scholars believe the second letter was not written by Paul, largely because it contradicts letters everyone agrees were written by Paul, in which he said the return of Jesus was imminent and said nothing about a series of preconditions to that return.
8. There are similar doubts about Paul's authorship of Ephesians and Colossians.

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1. Immediately following Hebrews in most versions of the New Testament is a letter attributed to **“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”** *James* 1:1.
2. Many people believe, and have long believed, that the Epistle of James was written by James the Righteous or James the Just, the brother of Jesus.
3. During Jesus' life, James apparently did not believe his brother was the Messiah. *John* 7:5.
4. Paul reports that Jesus appeared to James after his resurrection, when he became a believer. *1 Corinthians* 15:7.
5. Describing a trip to Jerusalem, Paul that he **“saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord's brother.”** *Galatians* 1:19.
6. In his history of the church written in about 325 A.D., Eusebius writes: **“Peter, James, and John, after the Ascension of the Saviour, did not claim pre-eminence because the Saviour had specially honoured them, but chose James the Righteous as Bishop of Jerusalem.”** Eusebius, *The History of the Church* at 36.
7. James is the only follower of Jesus other than John the Baptist mentioned by Josephus, who describes his death in 62 A.D. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20:9:1.

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1. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he criticizes James for sending an emissary to Antioch to try to convince Paul to stop accepting followers of Jesus who were not circumcised according to Jewish law. *Galatians* 2:12-13.
2. Paul then sets out why he believed that James was wrong to insist that Gentiles be circumcised. **“Consider Abraham: ‘He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith”** *Galatians* 3:6-8.
3. This verse is in James: **“And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness’ and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.”** *James* 2:24.

4. Looking at these two verses in the context of the dispute between James and Paul, people have long believed that James wrote his letter to contradict the teachings of Paul.
5. It is also possible that Paul wrote his letter to contradict James.
6. Either way, that would make James among the very earliest books of the New Testament, written by someone personally familiar with Jesus and his teachings.
7. As a Lutheran pastor recently wrote: **“James is a vital key to the beliefs and teachings of Jesus.”** Butz, *The Brother of Jesus* at 17.

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1. Largely because of its teaching about the relative importance of works and faith, the Epistle of James has long been controversial.
2. By the fourth century, based on the writings of Paul, orthodox Christians had come to believe that **“faith in Christ alone”** was sufficient to guarantee salvation. Eusebius, *The History of the Church* at 90.
3. Because James rejects this idea, Eusebius doubted its authenticity, even though he acknowledged that it had been used regularly by very many churches. *Id.* at 61.
4. Because of James’ rejection of “faith alone,” Martin Luther said that he would like to remove James from the Bible because it **“mangles the Scriptures.”** *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35 at 395-399.
5. Some scholars have challenged the conclusion that James the brother of Jesus wrote the Epistle of James because it is written in elegant Greek, a language in which James is assumed not to have been fluent.
6. As Bart Ehrman writes: **“The historical James . . . was an Aramaic speaking peasant from Galilee who almost certainly never learned to read. Or if he did learn to read, it was to read Hebrew.”** Ehrman, *Forged* at 198.
7. Others argue that even if James wrote only in Hebrew, for which there is no evidence, the letter we have could be a Greek translation of a Hebrew original.
8. As a result of this and other arguments, scholars are about equally divided about who wrote James.
9. As one author writes: **“The matter has not been settled. The score is tied and both teams are still on the field.”** Trickler, *Who Wrote the Books of the Bible?* at 311.

Slide 36

1. Two letters in the New Testament are attributed to Peter, the disciple of Jesus originally named Simon.

2. Today, many scholars reject the claim that Peter wrote either of these letters, in part because he, like John, was illiterate. *Acts* 4:13.
3. But even if Peter were literate, there is evidence he did not write both letters.
4. As Christians in the first generation after Jesus believed, 1 Peter proclaims: **“The end of all things is near.”** *1 Peter* 4:7.
5. But the author of 2 Peter quotes doubters as saying: **“Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.”** *2 Peter* 3:4.
6. He then told his readers to be patient because **“[w]ith the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”** *2 Peter* 3:8.
7. The frustration over the failure of Jesus to return occurred **“much later”** than during the life of Peter, who died in about 64 A.D. Ehrman, *Forged* at 70.
8. In addition, scholars have long noted that entire passages in 2 Peter are virtually identical to those in Jude, a letter purportedly written by Jesus’ brother.
9. As Ehman notes: **“The parallels are so numerous that scholars are virtually unified in thinking that the author [of Second Peter] has taken Jude’s message and simply edited it a bit to incorporate it into his book.”** *Id.* at 69.
10. As a result, most scholars believe Peter could not have written 2 Peter and many believe he did not write 1 Peter.
11. Many scholars also believe that the other epistles, 1, 2 and 3 John and Jude, were not written by the people claimed to have written them, although some of the letters of John may well have been written by the same unknown person or persons who wrote the Gospel of John.

Slide 37

1. This brings us to Revelation, the most controversial book in the New Testament.
2. As we will see next week, **“some Christians were reluctant to include it in the canon.”** Armstrong, *The Bible* at 76.
3. Revelation is in the Bible because it claims to be written as the **“revelation of Jesus Christ,”** who sent **“his angel to his servant John.”** *Revelation* 1:1.
4. Early Christians believed this was the same John as Jesus’ disciple, who they believed had also written the Gospel of John.

5. The conclusion that Revelation was written by a disciple of Jesus was challenged in the third century and is widely rejected today because of its unique language and theology.

Slide 38

1. Many scholars see in the visions described in Revelation clues that the author was writing about his own time and about the Roman siege of Jerusalem, which many Christians at the time thought meant the return of Jesus was at hand.
2. For example, one passage describes **“locusts [who] looked like horses preparing for battle”** led by **“Appollyon,”** who **“tortured [the people] for five months.”** *Revelation 9:5-11.*
3. The five-month siege of Rome was led by a Roman legion named Apollinarus.
4. Revelation describes a **“beast”** whose **“number is 666.”** *Revelation 13:18.*
5. Based on the cryptogram of his name, **“[n]umerous scholars ascribe the number 666 to Nero”** and believe that the author of Revelation wanted his readers to know that the symbolic “beast” was Nero, who had begun the persecution of Christians and had sent troops to Jerusalem. Mathison, *When Shall These Things Be?* at 227.
6. Many scholars believe this interpretation is required by the description of the beast as a seven-headed monster, with the seven heads expressly said to be **“seven hills,”** a common description for Rome. *Revelation 13.1; 17.9.*

Slide 39

1. The eighteenth chapter of Revelation describes God’s annihilation of a **“great city”** in **“one hour”** by **“fire”** and **“dust”** because of the city’s great **“wealth,”** **“excessive luxuries”** and carnal **“sins.”**
2. This description matches perfectly what we know about the Roman city of Pompeii, which was destroyed in 79 A.D. when Mount Vesuvius erupted with unexpected ferocity, quickly burying the city under about 20 feet of burning pumice and ash and instantly killing thousands of its residents.
3. A number of scholars have concluded that the author of Revelation was claiming that God had destroyed Pompeii because of its wickedness and would soon rescue the Christians from their persecution at the hands of the Romans.
4. As one author notes, Revelation said to first century Christians: **“Keep the faith, fellow Christians! God will destroy Rome and end the persecutions.”** Trickler, *Who Wrote the Books of the Bible?* at 330.

Slide 40

1. Most Christians are familiar with Revelation's description of a great battle that will be preceded by a gathering of kings **"at a place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon."** *Revelation 16:16.*
2. Armageddon refers to Megiddo, a city in the Jezreel Valley north of Jerusalem.
3. Titus, a future Roman emperor, gathered his troops together near Megiddo in 67 A.D. in preparation for his successful siege and destruction of Jerusalem.
4. As a result, Armageddon became a symbol of that disaster and the basis for a hope that the armies of God would soon assemble at Megiddo and destroy the Romans.
5. The conclusion among many scholars that Revelation was describing events of the first century is known as preterism.
6. However, for many Christians, Revelation remains a prediction of the future.

Slide 41

1. Next week, in the final presentation in this series, we will examine how and why the books in our Bibles were selected.
2. We will look at other books available for inclusion in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament and examine why they were not selected.
3. We will also try to answer this question – in what sense are the books of our Bible, written by mortals and including errors and contradictions, legitimately seen as the inspired words of God?

Resources:

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Ehrman, Bart, *Misquoting Jesus* (Harper San Francisco 2005)

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Eusebius, *A History of the Church* (Penguin Books 1989)

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Walker, Williston, *A History of the Christian Church* (Schribner 1985)

White, L. Michael, *From Jesus to Christianity* (Harper San Francisco 2004)