

The Reliability of the Gospels

#1: What Makes Our Gospels Special?

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Introduction: Discovery of the *Gospel of Thomas*

I. Our Culture's Fascination with Lost Gospels

- A. Like the time of the Judges, our culture values diversity (so there is no absolute truth)
- B. The study of early Christianity has been affected by the push for diversity
 - 1. Walter Bauer's views of orthodoxy and heresy
 - 2. For modern scholars, there is no such thing as "Christianity" in the earliest stages
- C. Different (and equally legitimate) Christianities leads to different (and equally legitimate) Gospels

Examples include the Gospels of Thomas, Peter, Mary, and the recent so-called Gospel of Jesus' Wife

II. The Case for the Canonical Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

A. The Canonical Gospels are the Earliest We Have

- 1. All the Canonical Gospels are dated c.50-90 A.D.
- 2. No Apocryphal Gospel is dated to the First Century

Implications:

- Closer to the events of Jesus, the better
- Eyewitnesses were still alive when the Gospels were published (and thus could challenge their content)

B. The Canonical Gospels Have a Credible Connection to the Apostles

- Who were the apostles?
 1. We have good reasons to connect the Canonical Gospels to the Apostles
 - Example: John. Irenaeus knew Polycarp who knew John Personally.
 - Implication: Gospels contain authoritative, eyewitness testimony
 2. Not a Single Apocryphal Gospel Could have Been Written by an Apostle
 - Apocryphal Gospels bear the names of Apostles for obvious reasons (Thomas, Peter, Phillip, etc.)
 - But, given their late date, none could have been written by an apostle or their companions

C. The Canonical Gospels Lack the Legendary Embellishments of Later Gospels

1. The Canonical Gospels Speak in a Restrained, Manner-of-Fact Manner
 - Scholars have observed for generations that the canonical gospels are quite restrained in the way they tell their story. It is very direct, straightforward.
2. Apocryphal Gospels Often have Extensive Legendary Embellishments
 - Example: Infancy Gospel of Thomas
 - Example: Gospel of Peter

D. The Canonical Gospels Were Recognized as Authoritative from a Very Early Date

1. The Canonical Gospels Were Recognized as Scripture Very Early
 - Irenaeus: Four and only Four
 - Muratorian Fragment: Four and Only Four
 - Clement of Alexandria: Four and Only Four
2. Most of the Apocryphal Gospels Were Expressly Condemned Or Simply Ignored
 - Not a Single manuscript with both apocryphal and canonical gospels
 - Not a single canonical list with both apocryphal and canonical gospels
 - Very few manuscripts (e.g. Thomas has total of 3, whereas canonical are upwards of 2,500).