

## The Reliability of the Gospels

### #2: When Were the Gospels First Regarded as Scripture?

Introduction: Who Chose the Gospels?

#### I. Understanding Irenaeus

##### A. For Irenaeus, the four Gospels Are Absolutely Certain

“It is not possible that the gospels can be either more or fewer than the number they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live and four principle winds... [and] the cherubim, too, were four-faced.” –*Haer.* 3.11.8

##### B. Was Irenaeus Alone In his Beliefs?

- Irenaeus Provides No Indication He is an Innovator
- Irenaeus is Drawing on Earlier Tradition

#### II. Contemporaries of Irenaeus

##### A. The Muratorian Fragment (c.180)

##### B. Theophilus of Antioch (c.177)

##### C. Clement of Alexandria (c.196)

#### III. Predecessors to Irenaeus

##### A. Justin Martyr (c.150)

“And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.” --*1 Apol.* 67.3

B. Papias (writing c.125, but referring to c.90)

“The Elder used to say: Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he [Peter] remembered. . . For he was intent on just one purpose: to leave nothing out that he heard or to include any falsehood among them . . . Matthew collected the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each interpreted them as best he could.” Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15–16

C. Epistle of Barnabas (c.130)

“As it is written, ‘Many are called, but few are chosen.’” *Barn* 4.14, citing Matt 22:14

D. 1 Tim 5:18:

“For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’”

#### IV. Implications of an Early Fourfold Gospel

A. The Church Did Not “Choose” the Gospels

- We need to move beyond the idea that the church “chose,” “decided,” or even “voted” on the Gospels
- Instead, they viewed the Gospels as something handed down to them from the apostles
- In this sense, they *recognized* and *received* the Gospels instead of choosing them
- John 10:27: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me.”

B. The Authority of These Books is not from Church Councils or Decisions of Humans

- These books are authoritative by virtue of having come from God’s authorized spokesmen (the apostles)
  - Matthew and John were apostles
  - Mark was a disciple of Peter, and Luke was also an apostolic disciple
- No other Gospels have a legitimate claim that they came from apostles