

Chapter 1 - The Synoptic Gospels

Introduction

Most Christians are aware of the biblical claim of inspiration and inerrancy yet when it comes to explaining how the Bible came to us in sixty-six books they are woefully bankrupt of any knowledge. Therefore, when anyone challenges the origin of the books of the Bible they are unable to give any reasonable or intelligent defense of the scriptures. The Bible comes to us as 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. In this lesson we will explore the origin of the first four books of the New Testament called the Gospels.

Jesus Christ left us no writings. In fact, the only recorded writing that Jesus did was to write something on the ground when the accusers of the woman taken in adultery wanted to stone her. We are not told what he wrote, but whatever it was it was most likely immediately erased by a swish of a sandal.

It is only logical that sometime after the death and resurrection of Jesus some people wrote down their recollections of what Jesus said and did. We do not know who or how many or to what extent these freelance writers recorded the story of Jesus. What we do know is that a few of these documents were already highly regarded as early as 50 A.D. by the apostles and churches of the early years.

Four of those writings, carefully copied and preserved by the churches, survive to this day. Those four documents are known as the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The word "gospel" means "good news." The Greek word for gospel is "evangeleon" from which we derive the terms evangelize, evangelism, evangelist, and evangelical. It refers to the good news heralded concerning Jesus Christ. In the Greek culture of the Roman Empire "evangeleon" in singular and plural forms referred to the announcement of the good news of victory. It was used in the Roman cult of emperor worship to mean the glad tidings of the birth of a future emperor or his ascension to the throne.

All of the gospels were written in the first century during the lifetime of the apostles and in plain view of critics, skeptics, and agnostics who could have torn it to shreds had it contained errors historical or otherwise. They did not and could not. In fact one of the antagonists to the gospel message, Celsus, in disputing the faith with Origen, could not deny the genuineness of the four gospels while he vehemently rejected the message. (Faussett-Brown p. 261) On the other hand the gospels, written during the lifetimes of hundreds and thousands of eyewitnesses, were never refuted, questioned, or challenged regarding words, chronologies, names and places, times or dates, or references to concurrent secular history. One wonders why in the midst of intense world persecution Christianity's opponents were not able to assail the reliability of the gospels seeing they too were eyewitnesses of the life and times of Jesus. One must also wonder why 1900 years later non-eyewitness theologians can assault the integrity of the gospel, impugning its veracity, and judging its authenticity as though they had more knowledge, evidence or proofs than did the first century scholars.

By the end of the first century and most certainly before the death of the last apostle (John) all of the books of the N.T. known to us today were already in circulation. (Faussett p112) The renowned scholar Andrew R. Faussett states the argument for validity of the N.T. canon this way.

"The prophets' in the Christian Church, speaking themselves under inspiration, and those having the Spirit's gift, 'the discerning of spirits,' acted as checks on the transmission of error orally before the completion of the written word. Secondly it was under their inspired superintendence that the N.T. Scriptures were put forth as they were successively written.... Thus by the twofold sanction of inspiration, that of the authors and that of the judges, the canonicity of each book is established. By God's gracious providence most of the books of the N.T. were in the church's possession years before the death of leading apostles, all of them before the death of John." (Faussett p112)

Higher Criticism

During the last 150 years theologians have turned to a critical analysis of the Old and New Testament known as higher criticism. Critical study of the Bible is not bad in all its disciplines. It should involve textual criticism (to discover original use and meanings of words), and historical criticism (a study of the historical setting of scripture). The problem comes when men begin to bring in speculative theories as to the sources and forms from which they think the scriptures were derived. Higher criticism seeks to discover what portions of the scriptures were really authentic and what are suspect. The problem is that their approach to the scriptural writings is full of skepticism and agnosticism. Their assumption is that the scriptures are not "God breathed."

From the outset they start with the assumption that the Bible is not historically accurate. Despite these incessant attacks on the Bible there has yet to be discovered any archeological or scientific discovery that proves the Bible wrong. "The attitudes behind these attacks on biblical accuracy and authority were those of complete rejection of God's inspiration of the scriptures." (p70 Grant Jeffrey) Many of these so-called religious scholars outright deny any supernatural event such as miracles or prophecy. For them any reference to miracles or prophetic fulfillment is an indication of unreliability. They begin with doubt and end with adamant unbelief. Their basic premise is that all in the Bible is false unless it can be corroborated by non-biblical evidence. Yet time and time again discoveries of the ancient world have confirmed the biblical narratives. Still they continue in unbelief refusing to listen to their own pre-established proof requirements. Instead they move on to their next pet-peeve against the scriptures. Their faith in agnosticism exceeds their need for scientific empirical data.

As we move into the NT these pseudo-scholars become even more vociferous against the scriptures. They seem hell-bent on disproving the historicity of Jesus at any cost. Their theme is evident - If it is miraculous it didn't happen. They are convinced of a scientific method that all things operate under the natural laws and anything outside that realm is fantasy. Therefore after 150 years of assaulting the Bible they are now emboldened to

assault Jesus Christ himself blatantly denying the birth, death, and resurrection accounts of Christ. Some have gone as far as to claim that Jesus did not even exist but was a hero legend of superstitious people.

The Jesus Seminar

The epitome of this folly is the infamous Jesus Seminar composed of seventy-five liberal scholars who sit in pompous judgement over the authenticity of Jesus' words. Meeting semi-annually they vote on the probability of the Jesus' sayings being genuine. It was reported in 1996 by Time magazine that their verdict over the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John was that they (the Gospels) were "notoriously unreliable." They had thrown out the story of the Nativity, the Resurrection and the Sermon on the Mount. When they examined the Lord's Prayer they rejected every word except the "Our Father." The Jesus Seminar has now produced a revised "Gospel According to Jesus" which eliminated almost all of the sayings of Jesus, and most of the miracles." (Jeffrey p112)

THE CANON

How The Gospels Came To Us

As we have already stated, the four gospels that we have in the New Testament were written and circulated not long after A.D. 50. As we will see, these books were unanimously upheld by the early church as authentic and written by the apostles or prophetic colleagues of the apostles. These New Testament books were not simply voted into the scriptures hundreds of years after Christ, they were considered scriptures at the earliest moment, when they were first written and circulated among the churches that the apostles had founded.

Early after the resurrection of the Lord congregations gathered authentic writings of scripture into archives or libraries, to be read in the churches on the Lord's day.

We call these archives of the books of the Bible "canons" from the Greek word *kanon* which means a reed, or rule of measurement. Reeds were used for measurement like a yardstick. We get the word *canon* from "*kanon*." It was a standard of measurement. In Revelation 11:1 John states that he was given a reed like unto a rod to measure the temple of God.

The word is used in Galatians 6:16, 2 Corinthians 10:13-16, and Philippians 3:16. The word "*canon*" carries the idea of a setting limits on something, that is, to set off the boundaries of something. Thus the canon of scripture sets off the boundaries of what is scripture and what is not. These manuscripts were carefully and laboriously copied and shared with other congregations. The apostles themselves referred to these writings as scripture. (See 2 Peter 3:16, I Cor 14:37, I Cor 12:10, and Galatians 1:8-9)

The churches themselves individually and without any organized oversight judged what was divinely inspired. We therefore have the solid witness of the apostles themselves, the churches individually and independently of each other using the gift of discernment, all coming to the unanimous decision that the gospels in particular, and the writings of the epistles were genuine, having been written either by the apostles, or as in the case of Mark and Luke, by apostolically recognized men.

Muratorian Fragment

An ancient manuscript written by Caius, a presbyter of Rome in the first century, known as the Muratorian Fragment, contains one of the earliest lists of canonical books, and declares Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to be scriptures while rejecting the Shepherd of Hermas as being spurious. (Fausset p 113) In the same era Peshito and Syriac versions of the canon agree with the Muratorian Fragment and include Hebrews and James.

Council of Carthage

It was not until AD 397 at the Council of Carthage that the organized church declared their agreement and ratified the canon of the New Testament as containing the 27 books which we now recognize. The canon agreed upon at Carthage could not make any writing inspired scripture which was not already scripture. "Man could never make that inspired which God has not, nor can the doubts of some divest of inspiration that which God has inspired." (Fausset p113) The church merely sealed by declaration the decision which the churches and apostles had already concluded through careful sifting. The canon was closed therefore at the death of the last apostle, not by any legislation of men, but by the witness of God's spirit to the church over a period of four hundred years.

A Test for Scriptures

The Diocletian persecution of AD 303 was directed against the Christian scriptures. Whoever delivered them was considered a traitor to the state, therefore even by secular standards there had to have been a predetermined canon of what constituted Christian scriptures. Men and women gave their lives for the scriptures even from the earliest days of Christianity. It is hard to believe that someone would die for something they considered to be the general writings of good men.

There were five possible guiding principles used by the early church fathers to determine whether a New Testament book was canonical.

1. Was it authoritative - did it come from the hand of God with the authoritative "Thus saith the Lord"?
2. Was it prophetic - was it written by a man of God who was himself a prophet?
3. Was it authentic - was its authenticity in doubt? The early church fathers had the policy, "If in doubt, throw it out."
4. Was it dynamic - did it come with the life transforming power of the Spirit?
5. Was it accepted - was it accepted unquestioningly by the church at large since the beginning?

(McDowell, A Ready Defense, p 39)

Reliability of the Early Dates for New Testament Writings

We now possess over 5,000 manuscript copies of portions of the NT in the Greek language. Beyond this there exist 15,000 manuscripts of the NT in other languages dating from the first centuries after Christ. No other writing of ancient times has so much original material that has been so carefully scrutinized as the New Testament. No other body of literature has undergone such intense attacks on its integrity.

The Synoptic Gospels

Part of the attack on the New Testament is due in part to what is called the "synoptic problem." Since the 18th century scholars have been comparing the gospels to see what similarities and differences might be there. They do this by placing the gospels side by side in parallel columns.

"Synoptic"

The term "synoptic" means "seeing together." (Syn= together and optic=seeing) In doing this kind of careful study it has been observed that three of the four gospels are very much alike. They are Matthew, Mark and Luke. John's gospel is different in content and in several other ways. Therefore Matthew, Mark, and Luke constitute the "synoptic gospels." It has also been noted that there are significant differences between these three witnesses to the life of Christ. These differences cause some scholars to conclude that there were therefore errors made by the writers.

The Q Document

Further studies reveal that Matthew's gospel contains 91% of Mark's words, and Luke contains about 53% of Mark's gospel. It has therefore been speculated that Matthew and Luke both used Mark's gospel and were familiar with it. Others speculate that there may have been a fourth document, or oral tradition, unknown to us, perhaps lost in the sands of time, known as the "Q" document that was also used by Matthew and Luke. ("Q" stands for the German word "Quelle" meaning source.)

Harmony of the Gospels

The Gospel of John is not a chronological Gospel therefore is not considered as part of the synoptics. But for our use and study of the Scriptures we are going to use it because though not chronological it helps us to grasp the bigger picture of what was happening in Jesus' life and ministry. We will call this the "Parallel" Gospels, or "Harmony of the Gospels." Thompson's Chain Reference Bible gives an excellent side-by-side comparison of the chronology of the Gospels. We have included it here for your use and enjoyment. You will find it very helpful in understanding the story of Jesus' life and ministry. For instance, using this chart you could easily pick out all the sermons Jesus preached and examine them from each writer's viewpoint. You could do the same with all the miracles, or all the healings.

For our present study, the story of the birth of Christ is told in only two of the four Gospels. That becomes very clear when you look at the chart. We have deliberately left out the chronology of Christ's Infancy so you could experience doing a "synoptic" comparison, or a "harmony" of the Gospel on your own. For an extra challenge we ask you to find the passages, Gospel or other book of the Bible that defines his Pre-Existence. (Hint: Only one of these passages comes from the Old Testament.)

PRE-EXISTANT CHRIST

- Eternally the Same
- With No Beginning
- His Activities Eternal
- Word Before Creation - Jn 1:1
- Creator of all things
- In glory before world
- Lamb slain before foundation
- Before Abraham

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

- Angel Gabriel to Zacharias
- Mary visits Elizabeth
- Birth of John Baptist
- Angel visits Joseph
- Angel visits Mary
- Birth in Bethlehem
- Visit of Shepherds
- Presentation in Temple
- Words of Simeon and Anna
- Visit of the Wise Men
- Flight to Egypt
- Return to Nazareth
- Visit to Jerusalem at 12 yrs
- Silent years

ASSIGNMENT:

Prepare your own synoptic gospel of the birth and early years (up to 12 years old) of Christ. Do this by labeling each event in the birth and childhood narratives and list those events in chronological order (the order in which they happened.) Be sure not to leave anything out. How many events are there? Ask yourself, "What are the differences and

similarities? Are there any contradictions? Why do you suppose they do not all contain identical material? Share your observations with the class.

Inspiration of Scripture

We must ask ourselves an important question at this juncture: Does it matter who wrote the gospel of Mark? If you are a liberal theologian it probably doesn't matter since in the end liberals don't believe the scriptures to be divinely inspired any more than Shakespeare or Milton were inspired. If you believe in the inspiration of scripture and that the scriptures are inerrant and infallible, then it does matter who wrote the gospels or any of the other New Testament books. If it doesn't matter who wrote the scriptures then we could also say it doesn't matter now if one adds to or takes away from those writings. If there is no divine inspiration and no inerrancy to worry about then anyone could write anything and be on par with the New Testament scriptures. In fact, you would have no reason to limit scripture to the canon of the New Testament at all. Why not canonize every inspired writing? Do you see the folly of the liberal view of scripture? It destroys the foundation of our faith and leaves revelation open to evolve with the times. The Bible itself declares its own inspiration as the inerrant, inspired, and unchanging word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21, 1 Corinthians 2:13, Matthew 5:18)

Now that we have established how the New Testament and the Gospels in particular came to us, let us consider separately each of the Gospel authors:

The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark is most likely the first of the gospels to be written. (Though some scholars contest this.) It is the shortest of the four gospels and it appears to have been used by Matthew and Luke as a skeleton upon which to build their narratives. The earliest known manuscript of Mark was found to be in the library of the Essenes in the Dead Sea Scrolls which were sealed in a cave around AD 50. That would mean that within the first 16 years after Jesus' life, death, and resurrection this gospel was written and circulated among the churches.

Critical scholars question the authenticity of Mark's gospel, rejecting historical tradition and recent archeological evidence that confirms its early existence. They also discredit Mark as being the John Mark of the New Testament based on their failure to find corroborating evidence in secular material of the time. They claim the book must have been written later than AD 70 and most probably by an unknown western Roman Christian who just happened to be named Mark, along with thousands of other Marks who lived at that time.

Did Mark Write the Gospel that Bears His Name? There is no internal evidence of the authorship of Mark's gospel, yet it is the unanimous witness of the early church Mark is the author. The earliest record of Markian authorship was by Papias, a disciple of the apostle John, in AD 140. Papias wrote a detailed account of Mark's authorship of the gospel. In quoting an even earlier source Papias testified that

1. Mark, who was the author, was the same John Mark of the New Testament mentioned in Acts.
2. John Mark was a close companion of the apostle Peter and was his interpreter.
3. Mark wrote the account at Peter's request and it was based on Peter's preaching of the gospel.
4. Mark accurately recorded the events and sayings of Jesus which writing was approved by Peter to be distributed and read among the churches. (NIV Study Bible p1490 and Jeffrey p254)

For many years higher criticism dated the Gospel of Mark near the end of Peter's life in Rome, at about AD 70 shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. More recent research, based on the findings in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947), have proved that fragments of Mark's gospel were in the library of scrolls the Essenes preserved before AD 50. Therefore Mark's gospel had to have been written within a dozen years of Christ's life. Why is this so important? This discovery by professor Jose O'Callaghan concluded that the gospel was in circulation while hundreds of eyewitnesses, including the disciples, were still alive to correct, refute, or challenge any inaccuracies had there been any. (Jeffrey p251)

The Gospel of Matthew

The gospel of Matthew, as with the other gospels, does not tell us who wrote it, yet the church fathers of the earliest centuries unanimously hail the apostle Matthew as its unquestioned author. Modern critical scholars have questioned its authorship as they have all the other gospel authors. Their reasoning is that if it was written by an eyewitness why would the author depend so heavily on Mark's gospel as a resource? The answer could be as simple as Mark's gospel being familiar to the whole church. Therefore it would be an excellent starting outline on which to build Matthew's own view of the events and teachings of Christ.

Jerome, one of the early church fathers, recounts the history of Matthew's authorship as passed down to him:

"Papias, a disciple of the apostle John, who lived around AD 100, says, 'Matthew wrote his oracles in Hebrew and each interpreted it into Greek as he could.' " (McBirnie p175)

His use of the past tense indicated that even by his time the Hebrew manuscript was a thing of the past, so that by the turn of the century the authoritative Greek translation was firmly in place and in extensive use by the churches. Nothing of the Hebrew manuscript has survived to our day. It has been speculated that the explanation for this may be the wide use of Greek, and that the Hebrew Christian judaizers clung tenaciously to the Hebrew, which over time became so corrupted by heretical influences it was rejected by the church.

It is surmised by most scholars and historians that the Greek speaking Jews, known as Hellenists, would have needed the Greek version of Matthew's gospel which in all likelihood Matthew himself provided, as some historical evidence indicates. This would explain the disappearance of the Hebrew manuscript, being unnecessary. The Greek version, accepted and used in all the churches before the time of the apostle John's death, would certainly have been protested by John had it not also carried Matthew's apostolic authority.

Matthew's gospel was probably written in Palestine originally written in Hebrew or possibly Aramaic, then translated into Hebrew. No one knows for sure since none of the original Hebrew or Aramaic documents survive to our day. It appears that Matthew had a good knowledge of Mark's gospel and quotes from it extensively. (91% of Mark appears verbatim in Matthew.) It would be reasonable to assume that Matthew was the second Gospel since Matthew did not quote from Luke or John. (Some have tried to prove that Mark borrowed from Matthew but the internal and external evidence weighs heavily in favor of Mark's gospel preceding Matthew's. The Gospel of Matthew was probably written sometime around or after AD 50, certainly before AD 60.

Matthew obviously wrote for Jewish people whether Hebrew or the Hellenistic Jews still in exile scattered in other parts of the world. His main purpose is to show from the Old

Testament scripture, from which he quotes or translates directly, that Jesus is the Messiah in fulfillment of the prophecies. He emphasized the lineage of David, the Kingdom of Heaven, and Jesus as the Son of David. Despite his appeal to the Hebrew mind he beautifully wove into the narrative such universal aspects of the Gospel as "the field is the world," the coming of the Magi, and the full text of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20. (NIV p1439)

The Gospel of Luke

Similar to the other gospels, Luke's gospel also contains no author's name, yet it has been unquestionably ascribed to the hand of Dr. Luke from the first century. This gospel is unique in that it is a dual volume containing both the gospel and the book of Acts, both written by the same author, each perhaps separated by a few years. It contains a prologue that carefully outlines the purpose and intent of the work:

" Many have taken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:1-3)

From this prologue we learn several things about the author:

1. The author is an educated man writing to a highly esteemed dignitary named Theophilus. We do not know who Theophilus was but some conjecture he was a high ranking Roman official acquainted with the author and who has made inquiries concerning the story of Jesus Christ. The author begins very professionally using language of classical Greek which was a common practice in historical works of the time. Therefore we conclude the author to be an educated man, well versed in the classical Greek writing style, and well known by men of influence.
2. The author refers to things "fulfilled among us" thus including himself with the band of those about whom he is writing. The author uses the first person singular "I" and later in the second volume the first person plural "we" thus showing that he was part of the story that is being recounted. He also reveals that he was not an eyewitness of Jesus Christ but received this information from others who were eyewitnesses.
3. The author presents himself as a careful investigator, the implication being that he is not presumptuous to do so but well qualified among his peers to accomplish this task.
4. The author reveals his sources: Eyewitnesses and servants of the word, as well as written accounts others have made of these events. It becomes obvious to the attentive reader that Luke is writing later than Matthew and Mark. Matthew qualifies as one of the eyewitnesses who took upon himself to write an account, and Mark is well known in Luke's Acts of the Apostles as "a minister of the word." This does not limit the

author to two sources but implies that he relied on at least two written accounts and most likely other accounts as well. ("Many have taken in hand to write.") It is possible that the author traveled extensively to research this report. His sources would include personal recollections from the apostles, including Paul with whom Luke had very close associations. He would have interviewed women who accompanied Jesus as well as those who were healed by him. He may well have had a compiled library of written sources not available to Matthew and Mark, nor to us.

5. The author's intent is to put the events into an orderly account for the reader. That is, the author is attempting to organize the material in a chronological fashion as closely as possible to recollections of the witnesses. Luke then is the first to attempt a harmony of the gospels. We should remember also the testimony of John who later fills in the blanks for Matthew, Mark, and Luke who said of his own gospel account: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book." (John 20:30) And "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were to be written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (John 21:25) There are events in Matthew that Luke does not include (i.e. The Wise Men) The same can be said for Luke's exclusion of some of Mark's material. All of the gospel authors use editorial license to choose those events that best suit their task and their audience.

Is Luke the Author?

Though the author does not mention his own name the internal evidence points to Luke.

1. Luke is the only New testament character that can fit the "I" and "we" passages of Acts. (See Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-15, 21:1-18, 27:1-28:16) Luke had extensive knowledge and access to Paul and all the apostles.
2. Luke was a gentile, well educated in Greek culture and language, a Greek speaker, probably born in Antioch, and he was a physician who accompanied Paul on several of his journeys and ministered to Paul while in prison. Luke's gospel uses the best Greek of the four and is written for the gentile mind.
3. Internal evidence that points to Luke is the volume of medical terminology used in his record. The author Hobart, in *The Medical Language of Luke*, documents over four hundred medical terms used by Luke alone among the gospel writers, which terms are also found in other Greek medical writers.
4. Finally the enormous voice of the church from the earliest days assign the gospel to Luke. In fact, there was no difference of opinion as to the authorship of this gospel. Such early church fathers as Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, as well as the Muratorian Fragment all agree that Dr. Luke is the author of both Luke and Acts.

The Gospel of John

The Gospel of John is the fourth witness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. John's gospel stands out among the others in that he does not seem to rely on any of the previously written sources. Then why should he? He was the beloved disciple, one of Jesus' inner circle, and an eyewitness to all that Jesus did. His name is not mentioned in this gospel which is strange seeing his prominent place among the twelve. Perhaps his conspicuous absence itself indicates he is the author. No one else would ignore such a prominent figure. John however, does reference himself as "the disciple whom he loved" (John 19:26) He reveals himself only briefly at the end of the gospel when Jesus commands Peter to "feed my sheep" then says of the disciple whom Jesus loved, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" The apostle then removes the veil identifying himself by saying, "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. (John 21:24)

John's gospel is distinctly different from the other gospels in several ways. That is why it is NOT called a Synoptic Gospel. It is not seen as mirroring the others. It does however contribute to the chronology of the life of Jesus in significant ways. John tells the stories the others may not have known or neglected to tell. Jerome relates his understanding of the motives that led John to write this gospel record.

- 1) John, the evangelist, wrote a gospel at the request of the bishops of Asia, against Cerinthus, and other heretics and especially against the then growing dogmas of the Ebonites, who asserted that Christ did not exist before Mary. On this account he was compelled to maintain His divine nativity."
- 2) Yet another reason for this work was that when he had read Matthew, Mark, and Luke he approved indeed the substance of the history and declared that the things they said were true, but that that they had given the history of only one year, the one that is, which follows the imprisonment of John... he relates the events of Jesus ministry in the earlier Judean ministry before John was shut up in prison." (McBirnle p117)

John's gospel then is another eyewitness account of the life of Christ from the perspective of the inner circle. John presents the gospel as it would appeal to the Greek thinkers, as a philosophy and theology behind the historical events.

John states his purpose for himself, "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." (John 20:31) Truly it is the evangelistic gospel. Myriads of truth seekers have come to Christ simply by reading this gospel. One can easily see throughout the book his intense interest in answering or rather leading the reader to answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" You cannot read the gospel of John and walk away thinking that Jesus was just a great man, or a prophet. C.S. Lewis put it this way:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. he would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."

Josh McDowell put it succinctly as a trilemma (as opposed to a dilemma) - Jesus Christ must be either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord." (McDowell, Evidence. p103)

Recommended Reading:

- Grant R. Jeffrey, The Signature of God, Frontier Research Publications, Inc., 1996
- William Steuart McBirnie, The Search for the Twelve Apostles, Living Books/Tyndale, 1973
- Josh McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Campus Crusade for Christ, 1979
- Josh McDowell, A Ready Defense, Compiled by Bill Wilson, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993