

How the Gospels authenticate one another

# The Ring of Truth

# Luke 1:4

... it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

# Our goals this morning

- To explore some of the *positive internal evidence* for the truth of the Gospels; in particular,
- To build a cumulative case that the authors of the Gospels were *well informed* and *habitually truthful*

# Two Questions

1. Why are there *four* Gospels?
2. Can we tell, by comparing two passages of Scripture with one another, that *both* are authentic, credible historical records?

# The First Natural Answer

We can find passages where two different writers tell the same story, perhaps even in the same words.

(Yes, but ...)

# A Skeptical Response

One of the documents might have been *copied* from the other one.

How can this possibility be ruled out on the basis of *internal* evidence alone?

# *Undesigned* Coincidences

- Example: one book may mention *in passing* a detail that answers some question raised by the other.
- Such *interlocking* would be very unlikely if
  - one of them were copied from the other, or
  - both were copied from a common source, or
  - the later book simply added a bunch of legends to the former.

# What Such Interlocking Shows

- Fictions and forgeries don't interlock like this. Either they don't interlock at all, or the interlockings are more obvious because they are intended to be noticed.
- But we would expect to find such undesigned coincidences in authentic records of the same *real* event told by *different* people who knew what they were talking about.



# For those who take notes ...

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

## Example #1: Matthew 14:1-2

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, And said to his servants, *This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.*

How would Matthew know what Herod had said to his servants?

# The explanation: Luke 8:3

And Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, . . .

# The answer to a previous question

- The fact that Jesus' followers had family in the highest ranks of Herod's servants also explains how they could have even better information about Herod's motives for killing John the Baptist than the Jewish historian Josephus did.

# Luke Explains Matthew

Matthew

Mark



Luke

John

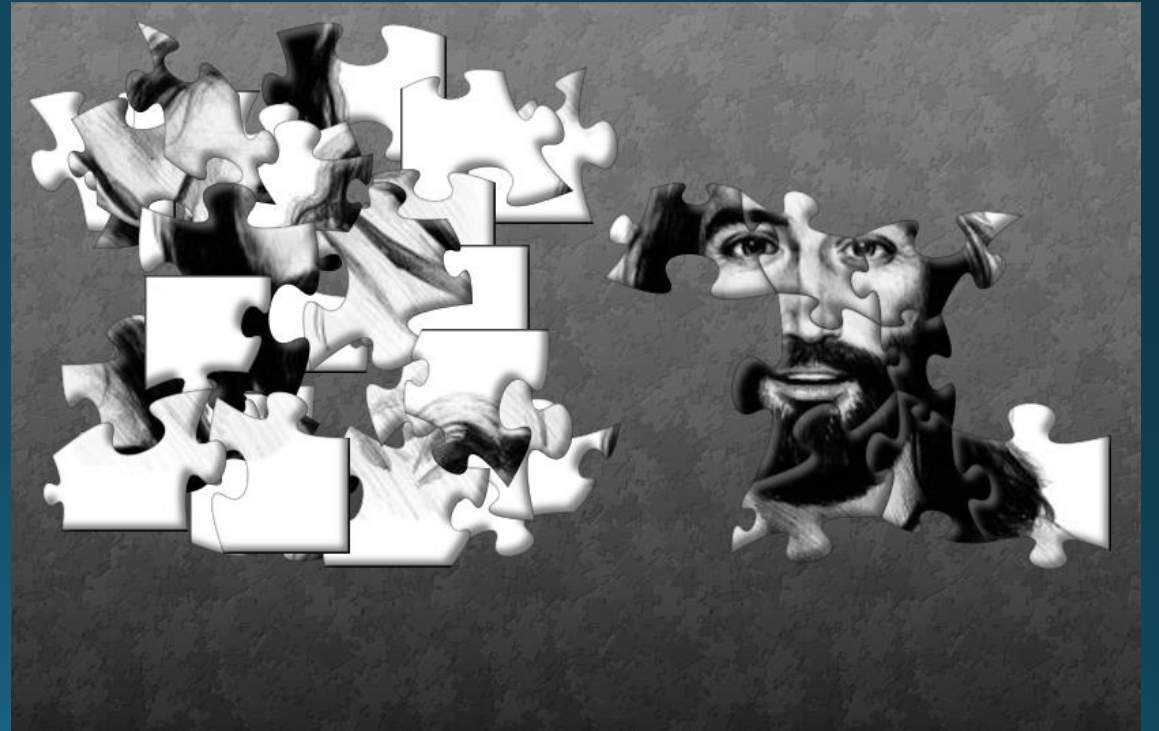
# A Cumulative Case

One undesigned coincidence like this *might* be an accident—like having two unrelated pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fit together, just by chance.



# A Cumulative Case

But if we discover *numerous* undesigned coincidences crisscrossing the documents, and in particular if each gospel has some things that explain things in the others, it becomes ridiculous to insist that they are *all* just accidental.



## Example #2: John 2:6-7

Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” ...

Why were the water pots *empty*?



# The explanation: Matthew 15:1-2

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.”

The Jews viewed handwashing as a ritual for everyone at every meal, not just something for the priests. Since the feast was in progress, the pots had been emptied already.

# Matthew Explains John

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John



## Example #3: The Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-35)

- Jesus' face is altered and his clothing becomes dazzling white.
- Moses and Elijah appear in glory and speak with him of his departure.
- A cloud covers them, and a voice comes out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son: hear him."

# Example #3: Luke 9:36

And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

# Example #3: Luke 9:36

*They what??!*

# The Explanation: Mark 9:9

And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

# The Explanation: Mark 9:9

Mark gives us the command but doesn't say whether they obeyed it; Luke records their obedience but omits the command.

# A Growing Network of Explanations





# Inventing a Gospel Story

The challenge: you want to invent—forge—a miracle story about Jesus and pass it off as an authentic account.

At the beginning, you're going to set it up by having Jesus ask one of his disciples a question.

# Inventing a Gospel Story

The setup for the miracle story is going to have to do with *money* and *food*.

*Which disciple do you pick?*

# Inventing a Gospel Story

Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, *Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?*

*Why Philip?*

# Putting the Pieces Together

Luke 9:10-11—And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. When the crowds learned it, they followed him, ...

# Putting the pieces together

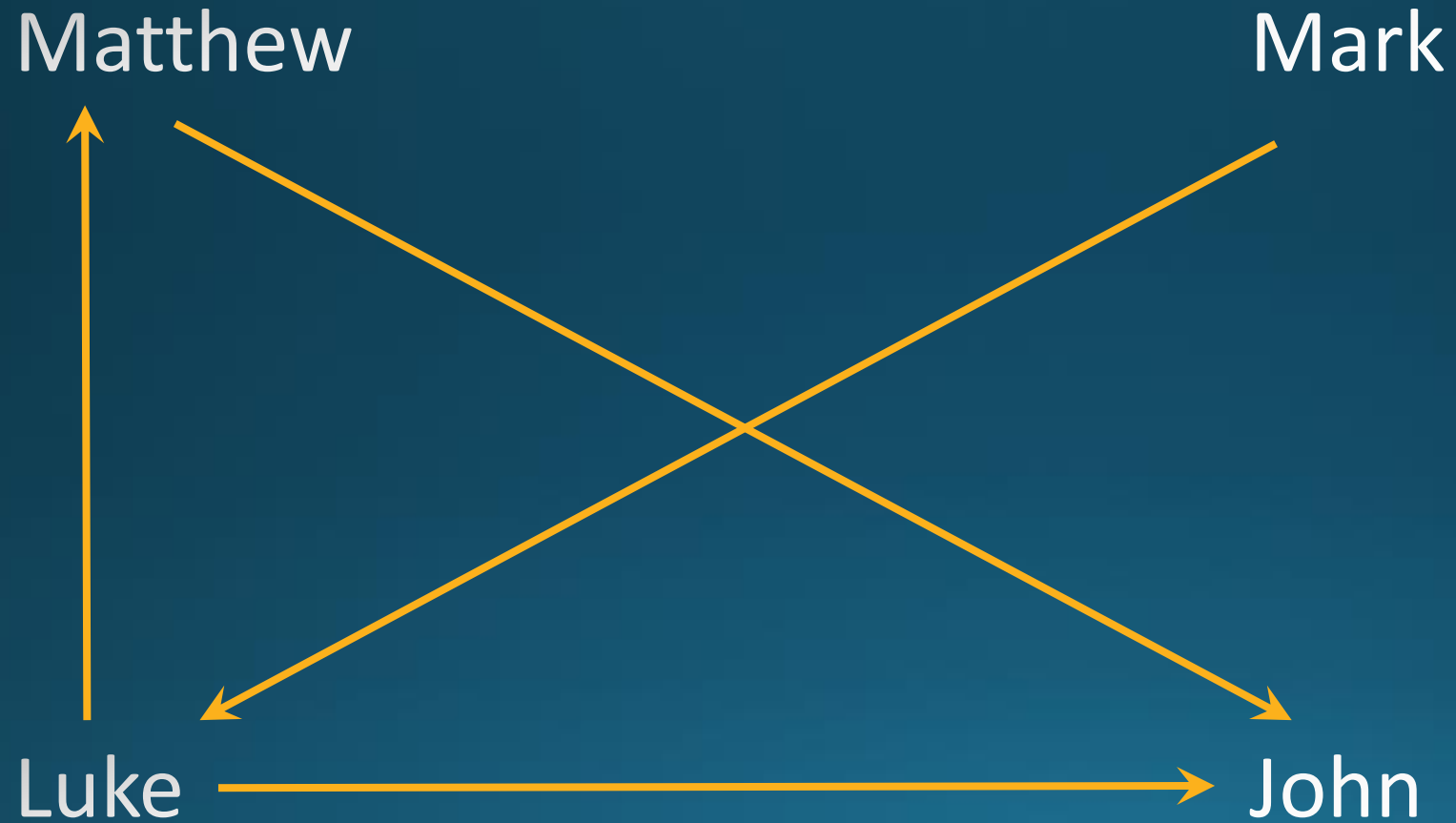
John 12:21—So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, . . .

# Luke and John fit together like pieces of a puzzle

Luke doesn't mention Philip in this context at all;  
John doesn't mention Bethsaida as the setting of  
the miracle.

Only by *putting them together* can we understand  
why Jesus speaks to Philip in John 6:5.

# The Network Keeps Growing



## Example #4: Mark 6:31,39

- And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.
- Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass.



About that **green** grass ...

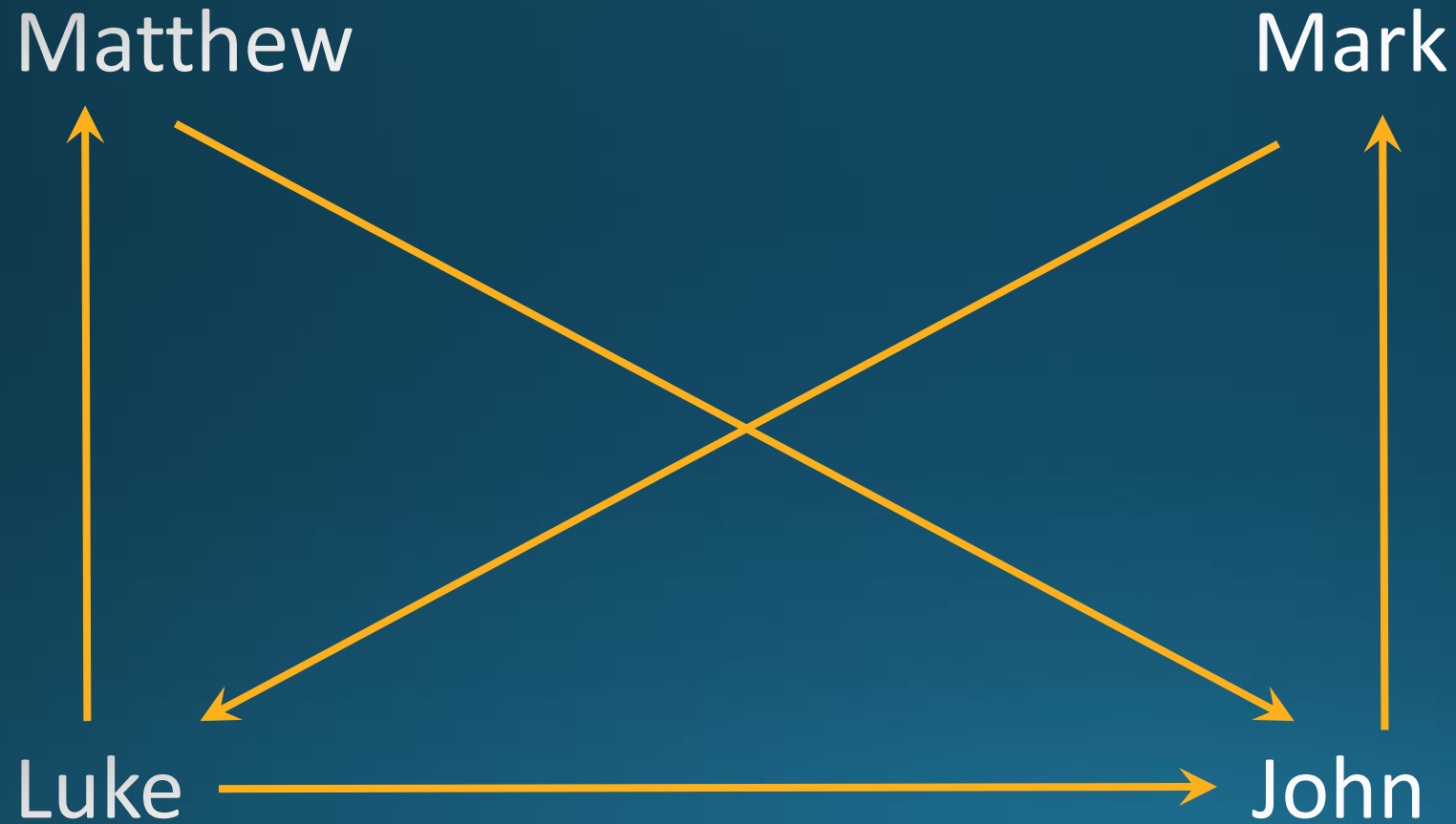


# The Explanation: John 6:4

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

Passover is in the middle of the (brief) growing season in Palestine; it is also a great feast to which hundreds of thousands of Jews traveled every year. John gives us, in passing, a detail that interlocks in two ways with Mark's account of the same event.

# Each Gospel Explains Some Other Gospel



## Example #5: Luke 23:2-4

*And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.*

*And Pilate asked him, Are you the King of the Jews?*

*And he answered him, You have said so.*

# Example #5: Luke 23:2-4

Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, *I find no guilt in this man.*

# Example #5: Luke 23:1-4

This sequence of events is completely baffling.

1. The Jews make a grave accusation,
2. Pilate questions Jesus *on this very point*,
3. Jesus *admits* to the charge, or at the very least insouciantly refuses to deny it, and
4. Pilate promptly declares him to be innocent!

# The Explanation: John 18:33-38

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, *Are you the King of the Jews?*

Jesus answered, *My kingdom is not of this world. . .*

Pilate . . . went back outside to the Jews and told them, *I find no guilt in him.*

## ... and Example #6

In John's account, Pilate's question to Jesus seems to come out of nowhere.

Luke gives the *accusation* but not the *full answer*;  
John gives the *full answer* but not the *accusation*.



# The Network Continues to Grow



# Example #7: John 21:15

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

# Example #7: John 21:15

Why does Jesus ask Peter whether he loves Him  
*more than the other disciples do?*

# The Explanation: Mark 14:29

Peter said to him, “Even though they all fall away, I will not.”

John 16:12

I still have many things to say to you,  
but you cannot bear them now.

# The Ring of Truth

The separate narratives are *independently grounded* in the same actual facts.

Our four Gospels, written by four different authors, *interlock* with one another and *explain* one another.

# Want More?

This argument was first explored for the Gospels by John James Blunt in his book *The Veracity of the Gospels and Acts* (1829), later republished with large additions under the title *Undesigned Coincidences*.

historicalapologetics.org



LIBRARY OF ———  
HISTORICAL  
APOLOGETICS





# The Network Continues to Grow



## Example #8: Matthew 26:71

And when he [Peter] went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.”

How did the servant girl know that Peter was with Jesus?

# The Explanation: John 18:15-16

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in.

# The Network Continues to Grow



## Example #9: Mark 1:19

And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets.

Why were James and John mending the nets?

# The Explanation: Luke 5:4-11

... [Jesus] said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” ... And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

# The Network Continues to Grow





## Example #10: Mark 14:58, 15:29

*We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another, not made with hands.*

. . .

*And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, . . .*

- Nothing in the Synoptic Gospels provides a pretext for this accusation.

## The charge against Jesus explained: John 2:18-19

So the Jews said to him, What sign do you show us for doing these things? Jesus answered them, *Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*

John gives us Jesus' *original statement* but not its use as an *accusation*; the Synoptics give us the *accusation* but not the *original statement*. Neither of these is copied from the other.

# The Network Continues to Grow



# The Ring of Truth

The numerous *undesigned coincidences* show that the Gospels were written by people who knew what really happened and reported it honestly.

# 1 John 1:1-3

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, ...