

INTRODUCTION TO THE FORE GOSPELS

THE HOLY BIBLE

Rightfully so, the Holy Bible is a widely beloved book, while not so universally understood. Unlike any composition from human history, its potent yet enigmatic contents have inspired unique reverence from billions of people over the course of millennia. During which time, these contents have been grouped together into varying “official” compilations (known as *canons of Scripture*). The following 66 books comprise the most commonly studied canonical collection:

<p>THE HEBREW BIBLE (39 Books Called, <i>The Old Testament</i>)</p> <p>The LAW or TORAH (The 5 books ascribed to Moses.)</p> <p>Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy</p> <p>The PROPHETS</p> <p>Joshua, Judges, I-II Samuel, I-II Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi</p> <p>The WRITINGS</p> <p>Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, I-II Chronicles</p>	<p>THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES (27 Books; <i>The Greek New Testament</i>)</p> <p>The GOSPELS (& Acts) (The 5 books of the Evangelists.)</p> <p>Matthew, Mark, Luke-Acts, John</p> <p>The EPISTLES (& Revelation)</p> <p>Romans, I-II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I-II Thessalonians, I-II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, I-II Peter, I-III John, Jude, Revelation</p>
--	--

Notably absent from this table of contents are the multifarious “hidden” (*apocryphal*) or “outside” (*extra-canonical*) writings, sometimes coined *the lost/hidden books of the Bible*. Once popular in more ancient times, many of those writings became suppressed by emerging organized religions even to the point of being forgotten until some were recently rediscovered. Such texts are sporadically acknowledged among the faithful and much too numerous to list here.¹ For the purposes of this introduction, it suffices to mention there are and have been many

¹ Worthy of mention are the books often termed *Deuterocanonical* (generally written between the Old and New Testaments, surviving primarily in Greek and later appended to the Hebrew canon of Scripture), which variously include:

people of different faiths founded on numerous versions of what is *essentially* the same Bible. That foundational essence contained within the first five books of both the “Old” and “New” Testaments is known respectively as the *Law of Moses* and the *Gospel of Jesus*, and those peoples who descend from these dual traditions have been collectively called *the People of the Book*.

In reference to the Book comprising many books, the word *bible* comes from Greek τὰ βιβλία {*ta biblia*} meaning, “the books”. The first several Hebrew books listed embody the oldest sizable prose literature written in world history, by the 8th century B.C.E..² A century later, this material along with most contents of the first five books (or *Law/Torah*) emerged as the first sacred and authoritative text of Western Civilization.³ Composed in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek primarily between the 9th century B.C.E. and 2nd century C.E., all 66 of these books were transmitted generationally by ancient and surviving handwritten copies (*manuscripts*). In 15th century C.E. Germany, a Latin translation of these books along with other secondary (*deuterocanonical*) apocryphal writings became the first major book ever to be printed with the newly-invented printing press.⁴ A century later in England, subsequent translations into the

I-II Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Psalm 151, Psalms of Solomon, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira (“Ecclesiasticus”), Baruch (including the Epistle of Jeremy), Additions to Daniel (including the Prayer of Azarias, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon), the Prayer of Manasses, I-IV Maccabees

Several other such apocryphal books have survived from antiquity, many of which are clearly *pseudepigraphical* (i.e. bearing false claims of authorship). Notable among these is the *Book of Enoch* which appears to be directly quoted in the New Testament (Epistle of Jude, verses 14-15).

Of particular import are the dozen codices discovered hidden in a jar outside Nag Hammadi, Egypt in 1945, thus referred to as the *Nag Hammadi Library*. This set of Scriptures, translated into Coptic from Greek in the 4th century C.E., includes many famous “Lost” Gospels and other Gnostic treatises including:

The Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Philip, Gospel of Truth, Gospel of the Egyptians, the Apocryphon (Secret Book) of John, Apocryphon of James, the Apocalypse (Revelation) of Adam, I-II Apocalypse of James, Apocalypse of Peter, Apocalypse of Paul, the Acts of Peter and the Twelve [Apostles], Hypostasis of the Archons, On the Origin of the World, the Exegesis of the Soul, the Sophia (Wisdom) of Jesus Christ, the Dialogue of the Savior, the Second Treatise of the Great Seth, the Three Steles of Seth, and several others.

² For research on this subject consult R. E. Friedman, *The Hidden Book in the Bible: The Discovery of the First Prose Masterpiece*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998).

³ For research on this subject consult Schniedewind, William M., *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴ The Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate was produced in the late 4th century C.E. largely by St. Jerome. Its name comes from *versio vulgata*, meaning “common[ly used] version”. This revision of even older Latin translations became widely used as the official translation of the Roman Catholic Church. In the 1450’s an edition of the Vulgate became the first major book ever to be produced on a printing press. This masterpiece of Johannes Gutenberg, inventor of mechanical movable type printing, became known as the *Guttenberg Bible*, and it represents the dawn of the printed book in the West and subsequent widespread circulation of information and ideas.

vernacular of the day became legal to print and own (*authorized*),⁵ heralding the Modern Era. Individuals like William Tyndale and John Rogers would no longer have had to face being burned at the stake for crimes of translation and publication of Biblical material. Therefore it is not only understandable this Book of Books is so well-beloved among so many people, but rightfully so: it plays fundamental roles in world history and represents a watershed of our ancient and modern civilizations.

Just as soon as the Bible became widely circulated and privately owned among a literate society printed in languages that could be understood, ideas flourished as new churches (*denominations*) and interpretations arose.⁶ Furthermore, there were many textual variations in existing manuscripts,⁷ and there arose an ever-growing number of different translation efforts based on

⁵ The first major translations of the Bible into Early Modern English include:

William Tyndale Bible (1525-31), Miles Coverdale Bible (1535), Thomas Matthew (John Rogers) Bible (1537), the Great Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560), the Bishops' Bible (1568), and the King James Bible (1611).

A notable German language translation is the *Martin Luther Bible (1522-34)*, produced by the influential Protestant reformer.

Translations such as these (their distribution aided greatly by the printing press), fostered a shift from the Bible being read primarily in Latin by a small (usually ecclesiastical) minority, to being made accessible in the common, vernacular languages of the majority:

“Master Tyndale happened to be in the company of a certain divine, recounted for a learned man, and, in communing and disputing with him, ... [he] added, ‘If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than thou dost.’” Taken from, *The Life and Story of the True Servant and Martyr of God, William Tyndale*, by John Foxe (Foxe's Book of Martyrs, chapter 12).

Amazingly in the early years of their existence, English translations were illegal to own and smuggled into England. For his efforts of translating directly from Greek and Hebrew and distributing an English version of the Bible, William Tyndale was burned at the stake before completing the entire Bible. John Rogers, having used the pseudonym “Thomas Matthew” to publish his edition of what was mostly Tyndale’s work, was martyred in like manner.

⁶ Tens of thousands of different Christian denominations and variations thereof presently exist, the majority classified as Protestant. A few early and significant groups include:

Lutheran, Anglican, Calvinist and Reformed, Presbyterian, Anabaptist, Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal.

⁷ Tens of thousands of partial and complete manuscripts of the New Testament alone are extant. Textual variations between Biblical manuscripts are practically innumerable. The ancient scribes and monks who copied these texts introduced changes to the Scripture, both accidental and intentional.

Differences between extant New Testament manuscripts are so diverse that they have been classified into several different types or “families” such as the *Alexandrian Texts*, and *Byzantine Texts* (also called *Majority Texts*). The Alexandrian textual family, which arose in Egypt, is generally considered the most important due in part to its antiquity. This family is best represented by the 4th century codices: *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*. The Byzantine or Majority textual family was much more widely used and copied. Desiderius Erasmus, who produced the first New Testament printed in Greek (1514), and most of the Early Modern English translators of the New Testament from Greek, used this type of text, and it is best represented by the 5th century codices: *Codex Alexandrinus* and *Codex Ephraemi*.

those varying texts, which in turn engendered an even greater diversity of scriptural interpretations and theologies! For the first time since the legalization of Christianity in the 4th century C.E.⁸ and subsequent growing enforcement of what was deemed correct or accepted belief (*orthodoxy*) by a universal (*Catholic*) church,⁹ Christendom was waking up again from its homogenized slumber. Finally, the multifaceted book – which had been sealed into singular established doctrines (*dogmas*) for centuries – was being unbound as it was in the first.¹⁰

To demonstrate inaccurate copying was a real problem (even in the most ancient of surviving Greek texts), a revealing marginal note appears next to Hebrews 1:3 in the Codex Vaticanus, reading:

“Fool and knave, leave the old reading and do not change it!”
ἀμαθέστατε καὶ κακέ, ἄφες τὸν παλαιόν, μὴ μεταποιεῖτε

The Hebrew Bible is not without its textual problems. Many different manuscripts were in existence, and between the 7th and 10th centuries C.E. standard readings were decided upon, annotating possible variants along the top, bottom and sides of each folio and also at the end of each book. These notations were called *massorah*, and that standard text (still read and translated from today), is called the *Massoretic Text* (MT). This text is best represented by the *Aleppo Codex* (10th century), and the oldest known manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible were from the 9th century until the discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* (DSS)

Between 1946 and 1956, many ancient and varying pre-Massoretic Hebrew Bible scrolls were discovered, often dating back to at least the 2nd century B.C.E.. When compared to the Hebrew Massoretic Text, many variants were found. Often, these variants agreed with, and thus gave more credence to, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the *Septuagint* (LXX). The variants of which, when compared to the Massoretic Text, had (up until that time) been viewed as less significant. Therefore between the Septuagint, Dead Sea Scrolls and Massoretic Text, the problem of *known textual variances* in of the Hebrew Bible practically rival those known in the Christian Scriptures.

⁸ The *Edict of Milan* (313 C.E.). This declaration proclaimed religious freedom in the Roman Empire. Signed by Emperors Constantine I and Licinius, the Edict helped to especially bring about an end to much persecution of Christians, along with an order to immediately return their confiscated properties. As such, Christians would no longer have to meet “underground”.

⁹ In 325 C.E., Emperor Constantine I convened a council of Christian bishops known as the *First Council of Nicaea*. At the time there were a diverse range of beliefs concerning Jesus Christ, and different sects of Christians devoted to their respective views. In constructing the so-called *Nicene Creed*, the Council defined what quickly became the authoritative doctrine of Christianity. Now when a sect’s interpretations did not agree with another’s, they were not merely deemed heresies, but officially heretical!

The word *heretic* comes from Greek **αἰρετίζω** {*hairetizo*} literally meaning to *make a choice*. Studying various philosophies and deciding what to believe and how to live one’s life would steadily fall out of vogue in favor of the singular established dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. So in a sad twist of irony, the religious freedom issued by Constantine in 313, legalizing Christianity and putting an end to its persecution by the Pagans, was soon eclipsed by the subsequent official defining of Christianity which would become enforced through the deathly persecution of any alternate forms of Christianity - by Christians.

¹⁰ In the first four centuries of Christian history, there was to be found a great diversity in belief-systems revolving around the person of Jesus Christ. These faiths came with an equally diverse and boundless (uncanonized) assortment of Scriptures. Only in the Modern Era, with freedom of religion and distribution of information has such diversity within Christianity become possible again. Indeed only until most recently, with the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library [see first endnote], are many of these lost Christianities being advanced and studied again.

THE FOUR GOSPELS

Despite all the differences between canons, manuscripts and translations being made accessible for study, how could so many different Christian schools of interpretation emerge from what was essentially the same book? Could they simultaneously be correct? Even more fundamental to this enigma was that there existed within the Christian Scriptures four, distinct biographical narratives concerning the person of Jesus Christ (the *Canonical Gospels*). Even if there was *one* definitive Bible manuscript and *one* authoritative translation thereof, it would still contain *four* portraits of the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus, written by four different Gospel authors (*Evangelists*), traditionally known as Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

What were devout readers and in-depth students of the Holy Writ to make of two different birth narratives and corresponding genealogical records of Jesus?¹¹ or the many peculiar variations in the accounts of his deeds, sayings and parables scattered between all four Gospels? or the puzzling alternate historical settings surrounding when he was crucified and who witnessed his resurrection?¹²

An analogy often raised to account for these differences between the Gospels goes like this:

When detectives investigating an incident interview various eyewitnesses in an attempt to ascertain what really took place, they should not expect any two witness accounts to be exactly the same because each witness will have perceived and remembered what happened differently from his or her individual vantage point. Should any two testimonies be strikingly identical, it becomes more likely they are recitations of a “story” which may not corroborate actual events.

In other words, it has been argued that the various differences between the Gospels lend to them an air of authenticity, since one should not expect eyewitness narrative testimonies to read nearly identical or even verbatim.

However, this is exactly how three of the four Gospels often read.

Matthew, Mark and Luke – the first three books of the New Testament – are often distinguished as the *Synoptic* (or “seen together”) Gospels. So-categorized because of their similarity, these three narratives contain many of the same stories, often in the same sequence, composed of similar or even verbatim wording. Contrariwise, the canonical fourth gospel, called John, differs significantly from the Synoptic Gospels. Consider the following passage, taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) translation:

¹¹ Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-3

¹² Matthew 27-28; Mark 15-16; Luke 23-24; John 19-20

Matthew 14:19b-20	Mark 6:41-43	Luke 9:16-17	John 6:11-13
He took the five loaves and the two fish { <i>ichthus</i> }, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed [the food], and breaking the loaves	And He took the five loaves and the two fish { <i>ichthus</i> }, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed [the food] and broke the loaves	Then He took the five loaves and the two fish { <i>ichthus</i> }, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke [them],	Jesus then took the loaves, and having given thanks,
He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples [gave them] to the crowds,	and He kept giving [them] to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish { <i>ichthus</i> } among them all.	and kept giving [them] to the disciples to set before the people.	He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish { <i>opsarion</i> } as much as they wanted.
and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets.	They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish { <i>ichthus</i> }.	And they all ate and were satisfied; and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets [full].	When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost." So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten.

This is an especially useful example because while a story may often be found shared between all three Synoptic Gospels, a fourfold witness in the Canonical Gospels is not as common. Therefore, this passage affords the rare opportunity to examine not only the similitude of the first three Gospels, but also the unique character of the fourth. Note some of the shared verbiage between all three synoptic texts (known as the *triple tradition*):

"He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed [them],"

λαβὼν	τοὺς	πέντε	ἄρτους	καὶ	τοὺς	δύο
having-had-taken	to-the-ones	to-five	to-loaves	and	to-the-ones	to-two

ἰχθύας	ἀναβλέψας	εἰς	τὸν	οὐρανὸν	εὐλόγησεν	[αὐτοὺς]
two-fishes	having-viewed-up	into	to-the-one	to-a-sky	He-goodly-spoke-unto	[to-them]

There are many similar examples throughout the shared stories in Matthew, Mark and Luke of accounts matching verbatim, upwards of several dozen words in a row! Today, there are several books in both Greek and English which offer chronological and textual comparisons of events described in the Synoptic Gospels. These books are usually called Gospel "synopses", "parallels" or "harmonies", and make for invaluable reference tools.¹³ Modest research reveals

¹³ For example: Aland, Kurt (ed.), *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, 10th ed. (Stuttgart: Biblia-Druck, 1993).

that the same stories reappear, having been sometimes sequentially rearranged, but utilizing the same words much too precisely and in the same order for them to have been independently composed. In the example above, note also how the Fourth Gospel not only possesses unique verbal arrangement but also distinctive vocabulary:

Matthew's "fish"	Mark's "fish"	Luke's "fish"	John's "fish"
ἰχθύς { <i>ichthus</i> }	ἰχθύς { <i>ichthus</i> }	ἰχθύς { <i>ichthus</i> }	ὀψάριον { <i>opsarion</i> }

Two different Greek words, ἰχθύς {*ichthus*} and ὀψάριον {*opsarion*}, are both translated "fish" in this and many other English translations. There are other valuable reference tools available with compiled lists of every word used in a translation (*exhaustive concordances*), affixed to Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek dictionaries (*lexicons*), which would reveal this and other discrepancies between the texts, often overlooked in the English.¹⁴ Further research affirms John reads as one might expect an independent and original composition – distinct from the first three literarily inter-dependent narratives.

To offer another analogy: had Matthew, Mark, Luke and John submitted these Gospels as student essays, their professor could have investigated them using textual comparison tools, and while John would have passed the test, Matthew, Mark and Luke would have been flagged with clear signs indicative of *plagiarism*. The question becomes: *who copied from whom?*

THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

The enigma of understanding four distinct portraits of the life of Jesus is therefore complicated by the paradox that while these Gospels represent four different versions of the story, three of them are written so similarly, that at least two of those must have copied from a pre-existing textual tradition. It's inconceivable that Matthew, Mark and Luke composed their books from memory (decades after the events they describe),¹⁵ independent of one another, yet wrote so closely that their material can be synopsized into one, continuous chronological account

¹⁴ For example: *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, originally published in 1890 as a study aid complementary to the widely-read King James translation, allowed for and popularized the method of study whereby one traces a word from a Bible translation backwards to the Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek from which it is translating and studies the etymology of its root definition. People, without direct knowledge of these languages, could still research any given keyword and subject across the Bible with some "original language" support. This afforded a degree of independence from strict reliance on the translation alone. Many concordances with Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek dictionaries have since been published, indexed to a variety of different translations.

¹⁵ While two of the four canonical gospels are traditionally attributed to Jesus' actual disciples (Matthew and John), with the other two being traditionally attributed to Peter's secretary and Paul's traveling companion (Mark and Luke, respectively), it is commonly believed among Christians that these narratives were composed decades after the death of Jesus (around 30 C.E.). Many Christian scholars will offer ranges for dates of composition such as: *Mark (70-80); Matthew (80-120); Luke (80-150); John (90-150)*.

showcasing many parallel stories often rendered verbatim! This quandary of *why three distinct Gospel accounts can read so similarly*, and therefore understanding the nature of their literary inter-relationship, became known as the *Synoptic Problem*.

Traditionally, it was held Matthew wrote his gospel first, followed by Mark, then Luke-Acts (so-called, because the *Gospel of Luke* and *Acts of the Apostles* were written by the same hand and appear to be parts 1 and 2 of a continuous story). Most agree Luke-Acts was not written first because it evidently introduces itself as having been based upon pre-existing compiled accounts:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order.¹⁶

Most modern scholars of the Gospels now agree Mark was the first of the Canonical Gospels to be written (*Markan Priority*), and they do so for numerous reasons considered together, notably:

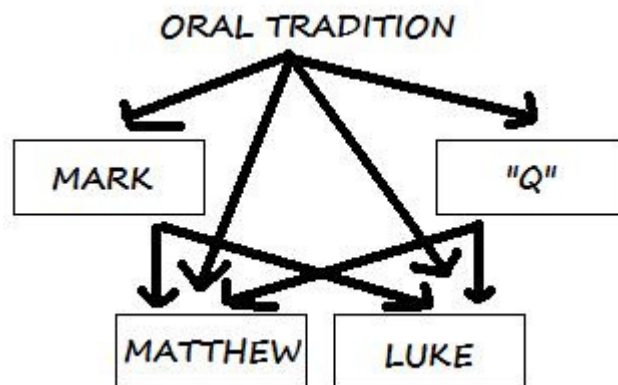
- **Shared stories between the Synoptic Gospels:** Matthew often agrees with Mark in details (contrary to Luke), and Luke often agrees with Mark in details (contrary to Matthew), but rarely do both Matthew and Luke agree with each other *against an alternate reading in Mark*.
- **Shared order of events of stories between the Synoptic Gospels:** Matthew may record an event in different sequence from both Mark and Luke, and Luke may record an event in different sequence from both Mark and Matthew, but never do both Matthew and Luke agree with each other *against an alternate chronology in Mark*.
- **Distinct versions of stories between Matthew and Luke:** Matthew and Luke record alternate accounts of Jesus' nativity, genealogy, sermons, many parables, and the resurrection appearances, which are altogether absent (agreeing or alternate) from Mark.

Careful study and comparison between the Gospels reveals that both Matthew and Luke copied stories from a pre-existing Mark, which was both biographically and theologically more original and primitive. Sometimes Matthew and Luke would alter Mark's account to suit their rhetorical purposes, but they appear to depend upon Mark virtually independent of one another as they composed their distinct Gospels. More pointedly, Matthew and Luke do not appear to copy from each other, to the extent of including important biographical details of Jesus life (absent in a primitive Mark), in very *distinctive* ways. In addition to Mark, further textual evidence also reveals that Matthew and Luke copied from a *second source*:

¹⁶ Luke 1:1-3a

- **Shared stories between Matthew and Luke:** Matthew and Luke share (though rarely sequentially) a set of sayings (about one-quarter of their composition), which are altogether absent (agreeing or alternate) from Mark. This sizeable material is known as the *double tradition* or the *Lost Gospel Q / Q Source Document / Q Sayings Gospel*.¹⁷

Had the material of this double tradition been in similar sequence, one might believe either Matthew or Luke copied from the other, but its sequentially unique insertions, respective of Mark's chronology, suggest Matthew and Luke independently synopsized Mark's narrative with a now lost list of sayings (*logia*) called the "Q" gospel, in an independent effort to compose their unique gospels. In the 19th century C.E., German scholars first assigned to this hypothetical document the letter "Q" which signifies *Quelle* ("source").¹⁸ So the prevailing answer to the synoptic problem of how Matthew, Mark and Luke are literarily inter-dependent, in which both Matthew and Luke depended upon both Mark and Q, is known as the *Two Document Hypothesis*.



So it can be deduced through careful analysis from internal textual evidence that Mark was originally written. Subsequently, Matthew expanded upon the biography of Jesus reusing more than 90% of Mark's material (some verbatim, some with variation) with another source text.

¹⁷ For research on this subject consult Kloppenborg, John S., *Q, the Earliest Gospel: An Introduction to the Original Stories and Sayings of Jesus*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

¹⁸ The *Two Document Hypothesis* was first proposed by Christian Hermann Weisse in 1838. This solution to the synoptic problem became widely accepted after Heinrich Julius Holtzmann advanced it in 1863. By 1890, the siglum "Q" was used by Johannes Weiss to represent the hypothetical sayings source used by Matthew and Luke.

More advances followed and alternate theories continued. Other views concerning the literary inter-relationship between the synoptic gospels included more traditional arguments for Matthew's priority, namely [Matthew>Mark>Luke], and specifically the so-called *Two Gospel Hypothesis*, arguing Luke used Matthew, and Mark used both Matthew and Luke. The latter was first proposed by Henry Owen in 1764 and advanced by Johann Jakob Griesbach in 1789.

Still later, Luke having foreknown and investigated “many” efforts to “compile ... accounts”, similarly used almost 80% of Mark with other sources to compose the first part of Luke-Acts. Finally, the theologically advanced fourth Gospel called John was finished, having no literary relationship to the previous three. This is a simplified and truncated introduction of that analysis, but it serves to acquaint the reader concerning an important enigma in the all-important Testimony of the Evangelists – the founding five books of the Christian Testament. Yet the Bible has many enigmas, and its *first* five books are not without their own “*Documentary Hypothesis*”.

THE DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

In modern times, students of the Bible also began taking a closer look at some peculiarities within Genesis, Exodus and Numbers. These three books appeared to contain multiple divergent narratives often with *two distinct versions of many of the same Bible stories*, including two accounts of creation, two primordial genealogies of humankind, two flood narratives, multiple parallel accounts concerning the Patriarchs such as Abraham, Jacob and Joseph, and repetitions of the same codes of laws along with different historical settings concerning the receiving of those laws.

Along with these doublets of stories, it was discovered that each set of parallel stories would often refer to “God” using different Hebrew names, respective of one other. This phenomenon concerning the study of proper nouns (or “onomatology”) has been theorized on extensively,¹⁹ and becomes obvious from reading the very first two chapters of the Bible which feature two distinct and parallel Creation accounts:

- **Genesis 1 records a distinct series of events following:**
“In the beginning **God {Elohim}** created the heavens and the earth...”
- **Genesis 2 records another distinct series of events following:**
“In the day that **the LORD God {Yahweh Elohim}** made earth and heaven...”

Two different Hebrew words, אֱלֹהִים {Elohim} and יְהוָה {Yahweh}, a title for deity and a proper name respectively translated “God” and “the LORD”, are often distinguishing characteristics between two parallel versions of a related story. This same pattern exists throughout the book of Genesis, just as the following chapters 6-9 contain two distinct Noah’s Flood accounts:

	ELOHIM (“God”)	YAHWEH (“the LORD”)
6:12 6:5-6a	<u>God</u> looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.	Then <u>the LORD</u> saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that

¹⁹ For examples of interpretive theories proposed to explain the respective onomastic variations between parallel stories in Genesis see the beginning of Chapter 1.

		He had made man on the earth,
6:13 6:7	Then God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.”	The LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.”
6:22 7:5	Thus Noah did according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.	Noah did according to all that the LORD had commanded him.

It’s challenging enough to navigate two parallel accounts of Creation appearing back-to-back (i.e. one, right after the other) in Genesis 1 & 2, yet even more mysterious than these, the two corresponding accounts of Noah’s Flood are interleaved back-and-forth (i.e. they have been synopsized into one, continuous chronological account)!

These assembled materials can be distinguished from their present Biblical arrangements which appear to be ancient editorial work resembling synopses of preexisting source documents. So in the 18th century C.E., another German scholar assigned to the Elohim author the letter “E” which signifies *Elohist*, and to the Yahweh author the letter “J” which signifies *Jahwist* (popularly in English, *Yahwist*).²⁰ How exactly to disassemble the Biblical material into separate documents hypothetically believed to have originally been composed is the aim of the *Documentary Hypothesis* (of which there are many proposed variations).²¹

²⁰ In 1780, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn advanced the idea (which had previously been discovered), that there were different groups of stories in the Hebrew Bible (particularly in Genesis) which he labeled “E” and “J” due to their usage of the Hebrew *Elohim* and *Jahwe*. After “P” was discovered to be present within the material previously labeled “E”, Julius Wellhausen proposed in 1878 the first socio-historical argument for how E J P and D (written by separate hands) all developed during the course of the history of Israel and Judah.

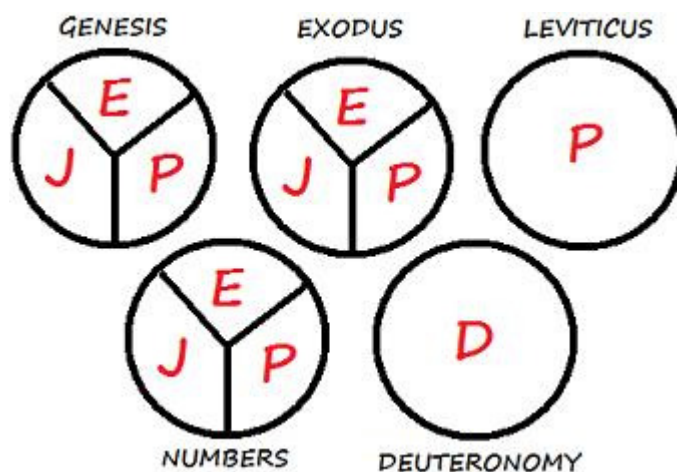
Many advances and alternate theories followed with respect to both the *distinguishing of these four documents* (within the present Biblical arrangement) and their *literary inter-relationship and historical development* (resulting in the present Biblical arrangement).

²¹ Aside from many views in determining exact portions of the scripture as original to specifically “E” “J” “P” or “D” or representative of the merging additions of a redactor, the most common variance in the Documentary Hypothesis is with respect to the developmental history of these documents. The original argument proposed that “P” was written last and “J” was likely written first (thus, “J” “E” “D” “P”). In this view “P” was believed a post-Babylonian Captivity (ergo, post-monarchical) Priestly response to the ancient J&E documents and Deuteronomy. The idea that “P” is a direct response alternative to J&E, before Deuteronomy was presented to King Josiah of Judah, would be popularized later. Whereas Southern “J” was often loosely seen as written first, it is also suggested that Northern “E” is the most ancient of these documents, with many students of the Hebrew Bible committing neither way. This issue of compositional order becomes especially relevant when studying the authors’ motivations and possible dependences or supplementary relationships to earlier narrative traditions.

Therefore in addition to the Documentary Hypothesis (which posits the existence of four separate *documents variously combined by a redactor or redactors*), another subtle alternative known as the Supplementary Hypothesis should be mentioned. Like the Documentary Hypothesis, these four primary literary works are acknowledged, however one or more of those believed to be written later are proposed to be *supplementations on the earlier work or works*. A primary example of this supplementary reasoning is how “P” is not regarded as a separate document which was subsequently synopsized with “E” and “J” (by another hand) but rather a work written in and around a pre-existing kernel of text. More pointedly, “P” is seen as both author and editor, composing the unique Priestly

Within the Elohim material there were yet still doublets of stories, discovered to have unique vocabulary and thematic concerns. So a third source (also referring to God as “Elohim”) needed to be distinguished, which served also to explain other linguistic and thematic discrepancies found within Genesis, Exodus and Numbers.²² This third document ultimately became known as the *Priestly source* (“P”), whose contents also represent virtually the entire book of Leviticus.

So it can be deduced there were originally three distinct documents (E, J and P) among which contained variations of related literary traditions. The similarity of these documents (i.e. their synoptic thematic nature), made it possible for their contents to be anciently rearranged and compiled into the scrolls we now know of as *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers*. Finally, a fourth document, represented by the fifth scroll of *Deuteronomy* and written by the *Deuteronomist* (“D”), is alternatively wholly distinct from the first three.



More careful analysis of internal textual evidence (such as archaic styles of Hebrew, historical references and literary dependence) reveals E and J are the oldest of these documents, being also the first to have been combined. Subsequently the alternate P material was written and combined with E and J. Finally, Deuteronomy was written and appended thereafter in the Hebrew canon of Scripture.

material such that it was never read separately, but in the more familiar combined state (which those subscribing to the Documentary Hypothesis would call a redaction).

These subjects are detailed in the following introduction and subsequent chapters of Part 1.

For an exhaustive reference of the Biblical text of Genesis through Deuteronomy with words distinguished and annotated as likely or tentatively “E” “J” “P” “D” or redactions, consult R. E. Friedman, *The Bible With Sources Revealed: A New View Into the Five Books of Moses*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2003).

²² Such nuances in vocabulary and theme are discussed at length in the following chapters, particularly chapters 1-3 where the inter-dependent literary development of “E” “J” and “P” is outlined with deserving examples.

The nature and specifics of these four hidden documents will be outlined with greater detail following this introduction. What's important to observe here is that the documents of *four Evangelists comprise the foundation and first five books of the New Testament*. (This we have always known, for they were transmitted to us as five *separate* books.) However, *four documents also comprise the foundation and first five books of the Old Testament!* These were not so easily acknowledged. Hidden in plain view for centuries, these *Fore Gospels* are the foundation of an even greater mystery.

THE FORE GOSPELS

There is a high degree of parallelism between the Old and New Testaments. Most Christian theologians like to expound upon this. Many readers of these books can sense a sort of quintessence, where the whole of the Holy Bible adds up to more than its individual parts. However, that *fifth element* is elusive, and can only be arrived at having intimate knowledge of the original *four elements* that make up these twin literary pillars of Hebrew and Christian faith.

Why should four different Gospels begin the New Testament? Simply, this is because four different "Gospels" begin the Old Testament. What's more, the four New Testament Evangelists *historically parallel and ideologically project* those overlooked four documents which comprise the so-called five books of Moses.

For example as just discussed, the documents identified as "J" and "P" both begin with two different accounts of the creation of the world and humans (Genesis 2 and 1, respectively). When one turns to the New Testament, both Gospels of Matthew and Luke begin with a unique account of the Nativity of Jesus (that is to say, his birth into the world as human). Furthermore, "J" and "P" both follow up their distinct creations of "Adam" with two distinct genealogies representing the first generations of humankind (Genesis 4 and 5, respectively). We find the Matthew and Luke nativities also feature distinct genealogical records of Jesus' parentage!

Contrariwise, the oldest, simplest and shortest Gospel, Mark, contains no such early history of Jesus, just as "E", the oldest, simplest and shortest Old Testament Gospel, contains no such early history of the world. This expositional absence on origins also holds true for the Fourth Gospels, John and "D".

Looking closer at "J" and "P", it will be noticed the Yahwist material ideologically concerns itself primarily with the people of Judah. Christian scholars have long coined Matthew the "Jewish Gospel" for its similar ideological focus. Likewise the Priestly account, despite being scattered throughout Genesis, Exodus and Numbers, also represents virtually all the unique contents of the book of Leviticus. Therefore, it's surprising to discover Luke, who shares

synoptic material with Mark and Matthew, happened to also write an entirely unique sequel, called Acts of the Apostles!

Drawing on the remarkable connections between these eight documents reveals a divine parallel:

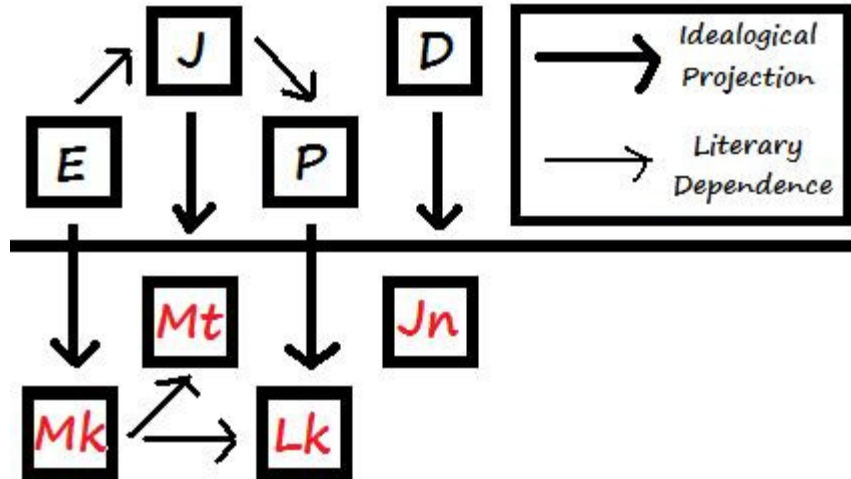
OT	Elohist (“E”)	Jahwist (“J”)	Priestly (“P”)	Deuteronomist (“D”)
NT	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John

Therefore, the first five books of both Testaments can be grandly “seen together” as follows:

Genesis (E/J/P)	Exodus (E/J/P)	Leviticus (P)	Numbers (E/J/P)	Deuteronomy (D)
Mark / Matt / Luke	Mark / Matt / Luke	Acts	Mark / Matt / Luke	John

Even more compelling as just discussed, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke have long been regarded as being “synoptic” and can be synopsized into one, continuous chronological account, showcasing alternate versions of the same stories. What do we find in the Old Testament? The “E”, “J” and “P” documents *have been synopsized* into one, continuous chronological account, showcasing doublet versions of the same stories scattered between Genesis, Exodus and Numbers! This, leaving us once again with the Fourth Gospels, John and “D”, written last and having no direct literary relationship with their three predecessors.

Completed in the same order and bearing the same structural similarities, the hidden Fore Gospels of the Hebrew Bible and the canonical Four Gospels of the Christian Scriptures preserve an ancient and divine mystery. The Holy Bible contains, within itself, the Key to decoding it. The four, distinct portraits of Jesus in the New Testament are the ideological projections of four, ancient Hebrew literary traditions. These traditions inspired the Evangelists, even at the subconscious level, to portray their Lord in certain ways, appending to his biography and amending the details. The person of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament therefore represents a personification and culmination of ancient and lost traditions, driven by a Messianic hopefulness to bring balance to history and to reconcile all things. None of these authors could know their material would become part of such a greater and celebrated whole (i.e. the *Holy Bible*).



In yet another mysterious show of parallels, the final chapters in both five-book foundations of the Old and New Testament conclude concerning the deaths of their traditional and beloved authors:

- **MOSES:** *“So Moses the servant of Yahweh died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of Yahweh.”*
- **THE DISCIPLE JESUS LOVED:** *“Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, ... This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things.”²³*

Yet how could the traditional authors of these books have written about their own deaths? Ironically, this question gave rise to the Documentary Hypothesis in the first place, which demonstrates *Moses did not write the “Five Books of Moses”*. Likewise, the anonymous “Disciple Jesus Loved” will be revealed, and that *John did not write the “Gospel of John”*. Now after centuries of obscurity, may this age see the full history of the Holy Bible be made manifest.

²³ Deuteronomy 34:5 & John 21:23b,24a