



HOUSE to HOUSE
HEART to HEART

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House to House Heart to Heart

VOLUME 29 NUMBER 5

Did the Apostles MAKE UP the New Testament?



Opponents of Christianity commonly say that the New Testament resulted from the disciples missing Jesus so much that they made up the resurrection and fabricated a record of His words and deeds. Everyday acts of kindness became astounding miracles. Sermons were sprinkled with references to His coming from heaven and being the Son of God. A good life became a sinless life.

Many who say such things have not read the Bible; they parrot what they have heard or read from other nonbelievers. Rarely have they carefully studied the details of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The average church member knows far more about the Bible, but that does not mean they are ready to meet the questions of a child or grandchild who doubts the Bible (1 Peter 3:15).

A commonsense approach involves carefully examining the content of the gospel. The New Testament has the ring of authenticity. If the gospel story were fabricated, it would read differently. What internal factors show that the disciples did not invent the gospel?

THE PRESENCE OF UNFLATTERING MATERIAL

Historians use this rule: If a document contains features embarrassing to those who wrote it, it has a high probability of being historical (also referred to as the criterion of embarrassment).¹

The disciples did not change the story, even when it would have made them look better. Collectively, they wrote that, as a group, they were

- slow to understand (Mark 8:17–18; 9:19),
- vainly ambitious (Mark 9:33–37; Luke 9:46; 22:24),
- uncaring (Mark 10:13–16; 14:32–42),
- unbelieving (Mark 16:14),
- unintelligent and timid (Luke 18:31–34; Mark 9:32),
- uneducated and disrespected (Acts 4:13),
- cowardly (Matthew 26:33–35; Mark 14:50–52), and
- filled with doubt (Matthew 28:17; Luke 24:25).

Individually, Zebedee's sons had their mother request exalted positions for them, which showed an embarrassing



lack of maturity, a misunderstanding of the kingdom, and a violation of Jesus' specific teaching (Matthew 20:20–23; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:24–27). Peter insulted Jesus by putting Him on the level with Moses and Elijah (Matthew 17:4–5), denied Him three times (Matthew 26:69–75), and was called "Satan" by Jesus in the biography that he likely helped author (Mark 8:33). Thomas doubted (John 20:24–28).

Culturally, we find an odd occurrence. Women—not the disciples—were the first eyewitnesses of the empty tomb at a time when women were second-class citizens and unable to testify in court.²

THE PRESENCE OF COUNTERPRODUCTIVE FEATURES

A second rule of historians is this: If a document contains features counterproductive to the purpose for which it was written, then it is likely to be historical.

If the disciples were trying to convince the world that Jesus was the holy Son of God (John 20:30–31), why include multiple accusations against Him that showed people denying that premise? Jesus Himself denied being good if He were not God (Matthew 19:17). The biographies show Jesus being accused by both His family and His enemies of being

- deranged (Mark 3:21; cf. John 7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20),

- deceitful (John 7:12, 47; cf. Matthew 27:63),
- drunk (Matthew 11:19), and
- demon-possessed (Mark 3:22; Matthew 9:34; 10:25; 12:24; Luke 11:15).

If trying to gain followers for Jesus, why admit that many of His followers deserted Him (John 6:66) and that His own family opposed Him? (Mark 3:21; John 7:5).

If trying to impress people with His greatness, why include unflattering facts such as

- His occupation as a poor carpenter in Nazareth (Mark 6:3),
- displays of His anger (Mark 3:5; John 2:13–17),
- John baptizing Him (Matthew 3:13–17). Critic Bart Ehrman, using the criterion of dissimilarity to judge the historical reliability of the claim Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, notes that "it is hard to imagine a Christian inventing the story of Jesus' baptism since this could be taken to mean that he was John's subordinate."³
- His arrest and conviction (Matthew 26:47–56; 27:15–31),
- and His shameful execution by crucifixion (Matthew 27:32–56).

It would have been easy for the disciples to leave out these details; by including them, they show a commitment to truth.

Further, the disciples did not construct the new religion to appeal to people who are mostly proud, worldly-minded, sensual, and profane. Jesus' teachings were radical, and, to that culture, embarrassing. His views were unorthodox on

- fasting (Matthew 6:16),
- divorce (Matthew 19:1–12),
- religious titles (Matthew 23:8, 10),
- legalism (Matthew 23:23),
- sinners (Luke 7:34), and
- women (John 4:1–9).

The dissimilarity criterion suggests that a saying or an action can be more confidently considered authentic to Jesus if it differs from or contradicts the perspectives of Judaism at the time of Jesus or the early church's views.

THE PRESENCE OF IRRELEVANT MATERIAL

After Jesus was arrested, an unknown young man was there, wearing only a linen cloth (perhaps a bed sheet) (Mark 14:43–52). When someone tried to grab him in the melee, he left his covering behind and ran off naked. The young man is not named. Why include this? It has no connection to the event except as a detail an eyewitness would remember—especially if that young man grew up to be the book's author (as scholars believe Mark did).

After a crowd asked Jesus what should be done with an adulterous woman, he wrote in the dirt as if stalling for time (John 8:1–10). John does not say what He wrote. It is not even clear how the writing is connected to event. The only reason to include this is that it happened.

Some material in the gospel accounts was irrelevant to the church's issues when these books were thought to be written (AD 50–90). Consider these incidents:

- Jesus' prediction of Jerusalem's destruction when it was already destroyed (Matthew 24:1–34);
- Jesus' controversy with the Pharisees on Corban practices when there was no temple or priests to make the practice possible (Mark 7:10–13; cf. Matthew 15:4–6).
- Jesus' teaching about the altar when it was gone (Matthew 23:18–20).

Why did the disciples include these? The most reasonable explanation is that Jesus said them.

THE ABSENCE OF RELEVANT MATERIAL

Early Christians had several disputes. They disagreed about

- circumcision as a religious requirement (Acts 15:1–2),
- keeping the Law of Moses (Galatians 5:3–4),
- questions about marriage practices (1 Corinthians 7),
- miraculous gifts/tongues (1 Corinthians 12–14),
- laws regarding dietary practice (Romans 14),
- Jews and Gentiles in the church (Ephesians 2:11–22).

When a question came up, the first practice was to see what Jesus said about it (1 Corinthians 7:6, 12, 25; 2 Corinthians 11:17). Yet Jesus did not say much about any of these issues in His recorded sermons. If the disciples had made up the gospel, imagine how tempting it would have been to add a verse to settle these controversies.

Another significant omission is the absence of statements from Paul. Imagine having a man as well-educated, polished as a writer, prominent as a leader, and well-traveled as a preacher, yet not include any of his material in writing the gospel. T. W. Manson wrote the following:

The Pauline letters abound in utterances which could easily be transferred to Jesus and presented to the world as oracles of the Lord. How many are? None. It seems a little odd that, if the story of Jesus was the creation of the Christian community, no use should have been made of the admirable materials offered by one of the most able, active, and influential members of the community.⁴

THE PRESENCE OF UNITY WITH DIFFERENCES

When collaborating to perpetrate a deception, participants get their stories straight so they do not contradict each other before law enforcement or others (depending on the deception). They give

uniform answers. Experts are suspicious if independent testimony is too similar. If multiple eyewitnesses describe a situation by essentially repeating the same details, it is rejected. On the other hand, if witnesses give the same key facts but vary in details, the case is compelling (this is called the criterion of multiple attestation).⁵

The first thing that strikes one who reads the eighty-nine chapters written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is the variation in the record of the same life. These men write of the same sermons, actions, conversations, interactions, and events, but each gives different details. Although Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels, meaning "from the same view," they differ significantly. Alleged controversies are even argued by Bible critics (and answered by Bible believers).

Yet the whole story agrees. The material shows the same view of God, the same claims of the Savior, the same general opinions of ethics and morals. Followers and enemies have meticulously compared Jesus' biographies for nearly two thousand years, yet the gospel accounts have passed the tests and analyses. How could each writer write separately, and each for his purpose, but when taken together, their writings form a well-adjusted whole?

Did the disciples invent the gospel? The evidence says that it is the work of God (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21).

Endnotes

¹ The criterion of embarrassment is one point listed in the "Criteria of Authenticity" used by academics, the others being the criterion of dissimilarity, criterion of language and environment, criterion of coherence, and criterion of multiple attestation (John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, vol. 1* [New York: Doubleday, 1991], 168–171.).

² Josephus wrote, "Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex, nor let servants be admitted to give testimony on account of the ignobility of their soul; since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment" (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 4.8.15).

³ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 7th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 194–195.

⁴ Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 4.

⁵ The criterion of multiple (or independent) attestation is a tool used by biblical scholars to determine whether certain actions or sayings by Jesus in the New Testament are from the "historical" Jesus.

Waiting Too Late

Before George Washington crossed the Delaware River, a Tory farmer gave the British general a note that stated General Washington's plan. Instead of reading the note immediately, the British general placed it in his pocket. When he got around to reading the note, he was a prisoner of war.

Many on the Day of Judgment will regret putting off taking advantage of God's longsuffering. They will long for another opportunity to obey the gospel, be restored to the church, or convert a friend. Avoid the "thief of time" and take care of vital decisions today (Hebrews 3:7–8; James 4:14; Luke 12:16–21).

"What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."

JAMES 4:14



God's Plan for Saving Man

Divine Love: John 3:16

God's Grace: Ephesians 2:8

Christ's Blood: Romans 5:9

Holy Spirit's Word: 1 Corinthians 2:12–13

Sinner's Faith: Acts 16:31

Sinner's Repentance: Luke 13:3

Sinner's Confession: Romans 10:10

Sinner's Baptism: Acts 22:16

Christian's Love: Matthew 22:37

Christian's Work: James 2:24

Christian's Hope: Romans 8:24

Christian's Endurance: Revelation 2:10

Watch on youtube





Teach the Children Well

A parent's primary spiritual assignment is to teach their children God's Word (Psalm 78:5–6). In the maze of moral confusion, God's Word guides us.

Notice the multigenerational aspect of these verses: forefathers, their children, the children yet to be born, and their children—four generations!

Grandparents, your spiritual assignment is not over when your children are grown. You must influence your grandchildren spiritually as well! It is not easy to teach children God's Word.

Sometimes our lack of knowledge hinders us, but remember that the teacher always learns more than the student. Sometimes a lack of time hinders teaching children. We must make time for what's important.

Share what you are learning in God's Word. Your children can teach you, and that encourages them to learn more.



Mothers

I don't expect anyone to fully appreciate that a mother makes more decisions in one morning than the Supreme Court makes in three years. —Erma Bombeck

"Manage the house."

1 TIMOTHY 5:14

The quickest way for a parent to get a child's attention is to sit down and look comfortable. —Lane Olinghouse in *The Wall Street Journal*



To watch videos, read articles, answer Bible questions, and more, go to housetohouse.com.

When Taking the Lord's Supper . . .

Meditation ("discerning the Lord's body," 1 Corinthians 11:29) is an important part of taking the Lord's supper. Here are some images to focus your thoughts on the body of Jesus:

- The head that lay on Mary's bosom, that would soon wear the King's crown—is now torn with thorns.
- The ears that heard the cries of the lonely and desolate, that heard the Father speak from heaven—are now filled with curses of His enemies.
- The eyes that beheld the crowds—are now scratchy as His body is dehydrated.
- The hands that tenderly held children, healed the leper, worked in a carpenter's shop—now quivering with the raw nerves touching the iron nail.

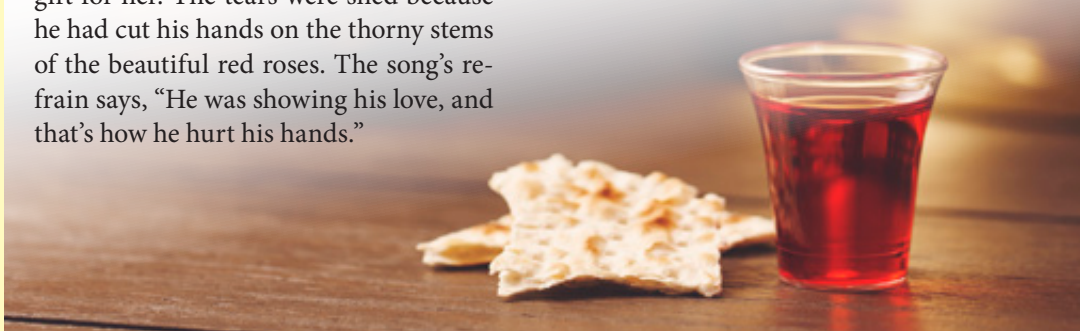
Many of us have seen or heard about little boys plucking flowers to give to their adoring mothers. A little-known song recounts a similar story of one small boy who came running to his mother with tears streaming down his cheeks and roses in his hands that he had gathered as a gift for her. The tears were shed because he had cut his hands on the thorny stems of the beautiful red roses. The song's refrain says, "He was showing his love, and that's how he hurt his hands."

In my mental images of Jesus, I often think about His hands and how He used them to show love for others. With His hands, He cleansed a leper (Matthew 8:3). He placed His hands on the tongue and ears of the deaf mute, causing him to hear and speak (Mark 7:32–35). With His hands, He gave sight to the blind (Mark 8:23). To the failing faith of a sinking man, He extended His hand in assurance (Matthew 14:31). To a maiden asleep in death, His hand had the power of life (Mark 5:41).

At no time were those hands more precious or more loving than when they were nailed to the cross for you and me. Those bleeding hands, that bloody brow, His stricken back, and that sword-pierced body were given as a sacrifice for my many sins. Indeed, He was showing His love, and that is how He hurt His hands. Let all of us see more clearly the love in the hands of Jesus. He truly loves and cares for you. —John W. Moore

"This do in remembrance of Me."

LUKE 22:19



Just for Fun Put the 10 Plagues in Order

Number the plagues 1–10 (Exodus 7–11)



LOCUSTS



BOILS



DEATH OF FIRSTBORN



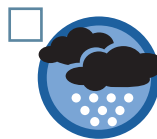
FLIES



WATER TO BLOOD



DARKNESS



HAIL



SICK CATTLE



FROGS



GNATS OR LICE

Answers: 1. Water to Blood; 2. Frogs; 3. Gnats or Lice; 4. Flies; 5. Sick Cattle; 6. Boils; 7. Hail; 8. Locusts; 9. Darkness; 10. Death of Firstborn

Where Did God Come From?



The question “Where did God come from?” assumes that God had a cause. However, by definition, an eternal spirit (“the everlasting God”) cannot logically have a cause. Asking “Where did God come from?” is like asking, “When did eternity start?” By definition, eternity never began. Eternity is without beginning and end. By definition, so is God.

From what we observe in nature, matter and energy are neither created nor destroyed. Scientists refer to this observed fact as the First Law of Thermodynamics. Evolutionists allege that the Universe began with the explosion of a tiny ball of matter 13 to 14 billion years ago, yet they have never provided a reasonable explanation for the cause of this supposed original ball of matter. The fact is, a logi-

cal, naturalistic explanation for the origin of the “original” ball of matter that supposedly led to the Universe does not exist. It cannot exist so long as the First Law of Thermodynamics is true.

Since the physical Universe exists, and yet it could not have created itself, then the Universe is either eternal, or something or someone outside of the Universe must have created it. Relatively few scientists propose that the Universe is eternal. In fact, there would be no point in attempting to explain the “beginning” of the Universe (with a Big Bang, for example) if scientists believed it has always existed. What’s more, the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that matter and energy become less usable over time, has led most scientists to conclude

that the Universe has not always existed; that is, it is not eternal.

The laws of thermodynamics and the law of causality do not apply to God because these scientific laws, like all scientific laws, apply only to what we find and study in nature. By definition, God is not natural; thus, God is not subject to the laws of nature.

If matter is not eternal, and it cannot create itself, then the only logical conclusion is that something or someone outside of nature (who is supernatural) caused the material Universe and everything in it. Christians call this someone “the eternal God” because He is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 90:2).

—Eric Lyons



Cut out this section and mail it to the address on the front.



Bible Quiz

VOLUME 29:5

Send us your answers to receive a free Bible bookmark. We will grade and return your questions and enclose the bookmark “Types/Antitypes—Burning Bush and Ark of the Covenant” as a way of saying thanks for spending time in the Word (quantities may be limited).

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City/State: _____
 Phone: _____

Questions are taken from the New King James Version.

Answers to Previous Quizzes

V. 29:3 David and Goliath: 1. Gath (17:4); 2. Philistines (17:4); 3. Six cubits and a span (17:4); 4. Five thousand shekels of bronze (17:5); 5. Six hundred shekels (17:7); 6. Forty (17:16); 7. Twice (17:16); 8. A fight between himself and a man of Israel, with the people of the loser becoming slaves to the people of the winner (17:8–10); 9. He was “dismayed and greatly afraid” (17:11); 10. He offered to fight him (17:32); 11. Eliab (17:13); 12. David (17:14); 13. Grain and loaves (17:17); 14. Cheese (17:18); 15. Riches, his daughter, and exemption from taxes (17:25); 16. Eliab, Saul, and Goliath (17:28, 33, 42); 17. Killing lions and bears (17:34–36); 18. Sword, spear, and javelin (17:45); 19. Name, Lord of hosts, defied (17:45); 20. “There is a God in Israel” (17:46).

V. 29:4 Starts with the Letter “D”: 1. Dagon (Judges 16:23); 2. Damascus (Acts 22:5–8); 3. Daniel (Daniel 6:16); 4. Darkness (Exodus 10:21); 5. David (Acts 13:22); 6. Deacon (1 Timothy 3:10); 7. Deborah (Judges 4:4); 8. Delilah (Judges 16:13–18); 9. Demas (2 Timothy 4:10); 10. Demetrius (Acts 19:24–26); 11. Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 1:1–5); 12. Devil (1 Peter 5:8 and Matthew 4:1); 13. Diana (Acts 19:35–38); 14. Dinah (Genesis 30:21); 15. Diotrefes (3 John 1:9); 16. Dove (Genesis 8:11); 17. Dreams (Genesis 37:5); 18. Drusilla (Acts 24:24); 19. Dothan (Genesis 37:17); 20. Door (John 10:7); 21. Doorkeeper (Psalm 84:10); 22. Dragon (Revelation 12:3); 23. Dust (Ecclesiastes 12:7); 24. Drink (Proverbs 20:1); 25. Debtor (Romans 1:14).

The Lost Chapter of the Bible

Find answers in Luke 15, which is called the Lost Chapter because it contains parables about lost things. Questions are taken from the New King James Version.

- The Pharisees complained because Jesus ate with _____.
- A man had one hundred of these, and one got lost, so he went looking for it. _____
- Did he find it? _____
- There is joy in heaven over one _____ that _____.
- A woman had ten of these, and lost one, and she diligently searched for it. _____
- Did she find it? _____
- How many sons did the father in the third parable have? _____
- The younger son _____ his possessions with _____ living.
- After running out of money, the younger son got a job doing this. _____
- Who did the hungry boy think had plenty to eat? _____
- What brought the prodigal son home? _____
- The younger son said he would go ask his father to make him a _____.
- Who saw the returning prodigal first? _____
- The younger son decided to tell his father he was “no longer worthy to be called your _____.”
- When the father saw his son returning, he ran and _____ him.
- The father had four things brought for his younger son. These were (1) _____, (2) _____, (3) _____ and (4) _____.
- The father said, “My son was _____, and is alive again; he was _____, and is _____.”
- Where was the elder son when the younger came home? _____
- When the older son heard of his brother’s return he got _____.
- When the older son would not come to the party, what did the father do? _____



Would You Want to Be a Christian If . . . ?

In Romans 8, Paul shows what Christ gives His followers that the world cannot experience. It is enough to make a man jealous! What are Christianity's benefits?

There is no condemnation in Christ (8:1–14). God accepts us, so we can accept ourselves. All men deserve to be condemned before God (3:9–23), but Christians will not be condemned in the judgment (8:1, 39). This is because of their position and their actions; they are “in Christ” (8:1, 39), and they do not walk “according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (8:1).

We have been adopted into God's family (8:15–17). We are not slaves made to fear God (like in Judaism and paganism) (8:15) because we are heirs of God (8:17; 1 Peter 1:4; John 14:1–3; 1 John 3:1) and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

We have hope (8:24–25). God keeps His promises. Hope saves us, although it is not yet attained. Hope = desire + expectation. It is possible to have either of these and not have hope, but hope comes with both. It causes us to wait in patience (8:25).

We have the Holy Spirit's help (8:26–27). He helps our infirmities; specifically, he takes the needs and desires of our hearts to God that we cannot adequately express in prayer. He makes intercession for us (8:26–27). Mediation and intercession are not synonymous. Only Christ mediates for us (1 Timothy 2:5); but a number may intercede for us—even righteous people (Genesis 18:22–23; 1 Timothy 2:1; James 5:16). The intercession of the Spirit is a blessing beyond our ability to appreciate.

God's providence helps Christians on earth (8:28–34). “All things” work together for our good. “All things” must be considered in its context, of course. The devil, demons, and evil lusts do not do us any good, but God can thwart and overcome them. Our primary focus should be on all those things Paul has mentioned—the Spirit's intercession, our adoption, and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

No external thing can separate us from God (8:35–39). God does not force us to remain with Him, but if we desire to, He will help us each step of the way. What assurance!

The church has room for more. Come with us to heaven!

Cut out this section and mail it to the address on the front.

Recommended Podcast



Sisters is a podcast for Christian women by Christian women. Our goal is to help you grow your faith and knowledge of God's Word – while also growing our own. We cover a variety of topics to encourage us, challenge us, and root us in Christ. Find episodes here: pod.link/1723627768

I want to learn more about the Bible!

If you knew for sure that the religious path you are on would not get you to heaven, would you change? If there was the possibility of a doubt, would you investigate? Why not request a personal Bible study today?

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Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Prayer requests or comments: _____

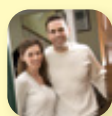
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New Tracts!

- Top Tier Teachers
- Authority in Religion
- Why Me?
- Why Do Bad Things Happen to Bad People?



More subjects:



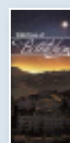
The First Christian in Europe



Babel's Rebels



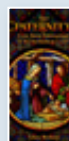
Mary's Little Lamb No More



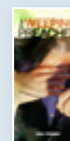
Little Town of Bethlehem



The God of Heaven's No Hanging Judge



Has Paternity Ever Been Determined in the Bethlehem Case?



The Weeping Preacher



The Rich Man, The Desperate Man

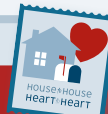


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VOLUME 29:5



Who Wrote the New Testament?



100% The Holy Spirit | 27 books | 138,020 Greek words*

(2 TIMOTHY 3:16–17)

There are eight (or nine) inspired writers of the New Testament. All of them wrote what the Holy Spirit instructed them to write, and each author's style/personality is observable in the text. The Bible is amazing, partly because people from such diverse backgrounds were able to write an intertwined account without contradictions or mistakes.

27.5% Luke | 2 books | 37,933 Greek words

The only Gentile author, Luke was a companion of Paul and a physician by training.

23.5% Paul | 13 books | 32,497 Greek words

Known in the New Testament as both Saul and Paul, he grew up in Tarsus as a devout Jew and a Roman citizen. After his conversion to Christianity, Jesus called him to be an apostle, and he went on several mission trips to the Gentiles.

20.4% John | 5 books | 28,092 Greek words

He was the "disciple that Jesus loved," an apostle, and one of Jesus' inner circle.

13.3% Matthew | 1 book | 18,345 Greek words

Jesus called him when he was a tax collector. He left that life and followed Jesus.

8.2% John Mark | 1 book | 11,304 Greek words

He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey but left early (Acts 13:13). This caused a dispute between Paul and Barnabas when the latter wanted to take John Mark on their second journey (Acts 15:37–39). Later in life he was a companion to Peter and reconciled with Paul (2 Timothy 4:11).

3.5% Unknown | 1 book | 4,953 Greek words

The author of the book of Hebrews is not given, and many authors have been suggested. The book was originally stored and bound with the books of Paul. Other suggested authors include Apollos, Silas, or Barnabas.

2% Peter | 2 books | 2,783 Greek words

He was a fisherman who became one of the inner circle of the apostles. While sometimes impulsive, he became a strong leader in the church.

1.3% James | 1 book | 1,742 Greek words

The half-brother of Jesus, who did not initially believe in Jesus, became a devout disciple after the resurrection.

0.3% Jude | 1 book | 461 Greek words

The half-brother of Jesus, he was also an unbeliever until after the resurrection of Jesus.

Does Must Mean Must?

Marshall Keeble was famous for saying: "The word *must* is one of the strongest words in the English language."

Jesus made faith (Hebrews 11:6), and true worship (John 4:24), divine "musts," as He did the new birth. Without the new birth (baptism), one cannot enter the kingdom (church) (John 3:3–5), which the Bible says is absolutely necessary (Hebrews 12:28; Colossians 1:13–14; Matthew 19:23–25; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:23–25). The Greek carries an imperative force (John 3:14; 12:34; 20:9).

Someone says, "Surely if I intended to be baptized, but died before I did, God would let me into heaven anyway."

Consider the following parallels: If Naaman had died before he reached the Jordan River so that he might dip himself seven times, would he have died a leper? (2 Kings 5). If the blind man had died before reaching the pool of Siloam, where he was to wash his eyes, would he have died blind? (John 9). If a young man should be killed while he and his fiancée are traveling to a preacher's house to get married, would they be married in God's eyes merely because they planned to be married?

While time is on our side, let us not deal in hypothetical ideas; instead, let us make immediate preparations to have our sins washed away (Acts 22:16).

"Make your call and election sure."

2 PETER 1:10



*The number of Greek words varies slightly across different versions of the Greek text.



Jesus built the church (Matthew 16:18) and is the head of it (Colossians 1:18). By His words we will be judged (John 12:48). The name on our building, the doctrine we teach inside of it, and the way we act outside of it identify a church as “of Christ.” Jesus is in charge.

However, without Jesus’ physical presence (Acts 1:11), who makes day-to-day church decisions? Thankfully He put a plan in place so that we do not have to figure this out on our own.

The early church ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23). They were told, “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God” (Acts 20:28).

Paul left Titus in Crete to “set in order the things that [were] lacking, and appoint elders in every city” (Titus 1:5). Elders are not decided at random, or by a popularity contest, but by meeting God-given qualifications (Titus 1:6–9; 1 Timothy 3:1–7). Elders are to serve willingly and oversee as they lead by example (1 Peter 5:1–3).

Every church today should have a plurality of qualified men overseeing, leading, serving, and teaching the members and acting as overseers. A church may temporarily find itself without elders, but should either have them or be working toward them.

Is the church you attend led by elders? If not, would it be willing to change to be like Jesus intended? Things work better when we follow the plan that Jesus put in place. —Matt Wallin



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