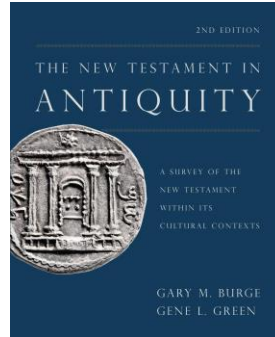


Chapter 5-Sources for the Story of Jesus



Key Terms Jesus Seminar, Josephus, apocryphal gospels, Greco-Roman biographies, Synoptics, Markan Priority, Q, four source Hypothesis, form criticism, *ipsissima vox Jesu*

Key Locations and People J. J. Griesbach, B. H. Streeter

Key Points

- Jewish and pagan sources attest, albeit briefly, to the person of Jesus.
- The canonical Gospels overwhelmingly provide the bulk of material concerning the life and ministry of Jesus.
- The genre of the Gospels is not a unique phenomenon; rather, it is similar to the Greco-Roman biography, whereby the readers are informed about the character and identity of the protagonist and are to believe that message.
- Concerning literary dependence, the theory of Markan Priority is to be preferred. It appears that Mark is the oldest, and both Matthew and Luke often depend on his gospel.
- For a variety of reasons, such as eyewitness testimony, the role of memory, and the function of apostles, we can be confident that the gospels accurately preserve Jesus's teachings and deeds.

Noteworthy Background(s) Picture of the Gospel of Thomas, examples of Synoptic comparison

Chapter Summary

External attestation to the character of Jesus exists in a variety of sources. The first pagan source to make reference to Jesus comes from Pliny. Shortly thereafter, Suetonius, a Roman historian, refers to a Jewish uprising that involved a person named "Chrestus." The clearest Jewish source is Josephus in his *Antiquities*. In it, Josephus makes two references to Jesus, though one is hotly debated. Recently, scholars have been investigating the apocryphal gospels and their relationship to the figure of Jesus. But these texts are generally Gnostic in character and their connection to Jesus has come under heavy scrutiny. In contrast to a few historical references here and there in Jewish and pagan sources, the Gospels overwhelmingly provide the bulk of material concerning the life and ministry of Jesus.

Current research in gospel studies has borne fruit concerning the genre of a *gospel*. Previously scholars argued that the gospel genre was *sui generis*; however, recently, experts suggest that the Gospels closely resemble Greco-Roman biography. The upshot is that the readers learn about the life of the protagonist and are persuaded to believe that message.

No scholar doubts that a textual relationship exists between the Synoptics. Every conceivable combination has been set forth as a legitimate possibility. Early on, Matthew was thought to be the first gospel written, Mark then abbreviated Matthew, and Luke utilized both of them in his composition. By far, the most popular combination today is to view Mark as the earliest gospel, leaving Matthew and Luke to borrow from him. Whether or not Mathew and Luke borrow from each other or from a tradition known as “Q” is difficult to determine. Recently, the historicity and traditional character of John’s gospel has begun to gain more attention among scholars.

Form criticism took New Testament studies by storm. This approach attempted to isolate passages that circulated individually before the Gospels were written. Eventually, these putative episodes, as form critics claimed, were written *by* local communities and *for* particular congregations. Recently, however, form criticism has come under heavy criticism. Scholars are becoming increasingly confident that the gospels indeed contain material that can be traced to the person of Jesus. In light of eyewitness testimony, the role of memory in the ancient culture, and the function of apostolic preservation of Jesus traditions, we can be confident that the present four gospels accurately preserve Jesus’s teachings and deeds.

Chapter 5 – Sources for the Story of Jesus

The students will be able to:

1. Describe the contributions and omissions of pagan and Jewish sources that were contemporary to the life of Jesus in giving us biographical information.
2. Describe the role of second- and third-century sources in offering an account of Jesus and the early church.
3. Identify the genre of the gospels.
4. Describe the various orders of gospel priority among the Synoptics.
5. Identify Q.
6. Describe the change in scholarship regarding John’s gospel.
7. Describe form criticism.
8. Discuss why the Gospels are authentic sources for our understanding the life of Jesus.