JESUS,
KING OF ISRAEL

TOWARD A FINAL QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

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Introduction and Overview

Acknowledgments

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In expressing my gratitude for their assistance, I do not wish to imply that any of them would agree with all, or any portion of the arguments made herein. This book challenges several established tenets of New Testament scholarship that are commonly thought to be unassailable. None of those who have graciously provided me their assistance have seen or critiqued the final manuscript, and none are in any way responsible for propositions advanced herein that may be regarded as controversial.

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Introduction and Overview

In 1991, John Dominic Crossan opened his famous work on the historical Jesus with a scathing assessment of New Testament scholarship in the ongoing quest for the historical Jesus:

> Historical Jesus research is becoming something of a scholarly bad joke. There were always historians who said it could not be done because of historical problems. There were always theologians who said it should not be done because of theological objections. And there were always scholars who said the former when they meant the latter. Those, however, were negative indignities. What is happening now is rather a positive one. It is the number of competent and even eminent scholars producing pictures of Jesus at wide variance with one another. . . it seems we can have as many pictures as there are exegetes. . . that stunning diversity is an academic embarrassment.[1]

Crossan wrote this 33 years ago when there was an almost universal consensus among scholars that the historical Jesus was to be found somewhere in the *Gospels of Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, commonly referred to as the Synoptic Gospels.[2] Since then, the exclusive focus on the Synoptic Jesus has eroded somewhat as many scholars have come to suspect that the *Gospel of John* may be more historically relevant than previously imagined. Nevertheless, despite a growing awareness that John should not be dismissed out of hand, the academic pursuit of the historical Jesus is still primarily driven by the beliefs that (a) Mark is the earliest of the four NT gospels, and (b) the double tradition material in Matthew and Luke is thought to have come from a primitive sayings collection known as "Q".[3] Thus, if the historical Jesus is to be found at all, most scholars believe he will likely emerge from the materials in these "earliest" Synoptic sources. As Craig Keener indicates:

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[1] Crossan, John Dominic, *The Historical Jesus*, Harper SanFrancisco, 1991, xxvii

[2] Matthew, Mark, and Luke are collectively referred to as the Synoptic Gospels since they are similar in form and content, and can easily be read side by side, "syn-optically."

[3] There are about 230 verses that appear in both Matthew and Luke, but do not exist in Mark. Collectively this material is known as the "double tradition." Many scholars assume that the authors of Matthew and Luke each used the *Gospel of Mark* as a source. It is believed that the double tradition material that did not come from Mark was drawn from a lost collection of Jesus' sayings which is typically referred to as Q, from the German *quelle*, meaning *source*.

> In reconstructing what we can know about Jesus to a great degree of probability by purely historical means, ***I depend heavily on Mark and "Q" material...*** It should be understood that I do not regard this material as the only potentially reliable material… But I am giving preference to these sources ***because I am appealing to a consensus of scholarship regarding the most accepted sources for reconstructing Jesus' life***.[4] (emphasis added)

Unfortunately, the relentless focus on Mark and Q as primary sources is what has produced the chronic academic confusion over the historical Jesus. For these sources support a variety of potential interpretations of Jesus, including Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet, a moral teacher/Rabbi, a Cynic sage, a charismatic healer, an exorcist, and a miracle worker. Scholars continue to discuss and debate which subsets of these traditions are most likely historical, with the understanding that they are not mutually exclusive categories; of course, Jesus could have exhibited traits of two or more of these theoretical personas. Virtually every conceivable permutation has been examined and explored. Yet no coherent and viable image of the historical Jesus has emerged that has been able to win scholarly consensus. Most scholars believe that Jesus was an apocalyptic figure to at least some degree since there are signs of apocalypticism in both Mark and Q, and the image of an apocalyptic prophet fits comfortably within the milieu of first century Jewish culture. Yet to what degree might he also have taught in parables about the kingdom of God? Did Jesus speak in pithy moral aphorisms? Did he conduct exorcisms? To what extent might the miracles attributed to Jesus have had historical antecedents? Though most scholars imagine that there was apocalyptic content in Jesus' preaching, those who view him primarily as a sapiential sage have difficulty accepting the eschatological materials as authentic. In the end, a clear image of the historical Jesus remains elusive.

In addition, there is the question of a revolutionary Jesus. The image of a Messianic Jesus cynically dressed as a king, then mocked, beaten, and crucified as an aspiring "king of the Jews" is at the very core of all four gospel accounts. Matthew, Mark, and John each present the riveting scene in which Jesus is dressed in a purple robe and crown of thorns, then mocked sarcastically with the taunt, "Hail King of the Jews." Luke presents a variation of this in Lk 23.11, then all four gospels converge on the one climactic event—the crucifixion of Jesus as a would-be king of the Jews. The Roman crucifixion itself carries obvious implications that Jesus must have been condemned

[4] Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, Eerdmans Publishing, 2009, 164

for sedition, as only an insurrectionist, or someone mistakenly perceived as one, would have met such a fate.

It is just on this point of Jesus' apparent sedition that the *Gospel of John* appears to be historically relevant. For in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus is known by a variety of titles including Lord, Messiah/Christ, Rabbi, Teacher, Son of man, and Son of God. However, John is the only gospel to candidly report that the followers of Jesus had hailed him as the pending *King of Israel*. He is recognized as such by Nathanael in John 1.49, and again by the enthusiastic crowds at the Triumphal Entry (John 12.13). This is noteworthy, for *King of Israel* is arguably the most overtly inflammatory title attributed to Jesus in the NT; it indicates that a restored sovereign kingdom of Israel is being contemplated, and that the Roman occupation will come to an end. And the *Gospel of John* is the only gospel that places the title *King of Israel* on the lips of the enthusiastic followers of Jesus. Conversely, the *Gospels of Mark* and *Matthew* make a candid effort to suppress the title. They both use it only once, and it is uttered by Jesus' adversaries who are taunting him in his dying moments on the cross. In this context, the authors make it appear to be an ignorant, absurd interpretation of Jesus on the part of his adversaries, as it is quite obvious that the dying Jesus is not the *King of Israel*:

Mark 15.26–32	**Matthew 27.37–44**
26 And the inscription of the charge against him read, ***"The King of the Jews."*** 27 And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. 29 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 save yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31 So also the chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 ***Let the Christ, the King of Israel***, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.	37 And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, ***"This is Jesus the King of the Jews."*** 38 Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. 39 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! ***If you are the Son of God***, come down from the cross." 41 So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the ***King of Israel***; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, ***`I am the Son of God.'"*** 44 And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

Matthew's account above is an edited version of Mark's. The author of Matthew edits Mark in two significant ways to divert the reader's attention from *King of Israel*. First, he eliminates Mark's referral to *the Christ,* a term that itself carries royal implications; as it is used in Mark, it reinforces the political connotations of *King of Israel*. Second, the author of Matthew adds in two references to Jesus as *the Son of God*, which do not appear in Mark. This tends to dilute the unique focus on *King of Israel* as it appears in Mark. By using *Son of God* twice, both before and after *King of Israel*, the author attempts to draw the reader's attention toward *Son of God* as the more significant and relevant title.

Meanwhile, the *Gospel of Luke* eliminates *King of Israel* entirely; there is no indication in Luke that anyone ever interpreted Jesus with this specific title. However, at the Triumphal Entry the people receive him saying, *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"* (Luke 19.38) Here he is interpreted as a king, but in context he appears to be king of a heavenly kingdom, not a pending political one. Luke contains another explicit reference to Jesus as an alleged king in the accusations before Pilate.

> 23.1 Then the whole company of them arose, and brought him before Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king." 3 And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." 4 And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, "I find no crime in this man." 5 But they were urgent, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place."

In this passage the author addresses a remembrance of Jesus as one who had not only promoted himself as a king, but counseled his followers to resist payment of taxes to Caesar. Now, the context here is critical; the author of Luke has gone to great lengths to present tax collectors in a positive light, and to emphasize that Jesus had befriended and shared meals with tax collectors (3.12, 5.27-30, 7.29, 15.1, 18.10-13, 19.1-9). Accordingly, within the context of the *Gospel of Luke,* the suggestion that Jesus might have been advocating tax revolt (23.2) is made to appear ludicrous. Luke's proposition is clear—how could anyone with such friendly relations with tax collectors have been a tax rebel? Thus, in Luke the author appears motivated to suppress the notion that Jesus had been a politically driven rebel. This is of a kind with the attempts by the authors of Mark and Matthew to make the title *King of Israel*

appear to be an absurd misunderstanding. But in so doing, they reveal their awareness that Jesus had in fact been regarded or promoted as King of Israel by at least some of his followers. For if there had been no memory of this in circulation, there would have been no need for these authors to make the claim look absurd. In short, the *Gospel of John* explicitly depicts followers of Jesus hailing him as King of Israel, and the authors of Mark and Matthew recognized this as a politically problematic memory that needed to be suppressed. Accordingly, the needle tilts toward the probability that the historical Jesus had in fact been recognized as a pending King of Israel.

The core tradition in the four gospels points rather insistently toward a seditious Jesus, one who had been perceived as a pending King of Israel, and one who had been executed precisely for promoting himself as such. The gospels' graphic details of the soldiers mocking him with "Hail, King of the Jews" after they had dressed him in a purple robe and crown of thorns leaves little room for doubt that Jesus was executed as a would-be king (Mt 27.28-29, Mk 15.17-19, Jn 19.2-3, Lk 23.11). All four gospels report that the inscription of the charge against him read "King of the Jews" (Mt 27.37, Mk 15.26, Lk 23.38, Jn 19.19).

Despite all of this graphic tradition, the possibility that Jesus had actually been a political rebel of some type has not found much support in the academy. Craig Keener observes:

> Little evidence connects Jesus with insurrectionist activity; revolutionary sentiments may have been widespread, shared even by many Pharisees and (before the war of 66–73 CE) some younger Sadducean priests. With that said, those actually involved in insurrectionary-type activity … around the time of Jesus' ministry must have been at most a small percentage of the population.[5]
>
> The preserved sayings of Jesus do not naturally lend themselves to the interpretation that Jesus was a revolutionary.[6]

There appear to be two reasons why most scholars cannot abide the notion of a politically motivated revolutionary Jesus. The first is that it is simply incompatible with Christian tradition. Most scholars working in NT studies have been educated in theological seminaries and colleges associated with the Church, so there is a natural bias in the academy toward interpreting the historical Jesus as one who had been animated more by a religious agenda

[5] Keener, Craig, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, Eerdmans Publishing, 2009, 10–11
[6] Keener, 12

than a political one. And scholars habitually speak of Jesus using religious terminology; they routinely discuss the *ministry* of Jesus and wonder what his *preaching* might have entailed. So the very rhetoric commonly used to discuss Jesus tends to predefine him as a religious figure. The use of language of this kind effectively reinforces the assumption that Jesus must have been in some sense a religious figure pursuing religious objectives. And of course, this makes sense, as Jesus in popular culture is often regarded as the most influential religious figure in history. So the notion that he must have pursued what we would interpret today as a religious agenda tends to be taken for granted. However, in antiquity, religion and politics were two sides of the same coin and less distinguishable as separate areas of concern. One might reasonably ask to what degree Jesus might have been motivated by concerns we would classify today as political.

The second reason scholars resist the idea of a politically motivated revolutionary Jesus is that it carries implications of hostile resistance to authority and perhaps even tendencies toward violent revolt. Keener says that "*the preserved sayings* of Jesus do not naturally lend themselves to the interpretation that Jesus was a revolutionary." This is correct insofar as it goes. However, the preserved sayings of Jesus are not necessarily the actual sayings of Jesus—if Jesus had been engaged in insurrection, it is a virtual certainty that his anti-Roman speech would not have been preserved. And Keener's claim that "little evidence connects Jesus with insurrectionist activity" is questionable. While one might argue that there is little to suggest that Jesus was engaged in seditious activity in the Synoptic Gospels, the same cannot be said of the *Gospel of John*. For the fact that John explicitly declares that followers of Jesus were recognizing him as the pending *King of Israel* is just the tip of the iceberg. The Fourth Gospel contains numerous remnants of a tradition pointing to Jesus as a political rebel that do not exist in the Synoptics. As examples, John indicates that Jesus aggressively promoted himself as Messiah, and that his enthusiastic followers wanted to make him king without delay (Jn 6.15). And after his arrest, his adversaries argue in strikingly candid terms before Pilate, *"If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar"* (Jn 19.12), and they follow this up with the explicit cry, *"we have no king but Caesar"* (Jn 19.15).

The Fourth Gospel also gives us several hints that the disciples had been subject to arrest. During the arrest scene, Jesus pleads with the soldiers to let his disciples go (Jn 18.8), which would indicate that the soldiers had

intended to arrest them. There is no indication as to whether the soldiers complied with Jesus' request. John also claims that Peter's three denials consisted of Peter denying that he had any association with Jesus, which suggests that Peter perceived some grave risk in being identified as a disciple. Similarly, Joseph of Arimathea is said to have been a disciple, but "secretly, for fear of the Jews" (19.38). After the crucifixion, the disciples are in hiding behind closed doors, again "for fear of the Jews" (20.19). And Nicodemus, evidently a member of the Sanhedrin, was said to have come to Jesus by night, apparently to keep his encounter with Jesus a secret (3.1–2). So the author of John appears to believe that associates of Jesus were subject at least to persecution if not arrest.

Moreover, of most intrigue, the author of John does not cast negative aspersions on the two souls crucified with Jesus. In the Synoptic Gospels these two are clearly disparaged as unsavory criminals unrelated to Jesus, but the *Gospel of John* treats them with sympathy and allows the reader to suppose that they may have been disciples who had not escaped. In John, they are highlighted as noteworthy individuals *precisely because* they are unnamed. They are in an elite group along with the first unidentified disciple to recognize Jesus as Messiah (1.35–41), the unnamed disciple who faithfully attends the interrogation of Jesus (18.15–16), and of course the unnamed Beloved Disciple. The author would surely have been aware that he was encouraging his readers to discuss among themselves, "Who was the first disciple to follow Jesus? Who attended the interrogation? Who was the disciple whom Jesus loved? And who were the two who died with the Lord?" Therefore, one must suspect that the author expected at least some of his initial readers to know who these persons had been so that they could be identified within the community. In short, since the author of John writes as if the associates of Jesus were subject to arrest, a reasonable inference would be that the two who died with Jesus were disciples/followers known to the community. This would indicate that the movement at large had been condemned for some reason, and sedition is the obvious implication.

Collectively, some of the characterizations of Jesus in the *Gospel of John*, as well as its suggestions that the disciples were at risk, appear to be remnants of a primitive tradition that Jesus had been engaged in a Messianic rebellion against Rome. There are far fewer indications of this kind in the Synoptic Gospels. In the *Gospel of Mark* in particular, quite the opposite is the case. In Mark, Jesus actively suppresses his identity as Messiah, he is *never* referred to by his followers as a king, and he is condemned at trial for

blasphemy (not sedition). In Mark, only the adversaries of Jesus refer to him sarcastically as a would-be "king of the Jews," and the author attempts to make this appear to be a misunderstanding of Jesus by those aligned against him. Furthermore, in all three Synoptics, the unforgettable kiss of betrayal by Judas serves to underscore the fact that *only Jesus* was to be identified, seized and led away—Mark's kiss of Judas alerts readers to the fact that the disciples were *not* subject to arrest (Mk 14.44–46, Mt 26.48–50, Lk 22.47–48).

When one compares the disparate interpretations of Jesus in the *Gospels of John* and *Mark*, one must ask, which if either of them might be the most historically viable? And here, the composition dates of the gospels are thought to be relevant. Though the dating of the gospels involves quite a bit of intuitive guesswork, the conventional assumptions among most scholars are that Mark was composed sometime around 70 CE, Luke and Matthew most likely in the 80s or 90s, and John probably closer to 100 CE. So John is typically seen by scholars as being the most removed from the historical events. Since John also contains a uniquely high Christology including a mythologized vision of Jesus as a preexisting eternal being (Jn 1.1–18, 17.5), it is often regarded as less historically credible than the Synoptics. Hence, there is a well-established academic reliance on Mark and Q as primary sources in historical Jesus research, as indicated by Keener.

Yet a late dating of John presents a monumental problem: Why would the author of John, writing at the end of the first century, suddenly begin to incorporate candid references into the gospel tradition that Jesus might have been a political rebel? Why would the author of John highlight in explicit terms that Jesus had been condemned for claiming to be a king and challenging the authority of Caesar? After Mark and Matthew had both attempted to make it clear that the emotionally incensed chief priests who were taunting the crucified Jesus as "King of Israel" were sorely mistaken, why would the author of John invalidate this by proclaiming that Jesus' followers had indeed been heralding him as the King of Israel? Why would he simply eliminate the Synoptic claim that Jesus had been tried by the Sanhedrin and condemned for blasphemy? What would have motivated the author of John to begin implying that the disciples had also been subject to arrest? None of this makes intuitive sense as "new" material being added to the gospel tradition at the end of the first century.

Along with all of John's apparent rewriting of the Jesus story as told in the Synoptics, the author of John inexplicably discards major features of the Synoptic tradition, including the most fundamental notions that Jesus had

taught in parables and moral aphorisms, that he had come to inaugurate the new kingdom of God, that he had befriended tax collectors, that he supported the payment of Roman taxes, and that he and his disciples had conducted a healing ministry in which they routinely cast out demons and unclean spirits. Furthermore, the author of John introduces a radically new claim into the gospel record—the idea that Jesus and his first disciples were actually followers of John the Baptist who had split off from his movement and competed with him for some period of time (Jn 4.1–3). This contradicts Mark's clear indication that Jesus did not begin his activities or call his first disciples until after John the Baptist had been imprisoned (Mk 1.14).

So, in many respects, the *Gospel of John* appears either to contradict or simply erase an array of prominent features of the Synoptic tradition. Why would the church at the end of the first century have embraced as authoritative a new gospel that began to insinuate that Jesus and his disciples had actually been engaged in rebellion against Rome? And why would the church have welcomed and sanctioned a new gospel in 100 CE that either negated or ignored so many prominent features of its cherished Synoptic tradition?

In practical terms, none of this makes much sense. At least it calls for a critical review of the conventional dating of the gospels. And since the source of the confusion is the *Gospel of John*, the one outlier among the four gospels of the New Testament, critical attention is drawn to this work. One must wonder, has the literary origin and compositional history of the *Gospel of John* been accurately assessed? Is it correct to interpret John as the last of the gospels, a late work of marginal historical value? Should it even be viewed as a literary and rhetorical whole, composed by a Fourth Evangelist at the end of the first century?

In my view, the answer to these questions is an emphatic *no*. One objective of this book is to illustrate that the literary origin and compositional history of the *Gospel of John* has been wholly misinterpreted. The evidence will indicate that a primitive edition of the *Gospel of John* initially appeared in the mid-first century. This initial composition will be referred to herein as ***Ur-John***. I will argue that Ur-John evolved through several recensions over a period of perhaps fifty years, and that the final canonical edition (other than the adultery pericope, 7.53–8.11) attained its finished form around the turn of the century. The original Ur-John narrative appears to predate the death of Peter, and accordingly, it would predate the *Gospel of Mark*. Consequently, John's apparent literary relationship with the *Gospel of Mark* has been

misinterpreted. Interpretive errors such as these are primarily responsible for the inability of the academy to arrive at a consensus on the historical Jesus.

Reinterpreting John and Mark

The first step toward revisualizing the literary relationship between John and Mark is to be found in the heavily edited narrative which currently resides in John 21, the appendix to the *Gospel of John*. I intend to establish that the narrative in John 21 was originally composed as the climactic final scene in the *Gospel of Mark* that followed the abrupt ending of Mark at 16.8. This will be recognized by many readers as a radical departure from conventional scholarship. That John 21 may be related to a missing ending of Mark beyond 16.8 is almost universally considered to be an impossibility by NT scholars, many of whom believe that the author of Mark *intended* to end abruptly at 16.8 without the post-resurrection reunion predicted in 14.28. It is commonly argued that the author ended the *Gospel of Mark* with the women fleeing in fear and saying nothing to anyone for profound theological reasons. Some have even argued that the abrupt ending at 16.8 is in keeping with the equally abrupt opening of the gospel in 1.1. However, Chapter 1 will draw attention to several direct literary correlations between the *Gospel of Mark* and John 21 which indicate that they may be related texts. This will lay a preliminary foundation for the theory. Further supporting observations will be offered in Chapters 2 and 3 that will strengthen the theory, and Chapters 4 and 5 will present a final direct link between Mark and John 21 that will establish the literary connection between the two with what, in my view, is a practical certainty.

The observation that the narrative in John 21 must have originated as the final climactic scene in the *Gospel of Mark* beyond 16.8 also leads directly to the inference that there must have been an earlier "proto" edition of Mark behind the canonical Mark. Chapter 2 presents evidence to establish that this early proto-Mark was non-apocalyptic, and that the eschatological "Olivet Discourse" in Mark 13 was a later interpolation. Since this proto-Mark had no awareness of the war or its outcome, this pushes the most probable composition date of proto-Mark back to the mid-60s, prior to the destruction of the temple in 70 CE.

Chapter 2 also reveals what I found to be a stunning, complex numerological structure that is deeply woven into the text of proto-Mark in which over two dozen key words and phrases are intentionally deployed in symbolic

frequencies. Keywords and phrases that carry positive connotations are rendered in sets of *seven* and *twelve*, while evil/negative terms appear in sets of *eleven*. Recognizing the presence of this fascinating complex structure is essential to the interpretation of proto-Mark, as it reveals a hidden secondary gospel within the gospel. This indicates that the author was writing for two entirely different audiences at the same time, and reveals that the author of Mark was a person of exceptional genius.

In a related challenge to conventional scholarship, Chapter 3 will address the unique primitivity of John 21. Scholars routinely and mistakenly imagine John 21 to be a later addition to a *Gospel of John* that had largely attained its canonical form in chs. 1–20 by the end of the first century. Chapter 3 will illustrate that John 21 is far more primitive than John 1–20, and thus must be evaluated as a potential primitive addition to Ur-John. The common assumption that John 21 is a late addition to the Fourth Gospel represents a fatal error in modern scholarship, as this single assumption virtually eliminates the ability to detect evidence of hostile discord within the primitive Jesus movement. For within these texts there is strong evidence of hostile political conflict between leading apostles. Ample evidence of this discord has been preserved in the *Gospel of John*, but it only becomes visible when John 21 is interpreted as a primitive addition to an early version of the gospel.

Chapter 4 presents the *Ur-John Thesis* which demonstrates that a primitive edition of the *Gospel of John* has been carefully and intentionally preserved in the canonical text of John by late first century redactors who regarded the original Ur-John edition as a sacred, inviolable text. The distinctive editing behavior of the redactors consistently indicates that they had either no authority or no desire to alter or delete problematic references in the primitive edition of the text as they had received it. Accordingly, most of this primitive Ur-John source text can be isolated and recovered with high confidence and can be proven to have existed as a discrete early composition. A reconstruction of Ur-John is included in Appendix I.

The Ur-John thesis resolves the interpretive conundrum that follows from the assumption that the *Gospel of John* is a late first century work: The reason John contains so much content that *appears* to be primitive is simply because it has been preserved from the original Ur-John document. As examples, the claim that Jesus and his group split from John the Baptist and competed against him for some time no longer needs to be interpreted as a newly conceived idea by a fourth evangelist circa 100 CE. Nor does the notion that Jesus was hailed by his followers as King of Israel, or that he was

convicted for challenging the authority of Caesar, or that the disciples were subject to arrest. All of this reads as authentic early memories of the historical movement that were documented by the author of Ur-John. Conversely, the reason the *Gospel of John* contains no references to Jesus befriending tax collectors or casting out demons or speaking in opaque parables is that this was not actual behavior of the historical Jesus as remembered by the author of Ur-John. Seen in this light, Ur-John becomes the foundational cornerstone upon which a valid theory of the historical Jesus may be erected.

Chapter 5 will demonstrate that the original Ur-John narrative predates the *Gospel of Mark,* and that the author of Mark was acutely aware of Ur-John. When Ur-John and the *Gospel of Mark* are read side by side, it becomes apparent that Mark was written, in part, as a methodical, point-by-point rebuttal of problematic representations in Ur-John. The *Gospel of Mark* was produced by the Petrine faction of the movement. Accordingly, the ideological conflict between the Johannine and Petrine factions of the early Jesus movement comes into bold relief when Ur-John and Mark are read together side by side. This reading reveals the conflict that gave rise to the two different gospel traditions represented by the *Gospel of John* on one hand versus the Synoptic Gospels on the other.

The second century patristic fathers are in universal accord that the Apostle John wrote the *Gospel of John* and was the enigmatic unidentified figure known in this gospel as the Beloved Disciple. Conversely, modern NT scholars are certain that the apostle John *did not* write the gospel; many believe instead that John the Elder, the presumed author of the Johannine epistles, was the final author/editor of John. Accordingly, many scholars also believe that John the Elder was the Beloved Disciple. Chapter 6 presents an argument that the patristic fathers and modern scholars are both half right. The original Ur-John composition predates Mark and the death of Peter. It can be established with reasonable certainty that the apostle John was indeed the author or overseer of this primitive Ur-John gospel, and that he was promoting himself in this work as the Beloved Disciple. But the apostle did not write the final canonical edition. Rather, the author of the Johannine epistles was responsible for much of the material that was added to Ur-John in later recensions during the last decades of the first century. If we may safely assume that the author of the epistles was John the Elder, then modern scholarship is correct in identifying John the Elder as a major contributing author to the canonical *Gospel of John*.

Chapter 7 examines another well-established tenet of NT scholarship that is nevertheless problematic, which is that the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Acts of the Apostles* were written by the same author as a combined volume. NT scholars routinely refer to these two works as "Luke-Acts" to underscore the belief that they must be viewed as a combined work by a single author. However, there is an alarming array of data that runs contrary to this interpretation, which is itemized in Chapter 7. Once again, the prospect of yet another proto-gospel becomes germane. In this case, it appears that there was an early edition of the *Gospel of Luke* which commenced at 3.1 and contained no infancy narratives. The textual data suggest that the first two chapters of Luke and the book of Acts were written by the same author two to three decades later and added to Luke 3–24 at that time. It appears that the author of Luke 1–2 and Acts created the two hails to Theophilus in Luke 1.3 and Acts 1.1 to make it *appear* as if the two works were a combined volume. Though it is conceivable that this may have been the same author writing several decades apart, the evidence presented in Chapter 7 indicates that these were most likely two different authors.

Independent of the question of common authorship, an earlier proto-Luke that commenced at 3.1 would have commenced with John the Baptist, at the same point in the narrative that the *Gospel of Mark* opened. Once Luke 3–24 is viewed in this light as a discrete early composition unto itself, and unrelated to the later material found in Luke 1–2 and Acts, it is reasonable to consider an earlier dating for this work in the 75–80 CE timeframe, for there is no practical reason to date it beyond about 80 CE.

Perhaps the most consequential error in the history of NT scholarship is the theory that the double tradition material in Matthew and Luke was drawn from a lost hypothetical sayings source that scholars refer to as "Q." [7] Chapter 8 presents arguments that Q never existed based on three essential observations: (1) the presuppositions used to infer the existence of Q are highly improbable, (2) the Q theory is internally self-contradictory, and (3) the double tradition is most easily and directly explained by assuming the author of Matthew's direct reliance upon Luke 3–24. For the author of Matthew shows a consistent tendency to edit and correct material that he is drawing from Luke in the same manner that he edits and corrects material he

[7] The Q theory is more formally known as the *Two-Document Hypothesis*, a theory which argues that the authors of Matthew and Luke each used the Gospel of Mark and the hypothetical Q gospel as their two primary sources. For the sake of simplicity I will refer to the Two-Document Hypothesis as the "Q theory."

is drawing from Mark. If "plausible editorial behavior" is the guiding premise for solutions to the Synoptic Problem, then Matthew's use of both the *Gospel of Mark* and Luke 3–24 is illustrated in Chapter 8 to be the most compelling solution to the problem.

In the end, the two "earliest" sources most frequently relied upon in the quest for the historical Jesus, the *Gospel of Mark* and the hypothetical Q, are each shown to be untrustworthy for different reasons, while the most vital historical source, the embedded Ur-John subtext in the *Gospel of John*, tends to be unrecognized and ignored altogether. This is, in essence, the reason for the failures of the various historical Jesus quests. Chapter 9 illustrates that once Ur-John is recognized as a primitive eyewitness account, and Mark is understood as a work written to rebut politically disadvantageous representations in Ur-John, a credible and coherent image of the historical Jesus as an anti-Roman Messianic rebel comes into clear focus.

It is no surprise that the movement which followed in the aftermath of the execution of Jesus was seeking ways to survive under Roman rule. In the earliest years they were simply trying to avoid persecution as a seditious movement. And for this movement to survive at all, it was essential to suppress evidence of its original anti-Roman roots. This instinct to survive was responsible for the many political obfuscations in the *Gospel of Mark*, which in essence presents a politically neutralized, whitewashed caricature of a Rome-friendly Jesus which bears little resemblance to the genuine historical figure. One may suspect that the desire to suppress evidence of anti-Roman origins was also a driving force behind the extensive expansions of Ur-John which transformed it into the "spiritual, non-historical" *Gospel of John*. And indeed, the mythologized, spiritual components of John do effectively mask the contentious political origins of the movement. In all cases, the NT gospels in their various ways are intended to disguise and obfuscate rather than reveal the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Since scholars rarely interpret the gospels from this perspective, it is perhaps not surprising that the quest for the historical Jesus has never produced results that could win academic consensus.