



# Bible Student's Notebook™

## *The Herald of His Grace*

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume X  
Issue 226

## *Dating the Gospels*

*Clear Scriptural Evidence that They Were Written Very Early*

by – R.B. Withers (?-1970)

Christopher Wordsworth (1807-1885) in his *New Testament Commentary* dated 1862, observed that in I Timothy 5:18 the Apostle Paul was quoting from Deuteronomy 25:4 and from Luke 10:7 “with the preamble by which St. Paul is accustomed to introduce quotations from Scripture,” to quote his own words. He cites Romans 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; Galatians 4:30. From this he draws the conclusion that,

The Apostle purposely designed to teach the important truth, that the Gospels are inspired by God no less than the Books of Moses are; and that the Gospels are to be received as Scripture by all, as the Books of Moses were received by the ancient people of God, and by the Apostles and Evangelists, and by the Son of God Himself.

He refers to his note on Luke 10:7, where he cites I Corinthians 10:27 as a quotation from Luke 10:8 and I Thessalonians 5:3 as a quotation from Luke 17:26. He also points out that I Thessalonians 5:2 implies knowledge of Matthew 24:43 or Luke 12:39. He also suggests that in II Corinthians 8:18, “the brother, the applause of whom is in the evangel throughout all the churches” must be Luke.

Viewed from the standpoint of our day, it is altogether extraordinary that Wordsworth never seemed to appreciate the overwhelming importance of his discovery or even to have gone further into the matter. Yet in fairness, it must be remembered that when his Commentary was published, the present almost universal unbelief in

the churches had only begun to develop. So far as I can discover, no writer since has ever shown the slightest inkling of the existence of Scripture evidence for the very early date of the Gospels.

When looking into what the New Testament says about “the Scriptures” and examining Acts 17:2-3, it suddenly occurred to me that it was rather odd that Luke should so pointedly divide what Paul placed before the Thessalonians into two contrasted parts, one a prophecy about the Christ, the other a vivid assertion about his announcement to them, thus:

*Now, according to the custom of Paul, he entered to them, and on three sabbaths he argues with them from the Scriptures, opening up and setting forth that, “It was needful for the Christ to be suffering and to rise out of dead ones” and that, “This One is the Christ – the Jesus Whom I am announcing to you.”*

From the way this is worded in the Greek, it is evident that if Luke had possessed the device of inverted commas, he would have used them as done here. We are given two distinct statements, preceded by *hoti*, “that,” and the former is the subject of Old Testament prophecy. So one is almost forced, once this is perceived, to ask the question: Where do we find the latter?

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## **Bible Student's Notebook™**

*Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal*

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
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- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
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- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with
  - ... total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
  - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
  - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

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**DATING** (continued from page 2145)

The simple answer is, here, in John 20:31:

*Yet these were written that you should be believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, eonian life you may be having in the name of Him.*

Nothing could be more explicit, yet it appears to have escaped notice completely. Needless to say (one may hope) that this must not be taken as meaning that the other Gospels do not contain this testimony. The essential point is – and it is an extremely striking one – that it is in John's Gospel that the explicit assertion is made which Luke is echoing in Acts 17:3. In the modern climate of opinion, it certainly is not easy to accept the idea about Luke's Gospel put forward by Wordsworth; but to be faced with the concept of John's Gospel being recognized, established Scripture by the time Paul's ministry began – that is indeed utterly revolutionary.

Yet, one may well ask: Why not? There is nothing in the Acts account to forbid it. There is no evidence anywhere, of any sort, to forbid it. In plain, cold fact, outside the New Testament there is no firm evidence whatever, one way or the other. So, why not?

If we were to strike out the speeches, the contents of the first sixteen chapters of Acts would be quite meager. Are we seriously to suppose that the Twelve Apostles and their converts did little or nothing beyond what is recorded? During that period of waiting in the upper chamber (Acts 1:13-26), when they completed the Twelve again, the brethren surely did more than merely wait. Surely they compared their reminiscences. Surely the understanding of the Scriptures conferred by the Lord Jesus Himself on the two after the journey to Emmaus (Luke 24) did not disappear as into the desert sands. And what of the succeeding months?

We are told repeatedly nowadays that no one felt it needful to record these events in writing. Not only does Luke 1:1 flatly contradict this, experience of human nature flatly contradicts it too. Peter and John were seen by the top people of Jerusalem to be "unlettered" and plain men (Acts 4:13); but that certainly was not true of Matthew and Luke; and

the tradition that Mark was Peter's amanuensis is by no means unlikely. Besides, if "unlettered" men could by the Holy Spirit's power speak as they did, it is hardly reasonable to claim that John could not have written as in his Gospel; for, deep indeed though the thought in it may be, there is nothing particularly erudite in the actual wording and, in any case, John would only have been writing down what the Holy Spirit had brought to his remembrance. The profundity is in what the Lord Jesus said, not in the reproduction of it.

Some will, no doubt, retort with the air of one laying down the ace of trumps, "But in those days people did not need to write down such reminiscences; they had good memories, and recited these things over and over again." Then why were there so many written documents? Why were the Epistles copied and circulated? Wandering story-tellers used to rely on memory; but those who wrote the Gospels could and did write themselves, as Paul and Luke did. Nobody would ever have invented such a retort who had stopped first to think and who was not already wedded to an untenable theory.

It is worth noting how prejudice is created by the now common practice of speaking of "the Gospel tradition" or "the Church tradition." No such things exist. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines tradition as "Opinion or belief or custom handed down, handing down of these from ancestors to posterity." But that is just what Christianity is *NOT*. On the contrary, it is derived from written records, and we have no knowledge whatever of any so-called "Gospel tradition" existing in addition to those written records. To declare that the records themselves are a tradition is to assume the very thing that ought to be proved.

Of the theory that the common source of the Gospels was oral, there is this to be said: it is wholly unproven unless, as I contend, they were written while the Twelve were together in Jerusalem at and after Pentecost. Then it is easily understandable that they conferred together and planned the whole operation, each Gospel being written to cover its own specific purpose.

In such circumstances, some material might ►



conveniently be reproduced in different Gospels in the same words, or nearly the same words. For it must not be overlooked that actual complete identity of words is not common, and writing as if it were is tantamount to deliberate deceit. Yet there are many close resemblances, and these are adequately explained by the presumption that the Apostles and disciples talked over them frequently, the differences by the presumption that while the general ideas remained in mind the actual wording did not, the rare coincidences by an occasional exceptional accuracy of memory where exactitude was especially important. Furthermore, it is fairly well known that the general framework or literary structure of all the Gospels is the same, even though Mark and John leave out certain sections found in Matthew and Luke.

So Acts 17:3 furnishes clear testimony that, at the very outset of his general ministry, the Apostle Paul recognized the Gospels as Scripture and is nowhere recorded as having been contradicted by anyone. At so early a date, generally considered to be within twenty years of Pentecost, this can only mean that the Twelve Apostles, the church at Jerusalem, and Paul, Barnabas, and the other later Apostles so recognized them as well.

**That being so, and in view of the considerations set out above, we must regard them as having had the full, unquestionable authority of all the Apostles. We are often told that "the Church" gave us the Bible. If by this is meant that the Gospels were issued with full apostolic authority and the Epistles with the full apostolic authority of their authors and the Apostles associated with them, this is true. On the other hand, if it is taken to mean that the authority of Scripture rests on certain Councils convened centuries later, it is false and utterly misleading. In fact, at so late a date such an "imprimatur" is an impertinence.**

Why has this truth about the Gospels generally been hidden from us? Partly on account of the twisting given by so many versions. The *New*

*English Bible's* version of Acts 17:3 is a masterpiece of additions to and distortions of the Greek text. It turns the second affirmation inside out. Its wretchedly poor paraphrase reads:

Following his usual practice Paul went to their meetings; and for the next three Sabbaths he argued with them, quoting texts of Scripture which he expounded and applied to show that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "And this Jesus," he said, whom I am proclaiming to you, is the Messiah."

It is instructive to compare this attempted paraphrase with the translation near the start of this paper and the original Greek. It betrays utter disrespect for the integrity of God's Holy Word. This, we are informed, is "the best available scholarship." What must the worst be like?

The experience of Paul and Silas in Berea (Acts 17:11), though not so definite as evidence when considered carefully, supports the testimony of Acts 17:3; for however thorough and prolonged the search of the Berean Jews into the Old Testament might have been, it could not have established that "*this One is the Christ – the Jesus Whom I am announcing to you.*"

It could and did form the basis for the revelation of this fact in the Gospels, but it was not itself that revelation. Without the Gospel history, no amount of study of the Old Testament would confirm this vital truth; it could only confirm the truth about Jesus when eventually He did appear; and that truth itself is disclosed in the Gospels, and in them alone.

Further testimony, all the more effective by being indirect, is furnished by Acts 18:24-28, where we are told of a certain Jew, named Apollos, a scholarly man,

*... Being able in the Scriptures. He was one who had become instructed in the way of the Lord and fervent in the spirit. He talked and taught accurately what concerns Jesus, fully versed only in the baptism of John.*

This can only mean that he fully understood the doctrine set out in the Gospels, for there and there alone is set out the baptism of John. The further teaching of Pentecost and the even more recently revealed teaching then being declared by the Apostle Paul was beyond his horizon. So we read that Priscilla and Aquila,

*... Took him to themselves and more accurately expounded the way of God.*

This is precisely what might be expected of a scholarly man who nevertheless had access only to the Old Testament *AND* the Gospels; for both pose vast problems that can be solved only through knowledge of the rest of the Greek Scriptures.

To the Thessalonians Paul opened up the Scriptures. The Bereans, “*more noble*,” examined the Scriptures for themselves – to see if these things had been prophesied? No! Simply, to see “*if these things BE SO*.” Thus Luke’s testimony.

Paul’s testimony is just as clear, for in I Corinthians 15:3-4 we find:

*For I give over to you first what I accepted also: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was entombed, and that He was roused the third day according to the Scriptures.*

Now, note particularly: what is twice said with such special emphasis to be “*according to the Scriptures*” is not some prophecy that He would die, or some prophecy that He would be roused; for if Paul had used such a word we would have perceived quite plainly that he was referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, to the Old Testament. But what he declares so definitely here is found in the Gospels, and nowhere else at all. Consequently, we again find the Gospels as a whole written of as something actually available and already authoritatively accepted as part of the Scriptures – and this is one of the earliest of Paul’s Epistles.

Possibly, some might contend that these interpre-

tations are too literal, and that the foregoing passages might well mean no more than that what is said is in harmony with the Old Testament Scriptures, in general agreement with them. This, however, is less than fair to Luke and Paul; for that idea could well have been asserted explicitly, had they meant it, as in Luke 5:36; Acts 15:15. The verb *sumphōneō* means precisely that, whereas this particular usage of *kata* with the accusative means “‘according to,’ in reference to some standard of comparison” (*Green’s Grammar*). He adds “stated or implied,” so there is no room for doubt. The Gospels were such a standard, the Old Testament was not.

**The foregoing ideas must seem radical in the extreme; and this is to be expected, for they are radical, in that they are a RETURN to the very roots of Christianity. Why must most of those who call themselves Christians lean so heavily, and so trustingly, on critics, councils and the so-called Fathers? The cardinal principle, “Go back to the original documents,” applies in matters such as this even more urgently than in historical research. Here is an appeal to original documents. Let us at least give it an unprejudiced hearing.**

Assuming that a *prima facie* case has been made out, let us now turn to an examination of some of its consequences.

With the dates of composition of the Gospels brought within a decade of Pentecost and probably much less, the “Synoptic Problem” and that of the nature of John’s Gospel, which are really two aspects of the same question, are completely transformed.

While the apostles and their friends were together in a close-knit company, there would be continual consultation between them; and there is no imaginable reason why each Gospel in turn should not have been examined and discussed with the greatest care and thoroughness. ►

The prophecy of John 14:26 will acquire a relevance far beyond what it has had hitherto, if read in this light:

*The Holy Spirit, which the Father will be sending in My name – will be teaching you all, and will be bringing to your memory all which I Myself said to you.*

Moreover, the account in the first chapters of Acts will itself be clarified. Amid the vast excitement at Pentecost, the Apostles themselves maintained a placid attitude altogether at variance with that of the crowds who heard them. They and their companions persevered with one accord in prayer (Acts 1:14). Presently, they chose a twelfth to complete their number (1:26). When they began at Pentecost to speak different languages, it was the multitude, not the Apostles and their companions, who were confused (2:6) and who thought that they were drunk with wine (2:13), but the speech promptly made by Peter was calmly reasoned. No trace of excitement, let alone of hysteria, can be found in it.

Completely in line with John 20:31 and Acts 17:3 are its closing words:

*The Gospels. narrating an accomplished fact. appeared very early indeed.*

*Let all the house of Israel know that both Lord and Christ God makes Him – this the Jesus Whom ye crucify (Acts 2:36).*

This agreement is, must be, altogether other than mere coincidence.

So we find, right at Pentecost itself, the calmest, clearest setting out of the purpose of the witness of the Apostles, namely, to declare that the Jesus Who had been crucified was both Lord and Christ. To declare this also was the purpose of John's Gospel. To prove this beyond any possibility of doubt, and from the Scriptures themselves, was the Apostle Paul's purpose in the opening moves of his ministry to the Gentiles. In the face of a proceeding so logical as this, how can we doubt that the first purpose of the Twelve, once their mission started, was to prepare those Scriptures to which the Apostle Paul was presently to appeal?

The moment we accept this proposition, the whole idea of Mark and Luke being late scissors-and-paste efforts, and John an even later compendium of religious meditations, becomes absurd.

Let us clear our minds, once and for all, of the idea, sedulously put about, that there is any objective evidence at all for the theory that Matthew and Luke are composite affairs, worked up from old accounts plus imaginary reconstructions very many years after the events they purport to relate. Even if we had to rely on subjective criteria alone, it would still be easier to believe them to be original documents than the hotchpotch imagined by the critics.

How much simpler it is to believe that the Apostles worked out *all four Gospels* among themselves; Matthew and John writing their own; Peter, perhaps, through Mark writing his special contribution; Luke probing and checking the reminiscences of their associates as well, and producing his own special complete representation of the perfect humanity of the Lord Jesus; all these checked by, and issued with the authority of all the Twelve Apostles; and presently adding that of the Apostles Barnabas and Paul as well.

A further conclusion emerges at once. The Greek Scriptures, commonly though inaccurately called "The New Testament," are now seen to be unified to an extent never appreciated hitherto. Instead of dragging on over two or more generations, *their launching was immediate*. The Gospels, narrating an accomplished fact, appeared very early indeed; the Epistles as soon as the ground was prepared for them. All Paul's churches must have had the Gospels in their possession, or available for their use, as soon as Paul began to evangelize them; so the myth that Paul preached Christ to people who had no means of knowing about Him, and so preached Christ that only the bare facts of His death, entombment and resurrection were necessary, vanishes, as it deserves to vanish.

*The Differentiator* (England)  
1967, page 165ff, abridged



## LETTER FROM THE

## EDITOR

### *Dearest siblings.*

It has been a while since I have taken important space in the *Bible Student's Notebook* to bring you a personal word from myself. I know that to some of you at least, this is an important part of the BSN, one that you look forward to. For you, I am sorry for my absence in this way.

### My Privilege

Thanks for your letters, notes, phone calls and e-mails. I appreciate the kind and gracious words of encouragement that Father allows me to hear from you. To know that you find some help and value from these feeble attempts is a real testament of His work, not ours.

There is something that you need to know in regards to this work. I believe I am the one actually being blessed the greatest of all in this undertaking, for it is always my great joy and privilege to come to you on a weekly basis. I treasure being able to share with you the things that I learn, as well as the writings of others that have been a personal help and blessing to me. Each week is a renewed excitement, as the process starts all over again. It is a lot of work, but it is the passion of my heart.

### My New Book

I am humbled to report that my latest book, *The Church in Ruins: Brief Thoughts on II Timothy* is now in stock and ready to ship. See the display of this title in this issue of the BSN.

I want to thank each of you who assisted us in this project by ordering the book early. Your copy is already on its way to you.

I should have a similar report for you next week on the availability of my next book.

## Video Teaching

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Good stuff. Wonder why trusting is so hard sometimes? I know it is for me. I tend to want to control the outcome of things, which is utterly futile, so I might as well surrender and just walk in peace knowing God is in control. It's much better that way. – **MS**

For one that spends a great deal of my ministry attempting to teach others Biblical Ecclesiology, you have brought a gigantic smile to my face and a reassurance to my doctrinal position [Daily Email Goodies #2242, #2243]. – **VT**

Thank you very much for sending out the Daily Email Goodies so faithfully. My family and I have finally left our "church." I've been using some of the *Unsearchable Riches* in our studies at home. Your Daily Email Goodies and BSN will also be helpful resources for me as I lead my family in worship and study. – **IA**

That is some very good stuff Clyde! – **PA**

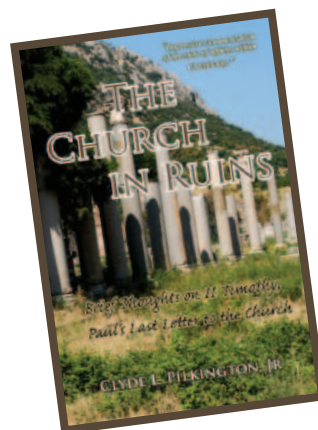
Thank you for your words of wisdom that you write all the time. I have passed many of your Daily Email Goodies on to others. God surely has gifted us with you and indeed He has made you a very competent writer. Thanks again and thank you Father for Clyde! – **CO**

This Daily Email Goodie on fear being an elementary education was excellent! I'm going to share it with the Bible study group I belong to tonight. We've been going through Galatians and I thought it would tie in well with that. Thanks. – **NY**

Thanks for the continuing great insight into the Word. It is true that riches are found on the surface but even greater riches are found when the effort is put into mining the Word. God bless you, yours and your mining. – **Canada**

## THE CHURCH IN RUINS

*Brief Thoughts on II Timothy,  
Paul's Last Letter to the Church*



This brief survey of Paul's last epistle will reveal that while almost 2000 years have transpired, the condition of the church has remained the same, and indeed has worsened in accordance with Paul's warning to Timothy.

This book is not a call for a re-awakening of "the church," because it is apparent that this is not Father's plan. Rather, it is a call to individual men – men whose place in the Christian religious system has left them empty, stagnant, and restless – to awaken to Father's call to be His faithful servant and stand outside of that system to look for other faithful men as well.

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### WHAT READERS ARE SAYING ABOUT THIS BOOK:

Priceless. – OH	A thrill to know that I'm
Awesome. – TX	not crazy after all! – PA
A real eye opener. – MI	Great clarification on
Groundbreaking stuff.	the subject. – WI
– OH	An outstanding little
One powerful message.	book, one that needs
– HI	to be read by every
Impressive. – TX	member of His
Another nail driven by	Body, and I do not
the Truth. – WI	exaggerate. – KS

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