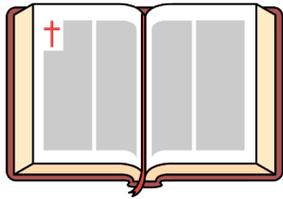
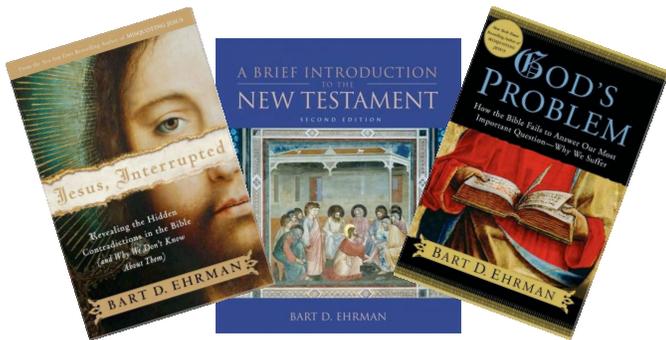
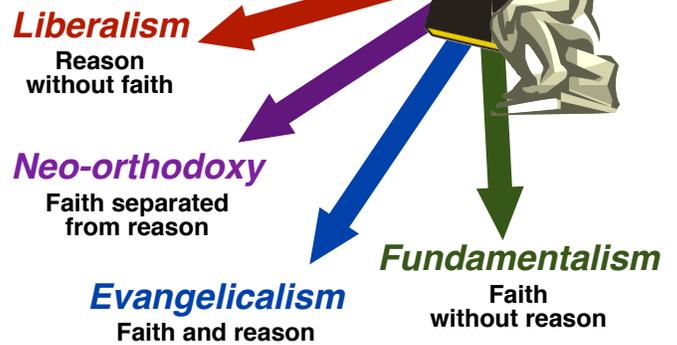


The Gospels



Are the Gospels trustworthy witnesses?

The church has been divided over faith and reason



benwitherington.blogspot.com/2009/04/bart-interrupted-detailed-analysis-of.html

Radical Historical Critics make assumptions. (both good and bad)

- The historian seeks a rational, natural, most probable, and common-sense explanation.
- The historian is skeptical of tradition, dogma, and claims of the supernatural.
- Only natural or “probable” explanations are allowed.
- We must explain everything naturally even if we have to use imaginary data or distort the data.
- Differences are exaggerated not harmonized.

Historical Critical example #1 - The Gospel accounts contradict each other.

Mark 16:2-5

On entering the tomb they saw a young man in a white robe seated at the right-hand side.

Luke 24:1-4

As they stood there not knowing what to think, two men in brilliant clothes suddenly appeared at their side...

Matthew 28:1-4

And all at once there was a violent earthquake, for the angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His face was like lightning, his robe white as snow...

Historical Critical example #2 - Many early followers of Jesus did not center their faith on the cross & resurrection.

Hypothetical “Q”

Material common to Matthew & Luke but not in Mark

Gospel of Thomas

A 2nd cent. Gnostic document

- ✓ No mention of Jesus’ death and resurrection.
- ✓ No emphasis on Jesus’ deity.

Historical Critical example #3 - Theory of development

The historical
Jesus ...



We know very
little about the
historical Jesus.

... became the
Christ of faith ...



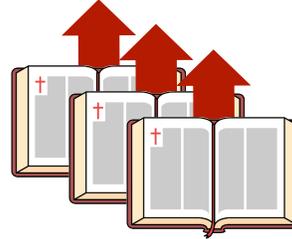
The early
church invented
Jesus as the
Christ.

... recorded
in the Gospels.

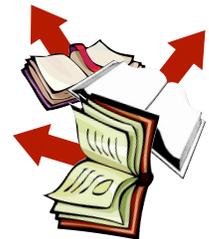


The Gospels
were written to
support the
theology of the
early church.

Historical Critical example #4 - Having it both ways.



The Gospels were created
to support the prevailing
theology of Paul.



The Gospels are
hopelessly inconsistent
and contradictory.

Speaking of the “harmony” or “tension” between N.T. writings

“These are among the most
difficult and controversial
issues that we will address
in our study of the New
Testament writings.”

Bart D. Ehrman
The New Testament

Historical criticism has weaknesses.

Luke 11:52 “Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.”

- ✓ **Narrow presuppositions.** Only natural explanations are allowed.
- ✓ **Sensitive to fads.** Whatever is in favor (culturally) sets the table.
- ✓ **Insensitive to its own bias.** It is quick to reject tradition and church dogma but unwilling to critique its own narrow bias.
- ✓ **Poor track record.** Dogmatic conclusions change from generation to generation.
- ✓ **Overstates its case.** That which is “possible” becomes “probable” and then “certain.”
- ✓ **Selective culling of data.** Deductive reasoning and narrow field of view.
- ✓ **It is an infant science.** It reflects the worldview of modern western thought.

“It is not merely that the Bible isn’t read from the *perspective* of faith, it isn’t even read from the *possibility* of faith.” To make matters even more difficult for those of faith, many institutions of higher learning aggressively socialize students with unqualified or justified pressure from expressions like, “obviously,” “of course,” “everyone now knows,” “all scholars agree that.”

Eta Linnemann (a former eminent historical critic)

What should be our posture toward Liberal Historical Critical challenges?

- **Respect its limitations.** It represents a very limited perspective which excludes the supernatural.
- **Be informed.** Get your facts straight.
- **Be humble.** Don’t be afraid to admit you don’t have all the answers or that you have nothing to learn from historians.
- **Be reasonable.** Recognize where you have a point to make and where the critic also has a valid point.
- **Don’t demand too much.** Realize that a faith commitment does not demand absolute certainty only reasonable probability.

2 Timothy 3

“¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known **the sacred writings**, which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ **All Scripture is inspired by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

2 Peter 3

“¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother **Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you**, ¹⁶ as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do **also the rest of the Scriptures**, to their own destruction.”

The role of the human authors

Selectors - from among the many things Jesus said and did, they chose which stories they wanted to include and which to omit.

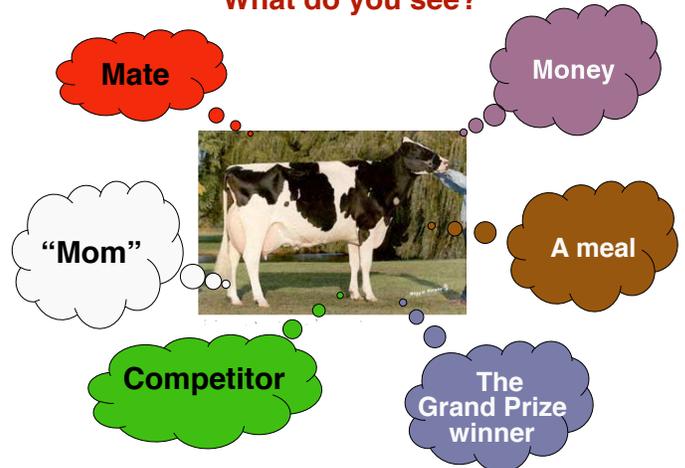
Arrangers - they organized the materials, not necessarily chronologically but often in thematic blocks.

Shapers - they edited the individual stories from their sources so as to emphasize the themes they wanted to stress.

Proclaimers - they were not technical historians, but preached the “good news” in ways appropriate to their audiences.

2 Peter 1:16 “We did not follow **cleverly invented stories** when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

What do you see?



Comparison of the four Gospels

John - The Mystic's story: This is a poetic revelation of the divinity of Jesus with an emphasis on the meaning of Jesus' words and actions.

Luke - The Chronicler's story: This is an orderly story of Jesus as a compassionate hero who appears as the climactic event of human history to change the world.

Mark - The Rebel's story: This is a concise revelation of Jesus as a revolutionary prophet who calls his followers to sacrificial action.

Matthew - The Rabbi's story: This is a defense of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises.

***Are the resurrection accounts really
“impossible” to reconcile?***

An angel, appearing as a young man dressed in white, came and rolled away the stone (**Matthew 28:1-4**). Later, when the women came, they saw him there (**Mark 16:2-5**) and surmised what had happened. As the women were trying to make sense of all this, a second man appeared (**Luke 24:1-4**) and explained it.

“Most of these [textual] differences are completely immaterial and insignificant....In fact, most of the changes found in our early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology. Far and away the most changes are the result of mistakes, pure and simple - slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders of one sort or another.”

*Bart Ehrman in Misquoting Jesus
pp. 10, 55-56, 62, 94, 177*

***Most common mistakes we make
when reading the Gospels***

- 1. We don't read them carefully enough.**
- 2. We are too passive in our reading.**
- 3. We assume that they are all written about, and directly to, us.**
- 4. We pay too little attention to context.**
- 5. We do not integrate our heart, head, and hands in our reading.**

“If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.”

*F. F. Bruce
Manchester University*

