

# OpenTheo

## S2E6 - The "Q" Source

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### Risen Jesus - Mike Licona

What is "Q"? Is it a common source of the gospels? It's own gospel? How should we view the other gospels in light of Q? On this episode, Dr. Licona discusses the Q source, it's content, and alternative hypotheses.

The Risen Jesus podcast with Dr. Mike Licona equips people to have a deeper understanding of the Gospel, history, and New Testament studies. The program is hosted by Kurt Jaros and produced in partnership with Defenders Media.

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## Transcript

[Music] Hello and welcome to the Risen Jesus Podcast with Dr. Mike Lacona. Dr. Lacona is associate professor in theology at Houston Baptist University and he is a frequent speaker on university campuses, churches, conferences and has appeared on dozens of radio and television programs. Mike is the president of Risen Jesus, a 501c3 non-profit organization.

My name is Kurt Jares, your host. On today's episode, we're talking about Q. Q is the proposed source, could be a document or an oral tradition or even a person that some scholars have put forward to look at the common material between Matthew and Luke. So it's a fascinating theory, Mike, and perhaps you can give us a little bit of the history behind Q. Yeah, well, first of all, I would say that for conservative Christians out there, the idea of Q is nothing to feel threatened about.

Some may who haven't heard about this before, they've just heard about it, but don't know really anything about it, might think, oh, it's just like another lost gospel, one of those false gospels like the gospel of Thomas, the gospel of Peter, the gospel of Mary.

No, this is not like that. Okay, so when we look at the synoptic problem, we see that there is a lot of content as we've observed throughout the season.

There are a lot of content in Matthew, Mark, and Luke that's very similar, almost verbatim. Okay, and when that's the case, when you see it, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, very similar than we assumes its mark came first, that we say Mark is the source and that Matthew and Luke use that. But what happens when there are over 200 verses in the New Testament, in the synoptic gospels, that only appear in Matthew and Luke that are very similar, but they're absent from Mark.

Well, that could not be Mark as a primary source, of course, because it's not in Mark. So there was a German scholar in 1863 named H.J. Holtzman, and he introduced the idea that Matthew and Luke used a common source that we no longer have access to. And so what do you call that source? Well, the German word for source is *quella*, so they just abbreviated that and Q. That's all it is.

So it's not a main character in the James Bond movies. It is not, I think there was one on Star Trek too named Q or something like that, right? Q is just an abbreviation for *quella*, the German word for source, because a German scholar came up with it. Okay, it's a hypothetical source.

Now, what is that source? Was it oral tradition? Was it a written gospel that we no longer have access to? It's hard to say. Most scholars who think that Q existed think that it was a document rather than oral tradition. But what is this? Luke does mention in the first verse of his gospel that many others had written accounts of Jesus.

So is Q one of those accounts? It is difficult to say. I mean, we can talk about some plausible scenarios, I think, on what Q is. But I think there's good reason to think that Matthew and Luke had access to a common source.

And so we just call that Q. Okay, so as I mentioned, Q, as a source, there are still different theories about that. It could be the oral tradition, just sort of the teachings of the church. And I guess from what I understand, a few scholars take that route.

Others, the majority think it's a literary document. Could be a person as well. So what are some of the views out there on this? The alternatives to Q? Well, the main one would be what's called the *fairer hypothesis*.

And that would be that Luke used Matthew. So you'd say, well, that's a simpler explanation. Luke used Matthew as a source, or you could say Matthew used Luke as a source.

Now only a few scholars take that one. But there's a major one named Richard Bockum. He takes the view that Matthew used Luke as a source.

But I would say that most of the scholars who veer off, who don't accept the Q hypothesis, and there are significant ones. For example, Mark Goodaker at Duke, you've got Nick Perrin at Wheaton, NT Wright. I don't think that he takes the Q hypothesis.

So there are significant scholars who reject Q, and they usually favor the fairer hypothesis that says Luke used Matthew as a source. Now the majority of scholars today, and I'm saying including evangelicals here too, would take what's called the two source hypothesis, Mark and Q, would be like the two major sources that Matthew and Luke used. But most New Testament scholars, I would say, and I would include myself in this, even though we have looked at this issue about Q versus fairer and the synoptic problem, how do you figure this out? What's going on with the interdependence of them and the sources involved? Most of us have not looked into it as some who have really spent significant time with the synoptic problem.

People like Mark Goodaker. And so when you look at, when you only consider those experts, those who have devoted considerable time to this issue of the synoptic problem, you still have a majority of them taking the two source hypothesis. That is the acceptance of a Q source.

However, the majority is much smaller than when you look at what you consider all New Testament scholars in this. Yeah. So we've got here the views that are out there.

But what good reasons might there be for thinking that for affirming the two source hypothesis? For affirming the Q? Yeah, for affirming Q. Yeah. Okay. Well, one thing I would say, I think it's a better explanation than some of the others.

Like, so a reason we wouldn't go with fairer is, you know, if, well, let me give you a reason why we might look at thinking that Luke used Matthew first. Sure. When you look at the editorial fatigue that we've mentioned in previous episodes, it suggests that Luke is aware of traditions that we find in Matthew.

But we don't see it the other way around. We never see it the other way around that there's editorial fatigue in Matthew that shows that he's aware of traditions that are in Luke. Okay.

So that would be a reason to think that if we're going to go, if we're going to reject Q, it's more plausible. That'd be a reason to think that Luke used Matthew rather than Matthew used Luke. Okay.

But the neuro reasons to think that Luke did not use Matthew. Okay. So for example, if Luke knew of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, how likely is, I mean, this is a beautiful sermon that's been put together.

And, you know, I've spent considerable time over the last several years just studying the Sermon on the Mount, meditating on it, reading commentaries on it, memorizing it as it

appears in Matthew. And it's amazing the more time I spent in it, the more I see how all the different, how Matthew has connected all the different themes throughout. It's really quite extraordinary what Matthew has done here.

And most scholars, New Testament scholars do think that Matthew has taken Jesus' teaching, some of which he taught on that occasion, but then he's called in other ones and artistically arranged them in the sermon that we find. So it's not that he would have given all these teachings on that occasion. All right.

But he did give these teachings, you know, sometime in his ministry. But it's a very artistic way that Matthew has put it together. Now, if Luke was using Matthew, why would Luke, we find this material in Matthew that's in the Sermon on Mount, some of it's there.

It's like, I think there's only 33 verses in the Sermon on Mount and Luke's version, but there's like 11112 in Matthew's version. Luke would have taken that and just scattered some of that other material throughout his gospel. Why would he break a beautifully artistically arranged sermon and scatter it throughout? Now, some like Mark Goodacre doesn't find that argument persuasive as a reason, you know, to reject Q. I mean, to reject the Pharaoh hypothesis, I find it persuasive.

Supportive Q. I mean, so what's your theory behind Q? Well, Q, the Q material, okay, so when you look at this material, it's almost exclusively, and like I said, there's well over 200 verses this way, it's almost exclusively teaching of Jesus, it's not narrative. All right, so when you have Matthew and Luke use Mark, it preserves narrative. You can see they're using Mark because of the verbal similarities and there's narrative involved, but the Q material is not narrative.

There's only three instances where narrative is involved, the rest of it is just teaching. So if I have to take a guess, I'm thinking that this was notes that one of Jesus' disciples took. So it would have been one of the disciples who were literate, and so Matthew comes to mind as a tax collector.

And maybe he took these notes so that he could take them with him, take these notes with him as he went out. Jesus sent his disciples out in twos, right? So he takes these with him. And then because Matthew is Jewish, he probably wrote these in Aramaic because Jesus taught primarily in Aramaic.

So he writes these in Aramaic. And I think that this could very well be what Papius refers to as Matthew's. He's writing the Talagia, the sayings, the teachings of Jesus in Aramaic.

This is what Papius is. He doesn't say Matthew wrote a gospel, he wrote the Talagia, the sayings or teachings of Jesus in Hebrew or Aramaic. So I think this is a plausible scenario and that what later happened is that Matthew, either himself or a scribe, had these

translated into Greek, and that under either Matthew did this or under Matthew's supervision, a scribe, Mark is a primary source, and then augmented that Mark's account by adding the cue material from Matthew, plus other eyewitness material that Matthew contributed.

And I think that's the gospel of Matthew that we have today. So this cue may be nothing more than Matthew's notes that he had taken of Jesus, which it's also makes sense because the cue material does not include Jesus' death or resurrection. And so if Matthew's writing the taking these notes while Jesus is teaching, well, they wouldn't.

We wouldn't expect because it's not narrative for one, and these things had not yet occurred. So that would be kind of what I'm thinking, but that's speculative. Some think that maybe this is taken from Jesus, some of Jesus' discourses, not cue, but like there's five discourses in Matthew.

I think I'm getting a little bit off track here, but Papius is referring to that rather than cue. Sure. You mentioned that the death and resurrection isn't part of cue.

Remind us again, while we know that cue is kind of believed to be the material between Matthew and the common material between Matthew and Luke, how is it that scholars can determine what really belongs to cue? Well, again, you look at the verbal similarities. If it's in Matthew and Luke, and you see this verbal similarity that's very striking, that seems to be they're using a common source or one of them is using the other. So it's just in the same way that we would use, we would say that when you see verbal similarities between Matthew and Mark, Mark is Matthew's source.

You either have to say, Mark is Matthew's source or Matthew is Mark's source. And we've talked about which one came first, Matthew or Mark? Yeah. So this is material.

You see the verbal similarities between Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark. So that's how you know that there's some other source out there that the two have used. Okay, so your theory is that early on you've got Mark and you've got Matthew's, Talagia of Jesus, the teachings.

Do you have a theory on which one was first? Probably Matthew's notes maybe? Oh, no, it's just all speculation. In fact, it's interesting. You have some of these cue experts.

They're usually those with a bent on the theological left and they will hypothesize that there was a cue community that did not believe in Jesus' resurrection. And that's why they never mentioned the resurrection in it. And so they just build this wild hypothesis and things like this.

And they say, well, this, this is the earliest, you know, the earliest, this came before Mark, this came before Paul. This, this is the earliest account of Jesus' teachings. And it didn't have the resurrection.

So resurrection was later put in there. But, you know, we can establish, of course, that Paul was preaching Jesus' resurrection. And it was part of the core teaching of the gospel message that Paul was preaching.

We read this in Acts chapter 2, and that he had run this gospel message past the Jerusalem apostles and they certified that he's preaching with their preaching. So we can get back to what Jesus' apostles were preaching through Paul, and they were preaching Jesus' literal physical resurrection. So even if there was a cue community, that was, that did not believe Jesus rose from the dead, then it's the cue community that was off message and not the gospel authors.

It was the cue community that went off message and came up with a later story that didn't include resurrection. But I think that's just bunk anyway, you know, about a cue community like that that didn't believe in a resurrection. I think it's more plausible to think that these would have been notes and or teachings of Jesus, either Jesus, you know, they were recorded before Jesus' death and resurrection because cue doesn't contain anything on Jesus' death.

But I don't see the cue specialists on the left saying, well, maybe there was this cue community that knew nothing of Jesus' death, or they didn't believe in it. No, they only focus on resurrection like that. But there's no reason to focus on resurrection and leave out death.

It just doesn't mention either of those. Go ahead. I was going to say there are all sorts of different books, dissertations on cue, what cue believed, the theology of cue.

And it seems like some of these folks exploring, you talk about, you know, those that talk about the cue community and all that. The ideas can really run wild here. Yeah, yeah, and so much so I remember a quote by N.T. Wright in one of his real thick books.

I forgot which one it is. But he says something when he's talking about all these, some of these scholars that are talking about a cue community who didn't know about the resurrection, he said, you know, these folks are just building castles in the air. And we as readers have no need to feel obligated to rent a room in them.

Nice. But I want to say something else about fairer because I mean, the way I look at the fairer hypothesis, I do think that that is probably the next, next to the two source hypothesis that has cue. I think that fairer hypothesis is the next most plausible one that Luke used Matthew.

But just to be clear here, I think some of the problem is again, with when we see how Luke uses Mark and Matthew uses Mark, they include narrative, but the cue material is almost exclusively saying of Jesus that we find between Matthew and Luke. So if Luke is using Matthew, why is it we only got the the sayings in it? We don't find Luke using

Matthew's narrative. So he'd be using Matthew differently than he uses Mark.

So since there's evidence that Matthew did not use Luke and evidence that Luke did not use Matthew, it seems to me that it's more plausible that Luke and Matthew used another source that they redacted. They might have redacted it differently on occasion, but it's very, very similar and that common source would be what we just call cue. And on your hypothesis, if Matthew's sermon on the Mount was a compilation of Jesus's teachings, which is correct me if I'm wrong, the majority of scholars, and actually, it's been believed throughout church tradition.

That's been the case. I think John Calvin even mentions that. If that was the case with the the Talagia, they may have been more in excerpt form, which Luke may have had access to.

And that's why he sort of threw these teachings throughout his gospel. Yeah. So that he would have those peppered throughout his gospel, where his Matthew combined them into a single sermon.

Yeah. So that that that would seem to suggest to me a common source rather than Luke using Matthew or Matthew. I guess Matthew could have used Luke in that sense, but it's just it's more difficult pill for me to swallow there that Luke used Matthew.

But given all of our, you know, everything that we're looking at, the total scenario, it seems to me more plausible to think that Matthew and Luke used a common source that we no longer have. Right. Right.

It's tricky because it's there are a lot of factors that, you know, a scholar or if the grant has to evaluate when they bring in and they begin to, you know, form their opinion on what they think actually happened. It is. And that's why, you know, I hold the two source hypothesis, you know, marking cue, I hold that with an open hand because I recognize that although I have studied this, I have not studied it nearly to the extent of those who specialize in the synoptic problem.

People like Goodacre and Nick Perrin and people like that who have spent years studying this stuff and writing on it, writing whole books on it, you know. Now again, you can have specialists like that and they write books and they come to different conclusions like Robert Stein wrote one on the synoptic problem. It's a great book.

And he comes to the conclusion that of the two source hypothesis, he thinks the existence of cue. But because I've not spent years looking at this, I hold it with an open hand, you know, and I don't think it's just a, it's an airtight argument either way. You find one of them more persuasive than the other, but it's not an airtight argument.

Sure. All right. Well, we've got a question from one of our listeners.

Her name is Victoria. She asks and it's funny you mentioned cue and their idea about the resurrection or lack thereof. Victoria's question is pertaining to that, the resurrection that is.

If you had two minutes to share the resurrection argument with someone, what would you say? Yeah, well, I think I'd break that down by saying, okay, look, there's a lot of data here. So I can't unpack it all. We can do that in a separate argument.

But I would first say that our best evidence for the resurrection of Jesus comes from Paul because Paul's very early. He was an enemy of the church. He hated Jesus.

He hated the movement he had started. He believed it was God's will to destroy it. And then by his own testimony in letters that have survived, Paul says that he had an experience that he was convinced was the risen Jesus who appeared to him and it radically transformed his life from being a persecutor of the church to one of its most able defenders.

And so convinced was Paul that this was a real appearance of the risen Jesus that he suffered continuously at the hands of the Jewish leadership and of the Romans and was eventually beheaded by the Romans for his gospel proclamation. So what would lead? I would say we've got good evidence that Paul had some sort of an experience that convinced him Jesus was raised and appeared to him. How do we best account for that? And you could say, well, hallucination, you could say he lied about it, or you could say it was an authentic experience.

The fact that he was willing to suffer and die for it seems to suggest to me that he wasn't lying. He really was sincere in what he believed. Hallucination, you have to say, well, it's a possibility, but then you bring in some other things and you say, well, wait a minute, the disciples claim that they saw the risen Jesus and not only did it occur to individuals, it occurred within group settings.

And so that kind of weighs out or weighs against hallucinations. And Paul wasn't grieving Jesus death. He was glad Jesus was dead.

And Jesus would have been the last person in the universe, Paul would have expected to see or wanted to see. Plus hallucinations don't account for an empty tomb. Then you'd have to pause it something like someone stole the body.

And of course, an empty tomb, Paul as a nonbeliever, that would have been the very first thing Paul would have suspected would have been tomb theft. But he claims that he saw the risen Jesus and his life was radically transformed as a result. So at the end of the day, the resurrection hypothesis really is the only hypothesis that can account for the facts adequately.

So I don't know if I do that in two minutes or a little over. I think it's about two and a half,



but that's probably good enough. Good, good.

Well, thank you for that quick answer there. It's a nice little tip that we can take with us. And also for enlightening us of and demythologizing, to use a big word, demythologizing Q and learning more about Q. So thank you, Mike.

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