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Who Wrote the Gospels? Michael Licona vs. Bart Ehrman - Part 1

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Risen Jesus - Mike Licona

Did Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John write the gospels that bear their names? The texts themselves do not name them as the authors and were published and circulated anonymously. In fact, the earliest record of names being associated with the gospel books comes from Irenaeus in 185 AD, over 100 years after Jesus lived. Dr. Bart Ehrman contends that we do not know who wrote these texts and that the names attributed to them must certainly be false, given that the uneducated, Aramaic-speaking, rural disciples would not have the rigorous education required to produce such Greek literary works. Michael Licona disagrees, taking on Ehrman's contentions and providing a positive case for the traditional authorship of the gospels in this episode of the Risen Jesus Podcast.

Transcript

Hi, this is Dr. Kurt Juris. Today's episode is a debate between Dr. Michael Licona and Dr. Bart Ehrman, held at the 2025 Sound Faith Conference in Boston, Massachusetts. Dr. Licona makes the case that the traditional authorship ascribed to the four gospels is accurately based on external evidence from six sources dating from 15 to 100 years later.

Dr. Ehrman also refers after Jesus' resurrection, as well as evidence found within the texts themselves. Dr. Ehrman disagrees, challenging this external evidence and arguing that the traditionally named authors will act the education to produce these Greek literary works. Welcome to the Risen Jesus Podcast, and thanks for listening.

Hello, everyone. Welcome to Sound Faith 2025. My name is Tyson James, I'm the president of Sound Faith Consulting, and it's truly an honor to be able to bring this event to you tonight.

Thank you, first of all, to everyone in attendance tonight. Thank you for braving downtown Boston and all of it. So have obstacles.

I think I'm into a weird course trying to get over here, but thank you for coming. Thank you, also, to Treehouse and Baptist Church for hosting this fantastic thing. We just give them a round of

applause.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, especially to Dr. Barbara and to Dr. Michael.

For agreeing to do this debate, I was actually very worried that they were so tired of each other from having debated so many times before. They'd be like, no, I don't remember. I have younger brothers, and we never got tired of fighting.

So, yeah, I'm so happy that they have agreed to do this. So thank you, guys. Also, thank you to my brother, Nate Salah, over here.

He's the founder of Wise Disciple Ministry. He is agreed to be the moderator of tonight's debate. He is a former debate coach and teacher, and has done a lot of debate teacher reacts videos on his YouTube channel, Wise Disciple.

So please check those out. I'm very grateful tonight for his experience in moderating tonight's debate. I do also want to encourage you, before you leave, to check out the sales tables back there, especially the one with all the books on it.

I drove those books here personally from Las Vegas, and I don't want to take them back. So please load up with all the books that you can. All of the books are cheaper than you'll find on Amazon.

So please take advantage of that. With that, enjoy your event, and I will bring Nate Salah to introduce our invaders. All right.

Wow, I want to take it all in. This is a really great venue. It's a great space.

Good evening. Thanks for coming out to this wonderful Boston evening, and to join the festivities. As we begin this event, I want you to get settled, and I want you to get comfortable, but also I want you to lead in with your minds.

Tonight's topic is who wrote the Gospels, and to help us explore this particular topic. We have two opponents, two debaters, who are uniquely qualified to engage this particular topic with their specific expertise in their backgrounds. I'm going to introduce Dr. Michael Lacona, as a professor of New Testament Studies at Houston Christian University.

He's the president of Risen Jesus Inc., RisenJesus.com. He has his PhD in New Testament Studies with distinction from University of Pretoria. Mike has participated in several high-profile debates with the likes of Shavir Ali, Richard Carrier, Matt Dillon, and Dean Dan Barker, and John Dominic Frostin, and he lives to tell the tale. Nobody? Okay.

And he's debated Dr. Ehrman as well. Welcome to the stage, Dr. Michael Lacona. Dr. Bart Ehrman is a James A. Gray Distinguished Professor at University of North Carolina at Chapel

Hill.

He has his PhD from Princeton Seminary. He's an expert on the New Testament in the history of early Christianity. He's written or edited 30 books, numerous scholarly articles, and dozens of book reviews.

Six of his books have been on the New York Times Best Seller List. It is website, it's Bart Ehrman.com, which helped me in welcoming Dr. Bart Ehrman. Listen friends, I'm not going to drone on and on because I hate when moderators do that.

Listen, debate is all about clash. The clash of ideas. That's why tonight's discussion is so important that you are able to be here and to wrestle with the best presentations on both sides of this particular topic tonight.

It's important. This is meaningful dialogue. It's why tonight's conversation matters.

Here's how the format is going to go. We have opening statements. So that's 20 minutes each for doctors Lycona and Ehrman.

Then we're going to go into first rebuttals, and that's 10 minutes each. We're going to get into cross-examination. That's 10 minutes each.

Then we'll go into second rebuttals, which is five minutes each. We'll get into closing statements, which is five minutes each. Then finally, audience Q&As.

If you notice, there's some microphones here on the sides, and we'll get into that. We'll moderate that for about a half an hour. All right, that's enough out of me.

Without further ado, let's get started. Dr. Lycona floors your seat of 20 minutes. Imagine that you've walked into a specialty bookstore that sells all books obtained from a state sale.

One book grabs your attention. So you buy it, take it home, and place it on a shelf for the display. A few moments later, months later, you have a friend over the comments on the book.

She removes it from her shelf and begins stubbing through it until she arrives in an all griddled nestled between some pages. You hadn't noticed. She hands you the book and you carefully remove the note and lay it on the table where you both read it curiously.

I write this so the burden dies with me. In 1908, beneath the glow of an unnamed Washington hotel now, I met Teddy Roosevelt. He spoke of fatigue from battles he fought in Cuba and Washington.

I spoke of the loneliness of clever women. Four times that went till we crossed the line as Ring drew. Each meeting was arranged through notes routed by a mutual friend who will never be made.

Teddy was gentle, charming, grateful, and tore himself with guilt afterward. I loved him for that. I loved him for three hours at a time.

History will say he was faithful. Let it. I know other ones.

You look at one another in shock not having the words to say. T.R. is known to have had a strong moral compass and was faithful to his wife. So this is big.

Maybe. Who wrote it? No signature. No date.

No context. Was it a death diary entry by the mistress? Or was it nothing more than an exercise for a writing class attendant long ago? You would never know. That story is my invention.

The graphic is AI. So don't believe it. When we come to the gospels many think they possess some of the same qualities as the note in my story.

No signature. No title. No date.

In fact, my friend Mark says this about the traditional authors of the gospels. The reality is that these persons are almost certainly not the authors of these gospels. The gospels are not memories recorded by those who are eyewitnesses.

They are memories of later authors who had heard about Jesus from others who were telling what they had heard from others who were telling what they had heard from others. These stories had been in circulation for years and decades before they themselves heard them. In other words, stories about Jesus were passed along word of mouth through countless people for four to seven decades changing along the way.

This is the forms these stories had come to after all those years of people that were included in the gospels. Far removed from the eyewitnesses. That's what Mark thinks.

I come at this differently. The evidence for the traditional authorship of the gospels is not perfect. But it's pretty good better than what we have for plenty of other ancient literature whose authorship no one questions.

Of course, it'd be great to hop into a time machine and ask ancient folks directly. We can't. Knowing they could be wrong.

That's my approach to gospel authorship. With that in mind, let's dive into the data. We can sort the evidence into two buckets, external and internal.

First, the external evidence. The early church agreed that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote the gospels in our new testimony. There are ten or more early voices saying as much.

There is, however, one and except. A report from the late fourth century said that some earlier people claimed the fourth gospel was written by the heretic serenths. Other than that, one claim.

The unanimous testimony of the early Christians is that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John authored the gospels in the New Testament. So let's zoom in on the earliest witnesses, the second century sources. There were six.

The first is Patmias. He wrote in the early second century. His original works are lost, but Chuck survived, quoted or summarized in the writings of others, what we now call the fragments of Patmias.

The one fragment, Patmias writes, explains how he gathered his information. He writes, I will not hesitate to set down for you, along with my interpretations, everything I carefully learned from the elders and carefully remembered, guaranteed their truth. And if by chance someone who had been a follower of the elders should come my way.

I inquired about the words of the elders, what Andrew or Peter said, or Philip or Thomas or James or John or Matthew, or any other of the Lord's disciples. And whatever Aristian and the elder John, the Lord's disciples were saying. I did not think that information from those who were profitably as much as information from a living and abiding voice.

Patmias calls Jesus' disciples elders and says he personally interviewed their companions, asking what the elders said, past tense, and what Aristian and the elder John, the Lord's disciples were say, present tense. So Patmias reports that he had interviewed people who knew the apostles first him at a time when at least two of Jesus' disciples were alive and active. This means Patmias received this information in the late first century.

In another place, Patmias says he learned the identity of the author of Mark's Gospel. He writes, and the elder used to say this, Mark, having become Peter's translator, wrote down accurately everything he remembered of the things he was said or done by Christ. So not at all.

For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterwards, as I said, followed Peter who adapted his teachings as needed, but had no intention of giving an order to count with the Lord's saints. Consequently, Mark did nothing wrong in writing down some things as he remembered. He made it his one concern not to admit anything that he had heard or to make any false statement in that.

In short, Mark served as Peter's translator and wrote down what he remembered Peter had taught. That's our earliest claim to the authorship many possible, and it comes from the early second century. Next up is Justin.

He wrote in the middle of the second century and was martyred around the year 165. So it was called commonly referred to as Justin Martin. Fifteen times he refers to what he calls the even of

the memoirs of the apostles.

When one of those occasions he calls them the memoirs composed by the gospels, by the apostles, which are called gospels. So the memoirs of the apostles are the gospels. Justin shows knowledge of the four gospels.

Sixteen times he cites content not only in Matthew. On four of those occasions he says it's the memoirs of the apostles. Half of which are verbatim with our Greek gospel of Matthew.

From Mark, Justin refers to Peter's memoirs and says they include Jesus renaming Peter, Simon as Peter, and the sons of Zebedim as the sons of thunder. A feature found only in the gospel of Mark. This lines up neatly with Matthew's report that Mark wrote when he remembered from Peter.

On two occasions Justin cites a passage found only in Luke's gospel and says it's in the memoirs composed by the apostles and those who followed them. Justin also shows knowledge of three texts that appear only in the gospel of John and quotes them in which clearly John's unique idiom. Then comes Irenaeus in the final quarter of the second century.

He recalls Iren Polykart discuss his interactions with the apostle John and with other disciples who had been with Jesus. Irenaeus had heard Polykart break out into words. Irenaeus names all four gospels, assigns them to the traditional authors and even points to each gospel's beginning.

This leaves no doubt that he met the ones in our new custom. And what better person to learn about the authorship of John's gospel than John's friend, Polykart? Word of mouth? Sure. But an excellent source and one not removed by four to seven decades.

Around the same time, the oculus of Antioch quotes the first verse of John's gospel and the second century, the meritorium fragment identifies Luke and John as the authors of the third and fourth gospels. In Clement of Alexandria, the author turns all four gospels to their traditional authors. Bottom line, the external case for traditional authorship is strong.

Six early sources writing fifteen to one hundred years after the final gospel all agree and they're spread across geographically diverse regions, Judea, Asia Minor, the Gaul, Egypt, and Rome. Now let's turn to the internal islands. Let's say you're at a dinner party with a friend who directs your attention across the throne to a real estate agent.

Later on you meet the guy. He doesn't tell you he's a real estate agent, but he mentions terms such as neighborhood amenities, lot premium, and builder incentives. Although that wouldn't prove he's a real estate agent, it would support your friends, claim that he is.

So for internal evidence, we're looking for clues in the gospels that are consistent with the external claims. Let's start with Mark. We observed that the early church said Mark broke down when he remembered of Peter's preaching.

So it's interesting to observe elements in Mark that are consistent with this claim. For example, Peter's at center stage in Mark. When Jesus speaks with disciples who were named in Mark, one figure dominates.

Out of twenty one such moments, Peter's in nineteen, and in roughly half of those, he's the only disciple. The only other disciple who gets a solo moment with Jesus in John, and he gets just one. That sounds like Peter's voice behind Mark's pen.

Peter's personality pops in Mark more than any other disciple. He's outspoken, bold, courageous, proactive, opinionated. He charges ahead of stumbles and falls and cares deeply about you.

It's the good, the bad, and the ugly of Peter. All of which are consistent with an author who knew Peter well. There are Aramaic echoes in Mark.

Six times in Mark, Jesus' words appear in Aramaic followed by a translation. There's only one in Matthew, and that's where he's using Mark. There's one in John, and none in Luke.

Preserving Jesus Aramaic sayings points to someone who hurt them first hand. The simplest explanation for these qualities in Mark is this is what it looks like when Peter is Mark's main source. He's everywhere.

Like the guy who always photo-walls the group picture. Let's turn to Luke. Imagine I'm writing a biography of my mentor Gary Habermas.

I cover his birth, childhood, and his schooling. I didn't know him back then, so I write, Gary did this, he went there. But when I get to later years, I might say, we co-authored a book together, and we attended several conferences together.

Readers naturally infer, where I say we, I was there. Almost all of them just as ours agreed. The same author wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

And in Acts, the author pulls the same move I did with Gary. Four times in the second half, the journey narratives of Paul flipped from they to we. In other words, the narrator isn't just reporting about Paul, he's boarding the ship with him.

Now, after much deliberation in the ivory tower, New Testament scholars have landed on a very sophisticated term for these narratives. We narratives try to keep up. Notably, the week passages are among the most detailed scenes in Acts, which fits eyewitness reporting.

And the geography checks out too, exactly what you'd expect from someone who actually made the trip. Craig Keener, a leading scholar on Acts, sums up the mainstream view of scholars. A large number, probably the majority of English speaking commentators believe that the author was a companion of Paul, as the we narrative suggests.

So who was this person? The book of Acts and several of Paul's letters list roughly a dozen or more co-workers who travel with Paul. Luke shows up in three of those letters. Since the external evidence is unanimous that Luke wrote that Gospel, the most reasonable conclusion is the traditional authorship of Luke's Gospel, he has correct.

Now to John. John reads like it's based on the testimony of someone who was there. Exact times, many incidental details, and explicit claims of eyewitness testimony.

The narrative sounds like a Jewish insider with front row access to Jesus and the twelve disciples. John chapter 21 links the stories in John to the beloved disciple as the eyewitness source and probably the author. That chapter even gives a short roster of seven disciples who were present.

Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, the sons of Zepody, and two others, the beloved disciple being one of the seven. So which one was he? His unique access fits Jesus's inner circle. Peter, James, and John.

Peter's distinguished from the beloved disciple, so it wasn't him. James was murdered early before the Gospel was written. That leads John to some Zepody is the best candidate, the same figure named by the external evidence.

Bottom line, the earliest public memory and the text's fingerprints point most strongly to John, the son of Zepody as he fought through the Gospel that bears his name. Finally, Matthew. There are some clues in this Gospel that's suggested it was written by Matthew who was a tax collector in Jesus' column.

For example, there are more items related to taxes in Matthew than in any other Gospel. Matthew mentions many more types of coins than the other Gospels do. There's also a distinctly Jewish texture throughout Matthew's Gospel.

Matthew shows deep familiarity with Israel's scriptures, laws, customs, traditions, and Semitic terms of phrase. Now there's an early tradition that says Matthew wrote something in Hebrew where he remained. Perhaps a document with Jesus' teachings.

Perhaps an entire Gospel, maybe even both. If he did, none of them have survived. Our Matthew was written in Greek, and it doesn't read like a translation.

Did Matthew write an hour Gospel, Matthew? I think he's behind it. We already observed that by the time he just did, his Greek Gospel was already known and linked to an apostle. I take it.

Matthew oversaw a Greek Gospel aimed at a broader audience than his earlier Hebrew or Aramaic word. He used Mark as a guide since Mark was already hungry. He made selective editorial tweaks to Mark and added a substantial amount of his own material, about 44% of the

entire Gospel.

The Greek version took off. The earlier Semitic collection faded away and was eventually lost. So then, like Josephus, his original account of the Jewish War and composed his original native language, Aramaic, did not survive.

While the Greek version he supervised later is the one that did. Bottom line, I think Matthew was likely involved at some stage. Perhaps every stage, but at minimum contributed a substantial share of the tradition in that Gospel.

I'll wrap this up. Considered both buckets, the external testimony and the internal clues. Considered together as best historical practice requires, they most plausibly indicate that Mark, Luke, and John, wrote the Gospels that bear their names.

Matthew was more nuanced, but the evidence points to his hand in shaping the Greek Gospel likely without its final form. History doesn't promise certainty, but it does offer probabilities. And here the probabilities favor the traditional field and does so with better evidence than we have for the authorship of other ancient literature, most scholars accept without blame.

The traditional authorship of the Gospels, not certainty, but the best explanation. Okay, thank you, Mike. Thank you all for coming.

I will start by saying I think Michael's probably the best case. Can't say it's a good argument that he's making. I used to agree a good.

I don't anymore. And I'm going to tell you what. I will have a chance for a direct read about it later, but I just want to have the other side of it.

So who wrote the Gospels? I want to start with our earliest records. I'll come to mind a few things about it. I want to say a few more things about it.

First thing, I want to emphasize. This is not widely recognized. People don't think about it much.

I had certain people who wrote it before tonight. No, no, no, I thought about that much. Of course not.

When you read the Gospels, it says Matthew Mark Luke and John. So why would you think about who wrote them? It says Matthew Mark Luke and John right there at the top. The Gospels are published anonymously, as Mike said.

The authors do not name themselves. Mark, the name Mark doesn't occur in Mark, Luke doesn't occur in Luke. John doesn't occur in John.

Matthew does occur in Matthew, as I'll say something about in a minute. They were circulated anonymously. In the early years, they did not have names attached to them.

As far as we can tell, from our record. Are there any authorial hints? Mike says there were. I will be questioning him about some of those claims.

For now, I'll just point out that the only one of these Gospels that says anything about the alleged author is Matthew. Matthew chapter 9 verse 9. I suggest you read. Read it carefully.

And ask yourself, is this author talking about himself? Just do it. He doesn't. It's where Jesus sees Matthew, calls him to be his disciple.

Matthew follows it. That's it. Not I followed him.

Okay. Early expectations. Mike pointed out that we have second-century evidence of people who attribute these things to usals.

Let's talk about that. Our early interpretations are in the abstract fathers. A group of writings.

Some about the year 102 about the book 140. There are passages in writers, well, writings such as the De Deque, where the Gospels are apparently quoted. But not by name.

Our debate here is whether Matthew Martin Luther John wrote these things. And our early expectations. Whether it's, whether it's the De Deque, whether it's a, whether it's, sorry, whether it's Polycarp, Ignatius, but they seem to be referring to our Gospels.

They don't name them. And what we're interested in here is when were they named? Who was the first to say that is Matthew Martin Luther John? As Mike pointed out. Fabius indicates that he has a Gospel of Mark that was Mark's account of the things that Peter said.

It is really unfortunate that Fabius does not quote this Gospel of his. Because there's no way of knowing whether what he had is what we had and what was later called Mark. If he had quoted a passage you do, then we simply don't know.

He also says of Matthew that Matthew wrote his Gospel. He wrote the logia, the sayings of Jesus in the Hebrew tongue. And everybody interpreted them or translated them as he could.

But as Mike just said, he does not appear to be talking about our Matthew. Mike didn't point out that it's precisely Fabius, he said that. Because Mike wants to rely on Fabius for Mark's authorship.

But he says that Matthew, that Fabius is wrong about Matthew's. Fabius is clearly not talking about our Gospel of Matthew. It's not a collection of sayings of Jesus in him is not written in Hebrew.

So it's not evidence that our Matthew goes back to Matthew. And if he's wrong about Matthew, was he right about Mark? So it is right. In fact, in fact, Justin Marner does appear to quote at least

three of the Gospels.

He may be quoting John. He does call them the memoirs and the apostles. And he does not name them Matthew Mark, Luke and John.

That's an important point. Yes. He knows memoirs and the apostles.

He does quote the synoptics. He appears to quote other Gospels as well. He doesn't call it Matthew Mark or John.

He names only one of the memoirs and the apostles. The apostles, Justin. Only one time does he name the memoirs and he refers to the Gospel of Peter.

It's not the Gospel of Mark. We have a Gospel of Peter. And it's the one that Justin names.

Doesn't name Matthew Mark, Luke and John. So when do we start getting Matthew Mark or John called Matthew Mark or John? Our earliest attributions were about the year 185. Mike didn't talk about when he dates to the Gospels.

I'm not quite sure when he dates them. Normally, a scholar's date marked would be the first Gospel around the year 70. Matthew Luke, around the 1885.

John made the 10 years later, 90 to 95. That's a general take that most people give. But, you know, we talk about that.

It's not going to matter much. Iron and E.S. is our first author to name Matthew Mark, Luke and John. And we know, unlike in the case of babies, we know this case.

He's talking about our Matthew Mark, Luke and John. Because these are exploding milk. And so we know there's not about our Gospels.

Absolutely. By the year 185, we have a witness who says that they're written by Matthew Mark, Luke and John. That is a hundred years after they had been circulating anonymously.

What were they named earlier? Or are they named earlier? The mere trying fragment written about the same time, like mentioned, does mention Luke and John. And it almost certainly, I think, mentioned Matthew and Mark. There are debates about when it was written.

Some scholars say it's actually written in the 4th century. But I think it's probably about the top of our audience. And so all we know is by the end of the 2nd century, people are calling them Matthew Mark and John.

That's the external evidence. A hundred years after their encirculation, people start calling for that. Okay, so it's absolutely not taking seriously.

And that is what they're named. We also have the Gospel, we have Gospel manuscripts that have the titles on them. And they're always Matthew Mark, Luke and John.

That should be taken into account. These titles, though, don't start appearing until the early 3rd century. After the point in which we know that they were called Matthew Mark, Luke and John.

We don't have manuscripts that have titles earlier than that. Once again, we're talking about a century after they were circulating it, obviously. They're given names.

But the names, when you read these manuscripts in Greek, the title of these Gospels is either from Matthew. It's either the Gospel according to Matthew or, or Pongolite, it's just according to Matthew. That's not a title.

That's somebody telling you that they think wrote the book. You see what I mean? The author didn't call it that. I mean, I'm pretty sure they didn't call it that time.

I thought Michael asked, but did you call it according to Michael? Yeah, I think he was going to. I think so. How can that be a title? They're not talking about why they're calling these names.

But I'll say I think we're unanimous. These are unanimous attributions. And the questions are the best guesses, false attributions, or are they right? That's the question.

Everybody agrees they're going to call this at the end of the second sentence. So how would we know them? That's what I mean to want to talk about. How do we know? I want to talk about the most important consideration in my view.

Who were these authors? Just think about the disciples for a second. Matthew and John, the same thing I think can be said about Mark. You could be said about Luke.

We're going to get into that once. Matthew, the disciples of Jesus were Aramaic speaking, uneducated, day laborers from rural Galilee, according to the Gospels. Who wrote the Gospels? Greek speaking, highly educated, trained authors from Greek speaking realms.

Does that matter? I think it does. Is there a match between what we know about the disciples from the New Testament themselves and what we know about authors in the ancient world? Could these people have written Gospels? So I want to begin with some demographics. And I just put a reference here in case you wanted to check me out, because I'm not making this up.

Walter Scheiner was one of the major Roman historians of ancient economy. And Stephen Creason has done a lot of work on ancient economy in Rome. And what they tell us is that in the ancient Roman world, Roman Empire, 80 to 90% of the population was rural, living in rural areas.

So 15, 20% maybe was urban. The wealth distribution is that we have a pretty good sense of how wealth distribution worked within urban areas, within the urban areas that are better documented,

because that's where people who got educated and did write, so you know about urban areas. 55 to 60% of the urban population was living at or below subsistence level.

I'm just talking about economic things here for a second. 10 to 20% were significant, the lows of subsistence level. And in the rural areas, it was much worse.

Most people living in rural areas, working in rural areas were dirt poor. They were either starving or on the verge of starving. That's what we do already.

So, what does that have to do with our question about the road Matthew Markle to John? Well, who got educated in Greek? As Mike pointed out, Matthew Markle to John are written in Greek. And it's pretty good Greek. It's really good Greek in comparison with what most people in the ancient world could write, because the vast majority of people in the ancient world could not write.

And those who could write could not write Greek. And those who could write Greek could not compose Greek. They could copy somebody else's work.

Being able to write a long narrative, like the gospel of Matthew, takes years of education. We know about this because we know a good deal about the educational systems in the ancient world. So, I'll give you another reference from Fela Perbiori, who is one of the world's experts on Greek and Roman education.

This is a great book, gymnastics in the mind, you can check it out. And there are lots of other books, basically the same conclusions, which are that education came only to wealthy, urban, and elite children. Those are the people who got education, who got trained.

We had to be rich, come from a rich family, because most of the people who are living in the countryside, most kids are put to work as soon as they can work, because you need them to help out. In urban areas, you do have wealthy people, and if you're among the very wealthy elite, then you can say there's kids to school. If you send a kid to school and they're getting a Greek education, then it goes through several stages.

First stage, you learn how to read the alphabet, and how to copy the alphabet. So, it's a basic process of learning how to read. They did not teach reading and writing at the same time.

Like we did. This is all like, thoroughly about it. After kids learned how to read, then they learned something about grammar, and they would start reading classics.

And so they'd read homework, for example. And that's how they would learn to read better, is by having to read some of the classic texts. That's a second stage, and most wealthy elite kids did not get to the second stage.

And most of the kids, you got to the second stage, did not get to the third stage. The vast majority of people who created educational systems did not get to the third stage, which is rhetoric and

composition, where you actually learn how to compose writings. Like you can write a story.

But even the composition isn't about writing stories. Usually it's about how to write a letter. How long did all of this take? This training, it took many years.

Year after year, kids were going to school to do this kind of thing, to learn how to do this. Very few people got it all the way through. Okay, so that's just general.

In the real world, in the real world, we're only in the ancient world. All right. What about raw Galilean? Do we have evidence of this kind of educational system in Galilean? No.

No evidence at all. We have evidence of people being trained in a second language. If they were, if they were Arabic speakers, as Jesus' disciples were, we have evidence of those people going to school to learn Greek.

In Galilean. No. Do we have any evidence of adult education classes in antiquity? No.

I had a question about this once. It's what I wrote, Gravela, and I asked her about it. She said, no, no.

There was nothing like that. Nothing like that. Right? But, you know, what about literacy? How many people could read and write? Well, it comes as such as the people who read and write a lot, right? We've got all these books right around.

People couldn't read it, right? No problem. Again, in a reference to William Harrison's literacy, 10 to 15% of the population in the ancient world, at the best of times. Could read.

And far fewer could write and far fewer than that could propose. He gives tons of evidence. It's a really interesting book.

Who were these people who were liberal, who could read? By the best of times, I mean Athens in the days of Plato. Okay. So we're talking like in urban areas.

Who could read? Very wealthy. They could read urbanites. What about in Israel? Didn't all Jewish boys go to synagogue and learned how to read and write? That's what I heard.

When I was young. Yeah. Jewish boys.

They all learned that. I'm a synagogue school. We have zero evidence in synagogue schools from within 200 years of Jesus' death.

There were no schools. Let me know. There's no archaeological evidence.

And in fact, there's no references to them until the third century. If you're going to get educated, you got educated at home by your father. How much was the, how widespread was the literacy in

Israel? Here's an important book.

Katherine Hetter's book, Literacy, Roman Palestine. Oh my God. Is that a thorough book? Common assumptions? No.

Every boy can read, right? If you can read, right? If you can read, right? You can be able to write a story, right? Then you can write a gospel. No problem. Right? Only 3% or so of the population in Roman Palestine could even read.

Those who could read would read Hebrew so that they could read the Torah in the synagogue far fewer than that could write. And if they learned how to write, they were trained to subscribe to copy the Torah. They were not trained in composition.

The literate people who got to this position where they could read and write anything would have been very wealthy to lead urbanites. We have only one author that we know about. From the entire 1st Christian century, who was a literary author in Israel.

Josephus, who might read. We hear of what another, retrained author. Justice of Tiberius, but we don't have any of his writings.

And then we have Matthew and Mark Lupitomo. Were they wealthy, elite, urbanites? Acts chapter 4 verse 13 says that Peter and John were on rheumatoid. That's the Greek word for unlevered.

It's the word for people who don't know their alphabet. Both of the facts says that John was unlevered. My conclusion, Jesus' disciples simply do not have been able to compose these Greek narratives.

People living in Israel. We don't know if anybody, any follower of Jesus could possibly have done this. The gospels are extensive lived narratives.

They're attributed to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and John, but what? They aren't attributed for over a hundred years. Why did they come to be attributed later if nobody knew who wrote them earlier? It's because at the end of the 2nd century when irony is his writing, there are other gospels in circulation. There's a gospel of Thomas.

There's a gospel of James. There's a gospel of Philip. There's a gospel of Bartholomew.

There are various gospels floating around. And you've got these four gospels of everybody in the Church of the Matrix reading, but they don't have names. And all these heretics use these other ones saying they're written by apostles.

We need authority for these books. We better name them. They name them after authorities.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke and John. They needed the authority, and so they gave them the names, and they chose fairly natural names. They picked two of Jesus' disciples, Matthew and

John, who could not read and write.

I'm pretty sure. And companions of his two most important apostles. It's not an accident.

They got two disciples on either side, Matthew, John, and then you've got Father Peter and the Father of Paul. So now you've got the vision of the disciples and the vision of the two most important apostles, and those are Father and Gospel and now called, starting around in what he thought. I do not think that they were originally written by Matthew, Mark, what are you doing? Thank you.

All right. We are heading into first rebuttal period, Dr. Lycona. You have 10 minutes to read it.

Well, thank you, Bart. In my opening statement, I argue that the traditional authorship of the gospels is probably correct. I built that case using two buckets of evidence.

External and internal. I'd like now to review my case in line at which part presented. First, the external weapons.

I argue that the early church spoke with a single voice. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are responsible for the gospels that bear their names. I focused on six second century sources, two of which were drawing on what they have learned from companions of the apostles.

Now, Mark responded, number one, that the gospels are anonymous. They don't contain the title in the very beginning, Gospel, according to Matthew, according to Mark, et cetera. He's right.

I know some have argued, like Mark and Anglo argued, that the titles were probably there with the original, so some have as well. I agree with part of those. But this is a nothing working folks.

And the reason is because that was a standard practice in antiquity. There were about 90 extant biographies written about anyone that had survived, and they were written within 150 years on each side of Jesus. Would you like to know how many of them contained the author's name in the title? None of them.

Not a single one. This was just the way they wrote in antiquity. So we may not know how they knew it, but the ancient student wrote them.

Now, I said, you know, when you're talking about, you wouldn't say that the gospel of something that I wouldn't write book and call it according to Mark. Now, of course not. This is the 21st century.

The question is whether they would have done that in antiquity. And the answer is yes. You have, I'm trying to think of the thing right now, it's a prominent artistic scholar.

And in his gospel, Matthew, he talks about, I'm sorry, his come to your Matthew. He says that

second magazine, it talks about the memoirs, according to Nehemiah, he used the same great preposition, kata. And of course, if you go to the book of Nehemiah, it's the first person.

So yes, they use that in antiquity in that sense. He says, well, no one directly ascribes the authorship of the gospels. He sees the authors until Irenaeus in the final quarter of the second century.

Well, that's true. Except for Mark, except for Mark. Now, he says, happiest was referring to the gospel here.

We'll get to that in a moment. Okay. But in terms of Matthew, Luke, and John, Barb is correct on that.

The first person to name them specifically attribute them to Matthew, Luke, and John, is Irenaeus. So what I'd like to ask Barb is when he does some passages, animals of Rome. Because the first person who mentions content in them and directly attributes them to Tacitus is a Christian author writing 250 to 300 years later.

Or what about Suettonius? The first person to meet the standard that Barb is saying here is tortalling them, writing 100 years later. Or how about Plutarch? The first is the Laocreus catalog, written about 200 years later. It's falsely attributed to Plutarch's son and contains literature in it that Plutarch didn't write.

There's one literature, a piece of literature that we know is written by Aristotle and the Laocreus catalog. What about Salas? He wrote three pieces of literature. One of them, the first person to mention it is Seneca the Elder writing 75 years later.

The other two quintillion, 135 years later. Yet no classist questions whether Salas wrote those, Plutarch wrote those, Suettonius, or Tacitus. Oh, no, Art thinks that that counts against them as well.

The question is the authorship for those. Now, what about Justin Margar? I'm mentioning the memoirs of Peter, and Art says that's the gospel Peter. No.

Because when he talks about the memoirs of Peter, he refers to contact that's talking about Jesus changing the name from Simon to Peter from James and John to the Sons of Fun. Folks, that's content only found in the gospel of Mark. It is not found in the gospel of Peter.

Okay. He says, well, they were just Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were just as Suettonians assigned to give them authority because they were competing with the other gospel of the gospel, Thomas gospel, Peter, et cetera, at the end of the second century. Folks, that's just pure speculation.

And it goes against all of our external levels. I just want everybody to see here. At least I'm

basing my piece on evidence.

Bart is basing his case on speculation. Now, he says, finally, he says that the, oh, two other things. He says that Matthew, look at how he narrates his own conversion.

It's strange. He just says, you know, Jesus called Matthew. Well, I think that Matthew is speaking in the third person.

And I know that might seem strange to us today, maybe like the old Seinfeld episode where Jimmy is speaking himself in the third person and gets everybody in lane and everybody at George confused. The question is whether they would have done that in the first century and then typically, and the answer is yes. Xenophonous on a basis speaks of himself almost exclusively in the third person.

Julius Caesar in his commentary on the Galat war, his commentary on the Civil War. From start to finish in both of them, speak of himself entirely in the third person. Jesus very often spoke of himself in the third person.

Son of man doesn't have a place they had laying his head. Son of man came to seek and to save that which is lost. Is it really so implausible that Jesus' disciples, Matthew and John, would have wanted to take after and emulate their Lord in this? Fun fact.

Mark says that no way the traditional albums could be involved because the followers of Jesus were uneducated, unlettered. They could read or write, they were Arabic speaking, whereas writers of the gospels were highly liberated, sophisticated Greek speaking authors. Well, we don't know much about Mark and Luke, so it's really difficult to comment there one way or the other.

But when it comes to Matthew and John, it's a nothing burger again folks. And the reason made is because they could have had help on this. In fact, I want you to think about this for a moment.

About almost 200 years ago slaves in the United States were becoming free and sooner after that they wouldn't be free. And a lot of people wanted to know what it was like to be a slave in the United States. Give us your memoirs.

They begged for it. But of course many slaves couldn't read or write. A really good example is someone called Sojourner Truth.

She was a slave here in New York, but she was a slave in New York, and she bought her own freedom. And people were begging her, tell us your story. Tell us what it was like to be a slave.

Once you couldn't read or write. So there was an abolitionist who said, we need to get this in writing. And so he listened to her tell the stories.

He took notes and then he took all of her stories and he arranged it all and wrote it down and

acted as her ghost of brain. And it was published in 1850 as the narrative of Sojourner Truth. The author, Sojourner Truth.

Now folks, it doesn't take much imagination at all because he would probably have. Think about the disciples. They had walked with Jesus.

They were teaching that Jesus was the Son of God. He offered salvation, forgiveness of sins, eternal life. People believed were believing them on this.

And as the disciples were growing old and dying. How plausible do you think it is? And people would have come to this and said, look, don't take this stuff to the grave. We need your stories in writing.

Can't read it right here. What will help you? Planning people. Yeah, literacy was one, but there's still plenty of people around that would have been glad to help them who were literate.

And they would have said, look, I'd be honored to help you get this stuff in writing. And on top of that, there were plenty. If I could list 11 people, I know that minimum in the New Testament who had the means and would have gladly funded such a project.

So I don't see any challenge to that at all that's going on. You've got the meritorium fragment and climate balance and career, who says those things happen in relation to the Gospels. So folks, I think both the external and internal evidence from the traditional authorship in the Gospels still stands.

Mike and I, a couple years ago, did a seven hour debate. Yeah, I think we should do it against night. So much to talk about.

Okay, Mike says, look. It's common for books to be written anonymously, but we know who wrote that. Because this book is attributed to the task that is hundreds of years later, and so Tony has said nobody doubts it.

I would suggest that we look into the scholarship behind why we think task this is Tony's book. It's because it's not at all simply because they were named that later. One of the problems with a great like this is to get to really explain the evidence.

You've got to get down in the weeds. These other books, they're not scholars, scholars, study these things. And they always approach it with an element of doubt.

How do you know tassels and moans? It isn't simply accepted because somebody says so. You have evidence for it. And so the question is not whether it's just later attributed.

The question is what's the evidence for being attributed? What's the evidence? And so that's basically what I want to talk about. When Mike says that writing a book calling it kata, according

to Matthew, that was common, I would like him to give me one example from the ancient world where a book is titled with the person that is according to. He gave us an example of a book which is attributed to somebody and it doesn't have that person's name as a title.

Where is the evidence of a title like that? Well, yeah, I don't think it exists. The fact he points out you have external testimony. When does that external testimony begin? A hundred years later.

So tell us why was something attributed earlier? I'd like him to answer that. When he says that Fabius is naming the gospel of Mark, when he says the gospel of Peter, because all the narratives is mentioned in both, and it's not in the gospel of Peter, I like him to tell us how he knows it's not in the gospel of Peter. You may not know the significance of that question, but I'm assuming Mike will.

How do you know it is not in the gospel of Peter? Okay. Right. We have a number of books from the ancient world that have external testimony that are right on the line for centuries.

We have a group of letters, six letters written by a led to the bit by a nation of Antioch that everybody for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years. And today nobody thinks they're written by a nation of Antioch. Why? Because later testimony is not evidence.

Later testimony is what people thought later. You know, and again, he wants to speak with the gospel that Fabius knows about the gospel of Mark and he ignores the fact that he himself says that Fabius cannot be trusted. Let me make sure you understand what we're talking about.

We're talking about pay piece. Pay piece is the first often we have probably writing about the 130. About the 130 who says that Mark was a copy of Peter who's taking down Peter's notes and that Matthew's written.

So he's writing 60 years later. He's telling us this. Okay.

And Mike is saying he's reliable about Mark, but he's not going to lie about Matthew. The reality is that Fabius is not reliable about most things that he tells us. And I think Mike will agree if not, it has an interesting Q&A.

For example, Fabius says that Jesus taught that in the future Kingdom of God, it's going to be such a paradise that every, that there will be, there will be, every field will have 10,000 vines grape vines. And every grape vine will have 10,000 vowels on it. Every bow will have 10,000 branches on it.

And every branch will have 10,000 shoots on it. And every 10,000, every shoot will have 10,000 clusters of grapes on it. And every cluster will have 10,000 grapes in the cluster.

And so, and each grape will produce gallons of wine. Jesus said that. And he says that when somebody reads it from one cluster, another cluster will cry, no, take me, I want to be used by

you.

Jesus said that. Well, that's what Fabius says. It sounds like a trustworthy witness to you.

Okay. When Mike says that Matthew and John had people to help him write. And he said, he emphasized that I base my view that he bases his views on evidence and I base my views on speculation.

Okay. Where do we find any evidence to Matthew and John using secretaries to produce the writing tool? Or to compose for them? Where do we find any evidence of that? Moral, I'd like to know what evidence we have from the ancient world that that ever happened. It would happen today, where somebody can't read it right.

Maybe if they want to tell stories and they dictate it to somebody and somebody puts them in his own writing. It could be very common, saccharides, and that. And then it goes to writing.

I looked at every reference to secretaries and every Greek and the Roman source in antiquity. To find out if people ever did that, I looked through every Greek and Latin author. They talk a lot about secretaries.

They talk about a lot of people taking dictation. They never refer to that practice. There is no evidence of anyone ever writing a book that way in the ancient world.

Period. If Mike has evidence that there was, I'd like to hear. Matthew and John were illiterate.

John is explicitly said to be illiterate. Whoever wrote these Gospels had high level Greek education. That is not true of Matthew, Mark, and John.

So, I don't think they wrote the Gospels. Thanks for joining us today. If you'd like to learn more about the work and ministry of Dr. Mike Lacona, visit RisenJesus.com where you can find authentic answers to genuine questions about the reliability of the Gospels and the resurrection of Jesus.

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