

Bible Expert Reveals Who REALLY Wrote the Gospels?

July 10, 2026

FRANK:

Ladies and gentlemen.

I just got back from Utah. I went out to the pre-trial hearing, not to be in the room, I couldn't be in the room. For some reason, the judge in the Charlie Kirk/ Tyler Robinson pre-trial hearing didn't want any eyewitnesses in the room to the murder. So I was not allowed in.

But I just went out there to give support to Erika and her team. And on the next podcast, the midweek podcast, I'll unpack some of that, including the evidence that has been revealed at the pre-trial hearing. So if you're listening on the American Family Radio Network or other stations around the country, you will not hear that on AFR. You've got to look for the I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist podcast.

It'll come out, Lord willing, on Tuesday. In the meantime, you may want to go back and watch the one we did prior to the pre-trial hearing, where I responded to some of the conspiracy theories of Candace Owens. So go back and listen to that. Today, however, we're going to talk about the Gospels. Who wrote the gospels? Were they anonymous?

And why does it matter who wrote them? Can we really trust them? Well, there's no better person to talk about than a man who has debated probably the top skeptic about the New Testament in the modern era. The skeptic's name is Bart Ehrman and the man that has debated him several times is the great Dr. Mike Licona, ladies and gentlemen, who comes all the way from Atlanta Brave land.

Are you wearing your Atlanta Braves shirt there, Mike? What is that?

MIKE:

Yes, sir. Go Braves.

FRANK:

Go Braves. You have done some chaplains for the Braves or some chapels for the Braves, haven't you?



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MIKE:

Well, for the front office. I'm not the chaplain, but I do have friendship with the chaplain and several guys in the front office. So, yeah, probably, I don't know, one, two times a year I go in and do a Bible study for them, and they're real kind to me, and they're just great people.

So a number of them are committed believers. And, it's really a joy. I love baseball, and so it's kind of neat to just bump shoulders with these guys.

FRANK:

I hope to have my friend Ted Barrett on the show soon. He's a former umpire. And we're going to talk a little bit about baseball and some of the controversy going on, especially with regard to Pride Night and all that.

It's just crazy how all that stuff infiltrates sports. Something that should bring us together where we could have fun with people we disagree with politically. But no, we got to bring that in to sport. But we're going to talk about something far more important, and that is the Gospels. Now you have debated Mike, Bart Ehrman, probably the most well-known skeptic of the New Testament, maybe of all time, really, because, with social media and the Internet, his stuff can get around.

And you were asked to do a debate with him that took place, I think, at the end of 2025 on who wrote the Gospels. How did this debate come about? And why is this debate even important?

MIKE:

It came about, Tyson James, who's the organizer, founder of it's called Sound Faith. And he puts on conferences.

And for the last, I think this was the third one, I believe, second or third one, where annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society is taking place. He puts on right after that an apologetics conference. And then he has several of the speakers who are scholars who were there for the conference.

And he has them come in, and they're already there. And so you got some, some really good people who are there, not just the, the typical scholars, professors, but even some, some very intelligent influencers who will speak at these things. So he asked if I would debate Ehrman. And I said, I've already debated him seven times and I've got some other stuff going on.

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I've got a panel discussion, plus, yeah, stuff, to do with Dale Allison at this. And that's taking some. So, yeah, maybe we can do it on something that we've already done, like resurrection or reliability of the Gospels. Well, Bart didn't want to do that, on something we'd already done. And so I suggested, who wrote the gospels? Let's talk about that. I said, it's a topic that I've really wanted to dive into but have never really done.

But he didn't want to do it. He said it had been debated before. And I said, well, it's discussed in commentaries and journal articles, but I've never seen really a debate on this. And so he didn't want to do it. And, so he wanted to do some other things, like, was Jesus' Gospel the same as Paul's?

And I said, well, that's important stuff, but I just really don't have any interest in that. And my plate is already pretty full. So, I don't want to sound childish here, but maybe get someone else to debate Bart. I'm just not interested in spending the time to prepare for something I don't have much interest in. And so finally, he agreed to do it.

And, so, yeah, that's how it came about.

FRANK:

I don't think people realize how much time it takes to do a formal debate. It's not just that. I mean, you may be very familiar with the arguments for and against a particular topic, but there are so many counter arguments and directions that the other person could go in that you have to be ready for.

And so you've got to track down almost every rabbit trail off that debate in order to be able to respond in a coherent way. And that just takes so much time. I've done probably 10 debates, other than debates I have with my wife, which, where she annihilates me all the time. But I mean, formal debates, I've probably done 10 or 12, and they always take so much time. And I think, as you will agree, one of the biggest impediments to a debate is the time they give you.

You've got five minutes, Dr. Licona. Go. Man, you have to be really precise and succinct in order to do that well.

MIKE:

I agree with you, Frank, and you're definitely experienced in this, you know exactly what it's like. So, you got to be able to bring the stuff up in a succinct manner and have it on the tip of your tongue, especially in, if you're doing dialogue. Crossfire.

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You either know it, or you don't. There's no hiding behind it.

FRANK:

That's right. Now, why is this debate important? Why did you say let's talk about who wrote the Gospels? Because is there some significance to who wrote the Gospels? It seems that Bart thinks they're anonymous and we really don't know who wrote them. Why is that important to even know who wrote them?

MIKE:

Well, the early church tradition is unanimous about Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Well, there's one exception to the Gospel of John from a 4th-century writer, I think his name was Epiphanius Salamis, I think. But a 4th-century writer who said that there was a group called the Alogi, or no logo, no logos, who said that the Gospel, the fourth Gospel was written by Cerinthus, not John.

So, that's the only exception. Other than that, it's all unanimous. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. So of course, if you're going to say Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John didn't write it, then, what else are the early church fathers wrong on? You know, how can we trust these at all? If we have no idea what. And those who are saying, because they're anonymous, we have no idea who wrote them.

I mean, even if they're anonymous, as some had said, there's still some evidence that they are at least rooted in some eyewitness testimony. But if you want to go as far as, let's say, the form critics and say no eyewitness testimony, isn't even behind them, then, yeah, that creates a problem. So I think all that's really necessary is to show that they're rooted in eyewitness testimony.

Not necessarily that they're written by eyewitnesses or those who knew the eyewitnesses.

FRANK:

Yeah, I think the case that you make though is that the traditional authorship is correct. And if the traditional authorship is correct, we know that both Matthew and John were eyewitnesses, Luke checked with eyewitnesses, and Mark basically is writing down the recollections of Peter, who was an eyewitness.

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So we get back to eyewitness testimony. If indeed Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the actual authors of the gospels that we have, and what we're going to do is dive into this right after the break. We're going to look at what Bart says, Bart Ehrman says why he thinks they're anonymous. And then we'll get from Mike his case that actually Matthew, Mark, Luke, John were written by those very people.

You're listening. I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network and other stations around the country. Our website, crossexamined.org, that's cross examined with a D on the end of it dot org. Check it out there. And also, by the way, Mike and I have a course, it's mostly Mike, on the resurrection. And we'll talk more about that right after the break. Don't go anywhere.

Ladies and gentlemen, who wrote the gospels? That's the topic we're talking about today. But it all leads to the bigger question. Did Jesus rise from the dead? And that is a course that Mike Licona and myself put together. It's mostly Dr. Licona and it's on our website. It's an online course. Go to crossexamined.org click on online courses. You'll see it there. Did Jesus rise from the dead? Evidence and objections for the modern mind.

Mike has devoted his ministry really more to the resurrection than any other topic. He is a disciple of the great Gary Habermas. So we're going to talk to Mike here in just a minute about who wrote the gospels. Before that, we've got a brand new course coming out live, beginning, I want to say it's on August 3rd. It's called The Bible You Never Knew. In Luke 24, Jesus is walking on the road from Emmaus with two disciples who don't recognize who he is.

And he essentially says the entire Old Testament is about him. Really, the Old Testament is about Jesus. You're, yeah, you're going to be shocked to see Jesus throughout the Old Testament. That's what The Bible You Never Knew is all about. And once you see it, you can't unsee it. So if you want to be a part of that class, sign up now. If you want to be a part of the premium version where we do live Q&A on Zoom we'll be together on at least five occasions, five occasions for those live Q&A Zoom sessions.

So check out The Bible You Never Knew in addition to Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? All right, let me go back to my guest, the great Dr. Mike Licona. Well, by the way, one of Mike's more recent books is called *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels: What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography*. He's got about eight other books as well, and he's debated Bart Ehrman, now nine times—

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MIKE:

Eight.

FRANK:

Oh, sorry, eight times.

Yeah, this was the eighth. Probably more than anybody else. And Mike, this most recent debate, which we'll put in the show notes, there's one downside to this debate, it was not recorded well, in terms of audio, in particular, but you can make out what's being said, and so we'll put that in the show notes. But what is the basic case that Bart Ehrman was making in this debate?

He's saying that the Gospels are anonymous. Why? What's his evidence for that, Mike?

MIKE:

Well, I think he's right. The Gospels were anonymous, at least when we're talking about the original manuscripts. Now, he goes further than that, and he would say that not only were they anonymous in terms of the manuscripts, but no one except the author himself, the authors themselves really knew who wrote them.

They were passed along anonymously and nobody really knew who wrote them. And it wasn't until later, I think he says sometime between Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, which Justin is writing 150 to 160, Irenaeus 174 to 189. So somewhere, let's just say between 160 and 175, some guy in Rome who has all four of them, he assigns the names to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and that's how we got them.

It just kind of kept going from there. So, I don't know anyone else who puts it that way, but, yeah, they're formally anonymous in terms of they don't have the names on the manuscripts in the autographs, that would be. And it wasn't until much later that the names were assigned to it. But no one really knew who wrote them.

FRANK:

Now, how does he know there were no names on the autographs if we don't have the autographs?

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MIKE:

Well, because some of the early manuscripts we have, the earliest manuscripts we have, don't have the names on them. You don't get it, I think the first time the names appear, on the manuscripts would be Codex Sinaiticus and, Codex Vaticanus, which would be fourth century.

Those would be the first time they appear. But we don't have it on stuff before that.

FRANK:

Well, what we had before then, though, are just fragments. We don't have a title page anyway, so you wouldn't have the name on it. Correct?

MIKE:

That's correct. But, I think he does have a point, and I agree with him that I don't think the autographs had titles. But this really isn't a major point at all, because all but one.

If you look at, if you look at all the biographies that were written that have survived about anyone, and they were composed within 150 years on each side of Jesus. So within a 300-year period, there are approximately 90 of them. Only one has the author's name in the title or even the proem. That's *The Passing of Peregrinus* by Lucian of Samosata in the middle of the second century.

That's the only one. And it's not even in the title. It's in the proem there. So it was standard practice not to put the author's name in the title, not even to put it in the proem. So virtually all biographies of that era were formerly anonymous in the same sense of the Gospels were. However, people knew who wrote those things. People knew who wrote *Plutarch's Lives*, people knew who wrote Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*.

People knew who wrote the Gospels. We don't know how they knew it, but they knew it.

FRANK:

Why do you think it was a practice then to not put the author's name on the title page? Because now, obviously, in the modern era, we always know, or most of the time, we know who wrote something. Why did they do it that way? Is there any scholarship on that that says they were intentionally anonymous for this reason?

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MIKE:

Yeah, Frank, I don't know. I can't answer that. We don't know. I mean, they just had different ways of putting. They might ask, well, why are you putting the author's name in a title? They might ask us that. So, I don't know.

FRANK:

The interesting thing is, as you said, that although the custom was not to put a name on a particular document, as soon as we get a title page in the New Testament documents, they have the name ascribed there, as you said, whether it's in the third or fourth century, people know that this is Matthew, and this is Mark, and this is Luke, and this is John.

But Bart says that some guy in Rome or somebody decided what those names were. What evidence does he have for that? And, I know this is kind of a loaded question because during the debate, you point out I'm giving evidence, and Bart is giving speculation. Where does he come up with the idea that somebody in Rome just put the names on them?

MIKE:

Yeah, it's just a guy who exists in his imagination.

It's a ghost. There's no evidence for it all. And I want to correct myself on something I just said. There is a manuscript P75, which scholars think were written somewhere between, was written between 175 and 225. And that has the title. Well, it's not actually a title, but *Kata Loukan* according to Luke. But it's not in the beginning.

It's in the end of the document. It's in the end at the end of the Gospel. So, that's our earliest one that has the author's name on it.

FRANK:

All right, so, this guy in Rome is kind of a phantom who has put the names on these Gospels. And from that point on, everybody agrees.

So this is sometime in the mid-second century. So maybe a hundred or so years after the Gospels are written.

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MIKE:

Well, that's just the manuscripts. Now, we can look at ancient attribution. What were other people of that period saying? So our earliest one is a guy named Papias, and he's writing somewhere between the years, let's say 105 to 135.

And Papias, now, he wrote five volumes of the Oracles, *The Discourses of the Oracles of the Lord*, which have disappeared. We don't have them anymore. You got many ancient authors that mention it, but they've been lost. They only survive in what are called fragments. In other words, when other ancient authors quote him, that's the only way it survived.

So the fragments of Papias. And Papias, in one of the fragments, he says that he received information from associates of Jesus apostles, and did so while two of them were still alive and in active ministry. Which would mean that Papias received this information toward the end of the first century.

So it's okay, this is pretty good. Now, he says he's the first to report about Mark, and he says Mark was Peter's translator, and Mark wrote down everything that he remembered Peter had taught about the words and deeds of Jesus. So he's the very first one to mention the authorship of any of the Gospels.

He also says something about Matthew, which is. It's kind of confusing. He says Matthew wrote the oracles, the ta logia, the oracles of the Lord in the Hebrew dialect. Now, is he referring, when he says the oracles, is he referring to a gospel? Most would say no.

Is he referring to the hypothetical source Q? Some would say yes. Many say no. I'm convinced, after looking at it, I wanted to say it's Q, but I don't think it was, because it seems that there are some decent arguments that Q, if it existed, or whatever the Q content is, was originally in Greek. And the Gospel of Matthew that we have today seems like it was originally written in Greek.

It's not translation Greek. So, what is Matthew referring to here? That's a difficult one—

FRANK:

Papias or Matthew?

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MIKE:

Matthew. So, well, what Papias is saying what Matthew wrote. So what is the question is, what is he referring to? Now you have six early church fathers, seven if you include Papias, that say Matthew wrote a gospel in Hebrew.

Some say in Hebrew letters. But again, we don't have that. We don't have any manuscripts of Hebrew and Matthew. We don't have any trace of Matthew written in Hebrew. So what is Papias referring to? Giving us a lot of thought. Now, I could change on this, where I'm at at the moment. And of course this is just speculation. That's all we can do, Frank.

But where I'm at at the moment, I do think that Matthew wrote something originally in Hebrew. It's not his gospel. It's not, it's not Q. We no longer have that. Then I do think that Matthew did write a gospel in Hebrew that we no longer have. And then somewhere along the line, Matthew, probably with the help of a secretary, wrote another gospel in Greek and used Mark as his primary source and supplemented it.

And the Hebrew Matthew was lost. The Greek survived. And let me just say one more thing about that, that's not really straining at gnats here. Josephus wrote all of his writings in his native tongue, he says, which would have been Aramaic, and he sent those out to the Jews. And then later on, he had all of those. He used the help of assistants, some slaves.

He had them translated into Greek. Well, guess what? We don't have, none of Josephus's writings in Aramaic have survived. We don't even have any traces of them. All that survived were the Greek because I guess the Jews didn't preserve those writings. The Jewish Christians didn't preserve the Hebrew Matthew. But Greek Matthew has been preserved.

FRANK:

We're going to cover that, more right after the break. In fact, this idea that the Gospels were biographies came onto the scene with a seminal book in 2004 we'll talk about. And once you see that evidence, you'll go, this makes a lot of sense, so don't go anywhere. We're listening or you're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. My guest today is Dr. Mike Licona.

We're discussing who wrote the Gospels. Don't go anywhere. We'll be back in just a minute.

AD:

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FRANK:

Who wrote the gospels? My guest, Dr. Mike Licona, risenjesus.com is his website and also has a great YouTube channel. He's debated the most known skeptic on the New Testament probably in the world, Bart Ehrman. He's debated him eight times. The eighth time he debated him was who wrote the Gospels. We'll put the debate in the show notes. But Mike, just before the break, I mentioned that there was a seminal book by, Professor Burridge in 2004 about the Gospels being Greco Roman biographies.

And, I want to quote something here. I'm reading actually from Brant Pitre's book. Brant is a Roman Catholic scholar. He wrote *The Case for Jesus*. And by the way, that's a very good book. It doesn't really get into Roman Catholicism or Protestantism. It's just about the evidence for Jesus. And he talks about what Papias said about Mark. And Papias, as Dr.

Licona mentioned in the previous segment, wrote sometime around 110 to 130 somewhere in there. Here's what Papias said about Mark. He said, Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately everything he remembered, although not in order of the things either said or done by Christ. And interestingly enough, Suetonius said this about a biography he was doing.

Having given, as it were, a summary of his life, I shall now take up its various phases one by one, not in chronological order, but by categories to make the account clear and more intelligible. So it's interesting we have a parallel from that time, Mike, that Papias is saying, here's how Peter put his gospel together.

And Suetonius is saying, here's how I put the life of the deified Augustus together. I didn't put it together in chronological order. I put it together by category, to make the account clearer. What do you think of Dr. Burridge's work? Do you think he's onto something here? That this is ancient Greco-Roman biography, that the Gospels sort of follow that sort of motif or that genre?

MIKE:

Yes, and Frank, and in fact, that is the majority scholarship view today, that the Gospels either belong to Greco-Roman biography, that genre, or they are closely affiliated with it because they

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share much in common with it. Now, someone may rightly ask, well, why Greco-Roman? Why not Jewish biography? Well, for some reason, Jews simply were not writing biographies of their sages in that time.

So all we have are four biographies written by Jews in the first century, three by Philo, two of which are more like commentaries on scripture than they really are biographies. Then his *Life of Philo* is more like what we have with Plutarch and Suetonius and others. And then you have Josephus' autobiography and Josephus's autobiography and Philo's *Life of Moses*.

Or maybe it's *The Life of Abraham*: I forgot which; are more like the Greco-Roman biography. And then after those four in the first century, Jews did not write biographies of their sages until modern times. We don't know why that was the case. But for some reason, Greco-Roman biography, or let's put it this way so that we don't confuse.

The overwhelming majority of biographies at that time were written by Greeks and Romans. That's why it's called Greco-Roman biography—

FRANK:

Now, in the debate—

MIKE:

So, you can just call it ancient biography if you want.

FRANK:

Now, in the debate you had with Bart, he was saying that these gospels are anonymous and we don't know who wrote them. They're just ascribed those names by some guy in Rome 100 or so years after apparently they were written.

But then you made a case in your opening statement that you have internal and external evidence that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John actually wrote those documents. I know we can't cover it in detail, but kind of give us an overview. What internal evidence do we have? What external evidence do we have?

MIKE:

Well, the external evidence, ancient attribution. You'd have six sources writing in the second century that attribute the Gospels, at least they attribute or show familiarity with our four Gospels.

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You have Papias with Mark. Then you have Justin Martyr, who shows familiarity with all four of our Gospels, he's writing, you know, 155 to 160. Then you've got Theophilus of Antioch writing around the year 175. He quotes from John 1:1 and attributes it to the apostle John. Then you have Irenaeus, who quotes from the beginning of all four gospels and assigns them to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Then there's the Muratorian fragment, writing toward the end of the second century that mentions the authorship of Luke and John. And most scholars, even Ehrman says they think that the Muratorian fragment also assigned it to Matthew and Mark. It's just that part has been lost. And then you've got finally Clement of Alexandria, writing at the very end of the second century, maybe just one or two years into the third, who talks about Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as the authors of the Gospels, and even tells how Matthew and John came to be written.

And I think Irenaeus talks about how Mark came to be written. So that's the external. The internal, wow. Let me just cover Mark there, for example. So you've got. Let's put it this way, Frank, if you and I, let's say we're at a party together at some kind of a get together, and there's a bunch of people there, and you point out a guy in the room to me and you say, hey, Mike, that guy over there, you see, he is the number one real estate agent in the Charlotte area.

I said, oh, okay. And then later on, maybe I'm over there getting some snacks, and I overhear this guy talking, the guy that you pointed out. And he doesn't say he's a real estate agent, but he uses terms such as builder incentives, interest rate locks, you know, things like that. That is entirely consistent with what you said: the external attribution that he's a real estate agent.

So the internal clues. We're looking for internal clues that are consistent with the ancient attributions. And so with Mark's Gospel, you have things like Peter's prominence. There are 21 occasions in Mark where Jesus is speaking to his disciples, and they are named. And of those 21 occurrences, Peter appears in 19 of them.

And in nearly half of those, he's the only disciple in view. The only other disciple to get a solo appearance with Jesus in Mark is John. And he gets just one. So that sounds like Peter's voice behind Mark's pen. And then, you've got Peter's personality is prominent throughout Mark's gospel; he's bold, he's courageous, he's opinionated.

He's proactive. He charges ahead, he stumbles, he falls. He grieves over denying Jesus. I mean, this sounds like it's written by someone who knows Peter personally, and Peter told him about

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these things. You've got a statement when Peter denies Jesus. And Jesus, it says, and Peter remembered. Peter remembered that Jesus had predicted this.

Well, that sounds like Mark is reporting what Peter had told him. You've got Aramaic. So there are seven times in the Gospels in which Jesus's words are given in Aramaic and then they're translated in Greek. Of those, five appear in Mark, one is in Matthew, but Matthew is using Mark as a source there, and the other is in John.

So it's five of them by far. It's most, almost all of them are in Mark. And that's consistent with what Papias said, that Mark was Peter's translator. And finally then you have something, called inclusio, which Martin Hengel, Richard Bauckham have pointed out. And it's inclusio is when some content is bracketed.

So, for example, of Jesus' disciples, the very first to be named is Peter, and the very last to be named is Peter. And he's named in Mark 16:7, where the angel says to the women at the empty tomb, go tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus has gone ahead of, He's gone ahead of you to Galilee.

There you go.

FRANK:

The disciples and Peter, he just adds that—

MIKE:

That's right. Isn't that interesting?

FRANK:

Yeah, it is.

MIKE:

And so that can be suggested that Peter is Mark's primary source behind this stuff. Now someone might say, yeah, but there's no proof of that. Yeah, well, that's true, there's no proof of that, but it is plausible. And we do have something of interest. Christopher Pelling, the foremost authority on Plutarch today.

He points out in his commentary, *The Life of Caesar*, that when Caesar goes to cross, the Rubicon, Plutarch reports that Caesar was consulting with his friends and Asinius Pollio. Well,

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why would he point out Pollio? He doesn't say anything about Pollio there. Well, Pollio ended up being a historian who had traveled with Caesar.

He wrote history that Plutarch was very much reliant on, as well as some other ancient authors and historians. Now, we don't have the writings of Pollio. They've all been lost. But his influence still permeates Plutarch and other authors. So that is Plutarch's way of giving an internal clue to the reader that Pollio is a source.

FRANK:

Now, it's interesting, and this came up in the debate, Mike, Bart tried to say that, well, these writers couldn't have written because according to Acts 4:13, it says this. When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled ordinary men, they were astonished that Jesus took note of these men.

Or they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus. So the key point here is that Peter and John were unschooled ordinary men, so they couldn't have written. How do you respond to that?

MIKE:

Yeah, well, unschooled, the Greek word that is used there is *agrammatoi* or *agrammatos* in the singular. And that doesn't mean no education or illiterate.

It means no formal education. So they still could have learned to read and write. You have, as Craig Evans had pointed out, in the city, ancient city of Smyrna, you have what, the lower marketplace, the lower agora. You have walls there, and approximately 30 inches and a little higher off the ground of these walls, you have all this graffiti and writing.

You have poor spelling, crude grammar. But these people could still write. They figured it was probably children who were manning the tables at some time, at least while the owners were gone and they were just fooling around and writing on the walls. Well, these would have been children of the poor. And yet they still could write. Moreover, there.

is evidence, archaeological evidence that Craig, Evans points out that I think is pretty interesting. You have what are, there are five volumes, *The Corpus of Inscriptions of Judea/Palestine*, which have more than 7,800 inscriptions. And this is the area in which Jesus' ministry would have happened.

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That's really unusual if you only have a literacy rate of, maybe 1%, as some are saying.

FRANK:

Well, there's also a fallacy that Bart presented that we'll expose right after the break. Bart Ehrman, that is. Don't go anywhere. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. Be back in just a couple.

Welcome back to I Don't have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. We're discussing who wrote the Gospels with my friend and scholar, Dr. Mike Licona. He debated Dr. Bart Ehrman several months ago. We'll put the full debate in the show notes on this very question. And I mentioned there's a fallacy that I think Bart was committing during this debate. It's called the fallacy. Well, I call it the fallacy of applying aggregate data to individuals.

This happens all the time in social media research, or I should say social science research. People say, well, 90% of the people back then were illiterate. So the gospel writers couldn't have been Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John because they were illiterate. Well, how do you know they were illiterate? As Mike just said prior to the break, saying that they were unschooled doesn't mean they couldn't read and write. They just didn't go to formal schooling.

You can't apply aggregate data to individuals. It's like what happened with the big ICE thing several months ago. There were some footage that looked like ICE was being too aggressive. Let's just put aside for the second whether they were too aggressive or not. You can't say that all ICE agents are like that just by data that is not complete. You can't apply just an individual incident to the entire group.

And you can't apply aggregate data to individuals. Unless the aggregate data is 100% of the people back then were illiterate, then okay, then they were all illiterate. But if only, if 90% were illiterate and 10% were literate, you can't say that the Gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were part of the 90% who were illiterate. That's, that's an illegitimate use of data.

You could say maybe it's more likely they were illiterate, but maybe they were part of the 10%. And, so he seems to say it's impossible that they wrote these down, Mike, when in fact, that is indeed not the case. And maybe you could comment more on the point you were making when we ran out of time. You were saying there was several volumes of inscriptions from that time.

MIKE:

Yeah, *The Corpus of Inscriptions of Judea/Palestine*.

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There's like five volumes that have about 7,800 inscriptions from Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. So these would be things that they have found on broken pieces of pottery called ostraca or on epitaphs on funerary inscriptions, things like that. So you've got these inscriptions that have survived.

And half of them are in Greek. That's something Bart says and others say. So, they say, look, these guys were Aramaic-speaking Jews. The Gospels are all written in Greek. I think Greek was a little more prominent than many people think. Mean, think about this for a moment. When Jesus renamed Simon, what was his name?

Peter. That's a Greek name. Two of Jesus' disciples, Philip, and Andrew had Greek names. Philip means horse lover. Andrew means manly or brave. You've got, in the book of Acts, chapter six, you've got seven deacons that are ordained. All of them had Greek names. Approximately ten miles from Nazareth.

You've got more than, it's the town of Bet She'arim. And there's more than 300 tombs there. Seventy-eight percent of the epitaphs on the tombs are written in Greek. A particular interest, there's one of the tomb of Rabbi Gamaliel. Not the Gamaliel of the New Testament, but Rabbi Gamaliel.

And his epitaph is written in Greek. So it's like Greek is far more common, I think given the archeological evidence that has survived. Far more common in Palestine, Judea than some would say. So, I do think that there's a whole lot more evidence that comes from archaeology that some who want to say, these folks were illiterate.

Now, I don't know that we don't know much about Luke or Mark. So, I think what you had said at the outset there, Frank, applies to that, Matthew and John. I kind of have my doubts that they would be able to pen the gospels that we have. I think they probably made use of secretaries to help them.

FRANK:

Yeah, you pointed that out. And Bart was really sort of against the idea of secretaries.

But didn't a secretary write Romans, the book of Romans?

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MIKE:

Yeah. Now, yeah, his name is Tertius. He says, I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. Romans 16:22. Bart did, you know, he brought up a good point, where he says that there are no other writings. Or no examples of a secretary who did more than editing, light editing, maybe some moderate editing.

They wouldn't do something as extensive. We don't have any examples of something as extensive as a biography. And of course, I said, you mean except for the evidence we have for Mark and John. That, I'm sorry for Matthew that they had. Yeah, that they had secretaries. And he said, well, no, I want something, some actual evidence.

I said, well, you got some written evidence here in multiple sources that say how these things came into being. And then I gave, I said, look, even if we didn't have those, it's just, it's very easy and very, quite plausible. And I gave the example of a former slave named Sojourner Truth in New York State who bought her own freedom. And, people in New York asked her to lecture, to tell what it was like to be a slave.

And so she did. And at one point, a guy named Oliver. I don't remember his last name, he begged her, he said, you got to get this in writing. Write a book on it. We want to know about it. She said, well, I can't write. So he said, I'll help you. And so he was her ghostwriter. And so it got published in 1850 as *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth*. Well, if that's the case with a former slave, don't you think that as these disciples who had been with Jesus had been eyewitnesses of all this, as they are growing old and some are dying, that their followers would have begged him, said, please do not take this to the grave with you.

Well, I can't write. We will help you. And there would have certainly been people who would have helped them. And I could name at least 11 people in the New Testament who would have had the means and the motivation to fund such a project. So I don't think there's any problem with that. So did Matthew and John actually put reed to papyrus and write in their gospels? My guess would be no.

But they were right there and very much involved in the composition of those gospels.

FRANK:

Well, it could have been because Matthew was a tax collector and had to have some ability to write and record, quite obviously so.

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MIKE:

But would it have been to the extent to write the gospel? Matthew's a very artistic gospel. So would a tax collector have had that? And if, I mean, now, I love The Chosen series.

They show Matthew, he's really into numbers, and he's got Asperger's. He's on the spectrum. People on this spectrum typically aren't artistic.

FRANK:

Okay, yeah, well, they could be. It depends. But we got to talk about another issue here, because this came up as well, and you brought it up, rightfully so, to Bart. If you were inventing names of the gospel writers, you wouldn't certainly pick Matthew, who is a tax collector and would be hated by the Jews, especially a gospel written primarily to Jews.

You might pick John. He's an eyewitness, but you wouldn't pick Luke and Mark. Why wouldn't you just pick the Gospel of Peter or the Gospel of Jesus? Just go to the top. Or the Gospel of Paul. How did Bart respond to that?

MIKE:

I don't remember how he responded. I know in his writings, in my prep for the debate, he says, well, how do we know that Mark and

Luke were obscure figures? And so, I mean, you watched the debate, so I guess I did answer it in there. And he answered, I don't remember.

FRANK: I think he kind of diverted almost to a joke. He didn't really engage with the argument. I think he did say, well, Luke represents Paul and Mark represents Peter. But that still begs the question, why wouldn't you just put Paul's name on it or Peter's name on it?

Then it would give it more authority. In fact, isn't that what the Pseudepigraphal Gospels do? They come later. Explain that.

MIKE:

Yeah, virtually all of them do. You know you got the Gospel of Peter, Gospel Thomas, Gospel of Philip. You do have the Gospel of Mary, which was a close follower of Jesus. You don't have these figures who were just associates of them. And you're right. Why not?

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By then, when Mark was written, the Gospel of Peter had not been written. So why not just say, call it the Gospel of Peter? It just wouldn't make sense. And you're right. Why would you say Matthew when he would have been hated by Jews for being a tax collector, if you're going to write to Jews? John was a Jew, so he could have written. There were plenty of others. All of the disciples, the 12, were Jews, so any of them could have written in that sense.

It just. Yeah, what you pointed out was correct there.

FRANK:

Mike, are there any competing attributions in church history other than the one you mentioned? Maybe in the 4th century? Does anybody say it wasn't Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John writing these?

MIKE:

No. The first time, I mean, it's just within the last few centuries, two or three centuries that people have been brought that up in questioning whether the traditional authorship of the Gospels is correct.

And Frank, what I did bring up in the debate is something I called the parity principle.

FRANK:

Yeah, explain that. We got about a minute left. Go ahead.

MIKE:

Treat similar cases in a similar manner. So that if you are going to question the authorship of the Gospels because they're anonymous or because the first person to attribute the authorship to them is 100 years later, well, apply that across the board to other ancient literature like the writings of Sallust, or Plutarch, or Suetonius, or Tacitus, and what you find is when you compare the evidence for the authorship of these classical, this classical literature that classicists don't even blink at in terms of the authorship, they don't question that at all in some of these writings that I just mentioned, in all of the writings I just mentioned.

But the evidence for the traditional authorship of the Gospels is pretty much about the same. And in some cases, it's even better. So either classicists are being credulous and accepting things too quickly or New Testament scholars are being too skeptical.

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FRANK:

Yeah, I think skepticism always rears more of its head when the miraculous is involved, and the documents have an implication on how you should live your life.

I think people get a lot more skeptical in that regard, than if they're just talking about, say, a biography of Alexander the Great. Well, I don't think that his, that biography is not going to tell me how to live, so I'm fine with it. I think that comes into play more often than not. Hey Mike, you did a great job on the debate. We'll put it in the show notes. Tell people again your website and YouTube channel. Risenjesus.com.

YouTube channel, I think it's Dr. Mike Licona, and let me just say too, we have a great apologetics program at Houston Christian University. Go to hc.edu/defend. Houston Christian University, yeah, check that out. Mike's down there teaches down there. So do many other great scholars. Great, great having Mike on. Mike, thanks so much.

MIKE:

Thanks, Frank.

FRANK:

God bless, folks. See you here next time.

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