

The Ring of Truth

How the Gospels authenticate one another

Luke 1:4

... it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Customs	Undesigned Coincidences
Culture	Unnecessary Details
Geography	Unexplained Allusions
Archaeology	Unexpected Harmonies
Non-Christian Historians	Unified Personalities

Our goals

- To explore some of the *positive internal evidence* for the truth of the Gospels; in particular,
- To build a cumulative case that the authors of the Gospels were *well informed* and *habitually truthful*

Two Questions

1. Why are there *four* Gospels?
2. Can we tell, by comparing two passages of Scripture with one another, that *both* are authentic, credible historical records?

The First Natural Answer

We can find passages where two different writers tell the same story, perhaps even in the same words.

(Yes, but ...)

A Skeptical Response

One of the documents might have been *copied* from the other one.

How can this possibility be ruled out on the basis of *internal* evidence alone?

Undesigned Coincidences

- Example: one book may mention *in passing* a detail that answers some question raised by the other.
- Such *interlocking* would be very unlikely if
 - one of them were copied from the other, or
 - both were copied from a common written source, or
 - the later book simply added a bunch of legends to the former.

What Such Interlocking Shows

- Fictions and forgeries don't interlock like this. Either they don't interlock at all, or the interlockings are more obvious because they are intended to be noticed.
- But we would expect to find such undesigned coincidences in authentic records of the same *real* event told by *different* people who knew what they were talking about.

For those who take notes ...

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

Example #1: Matthew 14:1-2

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, And said to his servants, *This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.*

How would Matthew know what Herod had said *to his servants*?

The explanation: Luke 8:3

And Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, . . .

Jesus' followers had family in the highest ranks of Herod's servants.

Luke Explains Matthew

Matthew

Mark

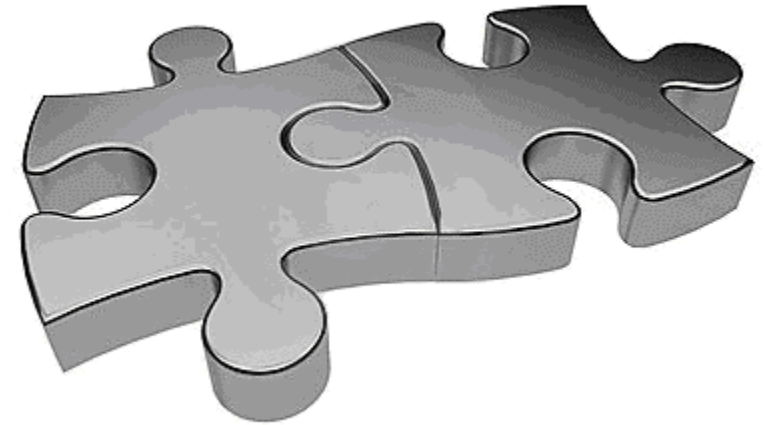


Luke

John

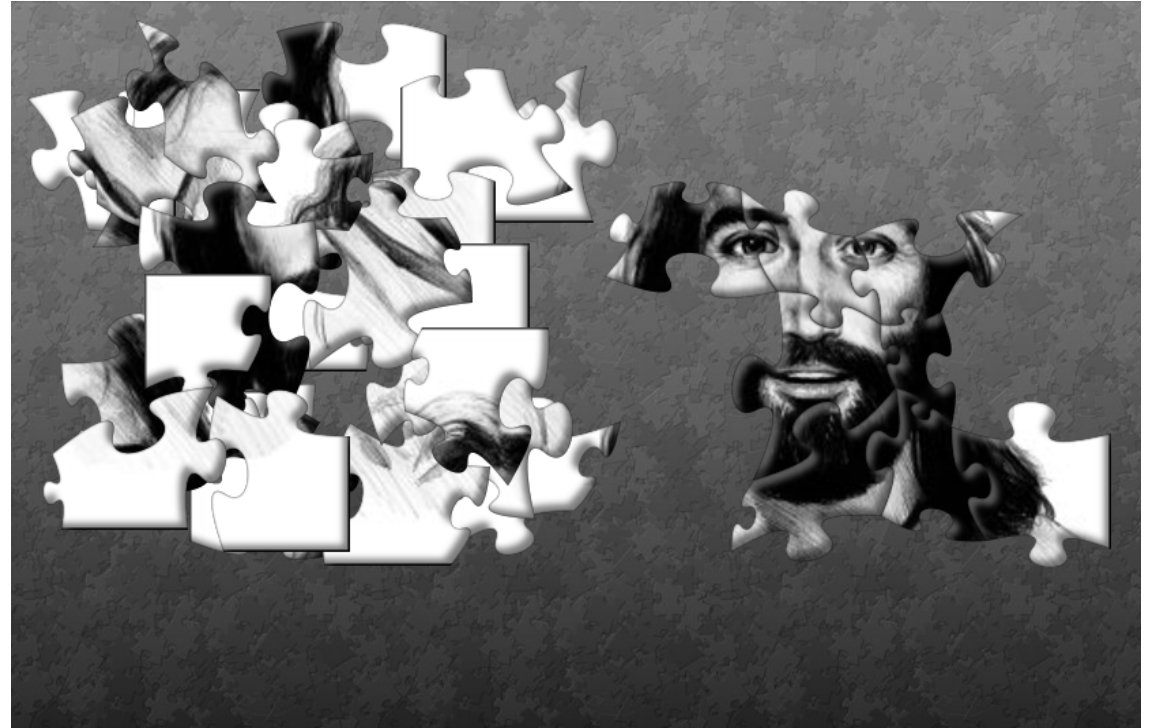
A Cumulative Case

One undesigned coincidence like this *might* be an accident—like having two unrelated pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fit together, just by chance.



A Cumulative Case

But if we find *numerous* connections crisscrossing the documents, and if each gospel has some things that explain things in the others, it becomes ridiculous to insist that they are *all* just accidental.



Example #2: John 18:10-11

Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Where did the metaphor of "the cup" come from?

The explanation: Matthew 26:39-42

And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” ... Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”

The metaphor was still in Jesus’ mind from his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane.

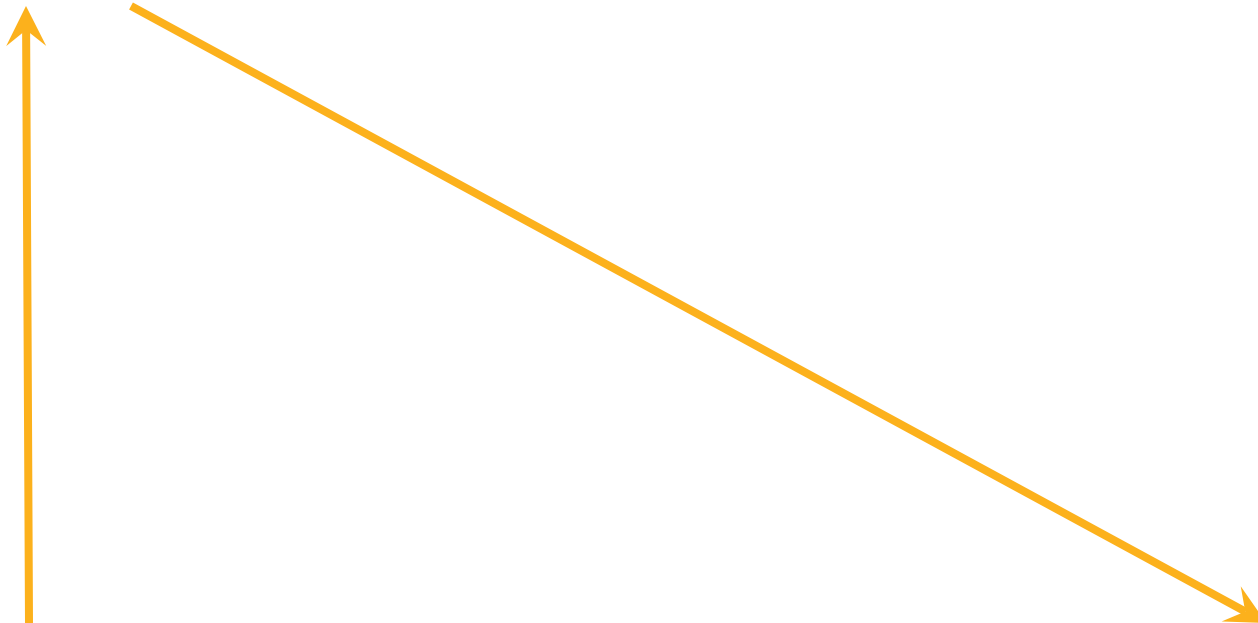
Matthew Explains John

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John



Example #3: The Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-35)

- Jesus' face is altered and his clothing becomes dazzling white.
- Moses and Elijah appear in glory and speak with him of his departure.
- A cloud covers them, and a voice comes out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son: hear him."

Example #3: Luke 9:36

And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen.

Example #3: Luke 9:36

They what??!

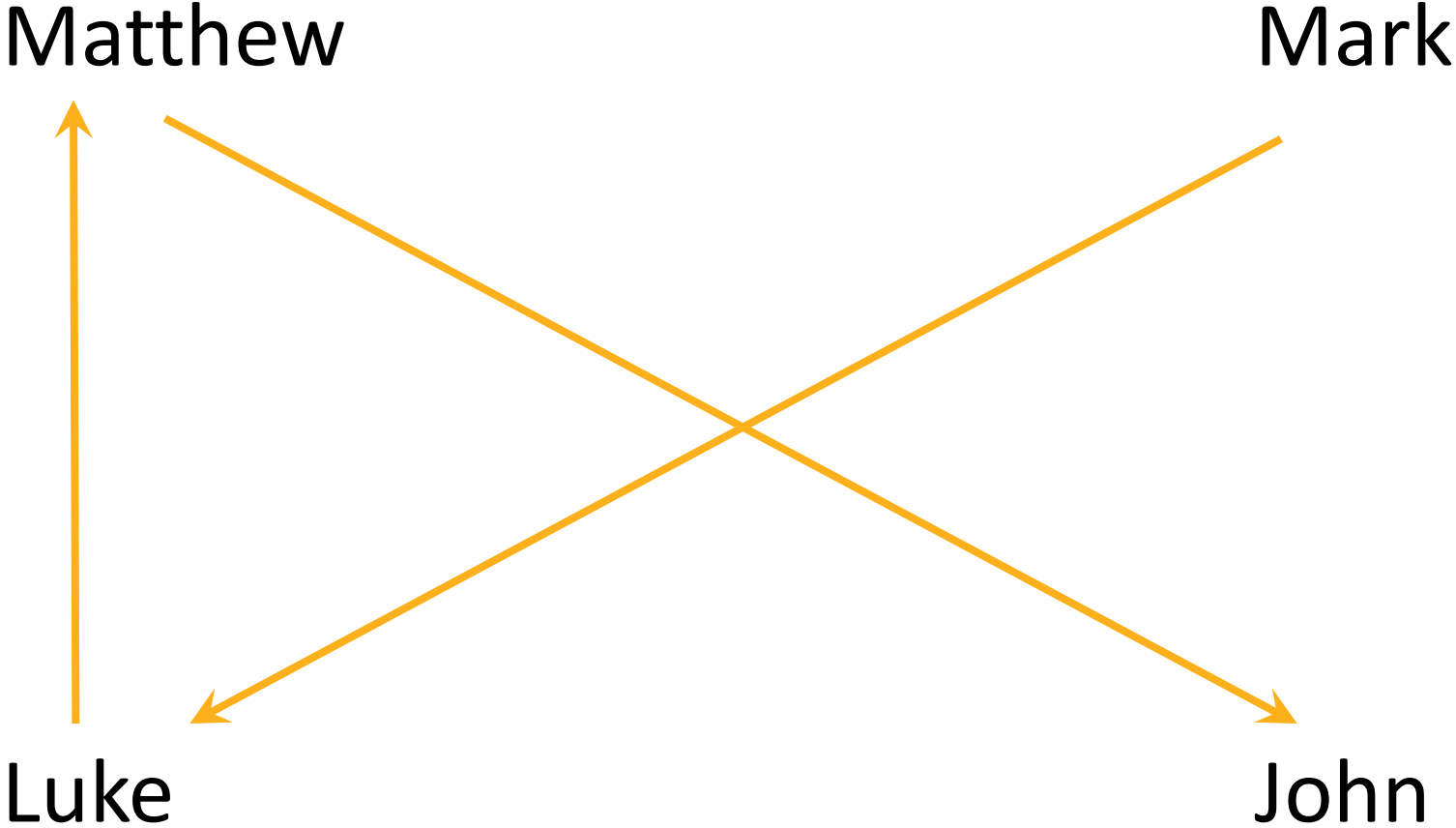
The Explanation: Mark 9:9

And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

The Explanation: Mark 9:9

Mark gives us the command but doesn't say whether they obeyed it; Luke records their obedience but omits the command.

A Growing Network of Explanations



Inventing a Gospel Story

The challenge: you want to invent—forge—a miracle story about Jesus and pass it off as an authentic account.

At the beginning, you're going to set it up by having Jesus ask one of his disciples a question.

Inventing a Gospel Story

The setup for the miracle story is going to have to do with *money* and *food*.

Which disciple do you pick?

Inventing a Gospel Story

Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, *Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?*

Why Philip?

Putting the Pieces Together

Luke 9:10-11—And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. When the crowds learned it, they followed him, ...

Putting the pieces together

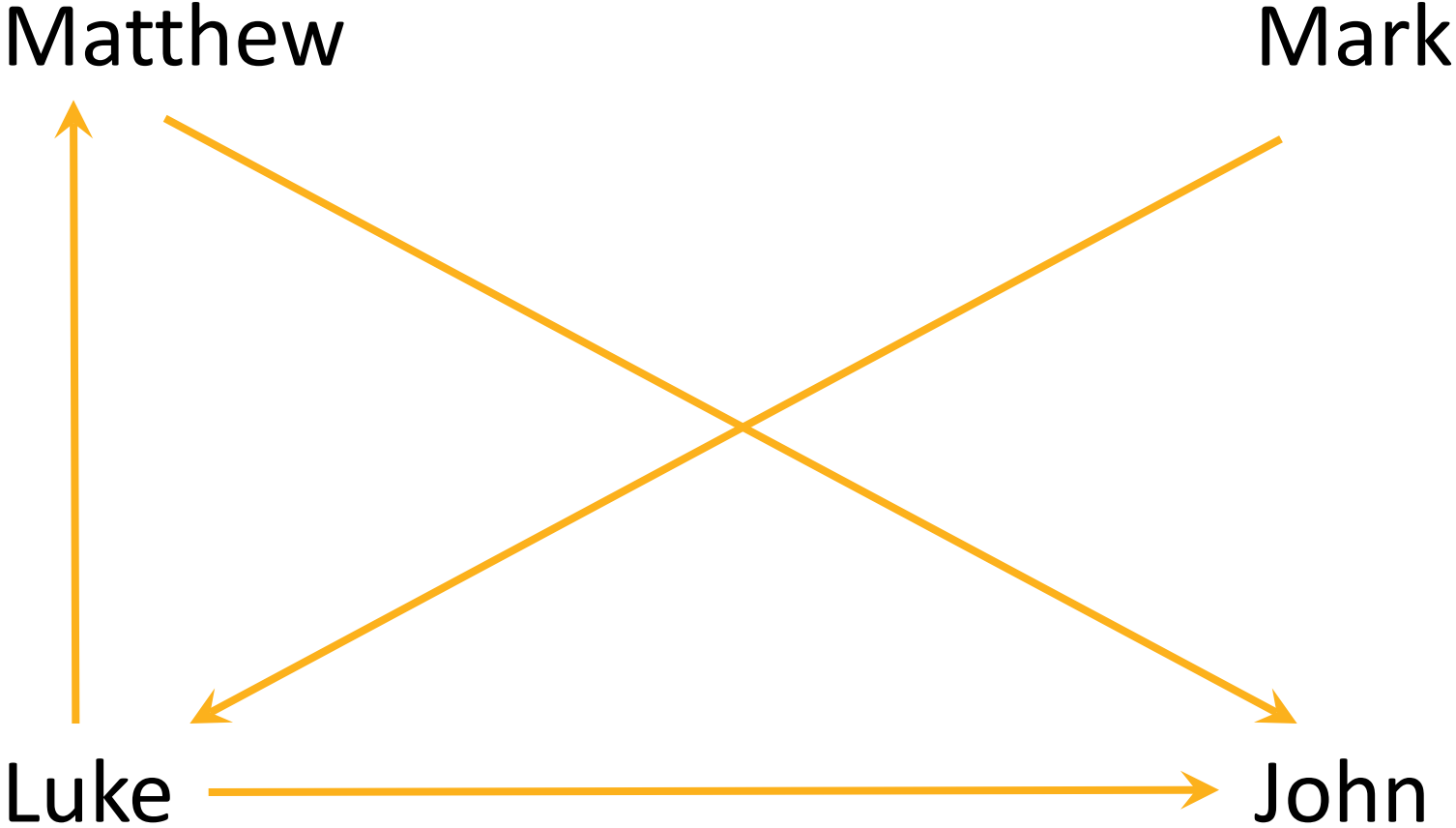
John 12:21—So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, . . .

Luke and John fit together like pieces of a puzzle

Luke doesn't mention Philip in this context at all; John doesn't mention Bethsaida as the setting of the miracle.

Only by *putting them together* can we understand why Jesus speaks to Philip in John 6:5.

The Network Keeps Growing



Example #4: Mark 6:31,39

- And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.
- Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass.

About that green grass ...

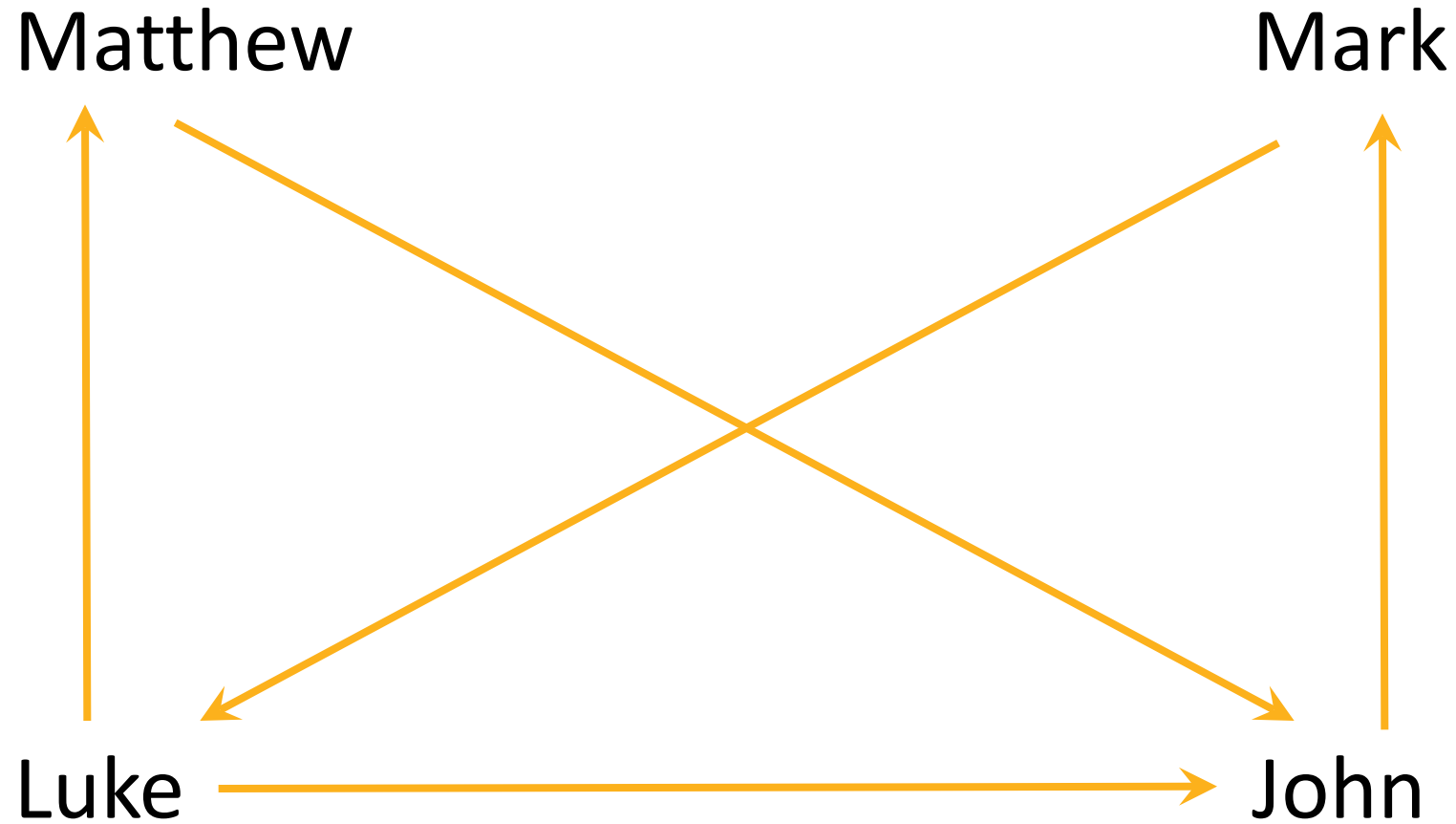


The Explanation: John 6:4

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

Passover is in the middle of the (brief) growing season in Palestine; it is also a great feast to which hundreds of thousands of Jews traveled every year. John gives us, in passing, a detail that interlocks in two ways with Mark's account of the same event.

Each Gospel Explains Some Other Gospel



Example #5: Luke 23:2-4

And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.

And Pilate asked him, Are you the King of the Jews?

And he answered him, You have said so.

Example #5: Luke 23:2-4

Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, *I find no guilt in this man.*

Example #5: Luke 23:1-4

This sequence of events is completely baffling.

1. The Jews make a grave accusation,
2. Pilate questions Jesus *on this very point*,
3. Jesus *admits* to the charge, or at the very least insouciantly refuses to deny it, and
4. Pilate promptly declares him to be innocent!

The Explanation: John 18:33-38

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, *Are you the King of the Jews?*

Jesus answered, *My kingdom is not of this world. . .*

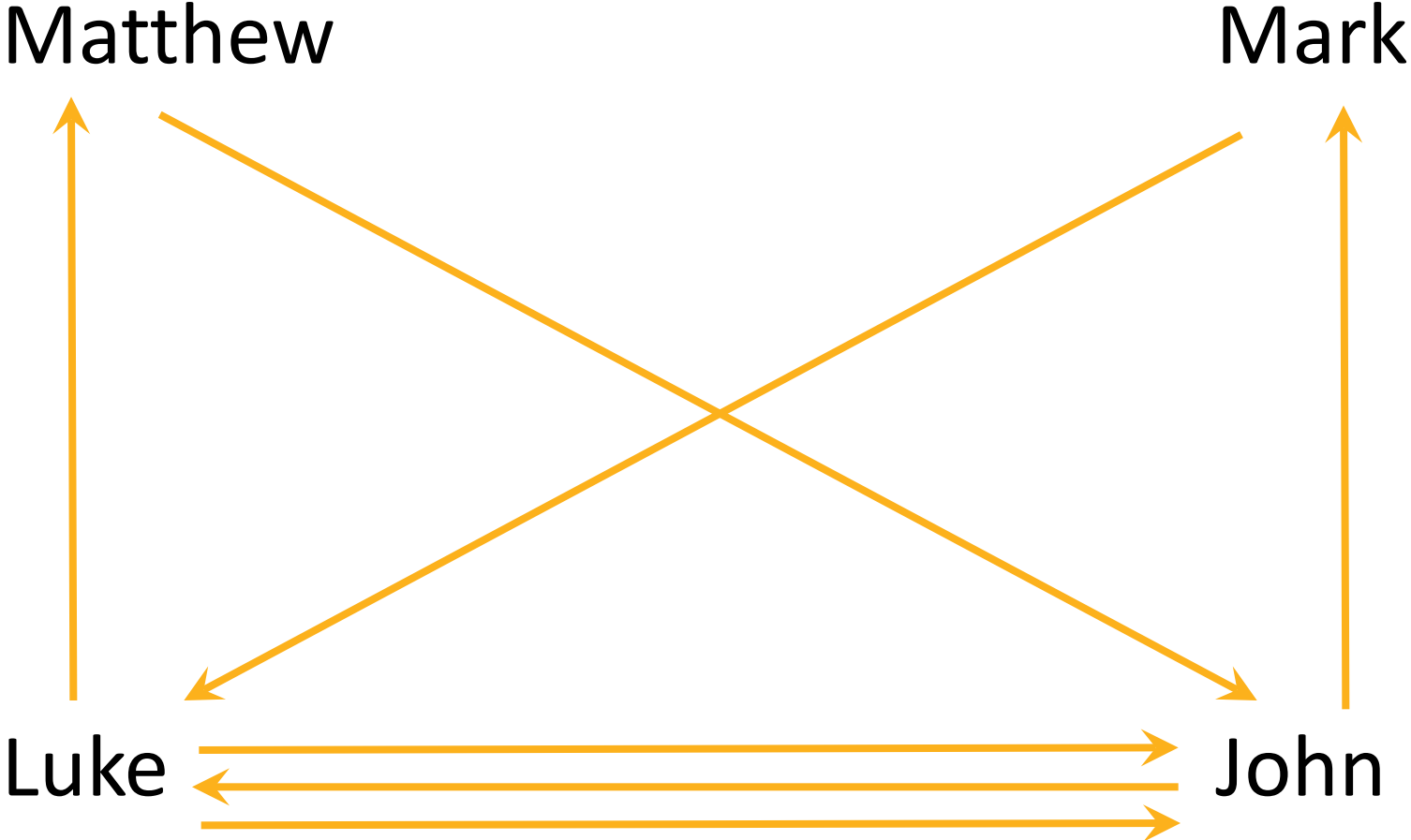
Pilate . . . went back outside to the Jews and told them, *I find no guilt in him.*

... and Example #6

In John's account, Pilate's question to Jesus seems to come out of nowhere.

Luke gives the *accusation* but not the *full answer*;
John gives the *full answer* but not the *accusation*.

The Network Continues to Grow



John 16:12

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

The Ring of Truth

- Our four Gospels, written by four different authors, *interlock* with one another and *explain* one another.
- The separate narratives are *independently grounded* in the same actual facts.
- The details *matter* – they are not just literary flourishes

Want More?

- John James Blunt, *The Veracity of the Gospels and Acts* (1829), later republished with large additions under the title *Undesigned Coincidences*.

UNDESIGNED COINCIDENCES

IN THE WRITINGS BOTH OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS,

AN ARGUMENT OF THEIR VERACITY

WITH AN APPENDIX,

CONTAINING UNDESIGNED COINCIDENCES BETWEEN THE GOSPELS,
AND ACTS, AND JOSEPHUS.

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NEW YORK:

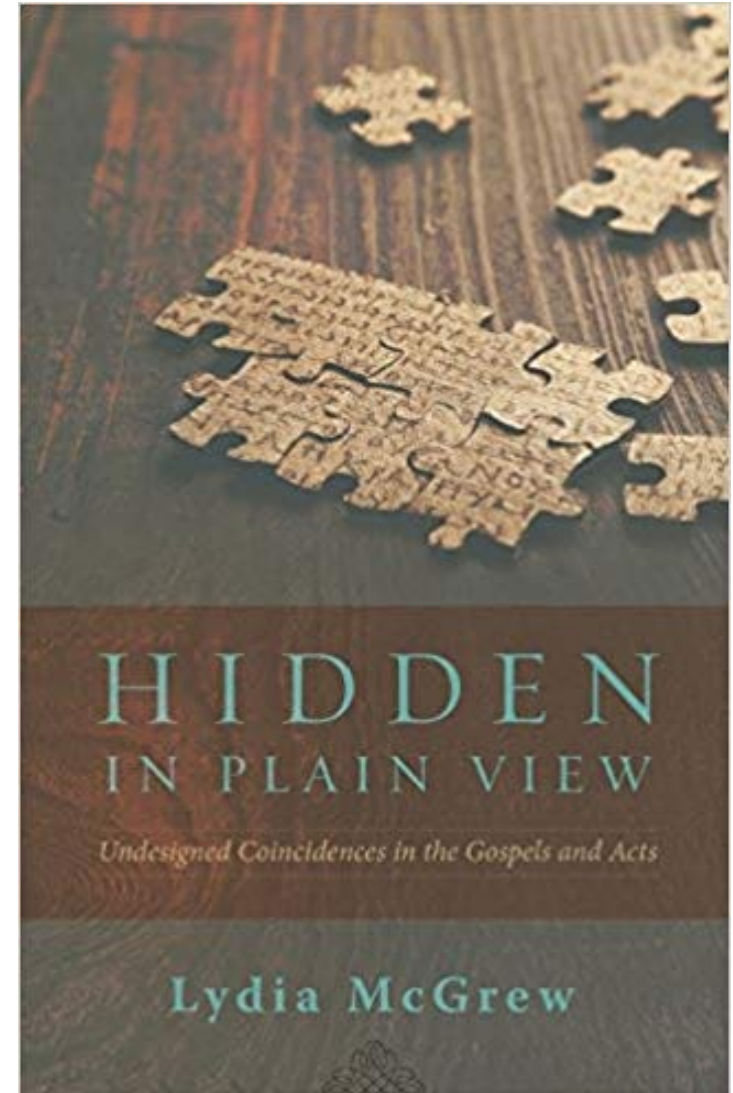
ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,

No. 285 BROADWAY.

1855.

Want More?

- Lydia McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View: Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts* (2017)



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