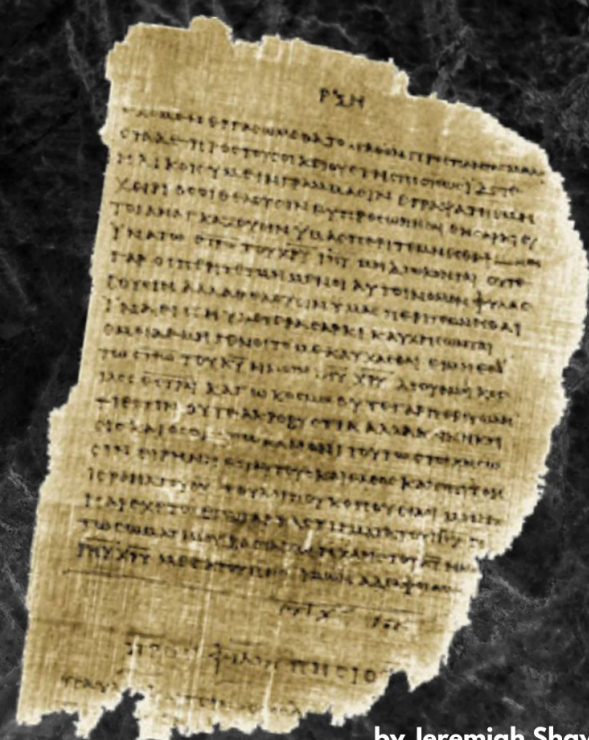




The weekly newsletter article of Parkside Chapel

LIFE NEWS

THE GOSPELS ARE FOR YOU



parksidevisalia.org

by Jeremiah Shawver
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Over the last month, I have spent much of my time studying how scholars have understood the Gospels, especially the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). It has been interesting to read the works of scholars who held a wide range of beliefs about Jesus. It is important to understand some of these scholars as they have influenced the way the Gospels have been read through the years. The goal of reading these men of the last 200 years was to understand how they approached the text and to ask if they were accurate in their understanding.

In reading this kind of scholarship, many of the ideas are based on the presuppositions or assumptions of the scholar writing. After the Enlightenment, there was a preponderance of scholars who no longer believed that supernatural activity was real. There was a focus on rationalism, which effectively changed the way people thought about Jesus so that they approached the Bible as skeptics. For many people, this can cause us to be fearful of “scholarship” about the Bible, that somehow this kind of study will cause us to give up on our beliefs about Christ.

Admittedly, there are many scholars who wrote about the Gospels who could be categorized in this manner. They

may view Jesus as a good teacher who was misunderstood. This is not the view that we would understand through a simple reading of scripture. My hope in writing this is to encourage you that we do not need to be fearful of these scholars; instead there are equally disciplined and rigorous scholars who have continued to hold to the faith handed down, once for all, to the saints.

One such scholar is Richard Bauckham. Bauckham called into question many of the assumptions of 20th-century scholarship about the Gospels. Bauckham’s major works in this area include *The Gospels for All Christians* (1998) and *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (2007). Both works are fantastic resources if you want to understand how the Gospels went from the preaching of the Apostles to the books we know today. As I read through scholarship from many different viewpoints, Bauckham was a breath of fresh air and an encouragement to me. Not because he agreed with me. Instead, it was encouraging to see his careful work, crafted over years, to answer questions we may all have concerning the Bible. In this article, I hope to bring you one of these encouragements.

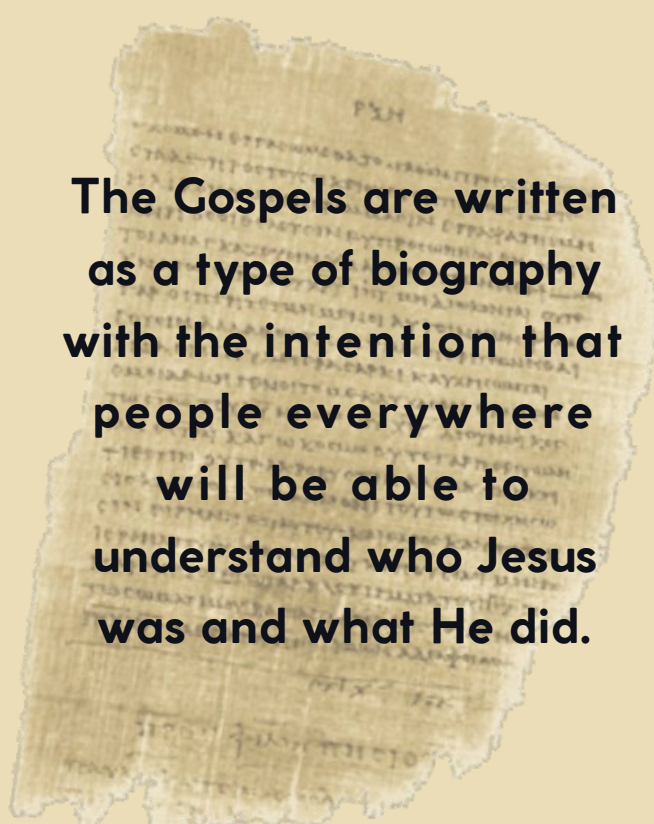
In *The Gospels for All Christians*, Bauckham edits a series of essays from several scholars on the transmission of the

Gospels. The basic premise of this work is that the Gospels were meant to be read and distributed to a wide and undefined audience. At the time, most scholars believed and taught that the Gospels were written to much smaller groups and only later distributed to the rest of the world. Bauckham and his colleagues show through several different methods that the expectation of the Gospel authors was to have their message about Christ read by as many people as possible in as many places as possible. If Bauckham is correct, then the audience of the Gospels includes the entire Ancient Near Eastern world. Matthew is not only talking to the people in Jerusalem or Israel but to the rest of the world as well.

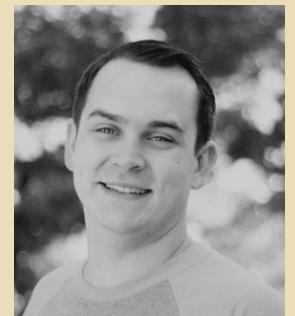
This view of the Gospels to me is very encouraging. As we read scripture, we are to understand its context, and this includes the audience of specific letters. As we read the book of 1 Corinthians, we understand the issues present in that Church, which helps us to understand the teachings of Paul. So, understanding the culture of the first century gives us extraordinary help in understanding scripture. In this view, the context of the Gospels includes an assumed audience of every Christian in the 1st century. There was no Christian form to whom the Gospels did not have relevance.

The Gospels are written as a type of biography with the intention that people everywhere will be able to understand who Jesus was and what he did. This message did not lose relevance for its audience in the 1st century. Instead, the audience has only grown. So, when I come to the Gospels, I can understand their relevance and application because they are for me as well. While the immediate context of the Gospels was the 1st century, the authors of the Gospels intended their message to be copied and preached to every tribe, nation, and tongue until Christ returns.

These four books were meant for you to understand who Jesus is and what He has done. I hope this is encouraging to you, that you will be able to grow in knowledge of and relationship with Jesus because the Gospels are for you.



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