

**THREE SEARCHES FOR THE “HISTORICAL JESUS”
BUT NO BIBLICAL CHRIST (Part 2):
Evangelical Participation in the
Search for the “Historical Jesus”**

F. David Farnell, Ph.D.
Professor of New Testament
The Master’s Seminary

This is the second of a two-part series surveying the ongoing search for the “historical Jesus” that has been conducted the last 250 years. This article covers the growing, as well as alarming, evangelical participation in this quest. Central to the evangelical participation is the concept of postmodernist historiography where “probability” is the best that can be asserted about key Gospel events, while judgment about the historicity of other events in the Gospels must be suspended if they cannot be demonstrated through subjective application of criteria of authenticity. The number four (4) looms strategic in the difference between many evangelicals and liberals, for Part One of this series showed that while E. P. Sanders held to 8 events that may have probability in the Gospels, evangelical participants in the search hold to 12 key Gospel events that have “probability” of occurrence.

Introduction:

**Does the Evangelical Search for the “Historical Jesus” Demonstrate the
Modernist-Fundamentalist Battle of History Repeating Itself?**

A wise old saying has warned, “Those who do not learn from the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.” Does history repeat itself? Pondering this question is important for current evangelical Gospel discussions, especially in reference to modern Gospel research. In terms of searching for the “historical Jesus,” history has repeated itself at least two, if not three, times as catalogued in Part One. All three quests have failed to find Him and have been declared a failure.

The First Quest for the Historical Jesus (1778–1906)
Ended in Failure but Produced New Beginning

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the battle between liberals and fundamentalists had reached somewhat of a crescendo.¹ In response to the alarming inroads of perceived liberalism in the mainline denominations at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, conservatives in many places separated, and many started their own denominations and schools, especially in the United States. This separation occurred approximately concomitantly with the end of the First Search period's declaration of failure in the early part of the 1900s (see Part One). In Britain, during the late A.D. nineteenth century, "in a period of theological decline,"² Charles Spurgeon warned the Baptist Union regarding "New Theology" that was arising in its ranks. Eventually, Spurgeon withdrew from the Union and was censured by vote. This became known as the "Downgrade Controversy" where evolution and higher critical thought raged within his denominational group.³ History proved Spurgeon was correct, but no one listened to him at the time. He died a broken man in 1892.

R. A. Torrey and *The Fundamentals*

In 1909, A. C. Dixon, Louis Meyer, and others produced a work called *The Fundamentals*.⁴ Originally, this work consisted of a 12-volume set that set forth the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith and was sent without cost to over 300,000 ministers, missionaries and other workers throughout the world. It had been funded by Lyman and Milton Stewart who were involved with Union Oil, as well as being influential in the founding of Bible Institute of Los Angeles (founded in 1908). The work essentially was a firm reaction against the fundamentalist-modernist controversy that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. At its time, many Bible-believing conservatives considered it one of the finest apologetic stances for Scripture and against current liberalism of the day. *The Fundamentals* was one of the most widely distributed statements of Christian doctrine ever produced and was written to combat the inroads of liberalism that had spiritually deadened the mainline denominations. The work defended the deity of Christ, the full inspiration of Scripture, the bodily resurrection of Christ and

¹ For further information on this period see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture, The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1980).

² History proved Spurgeon's perceptions regarding encroaching liberalism were correct. David P. Kingdom, "C. H. Spurgeon and the Down Grade Controversy," in *The Good Fight of Faith*, 1971 Westminster Conference Papers (London: Westminster Chapel, 1971), 35.

³ Dennis Swanson, "The Down Grade Controversy and Evangelical Boundaries: Some Lessons from Spurgeon's Battle for Evangelical Orthodoxy," *Faith and Mission* 20, No. 2 (2003): 16–39.

⁴ R. A. Torrey, A. C. Dixon and others, *The Fundamentals, A Testimony to the Truth*. Reprinted without alteration or abridgment from the original, four-volume edition issued by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles in 1917. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972 [1917].

foundational truths of Scripture that had been historically held in the orthodox church. It constituted a strong apologetic against the history of higher criticism produced during this time and decried the atheistic philosophies that lay at the core of historical-critical ideologies.

Modernists during this time had refused to give voice to anything approaching the trustworthiness of Scripture. Conservatives were isolated and shunned within mainline denominations. From May 25 to June 1, 1919, six thousand gathered in Philadelphia for “The World Conference on Christian Fundamentals,” in reaction to this denominational liberalism, comparing the conference’s importance to Luther’s nailing of the 95 Theses on the door at Wittenberg.⁵ The 1925 Scopes trial regarding evolution also marked a watershed issue for fundamentalists during this period.⁶ Fundamentalists refused participation in the First Search, for they realized its *a priori destructive* presuppositional foundations and its intent of the destruction of the influence of the Gospels and Christianity.

The Separation of the Faithful from the Modernists

In subsequent years across America, scores of Bible schools and seminaries were launched by fundamentalists. One need mention only a select few. Moody Bible Institute was founded in 1886 by evangelist Dwight L. Moody. In 1907 Lyman Stewart funded the production of *The Fundamentals* heralding the founding of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. By 1912, Torrey, coming from Moody Bible Institute, became Dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles as well as assuming editorial leadership in publishing *The Fundamentals* as a four-volume work in 1917. The warning of J. Gresham Machen that “as go the theological seminaries, so goes the church” struck deep at the heart of Bible-believing scholars everywhere: “many seminaries today *are* nurseries of unbelief; and because they are nurseries of unbelief the churches that they serve have become unbelieving churches too. As go the theological seminaries, so goes the church.”⁷ In 1929, Machen was influential in founding Westminster Theological Seminary as a result of Princeton’s direction.⁸ Dallas Theological Seminary was founded in 1924.⁹ Fuller Theological Seminary

⁵ William Riley, a leader of this movement, commented “The importance of this occasion exceeds the understanding of its originators. The future will look back to the World Conference on Christian Fundamentals, held in Philadelphia, May 25, to June 1, 1919, as an event of more historical moment than the nailing up, at Wittenberg, of Martin Luther’s ninety-five theses.” William B. Riley, “The Great Divide, or Christ and the Present Crisis,” in *God Hath Spoken* (Philadelphia: Bible Conference Committee, 1919), 27.

⁶ See George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 36–37.

⁷ J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1965 [1936]), 65.

⁸ For a revealing look at Machen’s struggle, see J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946); *The Virgin Birth of Christ*. Second Edition (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1932); *What is Faith?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946).

⁹ For a recent recounting of the history of Dallas Theological Seminary, see John D. Hannah, *An Uncommon Union: Dallas Theological Seminary and American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

was established in 1947 by a Biola graduate, Charles E. Fuller, and Harold Ockenga.

The Second Quest (1953–1988?)

This minimalistic, negative state of affairs regarding historical Jesus studies was not substantially changed by the inauguration of the “New” or “Second” Quest (1953–1988). During this time, evangelicals continued to establish more Bible colleges and seminaries. In 1952 Talbot Theological Seminary was started as a graduate training-arm of Biola.¹⁰ In 1949, the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) was formed. In 1958, Charles Feinberg republished *The Fundamentals* in the 1958 Biola *Year of Jubilee* (50 years after its founding) to reaffirm its historical positions against the encroachment of modernism as well as historical criticism. This is admittedly a selective history, but it is significant to mention a few of the many events that happened as a result of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy and its questing for Jesus.

Lessons Soon Forgotten

After this strategic withdrawal by fundamentalists of the first generation who fought the battle to preserve Scripture from the onslaught of historical criticism as well as its subsequent searching for the historical Jesus, subsequent generations from fundamentalist groups grew discontent with isolation from mainstream biblical scholarship that was dominated by liberals. By the mid-1960s, prominent voices were scolding fundamentalists for continued isolation. Dialogue and interaction once again became the rallying cry. Carl F. H. Henry’s criticisms struck deep: “The preoccupation of fundamentalists with the errors of modernism, and neglect of schematic presentations of the evangelical alternative, probably gave neo-orthodoxy its great opportunity in the Anglo-Saxon world If Evangelicals do not overcome their preoccupation with negative criticism of contemporary theological deviations at the expense of the construction of preferable alternatives to these, they will not be much of a doctrinal force in the decade ahead.”¹¹

Echoing similar statements, George Eldon Ladd of Fuller Theological Seminary became a zealous champion of modern historical-critical methods, arguing that historical critical methods like the two-source hypothesis should be accepted “as a literary fact” and that form criticism “has thrown considerable light on the nature of the Gospels and the traditions they employ” adding, “Evangelical scholars should be willing to accept this light.”¹² Indeed, for Ladd, historical-critical methods have derived great benefit for evangelicals:

¹⁰ See Charles Feinberg, *The Fundamentals for Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1958).

¹¹ Carl F. H. Henry, *Jesus of Nazareth, Savior and Lord* (London: Tyndale, 1970), 9.

¹² George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 141, 168–69.

[I]t has shed great light on the historical side of the Bible; and these historical discoveries are valid for all Bible students even though the presuppositions of the historical-critical method have been often hostile to an evangelical view of the Bible. Contemporary evangelicals often overlook this important fact when they condemn the critical method as such; for even while they condemn historical criticism, they are constantly reaping the benefits of its discoveries and employing critical tools.¹³

Ladd asserts, “One must not forget that . . . everyday tools of good Bible study are the product of the historical-critical method.”¹⁴ George Ladd catalogued the trend of a “substantial group of scholars” whose background was in the camp of “fundamentalism” who had now been trained “in Europe as well as in our best universities,” who were “deeply concerned with serious scholarship.”¹⁵ He chided fundamentalists also for their “major preoccupation” with defending “inerrancy of the Bible in its most extreme form,” but contributing “little of creative thinking to the current debate.”¹⁶ Although Ladd acknowledged that historical-critical ideology was deeply indebted for its operation in the Enlightenment and that German scholarship who created it openly admitted that its intention was designed for “dissolving orthodoxy’s identification of the Gospel with Scripture,”¹⁷ instead, Ladd sent many of his students for subsequent study in Britain and Europe to enlarge the influence of conservatives, the latter of which influence was greatly responsible for the fundamentalists split at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁸

Today, Ladd serves as the recognized paradigm for current attitudes and approaches among evangelical historical-critical scholarship in encouraging evangelical education in British and Continental education as well as the adoption and participation in historical criticism to some form or degree, which actions previously were greatly responsible for the fundamentalist/modernist split.¹⁹

¹³ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴ Ladd offers two examples: Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and Arndt, Gingrich, Baur and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Ladd, *New Testament and Criticism*, 11.

¹⁵ George E. Ladd, “The Search for Perspective,” *Interpretation* XXV (1971), 47.

¹⁶ Ladd, “The Search for Perspective,” 47. In a hotly debated book, Harold Lindsell in the mid-1970s detailed the problems facing Fuller, the Southern Baptist Convention and other Christian institutions due to the encroachment of historical criticism from European influence. See Harold Lindsell, “The Strange Case of Fuller Theological Seminary,” *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 106–21. Marsden’s book also covers this period in *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

¹⁷ Ladd, “The Search for Perspective,” 49; cp. Ladd’s citing of this admission by Ernst Käsemann may be found in the latter’s, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964), 54–62.

¹⁸ An example of one of Ladd’s students is the late Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount, A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 23 promoted an exegesis “that . . . makes use of the literary critical tools including text, source, form, tradition, redaction, and structural criticism” and goes on to assert “for many to whom the Scriptures are vital the use of these critical tools has historically been more ‘destructive’ than ‘constructive.’ But one need not discard the tool because of its abuse.”

¹⁹ Mark Noll conducted a personal poll/survey among evangelicals and has, as a result, described Ladd as “the most widely influential figure on the current generation of evangelical Bible scholars.” Ladd was “most influential” among scholars in the Institute for Biblical Research and was

Lessons from what caused the last theological meltdown were long forgotten or carelessly disregarded.²⁰

The Evangelical Participation in the Search for the Historical Jesus

The End of the Twentieth and Beginning of the Twenty-first Century

Now, flash forward to the latter third of the twentieth century and beginning the twenty-first.²¹ Another historical-critical crisis may well have been brewing in the fundamentalist camp, now also known as the evangelical camp, that reveals a widening cleavage among its members due to the growing evangelical participation in the third quest.²² In 1979, Jack Rogers and Donald McKim produced, *The Authority and the Interpretation of the Bible, An Historical Approach* that challenged current views among some evangelicals concerning concepts of inerrancy and biblical interpretation.²³ John Woodbridge's *Biblical Authority, A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* issued an effective critique of their proposal.²⁴ In 1976, Harold Lindsell produced his now famous *The Battle for the Bible* that greatly disturbed parts of the evangelical world that had been founded at the turn of the twentieth century. Lindsell, part of the founding members at Fuller Seminary, traced what he felt were troubling events at Fuller and other evangelical seminaries and denominations regarding the "watershed" issue of inerrancy.²⁵ Lindsell's negative historical take on problems received counter-balancing by

placed just behind John Calvin as "most influential" among scholars in the Evangelical Theological Society. See Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*. Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 97, 101, 112–114 [note especially p. 112 for this quote], 116, 121, 159–63, 211–26. Moreover, Marsden described Noll's book as making "a major contribution toward understanding twentieth-century evangelical scholarship." See George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 250 n9. Since Noll marked out Ladd as the outstanding figure influencing the recent paradigm-shift in twentieth-century evangelical scholarship toward favoring historical-critical methods, and since Marsden promotes Noll's book as making "a major contribution toward understanding twentieth-century evangelical scholarship," this paper uses Ladd as the outstanding paradigmatic example, as well as typical representative, of this drift among evangelicals toward historical-critical ideologies that favor literary dependency hypotheses.

²⁰ For further historical details, see F. David Farnell, "The Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism," in *The Jesus Crisis, The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 85–131.

²¹ For an excellent review of evangelicals problems at the end of the A.D. twentieth century, especially in England, see Ian Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000).

²² See, for example, John H. Armstrong, gen. ed., *The Coming Evangelical Crisis* (Chicago: Moody, 1996).

²³ Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979). Rogers and McKim relied heavily upon the work of Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism British and American Millenarianism 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970).

²⁴ John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

²⁵ Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*.

Marsden’s *Reforming Fundamentalism*, produced in 1987.²⁶ By 1978, conservative evangelicals felt the need to produce *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, and in 1982 produced another on *Hermeneutics* to reaffirm their historical positions in these areas as a result of Rogers’ and McKim’s work.²⁷ In 1982, Robert Gundry was removed from membership of ETS due to his involvement in alleged dehistoricizing of Matthew reflected in his commentary, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*.²⁸

In 1982, Alan Johnson, in his presidential address to ETS through analogy, asked whether higher criticism was “Egyptian gold or pagan precipice” and reached the conclusion that “the refinement of critical methodologies under the magisterium of an inerrant scriptural authority can move us gently into a deeper appreciation of sacred Scripture.”²⁹ At another ETS meeting in Santa Clara, California in 1997, Moisés Silva, in his presidential address, chided conservative scholarship for their lack of openness to methods of modern critical methods in an address entitled, “Can Two Walk Together Unless They Be Agreed? Evangelical Theology and Biblical Scholarship.”³⁰

The next year, in 1998, Norman Geisler, taking the opposite tone, warned evangelicals regarding the negative presuppositions of historical-critical ideologies in his “Beware of Philosophy.” In his address, Geisler featured a 1998 work entitled, *The Jesus Crisis*, that detailed growing evangelical involvement in historical-critical ideologies like questing. To say the least, Geisler’s address, as well as *The Jesus Crisis*, created a hornet’s nest of controversy. While some praised it as needing to be written,³¹ other evangelicals disdained the work as strident, fundamentalistic rhetoric that was closed-minded to a judicious use of historical criticism.³² In a highly irregular move for the Evangelical Theological Society, Grant Osborne was given an opportunity in the next issue of *JETS* to counter Geisler’s presidential address, wherein Geisler’s address was criticized as well as *The Jesus Crisis* saying, “the tone is too harsh and grating, the positions too extreme.”³³ In 2002, Geisler, a world-renown Christian apologist and long-time

²⁶ George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 [1987]).

²⁷ “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” *JETS* 21, No. 4 (December 1978): 289–96 and “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics,” *JETS* 25, No. 4 (December 1982): 397–401.

²⁸ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

²⁹ Alan F. Johnson, “Historical-Critical Method: Egyptian Gold or Pagan Precipice,” *JETS* 26, No. 1 (March 1983): 3–15. See also, Carl F. H. Henry, “The Uses and Abuses of Historical Criticism,” vol. IV: *God Who Speaks and Shows*, in *God Revelation and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1979), 385–404.

³⁰ Moisés Silva, “Can Two Walk Together Unless They Be Agreed? Evangelical Theology and Biblical Scholarship,” *JETS* 41, No. 1 (March 1998): 3–16.

³¹ See the back cover page of the work where some called it “a blockbuster” and “the best up-to-date analysis in print of the dangerous drift of evangelical scholarship into negative higher criticism.” Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, *The Jesus Crisis*.

³² Osborne’s article constitutes a criticism of not only Geisler but *The Jesus Crisis*, Grant Osborne, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical,” *JETS* 42, No. 2 (June 1999): 193–210.

³³ *Ibid.*, 209.

member of ETS, cited the Society's acceptance of open theists among the ETS group and withdrew as a member.

Interestingly, Craig Blomberg blames books like Harold Lindsell's *Battle For the Bible* (1976) and such a book as *The Jesus Crisis* for people leaving the faith because of their strong stance on inerrancy as a presupposition. In an interview in 2008 conducted by Justin Taylor, Blomberg responded this way to books that hold to a firm view on inerrancy. The interviewer asked, "Are there certain mistaken hermeneutical presuppositions made by conservative evangelicals that play into the hands of liberal critics?" Blomberg replied:

Absolutely. And one of them follows directly from the last part of my answer to your last question. The approach, famously supported back in 1976 by Harold Lindsell in his *Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan), that it is an all-or-nothing approach to Scripture that we must hold, is both profoundly mistaken and deeply dangerous. No historian worth his or her salt functions that way. I personally believe that if inerrancy means "without error according to what most people in a given culture would have called an error" then the biblical books are inerrant in view of the standards of the cultures in which they were written. But, despite inerrancy being the touchstone of the largely American organization called the Evangelical Theological Society, there are countless evangelicals in the States and especially in other parts of the world who hold that the Scriptures are inspired and authoritative, even if not inerrant, and they are not sliding down any slippery slope of any kind. I can't help but wonder if inerrantist evangelicals making inerrancy the watershed for so much has not, unintentionally, contributed to pilgrimages like Ehrman's. Once someone finds one apparent mistake or contradiction that they cannot resolve, then they believe the Lindsells of the world and figure they have to chuck it all. What a tragedy!³⁴

To Blomberg, anyone who advocates inerrancy as traditionally advocated by fundamentalists is responsible for people leaving the faith.

Evangelical Questing Begins

What distinguishes the Third Quest from the other two questing periods is the rapidly growing evangelical participation in it, rather than rejection as happened in the first two. These evangelicals have largely been stimulated by their participation in the Society of Biblical Literature as well as 1980s renewed interest in historical Jesus studies that was led by Robert Funk of the Westar Institute, resulting in the latter's work entitled, *The Five Gospels, The Search for the Authentic Words of*

³⁴ See <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2008/03/26/interview-with-craig-blomberg/>. (Accessed July 19, 2012).

Jesus that demonstrated atomistic voting on the historicity of Jesus’ sayings in the four canonical Gospels as well as the Gospel of Thomas.³⁵

However, with the perceived shift from a minimum to a *modicum* of historicity in the Gospels—a shift in the burden of proof—as well as a perceived openness to the miraculous among some Third Questers, some evangelicals now desired to participate. While protesting the charges in Geisler’s presidential speech as well as *The Jesus Crisis* (1998), soon afterwards a significant number of evangelicals joined the effort. One young evangelical wrote, “this Third Quest for the historical Jesus . . . provides the greatest possible hope for a more sympathetic reading of the gospels as historical sources and is likely to provide a reasonable answer as to why the church began, and why it believed what it did and acted how it did.”³⁶ Craig Evans wrote about the Third Search that “the miracle stories are now treated seriously and are widely accepted by Jesus scholars as deriving from Jesus’ ministry” and “myth has ceased to be an item of importance . . . the miracle tradition is no longer the stumbling block that it once was.”³⁷ In 2004, Evans edited *The Historical Jesus: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, as well as the *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus* (2008) wherein many evangelicals participated.³⁸ No exaggeration exists to say that a plethora of books by evangelicals, to some degree or another favorable to questing, have been produced in the last decade of the twentieth and first decade of the twenty-first century.

As of 2010, however, Scot McKnight, in *Christianity Today*, made public that he had withdrawn from participation in the Third Search as an evangelical, citing that “historical method cannot prove . . . that Jesus died for our sins and was raised for our justification” and that scholarly attempts at discovering the “‘real’ Jesus have failed,” with the attempts resulting in “making Jesus in their own [historical Jesus scholars’] image.”³⁹

Other evangelicals have reacted strongly to McKnight’s withdrawal. British evangelical N. T. Wright, in the same edition of *CT*, reacted negatively to McKnight’s declared failure to the Third Search. Wright declared that “[n]ot all historical Jesus scholarship is skeptical in intent or effect.” He also attacks “shallow would-be ‘orthodox’ Christians, who misreading the texts, marginalize Jesus’ first-

³⁵ Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels, The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 5. A debate has raged among evangelicals as to where the Jesus Seminar relates to the Third Quest. Some place it as part of the Third Quest, while others, like N. T. Wright assign it to the period of the New or Second Quest. See Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Philadelphia: Minneapolis, 1992) 98–120.

³⁶ Michael Bird, “Shouldn’t Evangelicals Participate in the ‘Third Quest for the Historical Jesus?’,” *Them* 29, No. 2 (1994): 8.

³⁷ Craig Evans, “Life of Jesus-Research and the Eclipse of Mythology,” *Theological Studies* 54/1 (March 1993): 19, 36.

³⁸ Craig Evans, ed. *The Historical Jesus: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, 4 volumes (New York and London: Routledge, 2004); *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008).

³⁹ Scot McKnight, “The Jesus We’ll Never Know, Why scholarly attempts to discover the ‘real’ Jesus have failed. And why that is a good thing.” *Christianity Today* (April 13, 2010), 26, 23.

century Jewish humanity.”⁴⁰ Evangelical Craig Keener also reacts negatively, encouraging evangelicals “to stay in the conversation” and that “historical Jesus studies remain valuable.”⁴¹ Again, in the same *CT* article, evangelical Darrell Bock also argues for the importance of historical Jesus research, asserting “historical Jesus work matters, and it matters a lot.” He argues that “History at best is reconstructive work, based in probability and working in a discipline that is severely limited by what it can deliver.” Bock admits that: “Yes, we cannot ‘prove’ it all, but we can make a compelling case for much of it, even key parts of it. When a compelling case is made, and when the burden of proof is high, that is impressive.” He continues, “historical Jesus studies give us a context for Jesus’ actions and help us understand the sources,” and that it is good because “This discussion is happening in the public square.” He insists that historical Jesus studies push “people to appreciate that if even the gist of the gospel story is right, then they must think through who Jesus is” and the Gospels convey “the footprints God leaves behind when we appreciate the context in which he acted.”⁴² For Bock, Gospel study has, at best, “burden of proof,” “probability” and “gist” in historical demonstration of the Gospels.

Bock has also declared that one of his works, *Studying the Historical Jesus*, on the Gospels “belongs to the third quest” even though he admits that the Third Quest is not “fundamentally conservative.”⁴³ He sees the “strength” of the Third Quest in the following terms, “the strength of the so-called third quest, whether or not it is really a third quest, is its starting point in the very milieu in which Jesus lived and spoke So there is value in seeing what can be shown historically to be likely in understanding Jesus and his relationship to his Second Temple Jewish context, as long as one keeps in mind that the Jesus of Scripture is a Jesus remembered.”⁴⁴ In 2009, in a very recent book on the Third Quest, Bock wrote:

Can the lion and the lamb lay down together? For many people, the idea of an evangelical engaging in a historical Jesus discussion is oxymoronic. For many critics, the evangelical view of Scripture is said to skew evangelicals’ discussion of Jesus issues So can there be evangelical approaches to the historical Jesus?

I believe the answer is yes. To get there, however, one must appreciate the nature of what historical Jesus work seeks to achieve as well as the limitations

⁴⁰ N. T. Wright, “No, We Need History,” in “Should We Abandon Studying the Historical Jesus? Two Responses.” *Christianity Today* (April 13, 2010), 28.

⁴¹ Craig Keener, “No, We Need to Stay in the Conversation,” in “Should We Abandon Studying the Historical Jesus? Two Responses.” *Christianity Today* (April 13, 2010), 27.

⁴² Darrell Bock, “Abandon Studying the Historical Jesus? No, We Need Context: A Response to ‘The Jesus We’ll Never Know,’” <http://www.ChristianityToday.com/ct/2010aprilweb-only/24-51.0.html>. Posted April 4, 2010 in *Christianity Today* April (Web-only) 2010. (Accessed November 12, 2011).

⁴³ Darrell L. Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 148, 152.

⁴⁴ Darrell L. Bock, “The Historical Jesus, An Evangelical View,” in *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 250–51.

under which such a historically oriented study operates when it seeks to cross thousands of years to do its work.⁴⁵

Some evangelicals also display some interesting parallels with their more liberal counterparts in their questing for Jesus. Similar to Sanders’ list of Gospel events that are considered historically certain, the evangelical Institute for Biblical Research Jesus Group identifies 12 events having probability of occurrence, while, as has been cited previously, E. P. Sanders identified 8 (see Part 1):

The IBR Jesus Group has been meeting annually since 1999 to consider twelve key events in Jesus’ life for which the group thought it could show core authenticity and the combination of which made a case for what Jesus’ mission was about. The project also has introductory and concluding essays that were discussed . . . The twelve events and the authors: John the Baptist and Jesus (Robert Webb), Choosing the Twelve (Scot McKnight), Exorcisms and Jesus’ Kingdom Teaching (Craig Evans), Sabbath Healings (Donald Hagner), Jesus’ Table Fellowship with Sinners (Craig Blomberg), Peter’s Declaration at Caesarea Philippi (Michael Wilkins), Entry into Jerusalem (Brent Kinman), The Temple Act (Klyne Snodgrass), The Last Supper (Howard Marshall), Jesus’ Examination by the Jewish Leadership (Darrell Bock), Jesus before Pilate and Crucifixion (Robert Webb), and Resurrection (Grant Osborne). [Bob did the introductory essay, and I have the conclusion].⁴⁶

At this point, one is left wondering about the implications of their positions on “core authenticity” as well as the historiographical “probability, “possibility,” “footprints” not only of the 12 Key Events but also of many other events in the Gospels not on their list.

Although the IBR Jesus Group distances itself from the Jesus Seminar’s voting on sayings of Jesus, they have developed their own scheme of certainty, probability, etc. on their evaluation of events in Jesus’ life, noting:

Jesus Group does not vote on the specific sayings or events from the life of Jesus. Rather, each event is assessed as a complete unit. It is examined to determine the evidence for the event in question, as well as the elements that make up this event. Then, given these results, the examiner develops the event’s significance for understanding Jesus’ life and ministry. Sometimes ratings assessing the possibility or probability of an event or a detail within it are used as a way of expressing what can be demonstrated historically. In other cases, alternative configurations of the sequencing of events are assessed. Judgments like these belong to the author of the article, not

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁴⁶ Darrell L. Bock, “IBR Jesus Group Report, IBR News” (December 8, 2008). http://www.ibr-bbr.org/IBRNews/IBRJesusGroup_12_08.htm.

necessarily to the entire group, but they are made after interaction with the group.⁴⁷

Thus, in terms of Jesus' baptism, one evangelical writer asserts, "The historicity of Jesus' baptism by John is virtually certain. The historicity of the theophany (the Spirit's descent and divine voice) is probable, but its timing as contemporaneous with the baptism is open to question. As a prophetic call-vision, the theophany quite possibly happened at a later time."⁴⁸ In *Key Events*, Webb updates his conclusions as follows:

My own judgment is that it is *probable* that Jesus did at some time experience a prophetic call-vision, and it is *somewhat probable* that it incorporated the elements of divine sonship and spirit anointing. It is *possible* that such a call-vision may have taken place at Jesus' baptism, but there are also problems with their association. It is equally possible that it occurred at some point in time subsequent to the baptism and again the theophany narrative is somewhat problematic . . . rendering such a temporal placement only a possibility.⁴⁹

He makes this assertion especially in his comparison of the Synoptics (Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:15–22) with John 1:32, where in John's Gospel John and Jesus meet and John relates that he saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and remaining on Him.

Webb's comments regarding the "possibility" of a disjuncture between Jesus' baptism and His commission/call, however, are highly unlikely and cast a completely unnecessary pale of doubt regarding Gospel writers as careful historians. One does not at all have to imagine that the Gospels, especially the Synoptics, played so loose with history in their records as Webb would lead his reader to suppose is a distinct possibility. All three Synoptics place the prophetic vision in clear language right after time of Jesus' baptism. The Synoptic language, with its use of εὐθὺς ("immediately"—Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10) would not seem to allow for such loose language to imagine separating Jesus' baptism from His call. Plus, John's statement that he "did not recognize Him" twice (John 1:31 and 1:33) would give the strong implication that John had baptized Jesus earlier, as indicated in the Synoptics, but that John did not recognize the full implications of who Jesus was at that time, i.e. John did not immediately know, at Jesus' baptism earlier, that he was the Coming One. John the Baptist's testimony in John the Apostle's Gospel (John 1:29–34) about Jesus is viewed most naturally subsequent to the Synoptic event, with John gaining full understanding about Jesus some time after Jesus' baptism by John. This does not mean that John did not know Jesus at all, but that John's full recognition came after Jesus' baptism, so that John's Gospel reveals the

⁴⁷ Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb, "Introduction of the IBR Jesus Group" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10.2 (2000), 259–60.

⁴⁸ Robert L. Webb, "Jesus' Baptism: Its Historicity and Implications," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10.2 (2000) 261–309 (361).

⁴⁹ Webb, "Jesus' Baptism by John: Its Historicity and Significance," in *Key Events*, 112.

aftermath. Such a conclusion is also enforced by the *τεθέαμαι* that would imply a settled conviction following Jesus’ baptism. Furthermore, while Jesus Himself witnessed the descent of the Spirit and the Father’s declaration in the Synoptics, John testifies to his own vision of the Spirit’s descent as a confirming witness to John, separate from the previous events in the Synoptics.⁵⁰

Evangelicals Embrace Aberrant and Unorthodox Concepts of Historical Criticism

What immediately becomes apparent in this evangelical participation in “questing” is that many evangelicals are now embracing concepts that have deep roots in unorthodoxy and atheism. That which is truly aberrant is now normalized or standardized as acceptable to evangelical scholarship in their efforts to sanitize its negative underpinnings. As demonstrated in Part 1 of this series, the term “historical Jesus” is historically, presuppositionally, and in practice a technical term that sharply distinguishes between the Jesus who is presented in the Gospels with how He is theorized to have actually existed in history. Ladd well-recognized this cleavage when he wrote regarding the term “historical Jesus”: “This is a technical term which is easily misunderstood and misinterpreted, even by New Testament scholars. It does *not* mean the Jesus who lived in history, Jesus as he actually was. It means rather the Jesus who is reconstructed by the historical-critical method—a Jesus who is altogether and only human—a Jesus without transcendence.”⁵¹ James Robinson also understood the implications of this term when he notes, “The clear implication is that the term signifies ‘Jesus of Nazareth as he actually was’ may be considerably more than or quite different from ‘the historical Jesus.’”⁵² Evangelicals are now attempting to wrest this term away from its normative sense and apply an abnormal meaning to it. In doing so, they also attempt to turn an aberrant, unorthodox term into something that they willingly embrace. They also cast doubt upon the Gospels’ record of Jesus’ life, placing those canonical records as somehow contrary to what actually happened in history.

Perhaps some of these evangelicals think that their recent dialogue and participation in the Third Search has now sanitized the term from its roots; after all, has not 250 years of discussion of the historical Jesus caused changes in ideology—they might reason. An examination of the Third Search has revealed that no substantial differences in ideology have changed, except that some now allow arbitrarily for a modicum, rather than minimum, of historical accuracy in the Gospels. No amount of evangelical dialogue has successfully sanitized historical criticism from its presupposition’s roots and ideology. For evangelicals to think otherwise is to rationalize the facts to justify their participation. The net result is that evangelicals are now creating a fifth Gospel that is different from the canonical Gospels in that these evangelicals separate parts of the Gospels as demonstrably

⁵⁰ See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (InterVarsity and Eerdmans: Leicester and Grand Rapids, 1991), 151.

⁵¹ Ladd, “The Search for Perspective,” 50.

⁵² James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1959), 26.

more historically probable than other parts. McKnight has now withdrawn from such studies for this very reason, admitting openly “a fundamental observation about all genuine historical Jesus studies: *Historical Jesus scholars construct what is in effect a fifth Gospel*.⁵³ The reconstructed Jesus is not identical to the canonical Jesus or the orthodox Jesus. He is the reconstructed Jesus, which means He is a ‘new’ Jesus.”⁵⁴ It makes the “authentic Jesus” different from the Jesus in the Gospels as well as creates shades of gray as to what can be trusted as historically verifiable in those four canonical documents. While evangelicals who participate in the questing attempt to separate themselves sharply from the Jesus Seminar and its voting on Jesus’ sayings, their approach results practically in a similar scheme of what may be affirmed and what may not be confirmed in the Gospel records.

12 Key Events Based in Probability of Occurrence According to an Evangelical Adoption of Post-Modernist Historiography

At the end of the twentieth century (ca. 1999), the Institute for Biblical Research began a series of meetings “that spanned more than a decade from start to finish” resulting in the publication of *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus, A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (2009).⁵⁵ At the time of the writing of this journal article, this work constituted one of the latest, and most significant, evangelical attempts at the Third Quest. The editors discussed this meeting over the decade in the following terms as they dialogued on historical Jesus research among a diverse group of evangelicals:

[T]he meetings of the IBR Jesus Group have been a pleasure from start to finish. Our participants came from three continents, and though separated by geographical distance, close relationships have been built, and friendships have been deepened as a result of our annual meetings. Our meetings were marked by lively conversations about Jesus, Second Temple Judaism and historical method. But these times also included wonderful snacks as we worked (M&Ms, cake, cookies, and chips) as well as marvelous evening meals out to close our meetings. The closing meal each year became a traditional adjournment of our time together. Nothing quite equals a Brazilian steak house to a bunch of hungry scholars!⁵⁶

⁵³ In a very similar way, Ernest Rénan posited a “fifth gospel” by adding to the canonical Gospels his own subjective experience of visiting the Holy Land. See Ernest Rénan, *The Life of Jesus* (London: A. L. Burt, 1863), 61.

⁵⁴ McKnight, “The Jesus We’ll Never Know,” 25.

⁵⁵ Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb, eds. “Preface,” in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus, A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). This book is now in simplified form to influence a larger audience, see Darrell L. Bock, *Who is Jesus?, Linking the Historical Jesus to the Christ of Faith* (New York: Howard Books, 2012).

⁵⁶ Bock and Webb, “Preface,” in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus*, v.

One is immediately impressed by this statement as an oddly casual comment as these evangelical scholars met to decide the future of evangelical conceptions of the Gospels as well as Jesus in history.

Bock’s and Webb’s IBR group chose 12 events that they considered strategic in this work, relating that the group made the decision “to focus our attention on exploring key events and activities in the life of Jesus which met two criteria: a strong case could be made for a judgment of high probability that the core event was historical, and that it was likely significant for understanding Jesus.”⁵⁷ They continue,

The goal was to see the extent to which a study of key events might provide an overall framework for understanding Jesus. Once these key events had been selected, each essay was to do three things: first, it was to set forth a case for the probable historicity of the event using the criteria of authenticity. The focus was to, first, establish the probable historicity of the event’s core rather than concerning itself with all of the details. Second, explore the socio-cultural contextual information that contributes to understanding the event in its first-century context. Third, in light of this context, to consider the significance of the event for understanding Jesus. Thus, each study would have both macro and micro concerns, being both analytic and synthetic.⁵⁸

The term “probability” or even “high probability” as a label to apply to the historicity of these events also strikes one as an odd term to apply to Gospel events by evangelicals, for it immediately implies a relative degree of doubt concerning the event. That is, it casts a pale of uncertainty over the Gospel materials. To assert that an event probably happened or even had a high probability also opens the possibility for the event not to have taken place or at least not to have taken place as described. To assert that the “core” of the Gospels is reliable in probability opens up the issue that other elements apart from the core may not be reliable.

Bock and Webb go on to issue a caveat, “[I]n a very real sense this work reflects the input of the group. The collaborative learning experience was very stimulating. Each author, however, remains alone responsible for the views expressed in their particular essay. In other words, the author of each essay had the final call on its contents,” but also assert that “Among the team there are differences in particulars, but *in general the synthesis set forth is one the team* [italics added] embraces as providing the most coherent understanding of what Jesus did as a historic figure.”⁵⁹

Bock and Webb note, significantly, that Robert Webb’s article on history, historiography, and historical method [“The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research”] is important for it “opens the book *to set the direction of what we sought to do and the issues we consistently faced throughout our meetings* [italics

⁵⁷ Bock and Webb, “Introduction to Key Events and Actions in the Life of the Historical Jesus,” in *Key Events*, 4.

⁵⁸ Bock and Webb, “Introduction,” *Key Events*, 5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

added]. It reflects discussions that regularly came up as individual events were considered and assessed. In other words, this essay was written at the end of our process; it was not written as a guideline at the beginning of it.”⁶⁰ They continue,

We write for an audience interested in historical Jesus study . . . Such a study concentrates on what it thinks can be demonstrated in a corroborative manner about Jesus. All sources are available for consideration and each is sifted critically. By working with the criteria, our goal was to work with a method that is generally used in such study. We are quite aware that such methods have been subject to important critiques from all sides of the debate, but in many ways these are the best means we have to engage in such a sifting process. *Webb's essay summarizes the criteria we used and how we intended to see their importance after we completed our study. It also places the criteria within a larger framework of broad historical method.*”⁶¹

The introduction concludes by acknowledging “the importance of recognizing, taking into account, and making one’s horizon, including one’s biases and preunderstanding,” noting that this IBR Jesus Group has as its vision “to foster excellence in biblical studies, doing so within a faith commitment. Thus each of us has a commitment to the Christian faith. While some of us would call ourselves ‘evangelical Christians,’ others might prefer ‘biblically orthodox Christian.’”⁶² The often repeated use of the term “probable” or “probability” of Gospel events in this introduction also struck the present writer of this two-part series with unease as to the possible widespread implications of the term for evangelicals today.

Questing Evangelicals Embrace a Post-Modernistic View of Biblical History: Certainty Is Out, Probability Is In

Since Webb’s article plays such an important role in fostering their approach to Jesus studies in the work, one must examine its assertions. The article is complex, but an examination of it reveals how history is now being theorized and approached by many evangelicals. Webb’s article follows immediately after the introduction to the work and constitutes Chapter 2, “The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research.”⁶³ One notices immediately that Webb attempts to issue a counter to Bock’s and Webb’s Introduction’s focus on the importance of his essay, asserting that his discussions “represent my [Webb’s] view on the subject, and they do not necessarily represent all members of the project . . . I remain solely responsible for its contents . . . this chapter was written at the conclusion of this project . . . but it never functioned as the guide that preceded the project.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6. emphases added.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 6–7.

⁶³ Robert L. Webb, “The Historical Jesus and Historical Jesus Research,” in *Key Events*, 9–93.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

Webb’s statement, however, is immediately reduced in its attempt to distance his assertions from others participating in the work when one observes that the volume presents no substantial counter to his view of the philosophy of history and historiography. His essay also received prominence as setting the stage after the Introduction and prior to any discussion or evaluation of the “historicity” of the key events chosen by the participants. The very nature of choosing 12 key events that the group as a whole felt could be demonstrated as historically “probable” also affirms this chapter as the underlying thinking of the project. It also subtly reveals that the editors of the work should realize the implications of its impact on the Gospel material.

For Webb, the distinctions between concepts of the “Jesus of history” and the “Christ of faith” are “not to be preferred over the other” for both “are equally legitimate subjects of inquiry” that use “different means to provide answers to different questions.”⁶⁵ The logical result of his assertion here is to legitimize fully possible distinctions of a sharp cleavage between Jesus as He is presented in the Gospel accounts with scholarly speculations of how He might have “actually” existed in history. This distinction of Webb also smacks of the German theological distinction between *historie* (actual history) and faith interpretation (*geschichte*).

He next provides “the foundation for the historical enterprise” in questing by defining history, historiography and historical method. In Webb’s view, history is not what happened in the past, since “we do not have *direct* access to these past events What survives might be a written document or some form of inscription alluding to the event.” Instead, what remains, according to Webb are “traces” that have survived.⁶⁶ He adopts Elton’s view of postmodernistic history that “historical study is not the study of the past but the study of present traces of the past.”⁶⁷ The term “traces” is used because “in most cases (if not all) these are only partial and fragmentary, but they are all we have to provide access to the past event. Thus, rather than having direct access to past events, all we really can access today is the surviving traces from the past.”⁶⁸ The practical impact is “in actuality what one really ‘knows’ [about what happened] is based on the surviving traces Thus, while in popular parlance the term ‘history’ may be used to refer to past events, this usage is problematic and may ultimately be misleading.”⁶⁹ He continues:

Surviving traces (i.e., ST) are the material used by the historian. Usually this material consists of written records of past events as reported and recorded by those closely (or not so closely) involved in the events. These written accounts may be based upon oral traditions that have been collected later or an account derived from eyewitnesses of the events. It may even be written by an eyewitness or, to the other extreme, it may be written by someone who has no

⁶⁵ Webb, “The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research,” 10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11, 13.

⁶⁷ Geoffrey R. Elton, *The Practice of History*. 2nd edition. Reprint. Afterward by Richard J. Evans, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1967), 8. See 13 Webb’s article footnote 8 and footnote 11.

⁶⁸ Webb, “The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research,” 13–14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

real knowledge of the events but has an idea what could have, or should have, happened. Whatever is the case, surviving traces involve the perspectives and interests of the eyewitnesses, the perspectives and traces of those who passed on the traditions, and the perspectives and interests of the person who wrote the account So surviving traces (ST) are hardly “raw” or “objective” data. The nature of those surviving traces is such that they require the later historian to develop a historical method . . . to properly handle these surviving traces. So these surviving traces are not ‘history’ either, for they are only the ‘stuff’ that has survived from the past—fragmentary, incomplete, and quite possibly biased, and perhaps even contradictory and incorrect.⁷⁰

What the modern historian must do, in Webb’s reasoning, is to “sift through and interpret these surviving traces using the tools and processes of the historical method to come to their understanding of the past event being studied.”⁷¹ After completing all the research an analysis, “the historian procures an account of his/her understanding of the past event which narrates a description and explanation of his/her understanding of the past event which narrates a description and explanation of it.”⁷² Thus, according to this view, all events are mediated through the subjective understanding of the interpreter of the events (i.e. historian) as he/she understood them through the surviving traces.

For Webb, “the term ‘history’ should be reserved for a later historian’s narrative account (i.e. NA) of a past event (i.e. PE) that is his/her understanding of that event based upon *the interpretation* [italics added] of surviving traces (i.e. ST).”⁷³ In other words, “history” is a narrative account that involves *interpretation* or, in other words, the potential biases of the historian, conscious or otherwise, that interplay with the surviving traces; thus history is mainly indirect knowledge rather than direct. Webb directly applies these principles to the Gospels and historical Jesus studies with some observations: “[w]ith reference to Jesus, the surviving traces . . . consists of two basic types: the discrete narrative episodes in the Gospels (i.e. the individual pericopae) and other sources (e.g. Josephus), as well as the overall portraits created by these early authors . . . these earliest portraits are . . . the earliest surviving attempts” [to give] “a coherent picture” [about Jesus].⁷⁴ (This term “surviving traces” seems to correspond closely to Bock’s “footprints” of Jesus in the Gospels.⁷⁵)

Importantly, the writing of history involves one’s philosophy of history or what is known as “historiography.” Webb contends that under the Enlightenment’s influence, history has been wrongly understood as “scientific history,” or a scientific endeavor that can be pursued with neutrality, objectivity, and value-free

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 16 note 13.

⁷⁵ Bock, “Abandon Studying the Historical Jesus? No, We Need Context: A Response to ‘The Jesus We’ll Never Know.’”

observations. Webb rejects the possibility of these factors in the writing of history or historiography, and instead, he argues, “The rise of postmodern historiography has contributed significant insights into the historical enterprise All historians interpret and write from their own perspective.” As a result, “the historian’s explanation and interpretation of the facts and providing causal and explanatory links between them is a contribution made by the historian and thus is ‘invention.’”⁷⁶ For Webb, such an invention “*does not mean* that which is fictional and purely imaginary” and “It is possible to embrace the strengths of what postmodern historiography can teach us, without slipping into total relativism.”⁷⁷

To avoid extremes of postmodernistic historiography, he adopts twin principles: understanding of history as representation [a “re-presentation of the past” and “not a description referring to something in the past; rather, it is a representation portraying something about the past”] and adopting the philosophical stance of the principle of critical realism [exemplified by the hermeneutical circle or spiral as expressed by existentialist Gadamer].⁷⁸ Practically, this involves allowing one’s own experience, initial understanding and continuing critical judgment [the subject] to affect understanding of what one is studying [the object]. Such understanding resulting is only provisional, and subject to expansion and development as the process continues and these two elements interact and fuse with each other. Although Webb may not admit the practical impact of this approach, the *practical impact, nonetheless, is that understanding of history is always changing and temporary, greatly impacted by the changing bias(es) of the interpreter as he “dialogues” or examines the object studied. Any such information gained in the process would be fleeting and temporary as views changed through time and interaction.* Biblical understanding has no objective basis, for the moorings are always subject to change and even contradiction.

Yet, such complexity is dubious in understanding God’s Word. Objectivity in interpretation is possible and must be defined in understanding God’s thoughts as a Spirit-guided process of thinking God’s thoughts in His Word as He intended. This latter position is a firm biblical position for those who are truly born-again. Jesus promised the disciples that the Spirit of truth (John 14:26; 16:13; cp. 1 John 4:6) would guide them into truth. Such is the result of the new covenant process whereby the genuine believer is provided with the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:26–27 cp. Ezek 36:25–27; Jer 31:31–33). To today’s evangelicals, this explanation might appear simplistic compared to the perceived sophistication of historical criticism that is rooted in the wisdom of men (1 Cor 1:18–2:14). The ground for understanding the Gospels as God intended is fully provided by the Holy Spirit who indwells the believer, providing a check against false teaching as well as an affirmation of the truth of God’s Word. As a result of postmodernism, evangelicals reject any conceptions of certainty and replace it with, at best, probability, i.e. these events probably happened. The latter of which leaves the door

⁷⁶ Webb, “The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research,” *Key Events*, 23.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24, 26–29 cp. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. Second Revised Edition. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Crossroad, 2004 [1975, 1989], 172–267.

wide open for allowing that a significant possibility looms that they did not occur as asserted in the Gospels or cannot be affirmed. Moreover, because some believers are not entirely filled with God's Spirit (or controlled by Him), as well as due to differing mental capacities by exegetes, some variance in interpretation is to be expected.

In terms of historical criticism, evaluation of the Gospel material, or for that matter, any historical record, for Webb (and others in Key Events) involves: (1) the preliminary phase where the interpreter must be self-aware of his/her horizon or biases/predispositions that are brought to the study; (2) the first main phase then involves the historian gathering and interpreting/evaluating the surviving traces or "raw data," (3) the second main phase is the historian interpreting and explaining the relevant data with hypotheses; and (4) the concluding phase it to gather the evidence (i.e. surviving traces), arguments and hypotheses into a coherent and complete historical narrative that the historian considers to be the most plausible representation (i.e. "narrative account or N/A) of that chunk of past reality being considered (i.e. the "past event" or PE).⁷⁹ Again, although Webb may not directly admit the impact of such assertions, *the practical impact here in interpreting the Gospels would again depend upon the a priori biases and prejudices of the interpreter and be anchored firmly in relativity and subjectivity of the resulting interpretation.*

Applying his study to the Bible accounts like the Gospels, Webb allows for possible distinctions between the biblical event itself (the event that is being described by the biblical author) and the biblical author's interpretive explanation of divine causality for that event. He also asserts that "the possible history of an event itself is a distinct matter from discussing the causal explanation provided in the ancient text."⁸⁰

Tools and Methods in Historical Jesus Research

Further doubt is cast regarding the Gospel material as seen in discussion of the tools and methods in historical Jesus research that were utilized throughout the work. Webb allows for a distinction between what the Gospels relate about Jesus' life as He lived in A.D. 30 with alleged beliefs that arose later in the composition of the Gospels after those events, so that the Gospels do not necessarily convey what actually happened in Jesus' day but may be beliefs of His life that developed later: "As primary sources written some 40 to 60 years after the events they portray, these three Synoptic Gospels are first and foremost evidence for the beliefs and viewpoints of their authors and some within their respective communities in the 70s and 80s C. E." and the question should revolve around "what extent can the pieces of the data also be used as evidence for 30 C. E.? This is the question of 'historicity' or 'authenticity.'"⁸¹ One is left wondering if and when the Gospels are

⁷⁹ Webb, "The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research," *Key Events*, 32–36.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

truly portraying the events of Jesus’ life or that of the church and how would one know the difference.

Webb also allows for creativity involved in the composition of the Gospels, as well as a layering process (“stages”) that occurred prior to the Gospels being written:

[T]he traditions contained within the Gospels are understood to have passed through various stages before they were written down in the Gospels At any time in this process, it is historically possible and even likely that an event or saying that had been observed or heard was later added to or changed in some way, and it is equally possible that an event or saying was created by someone and inserted into the traditioning process at any stage, whether as an oral tradition, a part of an early collection, or a periscope in a written Gospel Thus, the purpose of the critical methods and criteria are to ascertain the probability of whether or not—and to what extent—something stated in the written Gospels can be traced back to the events stage.⁸²

In order to evaluate whether or not a particular piece of data was changed and how it might have been changed, critical methods are applied for their purpose is to “ascertain the probability of whether or not—and to what extent—something stated in the written Gospels can be traced back to the events stage” and again “Gospel studies generally and historical Jesus studies in particular have developed a number of critical methods and criteria to help the historian evaluate the Gospel data, weighing the probability of whether or not a particular piece of data or part thereof is ‘historical’ or ‘authentic.’”⁸³ These are preliminary (source, redaction and tradition criticisms), primary (criteria of authenticity—“criteria given the heaviest weight in making a judgment concerning the authenticity of an event or saying, or a particular element within such a periscope”) and secondary criteria (criteria of authenticity that “contribute less weight to judgment concerning the authenticity of a particular piece of tradition”).⁸⁴ Importantly, in response to such criteria, *their practical impact would automatically cast further doubt about the trustworthiness of the Gospel traditions as practiced by the evangelical questers* rather than add confidence to trustworthiness.

The natural result of utilizing these “preliminary” criteria of source, redaction and tradition criticism used by these evangelical questers is to open up the distinct possibility that the Gospels are not direct eyewitness accounts (Matthew, John) or related to eyewitnesses (Luke carefully investigating information from eyewitnesses—Luke 1:1–4; Mark relating Peter’s preaching), but instead may have had multiple layers that must be peeled back to discover what actually happened in Jesus’ life. The impact is that these eyewitness accounts no longer are direct but indirect mediations of Jesus’ life.

⁸² Ibid., 55–56.

⁸³ Ibid., 56, 57.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 60, 69.

In terms of these primary criteria of authenticity, Webb admits that “[t]he relative importance or weight for each of these primary criteria is somewhat subjective among scholars—I have placed them . . . in an order that makes sense to me.”⁸⁵ This statement constitutes a tacit admission that criteria of authenticity are replete with subjectivity and contribute little to any valid discussion, since they assume what they are trying to prove (see Part 1 of this series for further discussion). Criteria of authenticity are *a priori* assumptions that are used to guarantee the desired outcome of what has already been decided as the conclusion regarding Gospel historicity. They assume what they are attempting to prove. They lack any objective anchor or ground for the interpreter. If the outcome desired is not forthcoming, then questers invent new criteria that ensure that outcome they desire. Such criteria also place a burden on the Gospel material to prove any ground or basis in historicity, i.e. their mere application implies doubt about historicity or authenticity.

In discussing, for instance, the primary criterion of multiple attestation (based in the 2/4 source hypothesis), Webb had related, “Most of the scholars in this project hold to the Two Source Hypothesis, but they differ over the extent to which they use a reconstructed *Sayings Gospel Q*.”⁸⁶ One must remember that multiple attestation depends for its validity on the 2/4 Source Hypothesis (e.g. Mark, Q). In order to prove anything about “probability,” multiple attestation operates direct from this assumption. If this Synoptic approach is invalid, then all operating principles based directly upon it, such as multiple attestation, prove nothing regarding the Gospel material whatsoever. It does, however, raise questions of doubt about material that cannot be in some way affirmed through this criteria.

In discussing the criterion of multiple attestation, Webb protests that “just because a particular event has only one eyewitness and/or chain of transmission, does not make it any less probable than one that has multiple witnesses and chains of transmission,” (i.e. single attestation) but he argues at the same time:

[M]ultiple attestation raises the level of probability because the material has independent corroboration. But single attestation means that this material does not benefit from independent corroboration; this does not, by itself, lower the judgment on the material. Viewed comparatively, material benefiting from multiple attention has a higher probability than singly attested material, but this is only because this criterion has raised the probability of multiply attested material; it has not lowered the probability of singly attested material . . . Just because a tradition is multiply attested does not mean it is *necessarily* authentic, but more so, just because it is singly attested does not *necessitate* a judgment of inauthenticity.⁸⁷

One is immediately impressed by the obvious confusion that this criterion presents, rendering it dubious in effectiveness. To raise one Gospel element as

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 61–62.

multiply attested is to immediately or naturally lower other elements that cannot be multiply attested, whether Webb or other evangelicals admit this or not. One cannot have it both ways, with one raised in probability, the other not impacted. If something is raised in probability through multiple attestation, then shades of doubt are automatically implied about other elements that cannot be multiply attested. Of course, one could perhaps “suspend judgment” about the historicity of a singly attested event, but the mere act of suspension of judgment automatically casts doubt on the event itself by the need to suspend judgment.

An example of another primary criterion that Webb commends is that of the criterion of dissimilarity. His conclusion regarding the historicity of Matthew 16:18 in his application of dissimilarity is significant:

An example of this criterion functioning to lower the level of probability may be observed in Jesus’ statement in Matthew 16:18, “. . . and upon this rock I will build my church.” Evidence in the Gospels indicate that the focus of Jesus’ ministry was upon “the kingdom of God” and not the “church” as it would have been understood by Matthew’s audience—A Christian entity distinct from Israel. The term “church” (ἐκκλησία) is only found one other time on the lips of Jesus in the canonical Gospels, also in Matthew (18:15). This suggests the probability that this language is a result of Matthean redaction, and it is quite unlikely that this clause, at least as it is understood in Matthew 16:18, is authentic.⁸⁸

Webb continues that his conclusion here “does not mean that the entire periscope of Matt 16:17–19 should be viewed as inauthentic.”⁸⁹

Also strategic is Webb’s admission about using this criteria in opposite directions: at one time proving and at another time disproving Gospel material. He relates caution regarding language of raising and lowering levels of probability: “All judgments of this nature should be understood on a scale of probabilities: Yes, it is possible in either example to conceive of a way that the opposite could be the case. But historical judgments using the criteria of authenticity are a means of judgment which is more probable.”⁹⁰ One can only wonder: *How valid is such a principle (or, principles-plural) that can be used either way in antithetical possibilities regarding historicity? Ironically, not only do these evangelicals allow doubt about the Gospel materials but they also have great doubt as to their scale assessing the surrounding level of doubt.*

Webb also is driven to admit that use of criterion of authenticity “is much more an art than it is science.” Furthermore, and perhaps more telling, he goes on to note,

[G]iven the nature of historiography [i.e. the adoption of a form of post-modernism by these evangelicals] discussed . . . and the manner in which the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 65–66.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 66.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

criteria of authenticity function, one must realize that judgments of authenticity or historicity are matters of greater or lesser probability, as are the explanations and hypotheses built upon them. Certainty—as one assumes in mathematics or hopes for in the sciences—is not realistic or possible in the historical enterprise . . . Thus the judicious historian weighs the evidence and provides judgments along a scale of ‘highly probable’ through ‘possible’ to ‘unlikely.’ Occasionally a historian might even use terms like ‘virtually certain’ or ‘most unlikely,’ but such extreme judgments should probably be reserved for situations in which virtually all the evidence overwhelmingly points in one direction. Otherwise, readers and other historians may in turn judge the evidence as ‘going beyond the evidence.’⁹¹

Apparently, in this reckoning, to believe in the virtual certainty of the Gospels as a whole would be “an extreme judgment.” While distancing themselves from the voting of the Jesus Seminar on sayings of Jesus, these evangelicals create a scale of probability that resembles what the Jesus Seminar attempts, except on the macro-level of events rather than Jesus’ sayings. Barriers that might exist between the conclusions of these evangelicals and the Jesus Seminar have little substance, except perhaps in terms of the degree of dehistoricization. What Webb and other evangelical questers who would agree with his approach have done is take the Gospel accounts and place them on the shifting sands of acute subjectivity and whim of the interpreter. All objectivity is lost. Certainty is now viewed as an extreme position in relation to the record of Jesus as presented in the Gospels.

Finally, Webb concludes his discussion by giving the reasoning behind why these particular twelve events were chosen in the work: “Three overarching questions have guided the project: (1) What are the key events in the life of Jesus that we think can be best demonstrated as being probably historical? (2) . . . what is the significance of each event for understanding the historical Jesus? (3) What is the portrait of Jesus that results from considering these events and their significance?”⁹²

Thus, the practical impact of such an approach is that a fifth Gospel has been created by these evangelicals associated with IBR in this work in their decision as to which events in the Gospel material have the best chance of being “probably historical,” i.e. the historically probable, essentially affirmable core Gospel. One wonders about the events that they left out—are they now to be considered less historical? Should evangelicals suspend judgment about the historicity of those not mentioned? Does this not result in a fifth Gospel that actually constitutes a *qualitatively different* gospel that Paul warned about (ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον—Gal 1:6) in that they cast doubt on the Gospels received in the canon that were written by eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life? Who would be convinced to trust the canonical Gospels by such an evidential “apologetic” of the material?

Webb also attempts to insulate the work against criticism in concluding his article by noting that “each author remains alone responsible for his views expressed in his particular essay . . . the authors of the essays . . . in this volume do

⁹¹ Ibid., 73.

⁹² Ibid., 83–84.

not all agree with everything that is stated in this introductory essay . . . it is quite possible that there may be some tensions between the views expressed in this chapter [Webb’s introduction to historiography] and particular elements in some of the chapters to follow. Though I suspect that they will be relatively few and not overly significant.”⁹³

Serious Historical Study?

In reply to Bock’s desire for “serious” historical study,⁹⁴ several comments are necessary. First, it is highly dubious that postmodernistic historiography, as well as historical criticism, can be truly considered “serious” historical study. These evangelicals fail to understand, or choose to ignore, that these ideologies bristle with hostile *a priori* criteria that always place the burden of proof heavily on the NT, resulting in acute accentuation of uncertainty and doubt about the documents that can never be overcome. Both historical criticism and postmodernism do not operate from any perceived “scientific” or “objective” basis. They are *designed* to make the Scriptures wholly pliable to modern sensibilities and remove any perceived objectionable elements that the documents may have to critical scholarship (e.g. supernatural, uniqueness of Jesus). When scholars apply postmodernism to the NT, they are seeking to remake any objectionable elements in the NT into images that are acceptable to them, as is clearly demonstrated in searching for the ‘historical’ Jesus. These ideologies deliberately render all opinions tenuous so that no one view is able to prevail. The NT documents can never overcome the skepticism of postmodernism or historical criticism, and indeed, these ideologies intend to be so. Pliability and skepticism regarding the NT documents are *by design*.

Second, if someone truly is to undertake “serious” historical study, one must clearly identify presuppositional and ideological factors involved in evaluating NT historical issues. This axiom applies to all evangelical approaches with no exceptions, for all have presuppositions. But not all presuppositions are equal or benign in their evaluative impact. Evangelicals adopt current trends in postmodernistic historiography with weight given to the negative ideology behind it or its impact on the perimeters of conclusions reached. The old adage of a “text, without a context, is a pretext,” applies here. Here ignorance or failure to acknowledge history and presuppositions is very much *enabling* these evangelicals to engage in popular trends while ignoring the proverbial “elephant” in the room of negative underpinnings. It also enables them to convince their readers of their conclusions, whose readers probably do not fully realize the existence of these negative bases. Clearly, the defense of the NT documents as reliable history comes through decisively, openly delineating these negative operational bases—*not* assuming them.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Contra Darrell Bock, “Faith and the Historical Jesus: Does A Confessional Position and Respect for the Jesus Tradition Preclude Serious Historical Engagement?” *JSHJ* 9 (2011): 3–25.

Third, many of the operating assumptions of searching and criteria of authenticity are based on other dubious foundational assumptions, e.g. source criticism (2/4 Source) or form/tradition criticism (the latter contradicted by eyewitnesses who stabilized tradition). If the foundations are tenuous, any conclusions involved in searching are rendered entirely suspect.⁹⁵

Fourth, the “myth of influence” needs crucial attention by these evangelicals. Scripture makes it clear that any convincing of an unbelieving person by human logic is dubious (1 Cor 1:18–2:14). The whole message involved in Jesus is *rejected* by the unbelieving as a default response (1:18–21). The default response of Jews to a crucified Messiah is to see it as “offensive” (1:22–23). God has deliberately designed a “foolish message” (1:21) to save *against* human logic. Thus, the human logic involved in posting “criteria of embarrassment” is dubious since it only accentuates Jewish offense to Jesus, resulting in further offense. The default response of unsaved Gentiles is to view information about Christ as “foolishness,” so no human logic applied will convince. Instead, God has chosen “foolish people,” “base things,” “despised” with a “foolish message” to nullify human wisdom (1:24–28) so that no person can boast of human wisdom leading to faith (1:29–30). For as Paul says, “your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but the power of God (1 Cor 2:5). The power to convince, biblically, resides in the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, not the wisdom of men (1 Cor 2:14). True power to convince is through the proclamation of God’s Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, otherwise man would have a boast before God (1:29). At the very least, such NT passages place severe limits on human logic for persuading. *Would anyone suggest that their powers of persuasion are on an equal or greater par than the Holy Spirit?* Perhaps this is too simple an approach for sophisticated evangelicals today (cp. Rom. 10:17). The New Testament documents find much safer harbor among “lay evangelicals” who are identified as not having the education or being as skilled as these scholars.⁹⁶

Fourth, closely associated with the previous point is: who among NT skeptics would be convinced by evangelical adoption of these ideologies or resulting conclusions? Do these evangelicals believe in the NT assertions of resurrection because criteria of authenticity affirmed it, or did they already (*a priori*) believe in the resurrection and impose their beliefs upon their research in such works as *Key Events*? The latter is more likely. It is also more likely that skeptics also would realize such impositions and reject any such evangelical assertions outright. The retort of Society of Biblical Literature’s Robert Miller suffices, “arguments about the historical Jesus can be productive only among those who already agree on a number of contested questions about historiographical method and the nature of the Gospels. Therefore, debates about the historical Jesus that occur between the ‘evangelical’ camp’ (which sees the canonical Gospels as fully reliable historically)

⁹⁵ Much has already been written about this point. See F. David Farnell, “Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism,” and “Form and Tradition Criticism,” in *The Jesus Crisis*, 85–131 and 185–232.

⁹⁶ See Bock, “Faith and the Historical Jesus,” 3–4.

and the ‘traditional camp’ (which sees the Gospel as blends of fact and fiction) are futile.”⁹⁷

Finally, the answer to the question imposed as to whether faith precludes “serious historical engagement” finds its answer: clear doubt exists as to whether these evangelicals have truly engaged in serious historical debate. The present writer still searches for genuine examples of true Gospel skeptics who are now believers due to the work of these evangelicals in “searching for the ‘historical’ Jesus.”

A Brief Cataloging of Some Assertions in 12 Key Events

In light of Webb’s setting forth of historiography, a brief examination of some of the various assertions regarding historicity in the Gospels is warranted. An examination of this IBR collaborative work reveals some interesting conclusions among some of the essays. Only a few examples can be cited due to space limitations. These observations reveal that some of these evangelicals are all too readily willing to surrender the Gospels to dubious Synoptic hypotheses that are fleeting, arbitrary and subjective (i.e. 2/4 Source, Q, criteria of authenticity). Moreover, if these current approaches are ill-founded, then they have actually proven *nothing* about Gospel historicity, or the lack of it—depending on their approach, in the end. All that was accomplished was an exposure of their willingness in opening up the Gospels to the subjective bias of scholarly whim that allows for the definite possibility that the Gospels are not historically trustworthy or that they cannot be affirmed beyond probability at best. Moreover, one receives the strong impression that a rule by scholarly consensus prevails among them, somewhat reminiscent of indirect voting on the historical nature of the events.

While Craig Evans, in his chapter, affirms the historicity of Jesus’ exorcisms, he allows for a level of creativity in the Gospel accounts that, in turn, denigrates Gospel historicity: (1) “The evangelist Luke [he does not identify if this is actually the historical physician Luke] draws upon his Markan source at this point [in Luke 11:16–20] pulling together elements from Mark 3, as well as the request for a sign in Mark 8:11–13” of the request for a sign into Luke 11:16 into the composition of the pericope in Luke, alleging that “the synthetic nature of the composition complicates the question of the original context.”⁹⁸ He argues that “[i]t is quite possible that the saying in v. 20 [Luke 11] derives from a different context” and “the parallel [to Luke 11] saying in Matthew 12:28 also seems to be out of its original context, being coupled—somewhat at cross-purposes—with 12:27 Either the sayings of vv. 27 and 28 were uttered in different contexts or they related to one another in a different way.”⁹⁹ For Evans, some evidence exists that Jesus’ healings were linked to a perception of disease as being caused by demons and the need for exorcism: “We see this in the healing of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law,

⁹⁷ Robert J. Miller, “When It’s Futile to Argue about the Historical Jesus: A Response to Bock, Keener, and Webb,” *JSHJ* 9 (2011), 85.

⁹⁸ Craig Evans, “Exorcisms and the Kingdom: Inaugurating the Kingdom of God and Defeating the Kingdom of Satan,” *Key Events*, 170.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 170 and 170 n43.

where Jesus is said to have ‘rebuked the fever’ (Luke 4:39), as though a sentient being was responsible for the fever.”¹⁰⁰ One is left with the impression that Evans implies that the Gospel had misperceptions of demons behind physical maladies, which were wrong, primitive, or accommodations here. The entertainment of the possibility of dubious compositional factors being involved here immediately raises questions about the historicity of the passage that give conflicting elements with his attempts at confirming the historicity of Jesus’ exorcisms at the same time.

Craig Blomberg, in defending the historicity of Jesus’ table fellowship, readily admits that he proceeds on a basis “in an order that progresses from those [12 passages he cites in his article] in an order from those with the strongest cases for authenticity to those that are not quite as secure.”¹⁰¹ Security of historicity for Blomberg centers in evaluative compliance with Markan priority and the Q hypothesis as well as the value criteria of authenticity that are applied. Based in this, the story of Jesus’ participation at Levi’s party (Mark 2:13–17 and parallels) has the greatest chances of historicity with verse 2:17 “on firm critical grounds” having “the most demonstrably historical core of the passage.”¹⁰² Such wording as “historical core” leaves one with the impression of varying elements of surety regarding historicity in the individual Gospel narratives as well. He asserts that the “core of the Markan version of the feeding of the 5000 is most likely authentic” leaving open the definite possibility existing that it might not be.¹⁰³

Commendably, Donald Hagner recognizes clearly that questions of historicity center in *a priori* thinking, “One’s *a priori* inclination becomes a crucially important factor in deciding for or against historicity”¹⁰⁴ and “the initial bias one assumes regarding the historicity of the gospel tradition, whether negative or positive, will largely determine the conclusion to which one is attracted.”¹⁰⁵ He then further relates,

What does seem to emerge is one indisputable fact: the crucially determinative role that is played by one’s predisposition to the question [historicity of the Synoptic Sabbath controversy passages]. This should not be surprising in a day when we are learning that there is no truly ‘objective’ or ‘neutral’ knowledge and that *every* position necessarily begins from some kind of ‘faith’ basis. This does not excuse us from doing our homework well. Nor does it mean that we accept everything blindly and uncritically, ‘by faith’ so to speak. But we are made freshly aware of the difficulty of the historical enterprise.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁰¹ Craig Blomberg, “The Authenticity and Significance of Jesus’ Table Fellowship with Sinners,” *Key Events*, 227.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁰⁴ Donald Hagner, “Jesus and the Synoptic Sabbath Controversies,” *Key Events*, 254.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 269.

Hagner then delineates “the strange paradox, then, is there is no more helpful tool for the Gospel interpreter than faith in the truthfulness of the Gospels themselves.”¹⁰⁷ For him, “The burden of proof here must remain with those who would deny historical authenticity to the material.”¹⁰⁸ If he affirms such a position in his lengthy discussion, then subjecting the Gospels to such dubious and fleeting ideology (e.g. criteria of authenticity) does little but significantly raise questions of doubt, skepticism and uncertainty and settles nothing about historicity. Such an effort is futile from its start and is defeated before it even begins. It is unable to accomplish anything. Hagner also labels that the reference to Abiathar” in Mark 2:26 as “the mistaken reference” and that “it hardly seems fair to make this confusion of names, really a minor point and found in other texts, a determining factor in whether Jesus spoke these words.”¹⁰⁹ While Hagner allows historical inaccuracy on some things, he chooses to maintain the general accuracy of the pericope. Once this level of inaccuracy is allowed or permitted, it becomes even more difficult or capricious (the slippery slope) for evangelicals to insist on the general accuracy of the story as a whole.¹¹⁰ He concludes his article by noting the “quest of the historical Jesus is a misnomer. It is not the search that can bring us the real Jesus . . . but rather a search that provides what necessarily and finally must remain an artificial construct The fact remains that the historical method, strictly practiced . . . is ill-equipped to deal with the uniqueness represented by the story of Jesus.”¹¹¹ Interestingly, here Hagner runs away from historical criticism while attempting to apply it to the Gospels.

In his work on Peter’s declaration concerning Jesus’ identity in Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:13–20; Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–21 and John 6:66–69), Michael Wilkins spends a great deal of effort and length in his discussion applying criteria of authenticity to the events surrounding this incident. He argues, “the collective testimony of the criteria of Semitism and Palestinian background, Embarrassment, and Historical Coherence present convincing evidence that Peter’s declaration of Jesus as the Messiah is historical” and “These collective criteria lead to the conclusion that the Gospel writers recorded an [sic] historically authentic account of Peter’s declaration that Jesus was the Christ/Messiah.”¹¹² Yet, at the end of his article, Wilkins laments, “The so-called distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith is an unhelpful divide. Jesus is the Christ of history *and* the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 254.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 259–60.

¹¹⁰ This reference may be anything but mistaken. Simple solutions to its resolution are readily available. For instance, the phrase “in the days” can also mean “during the lifetime.” According to 1 Sam 21:1, Ahimelech was the priest who gave the bread to David, while Abiathar was his son who later was the High Priest during David’s reign. Since Ahimelech died shortly after this incident (cp. 1 Sam 22:19–20), it is likely that this mention of Abiathar was used since he was the well-known companion of David who later became High Priest in David’s reign, along with Zadok (2 Sam 15:35).

¹¹¹ Donald Hagner, “Jesus and the Synoptic Sabbath Controversies,” 288.

¹¹² Michael J. Wilkins, “Peter’s Declaration Concerning Jesus’ Identity in Caesarea Philippi,” *Key Events*, 349, 367.

Christ of faith.”¹¹³ On one hand, Wilkins affirms the validity of these criteria in his article, while at the same time rejecting the divide that the application of such criteria of authenticity *a priori* create and, in practice accentuate, between Jesus in the Gospels and Jesus in history. The standard operating assumption in these criteria is that a divide exists, and their application is to determine the extent or nature of the divide. Why then does Wilkins so diligently affirm such criteria while at the same time insisting no divide exists? This is a manifest contradiction.

For Klyne Snodgrass, the Temple cleansing incident in the Synoptics placed at the end of Jesus’ ministry after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt 21:12–17; Mark 11:12–19; Luke 19:45–48) versus John 2:12–22 where the latter places a cleansing at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, leads to the conclusion that only one cleansing really occurred, not two: “The difference between the Synoptics and John on the chronology of the temple incident leads some to conclude there were two cleansings. While this cannot be absolutely precluded, it is not likely. Not only are the accounts very close in what happened, both traditions have the temple incident followed by questioning from the religious leaders . . . Whether the Synoptic or the Johannine chronology is to be preferred is not easily determined.”¹¹⁴ Snodgrass concludes, “I lean toward the Synoptic chronology because of the incident’s logical connection with Jesus’ arrest, but in the end I do not think that either option may be excluded.”¹¹⁵ To Snodgrass’ credit, he does not deny the historicity of a temple cleansing—just the idea of two cleansings. However, his allowance for such latitudes in historicity in that only one cleansing is proposed as possible, immediately opens up a Pandora’s box that leads to the destruction of the trustworthiness of the Gospels as historical records. If the Gospel writers are postulated to have such laxity in inventing separate, as well as disparate, contexts for the same events for alleged theological (redactional) reasons, very little if anything in the Gospels can be trusted as historical. Snodgrass is reflecting the capricious scholarly bias against doubles occurring in Scripture and also its bias for an evolutionary development in the Gospel tradition, resulting in one account developing into another, the latter of which is grossly speculative. The temple connections in the Synoptics as well as John make the events rather tight, not allowing for such creative liberty. One would also wonder why Jesus’ cleansing would occur only once. Why would the Temple authorities, who rejected Jesus’ Messianic claims, ever respond to His cleansing the first time in conforming to Jesus’ corrections of their activities? Most likely, they would have immediately returned the Temple to its prior status before Jesus’ disruption of it the first time as witnessed by John. The idea of need of cleansing is far more natural in light of the persistent rejection of Jesus by the authorities. If he did it once at the beginning of His ministry, that He did it twice, at the end also, would be very natural in light of such resistance to His messianic authority.

I. Howard Marshall’s article, “The Last Supper,” affirms, “denials of the historicity of the essential elements in that narrative are untenable. It is one thing to

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 371.

¹¹⁴ Klyne R. Snodgrass, “The Temple Incident,” in *Key Events*, 445.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 447.

cast doubt on details of the story; it is another thing to rule out any possibility of basic historicity. . . . The suspicions that may attach to some parts of the story and the historical difficulties created by others are not on such a scale as to call in question the essential historicity of what is recorded.”¹¹⁶ Marshall is also strategic, not only for his article’s inclusion and its affirmation of “basic historicity” but also for Marshall’s influence that he has had on some contributors to *Key Events*. Several were mentored in their doctoral program by Marshall at Aberdeen University. His influence among them is frequently seen.

In 1977, Marshall wrote *I Believe in the Historical Jesus*.¹¹⁷ In this book, Marshall did much to add confusion to the term “historical Jesus” among British evangelicals and Americans who trained in British universities for theology. He attempted to take the term “historical Jesus” and redefine the traditional meaning of its usage in terms of its presuppositions, history and origins, i.e. somehow rehabilitate the term from its radical contexts of Schweitzer and Käsemann. Michael Green (who also studied under Marshall), in the editor’s preface to Marshall’s book, comments that the purpose of the book will have “a very wide impact in clarifying these muddied waters” that the first and second searches for the historical Jesus had caused.¹¹⁸ This two-part series has demonstrated that the term makes a distinction between what the Gospels assert about Jesus and hypotheses how he actually was based in historical-critical suppositions that a difference exists between the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life and how he is alleged to have truly existed in history. Marshall, however, did not add clarification but muddied the waters further, relating that the term could also mean that the person actually existed so that the person is historical. So his title, “I believe in the historical Jesus” means that for Marshall, Jesus was truly a person who existed in history—“I believe that there was a historical person called Jesus.”¹¹⁹ Both Schweitzer and Käsemann, however, never denied Jesus’ existence in history but the Gospel portrayal of Jesus in history. For Marshall, to define the term otherwise, was to do so as to assign an aberrant significance to the term. Marshall went on to argue that “methods of historical study applied to the Gospels leave us in no doubt that *some* [italics added] knowledge of Jesus is possible and that the existence of such knowledge naturally implies that Jesus really existed.”¹²⁰

Furthermore, much of the postmodernistic historical approach of *Key Events* is foreshadowed in Marshall who explains the historian’s task as determining what actually happened as opposed to a historian’s account that related what happened. In other words, history always involves interpretation of what happened.¹²¹ This means that the historian must evaluate evidence with critical skill and knowledge to separate “reliable evidence” from “unreliable.” For Marshall, “historical statements are attended by various degrees of probability, and that the lines between ‘certainly

¹¹⁶ I. Howard Marshall, “The Last Supper,” in *Key Events*, 577.

¹¹⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977).

¹¹⁸ Michael Green, “Editor’s Preface,” n.p.

¹¹⁹ Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus*, 11–16, note esp. 16.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

historical,' 'probably historical' and 'possibly historical' are hard to draw" for "the historical is compelled to use 'probably' and 'possibly' very often."¹²² Such an approach, for Marshall, leads to a more accurate knowledge of "what happened," for the aim of the historian (or, gospel critic) is "to ascertain precisely what can be proved to have taken place during a particular period in time" and to be aware of his own biases as an interpreter.¹²³

As applied to Gospel studies, that Marshall chided British evangelical Donald Guthrie for his traditional approach is very significant and reflects an attitude that has undoubtedly influenced some of his students today,

A very traditional type of picture of Jesus is presented by D. Guthrie in *Jesus the Messiah*. Although Guthrie is well aware of the methods of modern historical research, he tends to ignore them in this book and to take it rather for granted that we can read the Gospels more or less as they stand as straight historical sources for the life of Jesus. The result is that the reader who is puzzled by historical questions will not find any help with his problems, and the insight which might be gained by the application of historical methods are missing. The modern reader needs more help than Guthrie is prepared to give him and might mistakenly conclude that there are in fact no historical problems.¹²⁴

For Marshall, apparently, to take the Gospels as straight historical sources is to be uncritical and unscholarly as a historian. In addition, Marshall believed that traditional views of Gospel authorship (e.g. Matthew written by tax-collector Matthew or John the Apostle writing the Gospel of John) are to be rejected: "In various ways this simple picture of the situation has been shattered" so that "The case that the Gospels are reliable because they were written by eyewitnesses seems to have evaporated."¹²⁵ Again, "even if the original apostles were writing the story, this was no guarantee that they themselves have not modified the facts in the course of repeated re-tellings by themselves and under the influence of the way in which other Christians recounted them."¹²⁶ For Marshall, the 2/4 document hypothesis, form and redaction criticism, criteria of authenticity must all be applied in adjudicating the historical claims of the Gospels. Marshall notes especially that criteria of authenticity (dissimilarity, multiple attestation, coherence, unintentionality, traditional continuity) are helpful "for separating off inauthentic elements from authentic elements" in the Gospels.¹²⁷ Marshall's conclusion is positive toward such historical-critical: "historical study can be the servant of

¹²² Ibid., 36.

¹²³ Ibid., 37.

¹²⁴ Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus*, 136 cp. Donald Guthrie, *Jesus the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972).

¹²⁵ Marshall, 143, 144.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 144.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 200–11.

faith.”¹²⁸ In another work, *New Testament Interpretation*, Marshall defined such “historical criticism” as “the study of any narrative which purports to convey historical information in order to determine what actually happened and is described or alluded to in the passage in question” as well as “to test the historical accuracy of what purports to be historical narrative.”¹²⁹

Darrell Bock’s intent in his article is partly to defend the Markan account of Jewish charges against and Examination of Jesus as “essential historicity.”¹³⁰ He considers Mark 14:61–64 (Matt 26:63–66; Luke 22:66–71) under the Two-Document Hypothesis, “likely to be the earliest form of this tradition”¹³¹ and applies criterion of historical plausibility, dissimilarity, ambiguity and Jewishness to the pericope of their examination of Jesus. He concludes his discussion by noting that “the scene has great historical plausibility” and that it is “far more likely that it goes back to the examination and not to Mark.”¹³² Furthermore, “the scene as a summary of trial events has a strong claim to authenticity, a stronger claim than the alternative, that the scene was created by Mark or by the early church,” and “I have argued that the case for the authenticity of this historic clash is strong.”¹³³ Bock’s usage of terms as “essential historicity” and “historical plausibility” in terms of this Gospel account is troubling for evangelicalism. One wonders, is Bock’s decision for this commendable conclusion regarding historicity firmly centered in his assumptions of the validity of criteria of authenticity that he has applied and the alleged earliest nature of Mark that he assumes is true? What if these criteria and his synoptic assumptions in succeeding generations are dismissed, demonstrated to be invalid or tenuous? What if others apply these same criteria and reach the opposite conclusion? Church history is littered with such examples of scholarly trends that dominate in one period but are rejected in another. What has Bock proved ultimately? The only thing that has happened is that Bock has centered questions of historicity upon the shifting sands of scholarly opinion and fads. Surely one would hope that Bock would still believe the historicity of the Gospels even without the application of these assumptions and criteria. Do these assumptions add any real demonstration to the historicity of this event in the Gospels or are the Gospels self-validating as God’s inspired Word? Are people convinced of God’s Word through argument or through God’s Spirit (Rom 1:18–20; 1 Cor 1:22–24). The latter assertion is admittedly not attached to any scholarly trends or ideologies that are currently practiced by some evangelicals. One is reminded of Jesus’ words in Luke 16:31, “But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’” In other words, if belief in God’s Word is not already (*a priori*) present, even the most convincing arguments will *never* succeed in fostering belief or assurance of historicity,

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹²⁹ I. Howard Marshall, “Historical Criticism,” in *New Testament Interpretation*. ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 126.

¹³⁰ Darrell L. Bock, “Blasphemy and the Jewish Examination of Jesus,” *Key Events*, 589.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 592.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 656.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 660–61.

including assumptions of criteria as well as the early nature of Mark. Paul's words in 1 Cor 2:1–5 are vital:

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,
and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom,
but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

And again, in 1 Cor 2:6–8:

Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away;

but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory;

the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Conviction or assurance of God's Word always rests in God's Spirit (John 14:26; 16:8–11, 13). Accentuation of doubt is produced by historical criticism. Does IBR's approach to affirm the "essentials" of the Gospel rest in God's power or the wisdom of human ideology? The responsibility of believers is to proclaim that Word that inherently is a sharp, two-edged sword (Heb 4:12), for it alone has the power to persuade regarding its historicity, not criteria of authenticity or shifting beliefs in synoptic approaches. Would these historical critics claim that such ideologies have any power to convince through approaches that were designed historically, not to affirm, but to destroy the Word? Would they affirm that they have greater powers of persuasion through these endeavors than God's Spirit?

In another recent book, *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* (2009), Dunn rightly criticizes Bock's approach with erroneously trying to equate the term "historical Jesus" with the biblical Jesus of the Gospels: "The question of what we mean by *historical* is also raised by . . . [his] somewhat casual use of the term 'the historical Jesus.'" Dunn goes on to criticize this evangelical rightly in his incorrect use of this term in that "properly speaking, 'the historical Jesus' denotes Jesus as discerned by historical study. Those engaged in the quest of the historical Jesus, those at least who have sought to clarify what the phrase 'the historical Jesus' denotes, have usually made the point that the term properly denotes the life and mission of Jesus as they have been 'reconstructed' by means of historical research—'historical' in that sense." He then criticizes this evangelical for his improper defining of the term "as a reference to the historical actuality of the first-

century Jesus of Nazareth.”¹³⁴ For Dunn, this evangelical’s concept of Jesus came too close to the biblical presentation of Jesus for it to be a permissible view of the “historical Jesus” in the Third Quest, especially in any certainty of the resurrection.¹³⁵ In other words, the view in the Third Quest that will *not* be accepted in searching is one that comes closest or wholly approximates that of the portrayal of Jesus in the Gospels. While this evangelical commendably sought to convince Third Questers that the Jesus of the Bible can be proven through the ideologies of Third Questing, such an attempt is flatly rejected as coming too close to the biblical portrait of Jesus. While Dunn, Sanders, Charlesworth, and Wright will allow a *modicum* of historicity in the Gospels as noted above, they do not appear to tolerate these evangelicals superimposing their evangelical presuppositions upon the text, even for “core” or “essential” historicity. For Dunn, at best, only “probabilities” are possible “rather than certainties.”¹³⁶ Ironically, under the Third Search, the closer evangelicals attempt to equate the “historical Jesus” with the biblical Jesus, the more the Third Questers outright reject their suppositions and cry foul for imposing evangelical views on the concept.

Grant Osborne’s article on the resurrection concludes, “The empty tomb and appearance narratives show a core of history”¹³⁷ and “This essay has contended that a genuine resurrection event supplies the best explanation for why we have the creed of a resurrection early on This case has been made using the criteria of historical Jesus study and setting these events in their conceptual and historical background. With this perspective, the most natural conclusion would be that there is a personal God who acted that remarkable day and raised Jesus from the dead.”¹³⁸ Osborne affirms N. T. Wright’s observation as “*a propos*: Not only does a true bodily resurrection provide a ‘sufficient condition’ for the empty tomb and appearances; it provides ‘a necessary condition for these things . . . no other explanation could or would do. All the efforts to find alternative explanations fail, and they were bound to do so.’”¹³⁹ While Osborne’s assertion is welcome, his somewhat tepid endorsement of the resurrection through the language of historical criticism stands in stark contrast to the bold assertions in the language of the New Testament. John 21:26–31 states:

After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace *be* with you.”

¹³⁴ James D. G. Dunn, “Response to Darrell Bock,” *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, 298–99.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹³⁷ Grant R. Osborne, “Jesus’ Empty Tomb and His Appearance in Jerusalem,” *Key Events*, 818.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 818–19.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 819.

Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.”

Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed.”

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;

but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

As well as Acts 1:3: “To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs [Greek—πολλοῖς τεκμηρίοις], appearing to them over a *period* of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” As well as 2 Pet 1:16–17: “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales [Greek—μύθοις—“myths”] when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased.”” Finally, Paul’s words in 1 Cor 15:1–8 reveal the startling facts of His resurrection:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that *He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now*, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also (emphases added).

Concluding Observations

In reply to Bock’s desire for “serious” historical study through utilizing the historical-critical approach of “searching for the ‘historical Jesus,’”¹⁴⁰ several comments ensue:

First, one receives the impression from these evangelicals who participate in some form of questing for “the historical Jesus” that they are sincere and sincerely believe that they are benefiting Gospel studies through such activities. The reality of the evidence reviewed here is that they have subjected the Gospels to marked

¹⁴⁰ Contra Darrell Bock, “Faith and the Historical Jesus: Does A Confessional Position and Respect for the Jesus Tradition Preclude Serious Historical Engagement?” 3–25.

doubt as well as the shifting sand of scholarly whim and opinion. The Gospels have clearly lost. An old proverb relates that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. In this case, however, a mega-size corridor has been opened on this highway to the Gospels’ destruction. The impact on the next generation of preachers is ominous, for will “probability” put proverbial “fire in the belly” of their preaching of the Gospels? Not likely.

Second, it is highly dubious that postmodernistic historiography, as well as historical criticism, can be truly considered “serious” historical study. These evangelicals fail to understand, or choose to ignore, that these ideologies bristle with hostile *a priori* criteria that always place the burden of proof heavily on the NT, resulting in acute accentuation of uncertainty and doubt about the documents that can never be overcome. Both historical criticism and postmodernism do not operate from any perceived “scientific” or “objective” basis. They are *designed* to make the Scriptures wholly pliable to modern sensibilities and remove any perceived objectionable elements that the documents may have to critical scholarship (e.g. supernatural, uniqueness of Jesus). When scholars apply postmodernism to the NT, they are seeking to remake any objectionable elements in the NT into images that are acceptable to them, as is clearly demonstrated in searching for the “historical” Jesus. These ideologies deliberately render all opinions tenuous so that no one view is able to prevail. The NT documents can never overcome the skepticism of postmodernism or historical criticism, and indeed, these ideologies intend to such. Pliability and skepticism regarding the NT documents are *by design*.

Third, if someone truly is to undertake “serious” historical study, one must clearly identify presuppositional and ideological factors involved in evaluating NT historical issues. This axiom applies to all evangelical approaches with no exceptions, for all have presuppositions. But not all presuppositions are equal or benign in their evaluative impact. Evangelicals adopt current trends in postmodernistic historiography, with weight given to the negative ideology behind it or its impact on the perimeters of conclusions reached. The old adage of a “text, without a context, is a pretext,” applies here. Here ignorance or failure to acknowledge history and presuppositions is very much enabling these evangelicals to engage in popular trends while ignoring the proverbial “elephant” in the room of negative underpinnings. It also enables them to convince their readers of their conclusions, whose readers probably do not fully realize the existence of these negative bases. Clearly, the defense of the NT documents as reliable history comes through decisively, openly delineating these negative operational bases—*not* assuming them.

Fourth, while attacking the Jesus Seminar for their radical opinions, the solution of these evangelicals is not much better. The Jesus Seminar uses the same or similar approaches to criteria of authenticity as do these evangelicals but reaches startling opposing or contradictory conclusions regarding historicity. If such polar opposite conclusions can be reached, then the application of this ideology is highly suspect. No distinct line of demarcation prevents evangelicals from slipping further into skepticism, since they operate on a similar presuppositional and ideological grid.

Fifth, many of the operating assumptions of searching and criteria of authenticity are based on other dubious foundational assumptions, e.g. source

criticism (2/4 Source) or form/tradition criticism (the latter contradicted by eyewitnesses who stabilized tradition). If the foundations are tenuous, any conclusions involved in searching are rendered entirely suspect.¹⁴¹

Sixth, his evangelical questing gives strong evidence that the views of Rogers and McKim regarding inerrancy may be now predominate among those who participate. The question must be posed as to whether a recent revival of Rogers' and McKim's viewpoint exists among conservative evangelicals. Rogers and McKim attacked fundamentalist belief in inspiration and inerrancy as a product of seventeenth-century Protestant scholasticism that allegedly was wrongly associated with classic orthodoxy by nineteenth-century Princeton theologians.¹⁴² The concept here is that while the historic position of the church is that the Bible may be accurate in terms of faith and practice, it may not be in terms of science, history, geography, origins. The watch-cry that fundamental, conservative evangelicals impose a twentieth-century concept of inerrancy upon an ancient world that did not have such high standards may be heard among their approach.

History, however, is being overlooked or forgotten. As a result of Roger's and McKim's misleading historical association of inerrancy with scholasticism, the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" was formulated by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy.¹⁴³ The purpose of the organization, along with its statements on inerrancy, was expressed as follows: "to counter the drift from this important doctrinal foundation [of inerrancy] by significant segments of evangelicalism and the outright denial of it by other church movements."¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, Article XVI states: "We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church's faith throughout its history. We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism."¹⁴⁵

In 1978, evangelicals met in Chicago to discuss biblical inerrancy in response to the trends of the day that were largely inspired by the works of evangelicals like

¹⁴¹ Much has already been written about this point. See F. David Farnell, "Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism," and "Form and Tradition Criticism, in *The Jesus Crisis*, 85–131 and 185–232.

¹⁴² Rogers and McKim use this logic of "Scottish 'Common Sense' Philosophy or Realism" to attack orthodox concepts of inerrancy. See Jack Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 235–48. Interestingly, Daniel B. Wallace seems to have revived a similar argument to Rogers and McKim that evangelicals maintain too exacting a concept of inerrancy, arguing that "Our modern descriptions of bibliography grow out of this [Scottish common sense and 19th century Princeton] era." See Daniel B. Wallace, "An Apologia for a Broad View of Ipsissima Vox," (Unpublished ETS Paper), 51st Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Danvers, MA., [November 18, 1999], 2–3 n2 and 18–19 n76.

¹⁴³ Rogers and McKim's work raised a number of responses, one of which was the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy with its "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy." See Marsden, 285.

¹⁴⁴ See the purpose statement printed on the back cover of the "Catalogue" of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (Oakland, CA: ICBI, 1983).

¹⁴⁵ See "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," *JETS* 21, No. 4 (December 1978): 289–96 (note especially page 292).

Rogers and McKim at Fuller Seminary in their attempt to rework views of inerrancy. In response, the Chicago Statement Article XVIII :

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.

We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.¹⁴⁶

The Chicago statement continued later to note,

Since the Renaissance, and more particularly since the Enlightenment, world views have been developed that involve skepticism about basic Christian tenets. Such are the agnosticism that denies that God is knowable, the rationalism that denies that He is incomprehensible, the idealism that denies that He is transcendent, and the existentialism that denies rationality in His relationships with us. When these un- and anti-Biblical principles seep into men’s theologies at presuppositional level, as today they frequently do, faithful interpretation of Holy Scripture becomes impossible.¹⁴⁷

The review of the current evangelical discussion on the Third Quest and searching clearly places much of the questing into a dubious category that contradicts the Chicago agreement. However, the Evangelical Theological Society never adopted it as a basis for defining inerrancy. The concept of the “historical Jesus” in all three Quests is motivated by hostile philosophical concepts that stand opposed to the full integrity of the Gospels. In other words, no “historical Jesus” ever existed except in the minds of those who pursued all three Quests, for the conception of “the historical Jesus” is that of Jesus divorced from the biblical portrayal in important ways, especially in terms of Jesus’ distinctiveness as well as supernatural content relayed of Him in the Gospels. Hence, the term “historical Jesus” is very, very ironic in that it really is a fiction of historical criticism without any connection to how Jesus really was. For those who would take the Bible as *a priori* an inspired work as hopefully evangelicals would, the Jesus in the Gospels is how He actually was. No separation exists.

Evangelical participation in the Third Search is a direct consequence of the growing evangelical acceptance of historical-critical ideologies of source, form/tradition and redaction and other scholarly fads. These are philosophically-motivated hermeneutical constructs that, regardless of whatever search, philosophically construct a separation from Jesus in the Bible from some concept of Jesus in history. The more one adopts these premises, as well as their philosophical underpinnings, the more one is forced to search for the historical Jesus. These evangelicals are merely reactive and adaptive to current trends. If, however, the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 292.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 295–96.

integrity of the Gospels is maintained and that they are, as the early church so strongly and unanimously espoused from its nascent beginnings, then they are eyewitness accounts of the actual life and activities of Jesus written by the men whose names the Gospels were connected with in church history. The anonymity of the canonical Gospels is a potently powerful witness to the apostolic origin of these documents, for only the certainty of their having come from apostolic origins can reasonably explain their unanimous acceptance. If evangelicals are operating from this supposition instead of adopting historical-critical approaches, any need for searching for the historical Jesus is null and void, i.e. unnecessary.

The data as reviewed in this series demonstrates that fundamentalist, evangelical history *is once again* repeating itself in a debate between fundamental beliefs and an encroachment of modernism. The conditions of the early twentieth century that resulted in separation of believers to preserve the fundamentals of the faith is now again repeating in the twenty-first century. Lessons of history have not been learned, or they have been forgotten, or worse, ignored. Since ETS is now largely influenced by evangelicals who affirm and practice historical-critical ideologies, perhaps the Society should merge with the Society of Biblical Literature, for the distinctions between these organizations grow less and less as time progresses. What separates them now appears to be 12 events instead of Sanders' 8. The thin line that distinguishes many prominent evangelicals is now four key events, Sanders' 8 versus these evangelicals' 12 Key Events, as well as the "probability" or "possibility" that the "core historicity," or "essential historicity" of these "footprints" or "historical traces," actually happened. They have not succeeded in their attempt but placed instead a significant shadow of doubt over the record of Jesus' life contained in the Gospels.

Seventh, the "myth of influence" needs crucial attention by these evangelicals. Scripture makes it clear that any convincing of an unbelieving person by human logic is dubious (1 Cor 1:18–2:14). The whole message involved in Jesus is *rejected* by the unbelieving as a default response (1:18–21). The default response of Jews to a crucified Messiah is to see it as "offensive" (1:22–23). God has deliberately designed a "foolish message" (1:21) to save *against* human logic. Thus, the human logic involved in posting "criteria of embarrassment" is dubious since it only accentuates Jewish offense to Jesus, resulting in further offense. The default response of unsaved Gentiles is to view information about Christ as "foolishness" so no human logic applied will convince. Instead, God has chosen "foolish people," "base things," "despised" with a "foolish message" to nullify human wisdom (1:24–28) so that no person can boast of human wisdom leading to faith (1:29–30). For as Paul says, "your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but the power of God (1 Cor 2:5). The power to convince, biblically, resides in the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, not the wisdom of men (1 Cor 2:14). True power to convince is through the proclamation of God's Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, otherwise man would have a boast before God (1:29). At the very least, such NT passages place severe limits on human logic for persuading. Would anyone suggest that their powers of persuasion are on an equal or greater par than the Holy Spirit? Perhaps this is too simple an approach for sophisticated evangelicals today (cp. Rom 10:17).

The New Testament documents find much safer harbor among “lay evangelicals” who are identified as not having the education or skill of these scholars.¹⁴⁸

Eighth, closely associated with the previous point is: who among NT skeptics would be convinced by evangelical adoption of these ideologies or resulting conclusions? Do these evangelicals believe in the NT assertions of resurrection because criteria of authenticity affirmed it, or did they already (*a priori*) believe in the resurrection and impose their beliefs upon their research in such works as *Key Events*? The latter is more likely. It is also more likely that skeptics also would realize such impositions and reject any such evangelical assertions outright. The retort to Bock, who tries to convince more critical scholars of the Gospels’ validity at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting by Robert Miller suffices, “arguments about the historical Jesus can be productive only among those who already agree on a number of contested questions about historiographical method and the nature of the Gospels. Therefore, debates about the historical Jesus that occur between the ‘evangelical camp’ (which sees the canonical Gospels as fully reliable historically) and the ‘traditional camp’ (which sees the Gospel as blends of fact and fiction) are futile.”¹⁴⁹ He further notes, “Scholarship from the one camp is unavoidably unpersuasive to the other camp.”¹⁵⁰ To the present writer, the result of this interaction is clear, however, i.e. the Gospels lose in being defamed, undermined in the process by both of these camps.

Ninth, all the efforts of these evangelicals are now dubious. Recent British-influenced scholars are now calling for the rejection of these criteria so diligently used by Bock, Webb, et. al. Keith, echoing Hooker, says about these criteria is that “they cannot deliver” what they are designed to do.¹⁵¹ Keith argues instead that scholars need “to set these particular tools down and find other means of searching” such as “memory” theories.¹⁵² Bottom line: all of these efforts are futile, founded on the constantly shifting sands of the whim of scholars. The loser will always be God’s Word.

Finally, the answer to the question imposed as to whether faith precludes “serious historical engagement” finds its answer: clear doubt exists as to whether these evangelicals have truly engaged in serious historical debate. The present writer still searches for genuine examples of true Gospel skeptics who are now believers due to the work of these evangelicals in “searching for the ‘historical’ Jesus.”

¹⁴⁸ See Bock, “Faith and the Historical Jesus,” 3–4.

¹⁴⁹ Robert J. Miller, “When It’s Futile to Argue about the Historical Jesus: A Response to Bock, Keener, and Webb,” 85.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁵¹ Morna D. Hooker, “On Using the Wrong Tool,” *Theology* 75 (1972): 570.

¹⁵² Chris Keith, “The Indebtedness of the Criteria Approach to Form Criticism and Recent Attempts to Rehabilitate the Search for an Authentic Jesus,” *Jesus, Criteria and the Demise of the Authenticity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2012), 48.

**Appendix: Overview of Methodology
The Jesus Seminar (Westar Institute) vs.
British-influenced Evangelical Critical Scholarships**

IDEOLOGICAL & METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES USED TO DETERMINE VERACITY OF GOSPELS	
Jesus Seminar Westar Institute	British-trained evangelical critical scholars
2/4 Source Hypothesis	2/4 Source Hypothesis
form criticism	form criticism
redaction criticism	redaction criticism
criteria of authenticity tradition criticism	criteria of authenticity tradition criticism
postmodernistic historiography	postmodernistic historiography
<p>ATOMISTIC approach: centers on Jesus' sayings <u>What did Jesus really say?</u></p> <p>*IMPORTANT—Also WHOLISTIC: focuses on what Jesus did Robert Funk: <i>Acts of Jesus</i> (1998)</p>	<p>WHOLISTIC approach: centers on Jesus' deeds & events <u>What did Jesus really do?</u></p> <p>Investigates predetermined key events in Jesus' life to see if the event is post- modernistically verifiable in terms of history</p> <p>IMPORTANT: considers many events not verifiable historically using postmodernistic historiography</p>
<p>BURDEN OF PROOF: shifted to The Jesus Seminar scholars to demonstrate reliability:</p> <p>“The Seminar has accordingly assumed the burden of proof: the Seminar is investigating in minute detail the data preserved by the gospels and is also identifying those that have some claim to historical veracity” (<i>Five Gospels</i>, p. 5)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">&</p> <p>“What do we know about the deeds of Jesus? About the shadowy figure depicted in snapshots in more than twenty gospels and gospel fragments that have survived from antiquity? The short answer is that we don't know a great deal. But there are some stories that probably preserve distant historical memories, and we can infer some deeds from his parables and aphorisms.” (<i>What Did Jesus Really Do?</i>, 527)</p>	<p>BURDEN OF PROOF: shifted to the evangelical-critical scholars' historical skills in applying criteria of authenticity:</p> <p>“burden of proof should lie with historian who is making the case, whether for authenticity or against it” (<i>Key Events</i>, p. 74)</p>

<p>“whisper of his voice” contained in Gospels</p> <p>posits Christ of faith vs. historical Jesus</p>	<p>“footprints” of Jesus contained in Gospels</p> <p>posits Christ of faith vs. historical Jesus</p>
<p>color-coding of Jesus-sayings in terms of red, black, gray, white that indicates probability of whether the real Jesus actually spoke the saying or performed a deed</p>	<p>probability scaling of Jesus’ events “probability,” “possibility” or historically non-verifiable scale for pericopes as to whether Jesus’ deeds or events surrounding Jesus happened or did not happen</p>
<p>RESULT:</p> <p>15 SAYINGS & A FEW DISTANT HISTORICAL MEMORIES (events) DEEMED “PROBABLY” AUTHENTIC out of hundreds of sayings in the Gospels</p> <p>RESULT: COMPLETELY REJECTS any assertions of “probability” from evangelical critical scholarship! score = 0 i.e. neither convinces the other</p>	<p>RESULT:</p> <p>12 EVENTS DEEMED HISTORICALLY “PROBABLE” out of hundreds of acts/deeds in the Gospels</p> <p>RESULT: REJECTS many assertions from The Westar Institute! score = 0 i.e. neither convinces the other</p>