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The
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WITH DR PETER J WILLIAMS, DR DIRK JONGKIND
AND DR SIMON GATHERCOLE

BIBLICAL EXPERTS HELP CHRISTIANS TO ARTICULATE
A RESPONSE TO THOSE WHO WRITE OFF THE BIBLE

**Bible & Church
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Commendations of Tyndale House

"My five-month stay at Tyndale House in 2006 was an extraordinarily productive time. I loved it. The combination of worship, fellowship over tea and disciplined seclusion surrounded by thousands of relevant books is unlike anything else I have experienced. I am thankful with the new leadership that the Lord has brought and pray that the future impact of Tyndale House on the strength of the Church will be greater than ever for the glory of Christ."

Dr John Piper, Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota

"The extraordinary holdings of the Tyndale House Library, reinforced by the assets of the Library of the University of Cambridge, make Tyndale House a superlative place for biblical scholars to engage in serious research and writing. Combine the holdings with the ambience and you have a research establishment unique among the libraries of the world. It has been an immeasurable boon to both young and senior scholars in the past; I would like to think that its best days are still ahead."

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"I wrote my PhD dissertation at Tyndale House and have returned for research and writing on other books over the years. Every time I begin working there, I sense an excitement of once again being back in this 'scholar's heaven'."

Dr Wayne Grudem, Research Professor of Bible and Theology, Phoenix Seminary, Scottsdale, AZ

"When I was researching for my Ph.D. I used the Tyndale House Library quite regularly, and would be very pleased to see it extended to accommodate even more scholars."

Lord Carey, Former Archbishop of Canterbury

"The work of Tyndale House in resourcing and advancing evangelical Christian scholarship is uniquely strategic and extremely significant."

The Revd Professor J.I. Packer

"Tyndale House is singular in its actual, and potential, influence in the world."

Dr Greg Pritchard, Founder and Director, The European Leadership Forum

"My visit to Tyndale House has been the most productive experience of my academic progression."

Andy Alo, Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology

"Christian greetings from Saudi Arabia. I wanted to write to let you know some of the impact your work is having in this country. I believe I am more equipped to do the Lord's work here because of the good things he has done through you."

Paul

Tyndale House

Excellence in Biblical Scholarship in Service of the Church

Set amid the buildings of the University of Cambridge, Tyndale House is a Christian community dedicated to researching all the primary evidence relevant to the study of the Bible. It possesses one of the finest libraries for biblical research in the world, packed with specialist material on the language, culture, history, and meaning of the Bible. It also has facilities for medium and long-term accommodation. The House enjoys close links with the University of Cambridge and many postgraduates, church leaders, and visiting scholars have found it an ideal setting for their own study.

The scholars and publications that have come from Tyndale House since its founding in 1944 have had a worldwide impact, and all major modern Protestant Bible translations have benefited significantly from the input of scholars associated with the House.

The House serves as a crossroads where scholars from around the world meet and form life-long friendships that inspire ministry worldwide.



Contents:

Page Number

4. **Introduction**
5. **How to Use the DVD Study Guide**
6. **Role of Argument in Christian Witness**
7. **Avoiding Futile Arguments**
8. **STUDY 1: Evidence of Eyewitnesses**
10. **STUDY 2: Evidence of Manuscripts**
12. **STUDY 3: Evidence of History**
14. **Further Study**
16. **About the Speakers**
17. **Speaker Timeline**
18. **About Tyndale House**

Introduction

“The four gospels that made it into the official canon were chosen, more or less arbitrarily, out of a larger sample of at least a dozen including the Gospels of Thomas, Peter, Nicodemus, Philip, Bartholomew and Mary Magdalen.”

(RICHARD DAWKINS, THE GOD DELUSION, P. 121)

“For a long time, there was incandescent debate over which of the ‘Gospels’ should be regarded as divinely inspired.”

(CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS, GOD IS NOT GREAT, P. 113)

Many books, magazine articles, websites and media broadcasts tell us that the Four Gospels are just a selection—probably a biased selection—from among a larger group of documents whose credentials are just as good as the Four that made it into the Bible.

This DVD and study guide are designed to help small groups to think through the credentials of the Four Gospels and of the earliest or most widely known other gospels. My colleagues and I believe that Christians need to be equipped to explain the credentials of the Four Gospels and that nowadays some acquaintance with other accounts of Jesus can help to assure you of the credibility of the Four Gospels and be useful in handling questions when they do come up.

It is usually best if you can handle the question of a work colleague, a relative or one of your teenage children when they raise the question and not weeks later when it may be more awkward to start the topic up again.

The Scout motto is ‘be prepared’. I hope that at the end of this short course you will feel a lot more prepared to give a reason for your faith (*1 Peter 3:15*)!

DR PETER J WILLIAMS

Speaker Timeline

1968-74	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The speakers are born
1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dirk has first of many children. He is growing tropical cut-flowers in the Netherlands.
1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pete meets Simon at Cambridge. They go to Burger King together.
Late 1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Everyone is very studious
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simon becomes Lecturer in New Testament in Aberdeen University
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pete’s bestseller: <i>Studies in the Syntax of the Peshitta of 1 Kings</i>• Pete and Dirk meet at Tyndale House
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pete joins Simon on faculty in Aberdeen University
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simon’s bestseller (co-edited): <i>The Book of Tobit: Texts, Comparisons, Lexicon and Concordance to the Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Syriac Versions: 792 pages!</i>
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pete and Simon become Senior Lecturers in New Testament in Aberdeen• Dirk becomes Fellow of St Edmund’s College, Cambridge and joins research staff at Tyndale House, Cambridge
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The last of the speakers’ children is born
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pete becomes Warden of Tyndale House• Simon becomes Lecturer in New Testament in the University of Cambridge and Editor of the <i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>• Dirk’s bestseller: <i>Scribal Habits in Codex Sinaiticus</i>
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pete, Dirk and Simon join together for their first Bible and Church conference

About The Speakers



Dr Peter J. Williams is the Warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge. He was educated at Cambridge University, where he received his MA, MPhil and PhD, in the study of ancient languages related to the Bible. After his PhD he was on staff in the Faculty of Divinity, Cambridge University (1997–1998), and thereafter taught Hebrew and Old Testament at Cambridge University as Affiliated Lecturer in Hebrew and Aramaic and as Research Fellow in Old Testament at Tyndale House, Cambridge (1998–2003). From 2003 to 2007 he was on the faculty of the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, where he became a Senior Lecturer in New Testament and Deputy Head of the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy. In July 2007 he became Warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge. He specialises in ancient translations of the Bible and is also on the translation committee of the *English Standard Version*. He is married to Kathryn with two children, Magdalena and Leo.



Dr Dirk Jongkind is a Dutch biblical scholar who finished his PhD at Cambridge University on Codex Sinaiticus, the oldest complete copy of the New Testament. After his PhD he was employed by the British Library to carry out research on Codex Sinaiticus and in 2007 he published *Scribal Habits in Codex Sinaiticus*. He has also recently re-edited the edition of the *Greek New Testament of Samuel Prideaux Tregelles*, and carried out significant work on the legal language used in and outside the New Testament. Currently he is the Research Fellow in New Testament Text and Language at Tyndale House, Cambridge and the John W. Laing Fellow at St Edmund's College, Cambridge. He is married to Marion, with six children.



Dr Simon Gathercole studied Classics and Theology at Cambridge University, he completed his doctorate at Durham University, and was appointed Lecturer, then Senior Lecturer in New Testament at the University of Aberdeen. He is now Senior Lecturer in New Testament at the University of Cambridge and Fellow of Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge. Some of his books include: *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and the New Perspective on Paul*, and *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark and Luke*. He is an acknowledged expert on early apocryphal gospels, having written *The Gospel of Judas: Rewriting Early Christianity* (Oxford University Press). He is now writing a commentary on the Gospel of Thomas. He is married to Rosie and has two children, Martha and Freddie.

How to Use the DVD and Study Guide

The DVD and study guide are divided into three main chapters or topics, which can be covered over three sessions. The DVD contains three short videos, one for each of the topics. In addition, for those who want to go into more detail, the DVD contains a complete lecture covering each topic.

For most groups we would recommend that you watch one of the short videos and then study the accompanying chapter.

If you really want to go deeper then you could watch both the short video and the lecture and then study the accompanying chapter, but for that you might need to set aside two sessions - one for the videos and one for studying the chapter.

I suggest that if you're in a group that you read the Introduction at home before the study and then go through the three study topics in the order they come up in the study guide and DVD.

Further resources for study can be found on page 14.

The Role of Argument in Christian Witness

It is important for Christians to be able to explain that there are reasons to believe and that Christian faith is not a leap in the dark. That's why the sermons in the book of Acts by Peter, Stephen and Paul are full of arguments for faith in Christ.

However, argument on its own without the context of changed lives is likely to leave many people untouched. Reasoned arguments have a real role to play alongside other forms of witness, but they have to be accompanied by a vibrant Christian faith free from hypocrisy.

In our relativistic society that emphasizes personal experience and fulfilment, reasoned argument certainly does not seem like a formula for short term success in reaching out to friends. Starting with people's immediate concerns will often seem more effective. I would agree that it is good to start with people's immediate concerns, but we also need to make sure that their concerns don't always set the agenda.

An essential part of the apostolic preaching was that the events surrounding Jesus were real space-time occurrences. For that reason alone, to be faithful to the Christian gospel, we need to emphasize the historical reality of Jesus' ministry, whether or not it seems to touch people.

The sermons and speeches in the book of Acts show that reasoned argument is on God's agenda. That's why giving reasons for the faith needs to be part of our long term strategy. We want people to recognise both that God goes far beyond what our small minds can grasp and that he himself has given us those minds to use.



For Further Study

Web-based

www.4gospels.com

<http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/toolbar>
free Bible study tools for your computer

www.tyndalehouse.com

Books

Jesus and the Eyewitnesses, Richard Bauckham (Eerdmans, 2006)

The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth behind alternative

Christianities, Darrell L. Bock (Thomas Nelson, 2006)

The Gospel of Judas: Rewriting Early Christianity, Simon Gathercole
(Oxford University Press, 2007)

Is the New Testament Reliable?, Peter M. Head (Grove Books, 2003)

How the New Testament Came Together, Peter M. Head
(Grove Books, 2009)

Credits

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Fiona Craig, Ruth Perrett and Phil Loose.

Avoiding Futile Arguments

Winning arguments often doesn't win people. Some people even like arguments since an argument can keep discussion away from their most important personal idols. We need to be prepared to engage in argument on some occasions, and to refuse to argue on others.

One way to avoid futile arguments is to establish a pre-answer contract.

Imagine that you've been asked a difficult question. This could be a genuine problem for the person you're talking to, or it could be a red herring—just a device to keep you away from talking about things that really challenge the heart. It could also be half-genuine. How can you find out how genuine a question is?

What I prefer to do is to get the questioner to agree a number of things before I even begin to answer. In other words I establish a verbal contract by asking a series of questions.

Things that I might want a friend to answer before I answer could include the following:

- 1) Is this your most important question?
- 2) Is this your most difficult question?
- 3) If I can answer, or partially answer, your most difficult question, will you be prepared to admit that the other questions could probably be answered to some degree?
- 4) What would a satisfactory answer look like?
- 5) If I gave a satisfactory answer what would you do? (read a gospel, go to church, etc.)

With questions like these I am asking people to commit themselves. If people are unwilling to commit themselves then the discussion is probably idle.

Study 1: Evidence Of Eyewitnesses

“You may be deceived if you trust too much, but you will live in torment if you do not trust enough.”

(FRANK CRANE, 1861–1928)

“Men are born with two eyes, but only one tongue, in order that they should see twice as much as they say.”

(CHARLES CALEB COLTON, 1780–1832)

Imagine you have to write a story about two places: one you’ve spent lots of time in and the other you have only heard about. How would you fare writing about the place you had never seen?

For most of us, I imagine that the story we would write about the place we had never visited would either be much more general or much less accurate.

We can apply the same test to narratives about the life and ministry of Jesus. How familiar are they with the time and place they’re talking about?



Questions for Discussion

- 1) What hallmarks of truth do the Four Gospels show?
- 2) What hallmarks of truth in the Four Gospels are easiest to get someone to agree with?
- 3) Imagine that someone comes to you with a book called *The True Story of Jesus*. The book claims to give a more authentic account of the teaching and message of Jesus than any other record. What ways are there to tell a false message from a true one? What hallmarks would a true message have?
- 4) What are the typical traits of untrue stories about Jesus?
- 5) What conspiracy theories have you heard about Christianity? Do these conspiracy theories show traits of being untrue?
- 6) Someone comes to you saying that the Four Gospels cannot be true because (they claim) two specific texts contradict each other and therefore cannot possibly both be true. What possible ways are there to respond and which way would be likely to be best?
- 7) A colleague at work comments that the stories about Jesus are just made up. How might you respond, if you only have time to reply in one short sentence?
- 8) A Christian you meet seems only to be concerned about whether the faith feels right for them and expresses indifference about whether it is historically true. How might you respond?

Study 3: Evidence Of History

“Nobody believes the official spokesman... but everybody trusts an unidentified source.”

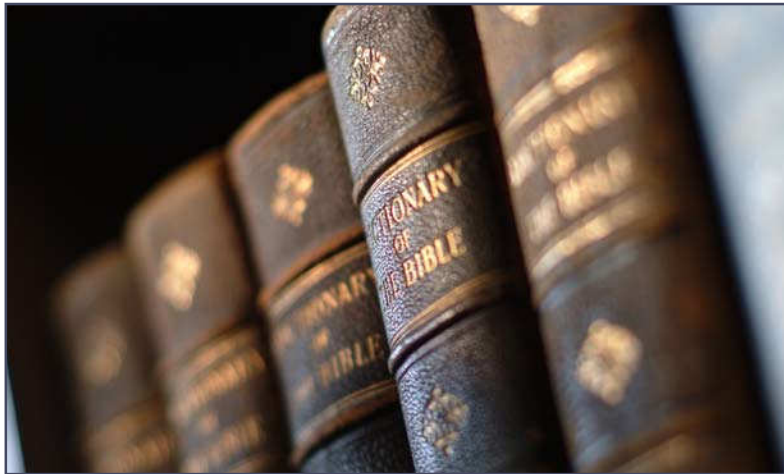
(RON NESSEN, WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY 1974-1977)

“To remain ignorant of things that happened before you were born is to remain a child.” (CICERO, 106-43 bc)

We have all come across conspiracy theories. Typically these theories suppose that something very clever and complex has gone on to hide the truth and usually there is a far simpler explanation. However, there are also such things as real conspiracies. How can we tell whether to take allegations of conspiracy seriously?

Although it is sometimes said that truth is stranger than fiction, it is also true that the truth is often simple. Conspiracy theories are anything other than simple, but the message of the Four Gospels about Jesus being the saviour of the world is extremely simple.

Another feature of the Four Gospels is that they claim that most of what they record took place in public or in front of multiple witnesses.



Questions for Discussion

- 1) Thinking of where you live, what things do the locals know that visitors do not?
- 2) What tests can you think of to distinguish an ancient writer who was familiar with what they were writing about from one who wasn't?
- 3) Imagine that someone comes to you with a book called *The True Story of Jesus*. The book claims to be by an eyewitness and claims that it is more authentic than all other records of Jesus. What questions might you ask about it and how might you test the claim that it is by an eyewitness?
- 4) What geographical knowledge do the writers of the Four Gospels display?
- 5) In what possible ways could ancient writers have gained the level of geographical knowledge that the Four Gospels display?
- 6) You have managed to convince a sceptical friend that the writers of the Four Gospels were familiar with the land of Jesus. They reply that it is still reasonable to believe that the stories themselves were made up. How might you respond?
- 7) Read a narrative section of one of the Four Gospels (suggestions: *Matthew 21:1-17*; *Mark 7:1-15*; *Luke 4:16-32*; *John 2:1-17*). What specific cultural and local knowledge does your chosen passage display? What does this level of knowledge imply about the author?
- 8) How can Christians ensure that they emphasize the historical reality of the events of the Four Gospels?

Study 2: Evidence Of Manuscripts

“Your manuscript is both good and original, but the part that is good is not original and the part that is original is not good.”
(SAMUEL JOHNSON, 1709–1784)

“Put more trust in nobility of character than in an oath.”
(SOLOON, CA. 638–559 BC)

You often hear that many millions of people watched a particular sporting fixture, whether of football, cricket, baseball, or some other sport. Strictly speaking, however, only those who were actually present saw it. The others saw images of the game on their TVs or computers. They didn't actually see a single player, see a single ball move, or any player move his bat or club.

The reason we don't usually bother to make the distinction I have just made is that we know that we're only seeing a transmitted copy of an image taken at the game, but we have complete confidence in the copying process. We say that we have heard the Beatles sing, when we have only heard a copy of the original recording they made, and we say that we have spoken to someone on the telephone, when we have only heard replicated copies of each other's voices on our own telephones.

Nowadays we are constantly trusting copies and exercising complete confidence that copying has occurred faithfully. It is of course technically feasible that someone could falsify images of a sports game and send them to your computer. However, we're sure this doesn't occur because it would take a huge amount of effort and would also soon be detected.

Funnily enough we often do not have the same confidence about writings copied from the ancient world. Some people will even assume that copies of a New Testament writing have been tampered with until the opposite is proven. This just doesn't seem fair.

Questions for Discussion

- 1) What things which you regularly trust have only come to you in a copy?
- 2) What gives you confidence in modern copying processes?
- 3) Imagine that someone comes to you with a book called *The True Story of Jesus*. The book claims to be more authentic than all other records of Jesus. How might you go about comparing its manuscript credentials with those of the New Testament Gospels? What questions would you need to ask?
- 4) Consider the following New Testament passages. What do they tell us about the way early Christians handed on the faith? (*Luke 1:4; Acts 4:42; 1 Corinthians 15:1–7*)
- 5) What do the following verses tell us about the circulation of literature amongst the early Christians?
Galatians 1:2 and 6:11
Colossians 4:16
2 Timothy 4:13
2 Peter 3:15–16
Romans 16:22; 1 Peter 5:12
Philippians 2:25–30; Colossians 4:7–9
- 6) A Muslim friend states that the Four Gospels have been corrupted. How might you respond?
- 7) A sceptical friend states that the Four Gospels have been corrupted. How might you respond using questions only, not statements?