

# Jesus – Lord, Liar, Lunatic..... or Legend

1 Peter 3:15

“...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,”

# Jesus – Lord, Liar, Lunatic..... or Legend

Christianity is a “**Reasonable**” faith, remember Voddie Baucham:

“I chose to believe the Bible because the Bible is a reliable collection of historical documents, written by eyewitnesses during the lifetime of other eyewitnesses, which report supernatural events in fulfillment of specific prophecies and claimed their writings are Divine and not of human origin. “

# Jesus – Lord, Liar, Lunatic..... or Legend

**John 3:8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”**

# Jesus – Lord, Liar, Lunatic..... or Legend

C.S. Lewis popularized the argument that Jesus was either a Liar or a lunatic or the Lord back in 1942.

But, he didn't invent it...

John Duncan (1796-1870) –  
Scottish Christian preacher

“Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or He was himself deluded and self-deceived, or He was Divine. There is no getting out of this trilemma. It is inexorable.”

## Watchman Nee (1936)

“A person who claims to be God must belong to one of three categories; First, if he claims to be God and yet in fact is not, he has to be a madman or a lunatic. Second, if he is neither God nor a lunatic, he has to be a liar, deceiving others by his lie. Third, if he is neither of these, he must be God. You can only choose one of the three possibilities. If you do not believe that he is God, you have to consider him a madman.

# Question: Is this a sound argument?

1. Are the terms clear? Yes
2. Is the logic valid? Yes
3. Are the Premises true? NO

There's another option, what if  
the things said about Jesus are

just

**LEGEND?**

# Legend/Myth?

Legend meaning:

The Jesus of history isn't the  
Jesus of the Bible

# Legend Defined:

(Note: I'm using legend/myth interchangeably)

*History and legends are historical facts, but history is an evidence-based record of past, whereas legends are exaggerated stories of ancient truths.*

**Myths** – Muthos (noun) “false story”  
or tale, legend, fable, fiction

# Legend/Myth Theory

**Skeptics rely heavily upon this “Legend” theory to discount the Gospel Records and their argument is an argument from SILENCE. They believe that the Gospel records were written LATE which gave time for legend to creep in and make the assertions below:**

## **Assertion #1:**

It is possible that legend crept in after the historical Jesus lived. This legend could have been created and propagated by his disciples to keep this new Christianity alive. Jesus of history was just a man with no supernatural powers and his disciples “created” the supernatural Jesus after his death and “supposed” resurrection.

## **Assertion #2**

Summed up by this quote from Dan Brown's Di Vinci Code

**“The Bible has evolved through countless translations, editions and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book”**

# Keep in Mind

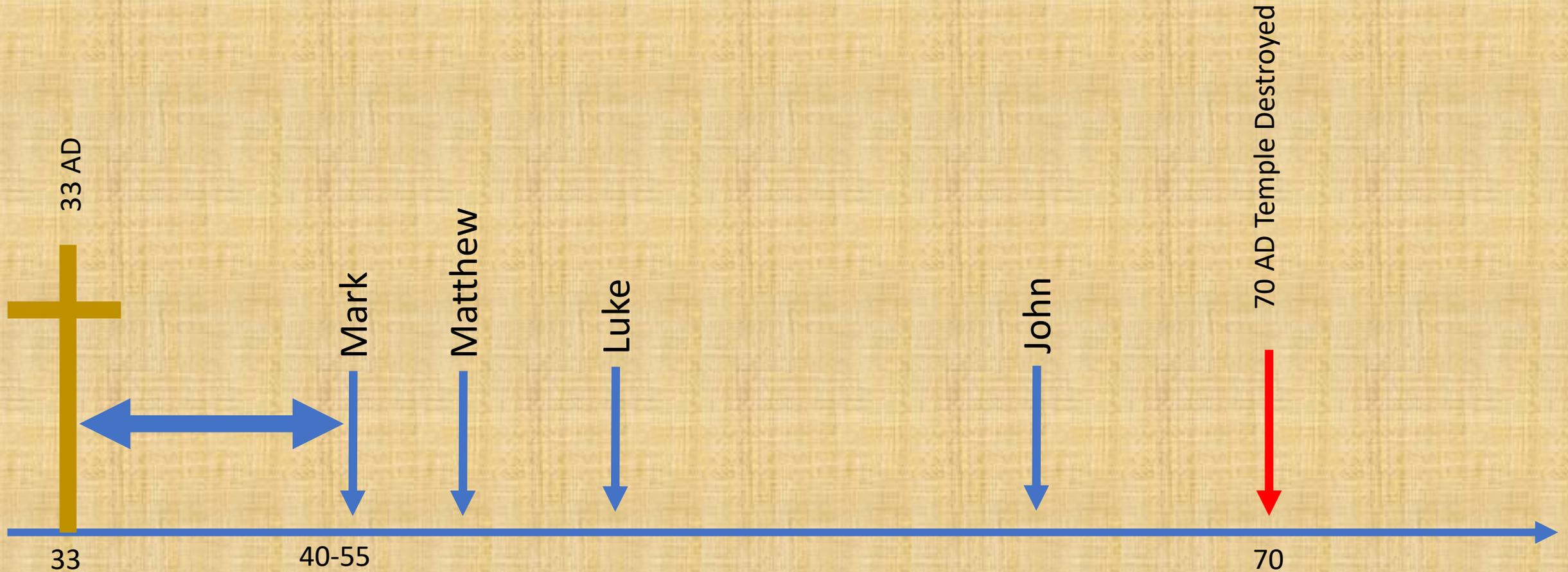
There are absolutely no texts from the first century that contradict the Gospel records.

These “Theories” are arguments from silence.

## 2 Peter 1:16-17

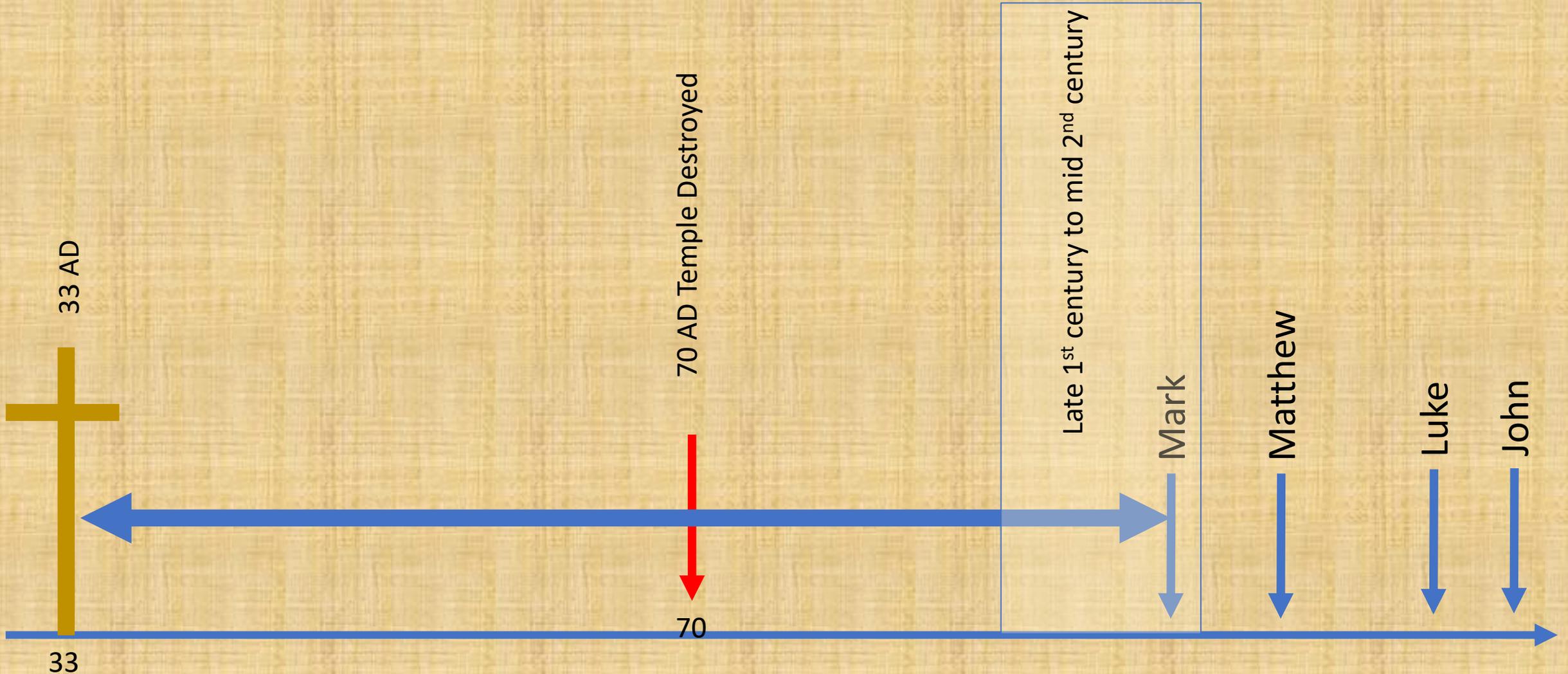
***16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son,<sup>[a]</sup> with whom I am well pleased"...***

Note the gap between Jesus' crucifixion and the earliest NT document.  
Skeptics make use of this gap to try to conjure up a different picture of Jesus  
that is depicted in the Gospels.



# This is how Skeptic NT liberal scholars try to date the NT

They actually push the Gospels into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century



## Refuting the Legend/Myth theory

C. S. Lewis, In a 1950 essay “What are we to Make of Jesus?”.

Lewis shows how unlikely it would be for the Jews to invent God become man: this is difficult because his followers were all Jews; that is, they belonged to that Nation which of all others was convinced that there was only one God – that there could not possibly be another. It is very odd that this horrible invention about a religious leader should grow up among the one people in the earth least likely to make such a mistake.

## C. S. Lewis, In a 1950 essay “What are we to Make of Jesus?” Cont’d

Lewis draws upon his background as a literary historian, “I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the Gospels are they are not Legends. I have read a great deal of legend and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of thing. They are not artistic enough to be legends. From an imaginative point of view, they are clumsy, they don’t work up to things properly. Most of the life of Jesus is totally unknown to us, as is the life of anyone else who lived at that time, and no people building up a legend would allow that to be so”

So, Lewis thinks it implausible that the monotheistic Jews would have invented an incarnate Messiah and he thinks that the genre of the gospels bears none of the typical marks of legends – based upon a lifetime of scholarly and leisure reading of ancient legends.

**Julius Muller** (The Theory of Myths in its Application to the Gospel History Examined and Confuted - 1844)

“One cannot imagine how such a series of legends could arise in an historical age, obtain universal respect, and supplant the historical recollection of the true character (of Jesus) if eyewitnesses were still at hand who could be questioned respecting the truth of the recorded marvels.”

# Other facts disproving the Myth/Legend Theory

- The Gospels are not written in the style of myth, they do not contain the normal features found in myth.
- No overblown, spectacular, childishly exaggerated events
- Nothing is arbitrary, everything in the Gospels fits and is meaningful.
- Psychological depth is at a maximum, in myth it is at a minimum.
- The character development in the Gospels, especially of Jesus, is remarkable.
- Myths are verbose, the Gospels are laconic (concise)

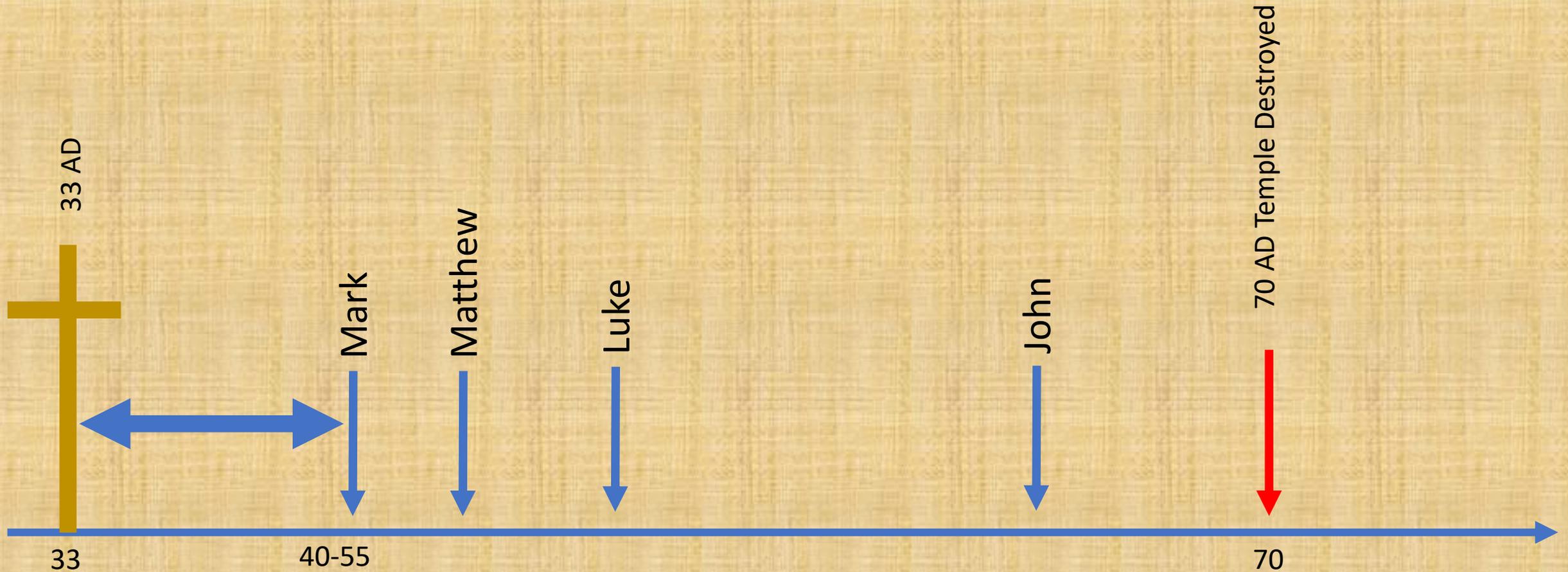
- Not enough time for myth/legend to develop, it usually takes greater than two generations before legend can develop and wipe out hard core historical fact.
- If the resurrection account is supposed to be legend for example, you would NEVER have women be the ones to discover the empty tomb!
- If you are trying to foist a myth or legend you don't propagate it while eyewitnesses are still alive and able to refute your claims
- You don't propagate a myth/legend in the same area where the events took place, you make it far removed from the location.

**EXAMPLE of a mythical writing from that era**  
**THE GOSPEL OF PETER ~125 AD**

As William Lane Craig puts it: (a supposed scene at the Resurrection site)

"In this account, the tomb is not only surrounded by Roman guards but also by all the Jewish Pharisees and elders as well as a great multitude from all the surrounding countryside who have come to watch the resurrection. Suddenly in the night there rings out a loud voice in heaven, and two men descend from heaven to the tomb. The stone over the door rolls back by itself, and they go into the tomb. The three men come out of the tomb, two of them holding up the third man. The heads of the two men reach up into the clouds, but the head of the third man reaches beyond the clouds. Then a cross comes out of the tomb, and a voice from heaven asks, 'Have you preached to them that sleep?' And the cross answers, 'Yes.'" (Apologetics, p. 189)

# WE CAN CLOSE THIS GAP BY USING THE EVIDENCE AVAILABLE



## Important fact #1

**1** It is important to understand that the dating of the Gospels and other New Testament books is at best an educated guess and at worst foolish speculation. For example, suggested dates for the writing of the Gospel of Matthew range from as early as A.D. 40 to as late as A.D. 140. This wide range of dates from scholars indicates the subjective nature of the dating process. Generally, one will find that the presuppositions of the scholars greatly influence their dating of the Gospels.

## Important fact #2

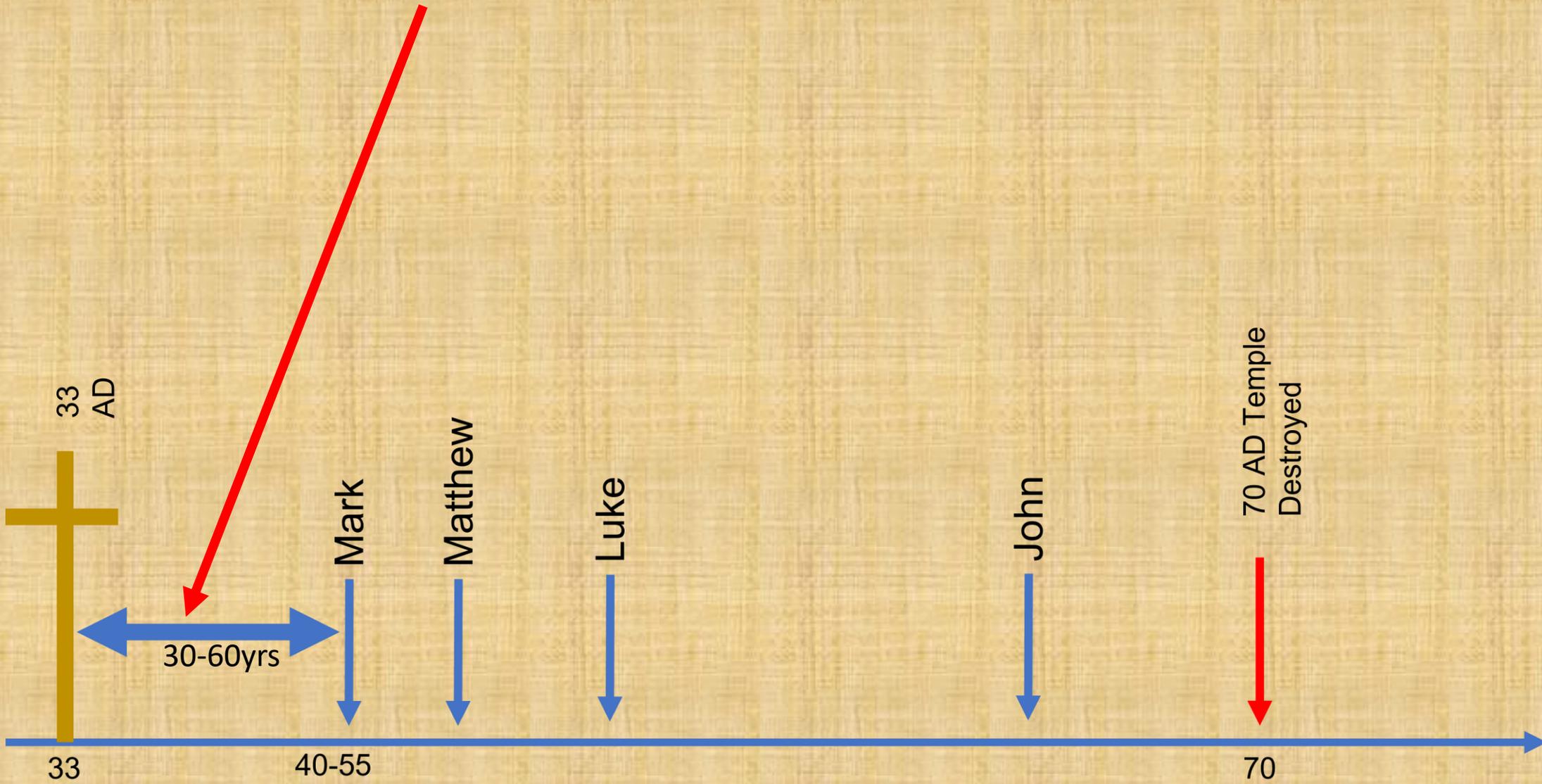
### The Presupposition of Anti-supernaturalism

- **Critics rule out Jesus' ability to predict the destruction of the Temple so precisely, so they say the NT documents have to be written AFTER 70 AD meaning the disciples added Jesus' prediction after the fact.**
- **Additionally, critics assume that if the text includes claims of miracles, then the truth of the text is automatically considered questionable/doubtful**

**To refute these assertions, we must establish the following facts:**

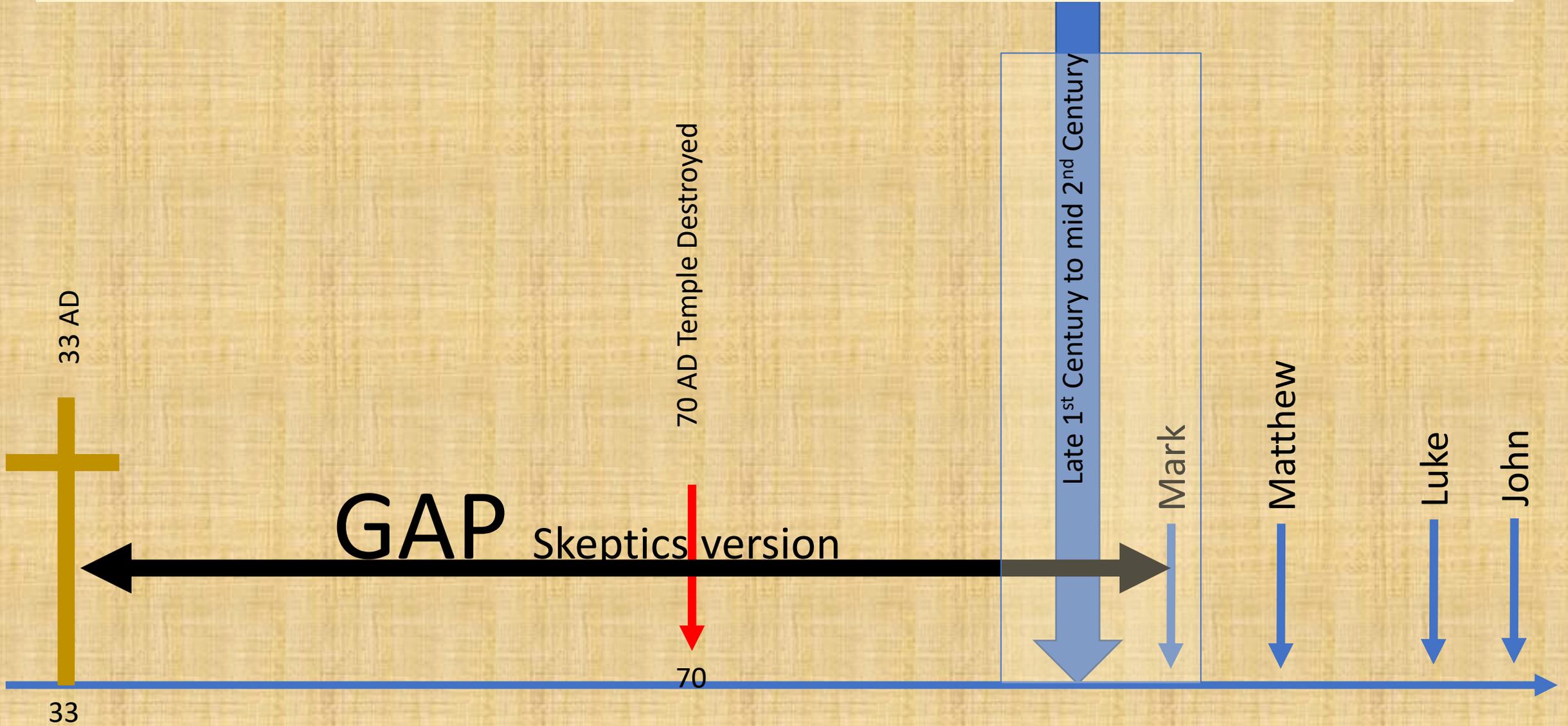
- 1.Oral Tradition & Creeds
- 2.Memory
- 3.The value of Eyewitness testimony
- 4.The EARLY dating of the NT MSS not giving enough time for “Legend/Myth” to develop

Remember we're working on closing that gap



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# Oral Tradition & Memory

- Ancient culture was vastly different from today, they were able to memorize vast amounts of information because upwards of 90% were illiterate
- Greek school children would memorize the Illiad or the Odyssey by Homer ( 52,000 words and 134,560 words respectively)
- It was common for a 14 year old Jewish student to have the entire Old Testament committed to memory (419,687 words)

# Oral Tradition (Orality)

Three different types of Oral Tradition, Informal Uncontrolled, Formal Controlled and Informal Controlled

- Informal Uncontrolled: oral tradition was information that was committed to memory but was able to be added to and modified
- Formal Controlled: Oral Tradition was to be memorized and unchanged – this is how the NT was transmitted before it was written down

# Oral Tradition

## Informal Controlled:

Oral Tradition was to be memorized and unchanged – but allows for variations in style without changing the “CORE” information. There was oversight by the elders in the community who would correct the teller if they got to “Core” facts wrong – This is what the NT writers used

# Oral Tradition

This is not like the “Telephone Game” where the goal is to have a mixed-up message at the end for a good laugh. Jewish oral tradition was spoken publicly in a community, recited and committed to memory, if one stated it incorrectly, they would be corrected by the group.

# Memory

- Memory plays an important role in in keeping the story straight.
- However, critics cite problems with memory, namely, it “LEAKS”.  
Meaning that over time memories become clouded and obscured.
- Study at SMU using the “Challenger Disaster” on Jan 28<sup>th</sup>, 1986.  
Asked Freshmen about the event then 3 years later asked the same question of the same students. 50% gave a different answer than their first and when shown the difference they considered their most recent answer the accurate one. This is the study that critics cite to prove MEMORY LEAKS over time.

# Memory

- Nothing at stake for the college students, **THEY SHOULD HAVE DONE THE STUDY WITH NASA** astronauts and those involved with the space program.
- **THESE STUDIES FOCUSED ON INDIVIDUALS, NOT CORPORATE GROUPS**
- Subsequent studies have shown that individuals with something at stake, who were involved in the event have a significantly better recall of the event.

# Memory

- The Gospel messages were orally shared over and over in churches which involves 'CORPORATE' memory rather than 'INDIVIDUAL' memory. Corporate memory is many people remembering for the sake of everybody rather than just one individual. This improves integrity of the story significantly.
- How many parents have read their children bedtime stories and the child wants the same bedtime story over and over again, to the point where both parent and child have the book memorized. Then, just for fun the parent tells the story differently and watch the reaction of the child.