



## The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins

*Burton L. Mack*

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The first book to give the full account of the lost gospel of Jesus' original followers, revealing him to be a Jewish Socrates who was mythologized into the New Testament Christ.

### **The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins Details**

Date : Published April 8th 1994 by HarperOne (first published 1993)

ISBN : 9780060653750

Author : Burton L. Mack

Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Religion, Christianity, Nonfiction, Spirituality, History, Theology



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## From Reader Review The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins for online ebook

### Marilyn Fontane says

In The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins, Burton L. Mack hypothesizes a new gospel, Q (from Quelle, French for source), which he puts together by going backwards from the four (or five if you include Thomas) narrative gospels and comparing the materials that are identical enough that most scholars (on all sides of the question) claim Matthew, Mark, Luke, Thomas and John took from a contemporary source of Jesus's sayings. After abstracting Q from them, he then goes on to interpret why the five have other materials which are different from not only this source, but from one another. Obviously one of the reasons is that the four narrative gospels were written long after Jesus, or his contemporaries, were around to correct them, and many stories and rumors and speculation was available to choose material from. Q, on the other hand, consists of material from no later than the first 40 years of the various Jesus movements. There were many Jesus groups of which Q was only one. Each emphasized ideas important to themselves.

The Jesus of Q is not a political or religious reformer, but similar to a cynic philosopher and teacher. Teachers with followers/ students (like Socrates) were fairly common at the time. He does not claim to be God or the King of the Jews. He proposes a set of rules for a moral life. His followers are Jesus people, not Christ people (Christians). Q is a book of his sayings, his teachings, and there is no reason to study his biography; he is a man, a teacher; his words are what is important.

However, years later when each of the authors of the narrative gospels was putting together his material, each had various, and different, agenda in addition to merely writing down a few sayings; the reasons were more nuanced and complex. Burton L. Mack does not claim that any of them deliberately tried to change Jesus into something he was not, but that time and attitude had changed portions of the population's interpretations as to the significance of Jesus's message. Different groups emphasized different things. Adding to this are Paul's views (who emphasized Jesus's death and mostly ignored his role as a teacher), many bishops' views, etc. Mack covers these differences in detail. He ends up claiming that a cynic teacher with no pretensions to universal greatness (based on the gospel of Q which was written during and very shortly after Jesus's lifetime), became bit by bit identified as the Messiah, the anointed or Christ, prophesied in the Jewish literature. Q shows the original; our own convoluted interpretation of a unity between Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Thomas, and Paul (who do not interpret the same figure at all) shows our current Christian view.

In Organization, The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins first explains how this gospel was "found" and put together. It then gives the complete text of the gospel and divides it into three parts, depending on when Mack believes it was written. Mack, a professor of New Testament at the School of Theology at Claremont, then provides a background explaining the social and cultural situation of the time and how it influenced the Q people. After that he shows how the Q material was passed down to, and incorporated by, Thomas, Matthew, and Mark (and from Mark to John and Luke). From there he gives details on how Paul and others created our Christian myth. Finally he explains how he feels this knowledge will effect our future beliefs. Mack thinks his hypothesis will change the church. However it is also possible, and even likely, the church will simply ignore it.

Conceptually the book is interesting; it does bog down in the many, many details, however. Anyone interested in the "real" Jesus could profit from reading this work, whatever his orientation to the situation is. Mack presents a human Jesus untouched by divinity; but the scholarly background he uses to present his view should be as useful to anyone who fully believes in the divinity of Jesus as to those who share Mack's own interpretation. The lengthy select bibliography would be useful to any scholars of this conflict as well.

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### **Ben says**

Mack peels back the layers of the gospels to argue that the earliest sayings of Jesus reveal a wisdom teacher influenced by the Cynic philosophy of Diogenes and his lineage, rather than the apocalyptic prophet he is usually characterized as being by modern academics. This is a rather appealing notion in terms of rehabilitating the ethically orientated aphorisms of the synoptic gospels from the accumulated layers of Christian detritus. It is difficult, however, for the lay person to meticulously reconstruct the process by which he strips back various layers in the Q manuscript, which is after all only a hypothetical document. We thus have to take Mack at his word. While his arguments do seem strong, I was hesitant to accept them at face value, which rather spoiled the impact of the book for me.

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### **Erik Graff says**

The first assignment in Walter Wink's course on the Christian Scriptures at Union Theological Seminary was to go through the synoptic gospels with magic markers, showing the correspondences of passages between two or more of them. As a consequence of this exercise I developed a firm conviction in the essential accuracy of the Q hypothesis (from the German Quelle or "source"). The many passages of sayings attributed to Jesus shared by Luke and Matthew indicate a common source not employed by Mark.

It is one thing to accept the hypothesis of a Sayings Document, another to reconstruct it. This is what Mack attempts to do in *The Lost Gospel*.

The Gospel of Thomas found in Egypt in the forties suggests what a sayings document might have looked like. Mack suggests a more complex model whereby such texts went through stages of development reflecting changing social conditions. Of course, texts being unique holographs in those days, one must imagine a tree of many branches constituting the whole of such a written tradition and one might expect that the earliest materials stemming from a common source would be the most abundantly evident in the Luke/Matthew parallels. This is roughly compatible with Mack's claim that the third and latest stratum, the one following the Roman War, is also the one least represented in the two gospels. However, many scenarios of transmission are imaginable, even those which conceive of scribes reconciling their texts, one to another.

Written for ordinary persons familiar with the bible, Mack's argument is dangerous in that it projects a confidence unwarranted by the evidence. While the probable existence of Sayings Documents is virtually uncontestable, any attempt to reconstruct exemplars beyond the aforementioned Thomas will be debatable until and unless more evidence is obtained.

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### **Edward Smith says**

The Q hypothesis is a theory that there was a source document of which the Gospels were derived from. Mack's controversial theory is based upon reconstruction and literary analysis of the writings of the Gospels, in which he attempts to "recreate" the Q document. The author provides a more skeptical interpretation of the New Testament, and provides the theory that Jesus was simply a wandering rabbi in the vein of the Cynic philosophers of Ancient Greece, with the Q documents being a collection of his teachings. Truly a thought

provoking theory that is left for you to decide.

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### **Sergio E says**

There just isn't enough evidence to convince me that the document hypothesized by the Q hypothesis is anything other than a hypothesis. Because of this, attempt to recreate the contents of this document, and the community that supposedly created it, are misguided at best. Equally misguided is the idea that such a document, which has absolutely no physical evidence to support its existence, can unlock the mysteries of the "real" Jesus and "real" Christianity.

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### **Michael says**

An examination of the proposed sayings Gospel known to scholars simply as "Q". The gospel of Q was compiled from content contained within the synoptic gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. The author argues that this lost gospel was used first by Mark in composing his Gospel, and then later by Matthew and Luke who combined it with Mar's Gospel to create their own accounts. The author goes on to argue that the earliest form of Q highlights Jesus of Nazareth not as a Jewish religious or political reformer, as the founder of a new religion, or as the promised messiah; rather, Jesus is argued as having been a Stoic sage such as Zeno or Seneca. The Jewish and Christ aspects were tacked on later as the movement grew and faced difficulty following the aftermath of the Jewish revolt. Interesting ideas on Christian origin and worth consideration. Of course, the antiquity and limited historical information on Jesus of Nazareth makes it hard to authenticate any claims on what about him was true.

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### **Joseph Schrock says**

I have greatly mixed feelings about the book I'm reviewing here, "The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q". I was inclined to suspect that the author is an atheist or agnostic, given the fact that he seemed extremely cynical about the possibility that the Divine could shine through the lives and teachings of some human beings. Even if the author is an atheist, that would not invalidate his arguments concerning the development of Christianity, the claims he makes about "Q" having existed as an actual book, and his arguments that "Q" presents a vastly different picture of Jesus of Nazareth than is offered in the gospel accounts.

Let me be brief in this review, and simply state that I found the book to be intriguing in that it offers a greatly diverse picture of Jesus' life and teachings than what one finds in the gospels. If Burton Mack is at all correct in his claims about "Q", then such a book could present a grave threat to traditional claims of "mainstream" Christianity. It appears that Dr. Mack was arguing that the earliest followers of Jesus (at any rate, the people of "Q") did not even teach that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. On page 43 I find the following observations: "... Since that seemed to fit the standard Christian scenario, no one bothered to ask Edwards how he knew that the people of Q thought that Jesus had been raised from the dead when they made no mention of it." By Dr. Mack's understanding of "Q" and the "Jesus people", it seems that some of the earliest followers of Jesus made no claims at all to the effect that Jesus had been raised from the dead, but merely taught that Jesus was a great spiritual teacher, prophet, and sage. On page 216 of this book, Mack asserts as follows: "... Why would the Christ congregations have used it [Christ, Messiah] if, as we have seen, the Jesus movement had not thought of Jesus as a messiah?"

In short, Mack argues that that some of the earliest followers of Jesus (the people of “Q”) did not even claim that Jesus had been resurrected and did not regard him as a messiah. Mack argues that a mythology was created around the life, death, and (supposed) resurrection of Jesus. On page 221, Mack makes further claims as follows: “The difference between the Jesus movements [including the people of “Q”] and their mythologies and the congregations of Christ [including Paul and his followers] and their mythologies should now be clear. One important contrast is that between a focus on the instructions of a teacher and the dramatic event of a martyr’s death and resurrection....”

Obviously, Dr. Mack is claiming that the “Christ people” who became “mainstream” Christianity created a mythology around the life of Jesus and made claims in the gospel writings, as well as through the teachings of Paul, that were dramatically diverse from what the people of “Q” had originally taught and believed.

Can Burton Mack’s arguments properly be regarded as veridical? I am not a “Bible” scholar, and I can only judge as a moderately educated layman what might be the best answers to offer. In fact, was the “Book of Q” ever an extant set of writings in book form? Mack claims it was, and many other “Bible” scholars are convinced that the gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) borrowed widely from “Q” in creating their gospel accounts. If I had to offer a guess (as a mere layman), I would guess that “Q” really had existed, but got lost and was never to be directly discovered, as can easily happen for writings of that era. Whether or not claims made by Burton Mack concerning the people who created “Q” are valid claims, this judgment I defer to those much more informed than myself. Burton Mack is among those, but there might well be equally informed “Bible” scholars who would declare that Mack gets it all wrong.

In conclusion, I will simply say that the book under review here is food for serious thought, reflection, and consideration. Any Christian who cares deeply about the validity of the foundations of his/her religion would do well to read such books as this. It could be a sobering experience and even a wake-up call.

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### **Cindy says**

Convincing thesis on the origins of Christianity.

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### **Doug Piero says**

Burton Mack does a brilliant job of revealing the Gospel of Q, how it was written, and who some of the authors may have been. Mack also explains in a very believable way how these author-communities got to be the way they were. The Gospel of Q itself, once extracted from the Gospels that copy from it, brilliantly illuminates much about Jesus' life, and the lives of the early believers in Jesus.

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### **Joe Stephens says**

In recent years, a litany of books has been written on how to best understand the early Christian movement. Mack excels in several key areas. His ability to distill scholarship on “Q” was impressive and fluid. Additionally, I’ve never heard his argument that there were three different layers of the “Q” tradition with the “Cynic Jesus” being the earliest. Even his reworking of the cultural landscape of Galilee was brilliant.

However, I wish he would've provided arguments for his more extravagant arguments that mainstream scholarship doesn't accept. For example, he should've buttressed his arguments that Jesus was intentionally fashioned after Hellenistic archetypes. Even other critical scholars like Ehrman repudiate that notion (although mythicists agree). Overall, it was a fascinating read—even if I'm not convinced of his every argument.

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### **Arturo says**

WOW! WOW! WOW!

This book will make you think!

Imagine the Christian gospels of Matthew and Luke being written using the Gospel of Mark and another second unknown source, as guides and examples

The unknown source is called Q from the German “Quelle” or “source”. This source is supposed to have had quotations from Jesus Christ.

Sounds crazy uh? Well the more you read it, the more you will see that it might be possible. The fact that this is suggested by scholars and not conspiracy nuts is what makes it a fantastic reading!

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### **Kevin Fuller says**

One would think with the relatively recent flood of the Nag Hammadi Scriptures into the popular media coupled with the pseudo-historical gnostic rewritings of the Jesus story that little more could be said on the subject.

This book however stands out as a scholarly approach to the Jesus myth that perhaps has been overlooked by many.

The author gives a nice introduction and even history of the 'quest for the historical Jesus', with Albert Schweitzer and various others slowly but surely casting a critical light on the New Testament to see just what is the what, and in so doing also deconstructing the classic narrative of a reformer who came to set the nation of Israel aright and save the world from a fallen state.

Roughly, the argument of 'Q' goes, within the four Gospels there are particular sayings of Jesus that have been found through textual analysis to predate Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. This being due to the fact the sayings are used by Matthew, Mark and Luke (the synoptics), which hopefully obviously predate John. That being said, one can extract these sayings and look at them in and of themselves, analyzing them within their own context to get a purer, more primitive picture of Jesus.

There is a buy in, obviously, but if one gives the book a chance, it unfolds into one bright and interesting argument for viewing Jesus more as a Greek Cynic with a hint of Judaic apocalyptic leanings who offered a simple way to the Kingdom of God, chiefly by eschewing ill-gotten gain and enjoying the simple things Life has to offer.

The text itself is offered in the middle of the book and is indeed fascinating to read. Illuminating even. It's like one can hear Jesus cutting through all the theological bull and speaking in and of Himself. The message is composed of maxims (truths about society), imperatives (ways to realize these truths), and mild apocalyptic. Not much to report here on much of what the traditional Gospel narratives offer, but more of a philosophical treatise peppered with interesting mystical insights. All without sounding elitist or off putting.

Let's face it. The Enlightenment happened for a reason. Man achieved new critical thinking skills that were fated to be applied to something as sacred as the Holy Bible. If one can stomach this and look at something held sacred by taking the blinders off, and that even briefly, one just might get a richer, truer understanding of who Jesus was and what He truly had to say.

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### **Yimmy says**

This book serves as a great introduction to the critical study of the bible, if you ignore everything he says about Q. Burton Mack uses the "well established" Q source to portray its *sitz im leben*; he calls the community "Jesus people." If Q is indeed well established, it is not within this book and one has to wonder whether Mack simply presupposes that the reader already subscribes to the Q hypothesis. For anyone remotely skeptical of Q, this book is not for you. The book released prior to "The Lost Gospel," "A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origin" is a better book and recommended for anyone with more than a casual interest in the history of Christianity.

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### **Shane Wagoner says**

Burton L. Mack is the Jesus Seminar's intellectual kamikaze. With a high-school level writing style and even shoddier logic, *The Lost Gospel* desperately tries to spark some form of misguided controversy. Unfortunately for its author, being a historian requires a bit more than making blanket generalizations. After pumping out a paper thin "methodology," Mack is somehow surprised to discover that none of the apocalyptic sayings of Jesus are original and that Jesus was nothing more than a cynic-philosopher teaching quick ethical one-liners (what a coincidence). Afterwards, he elaborates on how Q has provided us with the true history of Christianity: A group of "Jesus people" was simply trying to live with verve in the political/philosophical turmoil of 1st century Palestine. Over time, many people distorted the original intentions of the movement through a series of myths that eventually became our modern gospels. Already a tenuous premise, Mack adds insult to injury by not even attempting to answer the inevitable questions that follow: How does this myth making work in a Jewish context? What about parts of the Pauline epistles that are contemporary or near the development of Q that portray a different narrative? Why is this Jesus completely divorced from his Jewish context? Why should we assume that the people of Q rejected a narrative just because their book lacked one? Overall, this book can only be described as what it is: a poorly written, overly-simplified joke.

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### **Sally says**

If you are a Christian and wavering in your faith, then this book may tip you over the edge. There are points the author raises that will challenge your beliefs and your understanding of many traditions that exist today. Q does not actually exist, but the contents have been reconstructed and is a collection of the sayings or

teachings of Jesus. This book describes the scholarly effort to reconstruct this hypothetical text, it includes the gospel of Q and traces the social environment affecting Q from the time it was written to modern Christianity as we understand it. How did the followers of Jesus change from the times of Q to now? And why?

**Background on Q.** New Testament scholars commonly believe that the gospels of Matthew and Luke were written from the gospel of Mark as a source. However, in the 19th century, a second common source was proposed. "Q" for *Quelle* from the German word for "source". This would represent one of the earliest accounts of Jesus' sayings.

I like that the author describes how the text was recreated, however I found some of the arguments hard to follow. He makes the distinction between the historical Jesus who existed, and who may actually have said and taught the words proposed in Q, and the Christ messiah who was crucified and resurrected.

Mind-opening book, but it should be read along with other explanations of Q. Read the epilogue after reading Q, and before the rest of the book. It might make it easier to follow some of the arguments. I think the book would have benefited from a glossary of terms as used (the dictionary meanings didn't seem to fully capture the context)

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