

This book presents evidence from the Bible showing that the fourth Gospel was recorded by the Lord's disciple Lazarus, not the apostle John; explains how the attribution error could have occurred; and explains Lazarus' significance for God's elect living in the last days.

Lazarus Revealed:

A Biblical Picture of the Last True Believers on Earth

by Robert Fitzpatrick

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ROBERT FITZPATRICK

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Chapter 1

A Big Surprise Concerning Lazarus

“Lazarus, come forth.” With those words, the Lord Jesus performed one of the best-known miracles of His ministry: He raised Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus’ resurrection wasn’t the first one recorded in the Bible; but it may be the most famous, except for the Lord’s own resurrection.

We can understand why this is so. Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. As his sister, Martha, said when she heard the Lord order that the stone to the tomb be removed, “by this time he stinketh.” So, there was absolutely no doubt Lazarus was dead. No one can claim he might have been revived by some CPR, or a shock from a defibrillator. His body was well on the way to decomposing.

It’s because of this mighty miracle that most people who are familiar with the Bible know the name Lazarus. However, there is a great deal more than this miracle to his story. But before we get to it, we should take a quick look at the other Lazarus.

The Fictional Lazarus

Yes, the Bible also tells us about another Lazarus – a fictional one. We read about him in a parable about a rich man and a poor beggar. Lazarus is the poor beggar, and the parable is found in Luke chapter 16. Lazarus is the only fictional character given a name in the Bible, and it’s no coincidence that his name is Lazarus.

The parable about Lazarus is only one of many told by the Lord Jesus. According to one count, there are 42 of them. We can think of a parable as a short fictional story that teaches a spiritual lesson. Some of the Lord’s parables are well known. You may have heard or read about the

sower who went out to sow seed; or the prodigal son whose father welcomed him home; or the widow and the unjust judge. None of the characters in these parables or any of the others have names, only the poor beggar named Lazarus. We will see that the Lord's reason for naming him Lazarus teaches us an important lesson about events involving the real Lazarus.

In the parable, we read first about the rich man at whose gate Lazarus lay. The rich man "fared sumptuously," but poor Lazarus wanted to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. According to the parable, both men die. The angels carry Lazarus to "Abraham's bosom." So, Lazarus goes to heaven, but the rich man is buried and "in hell." We also read that he is "in torments."

The rich man cries out to Abraham, asking him to send Lazarus with just the tiniest bit of water to cool his tongue because he is "tormented in this flame." Abraham tells the man that there is a "great gulf fixed" between "us and you." Therefore, it is not possible for Lazarus to go to the rich man.

There's some terrifying language here and elsewhere in the Bible, and it's easy to miss the parable's main point. Many people believe this parable clearly shows that unsaved people are doomed to suffer eternally in a fiery place called hell. However, in verses such as Exodus 21:23-25 ("eye for eye, tooth for tooth") and Romans 6:23 ("the wages of sin *is* death"), God reveals that the penalty for sin is limited, and is the destruction of body and soul. It is not an eternal life of torment.

To correctly understand this parable, we need to be aware of three points. First, because it's a parable we must expect elements of the story to convey spiritual truth. Flame and fire, for instance, are symbols of God's wrath and eventual judgment on all who are unsaved. It's a judgment that will kill and completely destroy them. Second, the translators did not always translate the original Greek words as accurately as they should have. When we look closely at some key words in the original language, we find their meanings guide us to

understand the parable as presenting the imaginary idea of a dead man evaluating his futile life from his earthly tomb. Third, God intentionally wrote certain verses to make them terrifying as a way to restrain mankind's evil tendencies.

When we carefully work through the parable about Lazarus and the rich man, comparing it with other Bible verses concerning death, we discover that the rich man is dead and not suffering anything. He is not aware of anything, but IF he could understand his situation, he would be sorrowing (not tormented) to know that he will never share eternity with the Lord. Near the end of the parable, we find that the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's house to testify to his five brethren, so that they would not come to "this place of torment" (Luke 16:28). To this request, Abraham replies that they have Moses and the prophets. He says, "let them hear them" (Luke 16:29). The man tries again, as we read in Luke 16:30:

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

Abraham's answer to this is in Luke 16:31, the parable's final verse:

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

This is what the parable teaches: even if someone came back from the dead to warn others to repent, they wouldn't.

What the Parable Means, And What It Doesn't Mean

That final verse is the point for this parable. Even if unsaved people knew that someone had come back from the dead and heard that person deliver a warning from God, they still would not come to God in a manner leading to salvation. Truly, God used His word to save people;

but unless God provided them with “spiritual ears” to hear that word with understanding, they could not be saved (Proverbs 20:12).

The real Lazarus became living proof of this. The Lord Jesus raised him from the dead; but instead of repenting at this tremendous miracle, the religious leaders wanted to kill the Lord. In fact, they even spoke of killing Lazarus! Imagine that – they actually considered killing Lazarus because they feared that more people would follow Jesus as a result of this incredible miracle. The chief priests and Pharisees had the word of God - “Moses and the prophets;” but they could not “hear” it.

With these things in mind, we can see why the Lord named the beggar “Lazarus” in the parable: it was to call our attention to the miracle that brought the real Lazarus back from the dead. The fictional Lazarus reminds us of the real Lazarus, and Abraham’s final statement to the rich man describes how the religious leaders reacted when they learned that Lazarus had come back to life. When we compare places mentioned in the Gospel accounts against a map of the area around Jerusalem, we find that the Lord must have told this parable before raising Lazarus from the dead. However, regardless of which occurred first, we know that God wants us to relate the parable to events in the life of the real Lazarus.

Lazarus Becomes Famous

The name “Lazarus” is thought to mean “whom God helps.” It appears 15 times in the Bible and comes from the Hebrew name “Eleazar.” (There was more than one Eleazar in the Bible; for example, see Exodus 6:23 and Nehemiah 12:42).

Of the fifteen uses of “Lazarus,” four times it’s used in the parable known as “the rich man and Lazarus” (Luke 16:19-31); so that leaves only eleven times when it’s applied to the real Lazarus. Those eleven uses are all from the fourth Gospel. In fact, everything we know about

Lazarus comes from the fourth Gospel account, identified in the Bible as “The Gospel According to John” or something very similar.

We first read about Lazarus in John 11:1:

Now a certain man *was* sick, *named* Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.

Verse 2 tells us that Mary had anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair; and in verse 3 we learn that Mary and Martha sent a message to the Lord, telling Him that Lazarus was sick:

Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

Instead of coming right away to see Lazarus, we read that Jesus remained where He was two days (verse 6). He then told His disciples, “Let us go into Judea again.”

We know that when the Lord Jesus got the message from Mary and Martha, He was somewhere on the other side of the Jordan River (John 10:40). He had been teaching in Jerusalem at the temple (John 10:22-23) until the Jews tried to kill Him. Then He left; so, we aren’t surprised to read how the disciples reacted when He told them about going back to Judea. In verse 8, we read:

***His* disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?**

The Lord knew that Lazarus had died by that time, but the disciples didn’t. In verse 11, He tells them: “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth: but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.” The disciples didn’t understand what the Lord meant about Lazarus sleeping, and so in verse 14 He tells them plainly, “Lazarus is dead.”

We don't know how long it took the Lord and the disciples to travel to Bethany; but we know that by the time they arrived, Lazarus had already been in the grave four days (verse 17). That was plenty of time for news of Lazarus' death to get around, and verse 19 indicates this:

And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

When Martha heard that the Lord Jesus was coming, she went to meet Him. She knew that He could have saved her brother (verse 21), and so did Mary – as we read in verse 32:

Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

Besides Martha and Mary, other mourners were there; for they had followed Mary when she left her house to meet Jesus. The sisters walked with the Lord to Lazarus' grave. Verse 38 describes this particular grave:

Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

Being there with the two grieving sisters and other mourners, the Lord Jesus was deeply moved. In fact, this was one of the two times recorded in the Bible when He wept. He then had the stone moved away from the entrance. He was about to do one of the most wonderful miracles we find in the Bible. With a loud voice, He cried, "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43).

We don't read about anyone fainting or running away at the sight of Lazarus coming out of the cave, but those who were there must have been absolutely shocked. Even Martha, who knew that the Lord could have healed her brother of his illness, figured it was now too late to do anything for Lazarus. John 11:39 proves this:

Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days.

Lazarus couldn't just walk out of the cave after coming back to life. We know this based on what we read in John 11:44:

And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

Lazarus was "bound hand and foot." He also had a covering over his face; therefore, he couldn't see where he was going. Besides all this, his body had most likely been laid out on a ledge or "bench" carved into the rock within the cave, a couple of feet above the cave's floor. Because of the grave-clothes, there was no way he could have gotten up and come out of the cave on his own power. No matter how healthy and strong you may be, if you are stretched out like that on a hard surface and all tied up, you won't be able to move out of your position. Therefore, Lazarus did not come out of the cave in any normal way. This means the people there must have seen something else miraculous that day: they must have seen Lazarus moving as if an invisible hand had grabbed him and pulled him out. Perhaps he floated out of the cave horizontally; or he may have been dragged along vertically until he came before the group outside the cave. In any event, it's clear that the Lord pulled him out, set him on his feet and held him there until his sisters could release him. What a sight that must have been!



The outside of Lazarus' tomb may have looked something like this, but with a very large stone that could be rolled to seal the entrance.

Jerusalem – Tomb of the Garden, Photo by Djampa, August 8, 2008

Some people might claim that Lazarus' resurrection is a picture of the resurrection on the last day; but there's another way to understand it. It fits as a picture of the unique time in a person's life when he or she is saved. In this process, there's no decision by the individual involved. It's all God's doing. In fact, the person being saved is completely powerless to respond to God, just as Lazarus couldn't respond in his own strength to the Lord Jesus when He called. Lazarus was completely powerless. He was, as the expression goes, as dead as a doornail.

We've seen that Lazarus was well-known before his illness. He and his sisters must have had many friends, because John 11:19 tells us that many of the Jews came to comfort Mary and Martha. Now, from the moment he came out of that cave, Lazarus would be more than just well-known: he was going to be famous.

Some of those who witnessed this miracle told the Pharisees what had happened, as we read in John 11:46. The news could have gotten back to them the same day, because Bethany was near Jerusalem. John 11:18 reveals that the distance was about 15 furlongs. This is estimated to be a little less than two miles – not very far from Jerusalem.

Even before this incredible miracle, the Pharisees were aware of what Jesus was doing. When Jesus healed a man who had been born blind (John 9:1-7), the Pharisees found out about it (John 9:13) and were very careful to investigate it. They questioned the man, and then had the man's parents brought to them for questioning. After that, they had the man brought in again (John 9:23-24) for more questioning. Healing the man born blind was an astonishing miracle. But, as amazing as it was, it couldn't have astonished people so much as the miracle of bringing back to life a man who had been dead four days.

After the Pharisees heard of the miracle concerning Lazarus, they must have either investigated it (as they did in the case of the man born blind) or almost immediately been presented with overwhelming evidence that it had happened. When they were convinced, they held a meeting with the chief priests to discuss what they should do about Jesus (John

11:47). In John 11:53, we read the decision that came out of that meeting:

Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.

From John 11:55, we know that this meeting was held sometime near the final Passover in the Lord's ministry. The religious leaders were now really determined to kill the Lord Jesus. More than that, they even considered killing Lazarus! We know this from John 12:10-11:

But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.

There is another verse indicating that many people knew Lazarus had come back to life. It's in the account of the Lord's arrival at Jerusalem a short time later. The word had gotten out that Jesus was on His way there, so people took branches of palm trees and went to see Him. John 12:17 tells us that people who had witnessed the miracle reported it:

The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record.

And John 12:18 tells us that this miracle was actually one reason for people coming to see the Lord Jesus that day:

For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle.

Based on John 12:19, we know there must have been many people there to greet the Lord:

The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him.

This verse also shows us that the Pharisees still wanted to control the situation. They opposed the Lord Jesus, and could not believe that He was God.

Verse 12:17, telling us that people who had witnessed the miracle “bare record,” is the last verse to mention the real Lazarus by name. However, we will see that there is much evidence that Lazarus is the man behind the scenes in several other events recorded in the fourth Gospel.

Something Special About Lazarus

We have now examined the only passages in the Bible that mention Lazarus by name. After reading about his death and resurrection (John 11), and his presence when his sister Mary anointed the Lord Jesus with costly ointment (John 12:1-3), most people think they have read all the Bible has to say about Lazarus. However, we will see compelling evidence that Lazarus was present at other major events, and that he is actually one of the most important figures in the Bible.

As we proceed, you need to be aware of something that’s evident throughout the Bible. You may have noticed the way God makes associations between some objects and ideas. In this way, He shows us how to understand certain things. For example, in Ephesians 6:17 we read:

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

By realizing that a sword is identified with the word of God - as it is in this verse - we get a better understanding of other verses that mention a sword (for example, Revelation 1:16). God has done something similar in certain verses about Lazarus. We see this in John 11:3:

Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

Notice the words “he whom thou lovest.” A couple of verses later, we find this idea again: in John 11:5, we read plainly that Jesus loved the two sisters and Lazarus. Then, in John 11:36 we read what was said about Jesus when He wept at Lazarus’ grave:

Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!

God really emphasizes that Jesus loved Lazarus. In the verses mentioning this love for Lazarus, God uses two different Greek words: phileo (Strong’s number G5368) and agapao (Strong’s number G25). You may be wondering if the Lord Jesus loved Lazarus more than anyone else He has saved. Is that a possibility?

As we continue reading this Gospel account after the chapters mentioning Lazarus by name, we come to a verse that helps to answer this question. It’s John 16:27:

For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

Here, the Lord Jesus is speaking to His disciples and telling them that the Father loves them. The Greek word translated as “loveth” is “phileo,” one of the same words used to tell about the Lord’s love for Lazarus. Revelation 3:19 is another verse in which we find the word “phileo” translated as love:

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

From this verse, we know that the Lord Jesus loves all His children and chastens them all at one time or another. God also uses the second Greek word we’ve seen applied to Lazarus – “agapao” - to describe His love for all the elect. In John 15:12, we read:

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

The words translated as “love” and “loved” are “agapao.” Therefore, the same two Greek words used to describe Jesus’ love for Lazarus are also used to describe His love for anyone He has saved. As we proceed, we will learn why there is an emphasis on Lazarus as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

There’s More to Lazarus Than Most People Realize

There’s a 15th century painting by Leonardo da Vinci called “The Last Supper.” It shows the Lord Jesus (of course, this is a violation of the second of the Ten Commandments – see Exodus 20:4) sitting at the table with His twelve apostles. The idea that there were only twelve others with the Lord that evening is commonly accepted. It may have gained even more acceptance as a result of Leonardo’s famous painting. However, the Bible does not limit the number of disciples at the supper to twelve. In fact, it implies that others were there.

One way it does this is found in Luke’s account. In Luke 22:14, we read this:

And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him.

Here and in other verses found in the four Gospel accounts, we find the twelve apostles mentioned. These are the twelve whose names are listed in Luke 6, Matthew 10 and Mark 3 (the apostle identified as Judas the brother of James in Luke 6:16 is called Lebbaeus or Thaddaeus in Matthew 10:3 and Mark 3:18). Luke’s account makes it clear that all twelve apostles were with the Lord at the Passover supper. But his account does something else, because several verses later we find this in Luke 22:39:

And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.

This verse tells us that, after the supper, the Lord Jesus left the house and went to the mount of Olives, and His disciples followed Him. In the original Greek, the word translated as “disciples” is a different word than the word translated as “apostles” earlier in the chapter in verse 14. We also read about the disciples in Luke 6:13:

And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;

The word translated as “disciples” here is Strong’s number G3101 (“mathetes”), which is the same word found in Luke 22:39. So it’s clear from Luke 6:13 that the Lord Jesus had other disciples besides the twelve apostles.

We should also note a word used to describe the room where the Passover supper was held. In Luke 22:12, the Lord describes it as a “large upper room furnished.” The Greek word translated as “large” is Strong’s number G3173, “megas.” It’s used 195 times in the Bible, and in 150 of those uses it’s translated as “great.” It suggests that such a room could easily accommodate many more than just the Lord and His twelve apostles. There was likely sufficient space for several large tables, each seating a dozen or more.

Here is something else to consider. In Luke 24, we read about two of the disciples on the road to a village called Emmaus on Sunday after the Lord Jesus had risen from the grave. The Lord appeared to them and spoke with them, but they did not recognize Him. When they were near their village, they invited Him to stay with them. Finally, as they were eating, they realized it was the Lord, as we read in Luke 24:30-31:

And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

These two disciples were so excited that they left the same hour to return to Jerusalem, to tell the apostles they had seen the risen Lord.

Now, have you ever wondered why they finally recognized the Lord when He broke bread? The Bible doesn't state this, but it seems reasonable that they were also at the Passover supper with the Lord when He broke bread. They could have remembered something about it. Perhaps it was the way the Lord did it - maybe a gesture or the tone of His voice. Something they had just seen (or heard) when they were eating with Him at Emmaus apparently reminded them of the Passover supper with the Lord. There's a similar event recorded in John 20:14-16, where Mary Magdalene was looking right at the Lord Jesus after He had risen from the grave. She didn't know it was the Lord until He spoke to her.

In any event, we don't need to know if Cleopas and his friend were at the Passover supper in order to conclude that others besides the twelve were there. We know there must have been at least one additional disciple present that evening with the Lord.

John 13 provides an account of that meal in the upper room. In John 13:21, the Lord tells His disciples that one of them will betray Him. Notice what John 13:23 tells us about one of those who was there:

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

Based on verses indicating the Lord's love for Lazarus, how can we conclude that this unnamed disciple is anyone else? This verse tells us that it's Lazarus. In fact, whenever we read the words "whom Jesus loved" in this Gospel account, we know that God is referring to Lazarus. Lazarus was definitely there.

There's something else in this verse that points to Lazarus. Recall that in the parable about Lazarus and rich man, we read this (Luke 16:22):

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

The fictional Lazarus is pictured as being in Abraham's bosom in heaven. This is a way of telling us that this Lazarus was with God – in His bosom. And now we find that one of the Lord's disciples was leaning on Jesus' bosom at the Passover supper. Could it be that this disciple has the same name as the one found in the parable about the beggar and the rich man? Absolutely! It was Lazarus.

Peter wanted to know which disciple would betray the Lord, and he gestured to Lazarus to ask (John 13:24). In John 13:25, we read:

He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?

The Lord Jesus answered Lazarus (John 13:26) and told him it was the disciple to whom He would give a sop. After this, the Lord had much to tell His disciples. Most of the next few chapters of this Gospel account, right up to chapter 18, record what the Lord said.

In John 18:1, we read that the Lord and His disciples went over the brook Cedron to a garden. It was there that a group of men from the chief priests and Pharisees, led by Judas Iscariot, went to arrest the Lord Jesus. The apostle Peter confronted the men, as we read in John 18:10:

Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.

From this Gospel account, we know that the Lord ordered Peter to put his sword back in its sheath. The other Gospel accounts provide additional details of what happened that night. For example, in the account recorded by Luke (Luke 22:51) we learn that the Lord healed the man whose ear was cut off; and in the account recorded by Matthew (Matthew 26:56), we read that all the disciples fled.

Returning to the fourth Gospel account, we read something very interesting. It's something that happened after the disciples fled. In John 18:15-16, we read:

And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and *so did* another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.

Both Peter and another disciple followed after the Lord; but the other disciple was known to the high priest and was able to enter the palace where the Lord had been taken. That other disciple was even able to get Peter past the door. Who was this disciple? It's curious that this disciple isn't named. However, we are given a very important piece of information about him: he was "known unto the high priest."

Toward the end of this Gospel account, we read another reference to an unnamed disciple (John 21:24). That disciple identifies himself as the one who "wrote these things." This was the disciple who recorded the fourth Gospel. Was this unidentified disciple the same one mentioned in John 18:15-16, and was he really the apostle John? The high priest knew the unidentified disciple mentioned in John 18:15 and 16; but there is no reason why Caiaphas (who was then the high priest, as we know from John 18:13) should have known the apostle John.

In fact, in Acts 4, we find Caiaphas with other religious leaders (Acts 4:6) trying to decide what to do about Peter and John. These two apostles had been arrested (Acts 4:3) the previous day because they were preaching about the Lord Jesus. Notice what verse 13 reveals about the religious leaders' thinking:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

It appears that the religious leaders are noticing Peter and John for the first time. Based on this verse, it doesn't seem possible that John was the disciple known to the high priest (John 18:15) when the Lord Jesus

was arrested in the garden. There was really only one disciple we would expect the religious leaders to know: Lazarus.

Continuing in the fourth Gospel, we read about other events preceding the Crucifixion. Then, in John 19:25, we read about the women who stood by the cross:

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

Now notice who is mentioned in the next two verses, John 19:26-27:

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own *home*.

We know who this disciple was, because of the words “whom he loved.” We know this disciple was Lazarus.

There’s still more about Lazarus in this Gospel. In John 20:1, we read that Mary Magdalene went to the sepulcher where the Lord’s body had been placed. She discovered that the stone used to seal the tomb had been moved. From other Gospel accounts (e.g., Matthew 28:1), we know she wasn’t alone. As we read in John 20:2, Mary ran back to tell what she had seen:

Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

This “other disciple” was Lazarus. He and Peter ran to the tomb to see for themselves (John 20:3-8). Lazarus was able to outrun Peter (verse 4); but he waited for Peter at the sepulcher. Peter went into the sepulcher first. Then Lazarus entered, as verse 8 tells us:

Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.

Lazarus was most likely a very young man then, perhaps in his early teens. We can't say this for certain, but it makes sense in view of the great sorrow at his death (John 11:33), and because he was allowed to sit next to the Lord Jesus at the Passover supper (John 13:25). He was also able to outrun Peter to the sepulcher.

After he and Peter saw the empty tomb, the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:18). Continuing in the same chapter, we read of two more times when the Lord appeared to groups of His disciples. In the final chapter of this Gospel, we again find Lazarus. This time he is with Peter and several of the apostles, and they have gone fishing (John 21:1-7).

In several chapters of this Gospel, like marks along a trail so that we may follow it, we find the words "whom Jesus loved" or similar language. When we see these words, we know that God is telling us about Lazarus. And so we know Lazarus was out there in the boat with Peter that day, as recorded in chapter 21, because we find those words in verse 7.

Apparently, Lazarus was the first to recognize Jesus (verse 7). The Lord had called to the disciples from shore and told them where to cast their net. Verse 6 tells us they did so and caught a "multitude of fishes." Just as the Lord brought all those animals to Noah's ark thousands of years earlier, He now caused a big catch of "great fishes" (verse 11) to swim right into their net!

When they got back to shore, the disciples ate with the Lord. Then, in verses 15 to 17, we read that the Lord asked Peter three times if he loved Him (it's instructive to note the different Greek words used for "love" in these verses). Of course, this reminds us that Peter three times denied knowing the Lord (John 18:17, 25, and 27). In answer to the Lord's question each time, Peter tells the Lord that he loves Him.

Continuing, we come to John 21:18, where we read what the Lord said to Peter after asking him that final question and again telling him to feed the sheep:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldest not.

This verse is packed with meaning, but we'll return to it later because there are other verses concerning Lazarus that we must consider first. Next comes something that is extremely interesting. In John 21:20-21, we find Peter asking the Lord a question:

Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what *shall* this man *do*?

The Lord had told Peter something about his future. Then Peter wanted to know what was in store for the disciple whom Jesus loved. We now know this disciple was Lazarus. We'll also consider the Lord's answer to Peter's question a little later. For now, let's skip to the next to the last verse of this chapter and this Gospel account. This verse identifies the man who recorded it. It is his name we should associate with this Gospel account. In John 21:24, we read:

This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.

The man "who wrote these things" tells us that he was an eyewitness to many of the events recorded in this Gospel account. In John 19:35 and John 20:30-31, we also find references to this disciple's first-hand knowledge and recording of events. This is the same disciple identified in John 21:20; it is the disciple whom Jesus loved. So now we see that it

was actually Lazarus who recorded the fourth Gospel - not the apostle John.

A Rich Man's Tomb?

In the four Gospel accounts, we learn some important details about another tomb besides the one in which Lazarus was interred: it's the tomb that was used for the Lord Jesus. Like Lazarus' tomb, the one used for the Lord was also sealed with a stone. Joseph of Arimathaea provided that tomb, and we read about that in Matthew 27:59-60:

And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.

This Gospel account also reveals that Joseph of Arimathaea was "a rich man" (Matthew 27:57). This detail makes sense in view of what is known about burial practices common to that area and time. The average person back then could not afford to be buried in a tomb such as Joseph had. A tomb carved out of rock and sealed with a custom-fit stone at the entrance would be very costly. So, in all likelihood, most people back then were buried in a cemetery, just as they are today.



Wealthy people can and often do choose to have an elaborate tomb built for themselves

Looking northwest at tomb of Franklin Winfield Woolworth in Woodlawn Cemetery, The Bronx, on a sunny early afternoon, 19 October 2008. Photo (in color) by Jim Henderson

The Bible refers to a kind of common burial in a couple of places in the Old Testament. For example, in Jeremiah 26:23, we read:

And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people.

A common type of burial is also indicated in 2 Kings 23:6. And in the New Testament, we learn that the chief priests used the money that Judas returned to buy a field, called the potter's field, in which to bury strangers (see Matthew 27:7). However, Lazarus' body was not buried like that. In John 11:38, we read this information about his grave:

Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

Archaeology has discovered that, in tombs such as this, the body would often be placed on a "bench" carved out within the cave, a couple of feet above the cave floor. Although we aren't given this information about Lazarus' tomb, it's reasonable to conclude that it was also carved that way, and that his body was laid out on a flat surface in a recessed area carved into a side of the cave.

Based on the Biblical information about Lazarus' tomb, we can conclude that his family had money. Perhaps they were even rich. (The ointment that Lazarus' sister Mary used to anoint the feet of the Lord Jesus is described as being very costly in John 12:3, so here too we find support for our conclusion that Lazarus and his family were well-off.)

There's something else that sets Lazarus apart from the other disciples who recorded a Gospel account, and that's in the way he reckoned time. Matthew 27:45, Mark 15:33, and Luke 23:44 are all in agreement that the Lord Jesus was hanging on the cross at the sixth hour; but John 19:14 states:

And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!

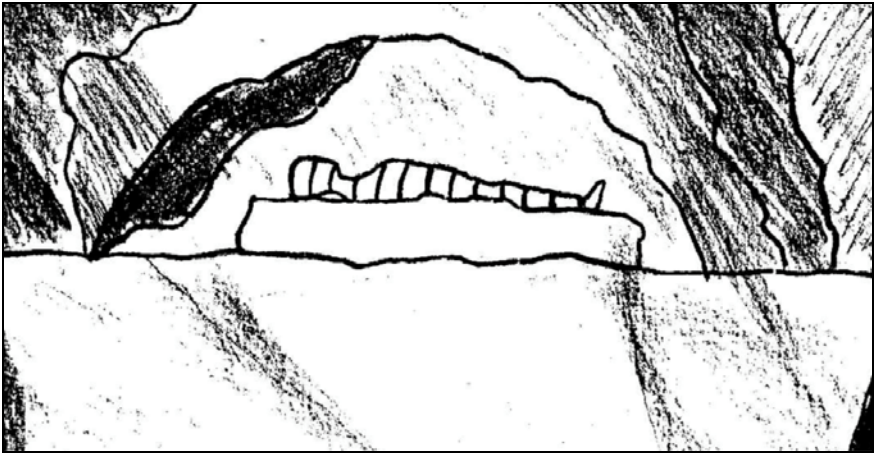
According to this Gospel account, the Lord Jesus was standing before Pilate at the sixth hour. Does this mean that Lazarus got confused about the timing of events when he later recorded these things? Of course not. It shows that Lazarus was counting the hours from midnight, as the Romans did; so, it was six o'clock in the morning when the Lord Jesus stood before Pilate. The other Gospel accounts, telling us that the Lord was on the cross at the sixth hour, are reckoning the day from six o'clock in the morning. Here is part of Matthew's account, recorded in Matthew 27:44-46:

The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Therefore, it was about six in the morning when Pilate sentenced the Lord Jesus to be crucified; the darkness began at noon when He was on the cross; and He died at about three in the afternoon. Lazarus' Gospel account is consistent with the others, but his different way of tracking time distinguishes him from the other Gospel writers and also from what we would expect of the apostle John - had he recorded the fourth Gospel account.

Of course, many people heard about Lazarus after the Lord raised him from the dead. We know that the Jewish religious leaders heard about it too. So, it makes sense that Lazarus would have been known to the high priest when the Lord Jesus was arrested (John 18:15). However, a wealthy Lazarus also fits well into this picture, because it's more likely that the chief priest would have known a wealthy man than a fisherman like the apostle John.

The Bible tells us that John and his brother James were partners in Peter's fishing business (Luke 5:10). John was probably typical of the common people, who were often poor. However, based on what we know of the tomb in which Lazarus had been interred, it's more likely that the chief priest knew of Lazarus and his family (even before the tremendous miracle that brought Lazarus back to life) than it is that he would have known about the apostle John.



In this position and bound as he had been for burial, Lazarus wasn't going anywhere - even after he was made alive again.

Conceptual sketch by Robert Fitzpatrick, February 2018: Lazarus' wrapped body on a bench carved inside a tomb

Are Names of Bible Books Inspired by God?

We don't know how long it's been since Lazarus' name was lost as the one who recorded the Gospel account, now known as the Gospel According to John. It's certainly been many centuries. Though it's very surprising, it's not so far-fetched as it may seem to you right now. As we proceed, you will see how it could have happened.

We know that each Old Testament book of the Bible (and possibly each New Testament book as well) was recorded on a scroll, and the content of all scrolls constituting the Bible came from God. From secular sources, we know that Jewish scribes copied out scrolls very carefully, even counting words in order to be certain that no content was lost.

Many early Christians were Jews, and so we have reason to believe that some of them were scribes. They would have continued their work of copying scrolls to help preserve and share the Gospel. Of course, God Himself watched over the process throughout the ages to make sure nothing was lost. He would have raised up people as necessary to preserve His word. So, we can be sure that the Bible we have today is the word of God.

At various times, scrolls may have been kept in boxes or other containers to protect them. Over the centuries, a variety of ways to identify those scrolls could have been used. For example, notations made on the outside of the scrolls, tags fastened to them, or engravings on containers or cabinets used to protect and store them are all possible methods.

Here is an interesting fact. Did you know that Hebrew names for Old Testament books actually differ significantly from names we find in our King James Version of the Bible? Think about that. How could that be? For example, Hebrew names for the Pentateuch books (the first five in the Bible) are taken from the first words of each book. So instead of the book of Exodus, the Hebrew name is "The names;" and instead of the book of Numbers, the Hebrew name is "In the wilderness."

If names for books of the Bible were truly inspired by God, then this should not be the case. Remember what we read in 2 Timothy 3:16:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

Also, consider what we find in Romans 3:1-2:

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is *there* of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

The oracles of God – that is, writings making up the first part of the Bible – were committed to the Jews. So, if we try to argue that names for Bible books are truly inspired by God, then we should identify Old Testament books using the same names the Jews used. Remember, they used those names centuries before the New Testament was written. These nomenclature differences are evidence that none of the names for Bible books are from God. The content of each Bible book you find in your Bible is inspired by God, but the names of those Bible books are not inspired.

Here is more evidence for this conclusion. In 1 Kings 16:14, we read:

Now the rest of the acts of Elah, and all that he did, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

When we read a verse such as this, mentioning a book of chronicles or a book of kings, we might think it's a reference to one of four books (1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles) found in the Old Testament portion of the Bible. However, if that's the case we should be able to find more information in the Bible about king Elah. As you see in the above verse, we are told that the rest of his acts are recorded in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. But if you search the Bible for that information, you'll discover that it's nowhere to be found. It's not in

either of the two books of Chronicles, and it's not anywhere else. Therefore, the Old Testament's numerous references to the "book" of chronicles are not evidence that God has assigned a specific name to the two books we know as 1 and 2 Chronicles. Instead, we need to think of these as two of 66 chapters or installments of the Bible, because that's really what each "book" of the Bible is: it's a chapter or installment of one book.

Although you will find Elah's name mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, it will not be a reference to king Elah. It will be a reference to someone else named Elah who lived at a different time in history. Therefore, in this case the book referred to is an historical document outside the Bible. It probably no longer exists. In fact, many works from antiquity (e.g., Greek plays) have been lost. But that's not surprising. Only the Bible contains God's words. He made sure it survived intact until modern times.

In connection with this line of thinking, it's also helpful to examine other verses having the word "book" or "books." There are close to 200 such verses, and several different Hebrew and Greek words have been translated into either or both of those words. If you examine them and see how those words are used, you won't find anything to contradict our conclusion that names for individual Bible books were never assigned by God.

There are a couple of verses that may appear to assign specific names to a Bible book. For example, in Luke's Gospel account we find a reference to the book of Isaiah and the book of Psalms. However, you'll also find a reference to the "book of Moses." Of course, there is no book of Moses in the Bible - but you will find the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Scholars are very certain that Moses recorded all of them. So, when we read about the "book of Moses" we can see that it's a reference to one or more scrolls on which those five books appear. Similarly, the "book of Isaiah" is a reference to a scroll of the words that Isaiah recorded; and the book of Psalms is a reference to a scroll with all the Psalms on it. Whenever we find these

books mentioned, we should distinguish between a reference to a particular scroll that contains a portion of the Bible, and to a divinely-inspired name assigned to it as a book. In the Bible, you'll find the former, but not the latter.

Sometimes the word “book” is applied to the Bible at its stage of completion at a particular time in history. It might also be applied to a major portion of the Bible. For example, in 2 Kings 22:8, we read:

And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.

This verse is most likely telling us about the discovery of the first five books of the Bible at the time of Josiah, king of Judah. Here they are called the book of the law. Yes, incredibly the priests had lost track of it. It wasn't until some work was being done in the temple that the scroll was rediscovered. Besides 2 Kings 22, we find some references in the Bible to itself while God was still writing the Bible. But it's not until Revelation 22 that we find a reference to the whole Bible as we have it today, because with the book of Revelation the Bible is complete.

The Book

In order to see where that reference is, we need to examine a couple of verses. In Revelation 22:18, we read:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

Notice that the word “book” appears twice in this verse: there's a reference to the words of the prophecy of this book, and to the plagues that are written in this book. In both cases, the word used for “book” is Strong's number G975 – the Greek word “biblion.” That word is the

diminutive form of the Greek word “biblos” (G976, translated as “book”). Therefore, “biblion” is a word used to describe a little book. Based on the context and a comparison with other verses, we can see that in both instances in Revelation 22:18 the word is indicating the scroll on which the book of Revelation was recorded.

The next verse we must consider is Revelation 22:19:

And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.

Here we find the word “book” three times. Let’s start with the middle usage, “the book of life.” God is telling us here that if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, He will take away his part out of the book of life. What is the book of life? We can answer this question only when we understand some things about God’s salvation plan. Also, our understanding of the book of life must account for another book mentioned in the Bible; that is, the Lamb’s book of life. We find that book mentioned in Revelation 13:8:

And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

The word used in Revelation 13:8 for the Lamb’s book of life is “biblos,” and that’s also the word use in Revelation 22:19 to describe the book of life. A “biblos” is not a “biblion.” A biblos is a book; so, we see that God has used a word allowing for the possibility that these are very large books, since each of the books – the book of life and the Lamb’s book of life – is a “biblos.”

The picture these verses suggest is that there are two different books naming people: the book of life and the Lamb’s book of life. One of them has the name of every person who has ever lived and will ever

live. It's a complete list of mankind. This is the book of life. When someone dies, the Lord removes his or her name out of the book of life if that person is not one of the elect. There is also the Lamb's book of life. This book has only the names of the elect. On the last day, the Lord will strike out of the book of life the remaining names of unsaved persons who are alive when He returns. Then the only names left in the book of life will be those of the elect, and that list will match the names in the Lamb's book of life.

Obviously, these two books are not physical books. They are lists of people that God keeps in His mind. Also, it stands to reason that a substantial number of people listed in them never even had a name. Many babies have died before birth and before they were ever named; but God knows each and every one of them, along with everyone else who has ever lived.

Returning to our examination of Revelation 22:19, we find that the last word in this verse is the word "book." This is another instance where the word "biblion" is used. It's referring to the scroll on which the book of Revelation is written. It's a "little book." Once we realize this, we can better understand what the verse is teaching. It refers to the unsaved. Unless a person is one of God's elect, God will "take away" his name from the book of life. He will have no inheritance with the elect ("the holy city"), and never enjoy the blessings ("the things which are written in this book") of being with the Lord in the new heavens and new earth - blessings described in the book of Revelation (e.g., see Revelation 22:1-5).

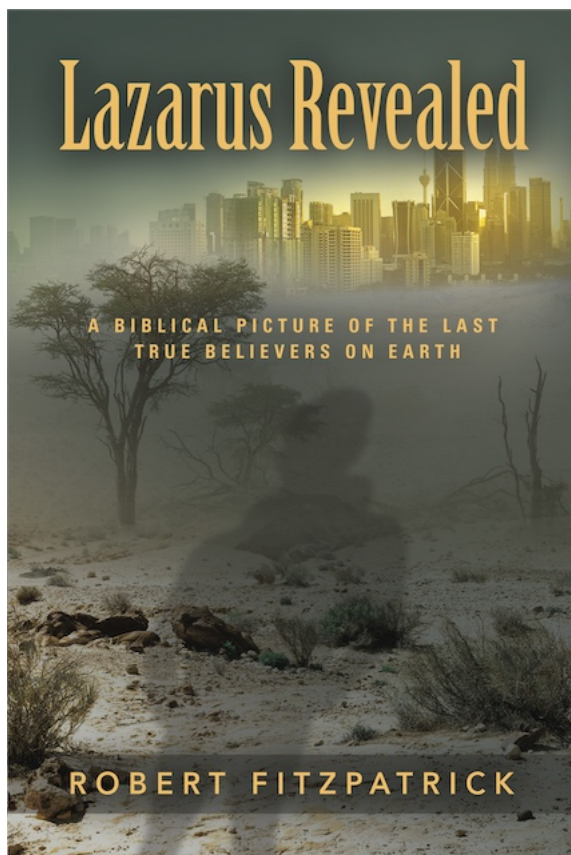
We now come to the third place where we find the word "book" used in Revelation 22:19, and that's at the beginning of the verse. There we read, "And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy ..." Here, the word translated "book" is "biblos." God isn't giving us a picture of a little book this time. It's not a "biblion," but a book. It's a reference to the whole Bible, complete as we have it today. Once we see how the words "biblion" and "biblos" are used in

Revelation 22:18-19, we can understand what God is teaching in these verses. Namely, that the book of Revelation completes the Bible.

When we think about it, we realize that the Bible is actually just one book and one long message from God, given to mankind in different installments over the course of about 1,500 years. Nothing else can be added to this last installment of the Bible, and nothing can be added to or taken away from the whole book. That book is “the book of this prophecy.” That book is the Bible.

Revelation 22:19 is the only verse in which God refers to the whole and completed Bible. Elsewhere in the Bible, we can find verses where the word “book” is applied to various scrolls that are either part of the Bible or outside the Bible. Sometimes the word “book” refers to only a small section of the Bible, such as a list (e.g., Matthew 1:1). However, the only instance where the word “book” is applied to the whole, finished Bible is found near the beginning of Revelation 22:19. That’s the only inspired name we have for the Bible or any of its books. It’s a book. In fact, the Bible is THE Book because it’s the only book God has given us.

And so, there are no Biblical grounds to contradict our conclusion – which is based on much Biblical evidence - that it was actually Lazarus who recorded the fourth Gospel. As surprising as this conclusion is, it’s not the most important thing we learn about Lazarus. However, before we can determine what really matters most about him, it’s necessary that we make a lengthy detour to discuss some major turning points in God’s salvation plan.



This book presents evidence from the Bible showing that the fourth Gospel was recorded by the Lord's disciple Lazarus, not the apostle John; explains how the attribution error could have occurred; and explains Lazarus' significance for God's elect living in the last days.

Lazarus Revealed:

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