

In yesterday's post I laid out the "wish list" historians have when it comes to sources of information about persons and events of the past, and evaluated how well the Gospels stack up against the list. Now I want to move into the kinds of criteria biblical scholars use when trying to extract historical information from the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, criteria made necessary by the fact that the Gospel writers were not trying to write objective historical narratives of what really happened, so much as trying to "proclaim the good news" of the salvation brought by Jesus. These Gospels were not meant to be providing history lessons per se. But nonetheless, they do contain historical information. If we want to learn that information, how do we proceed?

Here is how I explain the beginning point in my book [Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet](#).

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### Using Our Sources: Some of the Basic Rules of Thumb

Before elaborating on some specific criteria that scholars have devised, let me say something about a few very basic methodological principles that most historians would agree should be applied to our sources.

#### The Earlier the Better

In general, historical sources closest to an event have a greater likelihood of being accurate than those at a further remove. This isn't a hard and fast rule, of course - sometimes ...

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