

Saturday, May 26, 2018—Great Lakes Grace Bible Conference—Undesigned Coincidences: Internal Evidence of Inspiration

Introduction

- Thank the men of Ohio Grace Ministries for hosting the conference and inviting me to speak.
- Announce the West Michigan Grace Bible conference in October.
 - Dates: October 19-21
 - Theme: The Renewing of the Mind
- II Timothy 3:16—inspiration is the Bible’s claim for itself.
 - II Peter 1:21
- As we all know, critics have attacked the divine origin of the Bible. Skeptics assert that the Bible is very ordinary and just like every other book ever written.
- The Book of Mormon (BOM) stands out as a clear example of a book of human origin. The BOM copies the King James Bible (KJB) in many places, some of which are verbatim.
 - Moroni 7:44-47 & I Corinthians 13

44) If so, his faith and hope is vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart; and if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity; for if he have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity.

45) And **charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.**

46) Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—

47) But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.
 - II Nephi & Isaiah—II Nephi in the BOM is identical to the KJB in fourteen chapters.
 - II Nephi 12-24 in the BOM is an identical match with Isaiah 2-14 in the KJB.

- The BOM contains English spellings, manners of speaking, and translational variants that only occur in the KJB.
- It is clear that Joseph Smith had a 1769 edition of the KJB on the table in front of him as he wrote the BOM.
- Critics of the Bible's inspiration assert similar things when it comes to the gospels. They allege that Mark was written first and that Matthew and Luke copied Mark and filled in their own particulars. In other words, the Gospels and therefore the entire Bible are of human origin.
- One area where Christian apologetics has shined brightest is in its presentation of the internal evidence of the Bible's divine origin. Under the general category of internal evidence for inspiration there are two lines argumentation that have been offered:
 - Undesigned Coincidences
 - Fulfilled Prophecy
- Since many are familiar with fulfilled prophecy as an internal proof of inspiration, this morning I would like to use the notion of *Undesigned Coincidences* (UCs) to demonstrate the reliability of the Bible. This discussion will extend to:
 - *The authenticity of the books*—they were written by who they claim to have been written by.
 - *The genuineness of the books*—they are trustworthy history, an accurate presentation of the material they report.
- In order to accomplish this purpose we will consider the following points:
 - What is an Undesigned Coincidence?
 - Undesigned Coincidence in the Gospels
 - See Appendix A on page 11 for Pauline examples.
 - Conclusion: Understanding in Impact of Undesigned Coincidences
- UCs standout as compelling internal proof of the Bible's inspiration.

What is an Undesigned Coincidence?

- In short, UCs provide us with evidence for the reliability and truthfulness for what the Biblical writers report in a way that made up stories or simply copies of made up stories or forgeries claiming to report events not really witnessed could not provide.
 - “An undesigned coincidence occurs when one account of an event leaves out a bit of information which is filled in, often quite incidentally, by a different account, which helps to answer some natural questions raised by the first.” (McLatchie)
- In our day, the notion of UCs as a defense of the Bible’s divine nature has been championed most loudly by Dr. Timothy McGrew, a professor of Philosophy at Western Michigan University. Dr. McGrew has produced a nine part lecture series on the reliability of the Bible in addition to participating in websites devoted to Christian Apologetics such as Apologetics315.com
- Dr. McGrew states the following regarding UCs:
 - “Sometimes two works by different authors (for example Acts, which was written by Luke, and the Pauline epistles) interlock in a way that would be very unlikely if one were copied from the other or both were copied from a common source. For example, one book may mention in passing a detail that answers a question raised by the other. The two records fit together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

Fictions and forgeries aren’t like that. Why would a forger leave loose ends, unanswered questions? And how could a forger control what another writes to make it interlock with what you have written? But this is what we expect to find when both writers are talking about real historical events that they both are familiar with.” (McGrew)

- While McGrew uses the notion of UCs in his defense of the veracity of the Bible, he was not the first to do so. Earlier Christian thinkers and theologians to use UC in support of the Bible’s truthfulness include:
 - William Paley—English Clergyman and Apologist: 1743-1805
 - [*Horae Paulinae*](#) (1790)
 - John James Blunt—English Anglican: 1794-1855
 - [*Undesigned Coincidences in the Writings Both of the Old and New Testament : An Argument of Their Veracity : With an Appendix, Containing Undesigned Coincidences Between the Gospels and Acts, and Josephus*](#) (1851)
 - Edmund Bennett—American Lawyer: 1824-1898
 - [*The Four Gospels From a Lawyer's Standpoint*](#) (1899)
- When we see parallel passages in the N.T. we usually simply see one as filling in a few more details not supplied in the other account. But sometimes they supply much more than that,

especially when we find details in passages that are not even in the same context as another passage.

- When considering *UCs* it is important to keep in mind that we have the luxury of possessing a completed Bible. We have all twenty seven New Testament books bound together in one book. Consequently, we sometimes miss or don't think about things like these *UCs*. Bear in mind that the New Testament books were not originally bound together in one book. Rather they were twenty seven separate books written by eight to nine different men. That is what makes the cumulative force of this argument for the genuineness of the Bible so strong.

Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels

- Regarding why there are four gospel accounts and not more or less, Christians have typically stated the following:
 - Each presents a different quality of Christ's character: 1) Matthew as King, 2) Mark as Suffering Servant, 3) Luke as the Son of Man, and 4) John as Deity.
 - Via all four gospels we get a full picture of who Christ is through the four different accounts.
- While these are valid points, there is more. As stated above, when we compare them, they provide us with evidence for the reliability and truthfulness of what they report in a way that made up stories or simply copies of made up stories or forgeries claiming to report events not really witnessed could not provide.
 - "What would have been my joy and confidence had I found four such letters, in four different papers, written by four different persons, giving an account of the same transaction? And although in a close comparison of these four accounts some variations should have been found as the particulars of that event, would that overthrow all belief in the trustfulness of the accounts? Nay, would it not rather furnish stronger proof of their integrity? Had all four account been exactly alike, the suspicion would have been irresistible that one was copies from the other, or that all were taken from the same original. But substantial uniformity with circumstantial variety is one of the surest test of truth in all historical narratives." (Bennet, 4-5)
- Critics of the New Testament claim that the Gospels are just copies of made up stories. They will say things like, Matthew just copied Mark and made up some stuff of his own to go along with it. Like if I went and bought a copy of the Grand Rapids press and then bought another copy to verify what I read in the first copy. Consequently, the critics will tell us that we can't use the gospels as separate independent witnesses.
- Dr. McGrew disagrees. He maintains that by noting the *UCs* in the gospel narratives we build a case that "the Gospel authors were well informed and habitually truthful."

UC #1—Waiting to be Healed

- Matthew 8:14-16—so if the people believed that Jesus could heal them, why did they wait till evening? If you were sick would you want to wait to get in to see a Doctor?

- Mark 1:21, 29-32—Mark tells the same story, but he gives us this detail in verse 21, “straightway on the sabbath day . . .” The reason the people waited till evening in Matthew 8 is because they were waiting for the Sabbath to end.
- So do you see here how these accounts interlock? Was Matthew simply copying from Mark? No, why would he leave out this detail. Was Mark copying Matthew? No, Matthew doesn’t even include the detail.
 - Mark is explaining Matthew
- So a skeptic could come along and say, “Well Matthew could have copied from Mark and just left out that little detail.” While this admittedly could be the case in one instance, if we have numerous instances like this, it builds the case that it is more than just accidental. It builds a case of cumulative force, which makes it ridiculous to claim accident or forgery.

UC#2—Tell No Man

- Luke 9:28-36—why did they tell “no man in those days any of those things which they had seen?”
- Mark 9:9-10—so Mark gives us the command whereas Luke gives us what they did while offering no explanation for it. Luke just leaves the reader with a curious reaction on the part of the disciples.
 - Now we have Mark explaining something from Matthew and Luke

UC#3—The Feeding of the 5,000

- Mark 6:31, 39—Mark’s account of the feeding of the 5,000 gives two details that the other gospel writers do not.
 - Verse 31—“. . .many were coming and going and they had no leisure so much as to eat.”
 - Verse 39—And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass.
 - Show picture. Why would Mark say this?
- John 6:4—John tells us that the context for the feeding of the 5,000 was during the Passover season. Passover is in the midst of the growing season, the only time of year when there would have been “much green grass” spoken of in Mark. In addition, this also explains the reason “Many were coming and going and they had no leisure so much as to eat.” The first century Jewish historian Josephus stated there may have been as many as one million pilgrims in Jerusalem at Passover. Even if he is exaggerating, there must have been a mass of people and this explains this detail given in Mark.
 - So now we have Mark explaining something found in Matthew and Luke and we have John explaining something found in Mark.

- Notice the way this is happening? Mark doesn't tell us why there were many people coming and going. John doesn't tell us that there were many coming and going, but he gives us the explanation for it. See how the accounts interlock in this *undesigned* manner?

UC#4—Events in Herod's Place

- Matthew 14:1-2—two questions arise here that are not answered by Matthew. First, why would Herod be talking to his servants about this? Does this seem a bit odd? Someone of Herod's stature discussing something of this nature with servants? Second, how would Matthew know what Herod was talking about in his Palace?
- Luke 8:3—Luke, in a totally different context, when talking about women who ministered to Jesus mentions “Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward.
 - Here we see in a totally different context, a totally undesigned interlocking of Luke and Matthew.
- Would anyone think Luke would have made up this information about Joanna in a totally different context just to explain Matthew? Don’t miss what’s happening, each of the gospels is explaining things in other gospels in a non-deliberate, undesigned way that gives them the mark of truth.

UC#5—Mighty Works in Bethsaida

- Matthew 11:21—what are the mighty works Matthew is talking about? For Chorazin the Bible doesn't tell us. But for Bethsaida we may find an answer. Wouldn't that be fortunate for us?
- John 6:5—why Phillip? Philip is not really a major character.
- Luke 9:10-11—in Luke, Bethsaida is the setting for the feeding of the 5,000.
- John 12:21—look at the interlocking of Luke and John. Luke doesn't mention Philip in this context at all. Meanwhile, John doesn't mention Bethsaida as the setting of the miracle. Only by putting the two accounts together can we understand why Jesus speaks to Phillip in John 6.
 - We see that John and Luke interlock.
- As to the mighty works done in Bethsaida in Matthew 11 one needs Luke 9 to learn that Bethsaida was where the feeding of the 5,000 took place. Also note that Matthew gives the account of the feeding of the 5,000 in chapter 14, after the woes are pronounced in Matthew 11. This is on account of the fact that Matthew arranges things thematically rather than chronologically. By comparing Luke, who arranges his account chronologically, we find that the feeding of the 5,000 took place before the woes were pronounced.
 - Luke explains and informs Matthew

UC#6—I Will Destroy This Temple

- Mark 14:58, 15:29—In Mark 14 the Jews, before the high priest, at Jesus' trial, make the accusation “we heard Him say I will destroy this temple”... Later in chapter 15, they mockingly throw this accusation at Jesus while on the cross. There is nothing in the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, or Luke) that could have been the pretext for this accusation.
- John 2:18-19—the Jews don't get what He is talking about. John gives the original statement but not the accusation; the synoptic gospels give us the accusation but not the original statement. Only by putting the two together do we get the whole picture.

UC#7—Jesus Questions Peter

- John 21:15—this example is interesting because the context is after the resurrection. So a mark of authenticity here would be extremely important. Notice carefully the content of what Christ asks Peter: “do you love me more than these...” Without a context, Christ's question seems challenging and mean. The context is not found in John.
- Matthew 26:33—Matthew records this boast although John does not. Also remember right after this Peter denies knowing the Lord three times.
- Another connection between John and the synoptic gospels is found in Peter's denial of Christ. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record that when Peter was warming himself in the palace of the high priest, a maid saw him, and charged him with being a disciple of Jesus, but none of the three intimate, who she knew it to be so.
 - John 18:17—we learn that the maid who addressed Peter was the very one who kept the door of the palace through which Peter had just entered. But how did this enable her to know that Peter was a follower of Jesus?
 - John 18:15-16—she saw John come in with Jesus, and then go out and bring in Peter, and remembering what he had said to her leaving the palace, figured it out.

UC#8—Jews Accusation Against Jesus

- Luke 23:2-4—the Jews make this grave accusation against Jesus, “He is claiming to be a king.” The Jews want Jesus put to death for blasphemy, but why would Pilate care about that? Pilate was probably a blasphemer himself. So they bring this charge that would be a clear violation of Roman law. Christ claiming to be king.
- But look at Pilate's response. Christ admits to the charge and Pilate says “I find no guilt in this Man.” The Jews had to have been highly annoyed at this point. So why does Pilate find no guilt?
- John 18:33-38—Pilate asks “are you king of the Jews?” Jesus answers “my kingdom is not of this world”. Pilate surmises this is a spiritual kingdom (i.e. make believe). Pilate thus pronounces “I find no fault in this Man”.
 - Only by comparing Luke and John do we get the full story.

Conclusion: Understanding in Impact of Undesigned Coincidences

- UCs do not just apply to the gospels. Consider that Luke offers the most detailed and descriptive language when describing circumstances of disease and/or mental and physical suffering than do Matthew and Mark.
 - Luke 4:38—"taken with a great fever" (Matt. 8:14, Mk. 1:30—"sick of a fever")
 - Luke 5:12—"full of leprosy" (Matt. 8:2, Mk. 1:40—"there came a leper")
 - Luke 6:6—"right hand" (Matt. 12:10, Mk. 3:1—"withered hand")
 - Luke 7:2—"he was sick and ready to die" (Matt. 8:6—"sick of the palsy")
 - Luke 8:41-42—"and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house: For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying." (Matt. 9:18—"my daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live.")
 - Luke 22:51—"And Jesus touched his ear, and healed him." (Matt. & Mk. Exclude this detail altogether.)
- Luke alone records the following details:
 - The compassion of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:33)
 - That Jesus sweat great drops of blood (Luke 22:44)
 - The fact that the sleep of the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane was induced by extreme sorrow (Luke 22:45)
- "Now why this more accurate observation and description by Luke of every occurrence of disease and of mental and physical suffering that can be found in any other historian of the same events? What was there in Luke's history or life which qualified and induced him thus to note and describe all kinds of diseases so much more minutely than the others?" (Bennett, 16-17)
 - Colossians 4:14—provides the answer, Luke was "the beloved physician"
- Luke and Colossians corroborate each other's testimony in an undesinged and indirect manner.
 - "Did the forger of Luke's Gospel conspire with the forger of Paul's Epistle, the one to put into Luke's mouth words which a physician would naturally utter, but without intimating that he was a physician, and the other to simply call him a physician, without giving any circumstances for indicating it? Forgers do not test content with such roundabout confirmations. On the other hand, truth-tellers do not trouble themselves to make their stories corroborate each other." (Bennet, 17)
- Bennett concludes his short work on UCs with the following statement:

- “Thus, by undersigned coincidences, by indirect confirmations, by unexpected corroborations, but natural and for the most part easily reconcilable differences, scattered throughout these four histories, may we be abundantly satisfied of the truth and harmony of the Gospels. The variations in these storied do not detract from their reliability, but rather the opposite.” (Bennett, 55)
- In his series of blogs on UCs Dr. Timothy McGrew reminds us that we know what a forgery looks like:
 - “We are not left merely to guess what forgery looks like. The gnostic “gospels” of the second century afford us a clear illustration of how writers of the time who were forging a document on the basis of documents already known make use of their material. Thus, the “Gospel of Peter” is studded with phrases that sound like they have been lifted directly from the canonical Gospels:
 - “And one of them brought a crown of thorns and put it on the head of the Lord.” (cf. Mark 15:17)
 - “And they brought two malefactors, and they crucified the Lord between them.” (cf. Luke 23:32-33)
 - “And in that hour the veil of the temple in Jerusalem was rent in twain.” (cf. Mark 15:38)
 - “But who shall roll away for us the stone …?” (cf. Mark 16:3)
 - “Whom seek ye? Him that was crucified? He is risen and gone.” (cf. Mark 16:6)

The degree of verbal similarity between the Synoptic Gospels and the “Gospel of Peter” is high precisely because the forger—and he must be a forger, for he is writing long after Peter’s death—wants to create a certain effect. He wants to give a ring of authenticity to the text he is manufacturing in order to ensure its favorable reception in a community where the established texts carry high prestige.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 3](#))

- The same could be said of the so-called Septuagint. The alleged Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament used by Christ and apostles during the first century.
- In all available versions of what is described as the Septuagint, the text of Romans 3:13-18 appears in Psalm 14:3, which (1) clearly disproves the BC existence of the Septuagint and (2) demonstrates that the Septuagint is corrupt and plainly did not originate from conscientious Jewish scribes. These added words also appear in Jerome’s Vulgate and the Douay-Rheims.
- Whoever created the Septuagint had the book of Romans in front of them in much the same way that Joseph Smith had the KJB in front of him when he authored the BOM.
- Notice there is at least one line between all the gospels. Critics make a big deal about which gospel was written first, who copied from who etc. The force of this evidence is that it doesn’t matter. This evidence points to independent testimony. The gospels are four separate witnesses giving accurate truthful accounts of actual historical events.

- These UCs serve as internal proof of the Bible's inspiration. Only a book written under divine inspiration would exhibit characteristics such as these. UCs demonstrate the reliability of the Bible and demonstrate the following:
 - *The authenticity of the books*—they were written by who they claim to have been written by.
 - *The genuineness of the books*—they are trustworthy history, an accurate presentation of the material they report.

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Appendix A

Undesigned Coincidences in the Pauline Epistles

- In his *Horae Paulinae* (1790), William Paley examines the Book of Acts, on the one hand, and the Pauline epistles, on the other, with a view to showing how each might illustrate the other. Paley's *Horae Paulinae*, was the first work to explore this sort of argument in detail. Paley's object is to show the numerous correspondences between the Pauline epistles and the book of Acts.
- According to William Paley, UCs are markers of the authenticity of scripture and validate its reliability.
 - “The very particularity of St. Paul’s epistles; the perpetual recurrence of names of persons and places; the frequent allusion to the incident of his private life, and the circumstances of his condition and history; and the connection and parallelism of these with the same circumstances in the Acts of the Apostles, so as to enable us, for the most part, to confront them one with another; as well as the relations which subsist between the circumstances, as mentioned or referred to in the different Epistles—afford no inconsiderable proof of the genuineness of the writings, and the reality of the transactions. For as no advertency is sufficient to guard against slips and contradictions, when circumstances are multiplied, and when they are liable to be detected by contemporary accounts equally circumstantial, **an imposter, I should expect, would either have avoided particulars entirely, contenting himself with doctrinal discussion, moral precepts, and general reflections; or if, for the sake of imitating St. Paul’s style, he should have thought it necessary to intersperse his composition with names and circumstances, he would have placed them out of the reach of comparison with the history.**” (Paley, 168)
- “Paley stresses, in the first chapter of the *Horae Paulinae*, that the indirectness, the evident undesignedness, is what makes these coincidences significant. The information that makes the passages from the epistles interlock with the history is dropped casually and naturally into the narrative. By contrast, although there is a very close verbal parallel between Paul’s description of the last supper in I Corinthians 11:24-25 and the words of institution in Luke 22:17-20, this coincidence might easily be explained by the hypothesis that one of the sources is copied from the other. That is not to say that either author actually did copy from the other. But when the points of coincidence are too obvious, the correspondence might have been forged after the historical work became well known, or vice versa.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 2](#))
- “If there were only a small number of undesigned coincidences, we might shrug them off as statistical noise. After all, in a large box of jigsaw puzzle pieces taken at random, one piece, from many different puzzles, someone searching with great patience might find a few pairs that fit together (more or less) by sheer accident. But when a large number of pieces fit together, sometimes in clusters, the chance explanation rapidly becomes absurd. That is why, to appreciate the force of the argument from undesigned coincidences, we must have the patience to work

through multiple examples. But the picture that emerges when we take the time to do this will amply repay us for the labor and study we bestow on the project.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 2](#))

Pauline UC#1—I am of Paul and I am of Apollos

- I Corinthians 1:12, 3:6—both of these verses suggest that Apollos had been at Corinth; the second also suggests that Paul had preceded him there.
- Acts 18:19, 23, 26; 19:1—“after his first visit to Greece, Paul went from Corinth to Ephesus, where he left his companions Priscilla and Aquilla; he returned to Palestine, stopping in Jerusalem, and then went north into Asia Minor (Acts 18:19, 23), ultimately making his way back to Ephesus. It is during the period of these later travels that Apollos comes on the scene, being instructed in Ephesus by Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 18:26) and passing from them over to Achaia, where “he greatly helped those who through grace had believed” (Acts 18:27). We might have inferred from this alone that Apollos went to Corinth on this trip, but we need not stop here, as we find that Paul came back to Ephesus at the very time that Apollos was in Corinth (Acts 19:1).” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 2](#))

Pauline UC#2—Letters of Commendation

- There is a further point of coincidence, equally indirect, between this passage of Acts and an expression Paul uses when remonstrating with the Corinthians in his second epistle.
- II Corinthians 3:1-2
- Acts 18:27—as it happens, the book of Acts provides the clue to Paul’s language; for when Apollos, having been instructed by Priscilla and Aquilla, made his own trip to Corinth, “the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him” (Acts 18:27).
- “What should we infer from the way that the book of Acts interlocks with the Corinthian epistles? The examples we have looked at here offer us some evidence that the authors of each were well informed and habitually truthful. That falls short of a demonstration, of course, but all historical evidence falls short of mathematical demonstration. The case is a *prima facie* one, and it would be strengthened if we found other, similar arguments with respect to these texts. Paley gives a dozen for each of these epistles.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 2](#))

Pauline UC#3—Contribution for the Poor Saints at Jerusalem

- “One of the benefits of having both Paul’s letters and a history of Paul’s activities (the book of Acts) from another hand is that we are able to compare points of contact across the two genres. Their overlap is all the more valuable since they appear to have been written largely or wholly independently of one another, with very little verbal similarity at any point.

What should we expect from such material, if each is independently grounded in the facts? With luck, and if the material is extensive, we should be able to find multiple instances where the documents refer to the same people or events. Of course we should not expect the history and the letters to correspond point-for-point; in the nature of the case, there will be much in the letters that would be out of place in the history, while the history—in keeping with the historical standards of the times—may organize material conceptually rather than chronologically and may compress or pass over some incidents in the course of the narration. And occasionally, the correspondences may cross over several letters, creating a network of related passages that cannot with any plausibility be dismissed as fabrication or forgery.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 3](#))

- Romans 15:25-26—here we have three points of interest all in the same passage in one of the letters: a collection being taken up in Macedonia, a similar collection in Achaia, and Paul’s plan to travel to Jerusalem to take this aid to the saints there.
- Acts 20:2-3—we find Paul on the way back to Palestine, but there is not a word about a contribution.
- Acts 24:17-19—Paul mentions that he came to bring alms to his countrymen, but there is no mention of where the monies come from.
- The points of correspondence are so indirect that there is no suspicion of copying here. Two other passages from the letters enable us to fill out the picture.
- I Corinthians 16:1-4—we see that there was a contribution being collected at Corinth, the capital of Achaia, for the Christians of Jerusalem.
- II Corinthians 8:1-4, 9:2—we find the churches of Macedonia introduced as already engaged in a collection for this very purpose.
- “Thus all of the circumstances brought together in those two verses in Romans are corroborated by a number of other passages in the history of Acts and in the Corinthian epistles. And each of these, by some hint in the passage, or by the date of the writing in which the passage occurs, can be fixed at a particular time—a period toward the close of Paul’s second missionary journey.

Does this conformity, scattered and indirect, with not a whiff of verbal similarity, look like forgery on one part or on the other? Or rather, does each passage stand perfectly naturally in connection with its own context? If so, the suggestion that such a coincidence is the effect of design is most improbable.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 3](#))

- “The book of Acts and the Pauline epistles are verbally independent; their interconnections are indirect. That is what makes their harmonies so impressive as evidence that both give us substantially truthful representations of real events.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 3](#))

Pauline UC#4—Greet Prisca and Aquila

- “There are certain parts of Paul’s letters that we typically pass over in silence. The long lists of greetings, in particular, are flyover territory for expository preachers. “Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas...” The congregation is probably snoring already. And yet such passages can, on occasion, furnish us with beautiful examples of coincidence without design.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 4](#))
- Romans 16:3-4—“first, the fact that this greeting appears in the epistle to the *Romans* suggests that Prisca and Aquila are inhabitants of that city.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 4](#))
- Acts 18:2—so Priscilla and Aquila were originally inhabitants of Rome, perhaps recently returned once the expulsion under Claudius ceased to be enforced. This is one point of coincidence.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 4](#))
- Acts 18:3, 18—“again, from Acts 18, we find that Paul stayed with them (18:3), and when he left, they departed with him (18:18). From this, it would be a fair inference that they were fellow workers with him, though only Paul’s greeting in Romans makes this fact explicit.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 4](#))
- Acts 18:12-17—“third, Paul says that they “laid down their own necks” for his sake. How so? See Acts 18:12-17, where Paul is dragged before the Roman tribunal and Sosthenes is beaten by the mob. If Aquila and Prisca were Paul’s fellow workers Christ Jesus in Corinth, it is clear that they, too, were exposed to dangers.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 4](#))
- “Fourth, Paul indicates that the churches of the Gentiles give thanks for them. Given the themes of the entire letter, this singling out of the Gentiles seems to have more than ordinary significance. And going back to Acts 18:2, we find that Aquila was a Jew, expelled from Rome when the emperor Claudius, exasperated with riots in the Jewish quarter that had something to do with a fellow named “Chrestus” (a common Roman misspelling of “Christus”), decided to evict the Jews. Yet they were working with Paul, who in this very city declared that he was turning from the Jews to the Gentiles and from that time forward conducted a highly effective mission among them (18:5-11). So Prisca and Aquila, though Jews, took part in the ministry to the Gentiles. And that is how they earned the thanks of the Gentile churches.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 4](#))
- Romans 16:1—*why commend a servant of the church at Cenchrea?* Paul is writing, apparently, from Corinth. Perhaps Cenchrea is, then, in the neighborhood of Corinth.
- Acts 18:18—we find from the book of Acts that Paul himself, upon leaving Corinth, visited Cenchrea.

- “Thus the apparently barren lists of greetings furnish us with numerous points of indirect correspondence—consistency and even harmony, but without verbal borrowing—with the events in the historical narrative of Acts.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 4](#))

Pauline UC#5—The Life and Journeys of Timothy

- I Corinthians 4:17—Paul explains that he has sent Timothy unto the Corinthians. From that passage alone, however, we cannot tell whether he has sent him *before* the letter or *with* it, in which case the language of “sending” would be anticipation of the act.
- I Corinthians 16:10-11—makes it plain that Paul had sent Timothy before writing the letter, as he speaks of Timothy’s arrival as something independent from their receipt of the letter itself.
- “But the comparison of these two passages raises an interesting question. If Timothy had been sent first, why should he not arrive first? And if he arrived first, what use would it be to send, after the fact, instructions on how they were to receive him?”

The only plausible resolution is that Timothy, though sent first, must have taken some indirect route to Corinth. The fastest method of travel from Ephesus, where Paul was writing, to Corinth would be to take a ship; with a fair wind, the journey between these two cities on opposite sides of the archipelago can be made in a very short time.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 6](#))

- Acts 19:21-22—“we discover that Timothy, when he left Ephesus, took the land route, and went up through Macedonia. Here once again we have the characteristic of undesigned coincidences that neither the historical account nor the letters could plausibly be said to have been written up from the other. The letter does not mention Timothy’s journey through Macedonia at all; the book of Acts does not mention Paul’s letter. But what we find in the book of Acts is the only plausible way of reconciling those stray comments Paul makes in the letter.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 6](#))
- “It is not always so in historical work. Jortin’s *Life of Erasmus*, for example, is framed almost entirely from Erasmus’s letters, and for just that reason it gives us virtually nothing that cannot be found in the letters themselves. There is much parallel material between the letters and Jortin’s biography, but there is no *interlocking*. The coincidences do not qualify as *undesigned*.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 6](#))
- II Timothy 3:15—clearly, this is a reference to the Jewish scriptures; but Paul gives no clue as to how Timothy, who was not circumcised until after his conversion as a young man (Acts 16:3), had acquired such knowledge.
- Acts 16:1—his mother made sure he was instructed in the scriptures of her people.

Pauline UC#6—Acts Was Not Written by Someone Copying Paul’s Letters

- “A life as rich in travel and relationships as Paul’s was, documented both by his letters and by the history of the book of Acts, affords many opportunities for undesigned coincidences to emerge—so many, in fact, that it is worth pausing to see some of the evidence that Acts was not written by someone who had Paul’s letters before him.

Leafing through II Corinthians, we notice how conspicuous a part is played by Titus. He is named multiple times (see chapters 7 and 8 in particular), and Paul describes him in II Corinthians 8:23 as “my partner and fellow helper concerning you.” Yet in the book of Acts, his name does not appear even once. It would be a poor fabricator who could not make more of his material than this. Yet in real historical documents, the omission of some person or event that we could hardly imagine ourselves omitting is quite common.

Or consider Paul’s enumeration of his sufferings in II Corinthians 11:24-25. “Thrice was I beaten with rods”—but only one of those occasions makes it into the history (Acts 16:22). “Thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep”—what an opportunity to tell a set of dramatic tales! Yet not one of these three is mentioned in the book of Acts, where the one disastrous voyage that is recounted (Acts 27) takes place years after this letter was penned.

Or compare the account Paul gives of his escape from Damascus in II Corinthians 11:32-33 with the account of the same adventure in Acts 9:23-25. The main facts are the same, but the differences make it perfectly clear that the history was not written up from the letter. In II Corinthians, for example, Paul says that Aretas had the city guarded, though there is no information as to who did the guarding. In Acts, it we are told that the Jews kept watch at the gates for Paul, for which they probably needed the leave of the ethnarch; yet Aretas goes unnamed. True, it is not hard to reconcile these statements. *Qui facit per alium, facit per se*, as the saying goes: he who does a thing by another does it himself. But here again, it is not credible to suggest that the author of Acts wrote his history from the letter.

This same manifest independence is visible in I Corinthians as well. Consider all of the problems that the church at Corinth had written about, problems to which Paul replies in 1 Corinthians 7 and 8: problems about marriage, about calling, about the unmarried, about food offered to idols. It is wholly natural that they should make these inquiries of Paul and wholly natural that he should reply to them. Yet in the book of Acts we find no trace of these problems at Corinth, and the one place that the question of food offered to idols is touched upon, the Jerusalem council arguably enjoins something stricter than Paul himself, writing later than that event, imposes (Acts 15:20).

All of these passages provide evidence that the history was written independently of these letters. The numerous coincidences between them, some of which we have already seen in this series and some of which we will be looking at in subsequent installments, are therefore genuinely undesigned. And that is why they provide evidence of their substantial trustworthiness.

One more touch of verisimilitude in 1 Corinthians itself, noted by Paley in his *Horae Paulinae*, though not really an undesigned coincidence deserves attention. Paul begins chapter 7 with a reference to earlier correspondence now lost: “Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me . . .”

The issues they have raised, however foreign to us, are the sorts of things we can well imagine arising in a young church of the time. But other parts of the letter reveal that there were graver and more embarrassing problems that they had not written about but that Paul had evidently learned of from other sources: bitter quarreling and divisions (1:11, 11:18), sexual immorality (5:1), and lawsuits between members of the church (6:1). What is more natural or probable than that their letter to Paul should speak of the issues that did not reflect poorly on any of them, while rumor carried to Paul’s ears (“It is commonly reported . . .” 5:1) an account of the more scandalous matters? This manner of dividing the issues Paul addresses would be most improbable in a forgery. It has the ring of truth.” (McGrew, [Undesigned Coincidences: Part 5](#))