

Making Our Way



A McMAHON / CHEYNE PODCAST

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Between the Lines

Our Hosts

Janet Cheyne McMahon is a lover of family, dogs, nature, travel, books, and music. Born south of the Mason-Dixon line, she left after 9 months for parts north, landing eventually in Michigan, which will always be “where I’m from.”

Love of learning led Jan to a Bachelor of Arts (History, Political Science) at the University of Michigan-Dearborn (Go Blue), and a Master of Arts (Library and Information Science) at the University of South Florida. Amid all that, studied for a time with Rob at Colorado State University, a pivotal time in their lives.

Worked at the U of M-Dearborn Library, and then The Salvation Army Florida Divisional Headquarters, with the greatest reward being in serving as the Divisional Librarian. A librarian is who Jan is “in my soul.”

Jan and Rob have made our home in Florida since 1983, and live now in retirement with their dog, Skye, who makes it all the best adventure. They travel as much as possible, spending time in nature and in diverse places on this amazing planet. It has all been, and continues to be a fascinating journey, with hope of making a difference, in small ways, by being brave enough to speak and act on behalf of others.

Rob McMahon is a native Michigander, born in Saginaw and raised in the suburbs of Detroit. Rob attended Michigan State University, graduating in 1978 with a Bachelor of Science degree. He did graduate studies at the University of Michigan and the University of South Florida. Rob is retired, having spent 36 years in public education teaching both high school chemistry and biology and middle school science. He worked as a total quality management trainer for the Pinellas County School District and served four years as the president of the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association. Rob cofounded a non-profit total quality management training center, The Learning Co-op, for Teacher Unions interested in applying the W. Edwards Deming continuous improvement principles to their day-to-day operations. He worked with teacher unions in Colorado, Maryland, New Mexico, North Dakota, Texas and Michigan. He also worked in a similar capacity with Jim Shipley & Associates. In retirement Rob has written a series of science related children’s books, and enjoys traveling with his wife, Jan, and their Black Labrador Retriever, Skye.

Deanna Cheyne, born in St. John’s, Newfoundland, earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Toronto (1996), studying with such luminaries as Elmer Eisler, Doreen Rao, Greta Kraus, Lois Marshall, and Rosemarie Landry.

Dee taught music at Mississauga Christian Academy, served as music director for Meadowvale Bible Baptist Church (Mississauga, Ontario), served as Assistant Divisional Music Director for The Salvation Army in Florida, is a former member of Tampa’s Master Chorale, and, for the past 18 years, has been a public school teacher.

Dee has visit 36 of the 50 U.S. states, and 12 countries. Her favorite destinations include France, Prague, New Orleans, National Parks, & Hawaii.

Dee & Jim live in Florida with Brigus (Golden Retriever) and Pip (Teacup Yorkie).

James Cheyne, born in Galesburg, Illinois, earned a Bachelor of Music degree (Theory and Composition) from Michigan State University (1978); and a Master of Music degree (Theory and Composition) from the University of Illinois Urbana/Champaign (1981), studying with David Liptak, Salvatore Martirano, and Ben Johnston.

Jim has served as music director for The Salvation Army in Central Illinois & Eastern Iowa, Orlando Area Command, and the Florida Division, served as a pastor with The Salvation Army, and was a public school teacher for 17 years.

In travel so far, Jim has visited 50 states and 27 countries. His favorite travel destinations include National Parks, New Orleans, Newfoundland, Argentina, Prague, & France.

Jim continues to write music and support Dee’s musical endeavors, and cooks whenever absolutely necessary. Jim & Dee live in Florida with their dogs Brigus & Pip.



L-R: Brigus, Jim, Deanna, Skye, Jan, Rob.
Inset: Pip

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Between the Lines

#91 - Season 3; Episode 30

4/8/2026

Host: Jim

| Jim looks at the books of Luke and Acts. Who wrote them? When were they written? And does knowing that even matter?

[Music]

JIM: All the tourists come here, crowd into this side street to line up at shops for those last-minute souvenirs, and in all this clamor and mess hides a quiet shop for rare and used books called "Between the Lines." The door bumps a jingling bell to welcome the occasional customer - no, not customer. Here you are a guest, one of the no hurry, no place to go, no place I'd rather be, folks. We've left those pleasures out there for the treasures in here.

And in here are those who've learned how to read between the lines. Read once for what the book clearly says, but read again for what the book really says. And look, here's a slim volume called Luke. A best seller in its day, rarely used anymore. Thumbing through the pages, here's a line:

"How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God."

Or another:

"He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty."

Here, what do you make of this one?

"While women weep as they do now, I'll fight."

You're right. That's not an exact quote. But remember, this is reading between the lines. And this "while women weep" bit? It's in there. Trust me.

Want to know more about this guy Luke? I'll take you, but remember, sometimes it's the destination, but sometimes it's just the journey. And we'll begin this journey in the most likely place I can think of. We'll begin in Brazil.

[Music]

In Brasília, the capital of Brazil, bronze statues guard the entrance to the Metropolitan Cathedral. There are 4 of them, one for each evangelist, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Now I would have put 2 on either side of the entrance, but these are arranged with 3 on the left and 1 on the right And I wanted to know why.

This is where I often get lost in thought.

They might represent Christian iconography. We've read how the 4 evangelists are sometimes portrayed as animals, or rather 3 animals and 1 human. It's something out of Ezekiel and Revelation So 3 animals on the left and 1 human on the right makes sense. Problem is, the human evangelist is always Matthew, Mark, or Luke, but it is never John, and that's John standing over there by himself.

Or this could be a cultural motif. We've read Joseph Campbell and how mythologies sometimes arrange 4 things as a group of 3 plus 1. It's found all over the world. Jung said it represented psychological wholeness and called it "quaternity." Maybe.

Or you've heard how scholars group the 4 gospels in just this way, as 3 plus 1. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, those they call the Synoptic Gospels because their narratives are so similar, as opposed to John, who tells his story in quite a different way. So 3 statues on the left, 1 on the right, makes sense.

On the other hand, they look good arranged this way. Maybe it's an aesthetic choice to match the cathedral's modernist design.

But it's Luke who keeps my attention here. John is standing away from the others, but it's really Luke who is the misfit here. Matthew and John were companions of Jesus, his disciples. And Mark was a companion of Peter, no one closer to Jesus than Peter. But Luke? From all reports, Luke never met Jesus, and he traveled with someone else who never met Jesus. Not in the usual sense, anyway. Yet here is his statue standing closer to the cathedral entrance than any of the other three.

Who is this guy?

Scholars tell us that Luke, and I'm going to call him Luke out of convention, they tell us Luke wrote not only the gospel with his name, but also the book of Acts. They point out how the level of Greek in each is the same, how the writing style is the same, and the vocabulary and the themes they share. I don't read Greek, but there is a clue so obvious even I can see it. The two books are addressed to the same person. Here's the opening of Luke.

"I ... decided, as one having a grasp of everything from the start, to write a well ordered account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may have a firm grasp of the words in which you have been instructed."

And here's the opening of Acts.

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up to heaven."

So two books written to someone named Theophilus, who Luke calls "most excellent." Theophilus might have been a high Roman official, or someone in high standing, maybe even Luke's patron. It could be something else. Scholars point out the name Theophilus means "friend of God" or "beloved by God." So Theophilus could be a narrative device to address all readers who want to learn more about Jesus, all who think of themselves as friends of God. It reminds me of a movie when someone asks for Theophilus, and Tony Curtis stands up and says, "I'm Theophilus." Then another, "I'm Theophilus," which is to say, we are all Theophilus. Okay, that's Spartacus, but I was reading between the lines.

So, Luke wrote both Luke and Acts, which is a lot of writing. Over a quarter of the New

Testament, and thousands of words more than Paul himself wrote. But was it really someone named Luke? Do we really know who wrote that gospel?

That question, and other questions like it, I've noticed, don't set well with some folks, with those who use phrases like "liberal scholarship," usually as a pejorative. You've heard that phrase. Every time someone asks, "Who really wrote the Gospels?" Or, "Did Paul really write Hebrews?" Or "Did Moses really write the books of Moses?" Some people get triggered by that.

I was talking recently with our niece Mattea about this very thing. Mattea is a geologist. Listeners might remember her from some episodes called Rocks and Ages that we did ages ago. I brought up this liberal versus conservative issue and said liberal and conservative Bible scholars are not a thing any more than liberal and conservative geologists are a thing. It's just geology. And Mateus said, "Scholars are scholars." Yes, exactly that.

Scholarship is not inherently liberal or conservative. People may be, but scholarship is a method, a discipline, evidence suggesting conclusion. And we can disagree with scholars' conclusions, they disagree with each other all the time, but we cannot dismiss the evidence at play, and we can never win an argument with labels.

This question is a good one. What can we know about this guy called Luke? We can know this. In a courtroom, his gospel would be called hearsay. Let me say that carefully, not heresy, but hearsay. Luke says so himself in that opening bit from the gospel. He says he's writing things that were, quote,

"handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses."

So Luke is not an eyewitness to what he reports. What's more, Luke isn't the only one doing the reporting. He tells us he is just one among many, each telling their own versions of the story.

Again quoting,

"Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us..."

See, he says there were many, not just two or three, and we happen to know there were dozens more.

Those who've read "The Da Vinci Code," or as I like to say it, those who are victims of "The Da Vinci Code" will recall that Emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicaea eliminated a lot of writings from the Bible in the 4th century. That's Dan Brown's telling of it, and that's completely wrong. Constantine and the Council of Nicaea had nothing to do with which books were in or out of the Bible.

But Luke is right. There were many writings for early Christians to choose from, many books vying for a place in the Bible Book Club. It wasn't so much a matter of a bouncer kicking books out, as it was that dozens of Gospels didn't make it past the velvet rope in the first place. And not just gospels. We have dozens of letters and dozens of Acts of various apostles. We kept the Revelation of John, but there were many other Revelations from Adam to Stephen, all wanting to get in.

With all these gospels, how did Luke get in? How did any writer get in?

Then, as today, people had itching ears. But then, as today, others were looking for authenticity. Forget what people were claiming as truth Did a writer truly know what he or she was talking about? Are they truly connected to Jesus?

First, we have to find out when Luke was written.

It goes back at least to the year 367, because Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria included Luke in a list of the 27 books he found to be acceptable This was the first such list to name our current 27 books, and no others. And this list wasn't the bishop's invention. Those 27 books were pretty much what everyone was already reading, anyway. So Luke is older than the fourth century. Do we know when it was written down?

That takes us to a segment from 60 Minutes with Morley Safer who was walking with someone in clerical garb through the Vatican Library, through the ornate halls, and into a document room. And I watched in disbelief as Safer and the curators of the library were thumbing through old books and documents with their bare hands. Their bare hands. You just don't do that. The acid and oils in fingerprints will destroy documents.

Which reminds me, a curator in the Library of Congress once, knowing my interest in music, took me behind the scenes and showed me a box labeled "Mozart" which he opened and took out a collection of Mozart's manuscripts bound together in a book, and he thumbed through them, these very pages Mozart had written, turning page by page, with his bare hands, and I was shocked, and even more so when he handed the book to me. Are you serious? I politely took it and held the cover, but didn't dare touch the pages. I mean, you just don't do that.

Anyway, back in the Vatican, the curator held a papyrus in his bare hands, running his fingers over the text, and to my horror Morley Safer said this was the earliest known copy of the Lord's Prayer. I couldn't believe it. Then, to my relief, Safer said, the original was too fragile to take out of storage. So this was a replica.

That was Papyrus 75 with the earliest copy of the Lord's Prayer, and it's well known. It's from the early 3rd century. But do we have something earlier? We have exactly zero original manuscripts of the New Testament. None. And we have exactly zero copies of the New Testament from the first century. The second century gives us about a dozen credit card-sized scraps of paper, none of which includes Luke.

But what happened to the manuscripts from before that time? Where did they go?

Age is one answer. Over time, those materials just fall to dust. On the darker side, a musicology professor once told us how monks in monasteries during the winter would sometimes burn old music manuscripts in a furnace for warmth

"What's this?"

"I don't know, but I'm cold."

Who knows what was lost? Could this have happened with biblical manuscripts as well?

On a more hopeful note, maybe some first century manuscripts still exist, buried somewhere, maybe, dare we hope, even some originals. Remember Belloq in Raiders of the Lost Ark, who said, "Perhaps the Ark is still waiting in some antechamber for us to discover."

So manuscripts push Luke back to the early 3rd century, but the gospel was known before then. Irenaeus of Lyon called it by name in the year 180, the first time we are certain it was called Luke. And there are other quotes from the gospel that go back to the beginning of the 2nd century. So we're making progress, and only speculation could reach back any farther than that.

What does this say about the author? This part needs a whole lot of reading between the lines.

Scholars note that Luke and Acts have a Gentile slant, and the author is probably a Gentile. If so, we've narrowed the field down to about 300 million people. Also, this would be the only Gentile author in the whole New Testament.

Next, there's a surprise waiting for us in Acts in chapter 16 that might help. The author is telling us about Paul and all the places he and his companions were traveling when this happens in verse 7.

"When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. During the night, Paul had a vision. There stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We therefore set sail from Troas."

Did you catch that change? The narrator switches from what *they* did to what *we* did. He started with "*they went down to Troas*" and finished with "*then we left Troas.*" The narrator has joined Paul at Troas as a traveling companion.

But which traveling companion?

Paul names several in Colossians chapter 4. There are Tychicus, and Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphrus, Luke, Demas. Could our author be someone on that list? Well, Paul tells us that two of them, Tychicus and Onesimus, have left and gone to Colossae, so cross them off. Paul then says three of them, Aristarchus, Mark, and Justice, are "of the circumcision," is the way he puts it, meaning they are Jews, not Gentiles. So we cut them off the list. That leaves Epaphrus, Luke, and Demas. In 2 Timothy, Paul says, Demas has abandoned him, so he's gone. Epaphras is closely connected to Colossae. He might have founded the church there, and evidence suggests he stayed pretty much in that region, so he's out.

That leaves Luke, but first one more word about Colossae.

Given the lack of manuscripts of the early New Testament period, wouldn't it be thrilling to uncover more of them? What if we could see with our own eyes what Paul describes as just how large his handwriting is? I wonder if Colossae is a place to look. Paul was very active in that area, writing letters here and there, and today it's in ruins. It has never been excavated. As Belloq might say, "Perhaps the manuscripts are still waiting in some antechamber for us to discover."

Luke is a Greek name. He's a Gentile, a companion of Paul, and it is Colossians that calls him "the beloved physician," and some have even found medical terminology in Acts that

only a physician would use. Reading between the lines, people have concluded that Luke is the author of Luke and Acts. Long way to go for an obvious answer, isn't it?

Well, there are doubts.

First, we don't know just how many traveling companions Paul had. The evidence is too thin to lead us to Luke and nobody else.

Then it's those we passages. The wording is off there. Tell me, if you were in Troas when Paul arrived, would you write, "Paul went down to Troas"? Or would you write, "Paul came down to Troaz"? It's the second one, isn't it? But that's not the way Acts has it.

Then there's that famous episode when a boy sitting in the window dozes off while Paul is speaking. Remember that one? He falls out of the window three stories and is picked up dead, but Paul goes down to help and revives him. It's a medical emergency, but Luke, the beloved physician, does nothing but narrate. He's like a bystander recording an accident with his cell phone. A beloved physician would drop everything and run to the scene.

Then there's the way the author drifts in and out of using this word "we." But there is an explanation for that. Remember, the author said at the beginning of the gospel that he was relying on others for what he was writing down. And if he's copying down what others have said, and putting it in his own logical order, then his on-again, off-again use of the word "we" makes sense. He's simply quoting somebody else.

Finally, what we know about Paul's life comes to us from Paul's own letters and from Acts. Now, if Luke and Paul were traveling companions, we'd assume their accounts of Paul's life would agree with each other, but instead they contradict, and in many places, which makes sense if the author of Acts got his information second hand.

Here's the thing. I don't mind contradictions in this text. I really don't. I don't mind not knowing who the author is. I do enjoy the search. Learn as much as possible Explain as much as is probable. The real point is to get out of the noise out there and learn to read between the lines. That's where we'll find a Good Samaritan waiting to meet us. That's where we'll watch as ten lepers are healed, while only one, a Samaritan, returns to say thank you. That's where we pause at a door to watch a widow offer two copper coins, two coins more valuable to her than billions are to some others. That's where we have the privilege to join the outcasts, the sinners, the creeps, the rejected, and share a meal with them, and with Jesus.

I remember an old Peanuts comic strip. Lucy is reading a book. Her face almost planted on the page. Then she says, "I give up. There's no use trying. No matter how hard I try, I can't read between the lines."

[Music]

Those statues are intriguing, striking, even perplexing. I can puzzle over them all afternoon. I just have to remind myself, don't forget to go into the cathedral.

I thank you for your company today.

Until next time.