

Chapter 10: The Historicity of the New Testament.

The turning point

Professor Ho stood by the open window in his office. He was on the third floor and his view looked out through a leafy kapok tree in bloom into the central courtyard of the campus. It would be hot outside that day if the southern sun showed his face, but the slight breeze coming into the room was fresh and pleasant. The boys had begun studying with Professor Ho in the dead of winter just after Spring Festival; now April was already half over. The world of nature had been reborn yet again by the coming of Spring.

Although no one had ever said anything specific, Xiao Wang and Xiao Li had been coming to Professor Ho's office at the same time every week for so long that they all tacitly regarded it as a standing appointment. So a week after their conversation about Daniel, when it was already 15 minutes past their usual meeting time, Professor Ho began to wonder. He knew that the previous week had been a watershed of sorts for Xiao Wang. He had studied enough evidence that the Old Testament really was inspired by God to be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt. "Not beyond *any* doubt," Professor Ho thought to himself with an ironic smile; "you can always come up with doubts; reasonable or not!" But Professor

Ho was confident that by this point the voice of logic in Xiao Wang was telling him that believing it made sense and not believing it really didn't.

At the same time, Professor Ho knew very well that humans frequently did not want the truth and would often choose to reject it in spite of the testimony of their own reason. So when the boys were late, he began to fear that Xiao Wang had decided he just wasn't willing to think about things anymore. He had seen many people do that before after what had seemed like an honest inquiry into Christianity. Professor Ho sighed out loud. The consequence of rejecting the truth would be being rejected by the Truth. But in the midst of his anxious reverie, he heard the expected knock on the door. "Come in!" he said quickly and rose from his seat. The boys hurried in.

"Sorry we are late Professor Ho," Xiao Wang apologized. "We were...out looking at books, and the traffic was bad on the way back."

"No problem!" Professor Ho assured them. He was about to ask "What books?" but thought the better of it. "Have a seat, please!" He gestured toward the two chairs placed and waiting for them across the desk from him. Everyone sat.

Xiao Wang spoke first. "Professor Ho, I am convinced that the Old Testament was inspired by God. There really is no way that all those prophecies could have been made by human insight or lucky guesses. But I'm not so sure about the New Testament or Jesus Christ. So maybe I should become a Jew! But the problem is, I really like pork dumplings!"

They all laughed. "Don't give up your dumplings yet!" Professor Ho advised. "Your question actually brings us to the next logical step in our inquiry: the truth of the New Testament and the person of Jesus Christ.

"The process is something like the one we used to confirm the Old Testament.

1. Historical sources outside the Bible, ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, and archaeological findings demonstrate that the books of the New Testament are historically accurate and indicate they were written in the first century.
2. Jesus's miracles, resurrection, and detailed fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy show that

New Testament and Early Church Period

(all dates approximate; all dates AD unless otherwise noted)

sometime 6 to 4 BC	Jesus is born
4BC–39AD	Herod Antipas is tetrarch of Galilee
11–14	Tiberius is co-regent with the Roman emperor Augustus
14–37	Tiberius is sole emperor of Rome
sometime 14 to 29	Lysanias is tetrarch of Abilene
26–36	Pontius Pilate is governor of Judea
26	John the Baptist announces Jesus as the Christ
28	Herod Antipas beheads John the Baptist
30	Jesus is crucified and rises from the dead
51–52	Gallio proconsul of Greece
54	Claudius (reigned 41-54) expels Jews from Rome because of 'Chrestus'
57	Erastus is city treasurer of Corinth
62	James the half-brother of Jesus killed
64	Fire in Rome; Christians persecuted by Nero (reigned 54-68)
67	Paul and Peter executed in Rome
70	Jerusalem destroyed by Romans
93	Josephus (37–100) mentions John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, James the half-brother of Jesus in <u>Antiquities of the Jews</u>
100	Writing of the New Testament already completed
112	Pliny the Younger (61–113) persecutes Christians in Bithynia-Pontus
116	Tacitus (55–120) mentions Christians in his <u>Annals</u>
120	Suetonius (70–post130) mentions Christians in his <u>Lives of the 12 Caesars</u>
125	Oldest extant fragment of the New Testament
165	Lucian (120–post180) mocks Christians in his <u>Peregrinus</u>
170-180	Muratorian Canon lists at least 22 books of the 27 books in the New Testament
by 180	At least 25 of the 27 New Testament books are referred to in the writings of the early church fathers
200	Oldest extant copies of entire books of the New Testament
350	Oldest extant copy of the entire New Testament

He is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

Our primary record for the life of Jesus is books of the New Testament, but before we look at who He is and what He did, we need to review the evidence for the date and accuracy of the New Testament itself.”

Did Jesus really exist?

Xiao Wang interrupted with a hint of the old combative look on his face, a look Professor Ho had not seen for awhile. “How do we even know that Jesus Christ existed?”

Professor Ho replied mildly, “The same way I know Qin Shihuang or Julius Caesar existed: based on excellent historical evidence.”

Professor Ho went to his overstuffed bookshelves and pulled out several volumes, continuing to speak as he moved. “The evidence is so extensive that the existence of Jesus as a person in history apparently was never questioned by His friends or His foes for 1,700 years after His death and resurrection.^{1,2} Then in the late 18th century, some so-called ‘Rationalists,’ who in fact were not at all rational, essentially invented a denial out of nothing. Interestingly, even Voltaire, who opposed the Bible, couldn’t stomach the absurdity of denying Jesus’s existence. Nonetheless, the denial gained some popularity in the 19th century among European atheists who wanted to reject anything that had to do with Christianity. It was always a minority view, however, and by the middle of the 20th century, the weight of evidence had convinced the overwhelming majority of historians and archaeologists that Jesus was real. That includes most of the non-Christian scholars, by the way.” Professor Ho flipped through the pages of one of the books. “This volume is by an expert in the field of New Testament studies. He doesn’t hesitate to quote critics of Christianity and deniers of the historicity of the New Testament. But speaking of the reality in the academic world he notes:

The theory of Jesus’ nonexistence is now effectively dead as a scholarly question.³”

Professor Ho raised his eyes and looked closely at Xiao Wang for a moment, wondering just what kind of books he had been out looking at. “Nonetheless—” he began slowly, “we do need to examine the historicity of the New Testament. The evidence is abundant and compelling, and along the way we’ll see that Jesus the Man is a real historical personage. The evidence can be summarized as:

1. Evidence from outside the New Testament demonstrating the existence and early date of Jesus and Christianity.
2. Evidence for the early date and accurate transmission of the New Testament documents.
3. Historical and archaeological support for the factual accuracy of the New Testament.

“Let’s start with the evidence from outside the New Testament.”

The historical evidence from Josephus: c. 93 AD

“The earliest well documented reference to Jesus and the events of the New Testament outside the Bible is probably the records in the Jewish historian Josephus. You’ll remember we looked at some of his writings last week when we discussed the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and subsequent diaspora of the Jews. Josephus’s two major works, The Antiquities of the Jews and The Wars of the Jews remain perhaps our best historical sources for events in Palestine and the surrounding areas during from roughly 100 BC to 73 AD.”

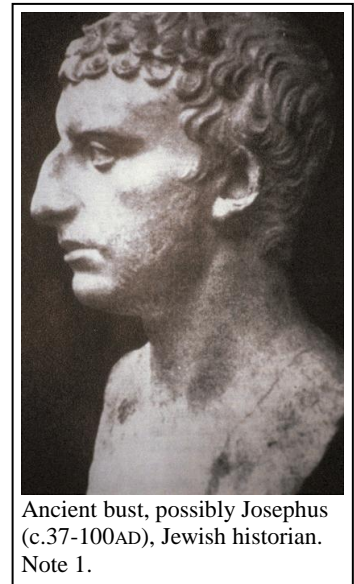
“Did Josephus see Jesus?” Xiao Li asked.

“No, he was born a few years too late, in about 37 AD. He died around 100 AD.”

“Was he a Christian?” Xiao Wang wanted to know.

Professor Ho shook his head. “No, his writings, including the extensive autobiographical sections, virtually rule out any such possibility. He talks a lot about God and religion, but never expresses a hint of faith in Jesus and did not live at all like a Christian.

“Josephus completed The Antiquities of the Jews about the year 93 AD, a little more than 60 years after Jesus. It confirms countless circumstantial details in the gospels and other New Testament books, such as the names and timeframes of Jewish kings and high priests, and Roman rulers in Palestine and surrounding areas. But for our purposes, the most important parts are three passages which deal directly with people and events in the New Testament.”



Ancient bust, possibly Josephus (c.37-100AD), Jewish historian. Note 1.

Josephus on John the Baptist

“In the New Testament, all four gospels and the book of Acts speak about Jesus’s cousin, John the Baptist. We talked about him last week. John the Baptist had a huge following among Jews throughout Palestine. He told them to repent in order to prepare for the imminent coming of the Messiah, the Christ, and baptized them as a symbol of their repentance and request for God’s forgiveness. The Jewish ruler Herod Antipas, called Herod the tetrarch, imprisoned John the Baptist when he rebuked him, and subsequently executed him.

1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis,

and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, 2 in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. 3 And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; [Luke 3:1-3 NAS]^A

3:5 Then Jerusalem was going out to [John the Baptist], and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. ... 11 [John said] "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He [Messiah] who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." ... 14:1...Herod [Antipas] the tetrarch... 3 ... had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. 4 For John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." 5 Although Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd, because they regarded John as a prophet. 6 But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod, 7 so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8 Having been prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." 9 Although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. 10 He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. [Matthew 3:5-6, 11-12; 14:3-10 NAS]

That's part of the New Testament's record about John the Baptist. Now let's see what Josephus says in his Antiquities of the Jews:

[Josephus's preceding paragraph details a battle lost by army of Herod Antipas (whom he also calls Herod the tetrarch) in c.37 AD.]

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God as a just punishment of what Herod had done against John, who was called the Baptist. For Herod had killed this good man, who had commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, righteousness towards one another and piety towards God. For only thus, in John's opinion, would the baptism he administered be acceptable to God, namely, if they used it to obtain not pardon for some sins but rather the cleansing of their bodies, inasmuch as it was taken for granted that their souls had already been purified by justice [righteousness].

Now many people came in crowds to him, for they were greatly moved by his words. Herod, who feared that the great influence John had over the masses might put them into his power and enable him to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best to put him to death. In this way, he might prevent any mischief John might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late.

Accordingly John was sent as a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I already mentioned, and was put to death. Now the Jews thought that the destruction of his army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure with him.⁴

There is apparently universal agreement among scholars that this passage from Josephus is genuine.⁵ It provides an enormously strong, independent testimony to many of the Bible's details about the career of John the Baptist: his preaching, wide influence, baptizing, and imprisonment and execution by Herod Antipas. It also roughly confirms the timeframe for John's activities and death as being prior to 37 AD, the time of the battle lost by Herod's army.⁶

Xiao Li was confused. "But the Bible says Herod imprisoned John because he rebuked him about marrying his brother's wife Herodias, and killed him because of her plot."

Professor Ho nodded, "Correct—and I'm sure that was a reason. But you must remember that for a king in a highly religious society to be publicly rebuked by a recognized prophet was a politically dangerous situation. There's actually no contradiction between Josephus and the Bible. Josephus's record of Herod's motivations for jailing and killing John might be his own guesswork, or it might be only one of the factors which motivated Herod, or it might be the excuse Herod gave publicly. As for Herodias's part in John's death, Josephus gives us no details of what happened between the imprisonment and the execution, so there's no contradiction there either."^B

Xiao Wang was quicker than Xiao Li to grasp the significance. "I see your point. It's an impressive corroboration from a completely independent historical source. But do you have any more? And what about Jesus?"

Professor Ho nodded in his characteristic way. "A very reasonable question! I have two more from Josephus."

Josephus on James the brother of Jesus Christ

"Josephus notes the unlawful execution of James, one of the younger brothers of Jesus. Many of the Jews in Pales-

^A For a discussion of the historical references here in Luke 3:1-3 see Chapter 9: The Prophet Daniel.

^B In addition, Josephus confirms the Bible's details about the relationship between Herod Antipas and his second wife, Herodias. According to Josephus, Herodias had been the wife of Herod Antipas's half-brother, Herod Phillip. Antipas fell in love with Herodias and convinced her to divorce Phillip and marry him. Josephus also mentions the daughter of Herodias by her first husband, Phillip; her name was Salome. This would be the daughter who danced at Herod Antipas's party. Josephus also refers to him as Herod the tetrarch, as Matthew 13:1 and other Biblical passages do. See Antiquities of the Jews Book 18 Chapter 5 Sections 1 and 4 (Chapter 5:109-110, 136). Here again, the Bible's details are independently confirmed by the non-Christian Josephus.

tine were virulently opposed to Christianity in the period 30-70 AD, but few Christians were killed outright in that time period. One reason is that normally only the Roman leaders had the right to execute people in Palestine, and the Romans had not yet begun to systematically persecute Christians. In 62 AD, the Roman procurator in Judea died, and before his replacement arrived, the Jewish high priest Ananus in Jerusalem took advantage of the situation. Josephus records:

He [Ananus] assembled the sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before it the brother of Jesus called Christ, whose name was James, and some others. When he had accused them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.⁶

James was a common name in 1st century Palestine. So was Jesus, which is the Greek equivalent of Joshua; there are a dozen or more different people named ‘Jesus’ in Josephus’s works.⁷ Here Josephus clarifies the James he is referring to is known as the brother of the Jesus who is ‘called Christ.’

“Does the New Testament record James’s death?” asked Xiao Li.

“No,” Professor said, “but it does tell us Jesus had a brother named James [Matthew 13:55; Galatians 1:19] who was a prominent leader in the church in Jerusalem [Acts 15:13-21; Galatians 2:9] and was still there in about 57 AD⁸ [Acts 21:18] when the Jewish high priest and other leaders attempted to put the apostle Paul to death, but were thwarted by the Romans [see Acts 21-23]. This fits perfectly with Josephus’s description of James the brother of Jesus Christ being a target of persecution by the Jewish leaders five years later in 62 AD, when there was temporarily no Roman procurator in town to stop them.

“In short, all the historical details fit perfectly—and Josephus had no axe to grind in support of Christianity!”

“Can we be sure this passage wasn’t added later?” asked Xiao Wang.

“Virtually all scholars, including unbelievers, accept it as genuine.⁹ It’s simply not the way a Christian interpolator would have written. Note that Josephus does not affirm that Jesus *is* the Christ, merely that some people call Him that. An actual Christian never would have used such an ambiguous phrase, nor referred to Jesus in such an offhand way, nor failed to note James’s important position in the church.

“To demonstrate that, let’s compare it to the third important passage in Josephus, one that almost certainly *does* have later interpolations by a Christian scribe, but part of which was almost certainly written by Josephus himself.”

Josephus on Jesus

Professor Ho turned to another page of Josephus and read:

Around this time lived Jesus, a wise man, [*if indeed it is right to call him a man*]; for he was a worker of amazing deeds, a teacher of people who accept the truth with pleasure. He won over both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. [*He was the Christ.*] And when Pilate, at the accusation of the leading men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those who loved him at the first did not cease doing so; [*for he appeared to them alive again on the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him*]. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.¹⁰

Professor Ho looked up at the boys and pointed to text. “You will notice several parts of this passage are inside brackets and printing in italics. Those are parts that most scholars believe were added or edited by a Christian copyist later on.^C When the presumed interpolations are removed, what remains closely matches Josephus’s style.¹¹ Scholars range on all sides of the question, but the majority opinion—and by far the mostly likely correct answer—is that Josephus wrote the core of the passage and a later Christian copyist modified it, thinking it was not sufficiently respectful to Jesus.”

“Well then, what did Josephus say about Jesus being the Christ?” Xiao Li asked.

“Scholars are divided on that one,” Professor Ho replied. “Many suggest that the original text included ‘He was the so-called Christ,’ like the phrase Josephus uses when he refers to James the brother of Jesus. I’m not sure about that, but in any case, in the essentially undisputed part of the passage, Josephus calls Jesus’s followers ‘Christians,’ which means ‘little Christs.’ That term implies that Jesus’s followers believed He was the Christ, the Messiah.

^C This passage about Jesus in the extant Greek copies of Josephus contains both too much and too little: too much to have been completely written by Josephus; too little to have been completely written by a Christian interpolator.

The text as we have it certainly says far more than Josephus could have believed: Jesus was the Christ and rose from the dead.

At the same time, it does not look like it was added completely from scratch by a Christian interpolator. The New Testament never calls Jesus merely a ‘wise man,’ nor was the term common among early Christians. In contrast, Christian writers from the end of the 1st century onwards customarily used highly respectful terms like ‘Son of God,’ ‘Lord,’ and ‘Savior’ to refer to Jesus; none of these appear in the passage. The term ‘pleasure’ in early Christian writings almost always has a negative connotation of hedonism and would not be expected to be used by a Christian scribe. The term ‘tribe’ for Christians would also be strange. (See Note 1, pg. 89-90, 93 for these and additional arguments.) Finally, a Christian would hardly have ended on such an almost pathetic note as ‘the tribe of Christians...are not extinct at this day’! A Christian would have spoken about the spread of the gospel all over the world. In short, the paragraph as a whole does not look like equivalent Christian writings from the early Church.

If there originally had been nothing about Jesus in this passage of Josephus, it is doubtful that a Christian copyist would have ever felt the need to add a section about Him from scratch. The existence of Jesus was never seriously disputed until the late 1700s (see Note 1, pg.6-8). Copyists over a thousand years before that weren’t feeling the need concoct ‘proof’ for Jesus in a book by a Jewish unbeliever!

“Just like the examples of John the Baptist and James the brother of Jesus, here Josephus provides an independent confirmation of New Testament details. Note at least ten points of agreement.” Professor Ho began to count off on his fingers:

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| 1. “His name was Jesus; | 7. Pilate crucified Him; |
| 2. He had a reputation for performing amazing deeds; | 8. his disciples continued to follow Him after His crucifixion; |
| 3. He was a teacher; | 9. they were called ‘Christians’ |
| 4. many Jews believed in Him; | 10. they still existed as a group in the latter part of the first century AD. |
| 5. Pontius Pilate was ruler during His ministry; | |
| 6. the Jewish leaders were opposed to Him and accused Him to Pilate; | |

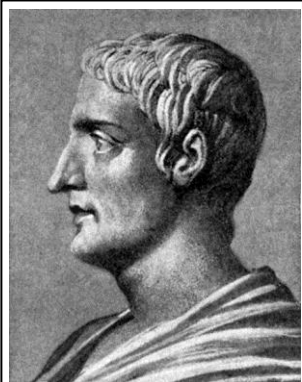
Every one of these points confirms historical details about Jesus and His followers specifically recorded in the New Testament.”

Professor Ho leaned back in his seat. “Taking all three Josephus passages together, we have substantial confirmation of situations and specific events recorded in the New Testament scattered throughout the period 26 AD to 62 AD. That time range, incidentally, includes almost all of the period covered in the historical narratives in the New Testament.”

“A good start!” said Xiao Wang with a nod. “But that’s only one writer, and anyway one passage has some question about it. Is there any more?”

“Lots!” replied Professor Ho with a smile.

The historical evidence from Romans: Tacitus, c.116 AD



Tacitus (c. 55-120AD), Roman historian. Note 1.

“The Roman historian Tacitus lived from c.55 to c.120 AD. One of his most important histories is the Annals which covers the history of Rome from the death of the emperor Augustus in 14 AD to the death of the emperor Nero in 68 AD.

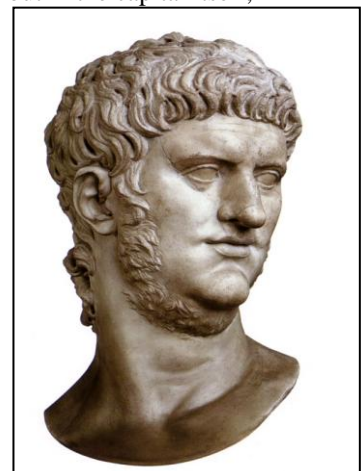
“In the year 64 AD, a massive fire destroyed most of the city of Rome. The government under Emperor Nero’s administration engaged in extensive religious rituals to appease the presumably offended gods, and spent a great deal of money on relieving the homeless and rebuilding the city. Despite this, rumors persisted that Nero himself had ordered the fire set so he could build a large palace on a burned out section in the center of Rome, or perhaps more broadly to gain the glory of having rebuilt the entire city.

[After the fire]...means were sought for appeasing deity...public prayers were offered to Vulcan, Ceres, and Proserpine, while Juno was propitiated by the matrons.... Ritual banquets and all-night vigils were celebrated by women in the married state.

But neither human help, nor imperial munificence, nor all the modes of placating Heaven, could stifle scandal or dispel the belief that the fire had taken place by order. Therefore, to scotch the rumour, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians [literally: Christians]. Christus [i.e. Christ], the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus [Pilate], and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue.

First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers^D were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night.^E Nero had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus, mixing with the crowd in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his car. Hence, in spite of a guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man.¹²

Professor Ho looked up from his reading. “Although the vast majority of scholars accept the passage as genuine,¹³ it contains so much important information about Jesus that some critics of the Bible had felt compelled to attack it’s genuineness. The very few who have denied it are, I think, motivated by their own anti-Christian biases. Nonetheless, let’s summarize the evidence.



Emperor Nero (reigned 54-68AD). Note 1.

^D Commentators note that this is an unspecified term which does not enable us to estimate an actual number.

^E Burning alive was the traditional Roman penalty for arson.

“The passage appears in our earliest extant copy and all other copies.^F Classicists note it’s style is distinctly Tacitus’s. Note how the passage displays a consistently negative view of Christians: despite believing they were unjustly made scapegoats by Nero, Tacitus still considers Christians so evil that they are worthy of the torture and death they suffered! This was the typical Roman attitude toward Christianity in the first through third centuries. If a Christian had written this section later—let me emphasize again there is absolutely no textual evidence for such a wild speculation—if a Christian had written it, he would have praised Jesus, or at least emphasized the Christians’ fortitude, not just called them haters of the human race! Additions by a Christian should have looked something like the ones we saw in the Josephus passage—biased in favor of Jesus, and standing out like a sore thumb.

“In addition to all that, some phrases from the Tacitus passage are used by a later historian, the Christian Sulpicius Severus^G who wrote around 403 AD; from this we conclude the passage was already known at that time. Despite what you might read on the internet—” Professor Ho looked closely at Xiao Wang, “—there is nothing in the passage which looks like it was added later by a Christian interpolator.”

“The text shows us what a Roman writer in 116 AD believed about the situation of Christianity in Rome in 64 AD.

1. It’s followers were called ‘Chrestians,’ the typical early Roman spelling of Christians.
2. It’s founder had been named ‘Christus,’ Latin for Christ or Messiah.
3. Christ was put to death in Judea by Pontius Pilate in the reign of the emperor Tiberius.
4. There were an appreciable number of Christians in Rome by 64 AD.
5. They were widely regarded as evil and socially harmful.

Obviously points 1 through 3 are strong, independent confirmations of facts stated repeatedly throughout the New Testament. Regarding point 4, the New Testament records a significant number of Christians gathering in several local churches in Rome and nearby areas by the period 57-59 AD [Romans 1:8, 16:1-16; Acts 28:13-15]. For point 5, of course, slander, hatred, and persecution of Christians are noted throughout the New Testament [e.g., Acts 16:20-23, 17:1-9, 28:22; 1 Peter 4:12-16]. Speaking of Rome itself, the imprisonment and impending death of the apostle Paul there in about 67 AD is specifically detailed [2 Timothy 1:8, 16-17; 4:6, 16].

“Tacitus’s record shows us that a careful Roman historian writing early in the second century had access to records about Christianity in Rome in 64 AD and the death of Jesus under Pontius Pilate, who governed Judea from 26 to 36 AD. That’s more strong evidence for the historicity of the New Testament—not to mention the existence of Jesus!”

Whoever said Jesus *didn’t* exist? Not Lucian in c.165 AD.

Inwardly Xiao Wang was impressed with the argument, but he still countered “But wouldn’t a Christian have wanted to add the parts about Christ being executed by Pontius Pilate if they weren’t there?”

“Why?”

“To prove that Christ really existed and died under Pontius Pilate.” Xiao Wang spoke as if it were obvious.

“To prove it to whom?” Professor Ho asked. “No one in the 2nd (or 12th!) century was arguing about whether or not Jesus had existed, any more than they were arguing about whether or not Julius Caesar had! The enemies of Christianity in the early centuries denied that He rose from the dead and often pointed out he had been executed as a criminal. They never suggested He hadn’t existed.” Professor Ho flipped to another page. “Consider the scathing sarcasm of Lucian of Samosata,^H writing in about 165 AD:

11. ...the Christians...they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world.

13. ...the Christians...poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody; most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws.¹⁴

In the work these quotes are taken from, Lucian repeatedly mocks Christians as gullible followers of a baseless superstition. He disparages Jesus as a ‘crucified sophist.’ He’d certainly want to convince people not to believe in Christianity. But he never suggests that Jesus hadn’t existed. The same is true for all the other critics of Christianity in the first 400 years after it’s founding.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, the early church fathers who wrote in defense of Christianity in the 2nd to

^F Three Latin words in the passage are in question (translated ‘were burned’ above); they are not significant for the passage’s meaning.

^G Sulpicius Severus (c.363-c.435 AD) in his Chronicle Book 2, Chapter 29. A simple comparison (as the present author has done), of the Latin text of Tacitus with that of Sulpicius will show Sulpicius used some of Tacitus’s phrases. At the same time, Sulpicius added details not in Tacitus, omitted some of Tacitus’s details, and writes in a different style. Most notably, Sulpicius has none of Tacitus’s negative portrayal of Christians. Some critics have suggested an (imaginary!) later ‘Christian interpolator’ added the passage to Tacitus based on the one in Sulpicius. The enormous differences between the two accounts show this claim is baseless. In fact, Sulpicius’s quotes demonstrate the exact opposite: in about 400 AD, Tacitus’s record about Nero and the Christians was already available for Sulpicius to read and quote.

^H Lucian of Samosata (c. 120/125 - after 180 AD) was a popular writer and speech maker who traveled throughout the Roman Empire in the 2nd century AD. Many of his writings survive.

4th centuries, never feel the need to offer proof that Jesus the man was real, so far as I know. As I mentioned earlier, we have no record of anyone, whether friend or enemy of Christianity, really disputing the existence of Jesus until the late 1700s. Therefore no one would have had a reason to forge a highly negative account about Christ and Christians and stick it into the work of a non-Christian writer like Tacitus.”

“Then why did they add to Josephus?” Xiao Wang countered.

Professor replied promptly, “Obviously because they felt Josephus wasn’t respectful enough to their Lord Jesus! But if Josephus hadn’t mentioned him, there would have been no reason to add anything at all. And in the Tacitus passage, there’s nothing positive added about Christ or Christians.”

Another objection occurred to Xiao Wang. “How old is our oldest copy of Tacitus?”

Professor Ho nodded. “A reasonable question! Our earliest extant manuscript of the section of Tacitus containing the passage about Nero persecuting the Christians was copied in the 11th century,¹⁶ hundreds of years before there was any controversy about Jesus’s existence!”

They fell silent awhile. Xiao Wang was thinking. Professor Ho’s suspicion was correct: Xiao Wang had been doing a lot of reading about the historical basis of the New Testament—but most of it had been on the internet. Now he was beginning to suspect that the extreme denials of Jesus and the New Testament he had been reading actually did not have any scholarly, historical basis. But he kept silent about those thoughts and finally asked: “Do you have any more evidence?”

Professor Ho gave a brisk nod. “Yes! Let’s look at another Roman.”

The historical evidence from Romans: Suetonius, c.120 AD

Professor Ho opened another of the books he had stacked on his desk. “The Roman historian Suetonius was born sometime between 69-73 AD and died sometime after 130 AD. His most important work is the Lives of the Twelve Caesars, published around 120 AD. It covers Roman history in the period c.100 BC to 96 AD. Although he was a contemporary of Tacitus, he apparently did not use Tacitus’s histories as a source for his own works.

“Book 6 of Suetonius’s Lives is the history of the emperor Nero, who reigned 54-68 AD. Suetonius is generally critical of Nero, but in an effort to be fair, he first records what he regards as Nero’s positive achievements. In the midst of a topical list of these ‘good deeds,’ he mentions Nero’s persecution of Christians:



Suetonius (c.69/73-after 130AD), Roman historian. Note 1.

During his [Nero’s] reign many abuses were severely punished and put down, and no fewer new laws were made: a limit was set to expenditures; the public banquets were confined to a distribution of food.... Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition. ...¹⁷

A few paragraphs later, Suetonius makes it clear that he approved of suppressing the Christian ‘superstition:’

I have brought together these acts of his [Nero’s], some of which are beyond criticism, while others are even deserving of no slight praise, to separate them from his shameful and criminal deeds, of which I shall proceed now to give an account.¹⁸

Thus Suetonius, like most Romans of his time, regarded punishment of Christians as either ‘beyond criticism’ or even ‘deserving of praise’!

“What is significant for our purposes is that Christians were a known group in Rome prior to the year 68 AD. They were also known to have arisen not long before that time. Furthermore, Suetonius’s statement, which is independent of Tacitus, gives further evidence that Tacitus’s mention of Nero persecuting Christians is correct.”

Professor Ho flipped to an earlier section of the book. “Suetonius also preserves what may be the earliest reference to Christ outside of the New Testament. He notes of that the emperor Claudius, who reigned 41-54 AD:

He [Claudius] expelled the Jews from Rome, since they were always making disturbances because of the instigator Chrestus.¹⁹

‘Chrestus’ is a common early Roman spelling for ‘Christus,’ or Christ. Very few scholars have ever suggested that the passage is not genuine, though many argue about whether or not it really refers to Christ.²⁰ Who or what is ‘Chrestus’? Suetonius here seems to regard ‘Chrestus’ as an individual Jew in Rome during Claudius’s reign who was stirring up trouble among the Jews.

That alone makes it clear that this passage is no Christian interpolation! What’s probably reflected here is the Romans’ early understanding of Christianity as merely a sect of Judaism. There was tremendous controversy among first century Jews about Jesus Christ; as the New Testament records, this sometimes boiled over into actual riots instigated by anti-Christian Jews and/or Gentiles [Acts 13:44—14:19]. It was probably events like that which led the emperor Claudius to expel the Jews.

“We can’t be 100% positive that ‘Chrestus’ refers to Christ, though it probably does. But even if it doesn’t, this record still confirms New Testament history, because the book of Acts also records the emperor Claudius’s expulsion of the Jews:



Emperor Claudius (reigned 41-54AD). Note 1.

1 After these things he [Paul] left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. ... [Acts 18:1-2 NAS]

So at a minimum, Suetonius's 'Chrestus' passage confirms a specific detail of New Testament history: the expulsion of the Jews from Rome under Claudius. Most likely, it also preserves the earliest reference to Jesus Christ ('Chrestus') outside the New Testament; since Suetonius's dates the event to Claudius's reign, it must have occurred before 54 AD.¹ That would make it a non-Biblical confirmation of Christ and Christianity dating from less than 35 years after Christ's death and resurrection!

"So much for Suetonius," said Professor Ho, closing one book and opening another. "Now let's turn to his friend and mentor, Pliny the Younger."

The historical evidence from Romans: Pliny the Younger, c. 112 AD



Pliny the Younger (c.61-113AD), Roman provincial governor. Note 1.

"Pliny the Younger lived from c.61 to c.113 AD. He is best known for hundreds of letters he wrote which are preserved to this day. He held various administrative posts in the Roman empire. At the end of his life, during about 111-113 AD, he was governor of the Roman province of Bithynia-Pontus, along the coast of the Black Sea in the north of what is today Turkey. During his administration, Pliny carried on an extensive correspondence with the emperor Trajan, frequently asking his advice and direction.

"During Pliny the Younger's governorship, the emperor banned non-officially recognized 'associations.' This led to arrest and prosecution of Christians in the province. Feeling that the prosecutions were getting too extensive, Pliny wrote to the emperor asking his advice. His letter gives us fascinating insights into Christian belief and practice about 80 years after Christ. Here's an excerpt from his letter:

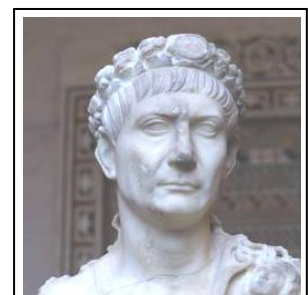
To the Emperor Trajan:

...I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it I repeated the question twice again, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed. ... Those who denied they were, or had ever been, Christians, who repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image, which I had

ordered to be brought for that purpose, together with those of the gods, and who finally cursed Christ—none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing—these I thought it proper to discharge. Others who were named by that informer at first confessed themselves Christians, and then denied it; true, they had been of that persuasion but they had quitted it, some three years, others many years, and a few as much as twenty-five [some manuscripts read twenty] years ago. They all worshipped your statue and the images of the gods, and cursed Christ. They affirmed, however, the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. Even this practice, however, they had abandoned after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your orders, I had forbidden political associations. I judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from two female slaves, who were styled deaconesses: but I could discover nothing more than depraved and excessive superstition. ... Persons of all ranks and ages, and of both sexes are, and will be, involved in the prosecution. For this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread through the villages and rural districts; it seems possible, however, to check and cure it. 'Tis certain at least that the temples, which had been almost deserted, begin now to be frequented; and the sacred festivals, after a long intermission, are again revived; while there is a general demand for sacrificial animals, which for some time past have met with but few purchasers. ... [Book 10, Letter 96]²¹

Note the points of concurrence with the New Testament:

1. Christ is regarded as God [John 1:1-3]
2. Christians were required to maintain high moral conduct [Galatians 5:19-23]
3. Christians will not engage in any form of idol worship or worship any other gods [1 Corinthians 5:10-11, 6:9]
4. Christians had deaconesses [1 Timothy 3:11]
5. Females and slaves could be full members of a church [Galatians 3:28]
6. Christians met regularly (even when it was illegal), sang at their meetings, and ate to-



Emperor Trajan (reigned 98-117AD). Note 1.

¹ Based on Acts 18, many scholars date the expulsion to 49 AD.

gether [1 Corinthians 11:20-34, 14:26, 16:2; Hebrews 10:25]

7. Christians were not allowed to deny Christ, even under torture or threat of death [Matthew 10:32-33; Revelation 2:13]
8. Christianity was criticized for having a negative impact on the businesses associated with pagan worship [Acts 19:23-27]
9. Christianity was widespread in Bithynia-Pontus in the first century [some time before his death in c. 68 AD, the apostle Peter greets the Christians there: 1 Peter 1:1]

At least two things are demonstrated by Pliny's letter: the *timing* of the beginning of Christianity and the *contents* of Christian belief and practice.

"First consider the timing. Note that in about 112 AD, some people claimed to have stopped their attendance at Christian meetings *more than* twenty or twenty-five years previously. That necessarily implies the practice of Christianity was already established in the Bithynia-Pontus by the 80s of the first century AD. That's a non-Jewish area over 1,000 kilometers away from Jerusalem! There were no mass communications back then; reasonably speaking, it would have requires some decades for the gospel to be established and propagate in that distant region. And that logically implies that the Christian gospel was already being propagated decades before 90 AD.

"The anti-Christian critics' claims that Christianity was mostly 'invented' in the 2nd century AD have no historical basis. As with the examples of Tacitus and Suetonius, Pliny is a non-Christian historical source which confirms the widespread existence of Christianity in the mid to late first century AD, which necessarily implies that it was founded in the first half of the 1st century—just as the New Testament says.

"Second, consider the contents of their belief. Pliny indicates Christian churches existed in Bithynia-Pontus before 90 AD—presumably with all the same beliefs he lists here. Critics have claimed that the major doctrines of Christianity, including the deity of Jesus Christ, were developed over time, mostly in the second century. But Pliny indicates the Man Jesus Christ was worshipped as God in the first century. Critics claim early local churches had no formal structure. But Pliny found recognized deaconesses in the early second century. Some extreme critics have claimed Christianity evolved out of various ancient pagan religions. But Pliny records that a total repudiation of idolatry, polytheism, and deification of human beings was taken for granted among early Christians—and regarded as worth dying for."

Professor Ho dropped his eyes and fell silent for a moment, thinking; at last he said, "Every time I read this passage, I'm impressed by the courage and the pain of those two slaves who were tortured and killed. Those were my sisters in Christ! And how casually Pliny treats it: just a couple of slaves, conveniently lacking any legal protection whatsoever, who could readily be tortured before they were executed—just in case they might provide a little more information! But under unthinkable pain, all they spoke of was the truth and the hope of the gospel—what Pliny called 'depraved and excessive superstition.'" He looked up at the boys over the top of his glasses. "But now they've been in heaven for 1,900 years. And Pliny has been elsewhere, pondering his callous cruelty, and all his other sins."

An argument from silence?

Professor Ho dropped his eyes. The three were silent for a moment, thoughtful. In his heart, Xiao Wang was already realizing that it was absurd to question Jesus's historicity. But as he pondered, another question suddenly occurred to him. He spoke up: "Why don't we have any record about Jesus from Roman historians who were alive when He was active?"

Professor Ho looked up and nodded. "A fair question," he said, returning to his usual businesslike tone. "First though, I should say that you are making what is called an argument from silence. Your question seems to imply that if Jesus were real, we should have a record of Him from contemporary historians—and if we don't, He must have been fake! That kind of argumentation is always weak at best.

"Why should the Romans have recorded the execution of some Jew by a provincial governor thousands of kilometers from Rome? It was not associated with any uprising or other significant political event. Josephus, who focuses on the Jews, records many uprisings in Palestine during the first century AD that we have no other record of—nothing in the Roman historians' records.²² How much less would the Romans bother recording the execution of one religious leader who was at that time unknown outside of Palestine! Jesus Christ didn't make an impact on the Roman world until the gospel of Christianity began to spread after 30 AD. There's no reason to expect earlier authors to take note of Jesus's death.

"But there's another answer to your question. Unfortunately, we have lost 100 years of Roman historical writing. Our extant texts end after the death of the historical writer Livy in 17 AD and don't pick up again until Tacitus's writing in 116 AD.^{23, J} If anything was written about Jesus in that time period, it is lost to us."

"Having said that, I should note that there are one or two other records from the early second and maybe even the first century which refer to Jesus: the letter of the Syrian Mara bar Serapion written some time after 135 AD, and possibly the Roman Thallus in about 52 AD. I find those evidences less compelling than the ones we've just examined. But I have copies of them here if you'd like to look at them later." [See this chapter's Appendix 10-1.]

The historical evidence from Jews

"The final historical source I want to look at is the writings of later Jews who were not Christians.

"Not surprisingly, the depiction of Jesus by Jews who denied that He was the Messiah are uniformly negative. He is

^J The sole exception is the minor Roman historian Velleius Paterculus, but his record focuses on Rome and ends in 29 AD.

portrayed as a deceiver, a worker of miracles by means of evil magic, and justly executed wrongdoer. Here are a few examples:

And a teacher said, ‘Jesus the Nazarene practiced magic and led Israel astray.’ (b. Sanhedrin 107b)²⁴

It was taught: On the day before the Passover, they hanged Jesus. A herald went before him for forty days [proclaiming], ‘He will be stoned, because he practiced magic and enticed Israel to go astray. Let anyone who knows anything in his favor come forward and plead for him.’ But nothing was found in his favor, and they hanged him on the day before the Passover. (b. Sanhedrin 43a)²⁵

These quotes are from the Talmud, a collection of writings of Jewish rabbis. The Talmud was completed by 500 AD, but it is often difficult to determine the exact date of composition of a given section. Apparently the internal evidence from the Talmud indicates the second passage we just looked at was written prior to 200 AD, during the so-called ‘Tannaitic’ period of Jewish rabbinic writing.²⁶ Other later passages in the Talmud^K mention that Jesus’s mother’s name was Mary and allege that his birth was illegitimate.²⁷

“The rabbis who compiled and wrote the Talmud were uniformly anti-Christian, so we would hardly expect a fair treatment of Jesus’s history. Obviously they mixed accurate and inaccurate details. For example, there is no historical record of any custom among the Jews or the Romans of having a herald seeking defense witnesses for forty days before an execution; that part was probably added by the rabbis to emphasize their view that Jesus was completely guilty. Nonetheless, even these hostile, biased writings confirm several major elements of New Testament history:

1. Jesus came from Nazareth. [John 19:9, Luke 4:16]
2. Jesus had a reputation for working miracles. [Luke 6:17]
3. He was judicially executed (and note that ‘hanged him’ in the Talmud might refer to being hung on a cross; compare Acts 5:30). [John 19:4-22]
4. He died at Passover time. [John 19:14]
5. His mother’s name was Mary. [Matthew 1:18]
6. Joseph was not His actual father. [Matthew 1:19-25, Luke 3:23]

The conclusion: Classical writers outside the Bible record Jesus and the earliest Christians

“So let’s tabulate the evidence.” Professor Ho sorted through a pile on his desk, opened a folder marked ‘New Testament evidences’ and pulled out a sheet with a table on it. “Here’s a summary of the major points we’ve covered so far today. Notice how the independent testimony of historians lines up with the New Testament record. The conclusion is this: the non-Christian, and even anti-Christian, historical sources of the late first and early second centuries AD indicate that Jesus was a real person who was crucified in the first half of the first century and that Christianity was established immediately after His death based on belief in Him.”

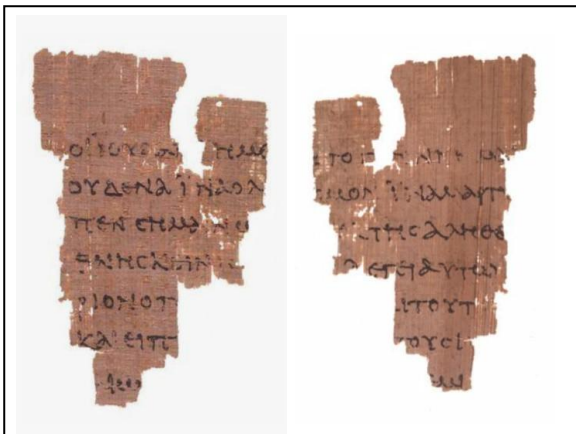
	New Testament	Josephus 93AD	Pliny 112AD	Tacitus 116AD	Suetonius 120AD
John the Baptist’s preaching, execution by Herod Antipas	✓	✓			
Jesus crucified by Pontius Pilate	✓	✓		✓	
Christians in Rome pre-54AD	✓				✓(?)
Jews expelled from Rome by Claudius	✓				✓
Christians in Rome pre-68AD	✓			✓	✓
Christians in Rome persecuted by Nero	*			✓	✓
James brother of Jesus leader in Jerusalem church pre-62AD	✓	✓			
Christian churches in Bithynia-Pontus pre-90AD	✓		✓		
Christians regarded Jesus as God	✓		✓		
Christians rejected all idol worship	✓		✓		

*The New Testament does not record the persecution of Christians in Rome in 64AD after the fire, but does note Paul’s impending execution under Nero in Rome three or four years later.

The New Testament documents: When were they written? Are they accurate?

“Our discussion thus far should be enough to show that Jesus was a real historical personage in the early 1st century

^K See for example b. Shabbat 104b in the Babylonian Talmud (c. 300 AD) and compare Origen’s Against Celsus 1:32 (early third century AD).



The Rylands Papyrus (P52), a fragment of gospel of John containing part of John 18:31-33 and 18:37-38. Dated to c.125 AD. Left: Front (recto). Right: Back (verso). Note 1.

AD and that Christian gospel and Church originated with Him. Now we turn to the documents of the New Testament selves, and especially the gospels: are they a reliable record of what Jesus and the apostles said and did? When were they written?

“The outline of the argument goes like this:

1. The New Testament was originally written in the first century AD, most of it before 70 AD.
2. The oldest copies we presently have are remarkably close in time to the originals.
3. The copies are very numerous.
4. The text has been very accurately transmitted.
5. The New Testament books were written by authors who were either themselves eyewitnesses of Jesus’s ministry or who had direct access to still living eyewitnesses.
6. The New Testament books were first circulated in the lifetime of eyewitnesses, and in some cases in the very places where Jesus had ministered.

7. Archaeology and history confirm hundreds of historical details in the New Testament, demonstrating it’s accuracy and indicating it’s early date of composition.
8. Virtually all the books which form our New Testament were recognized by the Church as authoritative from the very beginning.
9. No other books ever gained any appreciable recognition from the Church as authoritative.
10. The fake books claiming to be written by New Testament authors can almost always be shown to date from the second century or later.”

The extant New Testament manuscripts: Very old

“The New Testament enjoys an immense advantage over virtually every other text of equivalent age. The extant manuscripts and fragments are remarkably close in time to the original composition.”

“What’s the oldest?” asked Xiao Li.

“At present, the oldest confirmed manuscript is a tiny scrap of the gospel of John called the Rylands John Papyrus or P52. It’s written on both sides of the papyrus and obviously belonged to a longer manuscript—presumably the entire gospel. It was found in Egypt at Oxyrhynchus (Behnesa), about 500 kilometers up the Nile, and is dated to the first half of the second century, probably about 125 AD.”

“How do they date it?” Xiao Wang queried.

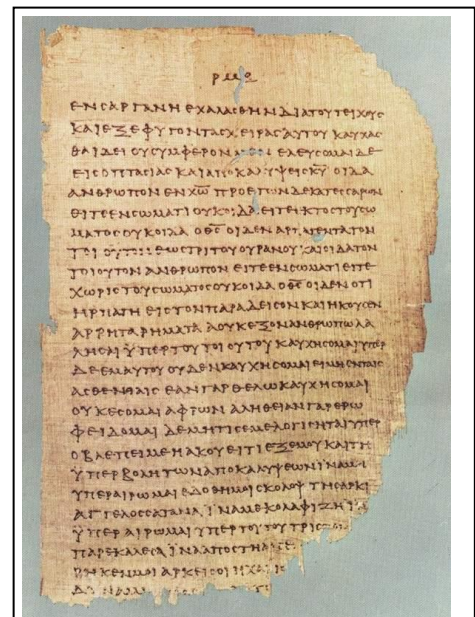
“Based on quite a few factors. The shape of the letters, the nature of the paper and the binding, the type of ink used, the punctuation and text division, sometimes the grammar or spelling—everything available is taken into consideration. These are compared to other ancient manuscripts whose age is considered well established and the best possible match is obtained.”

“Do they use carbon-14 dating?” Xiao Wang asked, then added, “But I guess you don’t believe in that.”

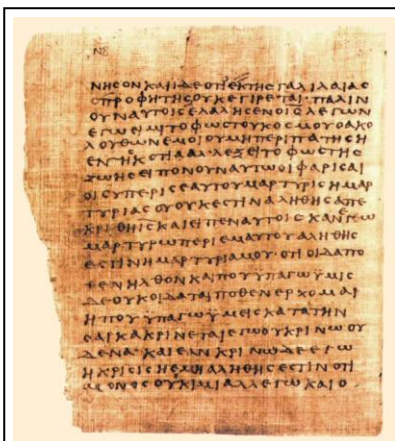
Professor Ho looked slightly bemused and replied “Actually, as I think I said before, I *do* believe in carbon-14 dating—when it’s properly calibrated! However it is rarely used on ancient Biblical manuscripts. It usually can’t provide enough specificity to really be helpful. In the case of the Rylands John papyrus, we would need precision to within a couple of decades to improve our dating, and carbon-14 rarely (or maybe never!) provides that much precision for 2,000 year old artifacts.”

“It’s generally agreed that John was the last of the four gospels to be written. Most scholars date it’s writing in 80-100 AD, though some, including me, suggest a date a little before 70 AD is more likely. Either way, you’ve got a copy of John in Egypt at a spot 500 kilometers from the coast within about 50 years of it’s composition. Meanwhile, all indications from the New Testament and early church history are that John himself was based in Antioch, at the southern tip of modern Turkey.

“That has at least two implications. First, for all practical purposes it demonstrates that the gospel of John is a first century document. No one has suggested that the Rylands fragment is from the original manuscript written by John; obviously it’s a copy. This copy was found far from the original place of composition of the gospel, and written at a time when the only way to make copies was by hand and the fastest means of travel was by sailboat. The fact the we have found any manuscript of John at all from that time period is surprising and strongly implies that there were already



Papyrus Chester Beatty II / University of Michigan Inv. 6238 (P46), containing most of the epistles of Paul. Dated to c.200 AD. Picture above shows 1 Corinthians 11:33—12:9. Note 1.



Papyrus Bodmer II (P66), containing most of the gospel of John intact. Dated to c.200 AD. Picture above shows section where John 7:52 is immediately followed by 8:12. Note 1.

many copies in existence at that time—the likelihood of finding a copy from a given time period is obviously related to the total number of copies in existence then. When we consider the time required for such widespread dissemination via hand copying, the Rylands fragment virtually guarantees that the gospel of John was already in existence before 100 AD.

“Second, the contents of this earliest fragment help to confirm the accuracy of the later, complete manuscripts. The copying was done accurately.”

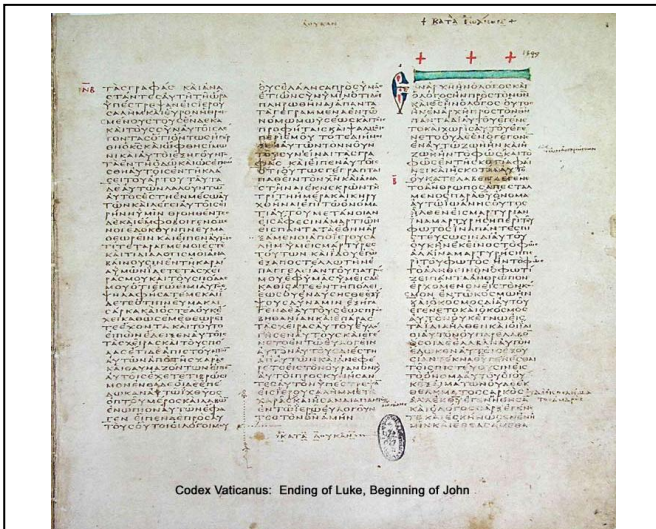
Xiao Wang immediately objected, “But that’s just a scrap! It might show the gospel of John is very old, but it doesn’t do much to confirm the accuracy of later copies.”

“Quite right,” agreed Professor Ho, “so let’s move on to copies of entire books. The earliest extant manuscript containing almost all of the gospel of John is Papyrus 66.^L It’s dated to c.200 AD. A more extensive manuscript known as Papyrus 46^M includes copies of most of the Pauline epistles, plus the book of Hebrews. It is also dated to about 200 AD, though it is suggested it could conceivably be as early as 150 AD or as late as 250 AD. Like many early copies, both of these came from Egypt, where the extremely dry climate helps greatly in preserving manuscripts. Though these incredibly ancient copies are missing parts of pages and some entire leaves, they still contain most of the text for the books they have. It’s simply amazing to have a nearly complete manuscript of John’s gospel copied only about a hundred years after he wrote it!”

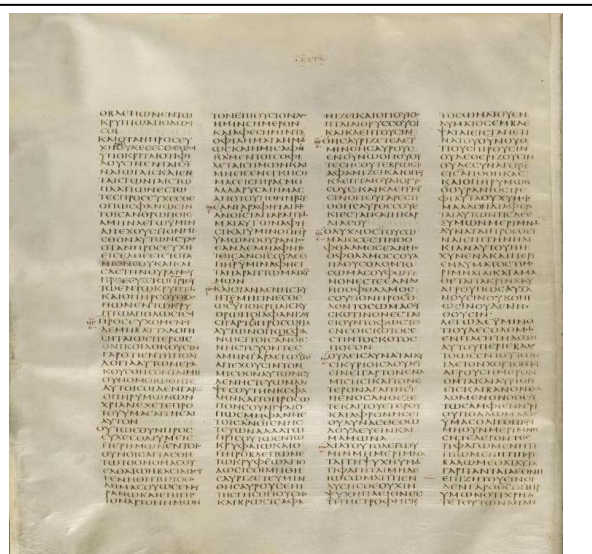
“What about the whole New Testament?” asked Xiao Li.

“The earliest we presently have is the codex Vaticanus. It is dated to c.325 AD, and is only missing a small part of the New Testament; it was almost certainly originally complete. The next oldest is the codex Sinaiticus which comes from c.350 AD and has the entire New Testament. Both of them also contain all or most of the Old Testament in Greek translation.

“In addition to the manuscripts I just mentioned, there are many other fragments, books and even entire New Testaments dating from the second through fourth centuries—I’m not sure how many, but there are more than fifty listed in my Greek New Testament, and that only includes the important ones!”²⁸



Codex Vaticanus, containing a nearly complete Greek New Testament. Dated to c. 325 AD. Picture shows end of Luke (left and center columns) and beginning of John (right column). Note 1.



Codex Sinaiticus, containing the entire Greek New Testament. Dated to c. 350 AD. Picture shows Matthew 6:4-32. Note 1.

The extant New Testament manuscripts: Very numerous

Xiao Wang was skeptical. “That doesn’t sound like many to me!”

Professor Ho smiled at him with a twinkle in his eye. “Oh really? Perhaps you think that sounds unreliable?”

Xiao Wang hesitated; he knew by now how careful Professor Ho was as a professional historian, so he answered cautiously, “Well, I don’t know.”

“Then let me ask you a couple of history questions,” Professor Ho continued. “Do you believe that Julius Caesar wrote, ‘I came, I saw, I conquered?’”

“I’ve heard he did....”

“Or that Confucius said ‘学而不思则罔，思而不学则殆’ [‘Learning without thought is useless; thought without learning is perilous’] as his disciples recorded in the Analects?”

^L P. Bodmer II.

^M Including P. Chester Beatty II and University of Michigan Inv. 6238.

Xiao Wang was more confident this time. “Confucius’s sayings are a well attested part of our cultural heritage!”

“I quite agree,” Professor Ho affirmed, “but attested by how much manuscript evidence? And how early?” Professor Ho pulled another sheet from the folder on his desk. “I did some research on this issue. It turns out the New Testament is unparalleled among all ancient documents that I know of in terms of the abundance of manuscripts and how remarkably early they are. Here’s a partial listing for comparison: ^{29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38}

Author	Title	Written	Earliest Extant Manuscript	Time Gap	# of Manuscripts	Source
Homer	<u>Iliad</u>	c. 800 BC	c. 400 BC onward (fragments and portions) 10 th cen. AD (complete)	400+ years 1,800 years	643	Note 29, etc.
Thucydides	<u>History</u>	c. 400 BC	1 st cen. (minor fragments) c. 900 AD and onward	400 years 1,300 years	? 20	Note 30, 37
Plato	<u>Republic</u>	c. 350 BC	(earlier minor fragments) c. 875-895 AD (complete)	? 1,250 years	11 2 11 th -15 th cen.: 50+	Note 31
Caesar	<u>Gallic Wars</u>	c. 50 BC	c. 850 AD	900 years	about 10	Note 30
Livy	<u>History of Rome</u>	c. 17 AD	4 th cen AD (fragments only) 6 th / 8 th cen AD (portions) 10 th cen AD (35 of original 142 books)	c.350 years 500-700 years 900 years	1 2(?) about 25	Note 30, 32, 33, 37
Pliny the Younger	<u>Letters</u>	c. 112 AD	c. 500 AD (6 leaves only) c. 850 AD	400 years 750 years	9 th -14 th cen: ~10 15 th -16 th cen.: ? (more)	Note 34
Tacitus	<u>Annals</u>	c. 116 AD	Book 1-6: c. 850 AD Books 11-16: c. 1050 AD Later copies.	750 years 950 years 1,000+ years	1 1 30+	Note 35
Confucius’ disciples	<u>Analects</u>	c.450BC? or later?	c.55 BC (<50%)	c.400 years	1	Note 38
(various)	New Testament	c. 50-100 AD	c. 125 AD (fragment) c. 200 AD (multiple books) c. 325 AD (most of NT) c. 350 AD (entire NT)	c. 50 years 100-150 years 225-275 years 250-300 years	2 nd to 4 th cen: 77+ 5 th onward: 5,600+ ^N (not including non-Greek translations)	Note 36, 37

“A glance at this chart immediately shows the incredible advantage the New Testament has in terms of the number and early date of it’s manuscripts. Consider how it compares to other major works of antiquity.

“The Iliad is Homer’s epic poem about the Trojan war. We still talk about a ‘Trojan horse.’ The Iliad was revered and copied throughout antiquity, and never lost. But our earliest complete copy dates from about 1,800 years after Homer’s time! No one questions that Socrates existed and that Plato gave a summary of his teachings in The Republic, but our earliest copy is from 1,250 years later, and we have less than 100 copies in total. There’s 900 years between Caesar and our earliest copy of the Gallic Wars. Nonetheless, no one doubts that Caesar wrote, ‘I came, I saw, I conquered.’

“How much vastly better the situation is for the New Testament! How much closer our copies are in time to the originals and how much more abundant! Our earliest copies of complete books date from only 100-150 years after they were composed! We currently possess probably close to a hundred different sections, books, and entire New Testaments from the 2nd to 4th centuries AD—all copied within three hundred years or so of the original writings. And we have literally thousands of Greek manuscripts copied during the subsequent centuries. By all the rules normally used to authenticate and date manuscripts, the text of the New Testament must be regarded as established beyond any rational possibility of doubt!

“Most of the examples I give here come from the West, because more research has been done there on these issues and also because the New Testament was written in the Roman Empire, so it makes sense to compare it to documents from the same place. But we can also compare the situation of ancient Chinese writings. For example, one of our greatest cultural treasures is the Analects of Confucius. No one knows exactly when it was written by his disciples; at least parts of it may be from as early as about 450 BC.”

“So how old are our oldest manuscripts of the Analects?” Xiao Li asked.

“I’m not sure how old our oldest copy of the complete text is,” Professor Ho said carefully. “It may be as late as the early Tang dynasty. But the earliest partial copy we presently have dates from about four hundred years after Confucius’s death. In 1973, archaeologists discovered fragments of the Analects written on bamboo strips in a tomb in Hebei province which was dated to before 55 BC. What remained amounted to less than half of the total text as we have it now.³⁹ There were differences from the received text which indicated what we already knew: there has been some textual corruption in the Analects. Nonetheless, no one would suggest Confucius never existed, and only the most radical scholars assert that we do not have a fairly accurate picture of his teachings. Why would we doubt the New Testament,

^N As of January 2006, Note 37 pg.77 lists: Papyri: 118; Unicals: 317; Miniscules: 2,877; Lectionaries: 2,433; Total: 5,745

when it is so much better attested?”

The extant New Testament manuscripts: How accurate?

“But I’ve heard that there are lots of errors in the New Testament manuscripts,” said Xiao Wang with a frown.

“Oh, there are hundreds of thousands of errors!” said Professor Ho with a strange smile. “At least if you believe the anti-Christian critics! If I remember correctly, one claimed 400,000 variations among the manuscripts—which, incidentally, is more words than there are in the entire New Testament; it only has about 138,000! That would be three errors for every word!”

“Then how did he count up with so many errors?” Xiao Li asked.

“By cleverly telling a half truth,” Professor replied promptly. “Among the thousands of Greek manuscripts we have of the New Testament, there are variations, mostly due to copying mistakes, and perhaps they even sum to 400,000. But they actually amount to nothing.^{40, 41}”

“Many of the so-called ‘errors’ were corrected by the scribes who proofread that text and then wrote the right word in the space above the line—but they’re still probably counted in the total. Other mistakes were not caught by the proofreader, but are perfectly obvious—such as omissions of a single letter. Let me give you some examples.”

The accuracy of the New Testament manuscripts: Most so-called ‘errors’ are completely unimportant

Professor Ho wrote some English sentences on a piece of scrap paper, then continued. “Xiao Li, I suppose you don’t know Greek, but your English is quite good I’m told. Consider this sentence:

I have to cats, a black one and a white one.

Is there anything wrong with it?”

“I think there’s a ‘w’ missing from the word ‘two’ ” Xiao Li replied.

“Very good!” replied Professor Ho. “How about this one:

I am going to store.”

“It’s missing the word ‘the’ before ‘store.’ ” Xiao Li answered at once. It was just like a middle school English quiz!

“You’re doing great! Next question: let’s say you had ten handwritten copies of a story. Nine of them, including the oldest, all said:

The boy ran to the school.

But one copy, made later than most of the others, read:

The boy ran to the.

Where did the boy run to?”

“Obviously the one copy is missing the word ‘school.’ ” said Xiao Li.

“Excellent! Now the final test. Another text has nine copies which read:

The girl read every page in the book

But one other copy reads:

The girl read every page in the cook.

What did the girl read?”

“A book, obviously!” Xiao Li smiled this time.

“Wonderful! You’re ready to be a textual critic!” Professor Ho exclaimed. “The overwhelming majority of the so-called ‘errors’ in the New Testament manuscripts are just like those examples: obvious and easily corrected, sometimes just by looking at the grammar, and sometimes by comparing other manuscripts. That’s part of the beauty of having so many early manuscripts! Such simple, completely unimportant copying mistakes account for most of the textual variants. One New Testament scholar put it this way:

70 to 80 percent of all textual variants are spelling differences that can't even be translated into English and have zero impact on meaning.⁴²

Most of the remaining 20-30% of variants are accounted for by things like:

1. Changed word order. Unlike Chinese or English, word order can sometimes be changed in Greek without significantly changing the meaning.
2. Replacement of pronouns with the corresponding proper noun (‘Jesus’ instead of ‘he’) in lectionary manuscripts which were read aloud in churches. Lectionaries were divided up into short sections for daily public readings in church. If the opening sentence for a day’s reading had a pronoun without an antecedent, it was sometimes replaced by the proper noun to avoid confusing the listeners.
3. Obvious accidental repetitions of words or phrases.

4. Minor stylistic, grammatical and spelling variations which do not impact meaning.^O

So the overwhelming majority of these so-called ‘400,000 mistakes’ are easily corrected and of no significance whatsoever. The only reason the number is so large is because we have thousands of copies! Of course, so many copies makes it much easier to find and correct mistakes in any given manuscript. Textual variations that are actually important are very, very rare—a bare handful at most. And none of those impact any point of Christian belief or Christian living.”

Are any of the textual variants important?

“Which variants do matter?” Xiao Li wanted to know.

Professor Ho nodded, understanding his concern. “By far the most important textual issues in the New Testament are Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53—8:11. We have no reason to think that either of those passages was in the original writings. Our oldest and most reliable manuscripts don’t contain them; furthermore, some of the manuscripts that do contain them also have notes inserted questioning their validity. Recent translations of the Bible point this out by notes in the text.^P The absence of even those two large portions does not change any Christian doctrine or practice. The things taught in those passages that are correct—like the resurrection of Jesus or the possibility of forgiveness for adultery—are taught clearly elsewhere, in the genuine texts of the Bible.”

“Then why are they there in the first place?” Xiao Li wondered.

“It’s a question of the history of the manuscript transmission and translation,” explained Professor Ho. “The manuscripts which formed the basis for the translations used in Western Europe, especially the Latin Vulgate, contained those added passages. Therefore they were transmitted for centuries, including in English and even Chinese, until the text were corrected by comparing them to the ancient Greek manuscripts. That’s the proper use of textual criticism: to enable us to get as close as possible to the original, inspired, inerrant texts.

“Those two passages are by far the biggest issues in the text of the New Testament. You mustn’t think there are lots of problems like that. There are no other major portions of the New Testament seriously open to question. Besides Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53—8:11, there are only 11 other questioned places that amount to even a single verse.⁴³ Of those 11 texts, three are two verses long; the other eight are a single verse.^Q Every other serious textual question in the New Testament is less than a verse long. Most of them are a just a word or two, and they simply aren’t important.”

“How do you know?” Xiao Wang challenged.

“A fair question!” Professor Ho replied. “I’ve often heard Christians claim we are sure of 99% of the text of the New Testament. That fits with my own experience of examining textual variants, but I could never find a rigorous statistical analysis to back it up. So I did a simple one on my own.”

The accuracy of the New Testament manuscripts: A test case using the gospel of John

“In the standard scholarly text of the Greek New Testament,⁴⁴ there are notes at the bottom of each page listing the significant variants wherever textual scholars think there is some reasonable possibility of a question about the original text. By the way, these scholars are by no means necessarily Christians, and even those who would call themselves Christians often do not believe the Bible is inspired or inerrant.

“For my analysis, I excluded John 7:53—8:11, and also John 5:3b-4, since we are confident those sections were not in the original texts. Then I counted up all the textual questions listed for the gospel of John.⁴⁵ I found about 152 textual issues raised, affecting about 140 verses.^R There are a total of about 865 verses in John.^S That means for about 84% of the verses, there was no question raised at all by the most eminent textual critics, not about one single word!

“Meanwhile, in the 16% of the verses where there was some possibility of question, the vast majority were either a single word or a phrase of a few words within a verse. In fact, 109 of the 152 questions were about either one or two words in a verse. In total, all of the questioned parts added up to about 378 words. There are about 15,500 words in the gospel of John in Greek. This means that only about 2.5% of the words in John had any possible question about them. So for 97.5% of the words in John, we have no reason to think that our text is not exactly the same as the one John first wrote down.

“Does the questioned 2.5% matter much? Most of it doesn’t matter at all! Let me give you some examples. For my analysis I chose John chapter 20, which describes Jesus’s resurrection. There are four verses in that chapter which have a question listed about them. The first is:

^O Such as absence or presence of the Greek definite article in contexts where it does not impact the meaning, the use or non-use of the Greek movable ‘nu,’ etc.

^P See, for example, the warning notes at Mark 16:20 and John 8:11 in the Chinese Standard Bible, and at Mark 16:8 and John 7:53 in the Chinese New Version.

^Q Based on a search of New American Standard New Testament texts bracketed as textually questionable, besides Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53—8:11, only Luke 9:55b-56a, John 5:3b-4, and Acts 24:6b-8a exceed one verse.

^R A note at John 18:13-27 raises a very minor question about the order of the verses (but not their contents) compared to three manuscripts of a non-Greek translation, an early church father, and two Medieval Greek manuscripts. This note is ignored in the analysis above since the contents of the verses is not being questioned, and the basis for raising any question about the verse order is extremely tenuous. It is not included in the 152 textual issues.

^S Not including John 5:3b-4 and 7:53—8:11.

But Mary was standing **outside** the tomb **weeping**; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; [John 20:11 NAS]

The questioned words are the Greek for ‘outside’ and ‘weeping.’ Some manuscripts read ‘outside weeping’; some say ‘weeping outside’; a few just ‘weeping.’ So there are three possible translations:

Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping;
 Mary was standing at the tomb, weeping outside;
 Mary was standing at the tomb weeping;

Is there any question about what Mary was doing? Or where she was?

“The next example in John chapter 20 comes in verse 16:

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, **Teacher**). 17 Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me..." [John 20:16-17 NAS]

There are two Greek manuscript variants^T listed for the word ‘Teacher.’ Both of them have only slight, late textual support. Our conceivably possible translations are:

...“Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher)
 ...“Rabboni!” (which means, Lord, Teacher)
 ...“Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher), and she ran up to take hold of Him.

Only one Greek manuscript adds the word ‘Lord’ in front of teacher. That virtually certainly wasn’t there in the original. If it was, what does it change? We already know that the Hebrew term *rabbi* implied a status and authority that partly overlapped with the word ‘Lord.’

“Four comparatively late Greek manuscripts and one corrector add ‘and she ran up to take hold of Him.’ That probably wasn’t in the original either. But did Mary take hold of Jesus? Doubtless she did, since in the next verse Jesus tells her to ‘stop clinging’ to Him. The textual variant is probably wrong.^U But here again, would it change anything about what happened?

“The third example is in the very next verse:

Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to **the Father**; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'" [John 20:17 NAS]

Here there is only one alternative textual possibility: the addition of the word ‘My’ with Jesus’s first use of the word ‘Father.’ So the choices are:

...I have not yet ascended to the Father
 ...I have not yet ascended to My Father

Of course, it would have been easy for an early copyist to either drop the word ‘My’ or add it unconsciously due to the influence of the ‘My Father’ in the second half of the verse. ‘The Father’ is the more likely reading. But in either case, is there any doubt Who Jesus was talking about?

“The last case in John chapter 20 is:

"If you forgive the sins of any, their sins **have been forgiven** them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." [John 20:23 NAS]

This verse has four alternate possibilities listed^V for the Greek word translated ‘have been forgiven.’ The only one with much manuscript support is the exact same word spelled differently, probably reflecting the pronunciation of a different Greek dialect. The other options are all insignificant grammatical variations which are hard to even express in Chinese. Here are the possibilities:

...their sins have been forgiven them
 ...their sins have been forgiven them [different spelling]
 ...their sins are forgiven them
 ...their sins will be forgiven them
 ...their sin has been forgiven them

Again, is there any question whatsoever about the idea Jesus was communicating? Christians sometimes disagree about the theological *interpretation* of this particular verse, but the *language* of the original manuscript is clear enough, even when we consider the grammatical variants.

^T Disregarding two Latin variants which substitute or add the Latin word for ‘Lord.’ The original was not in Latin, so these are ignored here.

^U A possible scenario for the addition is: Perhaps the scribe was bothered by the fact that John did not record Mary’s taking hold of Jesus, despite this action being necessarily implied by ‘Stop clinging.’ Then, perhaps influenced by Matthew 28:9 and/or sermons he had heard, the scribe thought a phrase might be missing from his copy, and added it as a gloss in the margin. Subsequently it was included in the text of a few manuscripts.

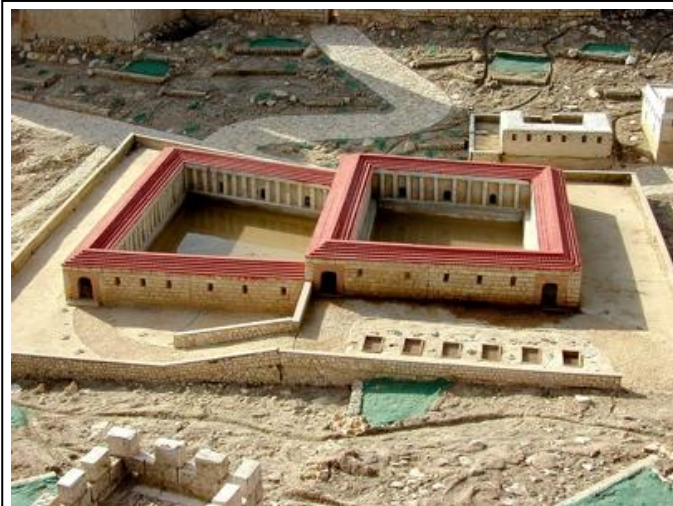
^V Plus two insignificant variations in parentheses that are apparently different spellings of two of the five major variant possibilities.

“Well boys, you might not enjoy so much grammar! But now we come to the conclusion: the overwhelming majority of the genuine textual variants in the New Testament *simply do not matter*. They don’t significantly affect the meaning of the passage, and they certainly don’t impact any matter of Christian belief or practice. I said about 2.5% of the words in John’s gospel might possibly have some kind of textual question—but only a tiny fraction of those are important for the meaning! As regards the original *meaning* of the New Testament writers, we really do have a text which is more than 99% accurate today. And there’s no reason to doubt that we have determined the exact, original *wording* for well over 95% of the text.

Archaeology confirms the historical accuracy of the New Testament and helps show when it was written.

“Now let’s turn from evidence written on paper to that written on stone. The archaeological evidence which confirms the detailed accuracy of the New Testament is enormous.” Professor Ho lifted a hand and pointed out a row in one of his bookshelves. “Entire books are written about it, and there’s more being discovered decade after decade. There’s far too much for us to even outline today, but I’d like to point out a few examples.”

“More ‘dig and you will find it’ I guess!” said Xiao Li with a smile.



A reconstruction of the pool of Bethesda as it would have looked in Jesus’s day. Note the five porticoes. Note 1.



At the bottom of the picture is part of the west side of the southern pool of Bethesda in Jesus’s day. Note 1.

Professor Ho smiled in return as he retrieved a book from his shelves. “You could say that! But I think you’ll find it’s more like ‘dig and you will see who’s accurate and who’s not.’ Archaeological findings show that the New Testament writings are minutely accurate, helping to confirm that they were written by eyewitnesses during the first century AD.” Professor Ho flipped open the book and pointed to a picture of ancient ruins. “Often it’s the small, tal details which provide the strongest evidence. The apostle John sets the scene for one of Jesus’s miracles done in about 28 AD:

Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. [John 5:2 NAS]

Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD and subsequently rebuilt by the Romans early in the second century as a new city called Aelia Capitolina which was dominated by a temple to Jupiter or Zeus. This small detail in

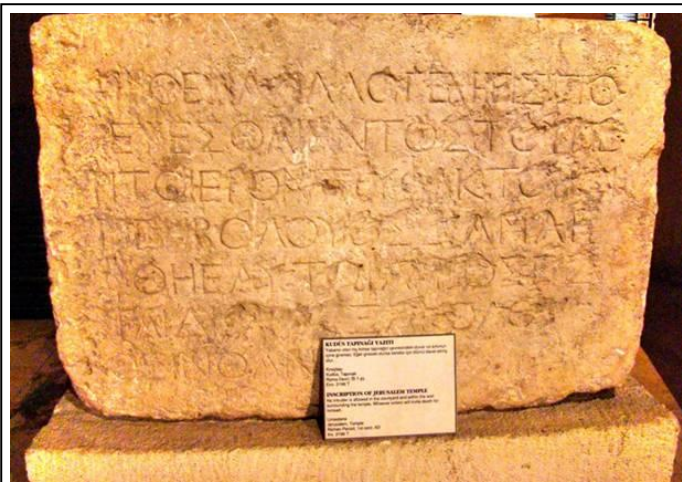
John indicates the writer was familiar with the detailed geography of Jerusalem as it existed prior to 70 AD. In 1888 excavators discovered the remains of a fourth century church in the ‘old city’ section of Jerusalem, in the quarter which was called ‘Bethesda’ or ‘New Town’ during the first century. Beneath this church was a crypt. The northern wall of the crypt was divided into five sections and had been painted with a scene depicting the pool of Bethesda. Archaeologists excavated deeper below the crypt and found the remains of the first century pool and its five porticoes, exactly as the gospel of John records.”

“That’s a geographical detail. Let’s look at a legal one.” Professor Ho turned to another page with a picture of an inscribed stone. “The New Testament indicates that in the first century, non-Jews were only permitted into the outermost courtyard of Jerusalem’s temple complex. A non-Jew going further inside was considered a capital crime: The apostle Paul was falsely accused of taking a non-Jew inside and nearly killed over it. A mob gathered,

28 crying out, “Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man [Paul] who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into

the temple and has defiled this holy place.” 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. 30 Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut. 31 While they were seeking to kill him... [Acts 21:28-31 NAS]

This rule is confirmed by Josephus, who says that there was a wall surrounding the inner court which had inscriptions warning non-Jews not to enter on pain of death.⁴⁶ What Josephus states and the New Testament indicates about the first century temple was confirmed in 1871 by the finding of one of the warning inscriptions which had been attached to that wall. It read:



1st century inscription warning foreigners against entering the temple in Jerusalem. Note 1.

No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to thank for his ensuing death.⁴⁷

“Now let’s consider a biographical detail.” Professor Ho searched through his book for a moment and stopped at a picture of another inscription. “It may come as a surprise to you, but apparently no record of Pontius Pilate from a Roman historian has survived, except the passing reference in Tacitus which we looked at earlier. As Roman governor of Judea, Pilate had his residence in Caesarea, on the Mediterranean coast. In 1961, archaeologists excavating the ancient theater there found an inscription mentioning Pontius Pilate as governor of Judea in the reign of Tiberius, just as the New Testament indicates.⁴⁸

“Of course, despite the paucity of Roman historical references to him, Pilate was a major government figure, so it’s not so surprising to find an archaeological inscription mentioning him. Far more impressive to me is archaeological confirmation of a minor character in the New Testament, a man only mentioned in passing about three times.^w In about 57 AD, the apostle Paul was in the city of Corinth in southern Greece. He wrote a letter to the church in Rome, our book of Romans in the New Testament. Near the end he lists greetings from the Christians in Corinth, including:

Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer^x greets you, and Quartus, the brother. [Romans 16:23 NAS]

According to this scripture, a man named Erastus was the city treasurer in Corinth in the middle of the first century AD. Not surprisingly, we had no notice of this minor official in any records outside the Bible—until 1929. That year archaeologists excavating the ancient theater in Corinth unearthed a stone in the pavement near the stage bearing the Latin inscription:⁴⁹

Erastus, commissioner of public works, bore the expense of this pavement.⁵⁰

The pavement was dated by archaeologists to the first century AD.⁵¹

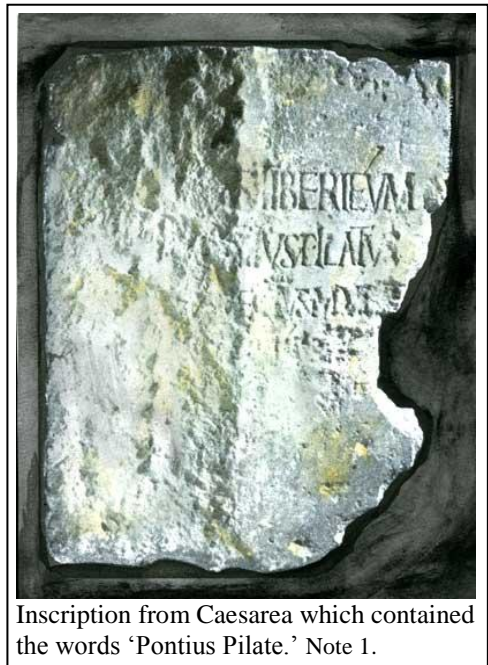
Xiao Wang looked up at Professor Ho. “Can they know be sure it’s the same man?” he queried.

“No, not absolutely sure,” Professor Ho admitted, “but it would seem like a strange coincidence if it’s not the same man! At a minimum, it demonstrates the city of Corinth had a director of public works named Erastus in the first century AD, which is exactly what the Bible records.”

But what do these details prove?



Paving stone in Corinth with Erastus’ name on it. Note 1.



Inscription from Caesarea which contained the words ‘Pontius Pilate.’ Note 1.

Xiao Wang was unconvinced. “Those are interesting details. But they could have been known by people from other places or later times. After all, you said yourself that the historian Josephus mentions the warning signs around the temple, and he also talks about the administration of Pontius Pilate. As for the pool of Bethesda, obviously the people who built the church over it in the 4th century knew where it had been. And you admitted you couldn’t be 100% sure the Bible’s Erastus treasurer of Corinth was the same one mentioned in the inscription on the paving block.”

^w An ‘Erastus’ associated with Paul is mentioned in Acts 19:22, Romans 16:23, and 2Timothy 4:20. In Acts and 2Timothy he is associated with Corinth. Although we cannot be completely certain, it is likely these all refer to the same man.

^x The Greek word here, ‘oikonomos,’ could also be translated as ‘director of public works,’ as the NIV does.

Professor Ho nodded with a calm expression on his face. “I see you point, Xiao Wang. I thought that to myself when I first began studying the topic. But how many first century historical details can we explain away? How many would have been available to these imaginary second century forgers in the days before printing presses and mass communications? Ten? Fifty? A hundred? There are *hundreds* of such details scattered throughout the New Testament, and no one has ever demonstrated a single one of them is inaccurate, despite over 200 years of attack by hostile critics. What the eminent 20th century archaeologist Nelson Glueck said over fifty years ago remains true today:

It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.⁵²

It strains our credibility to believe that these later imaginary forgers could get *all* the details right. We only have time to look at a half a dozen examples today; that much didn’t convince me either. It was as I went on and found scores of examples scattered all over the New Testament that the weight of the evidence forced me to the conclusion that I was looking at reliable history from the first century AD.”

Score: Critics 0, New Testament 100

Professor Ho began paging through his archaeology book again, sticking his fingers in to mark several places. “Still, you raise a fair objection, Xiao Wang. Three of the four examples I just gave you were about widely known information. Much more convincing are tiny, little known details, facts so obscure that the ‘scholarly’ critics used to say the Bible’s record must be wrong. But as archaeology advanced, the Bible was shown to be right about these small details, some of which we could only reasonably expect an eyewitness of the first century to know.”

Professor Ho opened the book to a picture of an inscription. “You may remember that last week we discussed Luke’s careful dating of the beginning of John the Baptist’s ministry in c.26 AD:

1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, ... and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, 2 ...the word of God came to John [the Baptist]...in the wilderness.
[Luke 3:1-2 NAS]

Abilene is a region west of the city of Damascus in Syria. But who was Lysanias? Critics of the Bible used to accuse Luke of being in error here, since the only Lysanias of whom we have any historical records had been king, not tetrarch, of a nearby region and had died in 34 BC,⁵³ sixty years before John the Baptist.

“The critics assumed that their imaginary second century forger of Luke had misunderstood the name of the region called ‘Lysanias’ as the name of a person governing it.^{54, Y} An understandable mistake, if Luke really was written over a hundred years after the fact! But it was the critics who had it wrong. Later, archaeologists dug up an inscription mentioning ‘Lysanias the tetrarch.’ The inscription also refers to the Emperor Tiberius and his mother Livia, which limits the date of it’s carving to the range 14-29 AD,⁵⁵ which fits exactly with what Luke wrote. Would a mid-second century forger be so precisely correct?”

“How about an even more obscure example?” Professor Ho flipped the book to where his next finger was marking a page and showed the boys a map. “This one involves regional and ethnic boundaries in the first century Roman provinces. There was a city called Iconium in what is today the country of Turkey. The New Testament indicates that Iconium belonged to a region separate and distinct from the neighboring region of Lycaonia:

1 In Iconium they [the apostles Paul and Barnabas] entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. ... 4 But the people of the city were divided.... 5 And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, 6 they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; [Acts 14:1, 4-6 NAS]

Note that the passage states the apostles fled *from* Iconium *to* the cities of Lycaonia, seeming to indicate that Iconium was not in Lycaonia. But that contradicts, ancient Roman writers, including the famous Cicero, who stated that Iconium was **in** Lycaonia. As usual, the critics claimed the Bible’s record contained a sloppy error made by the second century ‘forger.’ So who was right?” Professor Ho paused and looked at Xiao Wang with a smile.

“I suppose you’ll tell me the archaeologists found the New Testament was right,” Xiao Wang replied with a wry grin of his own.

Professor Ho nodded sharply. “Exactly—as usual. Starting in 1910, ancient inscriptions were found in the area indicating the people of Iconium regarded themselves as belonging to the region of Phrygia, not the region of Lycaonia.⁵⁶ Perhaps faraway Romans could not distinguish the two, but the first century locals did—and so does the New Testament, with perfect accuracy.”

Professor Ho turned past a few more pages in the book. “The New Testament gets the names of the rulers right; it gets the names of the regions right; it also gets the titles of the local officials right. Another obscure reference in the New Testament used to be criticized as at least a possible error:

1 ...[the apostles Paul and Silas] came to Thessalonica... 6 When they [the mob] did not find them [the apostles Paul and Silas], they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities [politarchs],

^Y These critics apparently misunderstood Josephus’s references to this region in Antiquities of the Jews, Book 19, Chapter 5, Section 1 (= Book 19:274-277) and Book 20, Chapter 7, Section 1 (= Book 7:137-140).



Greek inscription from a 2nd century AD arch found in Thessalonica which lists names of six politarchs. Note 1.

shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; 7 and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." 8 They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities [politarchs] who heard these things. [Acts 17:1,6-8 NAS]

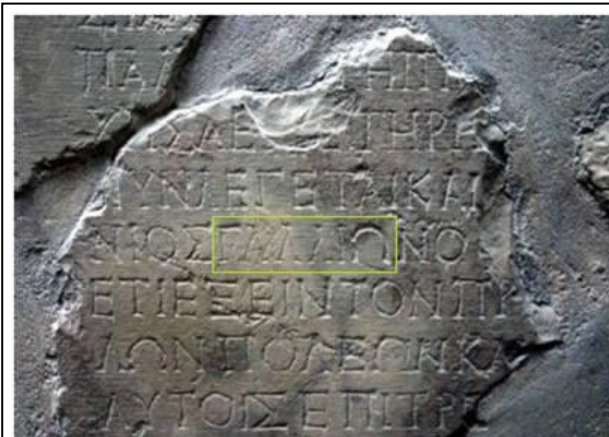
The event occurred in Thessalonica, a city in the region of Macedonia in northern Greece. The Greek term used here for 'city authorities' is 'politarchs.' The word has never been found anywhere else in the entire, enormous body of extant classical literature. As usual, this led some 'critics' to claim the New Testament writing was in error. But in 1835 the term was found on an inscription on an ancient arch in Thessalonica. Subsequently it turned up on an additional sixteen ancient inscriptions, referring to city authorities in Macedonian

towns.⁵⁷ Apparently the term was only used in that region—another example of precise historical accuracy in the New Testament.”

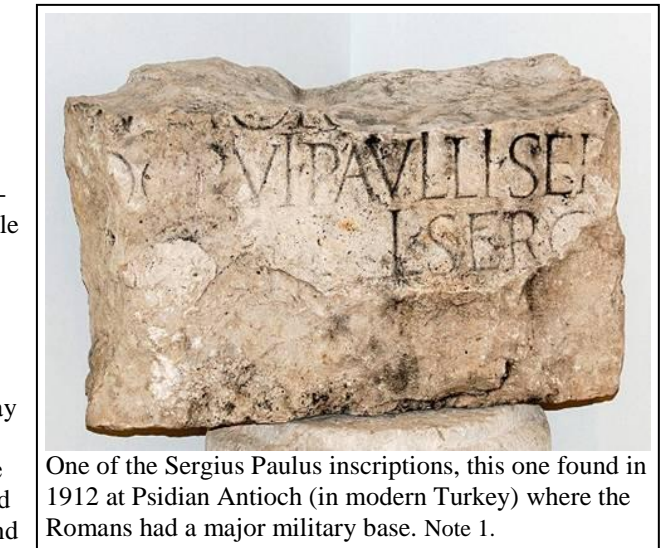
Professor Ho let go of the book, leaned back in his chair and looked up at the ceiling as though pondering. “Tiny, obscure details about mid-first century AD rulers, regions, and titles. How did that clever forger a hundred years later in the second century get it all right?” Professor Ho laughed aloud and brought his gaze back down to the boys. Still smiling, he continued. “But as I said before, a few examples aren't enough. Would you like to see another New Testament 'error' about the title used for local officials?

Acts 16:20 was questioned because it gives the chief city magistrates the Greek equivalent of the exalted title 'praetors' when Roman historical sources say they should have been called mere 'duumvirs.' But it turns out these provincial city officials really did regularly arrogate the higher title 'praetors' to themselves.⁵⁸ Or perhaps you'd like to see another geographical term 'mistake.' One of the greatest New Testament Greek scholars at the end of the 19th century, F.J.A. Hort, was quite sure the Greek word for 'district' was used wrongly in Acts 16:12—until the archaeologists dug up examples showing it really was used that way by Macedonians.⁵⁹

“How about more examples of the name and timeframe of minor first century rulers? Acts 13:6-7 has a man named Sergius Paulus as the Roman proconsul governing the island of Cyprus in about 46 or 47 AD.⁶⁰ Archaeologists have found several inscriptions mentioning him, including one on Cyprus dated to 54 AD. That inscription speaks of the writer's reforming his city's government 'during the time of the proconsul Paulus,' clearly showing Paulus was ruling in Cyprus not long before 54 AD.⁶¹ That stone was carved just eight years after the time the New Testament indicates for Sergius Paulus being proconsul in Cyprus. But maybe you think that's too rough! How about a one year range instead? Acts 18:12 finds the apostle Paul in Corinth during the one year administration of the Roman proconsul Gallio.



Part of the inscription found in Delphi, Greece naming Gallio as proconsul. Note 1.



One of the Sergius Paulus inscriptions, this one found in 1912 at Psidian Antioch (in modern Turkey) where the Romans had a major military base. Note 1.

Archaeologists date his twelve months as proconsul to 51-52 AD based on an inscription found in Greece.⁶² That timeframe fits perfectly with all the other detailed information we have in the New Testament about the apostle Paul's travels.⁶³

“I could go on and on—but you might think I've gone on too long already,” Professor Ho added with a smile toward Xiao Li.

But isn't the New Testament wrong sometimes?

Xiao Wang was thinking deeply, with almost a scowl on his face. “But aren't there also places where the New Testament history is known to be wrong?” he asked.

“Is *known* to be wrong?” Professor asked in reply. “No. Not one. Is *claimed* to be wrong by the anti-Christian critics? Yes, there are still a few areas. One of the biggest comes from Luke's time notations about the birth of Jesus

Christ:

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. [Luke 2:1-2 NAS]

We know Quirinius was governor of Syria in 6-7 AD and held a census then which included Palestine. Luke apparently knew about that census, since it seems to refer to it in Acts 5:37. But that one was too late for Jesus' birth. Furthermore, the text refers to a 'first census,' implying there were two occasions when Quirinius was governor of Syria and held a census. Our presently available historical sources about Quirinius do not specifically confirm he had governing authority in Syria before 6 AD, and they do not specify a census in Palestine in 6-4 BC when Jesus was probably born. This has led many critics to accuse Luke of historical error. You can see confident assertions by atheists on the internet that this 'error' proves the Bible is fallible and not inspired by God!

"What's the solution here? We don't have enough data at present to give a definitive answer. That there could have been a census in 6-4 BC is not strange; the Romans held them frequently throughout the empire. Some scholars assert there is some evidence that Quirinius was active in the government of Syria in 6-4 BC, but it's not certain. Other scholars suggest the Greek really means the census was taken *before* Quirinius was governor, but that interpretation seems forced."⁶⁴

Professor Ho sat back in his chair and touched the fingers of his two hands together. "Let's consider the record here. For 200 years the unbelieving critics have been saying the New Testament, and especially Luke's writing, has historical errors. And again and again, for 200 years, item after item that the critics used to say was wrong has been shown to be correct. Which is more reasonable? To doubt a text which has withstood centuries of hostile scrutiny and shown itself to be exquisitely accurate in its description of first century AD history? Or to trust that text in the couple of areas where we don't yet know the full historical background? The archaeologist Jack Finegan, who was the greatest Biblical chronologist at the end of the 20th century, reached this conclusion:

In view of Luke's general accuracy in other chronological matters there seems no sufficient reason to question his accuracy in speaking of the position of Quirinius in relation to an enrollment at the time of the birth of Jesus.⁶⁵

My conclusion is the same as Finegan's. Furthermore, I expect that sooner or later we'll have additional archaeological data which will confirm Luke's 'first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria,' and the New Testament will be confirmed yet again, and yet another anti-Biblical criticism will fall to the dust."

Professor Ho paused, leaned forward over his desk and looked searchingly at Xiao Wang. "What do you think, Xiao Wang? Is my assertion based on blind faith? Or on the trendline of 200 years of archaeological discoveries?"

Xiao Wang returned his gaze. Slowly his knit brow relaxed, and his face smoothed into a smile. "O.K. Professor Ho. I get the point. I think I've spent too much time on the internet lately—or at least on the wrong sites!"

Dig for yourself—and you will find it.

Professor Ho sat back again. "Today's ten examples certainly aren't enough to enable you to reach a conclusion, but they're a fair illustration of what you'll find if you're willing to look." He closed the archaeology book and slid it across the desktop toward Xiao Wang. "Xiao Wang, if you're interested, you can borrow this book and consider the evidence for yourself. I think it will provide a healthy counterbalance to some of the unsupported critical claims you've bumped into."

Xiao Wang picked up the book and laid it on top of his backpack. "Thank you, Professor Ho. I'll look at it."

"Our study of archaeology today has been limited and narrow," Professor Ho admitted again. "Most of my examples are drawn from the books of Luke and Acts, because they record the greatest wealth of historical details and have been subject to some of the most extensive examinations. Of course examples could be drawn from the other books of the New Testament, but note that Luke and Acts together cover virtually the entire period of New Testament history, from the birth of John the Baptist around 5 BC to the first imprisonment of the apostle Paul in about 61 AD. The detailed history in Luke and Acts agrees and integrates perfectly with the history in the rest of the New Testament, that is, the other gospels and the epistles. If Luke and Acts are accurate—and they are!—then so is the rest of the New Testament."

Professor Ho leaned forward and looked earnestly at the boys. "That kind of accuracy forced me to a conclusion. The New Testament history is based on the testimony of first century AD eyewitnesses—not second century forgers rehashing hearsay. I'm not alone in that conclusion. One of the 20th century's greatest biblical scholars, the historian F.F. Bruce, put it this way:

...for the most part the service which archaeology has rendered to New Testament studies is the filling in of the contemporary background.... And this background is a first century background. The New Testament narrative just will not fit into a second century background."⁶⁶

Which books are in the New Testament?

"How do we know which books belong to the New Testament?" Xiao Wang asked. "I heard some scholars say—" Xiao Wang hesitated a moment before continuing more slowly "Well, actually, I read it on some anti-Christian websites; but anyway, isn't it true that the leaders of the church got together hundreds of years after Jesus's time and decided

which books would be in the New Testament?”

Professor Ho shook his head vigorously. “That’s a popular misconception, but nothing could be further from the truth. It’s true there was a church council in 397 AD at Carthage in northern Africa which acknowledged that same New Testament books which we have today. But those church leaders did not *decide* which books would be in the New Testament; they simply *affirmed* what was already almost universally accepted among Christians.”⁶⁷

Professor Ho had already stood up and was plucking more books from his bookshelves. “We’ve already seen that the books of the New Testament were written in the first century AD. For a book to be accepted by the church, it had to come from that period, and had to have what is called ‘apostolic authority,’⁶⁸ that is, it had to have either been written by an apostle or by someone in close contact with and approved by an apostle. Of the 27 books of the New Testament, 22 were written by apostles. Of the other five, two, Luke and Acts, were written by Luke, who was the apostle Paul’s close companion. The gospel of Mark was written by Mark, who had been a companion of the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter. The book of Jude was written by the Jude who was a physical half-brother of Jesus. We are uncertain about one book, Hebrews, but it may have been written by Paul. All of those books were already known and recognized in the second century AD.”

Professor Ho sat back down at his desk, cleared a space for the new books, and began searching through one of them as he spoke. “There are basically three ways of confirming that the early Christians acknowledged a book as an authoritative part of the New Testament. One is when a quotation or allusion from a book is used in an authoritative manner. Thus the early church father Polycarp wrote in 110-120 AD:

...[you are] well versed in the sacred letters...it is said in these scriptures, ‘Be angry and sin not’ and ‘Do not let the sun go down on your anger.’⁶⁹

Here Polycarp quotes from Ephesians 4:26 early in the second century, regarding it as authoritative and inspired.

“A second way a book was acknowledged as part of the New Testament by the early Christians was when they made a specific statement affirming a given book as authoritative. In about 95 AD, the church father Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the church in Corinth and reminded them:

Take up the epistle of the blessed apostle Paul. ... Truly, under inspiration of the Spirit, he wrote to you concerning himself, Cephas, and Apollos, because even then parties had been formed among you.⁷⁰

Here Clement plainly refers to 1 Corinthians 1:11-12 and regards the entire book as inspired and authoritative.”

Professor Ho paused and looked up. “For the moment, let’s consider only these two types of testimony: authoritative quotations from a book or specific assertions that a book is authoritative. Furthermore, let’s limit ourselves to the sixty years immediately after the New Testament was completed, say about 90-150 AD. Of course, we have only a small portion of the total writings of the church leaders of that period still extant. But among them we find reference to at least 20, and possibly 23, of the 27 New Testament books—including all four gospels, Acts, Hebrews, James, 1Peter, 1John, Revelation, and at least 10 of Paul’s epistles.⁷¹ The seven books for which we presently seem to have no definite attestation before c.150 AD are 2Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 2Peter, 2John, 3John, and Jude. All of them are relatively short—four of them are just a single chapter.

“If we count just the 20 books we’re most sure are referred to, they represent about ¾ of the total number of books in the New Testament. But that’s not the best measure. Since most of the books we don’t have quotes from are very short, they actually represent very little of the entire New Testament. If we calculate the percentage based on the number of verses in the books, the 20 books definitely quoted from represent 7,690 of the approximately 7,957 verses of the New Testament, or about 97% of the total contents. And that’s just based on quotations dated to 150 AD and earlier!”

Xiao Li was confused. “You mean those early church writings quoted over 7,000 different New Testament verses by 150 AD?”

“No,” Professor Ho shook his head, “I just mean the books they quote from as authoritative contain that many verses and represent about 97% of the contents of New Testament.

“Of course, I’m quite confident the remaining 3% was also recognized in the early church, but presently we don’t seem to have definite testimony about them in surviving works of the church fathers before 150 AD. That, however,

should not surprise us.

“The New Testament books were acknowledged as authoritative as soon as they were received by the first generation of Christians. However, in those days, with no printing press or mass communication, it took time for a document to spread around the Roman Empire. Furthermore, many of what we call the ‘books’ of the New Testament were originally letters sent to a small group of regional or ethnic churches, or to a specific local church, or even

	New Testament	Early Church Fathers	Early Church Fathers
Date	c.50-90AD	c.95-150 AD	by c.170-180 AD
Books	27	at least 20	at least 25
% NT books		74.1%	92.6%
% total NT		96.6%	98.4%
Not definitely mentioned		2Tim, Titus, Philemon, 2Pet, 2Jn, 3Jn, Jude	2Pet, 3Jn(?)
Sources		Clement of Rome (c.95AD); Polycarp (c.150AD); “Shepherd of Hermas” (c.150AD); Justin Martyr (c.140AD).	Additional: Irenaeus (c.170AD); Muratorian Canon (c.170-180AD).

See Note 67, Pg.430-431.

to an individual. As a result, some of them would not necessarily immediately be copied and widely distributed. That would be especially true of short letters written to individuals, which might not immediately seem to be of broad interest, despite being written by an apostle. Finally, the shorter the letter, the less likely that there would be an occasion to quote it.

“As I just mentioned, the seven books we haven’t yet found quoted before c.150 AD are all short. Furthermore, at least four of them are addressed to individuals. These two factors might have caused them to be relatively late in coming into wider circulation.

“But now let’s move forward another 30 years in church history and consider the third line of evidence. The third way to confirm that the early Christians acknowledged a book is when they would make a list of all the books which were accepted as having apostolic authority—or, as we would put it, accepted as part of the New Testament Bible.”

The Muratorian Canon (c.170-180 AD)

Professor Ho opened one of the books to a picture of an ancient manuscript. “The oldest attempted list of the books of the New Testament which we currently possess is the Muratorian Canon. It apparently dates from about 170-180 AD.^Z It includes four gospels, the book of Acts, all the epistles of Paul, and several other New Testament books—in total, at least 22 of the 27 New Testament books.”

“Does it include any other books?” asked Xiao Wang.

“Only one non-canonical book is even mentioned for possible inclusion in the New Testament,^{AA} the Apocalypse of Peter, and that one is immediately qualified by ‘though some among us will not have this later read in the Church.’^{BB} On the other hand, a number of second century AD compositions which were trying to claim authority were expressly rejected. The writer of the Muratorian Canon indicates an understanding that the New Testament, like the Old Testament, is already complete when he says of one rejected book:

...it cannot be...placed among the prophets, as their number is complete, nor among the apostles to the end of time.

It seems obvious that the ‘prophets’ refers to the Old Testament, and the ‘apostles’ to the New Testament. While the author may be slightly uncertain about whether a certain book belongs in the New Testament, he has no question that nothing new may be added to it.

Which New Testament books are missing from the Muratorian Canon?

“Which New Testament books are missing from the Muratorian list?” Xiao Li asked.

“A very important question!” Professor Ho affirmed. “Hebrews is missing, but Hebrews is quoted by Clement of Rome in 95 AD, long before the Muratorian Canon. James is missing, but James is quoted in the Shepherd of Hermas in about 150 AD. 1st and 2nd Peter are apparently missing, though some scholars think the original writing may have had them and they were lost due to a copying error. 1st Peter was never questioned in the church and is quoted by Justin Martyr around 140 AD and by Polycarp around the same time or earlier—before the Muratorian Canon was drawn up. 2nd Peter was known in the early church, but its authenticity was debated during the second and third centuries. 3rd John is possibly missing, but some scholars think it is included.

“In short, what the Muratorian Canon includes is also in our present New Testament. What the Muratorian Canon skips is almost all attested by even earlier witnesses.

“Thus we have powerful confirmation that our present New Testament books were known and acknowledged in the early church before the year 200 AD. At this point, I think you can see that it is simply unreasonable to suggest that the New Testament was decreed by some council in the 4th century AD.”

Xiao Wang had another question. “Professor Ho, I see your point that our present New Testament books come from the first century and were accepted by the early Church. But what about what *isn’t* in the New Testament now? Isn’t it true that a lot of writings were suppressed by the early Church?”

Did the early Church ‘suppress’ writings which it didn’t agree with?

“I take it you mean the ‘Gnostic’ gospels and other apocryphal books written during the second and third centuries. These certainly were *rejected* by the early Church, but they weren’t *suppressed*. In the second, third, and early 4th centuries, the Christians were a tiny, persecuted minority in the pagan Roman Empire. Christianity wasn’t even legal until

^Z The Muratorian Canon mentions the period when Pius I had been bishop of the church in Rome; which was c.140-155 AD. This period is referred to as having been ‘very recently in our times.’ Thus the Muratorian Canon was composed sometime after 155 AD, but less than a human lifetime thereafter, and thus almost certainly before 200 AD. Other historical references in the document are likewise to events in church history occurring before 200 AD.

^{AA} Oddly, the Muratorian Canon also includes an apocryphal Jewish writing, the so-called ‘Wisdom of Solomon.’ That book, however, has nothing to do with Jesus, the church or the New Testament, and therefore its inclusion is not relevant to the Muratorian Canon’s New Testament list.

^{BB} Some scholars have even suggested our manuscript has a copying error and that the original text included both 1 and 2 Peter, with ‘this latter’ referring to the disputed 2Peter. This is a just a supposition. It should be noted, however, that the absence of 1Peter would be quite surprising, since it was widely known and acknowledged in the church in the second century and its authenticity was never questioned.

313 AD. The early Church fathers of the second and third centuries were in no position to ‘suppress’ anything! They did, however, expose and vigorously refute the fake, apocryphal writings which were cropping up.

“As the number of Christians increased during the second century, a variety of false gospels and false epistles began to be written by forgers under the name of various apostles. It’s actually quite easy to identify these.” Professor Ho began counting off on his fingers. “The fake writings:

1. are later than the New Testament;
2. often contain obvious ‘Gnostic’ teachings from the second century and later which contradict basic, central teachings of the Old Testament and Christianity;
3. were never included in or proposed for inclusion in the actual recognized New Testament canon.

Apocryphal Gospels: Later than the New Testament

“First and most important of all, the false or apocryphal gospels are always written much later than the real New Testament books. The earliest of them were written in the middle or late second century, over 50 years after the New Testament was completed.”

Professor Ho paused and looked closely at Xiao Wang. “However, you will hear unsupported claims made that some of the false gospels are actually earlier than the New Testament. Perhaps you’ve bumped into some of those, Xiao Wang?”

“Yes I have,” Xiao Wang affirmed. “But it’s almost impossible for me to figure out who’s right and who’s wrong.”

“Perhaps I can help,” Professor Ho resumed. “Let’s start with the strongest case the other side can muster. The anti-Christian critics who claim some of the false gospels are older than the real ones usually cite the so-called ‘Gospel of Thomas’ as the oldest and best example. Apparently the majority of scholars date it’s writing to the second century.⁷² But the radical critics assert this ‘Gospel of Thomas’ was written in the first century. Their claim has no basis.”

“How old are the manuscripts?” asked Xiao Li.

“Needless to say, they don’t have any manuscripts dating to the first century,” Professor Ho replied. “The oldest extant parts of the ‘Gospel of Thomas’ are three small fragments written in Greek which were found at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt. The fragments date to the early third century AD.⁷³ Our oldest complete copy is a translation into Coptic copied around the late third or, more likely, the mid 4th century AD. It’s contents differ somewhat from the earlier fragments. However, it’s not the relatively late date of the manuscripts that convinces me the Gospel of Thomas could not be from the first century. It’s the contents which make it plain.”

“Did you ever read it?” Xiao Wang asked with a hint of challenge in his voice.

“As a matter of fact, yes,” Professor Ho replied mildly. He got up and retrieved yet another book from his shelves. He continued speaking as he paged through it. “The ‘Gospel of Thomas’ is quite short, a little over 5,000 words in translation. It’s not really a gospel history at all. It’s a hodgepodge of 114 little snippets strung together without any obvious organization. These are alleged to be quotations from Jesus and brief dialogues with his followers. Almost none of the sayings has any context. There’s no history—no birth, no ministry, no crucifixion, no resurrection. There’s no plot line at all.^{CC, 74}

Second, the work contains allusions and quotations from many of the books of the New Testament, including all four gospels and apparently even the comparatively late books of 1 John and Revelation.⁷⁵ This strongly indicates that it was written *after* the New Testament was complete and in general circulation. Let me give you a few examples:

Gospel of Thomas, 26 Jesus said, ‘The chip that is in your brother’s eye you see, but the log in your own eye you do not see. When you take the log out of your eye, then you will see to remove the chip from your brother’s eye.’⁷⁶

Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. [Matthew 7:3-5 NAS; see also Luke 6:41-42]

The quotation is from Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount. There are many examples like this, where the Gospel of Thomas records a brief snippet from the actual New Testament gospels in a slightly altered form. It sometimes combines pieces from different places, removing them completely from their actual context:

Gospel of Thomas, 39 Jesus said, ‘The Pharisees and scribes took the keys of knowledge; they hid them. They did not enter, and they did not allow those to enter who wanted to enter. But you be wise as serpents and as innocent as doves.’

This is a combination of quotes from two sections of the Bible. The first half is extracted from a discussion Jesus had with Pharisees and scribes, as well as experts in the Old Testament law know as lawyers. These were important religious leader among the Jews in Jesus’s day.

37 Now when He [Jesus] had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined at the table. ... 52 "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you your-

^{CC} Contrary to claims sometimes made by anti-Christian critics, this ‘collected sayings’ style of writing did not end in the first century, but continued to be used in apocryphal writings at least to the end of the second century. See Note 74.

selves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering." 53 When He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, 54 plotting against Him to catch Him in something He might say. [Luke 11:37, 52-54 NAS; see also Matthew 23:13]

The second sentence in the Gospel of Thomas 39 is extracted from a Jesus's charge to His disciples as He was sending them out to preach:

5 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: ... 7 "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' ... 16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 "But beware of men, for they will hand you over to *the* courts and scourge you in their synagogues; 18 and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. [Matthew 10:5, 7, 16-18 NAS; see also Luke 23:13]

In both cases, as usual, the Gospel of Thomas has removed the context, but the similarity is too great to write off to chance. Dozens of parallels like this are a strong reason to believe the Gospel of Thomas wasn't written until the second century, after the New Testament had already been completed and was widely known. One New Testament scholar even suggests the Gospel of Thomas has explicit parallels to more different parts of the New Testament than any single early Church father writing prior to 150 AD.⁷⁷ Are we seriously to believe that the Gospel of Thomas was written in the first century?^{DD}

"Could the apostle Paul have quoted from the Gospel of Thomas?" Xiao Wang suggested. "Maybe it was written first!"

Professor Ho laughed aloud. "There's a theory! And I suppose we are to believe Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all consulted the Gospel of Thomas before they wrote? The Gospel of Thomas has quotes and allusions paralleling all of their writings!" Professor Ho regained his serious look and continued. "In fact, the anti-Christian critics sometimes assert that much of the Gospel of Thomas is similar to the New Testament because it began as a rough, first century collection of some of the sayings of Jesus. That's not impossible, and some of the Christian scholars agree with the idea. But the whole of the Gospel of Thomas as it stands now certainly didn't come from the first century, and I'm quite sure no New Testament writer would have ever acknowledged or used it."

"How can you be sure?" Xiao Wang countered.

"Because," explained Professor Ho, "in addition to snippets of the New Testament, it contains a lot of blatantly *unChristian, unJewish, second* century ideas known as Gnosticism."

The false 'Gnostic' Gospels: Obviously written to support a non-Christian viewpoint.

"The Gospel of Thomas, like most of the forged gospels, contains an obvious streak of what came to be called 'Gnosticism,' Gnosticism was a perversion of Christianity which began in the late first century. Many of its distinctive teachings would have been totally unacceptable even to any *Jew* of the first century, much less to the *Christian* writers of the New Testament!^{EE}

"Gnosticism borrowed many of its distinctive ideas from some of the Greek philosophies and religions of the period and then tried to force these onto Christianity. For example, Gnosticism held that matter, including the human body, is intrinsically evil, while spirit is good. As a result, many Gnostics were ascetic and disparaged marriage and sexuality. In addition, they considered females as both fundamentally inferior to males and guilty of continuing the propagation of the race, thereby enchaining more souls in bodies. These ideas are reflected in one of the most 'Gnostic' sayings in the Gospel of Thomas:

Gospel of Thomas, 114 Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary leave us, because women are not worthy of the Life.' Jesus said, 'Look, I shall guide her so that I will make her male, in order that she also may become a living spirit, being like you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Can we reasonably believe a mid-first century Jewish believer in Jesus would have written this? In contrast the Bible, Old Testament and New, says God made matter, human bodies, and sexuality and they are not inherently evil. Furthermore, both men and women were created in the image of God:

27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ... 31 God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. ... [Genesis 1:27, 31 NAS; see also Matthew 19:4, Mark 10:6]

In sharp contrast to the second century Gnostics, orthodox Christians from 30 AD onward welcomed women as full members of the Church:^{FF}

^{DD} For a more complete discussion of the evidence that the Gospel of Thomas as it stands now comes from the second century, see Note 75.

^{EE} Note also that the 'Gospel of Thomas' seems to make no reference at all to the Old Testament, not even when it records Jesus quoting from the Old Testament. This would be incredible if it really were written by a first century Jew. The New Testament, of course, quotes the old Testament hundreds of times. Other first century Jewish literature, like the writings of Josephus or Philo, does the same. Gnostics, however, rejected the Old Testament.

^{FF} While still affirming gender role differences; see 1Corinthians 11:2-16, 14:34-38, 1Timothy 2:11-14, Ephesians 5:22-24, etc.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [Galatians 3:28 NAS; see also Acts 1:13-14]

The Gnostics' disdain for the physical world not only caused them to denigrate women, but additionally led them to deny that Jesus was both the Son of God and, at the same time, a real man with a real body. Sometimes they denied that His body was real, that is, denying that He really was a Man. At other times, they denied that the Man Jesus really was God, and claimed that God just temporarily lived in Him during part of His ministry. These ideas appear a little in the Gospel of Thomas:

Gospel of Thomas, 15 Jesus said, 'When you see him who was not born of woman, throw yourself down on your faces and adore [or worship] him; that one is your Father.

Here the writer either denies that Jesus really was born of a woman—and thus denies that He really is a human being—or else denies that the Man Jesus really is God and worthy of worship. For a clearer example, we can look at the so-called 'Gospel of Judas.' ”

“I've heard of that one!” Xiao Wang interjected.

“Yes, it's made quite a stir in the past few years” Professor Ho affirmed. “Originally it was only known to us from the early Church fathers. Irenaeus, writing in about 180 AD mentions it in his book Against Heresies. He calls it 'a fictitious history...which they style the Gospel of Judas.'”⁷⁸ A manuscript of the Gospel of Judas which was copied in the third or fourth century was reconstructed recently. It's contents turned out to be pretty much what had been expected based on Irenaeus's description.”⁷⁹ Professor Ho turned a few pages in the book. “Here it is. It has very, very little reference to events in Jesus's life and almost no relationship to the New Testament. It's primarily a collection of Gnostic doctrines presented in a series of symbolic discussions held between it's so-called 'Jesus' and his disciples. Near the end, this so-called 'Jesus' says to Judas:

...you will sacrifice the man that clothes me.

In this particular Gnostic writing, Jesus is presented as not really a human being; his body and humanity are just an exterior cloak, and only that 'clothing' will die on the cross. In contrast to that, a basic teaching of Christianity from the beginning is that Jesus is God become a human being:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ... 17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. [John 1:1, 14, 17 NAS]

“The Gnostics not only denied Jesus's nature as true Man and true God. They also denied the central point of the gospel message: that Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins so we could be forgiven.” Professor Ho paused and turned to another section of his book. “I'll spare you a wade through the swamp of the gospel of Judas. But here's the conclusion of one expert—a professor of Biblical studies at a major secular university:

So what does the Gospel of Judas really say? It says that Judas is a specific demon called the "Thirteenth." In certain Gnostic traditions, this is the given name of the king of demons—an entity known as Ialdabaoth who lives in the 13th realm above the earth. Judas is his human alter ego, his undercover agent in the world. These Gnostics equated Ialdabaoth with the Hebrew Yahweh, whom they saw as a jealous and wrathful deity and an opponent of the supreme God whom Jesus came to reveal.

Whoever wrote the Gospel of Judas was a harsh critic of mainstream Christianity and its rituals. Because Judas is a demon working for Ialdabaoth, the author believed, when Judas sacrifices Jesus he does so to the demons, not to the supreme God. This mocks mainstream Christians' belief in the atoning value of Jesus' death....⁸⁰

Are we seriously to believe that the 'original' Christianity is reflected in apocryphal gospels like this? Did the first century Christians, the earliest of whom were all Jewish, regard the Yahweh of the Old Testament as an evil 'lesser' god? Did they deny that Jesus was sacrificed by God on the cross so sinners could be forgiven?”

Professor Ho paused and looked at Xiao Wang with a furrowed brow. “Xiao Wang, you asked me a moment ago if I'd ever read the Gospel of Thomas. I have, and some of the other Gnostic writings as well. You might be worried that I've chosen the 'worst' examples of apocrypha, the least likely to be legitimate. In fact, I've focused on the *best* example, the Gospel of Thomas. It's all down hill from there—later and later texts, more and more twisted ideas. Anybody who lays out the apocryphal gospels and epistles beside the New Testament will quickly see the difference. I recommend that you try it if you have doubts!”

The Gnostic and other apocryphal writings were never accepted by the Church

“The early Church never 'suppressed' the Gnostic writings, or any other apocryphal writings. As I said before, they had no power to suppress anything. And they also had no need. The early Church confronted falsehood by *exposing* it. After refuting many Gnostic ideas and specifically mentioning the Gospel of Judas, the early Church father Irenaeus writing in 180 AD goes on to say in his conclusion:

It was necessary...to bring forward their doctrines, with the hope that perchance some of them, exercising repentance and returning to the only creator and God, the former of the universe, may obtain salvation. ...

...look with contempt upon their doctrines, while at the same time...pity those who, still cleaving to these miserable and baseless fables, have reached such a pitch...

...They have now been fully exposed; and simply to exhibit their sentiments is to obtain a victory over them.⁸¹

Far from any imaginary ‘suppression,’ Irenaeus says the best way to rescue people from these errors is by openly exposing, discussing and refuting them—including by comparison with the New Testament, which he quotes extensively and knows to be authoritative.

“So boys, that’s the historical reality. The Gnostic and other apocryphal writings are late—second century and later. They clearly arose after the New Testament was already complete and widely known. They deliberately contradict the New Testament. They were never accepted outside of heretical circles, and were certainly never considered for inclusion in the New Testament.

The (non-existent) ‘Da Vinci Code’

“Professor Ho, what about the Da Vinci code?” Xiao Li asked.

“What about it? What *could* there be about it?” Professor Ho asked with an ironic smile. “The book is a novel, a work of fiction, as the author freely admits. Why on earth should we look to a 21st century fictional novel for insights about Jesus? The author suggests that Leonardo da Vinci believed Jesus married Mary Magdalene—all based on his ridiculously forced interpretation of da Vinci’s famous picture *The Last Supper*. Funny no one ever noticed it before! All those art historians overlooked it for 500 years! In reality, it’s ludicrous—if da Vinci were alive, he’d sue that author for libel! And if it were true that da Vinci had thought that way, what would it matter? Would we look to a painter living in 1500 to explain what Jesus really did, rather than to the first century AD New Testament writers?”

“The writer of the da Vinci code does make the same tired old claims about the Church ‘suppressing’ Gnostic writings. But he doesn’t offer any evidence—just empty claims placed in the mouths of fictional characters. Meanwhile, the novel is filled with definite historical inaccuracies, as has frequently been pointed out.”⁸²

The real New Testament gospels: Written by (or based on) eyewitnesses, first spread among other eyewitnesses

“Well, enough about fake gospels written one or two centuries after Jesus. The four *real* gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—were written before 100 AD, either by eyewitnesses, or by those who heard the testimony of eyewitnesses.

“Matthew and John were apostles, eyewitnesses of Jesus’s ministry. According to early church history, Mark wrote down what he heard another eyewitness, the apostle Peter, say about Jesus:

...Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. ... he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely.⁸³

The other gospel writer, Luke, explicitly notes he received information from eyewitnesses:

1 In as much as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. [Luke 1:1-4 NAS]

In addition to a gospel, Luke wrote the book of Acts, which gives a history of the church from 30 AD to c. 61 AD. For parts of the book of Acts, Luke himself is the eyewitness.

“Thus all the authors of the New Testament claimed to either be eyewitnesses or to have heard eyewitnesses.”

“But they might have been biased!” Xiao Wang immediately objected.

Professor Ho raised one eyebrow, then said mildly, “Your logic suggests that we should only accept the testimony of a person’s opponents, never of their supporters. In that case, I suppose our only reliable sources for the actions of Chinese generals during World War II would be the Japanese army records. Would you agree that we should discount all testimony from Chinese soldiers? After all, supporters might be biased!”

“You have a point,” admitted Xiao Wang.

“I think we can show that the gospel writers had no reason to distort the record of Jesus’s life; we’ll return to that in a moment. But first note that, even if they had wanted to, they would have had a hard time succeeding. Consider who the earliest audience of the gospel story was. Christianity was first spread among Jews in Palestine, in the very place where Jesus was said to have preached and done miracles. According to the gospels, not less than tens of thousands of people, maybe even a hundred thousand or more, had heard Him preach and seen Him do miracles in specific cities up and down Palestine—Nazareth, Capernaum, Jericho, Jerusalem, Bethany, and dozens more. If no one in those places had ever heard of Him, who would have believed the early Christian preachers? Shortly after Jesus’s resurrection, which was probably in 30 AD, the apostles began preaching the gospel in Jerusalem, openly asserting that they were talking about the same Jesus everyone already knew about:

14 But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. . . . 22 . . . Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know -- 23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. . . . 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. [Acts 2:14, 22-23, 41 NAS]

Almost all the earliest preaching of the gospel was done in places where Jesus was explicitly said to have ministered publicly and been well known. If He'd never been seen there, no one would have believed it. If the apostles had 'invented' a Jesus who supposedly drew huge crowds and did miracles in Palestine within the living memory of their hearers—if none of those people had seen Jesus in their towns, how could the apostles have convinced anyone to join a movement which was being persecuted? But in the years immediately after Jesus's resurrection, thousands, probably tens of thousands, of Jews in Palestine put their faith in the Jesus whom they had seen preach and heal.

"This situation would have continued in Palestine for at least a generation. About 30 years after Jesus's resurrection, in 59 AD, at Caesarea, a hundred kilometers northwest of Jerusalem, the apostle Paul was on trial before a Jewish king, Herod Agrippa II, who reigned 50-70 AD. Paul naturally expects him to know about Jesus and Christianity:

1 Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense: 2 "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; 3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews. . . . 9 . . . [before his conversion] I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. . . . 20 [after his conversion] I kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea. . . . 22 . . . stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; 23 that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles. . . . 26 For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. 27 "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." 28 Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." [Acts 26:1-3, 9, 20, 22-25, 26-28 NAS]

King Agrippa was doubtless being sarcastic about becoming a Christian, but he certainly knew about Jesus of Nazareth and Christianity. As Paul said, Jesus's ministry and the preaching of His resurrection was not done 'in a corner.' At that point, only a generation after His crucifixion and resurrection, many of the people who had seen Jesus were still alive, including almost all of the apostles.

"So it's clear that Christianity was first spread among people who had either seen Jesus themselves, or had ready access to people who had seen Him. If the whole thing had been a fake, the movement never would have gotten off the ground."

New Testament writers: No motive for lying

"Finally, let's return to the question of the motives of the writers of the New Testament. They simply had no reason to tell lies."

"The apostles themselves suffered social ostracism, beatings, imprisonment and death for the sake of their testimony—which is exactly what they knew beforehand would happen if they preached about Jesus! Why did they endure all this? Had someone tricked them into believing in a Jesus who'd never existed or who'd never done miracles? No, they themselves repeatedly stated that they were the eyewitnesses to Jesus's actions, despite knowing that their testimony would only bring them suffering in this life. Does it make sense to think they 'invented' Jesus or His message? A person might die for a someone else's lie if they've been tricked into believing it, but who would choose to purposely die for what he knew was false?

"And remember, the earliest preachers were all devout Jews. They all believed in judgment after death. They could only have expected punishment from God after they died if they had concocted lies about the Messiah. This is not a small point, though it might be hard for us get a feeling for it. The writers of the New Testament all implicitly believed in the immortality of the soul, in God's omniscience and omnipotence, and in the certainty of judgment after death. What could have possibly motivated them to knowingly make and spread lies about Jesus? What could they possibly have thought to gain by lying—except suffering in this life, and eternal hell in the next?"

"I never thought of that before," admitted Xiao Wang.

Xiao Wang tried to put himself in the place of the New Testament writers. This led him to another question. "Professor Ho, did the writers of the New Testament know they were writing the Bible?"

The New Testament writers were inspired—and they knew it!

"Let me rephrase your question a little," Professor Ho replied. "Did the writers of the New Testament know they were inspired by God and writing authoritative scriptures? The answer is: yes." Professor Ho paged through the battered old Bible that was always on his desktop. "On the night before Jesus was crucified, He made a promise to his disciples:

14:26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. ... 16:12 "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. 14 "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. [John 14:26, 16:12-14 NAS]

Jesus explicitly predicted that God's Holy Spirit would remind them of Jesus's words and deeds, teach them additional doctrinal truth to them, and reveal parts of the future to them. Subsequently, the apostles were well aware of their authority. Paul wrote to the early church in Corinth:

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. [1Corinthians 14:37-38 NAS]

Paul regards his apostolic writings as having the authority of commands from God—not just advice from a pastor! The apostles also received and wrote down prophetic revelations."

"You mean like when John wrote the book of Revelation?" Xiao Li asked.

"Yes, including that, but also prophecies scattered throughout the New Testament writings. For example, the apostle Paul even predicted the rise of the asceticism which accompanied Gnosticism:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; [1Timothy 4:1-4 NAS]

Note several things here. Paul specifically claims to be predicting the future by inspiration. Writing around 64 AD, he predicts a spread of certain false doctrines by people who arise *within* the church claiming marriage is bad, ascetic abstinence from food is necessary, and denying that God's material creation is good. That's exactly what Gnosticism subsequently preached as it tried to swallow the church whole in the second and third centuries."

"But Paul wasn't there on the night before Jesus died. So how do we know the promise extended to him?" Xiao Li wondered.

"Paul certainly was an apostle," Professor Ho replied, "and the other apostles recognized him as such. Not only that, but they also recognized the authority of each others' writings. Late in his life, sometime before 68 AD, the apostle Peter wrote:

... just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. [2Peter 3:15-16 NAS]

Here Peter explicitly acknowledges that Paul writes under inspiration, 'according to the wisdom given him,' He also gives Paul's writing the same level of authority as the Old Testament scriptures when he says 'the rest of the Scriptures.' The word he uses here, 'scriptures,' could only have referred to the Bible when used by a first century Jew like Peter."

The conclusion: The New Testament is a trustworthy historical document

"Considering all the evidence we've just reviewed—and it's just a sampling—as a historian I think we have ample grounds to be confident that the New Testament records were based on eyewitness testimony from competent people who had no motive for lying. In simple terms, it's true history."

The three fell silent for a moment. Xiao Wang realized he'd been far too quick to be shaken by unsupported assertions on the internet. He'd probably need to study it further and weigh more evidence. But he already had enough experience with Professor Ho to know what he'd find. Professor Ho would have already gone over all the evidence with a fine toothed comb, faced down all the objections and seen through them, and come away with an assured conclusion. Come away with the only reasonable conclusion: that the New Testament really was true history. Xiao Wang was already 90% sure that's what he would find if he looked, because that was what had happened when he'd tested the evidence for the existence of God and the truth of the Old Testament. But he still felt the need to check more.

Professor Ho turned to Xiao Wang, who was staring at the ground. "Well Xiao Wang," he said gently, "would you like to come next week and start looking at who this Jesus is that the New Testament talks about?"

Xiao Wang looked up from his reverie. After a brief pause he replied, "Yes, Professor Ho. I'd like to see who Jesus is."

Appendix 10-1: Additional ancient evidences for Jesus' historicity.

The history of Thallus

The Roman historian Thallus (or Thallos) wrote in about 55 AD. None of his writing is extant, but he is cited by other writers. The Christian historian Sextus Julius Africanus (c.160-c.240) writing about 221 AD discusses the dark-

ness during Jesus's crucifixion in his History of the World 18:1. In this passage he mentions Thallus's writing::

[At the time of Jesus's crucifixion] On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. Thallus, in the third book of his Histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun—unreasonably, as it seems to me.⁸⁴

Thallus apparently records an eclipse of the sun at that time. Julius Africanus regards this explanation as unreasonable, presumably because Jesus was crucified during the Passover, which would have been the time of a full moon, and thus a solar eclipse would have been impossible. Julius Africanus asserts the darkness was not merely an ordinary natural event, but had the significance of a portent.

Presently, it is not possible to confirm Julius Africanus's citation of Thallus. If he correctly cites Thallus, Thallus at a minimum would be a testimony to the unusual darkness at the time of Jesus's death (probably Spring 30 AD). Possibly Thallus referred to the Christians' testimony about Jesus's death and the darkness which accompanied it. Christians would have tended to claim it was a portent; perhaps the pagan Thallus was asserting it was merely natural. If so, Thallus's argument would represent the earliest non-Christian record about Jesus.⁸⁵

The letter of Mara Bar-Serapion

Sometime between the late first and early third centuries, most likely some time between 135 and 200 AD, a Syrian named Mara Bar-Serapion was imprisoned by the Romans after his city was conquered by them. From prison he wrote a very philosophical letter to his son, consoling him about the situation and trying to encourage him to pursue wisdom and endure suffering patiently. In it he gives three historical examples of people who suffered unjustly but were vindicated and remembered by posterity:

What else can we say, when the wise are forcibly dragged off by tyrants, their wisdom is captured by insults, and their minds are oppressed and without defense? What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea; the Jews, ruined and driven from their own land, are scattered through every nation. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; He lived on in the teaching [or: new laws] which He had given.⁸⁶

Although Mara does not name Jesus specifically, He is the only historical figure who could possibly fit the description. First, the Jews must already be scattered, which demands a date at least after 70 AD and more likely after the end of the second Jewish revolt in 135 AD. Secondly, there is no other figure in history who claimed to be king of the Jews but was put to death by them. Thirdly, it is specified that this executed king's teaching or 'new law' is still being observed. Finally, the scattering of the Jews as a punishment for rejecting the Messiah is explicitly predicted in the New Testament (see Chapters 9 and 15) and was a common teaching among Christians.

Why doesn't Mara name Jesus specifically? As the letter makes clear, Mara is still hoping to be released by the Romans. It would not have seemed like a good idea to praise by name a man who had been executed by a Roman governor, nor directly refer to the founder of religious group which was considered illegal and sporadically persecuted in the Roman Empire during the second century AD. Note that Mara also scrupulously avoids mentioning the part the Romans had had in Jesus's death.⁸⁷

Thus we have an additional very probable reference to Jesus from a non-Christian writer in the second century AD.

Appendix 10-2: Full text of Pliny the Younger's correspondence with the Emperor Trajan, Letters 96-97

To the Emperor Trajan:

It is a rule, Sir, which I inviolably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts; for who is more capable of guiding my uncertainty or informing my ignorance? Having never been present at any trials of the Christians, I am unacquainted with the method and limits to be observed either in examining or punishing them. Whether any difference is to be made on account of age, or no distinction allowed between the youngest and the adult; whether repentance admits to a pardon, or if a man has been once a Christian it avails him nothing to recant; whether the mere profession of Christianity, albeit without crimes, or only the crimes associated therewith are punishable—in all these points I am greatly doubtful.

In the meanwhile, the method I have observed towards those who have been denounced to me as Christians is this: I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it I repeated the question twice again, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed. For whatever the nature of their creed might be, I could at least feel no doubt that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy deserved chastisement. There were others also possessed with the same infatuation, but being citizens of Rome, I directed them to be carried thither.

These accusations spread (as is usually the case) from the mere fact of the matter being investigated and several

forms of the mischief came to light. A placard was put up, without any signature, accusing a large number of persons by name. Those who denied they were, or had ever been, Christians, who repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and offered adoration, with wine and frankincense, to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for that purpose, together with those of the gods, and who finally cursed Christ—none of which acts, it is said, those who are really Christians can be forced into performing—these I thought it proper to discharge. Others who were named by that informer at first confessed themselves Christians, and then denied it; true, they had been of that persuasion but they had quitted it, some three years, others many years, and a few as much as twenty-five [some manuscripts read twenty] years ago. They all worshipped your statue and the images of the gods, and cursed Christ.

They affirmed, however, the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. Even this practice, however, they had abandoned after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your orders, I had forbidden political associations. I judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from two female slaves, who were styled deaconesses: but I could discover nothing more than depraved and excessive superstition.

I therefore adjourned the proceedings, and betook myself at once to your counsel. For the matter seemed to me well worth referring to you, especially considering the numbers endangered. Persons of all ranks and ages, and of both sexes are, and will be, involved in the prosecution. For this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but has spread through the villages and rural districts; it seems possible, however, to check and cure it. 'Tis certain at least that the temples, which had been almost deserted, begin now to be frequented; and the sacred festivals, after a long intermission, are again revived; while there is a general demand for sacrificial animals, which for some time past have met with but few purchasers. From hence it is easy to imagine what multitudes may be reclaimed from this error, if a door be left open to repentance. [Book 10, Letter 96]⁸⁸

Trajan to Pliny:

The method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those denounced to you as Christians is extremely proper. It is not possible to lay down any general rule which can be applied as the fixed standard in all cases of this nature. No search should be made for these people; when they are denounced and found guilty they must be punished; with the restriction, however, that when the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall give proof that he is not (that is, by adoring our gods) he shall be pardoned on the ground of repentance, even though he may have formerly incurred suspicion. Informations without the accuser's name subscribed must not be admitted in evidence against any one, as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the spirit of the age. [Book 10, Letter 97]⁸⁹

Appendix 10-3: Full text of the Muratorian Canon, c.170-180 AD

[Beginning of text is missing.]

. . . at which nevertheless he was present, and so he placed [them in his narrative]. The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke. Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken with him as one zealous for the law, composed it in his own name, according to [the general] belief. Yet he himself had not seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events, so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John. The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples. To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write], he said, 'Fast with me from today to three days, and what will be revealed to each one let us tell it to one another.' In the same night it was revealed to Andrew, [one] of the apostles, that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it. And so, though various elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels, nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection, concerning life with his disciples, and concerning his twofold coming; the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place, the second glorious in royal power, which is still in the future. What marvel is it then, if John so consistently mentions these particular points also in his Epistles, saying about himself, 'What we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears and our hands have handled, these things we have written to you? For in this way he professes [himself] to be not only an eye-witness and hearer, but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order. Moreover, the acts of all the apostles were written in one book. For 'most excellent Theophilus' Luke compiled the individual events that took place in his presence — as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter as well as the departure of Paul from the city [of Rome] when he journeyed to Spain. As for the Epistles of Paul, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones [they are], from what place, or for what reason they were sent. First of all, to the Corinthians, prohibiting their heretical schisms; next, to the Galatians, against circumcision; then to the Romans he wrote at length, explaining the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle (or, main theme). It is necessary for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: To the Corinthians first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third, to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth, to

the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition, yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches, nevertheless speaks to all. [Paul also wrote] out of affection and love one to Philemon, one to Titus, and two to Timothy; and these are held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. There is current also [an epistle] to the Laodiceans, [and] another to the Alexandrians, [both] forged in Paul's name to [further] the heresy of Marcion, and several others which cannot be received into the catholic Church—for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey. Moreover, the epistle of Jude and two of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of) John are counted (or, used) in the catholic [Church]; and [the book of] Wisdom, written by the friends of Solomon in his honour. We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter, though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church. But Hermas wrote the Shepherd very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair of the church of the city of Rome. And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets, whose number is complete, or among the Apostles, for it is after [their] time. But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinous or Valentinus or Miltiades, who also composed a new book of psalms for Marcion, together with Basilides, the Asian founder of the Cataphrygians...⁹⁰
[End of text is missing.]

Appendix 10-4: Excerpt from Lucian of Samosata's (c. 120/125 - after 180 AD) The Passing of Peregrinus (c.165 AD)

Peregrinus Proteus (c.95-165 AD) was a famous philosopher of the Cynic school. At one point in his life he had professed Christianity, but then left it and turned to Greek Cynic philosophy. Lucian of Samosata wrote a scathingly sarcastic biography of him around 165 AD in which he also mocks Christians and Christianity. It is not to be assumed Lucian's characterization of Christianity is completely accurate, but it does confirm some of the details of the New Testament records and early church history.

11. "It was then that he [Peregrinus Proteus] learned the wondrous lore of the Christians, by associating with their priests and scribes in Palestine. And—how else could it be?—in a trice he made them all look like children, for he was prophet, cult-leader, head of the synagogue, and everything, all by himself. He interpreted and explained some of their books and even composed many, and they revered him as a god, made use of him as a lawgiver, and set him down as a protector, next after that other, to be sure, whom they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world.

12. "Then at length [Peregrinus] Proteus was apprehended for this and thrown into prison, which itself gave him no little reputation as an asset for his future career and the charlatanism and notoriety-seeking that he was enamoured of. Well, when he had been imprisoned, the Christians, regarding the incident as a calamity, left nothing undone in the effort to rescue him. Then, as this was impossible, every other form of attention was shown him, not in any casual way but with assiduity, and from the very break of day aged widows and orphan children could be seen waiting near the prison, while their officials even slept inside with him after bribing the guards. Then elaborate meals were brought in, and sacred books of theirs were read aloud, and excellent Peregrinus—for he still went by that name—was called by them 'the new Socrates.'

13. "Indeed, people came even from the cities in Asia, sent by the Christians at their common expense, to succour and defend and encourage the hero. They show incredible speed whenever any such public action is taken; for in no time they lavish their all. So it was then in the case of Peregrinus; much money came to him from them by reason of his imprisonment, and he procured not a little revenue from it. The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody; most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once, for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws. Therefore they despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property, receiving such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence. So if any charlatan and trickster, able to profit by occasions, comes among them, he quickly acquires sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk."⁹¹

1 Pictures taken from:

Josephus: PUB-DOM en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Josephusbust.jpg

Tacitus: PUB-DOM commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gaius_Cornelius_Tacitus.jpg

Nero: characterattack.wordpress.com/2011/05/02/emperor-nero/.jpg

Suetonius: spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ROMsuetonius.htm .jpg

Claudius: spqr360.com/images/article_images/claudius_roman_emperor.jpg

Pliny the Younger: truthnet.org%20Apologetics%20 .jpg

Trajan: PUB-DOM commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Traianus_Glyptothek_Munich_72.jpg

Rylands Papyrus: PUB-DOM en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:P52_recto.jpg; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:P52_verso.jpg

Chester Beatty II /University of Michigan Inv. 6238 (P46): PUB-DOM en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:P46.jpg

Papyrus Bodmer II (P66): PUB-DOM en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Papyrus66.jpg

Codex Vaticanus: PUB-DOM commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Codex_Vaticanus_end_or_Luke.jpg

Codex Sinaiticus: PUB-DOM commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Codex_Sinaiticus_Matthew_6,4-32.JPG

A reconstruction of the pool of Bethesda: welcometohosanna.com/JERUSALEM_TOUR/jerusalempics/bethesdamodel.jpg

West side of the southern pool of Bethesda: biblewalks.com%20Sites%20Bethesda.html#General_Bethesda5s.jpg

Inscription warning foreigners against entering temple: kingdomrecaptured.com/gentile_inscription.htm.jpg

Inscription with 'Pontius Pilate' : bible-history.com/archaeology/Israel/pilate-inscription.html

Paving stone with Erastus: kingdomrecaptured.com/erastus_inscription_files/image001.jpg

Greek inscription listing names of six politarchs: kingdomrecaptured.com/politarch_inscription.htm .jpg

One of the Sergius Paulus inscriptions: www.kingdomrecaptured.com/sergius_paulus_inscription.htm

Part of the inscription found in Delphi: www.kingdomrecaptured.com/gallio_inscription.htm

² Van Voorst, Robert E. Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence. William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2000. Pg. 6-9.

³ Note 1, pg. 14.

⁴ Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, Chapter 5, Section 2 (= Book 18:116-119). Translation from: livius.org/jo-jz/josephus/fj02.html

⁵ See, for example, the assessment at www.livius.org/jo-jz/josephus/fj02.html. The author clearly does not believe the Bible is inerrant and inspired.

⁶ Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews, Book 20, Chapter 9, Section 1 (= Book 20:200-201). Translation from Note 1, page 83.

⁷ Note 1, pg. 83, footnote 26.

⁸ The date is established by the names of the Roman rulers in Palestine at the time. See, for example, Unger, Merrill F., R.K. Harrison, Howard F. Vos and Cyril J. Barber. The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, Revised and updated edition. Moody Press, 1988. Pg. 405, 423-424, 975.

⁹ See note 1, pg. 83-84.

¹⁰ Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, Chapter 3, Section 3 (= Book 18:63-64). Translation composite. Brackets and italics added.

¹¹ Meier, John P. A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume I. (New York, 1991) Pg.62; 80-83. Quoted in en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephus_on_Jesus

¹² Tacitus. Annals. 15:44. Loeb Classical Library edition accessed from: penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Tacitus/Annals/15B*.html. 'Christus' modified to 'Christ.'

¹³ For a thorough discussion of the passage and its authenticity, including the spelling of 'Christ' and 'Christians,' see Note 1, pg. 39-53.

¹⁴ Lucian of Samosata. The Passing of Peregrinus. Chapters 11, 13. Translation by A.M. Harmon in the Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1936. Available online at: tertullian.org/rpearse/lucian/peregrinus.htm

¹⁵ Note 1, pg.15.

¹⁶ tertullian.org/rpearse/tacitus/#4

¹⁷ Suetonius. Live of the Caesars. Book 6 (Nero), 16:2. Rolfe's translation in the Loeb classical library. Available online at fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/suet-nero-rolfe.asp

¹⁸ Note 17, Book 6 (Nero), 19:3.

¹⁹ Suetonius. Live of the Caesars. Book 5 (Claudius), 25:4. Translation from Note 1, pg.30.

²⁰ See the extended discussion of this issue in Note 1, pg.31-37.

²¹ Pliny the Younger. Letters. Book 10, Letter 96. 1915 Loeb Library translation. Available online at: vroma.org/~hwalker/Pliny/Pliny10-096-E.html

²² Note 1, pg.70.

²³ Note 1, pg.70.

²⁴ Translation from Note 1, pg.112.

²⁵ Translation from Note 1, pg.114.

²⁶ Note 1, pg.107, 114, 117.

²⁷ Blomberg, Craig L. The Historical Reliability of the Gospels. 2nd Edition. InterVarsity Press, 2007. Pg.253

²⁸ Aland, Kurt et al., Eds. The Greek New Testament, 3rd Edition (corrected). United Bible Societies, 1983. Pg.xiii-xix.

²⁹ Cited in: McDowell, Josh D. The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999. Pg.38.

³⁰ Bruce, F.F. The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable? InterVarsity Press, 1964. Pg. 16-17. Reissued by: Wilder Publications, LLC, 2009.

³¹ Boter, Gerard. The textual tradition of Plato's Republic E.J. Brill, 1989.

³² en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ab_Urbe_Condita

³³ Parkes, Malcolm Beckwith. Pause and effect: an introduction to the history of punctuation in the West. University of California, 1993.

³⁴ Pearse, R. tertullian.org/rpearse/pliny/pliny_mss.htm

³⁵ Pearse, R. tertullian.org/rpearse/tacitus/

³⁶ Aland, Kurt and Barbara Aland. The Text of The New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism, 2nd Edition. Translated by Erroll F. Rhodes. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995. Pg.81.

Cited in: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_manuscript

³⁷ Komoszewski, J. Ed, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel Wallace. Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Mislead Popular Culture. Kregel, 2006.

³⁸ 定州汉墓竹简《论语》 gj.zdic.net/archive.php?aid-2449.html. [In English, consult: Xinhua News Agency May 25, 1999.

"Oldest Edition of Confucian Classic Discovered." www.crystalinks.com/china2.html]

³⁹ Note 38.

⁴⁰ For an online discussion of these issues, see: Daniel B. Wallace, Daniel B. The Book of Bart. Online at: bible.org/article/gospel-according-bart

- ⁴¹ For an extended discussion of these issues, see: Komoszewski, J. Ed, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel Wallace. Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Mislead Popular Culture. Kregel, 2006.
- ⁴² Strobel, Lee. The Case for the Real Jesus. Zondervan, 2007. Pg.86.
- ⁴³ Note 27, pg.333
- ⁴⁴ Note 28.
- ⁴⁵ Note 28, pg.320-415
- ⁴⁶ Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews. 15:11:5 (15:417).
- ⁴⁷ Note 30, pg.66.
- ⁴⁸ Vos, Howard F. Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999. Pg394.
- ⁴⁹ Free, Joseph R. and Howard F. Vos. Archaeology and Bible History, Revised Edition. Zondervan Publishing House, 1992. Pg.278.
- ⁵⁰ Barker, Kenneth L., General Editor. The NIV Study Bible, 10th Anniversary Edition. Zondervan Publishing House, 1995. Commentary at Romans 16:23.
- ⁵¹ Note 30 Pg.67.
- ⁵² Glueck, Nelson. Rivers in the Desert: History of the Negev. Farrar, Straus, and Cadahy, 1959; as quoted in Note 29
- ⁵³ See Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews, Book 15, Chapter 4, Section 1 (= Book 15:88-95) and Wars of the Jews, Book 1, Chapter 13, Section 1 (= Book 1:248-249).
- ⁵⁴ Unger, Merrill F., R.K. Harrison, Howard F. Vos and Cyril J. Barber. The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, Revised and updated edition. Moody Press, 1988. Pg. 790.
- ⁵⁵ Note 30, pg.62.
- ⁵⁶ Note 49, pg. 270-271.
- ⁵⁷ Note 49, pg.274; Note 30, pg.60; Note 50, commentary at Acts 17:6.
- ⁵⁸ Note 49, pg.272-273; Note 30, pg.60.
- ⁵⁹ Note 49, pg.272.
- ⁶⁰ For the time of Paul's visit to Cyprus, see Note 65, pg.394 and Note 50, timeline at Acts 10:3.
- ⁶¹ Note 48, pg.495; Note 49 pg.268-269; www.biblehistory.net/Sergius_Paulus.pdf;
www.kingdomrecaptured.com/sergius_paulus_inscription.htm
- ⁶² Note 49 pg.278; Note 65, pg.391-393
- ⁶³ Note 50, timeline at Acts 10:3; Note 65, pg.391-402.
- ⁶⁴ For a summary of the problem and the proposed solutions, see Note 30, pg.61-62; Note 49, pg.242-243; Note 65, pg.302-306.
- ⁶⁵ Finegan, Jack. Handbook of Biblical Chronology, Revised Edition, Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, pg.305.
- ⁶⁶ Cited in Note 29, pg.62.
- ⁶⁷ Tenney, Merrill C. Revised by Walter M. Dunnnett. New Testament Survey, Revised Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985. Pg.405, 410.
- ⁶⁸ Bruce, F. F. The Canon of Scripture. IVP Academic, 1988. Pg.164.
- ⁶⁹ Polycarp. To the Philippians 21:1. Quoted in Note 68, pg.122
- ⁷⁰ Clement of Rome. The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians. Chapter 47.
- ⁷¹ Note 67, Pg.405-406, 430-431
- ⁷² For discussion, see Note 1, pg.189 and Note 27 pg.264 footnote 66.
- ⁷³ Hurtado, Larry W. The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts. Eerdmans, 2006. Pg.228
- ⁷⁴ See New Testament scholar Dr. Craig A. Evans's comments quoted in Strobel, Lee. The Case for the Real Jesus. Zondervan, 2007. Pg.38-39.
- ⁷⁵ Turner, Ryan. Does the Gospel of Thomas belong in the New Testament? online: www.carm.org/gospel-of-thomas
- ⁷⁶ All Gospel of Thomas translations from Note 1, pg.189-201.
- ⁷⁷ Craig Evans, cited in Note 75.
- ⁷⁸ Irenaeus, Against Heresies Book 1, Chapter 31, Verse 1.
- ⁷⁹ Byers, Gary. "After the Hype: The Significance of the Gospel of Judas." *ABR Electronic Newsletter* May 2006. Online: biblearchaeology.org/post/2006/06/14/After-the-Hype-The-Significance-of-the-Gospel-of-Judas.aspx
- ⁸⁰ DeConick, April D. "What the Gospel of Judas really says." *New York Times*, Sunday, December 2, 2007. ny-times.com/2007/12/02/opinion/02iht-ededeconick.1.8558749.html
- ⁸¹ Irenaeus. Against Heresies Book 1 Chapter 31 Section 3.
- ⁸² See:
Witmer, David. "Fact and Fiction: Checking the Da Vinci Code History" www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2006/03/03/Fact-and-FictionChecking-the-Da-Vinci-Code-History.aspx
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www.thetruthaboutdavincci.com
- ⁸³ Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History 3:39:15.
- ⁸⁴ Julius Africanus. History of the World. 18:1; preserved in a quotation by Byzantine historian Georgius Syncellus in his Chronicle (c.800 AD). Translation cento, including Note 30 Pg.79.
- ⁸⁵ See Note 1 pg.20-23 for a thorough discussion of the letter of Mara Bar-Serapion.
- ⁸⁶ Mara Bar-Serapion. Translation cento, including Note 30 pg.79-80 and Note 1 pg.54.
- ⁸⁷ See Note 1 pg.53-57 for a thorough discussion of the letter of Mara Bar-Serapion.
- ⁸⁸ Pliny the Younger. Letters. Book 10, Letter 96. 1915 Loeb Library translation. Available online at: vro-ma.org/~hwalker/Pliny/Pliny10-096-E.html
- ⁸⁹ Pliny the Younger. Letters. Book 10, Letter 97. 1915 Loeb Library translation. Available online at: vro-ma.org/~hwalker/Pliny/Pliny10-097-E.html
- ⁹⁰ From www.bible-researcher.com/muratorian.html .
- ⁹¹ Note 14.