

Is The New Testament Reliable?

What Can We Really Know About Jesus Christ From History?

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Some have attempted to argue that almost nothing can be known about Jesus of Nazareth outside of the Bible. As this paper will demonstrate, this is historically inaccurate on many counts. And in addition, this type of argument rests on the faulty assumption that the Bible, or the New Testament more precisely, is a single book which can and should be treated as inadmissible evidence. While it is true that Christians claim the New Testament to be inspired and infallible, at the same time the texts it contains are also real ancient historical documents that have to be explained on historical grounds. In fact, The New Testament is a collection of 27 separate texts written by 8 or 9 different authors (depending on who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews). So, it's a legitimate question to ask whether each of these documents was written early or late, appears to be fictitious or real, etc. And it's important to ask questions about these various ancient texts purely for purposes of historical investigation. While the type of person who says "The Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it!" may himself be a lifelong believer, his faith will probably be of little value to those who wish to ground their belief in the established facts of the real world.

Interestingly enough, grounding faith in the real world is in fact what one finds in the New Testament accounts. For example, Luke, in his attempt to give Theophilus "certainty" about the events in the life of Christ does not encourage an experiential "leap of faith," but rather says that his report can be safely relied upon because he went directly to the eyewitnesses in order to obtain a trustworthy account (Luke 1:1-4). So if this way of reasoning was not irreligious for Luke, it will not be irreligious for us. Thus, in order to establish the claim that Jesus Christ actually lived, performed miracles, died, and rose again from the dead, this paper will interact with the most important available data, including the individual texts that make up the New Testament as well as outside historical information. For the simple fact remains that each of these writings are a part of the world in which we live, and therefore some account must be given of their origin, whether one believes in the inspiration of the Bible or not.

500 BC and earlier: Various Old Testament prophecies show that the Jewish messiah and redeemer was to be God himself. Thus the Christian claims about Jesus are consistent with Jewish messianic expectations:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6).

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from everlasting (Mic 5:2).

See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty (Mal 3:1).

Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the LORD (Zech 2:10).

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son...On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity (Zech 12:10 - 13:1).

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities...All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all...Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities (Is. 53: 4-11).

30 AD: Death of Christ. Archaeology has unearthed an inscription showing that Pontius Pilate was indeed the governor of Judea at this time, as well as the tomb of Caiaphas, proving that he was in fact the high priest of the period. More importantly, the Babylonian Talmud records that there was a trouble maker named "Yeshu Hannozi" (Hebrew for Jesus the Nazarene): "He shall be stoned because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostacy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf..." (compare this with John 11:57). This same section of the Talmud also records what later became of this Yeshu:

On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is...to be stoned because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostacy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf. But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was

hanged on the eve of the Passover — Ulla retorted: 'Do you suppose that he was one for whom a defence could be made? Was he not a Mesith [i.e., enticer, or heretic].
Sanhedrin 43a

This is very helpful "hostile witness" material, for it is evidence that Jesus was in fact a miracle worker. Here the Jews do not dispute the miraculous, but merely claim that Yeshu was using "the dark side of the force," etc. This also confirms the historicity of Mk 3:22-30, Matt 12:24, Luke 11:15 and other texts which show that the Jewish religious leaders accused Jesus of working miracles by means of demonic / Satanic power.

The Jewish historian Josephus also wrote about the person of Jesus Christ, but the charge has often been made that the original text has been altered. This should be readily admitted for Origen writing in early part of the third century reported that Josephus did not believe in "Jesus as the Christ," and remained Jewish, yet the standard text we have today reports this Jewish historian saying that Jesus "was the messiah." In 1972, however, Jewish Professor Schlomo Pines discovered an Arabic manuscript with what he and many scholars believe to be the original unaltered text:

At this time there was a wise man called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. Many people among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive. Accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have reported wonders. And the tribe of the Christians, so named after him has not disappeared to this day (Ant. 18.3.3).

Furthermore in this same work, Josephus makes another reference to Jesus when he records the stoning of James, the brother of Jesus which occurred in 62 A.D (Ant. 20.9.1). Here Jesus is not referred to as "the Christ," but rather "Jesus, who was called Christ," lending even more support to the manuscript copy discovered by Professor Pines. Both these references to Jesus Christ are found in *The Antiquities of the Jews*, written by Josephus somewhere between 93-95 AD.

30-34 AD: Philip the tetrarch commissioned the rebuilding of the town of Bethsaida. When it was completed, the name of the town was changed to Julias in honor of Tiberius Caesar's mother (Josephus: Ant. 18.2.1; War, 2.9.1). Josephus, who wrote from 73-95 AD, refers to the town "Julias" 16 times throughout his writings, but only refers to the town's older name "Bethsaida" once (in his account of the name change). Interestingly, none of the gospel writers mention the town by the later name, but there are numerous references to the name Bethsaida (see Mt 11:21, Mk 6:45, 8:22, Lk 9:10, 10:13, Jn 1:44, 12:21). A similar thing happened to the town Caesarea Philippi, mentioned in Matt 16:13 and Mark 8:27. In 54-57 AD, King Agrippa rebuilt the city and renamed it Neronias in honor of Nero Caesar (Josephus: Ant. 20.9.1-4). In fact coins are still in existence today commemorating this

dedication. These name changes are significant because they indicate to us that the gospel writers were accurate with regard to the historical details of the names and places they described. It also suggests that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote their texts within a few decades of the events of the life of Christ. Why is this? Because the older place names are written without explanation, and this indicates that the older names are assumed to be known, or perhaps even still in use, both by the author and his readers. But this would not be the case after more than a few decades of a name change. A good example of this is what happens to the Sea of Galilee. In 20 AD Herod built a city on this lake and named it Tiberias, in honor of Tiberias Caesar (Ant. 18.2.3). As this town grew in prominence, the large body of water it sat on began to be referred as the "Sea of Tiberias" (see for example Josephus: War, 3.3.5). Notice for example how John writes of this in his Gospel, "Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias" (Jn. 6:1; see also Jn. 21:1) This is one of the reasons many argue that John is the latest of the four gospels, because he lists both names, implying that he wrote his gospel at a time in which some of his readers required an explanatory comment not included by the other earlier gospel writers. But it also implies that John's memory refers back to the time in which the lake was simply referred to as the Sea of Galilee, which indicates that he lived during the crucial eyewitness period.

49 AD: Edict of Claudius expelling the Jews from Rome. This event was recorded by Luke in Acts 18:2, and his account is confirmed by the Roman historian Suetonius who wrote that, "Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, [Claudius] expelled them from the city" (*Lives of the Caesars, Claudius*, chap. 25). This was apparently only temporary, as the Jews were allowed to return in 54AD, but most scholars are agreed that the Claudius in his edict confused Christ (Christus) for Chrestus, the latter being a common Latin name. As for the "continuous disturbances among the Jews," this matches up nicely with what Luke describes in numerous Jewish communities in response to the preaching of the Christian message: Acts 13:45-50, 14:1-19, 16:19-20, 17:5, 18:1-12, 19:8-9. It also is reminiscent of the very pre-conversion ministry of the Apostle Paul himself in persecuting the church even into foreign cities (Acts 26:11).

50-52 AD: Paul wrote his Thessalonian epistles, and the date of these two texts are not contested even by the most liberal historians. In these ancient letters, Paul records that Jesus was killed by his own countrymen (1Thes 1:14-15), yet was "raised from the dead" and will "deliver us from the wrath to come" (1Thes 1:10). Jesus is described as the son of God (1Thes 1:10) as well as "the Lord Jesus Christ" (1Thes 1:3, 5:9, 5:23) who will be "revealed from heaven with his mighty angels" (2Thes 1:7-10).

What's really significant, however, about Paul's discussion of the coming "day of the Lord" is the language he uses to describe this important event. He writes, "You yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1Thes. 5:2). This imagery of the day coming like a "thief in the night" was in fact first introduced by Jesus

as recorded in Matt 24:42-44 and Luke 12:37-40. Additionally, Paul writes that "there will be peace and security, then sudden destruction will come" (1Thes 5:3), which appears to be an echo of Matt. 24:37-39, Mark 13:35-37 and Luke 17:26-31, and Paul warns the Thessalonians to be "sober," to remain "awake," and describes the sudden coming of Jesus as "labor pains" on a pregnant woman, all of which appear in the warnings Jesus as recorded in the gospel accounts (stay "awake": Matt. 24:42, Mark 13:33-37, Luke 12:37-38 and 21:36; be "sober": Matt 24:49, Luke 12:45 and 21:34; "labor pains": Matt 24:8, Mk 13:8; compare also the "times and seasons" of 1Thes 5:1 with Acts 1:7). The interesting thing about all this is that just some twenty years after the crucifixion, Paul is found to be drawing upon Jesus' imagery of the day of the Lord as recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, and not by way of introduction but reminder. For he writes that the Thessalonians are "fully aware" of these things, which implies that they had already been introduced to the teachings of Jesus on these matters. And for a community of believers in Thessalonica to be "fully aware" of these matters by the early 50's requires this community to have been introduced to these teachings for quite sometime before this, pushing the writing of one or more of these gospel accounts sometime into the 40's or earlier by simple force of necessity.

55-56 AD: Paul wrote his letters to the Corinthian churches. As above, the date of these texts are not disputed, and in them we find eleven references to the "Lord Jesus Christ" (1Cor 1:2, 1:3, 1:7, 1:8, 1:10, 6:11, 8:6, 15:57; 2Cor 1:2, 1:3, 8:9, 13:14) as well as the phrase, "Jesus Christ our Lord" (1Cor 1:9). And at the close of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "Maranatha. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you" (1Cor 16:22-23). This word "maranatha" is not Greek but Aramaic, and is translated "Come O Lord." So a good question to ask is why Paul would include this Aramaic word to the Greek speaking Corinthians? (see for example a Greek version of this phrase in Rev. 22:20). Most scholars have concluded that this unexplained word was a liturgical device used in the earliest worshipping communities founded by the Aramaic speaking disciples. In other words, it was used so often that by the time of Paul's writing in the mid fifties, it simply did not need to be explained or translated (much like the Hebrew word Halleluia, or Amen). But all this implies that the earliest Christian disciples, and the communities they established in the decades preceding the writing of this letter, began from the very beginning worshipping Jesus as "Lord" and anticipated his second coming.

Notice also what Paul writes in concerning the claim of Jesus' resurrection from the dead:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ...And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised (1Cor 15:3-15)

Again, this text was written just over twenty years after the crucifixion of Jesus, and its appeal is to eyewitness testimony and fulfilled prophecy. Notice too that Paul mentions five hundred "brothers" who saw the risen Christ at one time. This is most likely an example of patriarchal numeration, a method which exclusively counted adult males (i.e. heads of households), rather than each and every person present. For example, in the case of the feeding of the five thousand, Matthew's gospel tells us that "those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children" (Matt 14:21), yet the event is summarized simply as "five thousand" in most passages (Matt 16:9, Mark 8:19). So too, Paul mentions only male witnesses (though in reality women were the first eyewitnesses; Lk 24:22), and records a sighting of "five hundred *brothers*." While it is possible that this was a men's only event, the most likely explanation is that this was simply another example of the common practice of counting male heads representatively, and that the crowd, if women and children were to be factored in, could conceivably have exceeded a thousand eyewitnesses at this single event. And most of these individuals though twenty some years had past were still alive at the time of Paul's writing.

57-58 AD: Paul wrote his letters to the Roman, Philippian, Galatian, and Colossian churches. Again, historians of every stripe are in agreement concerning the dates of these ancient writings. And in his Epistle to the Romans Paul begins as follows:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...(Rom 1:1-4).

Notice in this text that Paul declares that Jesus is fully human ("descended from David"), as well as fully divine ("the son of God; Jesus our Lord"). It would be one thing for a polytheist to assert that a fellow countryman was Zeus incarnate (see for example Acts 14:12-13). But Paul was a strict monotheist of the party of the Pharisees and student of the famous Gamaliel. Yet, here he is arguing in this text that a fellow Rabbi, crucified some twenty-five years hence, was God incarnate. What can account for the change in Paul's religious outlook? This persuasive argument is best developed by J. Gresham Machen in his classic book *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (1921), which is still in print, and available on the internet.

In his Epistle to the Philippians, Paul makes a striking comment about the nature of Jesus:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in

human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:5-11).

In this text, written in the mid fifties, Paul argues that Jesus Christ was in fact equal with God. In fact, in the latter part of this text Paul quotes from Is. 45 which reads "I am God, and there is no other...To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance." (Is 45: 22-23). Yet Paul applies this Old Testament Scripture to the person of Jesus. Also, some scholars do not believe that the quotation from Philipians chapter 2 is original with Paul, but is actually a text of an early Christian hymn which Paul quotes from memory. If this thesis is correct it is further evidence that Jesus was viewed as divine by his followers from the very beginning. In fact, there is outside evidence that this sort of thing continued into the next generation, for some sixty years later, Pliny the Younger complained in a letter to Emperor Trajan that the Christians of his region were found singing "hymns to Christ as if to a god" (the full text of this citation is presented later in this document).

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul warns the early Christians saying:

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ (Col. 2: 8-17).

Here Paul not only claims that Jesus is divine, but that by his death, burial and resurrection, the believer's relationship to the Mosaic law has been radically altered. Notice for example that circumcision, religious festivals, dietary laws and Sabbath days are all said to be fulfilled in Christ. This is a radical new teaching, for according to the Mosaic code, one could be put to death if found doing work on the Sabbath (Ex. 31:15). Yet Paul here is claiming that something of monumental importance has happened, making these laws of no effect (see also the argument put forth in Heb 8:13). And if this event was not the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, what then could explain Paul's radical change in thinking

concerning the discontinuity of the Mosaic law? Remember, these were not viewed simply as the commands of Moses, but were believed to be the very words of God (Ex. 20:1). But in his letter to the Galatians (58 AD) Paul writes that "the law was our guardian until Christ came...But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian" (Gal 3:24-25). No one in the history of Judaism had ever claimed such thing, and as we would expect, this caused no small controversy (see Acts 21:17-36). So what was the basis for Paul's radical new outlook? This is one of the major problems with all naturalistic explanations concerning Jesus' life and ministry. For if Jesus was merely a gifted teacher who for some reason got himself crucified, what in turn explains the beliefs and actions of Paul, or all the other Apostles for that matter? Something must have motivated them to cause the controversies, to endure the beatings, scourgings, and ultimately the cruel deaths that most of them had to endure. What was the origin of their new found faith and courage? If Jesus did not perform any miracles during his lifetime and did not rise from the dead after his crucifixion, then who made up these false reports about him? When did they do this, and why would there be multiple accounts of Jesus' work, each told from differing perspectives and featuring various apparent contradictions? And why would the originators of these fabrications suffer persecution, torture and martyrdom for something they knew that they themselves made up?

Finally, one significant consideration in evaluating the writings of Paul is to notice the absence of any serious debate concerning the divine nature of Jesus. There are debates about the continuity of the laws of Moses (Acts 15:5-29, Acts 21:21, Gal 5:1-6, Eph 2:14-16, Col 2:11-17, Titus 1:10-11), the timing of the return of Christ and the general resurrection (2Thes 2:1-8, 2Tim 2:17-18), and a host of ethical and practical considerations (1Cor 5:1-2, 1Cor 8:1-13, 2Cor 9:1-12, Col 2:20-23, 2Thes 3:11-12), but there is simply no controversy concerning the belief in Jesus' divinity among the earliest writings of the first Christians, a community that was essentially a sect of monotheistic Judaism. What can account for this strange yet undeniable historical fact?

48-62 AD: The Epistle of James was written. How do we know? As mentioned previously, Josephus recorded the fact that James was martyred in 62 AD (requiring his Epistle to have been written beforehand). But there are also good arguments that this Epistle was written well before his death (see for example John A.T. Robinson's *Redating the New Testament*). In this letter James refers to himself as "a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). Later he refers to Jesus as the "Lord of Glory" (2:1). It's also interesting to note the literary relationship that is evident between James' Epistle and the Sermon on the Mount as recorded by Matthew. Compare for example Matt 5:33-37 with James 5:12:

I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. (Matt. 5:33-37)

But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. (James. 5:12)

Numerous other parallels can also be discovered upon close inspection (compare Matt 5:12 with James 1:2; Matt 7:7 with James 1:5; Matt 7:13 with James 1:13; Matt 5:22 with James 1:20; Matt 7:24 with James 1:22; Matt 6:15 with James 2:13; Matt 5:16 with James 2:18; Matt 7:16 with James 3:11-12; Matt 5:9 with James 3:18; Matt 5:4 with James 4:9; Matt 6:19 with James 5:2). Now, many scholars argue that this Epistle was written around 48 AD, and I agree with this assessment. But even if it was written just before James' death in 62 AD, it still indicates that Matthew's gospel, or at the very least, the memorized sayings of Jesus which Matthew also recorded, were circulating within the crucial eyewitness period.

55-62 AD: Gospel of Luke had been written by this time (and possibly significantly earlier). How do we know? Luke was the author of both the Gospel of Luke and The Acts of the Apostles, and the former text was composed first (Acts 1:1). The book of Acts is an early church history book, which has some surprising omissions. For example, it does not mention a) the Destruction of Jerusalem (70AD), b) the death of Peter or Paul (67-68AD), or c) the death of James which even Josephus records as occurring approximately 62 AD. Here is Josephus' full account of James' martyrdom:

Caesar, upon hearing the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judea, as procurator. But the king deprived Joseph of the high priesthood, and bestowed the succession to that dignity on the son of Ananus, who was also himself called Ananus. ...This younger Ananus...was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews... he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned... (Ant. 20.9.1).

Yet no mention of James' death is recorded by Luke, and in fact, the book of Acts ends with Paul in house arrest in Rome. No Trial? No martyrdom? Clearly these would be important events for Luke to record. Now, even if Luke wrote the book Acts just before Paul's martyrdom in 67-68, and failed to mention the death of James because he was not in Jerusalem at the time, this would still indicate that the text of Luke's *Gospel* was written in the mid sixties or earlier, a time in which he would have had access to many of the eyewitnesses who were still living, just as he in fact claims in his opening remarks.

But in fact, there is strong evidence that the Gospel of Luke was written much earlier than the mid to late sixties. For in 55 AD Paul wrote his First Letter to the Corinthians, and this letter contains a quote from Luke's Gospel. The quote is of Jesus at the Last Supper, and is

found in 1 Cor 11:24-25 which reads: "...and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" The wording is nearly identical to Luke 22:19-20, which includes the line "Do this in remembrance of me," a line not mentioned in any other gospel account. This give us a very strong indication that Luke's account of the life of Christ was written by at least 55 AD, if not earlier. Similarly, another quote from Luke's Gospel can be found in Paul's First Epistle to Timothy (1Tim. 5:18), and in this text Paul even goes so far as to call the quotation "Scripture." He most likely wrote this letter to Timothy in 62 AD on his fourth missionary journey, thus requiring the source of the quote from Luke to have been written well before that time, especially given the fact that this text had by the time of his writing been accepted on an equal plane with the Old Testament writings. And as previously mentioned, it is possible that Luke is one of the sources of Paul's discussion of the day of Lord coming as a "thief in the night" recorded in 1Thes 5:1-8, written in the early 50's. So again, we have strong evidence that Luke's Gospel was written well within the crucial eyewitness period.

It is also interesting to note that Luke addressed his gospel to the "most excellent Theophilus." The prefix, "most excellent" implies that this gospel was being dedicated to a person in a position of authority or nobility. In fact Josephus records that a high priest by the name of Theophilus served in Jerusalem from 37 to 41 AD (Ant. 19.6.2). We also know of this Theophilus from archeology, for in the mid 1980's an ossuary was discovered that bore the name of "Yehohanah (Joanna) granddaughter of Theophilus the high priest" (see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 2006, p. 450). The name "Joanna" is also significant, for it is a name that appears exclusively in Luke's gospel (8:3 and 24:10). These texts mention that Joanna was among one of the original followers of Jesus, and that she in fact became one of the eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Christ (for background info about Joanna, see Ben Witherington's *What Have They Done With Jesus?*, 2006). So if we are dealing with the correct family, Luke's account may have been an attempt to furnish Theophilus the high priest (or former high priest...depending upon the date of writing) with a full account of the events in the life of Jesus, rather letting him rely merely upon the report that he may have personally received from his own granddaughter. It also makes sense for Luke to write a direct appeal to one or more of the high priests, given what he mentions in Acts 6:7, namely that "a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." These considerations lend credibility to the fact that Luke's gospel was written by someone who lived during the crucial eyewitness period. And as Luke 1:1 indicates, other gospels were already circulating before Luke's account was written (lending credibility to the idea that Matthew and Mark may have been written even earlier).

Finally, notice the eyewitness character of Luke's own report:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been

accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).

See also this same emphasis on the crucial nature of eyewitness testimony in Acts 2:32, 3:15, 10:36-43, 26:25-26, 1Cor 15:1-9, 2Pet. 1:16, 1John 1:1-4, Heb 2:3). There are striking similarities between Luke's opening remarks and the remarks of the Greek historian Thucydides, who is considered the father of modern history, primarily because he "researched" his findings (gk: *historia* = researches, or learning by inquiry) rather than simply passing on unchecked tales. Thucydides writes, "So little pains do the vulgar take in the investigation of truth, accepting readily the first story that comes to hand" (History of the Peloponnesian War, 1.20.1-3). Thucydides however, says that his report can be trusted and safely relied upon based on the "proofs" he provides in his research. The text of Luke's gospel has this same approach.

Now, simply arguing that the writings of Luke or other gospels are early does not necessarily indicate that all the internal claims of these documents are true. If we, like Theophilus, wish to have "certainty" for ourselves concerning these matters, we should be willing to entertain the following questions: 1) Does the document fit the first-century Jewish context (descriptions, names, places, customs, rulers, dates, etc.). 2) Are there multiple witnesses, and if so, do their stories sound identical (rehearsed) or varied (authentic)? 3) Is the report contradicted by other records or archaeological finds? 4) Do the reporters have other possible motives for telling such a tale? 5) Could the report be better explained as a fabrication? Invite these kinds of questions, because the New Testament documents can withstand them. A great question to ask, for example, is why if this is a fabrication did the disciples say the women were the first to witness the resurrection, at a time in which the testimony of women were not permissible in most law courts throughout the ancient world. Notice for example the way the Jewish writer Celsus responds to Origen's claim of the resurrection of Christ, "Who beheld this?...A half-frantic woman" (Against Celcus, book 2, chap 59). Or consider even the Apostle Paul, who in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, cites only the male disciples in his extended list of eyewitnesses to the resurrection (1Cor 15:3-9; compare with Luke 24:22-23). So if the testimony of women is a stumbling block to belief, why would the Gospel writers fabricate a story with women as the first witnesses of the resurrection?

60-68 AD: Peter writes his two Epistles, referring to Jesus as the "Lord Jesus Christ (1Pet 1:3). This Jesus was the one whom the Old Testament prophets had written about (1Pet 1:10-12), was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is now seated at the right hand of God (1Pet 3:21-22). And on what does Peter base his claims? Does he recount a religious experience? Did he receive secret revelation? No. He claims to have been a firsthand eyewitness of the events in the life of Jesus:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain (2Pt. 1:16-18).

Additionally, Peter treats the words of Jesus as being on equal weight with the prophetic writings: "I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles..." (2Pet 3:1-2). In particular, he wrote to remind his readers of Jesus' teachings about the coming day of the Lord: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed" (2Pet 3:10). So, as mentioned in the case of the Apostle Paul, we have additional confirmation of the veracity of the gospel accounts (Matt 24:43, Luke 12:39) in which the coming of the day of the Lord is described by Jesus as a "thief in the night." And Peter's introductory remarks in 2Pet 3:2 make it clear that the information he passed along to his readers concerning the end, came directly from Jesus himself.

62-68 AD: Josephus mentions the martyrdom and fame of John the Baptist, confirming the historicity of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. His account, written in 95 AD, refers back to the period leading up to the Destruction of Jerusalem:

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism...Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to...the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death. Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure to him (Antiquities 18.5.2).

It's interesting that the NT account of John the Baptist matches up quite nicely here. But why would some of the Jews think their destruction was a judgement against John the Baptist? Why not Jesus Christ? Perhaps it is because many of not most Christians have already been purged from Jerusalem at this time and ejected from the synagogues, etc, for being part of the "minim" or heresy. John the Baptist, however only claimed to be prophet, not the son of God. In other words, Jesus was a polarizing figure. One either loved or hated him. And those who loved him early on were persecuted (Matt 10:34-37, Acts 26:11, Heb. 10:32-34). But with regard to John the Baptist, even up to the late sixties there was still a strong dose of popular affection for his memory as an important prophet. In light of this information, think about the following passages from John's Gospel:

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. ...vs. 15...(John bore witness about him, and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'")...vs. 19...And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said" (John 1:6-23; see also 1:24-36; 3:28-30; 5:33-37; 10:40-42).

Clearly, the best explanation for the inclusion of these numerous references to John the Baptist, is that John wrote his gospel at or near the height of this prophet's fame. But would this fame have continued 50 - 60 or more years after his death? Would his fame have continued beyond 70 AD? Most scholars today argue that John was written in the 90's (over 60 years after John the Baptist's death, when relatively few people were alive to even remember the man, and over 20 years after the destruction of Jerusalem. But this does not make sense. There are good reasons to believe that John is the latest of the four gospels. First, there is the fact that he alone refers not merely to the "Sea of Galilee," but also to its later name the "Sea of Tiberias." Second, there is a strange dialog at the end of John's gospel which alludes to Peter's death and John's remaining alive later (John 21:20-23). This was quite possibly written as an explanation of events already transpired. Nevertheless, there is still no reference to the destruction of Jerusalem. The best explanation, then, is that John was penned after the death of Peter (67-68) but before the autumn of 70. This also gives plenty of time for copies of John's gospel to circulate all the way to Egypt, and for one fragment of which to be discovered this past century (The John Rylands Papyrus), a fragment which is dated around 100 AD.

70 AD. The Destruction of Jerusalem. None of the 27 documents which together make up the New Testament mention the destruction of Jerusalem (except in the various prophecies of Jesus). Many with an anti-supernatural bias reject prophecy, and thus assume that the prophecies were written after the fact. But is this the best explanation of the data? Wouldn't the early Christians have seen the destruction of the Temple as a vindication of their position? Wouldn't the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, have mentioned something about this in relation to his discussion of the superiority of Christ's sacrifice to the repeated temple sacrifices? What we do in fact find in this epistle are comments to the effect that the Temple is still in operation, and that the priests are continuing to perform their daily service (Heb. 10:1-11). In fact, the author writes of new covenant contrasting it with the old saying, "what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13). This is hardly something one would write after the Jerusalem Temple had in fact disappeared from the scene.

Once again, the best book on this subject is John A.T. Robinson's *Redating the New Testament*. The book is hard to find, but worth its weight in gold. Robinson was not a conservative or fundamentalist by any stretch, but he came to conservative conclusions with regard to the dating of the New Testament documents simply by a forthright investigating the facts. In fact, in the Author Info appendix of her recent book *Christ the Lord*, Anne Rice discusses Robinson's book in her account of why she lost faith in the atheistic / skeptical explanation of Christian origins:

All these skeptics insisted that the Gospels were late documents, that the prophecies in them had been written after the fall of Jerusalem. But the more I read about the fall of Jerusalem, the more...I found it absolutely impossible that the Gospel writers could not have included the fall of the Temple in their work had they written it as critics insist ...Wouldn't the Christian writers have seen in the fall of Jerusalem some echo of the Babylonian conquest? Of course they would have...I am convinced that the key to understanding the Gospels is that they were written before all this ever happened. That's why they were preserved without question though they contradicted one another. Of course John A. T. Robinson made the case for an early date for the Gospels far better than I ever could. He made it brilliantly in 1975, and he took to task the liberal scholars for their assumptions then in *Redating the New Testament*, but what he said is as true now as it was when he wrote those words...(Christ The Lord: Out of Egypt, see pages 306-318).

Anne Rice also describes her frustration with the various "New Testament scholars" she had read as she began to seriously research the historical foundations of the Christian movement:

In sum, the whole case for the non-divine Jesus who stumbled into Jerusalem and somehow got crucified by nobody and had nothing to do with the founding of Christianity and would be horrified by it if he knew about it -- that whole picture which had floated in the liberal circles I frequented as an atheist for thirty years -- that case was not made. Not only was it not made, I discovered in this field some of the worst and most biased scholarship I'd ever read....And I had also sensed something else. Many of these scholars who apparently devoted their lives to New Testament scholarship, disliked Jesus Christ. Some pitied him as a hopeless failure. Others sneered at him, and some felt an outright contempt...I'd never come across this kind of emotion in any other field of research, at least not to this extent. It was puzzling. The people who go into Elizabethan studies don't set out to prove that Queen Elizabeth was a fool. They don't personally dislike her. They don't make snickering remarks about her, or spend their careers trying to pick apart her historical reputation...But there are NT scholars who detest and despise Jesus Christ...Now somewhere during my journey through all of this, I became disillusioned with the skeptics and with the flimsy evidence for their conclusions...Now the Gospels were becoming ever more coherent to me, the Gospels which appealed to me as elegant first-person witnesses, dictated to scribes no doubt, but definitely early, the Gospels produced before Jerusalem fell.

I personally had the opportunity to correspond with Mrs. Rice in preparation for a radio

interview, and in one of our exchanges, she boldly wrote that in her opinion, "New Testament studies, as a field, is a scandal. It's in crisis!" Over a half century ago, popular historian Will Durant in his book, *Caesar & Christ*, came to the very same conclusion when he observed:

In the enthusiasm of its discoveries the Higher Criticism has applied to the New Testament, tests of authenticity so severe that by them a hundred ancient worthies...would fade into legend. Despite the prejudices and theological preconceptions of the evangelists, they record many incidents that mere inventors would have concealed—the competition of the apostles for high places in the Kingdom, their flight after Jesus' arrest, Peter's denial, the failure of Christ to work miracles in Galilee, the references of some auditors to his possible insanity, his early uncertainty as to his mission, his confessions of ignorance as to the future, his moments of bitterness, his despairing cry on the cross; no one reading these scenes can doubt the reality of the figure behind them. That a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality...would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels. After two centuries of Higher Criticism the outlines of the life, character, and teaching of Christ, remain reasonably clear, and constitute the most fascinating feature in the history of Western man (*Caesar & Christ*, p. 557).

The simple fact of the matter is that a straightforward investigation into the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude (i.e. the authors responsible for the New Testament corpus), show beyond reasonable doubt that these texts were written within the eyewitness period, and show no signs of later copist additions or revisions. J. Gresham Machen once noted that "We know that the gospel story is true partly because of the early date of the documents in which it appears, the evidence as to their authorship, the internal evidence of their truth, the impossibility of explaining them as being based upon deception or upon myth" (*Christianity & Liberalism*, p. 72). That last part is a crucial component. All the quests for the "real" Jesus have failed miserably. All the attempts to explain the New Testament away on naturalistic grounds have major difficulties. Nothing but the resurrection of Jesus Christ can explain the documents that make up the New Testament as well as the other historical accounts about Jesus. Nothing but the resurrection can explain the incredible energy and enthusiasm that was a part of early Christian proclamation, especially in light of the fact of Jesus' crucifixion, and the shame that is attached with such a horrific death. Nothing else can explain why the disciples, who portray themselves with so many character faults in the pages of the NT, would suddenly find the courage of conviction to endure serious persucution and torture unto death simply in order to spread the message of the early Christian gospel. At the end of the day, doubt concerning the trustworthiness of the New Testament canon is rooted, not in problems with the evidence *per se*, but rather with the supernaturalism that these texts present. In other words, the problem lies with the unquestioning faith of those who assume that matter is all there is, and that miracles can never happen. This however, is its own kind fundamentalism.

68-100 AD: First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians. This text gives us numerous NT citations (Mt, Mk, Lk, Acts, Rom, 1Pet, Tit, Eph, Heb, 1Cor, James, 1Thes, etc.), and there are no references to any of the "gnostic gospels." In fact within a generation of the end of the apostolic age, every book of the NT is cited as authoritative by some church father. This epistle contains proof that the very early church believed in a) the divinity of Christ, b) the inspiration of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as well as the Apostolic writings c) the resurrection of Christ, and d) justification by faith alone.

The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ [has done so] from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand (chap. 42).

Take up the epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the Gospel first began to be preached? Truly, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he wrote to you concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos...(chap. 47).

And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (chap. 32).

105-107 AD: Epistles of Ignatius. The date of this writing is unsure, but in 107 Ignatius was martyred, so it cannot be later than that (though there is a minority opinion that he was killed in 116). Notice the early stage of the formation of the creed in this first paragraph:

Stop your ears, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was truly begotten of God and of the Virgin, but not after the same manner. For indeed God and man are not the same. He truly assumed a body; for "the Word was made flesh," and lived upon earth without sin. For says He, "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" He did in reality both eat and drink. He was crucified and died under Pontius Pilate. He really, and not merely in appearance, was crucified, and died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth...He descended, indeed, into Hades alone, but He arose accompanied by a multitude; and rent asunder that means of separation which had existed from the beginning of the world, and cast down its partition-wall. He also rose again in three days, the Father raising Him up; and after spending forty days with the apostles, He was received up to the Father, and "sat down at His right hand, expecting till His enemies are placed under His feet" (Ep. to the Trallians, chap 9).

I flee to the Gospel as to the flesh of Jesus Christ, and to the apostles as the presbytery of the Church. I do also love the prophets as those who announced Christ, and as being

partakers of the same Spirit with the apostles...The prophets and the apostles received from God, through Jesus Christ, one and the same Holy Spirit, who is good, and sovereign, and true, and the Author of [saving] knowledge. For there is one God of the Old and New Testament, "one Mediator between God and men" (Ep. to the Philadelphians, chap 5).

There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God...even Jesus Christ our Lord ...Give heed to the prophets, and above all, to the Gospel, in which the passion [of Christ] has been revealed to us, and the resurrection has been fully proved (Ep. to the Smyrnaeans, chap 7).

100-125 AD: John Rylands fragment of the gospel of John (which contains a number of verses from chapter 18, just as we know them today. Skeptical theologians tried to argue for centuries that John's Gospel was written late in the second century, and echoes of that view can still be heard in some anti-Christian circles today. The Rylands papyrus puts that case out of court. Many were initially convinced that text from 125, or even as late as 138 AD, but according to the respected scholar Philip Comfort in his book *Early Manuscripts & Modern Translations of the NT*, "recent discussions...tend to date it closer to 100." After the discovery of this famous Papyrus, Sir Frederick Kenyon wrote in his book *The Bible and Archeology* (1940):

This is at any rate objective evidence, not resting on theological prepossessions, and since it is accepted by all those who have had most experience in dating the gospel itself must on all grounds of probability be put back into the first century, in order to allow time for the work to get into circulation; and a date toward the end of that century is what Christian tradition has always assigned to it...The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established (p. 288).

110-112 AD: Pliny the Younger (Governor of Bythnia to Emperor Trajan).

I have taken this course about those who have been brought before me as Christians. I asked them whether they were Christians or not? If they confessed that they were Christians, I asked them again, and a third time, intermixing threatenings with the questions. If they persevered in their confession, I ordered them to be executed; for I did not doubt but, let their confession be of any sort whatsoever, this positiveness and inflexible obstinacy deserved to be punished...There have been some of this mad sect whom I took notice of in particular as Roman citizens, that...denied that they were Christians now, or ever had been. They called upon the gods, and supplicated to your image, which I caused to be brought to me for that purpose, with frankincense and wine; they also cursed Christ; none of which things, it is said, can any of those that are ready Christians be compelled to do; so I thought fit to let them go....Others of them that were named...said they were Christians, but presently

denied it again; that indeed they had been Christians, but had ceased to be so...All these worshipped your image, and the images of our gods; these also cursed Christ. However, they assured me that the main of their fault, or of their mistake was this: That they were wont, on a stated day, to meet together before it was light, and to sing a hymn to Christ, as to a god, alternately; and to oblige themselves by a sacrament [or oath], not to do anything that was ill: but that they would commit no theft, or pilfering, or adultery; that they would not break their promises...after which it was their custom to depart, and to meet again at a common but innocent meal...Hereupon I have put off any further examinations, and have recourse to you, for the affair seems to be well worth consultation, especially on account of the number of those that are in danger; for there are many of every age, of every rank, and of both sexes, who are now and hereafter likely to be called to account, and to be in danger; for this superstition is spread like a contagion, not only into cities and towns, but into country villages also, which yet there is reason to hope may be stopped and corrected.

115 AD: Tacitus, writes of the spread of Christianity in the Time of Nero:

Consequently, to get rid of the report [that he had started the fire in Rome], Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired (Annals, 15.44).

130 AD: Mathetes' Epistle to Diognetus. "Mathetes" simply means disciple, as this unknown writer claims to have been a "disciple of the apostles." Some have suggested Clement or Apollos (both mentioned in the NT) as the possible author. This epistle includes citations from the Gospel of John, Matthew, Revelation, and other NT texts.

Having been a disciple of the Apostles, I am become a teacher of the Gentiles... [Jesus] is He who, being from everlasting, is today called the Son; through whom the Church is enriched, and grace, widely spread...Then the fear of the law is chanted, and the grace of the prophets is known, and the faith of the gospels is established, and the tradition of the Apostles is preserved (chap 11).

He Himself took on Him the burden of our iniquities, He gave His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy One for transgressors, the blameless One for the wicked, the righteous One for the unrighteous, the incorruptible One for the corruptible, the immortal One for them that

are mortal. For what other thing was capable of covering our sins than His righteousness? By what other one was it possible that we, the wicked and ungodly, could be justified, than by the only Son of God? O sweet exchange! O unsearchable operation! O benefits surpassing all expectation! That the wickedness of many should be hid in a single righteous One, and that the righteousness of One should justify many transgressors! (chap. 9)

150 AD: Epistle of Polycarp to the Philipppians. Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John:

We are before the eyes of our Lord and God, and "we must all appear at the judgment-seat of Christ, and must every one give an account of himself." Let us then serve Him in fear, and with all reverence, even as He Himself has commanded us, and as the apostles who preached the Gospel unto us, and the prophets who proclaimed beforehand the coming of the Lord [have alike taught us]...Wherefore, forsaking the vanity of many, and their false doctrines, let us return to the word which has been handed down to us from the beginning... (chap. 6-7).

155 AD: Fragments from Papias, regarding The Gospels of Mark and Matthew:

Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him...of one thing he took especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements...Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could.

150-160 AD: Justin Martyr refers to the gospels frequently as "the memoirs of the Apostles, argues for the divinity of Christ, and explains what Christians regularly do on the Lord's Day. Also, in his correspondence with the Emperor about the Christian claims, rather than appealing to the Christian gospel documents, he appeals to the official record of the "Acts of Pontius Pilate" a document that is no longer in existence. Obviously, however, this would not have been a good argument if such a record never existed, or if Christian origins had been fabricated.

For [Christ] called one of His disciples-previously known by the name of Simon-Peter; since he recognised Him to be Christ the Son of God, by the revelation of His Father: and since we find it recorded in the memoirs of His apostles that He is the Son of God, and since we call Him the Son, we have understood that He proceeded before all creatures from the Father by His power and will. (Dial. Trypho, chap. 100).

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the

president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen (Ibid, chap 67).

As the prophet [fortold], they tormented Him, and set Him on the judgment-seat... "They pierced my hands and my feet" (Ps. 22), was used in reference to the nails of the cross which were fixed in His hands and feet. And after He was crucified they cast lots upon His vesture, and they that crucified Him parted it among them. And that these things did happen, you can ascertain from the Acts of Pontius Pilate (Apology of Justin to the Emperor Titus & Roman Senate, 35).

160-170 AD: Tatian the Assyrian edits his famous Diatessaron (through the four: one). Tatian did not like the distinctive nature of the four gospels, so he tried to iron out the differences by writing a single gospel from the four sources. Also due to his later gnosticism, he edited out references to the incarnation, and true humanity of Christ. Tatian's work proves that the four gospels, and only the four gospels were viewed as authoritative by the middle of the second century, even to someone who had become unorthodox.

180 AD: Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp, writes in his book *Against Heresies*:

We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith...Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord...did himself publish a Gospel...(Ad Her. 3.1.1).

180-217 AD: Clement of Alexandria writes concerning the four Gospels:

The Gospels containing the genealogies [Matthew & Luke] were written first and that the Gospel according to Mark was composed in the following circumstances: Peter having preached the word publicly at Rome, and by the Spirit proclaimed the Gospel, those who were present, who were numerous, entreated Mark, in as much as he had attended him from an early period, and remembered what had been said, to write down what had been spoken. On his composing the Gospel, he handed it to those who had made the request to him; which coming to Peter's knowledge, he neither hindered nor encouraged. But John, the last of all, seeing that what was corporeal was set forth in the Gospels, on the entreaty of his intimate friends, and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel (*Ante Nicene Fathers*, vol 2 p. 579).

200 AD: Turtullian's response to the Marcionite Heresy. Marcion was a Gnostic heretic who edited the Gospel of Luke (removing references the Old Testament that he found offensive because of their "Jewishness") and completely rejected Mark, Luke and John. He did allow a number of the Epistles of Paul into his canon, which was developed approx. 150 AD. The interesting thing about Marcion's canon is that he did not include the Gospel of Thomas, or the Gospel of Judas, or any of the Gnostic Gospels into his list, and the only real explanation for this fact is that such gospels were late and were not yet available to Marcion who would certainly have preferred those gospels to Luke. Here is Turtullian's response to some of Marcions objections:

From apostolic word descends the Church...The Gospel, four in number, one in its diffusion 'mid the Gentiles, this, by faith elect accepted...Who from the Father came, sole Carrier of tidings good; whose glory vast completes the early testimonies; by His work Showing how great the orb's Creator is: whose deeds, conjoined at the same time with words, those faithful ones, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, recorded unalloyed (not speaking words external), sanctioned by God's Spirit, 'neath so great a Master's eye! This paschal Lamb Is hung, a victim. on the tree (Five Books in Reply to Marcion, book 2, lines 55-80).

On the whole, then, if that is evidently more true which is earlier, if that is earlier which is from the very beginning, if that is from the beginning which has the apostles for its authors, then it will certainly be quite as evident, that that comes down from the apostles, which has been kept as a sacred deposit in the churches of the apostles. Let us see what milk the Corinthians drank from Paul; to what rule *of faith* the Galatians were brought for correction; what the Philippians, the Thessalonians, the Ephesians read *by it*; what utterance also the Romans give, so very near (to the apostles), to whom Peter and Paul conjointly bequeathed the gospel even sealed with their own blood. We have also *St. John's* foster churches...whereas Marcion's Gospel is not known to most people, and to none whatever is it known without being at the same time condemned. It too, of course, has its churches, but specially its own — as late as they are spurious; and should you want to know their original, you will more easily discover apostasy in it than apostolicity, with Marcion forsooth as their founder, or some one of Marcion's swarm...Such are the summary arguments which we use, when we take up arms against heretics for the faith of the gospel, maintaining both that order of periods, which rules that a late date is the mark of forgers, and that authority of churches which lends support to the tradition of the apostles; because truth must needs precede the forgery, and proceed straight from those by whom it has been handed on (Against Heresies 4.5).

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