

The
LIGHT *of*
TRUTH

Early Proof Texts of the Gospel Record

W. MICHAEL McCORMACK

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THE GOSPEL RECORD

What if we had no Bibles? Many people in the world don't. What do they do? How do they relate to God and each other? Those who hold to the idea of living within a civilization follow whoever "seems" to have the truth concerning how to live. Their religion is socialized. Even in the United States, most are not really dedicated to their religion. It is a social convention. True Christians are more than social. We are radicals,—radical lovers of people who want to spread the Good News. The Gospel record avails us much and encourages us more.

Genuine Christians believe that the Bible is God's revelation to man. In other words, the Bible is the only place where we can get accurate information about God, mankind's need for God and how provision for that need can be found. It offers guidance for daily life and directions on how to claim eternal life. One writer has commented that the Bible is where God has condensed his thoughts about his relationship with mankind into written form for our understanding and acceptance of him. It is not everything about God and not everything about mankind, but it is enough for us to understand that we can live together happily ever after. And, there is no ancient text with more archeological veracity than our Bible, as we shall see. The main point of the Gospels in particular, is not information, though there is a great deal of it. The principal point is application to our lives.

But first, I would like to give you a word from the Apostle Paul. We know that Paul had an enormous impact on the Gospel of Luke and personally dictated or wrote much of our New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His last New Testament letters were to Timothy who was pastoring a church. Even though Timothy had access to the Gospel, he had a tendency to be timid in the face of the older Jews. In his last letter to Timothy, Paul wanted to make sure that his protégé would not be timid but courageous. In 2nd Timothy 1:8, he says; "Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the Gospel by the power of God."

This verse tells us that Paul is not a prisoner of Rome, but of the Lord. This may seem strange, but it is said from a point of great faith that Paul knew he was captive because of his work for the Lord. And, that Timothy should expect suffering for the Gospel by the power of God, the Father. Just like Timothy, we are saved and called to a holy purpose. This, not because of our holy works, but for his own purposes. The aim of Paul's writing is to remind Timothy of God's love and justice, no matter what. Writing this, the Apostle helps us all to remember that Christianity begins with the conviction that God is a reality outside of ourselves. The Gospel message is that of our sovereign God, in Jesus, coming to search for us and save us. This was done in history. Jesus was a real person. Our realization of this worldview puts strength into our walk and our witness.

In another of his New Testament letters, Paul sums up God's plan for us. In the Book of Ephesians, he writes, "[God] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us

for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”

As we do our work for Christ to further his kingdom, we must never doubt that the Sovereign of the universe is for us. If we trust Jesus for our life, we are saved by him to eternal life. We must never doubt that all the evil that might befall us, even if it takes our life, is God’s loving wish in order to glorify him.

In our pluralistic, elitist, materially driven world, we can be distracted or discouraged as Christians. The great lessons and the life of Christ revealed in the Gospels will protect us from human philosophies and traditions. This helps us to become valiant, no matter the odds, for kingdom causes. We who believe in him are secure forever. Nothing can separate us from him. In the end, everyone serves to magnify the glory of our Savior and prove the faith we have in him.

Now, let’s turn to the specific history of the New Testament documents.

THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY PAPYROLOGISTS

There were many British and American Papyri hunters during the late 1800s and the early 1900s. We have time to only cover a few of the central characters who braved the elements and a hostile social climate in Egypt in order to find proof texts of our Christian faith. We start with Grenfell and Hunt. These two intrepid Brits found a treasure trove of biblical documents in a scriptorium dump deep in Egypt at a place called Oxyrhynchus. At the time, the place was in the middle of nowhere. The team was a well educated one. Grenfell was a scientist and Egyptologist who was widely respected in England. Hunt was a former British officer who had been stationed in Egypt and had become a Papyrologist, a collector and protector of ancient paper documents.



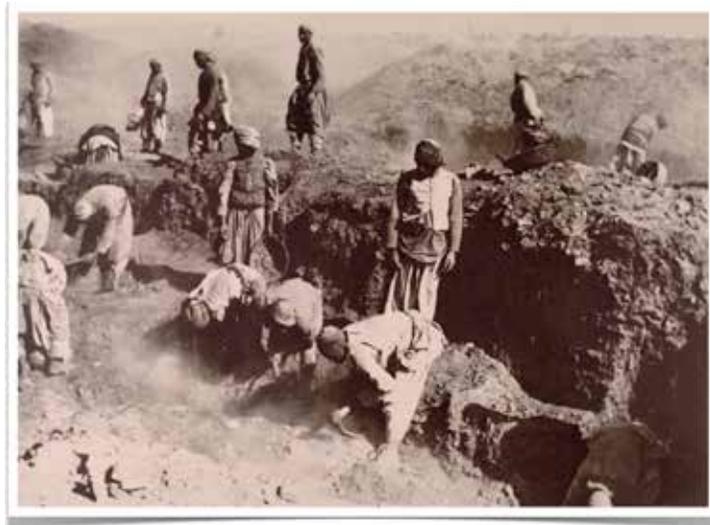
Bernard Pyne Grenfell
(1869-1926)
English Scientist and Egyptologist



Arthur Surridge Hunt
(1871-1934)
English Papyrologist

In the year of 1895, they travelled up the Nile from Alexandria, past Cairo and into the hinterlands of the Egyptian desert in search of a rumored scriptorium dump. This

sort of dump is the garbage heap where scripts of all sorts were copied as the originals got old and brittle. Papyrus documents had a short shelf life of about 15–20 years depending on how much they were used and the humidity in the air. Therefore, every 20 years or so, copyists were hired to make exact copies of important originals so that the messages were properly read. (The ink of those days became brittle on the page and would begin to “fleck-off” over time and the paper discolored.) These copyists were professionals who took great pains to be true to each page. Not all manuscripts were biblical. Civilization required all sorts of legal documents. Copies were made of wills, merchant transactions, military orders, divorces, —all sorts of agreements. Among them were certainly books of the Bible. When the copies had been successfully made for the client, the old copies were dumped into a pile outside the scriptorium. Over the centuries the sands of Egypt covered the old scripts until there was little evidence they had ever been placed there. However, 15 to 20 feet down into the dunes they lay conserved at almost the same state they were when discarded.

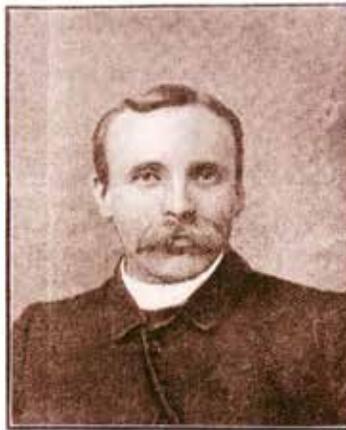


Grenfell and Hunt were after this treasure trove and they found one outside the little hamlet of Oxyrhynchus. They used their own money and some funds from Bible societies in Great Britain, to begin excavations in the dry climate and soon began to find papyri. To make a long story short, the yield was over 100,000 documents that were carefully packed and sent back to England. Many were of the earliest Bible books in existence. We will see these designated as P. (for Papyrus) Oxy (for Oxyrhynchus) plus the number that was given to the document in the order it was retrieved from the dump. An example would be P. Oxy 4449.

The Christian Church in England was ecstatic with the find! Why? Because there had been several decades of atheist propaganda based on the theologies of Hegel, Kant and Herder, the unholy trinity of German pagan scholars, who wrote and taught that the Bible was invented by the church in the 4th–8th centuries because there was no found evidence of its existence before these dates. In 1860, a Frenchman named Ernst Renan, published a book called *The Life of Jesus*, which proposed the theory that Jesus was mostly “the Christ of faith than the Jesus of history.” In other words, the historic

character called Jesus was a made-to-order Savior for the purposes of the Christian Church. It seemed right to readers that, since there were no writings dated before the fourth century, the church had to reach back and make Jesus into what they wanted in a Savior.

This heresy, combined with the 1860 publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* and his *Theory of Evolution*, was the kindling for the new atheistic movement. Leading atheist author Richard Dawkins has stated that "Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist." In the 1870s the theory of the Gradual Assent of Man became the academic rage in Europe with the *Theory of Evolution* taking hold. The birth of secular humanism brought the teaching that mankind, as he progresses, is the model for ethical living, and that the highest order of intellectual man was the truest truth. This became very popular in the universities of Europe. British Christians had little evidentiary, historical proof that Jesus was not the Christ made up by the 5th century church. And so, the hunt for evidence was on.



Charles Bousfield Huleatt
(1863-1908)
Anglican Priest

Shortly after the first searchers went out, an Oxford graduate and Anglican Priest from England was assigned as chaplain to the English hospital in Luxor, Egypt. Luxor was the place of temple ruins which were unmatched for grandeur. During his time at Luxor, Charles Bousfield Huleatt made a hobby of visiting the market for unusual items that he could send back home. One of the things that he was most interested in was biblical papyri. One day, Huleatt was sold some papyri scraps that he recognized as verses of scripture. He put them in an envelope and sent them to his old university library at Magdalene College, Oxford. Within a year, Huleatt was transferred to Italy. He and his family died there in the great earthquake of 1908 and the tiny scraps were shelved in a box in the old library. Many years later, those little scraps of paper sent to Oxford were analyzed and dated to the first century AD! Most importantly, they were codices (book form) copies of the Gospel of Matthew. This precious find proves conclusively that the Gospel of Matthew must have been written within the lifetimes of those who walked with Jesus and that He was not the Christ made-up by the official church but truly the Jesus of history.

THE HISTORY, CONTENT AND IMPORTANCE OF THE CHESTER BEATTY PAPYRI

Sir Alfred Chester Beatty, an American from New York, began realizing his kingdom calling as a young engineering student in the early 1900s at Columbia University. (The “Sir” comes from his being made an honorary citizen of the United Kingdom later in life.) After college, he went west and became a common worker in the gold mines of Colorado. Persevering, he worked his way up to manager, then owner of many mines. With his money, he became a philanthropist. Among the things he felt a passion for was to find the origins of the Christian faith,—the close-to-source documents.



Sir Alfred Chester Beatty
(1875-1968)

Gold Miner – Cripple Creek, Colo.

Collector, Egyptian Papyri – Dublin, Ire.

He travelled to Egypt, which was run by the British at that time, and built a house in the shadow of the great Pyramids. He let the word go out that he was interested in ancient papyri and, before long, some Bedouins brought a carriage load of the yellowed paper to him. They were traders in all sorts of antiquities that they knew the British and Americans were fond of collecting. Because of this, the exact circumstances of the find are not clear. One account is that the manuscripts were in jars in a Coptic Church or monastery in Egypt at one time.

All of the manuscripts were codices, books, which was surprising to the first scholars who examined the texts because it was believed at that time that the papyrus codex was not extensively used by Christians until the 4th century. Most of the manuscripts are now dated to the 3rd century, with some as early as the 2nd. That’s AD 100–300. The manuscripts employ nomina sacra, (sacred abbreviations). One notable example is in Beatty P. VI which contains portions of the Old Testament. The name Joshua which relates linguistically to Jesus was considered a sacred name and is abbreviated as such.

Since all but two of the eleven manuscripts are dated before the 4th century, they present significant textual evidence for the Greek Bible as it existed in Egypt prior to the Diocletianic persecutions where Christian books are said to have been destroyed and a century or more earlier than the Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus. (Before the Beatty find, these two were the earliest verified documents that had been found.)



One of the Beatty texts contains 10 leaves from the Book of Revelation, documenting chapters 9–17. This manuscript also dates to the 3rd century.

The Chester Beatty discovery means the possibility of entire Bibles, in book form in Greek, with sacred abbreviations, existed within 100 years of the Apostle John's death in about AD 99. They are quite possibly from the first "book" copies made only one generation away from the original writing. This is extraordinary encouragement that we have today "archeologically fresh" words of the disciples who lived with Jesus and saw him with their own eyes. Texts that are more "historically fresh" than any work of antiquity known to mankind. Fresher than copies of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, fresher than any copy of a Greek play, philosophy, writing or any Roman history. Fresher than any Egyptian writing, including the famous Book of the Dead. We're talking the freshest or earliest of the paper writings of antiquity.

Finally, we have over 5,000 Greek fragments of the New Testament writings in order to compare any variances between copyists for the first thousand years of Christianity. This gives scholars a high degree of certainty as to coming up with the best text. Comparative statistical studies show that the 5,000 plus copy fragments agree on over 95 percent of the current New Testament text. And none of the less than 5 percent of variances poses any problem as to the basic doctrines of the Bible.

This means we can believe in the authenticity of the Bible, if we can believe in ANY ancient text at all! We must take the Bible as textually true, or take no text of the ancients at their word.

According to the experts, the Bibliographical Test cannot be underestimated for ancient literature. This test looks at the number of manuscript copies of the original and the length of time between the writing of the original and the writing of the existing copies when none of the originals still exist. Here is how the Bibliographical Test works:

Caesar wrote his history of the Gallic Wars between 100 and 44 BC. The earliest copy that we have is one produced 1,000 years after his death, and we have only ten copies of that document. Can we trust them as Caesar's thoughts? Or did a subsequent Roman write these things and preserve them under Caesar's name? But the ten copies do seem to correspond with each other 90 percent of the time.

Plato wrote from about 427 to 347 BC; the earliest copies of his writings that we have were produced around AD 900, nearly 1,200 years after the originals. And we have only seven copies. Can we believe that these are the words of Plato?

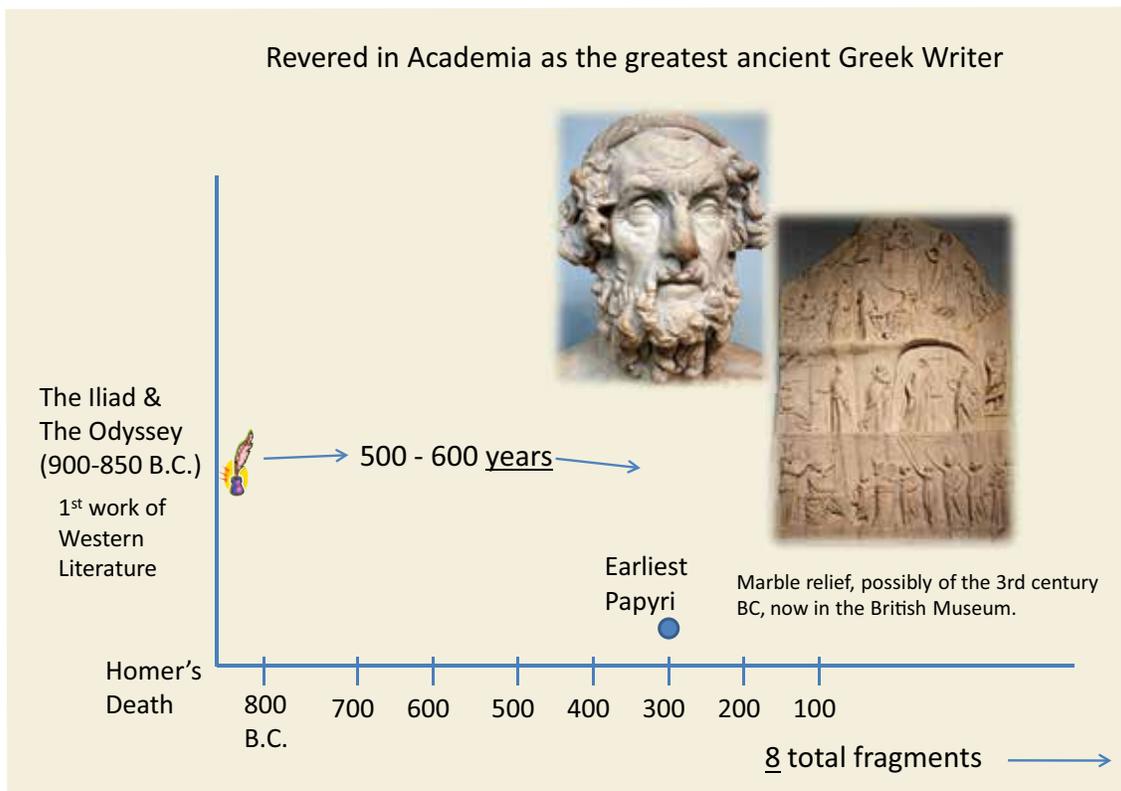
Aristotle lived and wrote between 384 and 322 BC. We have only five copies of his manuscripts today, the earliest copy being produced around AD 1100, over 1,400 years after the originals. Was Aristotle even a real person? There are some differences between the texts of the copies.

Tacitus, the Roman historian, wrote beginning of the second century, about the year AD 116. The only copy that we have of his writings is from around AD 850, over 700 years after the original. Was this Tacitus or some Roman revisionists who wrote? Were the events real or were they romanticized?

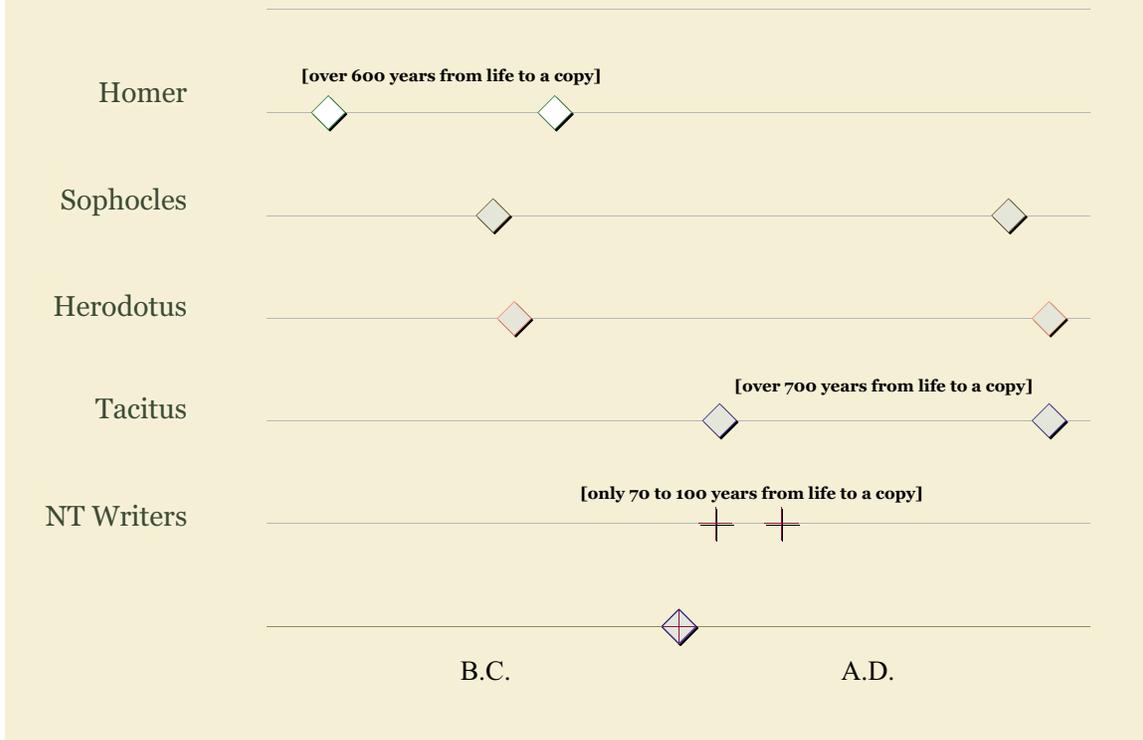
Thanks to the, admittedly scarce, close-to-source documents, scholars and experts have decided to confirm the authenticity of documents by Caesar, Plato, Aristotle and etc. and the reliability of the authors.

So, let's apply the same test to biblical writings, to New Testament documents. The books of the New Testament of the Bible were written from about AD 40s to AD 90s. The earliest full manuscript copies of the Gospels date from about AD 130, only about 50 years after the originals. More than 5,000 fragments exist from the era of the second and third centuries, not more than 200 years after the original writings. They agree with each other 95 percent of the time.

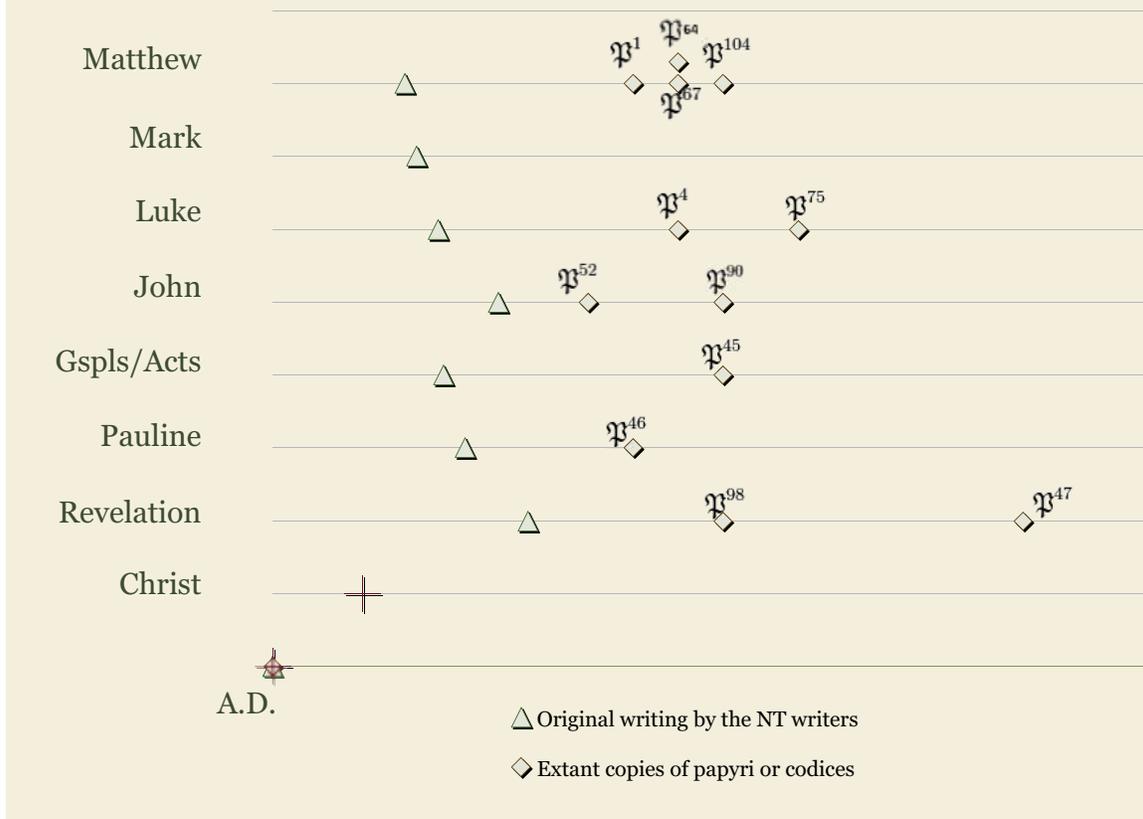
Veracity case made. As we go through this book, we will see references to the P. Oxy manuscripts, the Magdalene Papyri (the Huleatt find) and the Beatty Papyri find.



Proof Texts of Other Ancient Writings



Early Proof Texts of the Gospel Record



THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPELS

- What do the Gospels tell us?
- Who were Matthew, Mark, Luke and John?
- Who may have helped several of them write the Gospel Records which bear their names?
- When was all of this originally written and are ancient copies reliable?
- Where were the writers when they wrote?
- Why is this important for Christians?

THE BACKGROUND

The year was AD 50. It had been 20 years since Jesus was crucified, buried, had been raised from the dead and ascended into heaven while many witnesses had watched. It was also the year of the 20th anniversary of the Day of Pentecost, wherein the Lord's Apostles and many other followers received the Holy Spirit.

Twenty years. Twenty years of growth for the Church and twenty years of turmoil in the city of Jerusalem. During that time, the fledgling church had been persecuted and some groups of believers had been scattered throughout the region surrounding Jerusalem due to hounding by the Jewish Zealots. However, there remained a large group of Christians in the City and the Disciples still used it as a sort of "base camp" for their exploits into areas that the Holy Spirit of Christ sent them to begin the evangelization of Judea, Samaria and other parts of the world.

The Romans were still in control of the country, but an underground movement was re-forming within the sectors of the city where Jewish Zealots were numerous. They formed societies dedicated to harassing and murdering Romans and their supporters. These zealots were called Sacarii, —assassins. (Sacariis the Latin word for "dagger.") The zealots were dagger men who terrorized by ambush and used daggers to slit the throats of the hated Romans. It would still be over ten years into the future, in AD 64, that there would begin a massive revolt by the Jews which would result in bringing two Roman Legions of troops under General Titus to Jerusalem for the final Roman solution to the Jewish problem in the year AD 70, —which was annihilation.

The True history

As we embark on our study, we must first note that the Gospels and the Book of Acts begin the New Testament. They are, collectively, called the "historicals" because they comprise the history of Jesus Christ on earth and the true historical beginning of the world-wide movement of his true Church; the Church he created and that he is the head of today, some 2,000 plus years later. The Acts, in particular, is the book containing the stories of the People Of The Way.

These five books should be read and interpreted first as history and second as theology. Why? Because if they are not historically true they cannot be theologically

relevant. Also, they can be (and have been) used “theologically” to pervert the Gospel and create sinful denominationalism when they are separated from the historical perspective and dissected by those seeking power over others via the biblical record. These so-called religious leaders have often succeeded in performing debilitating brain surgery on the Body of Christ to their own ends; leading zombies through the motions of worshiping other gods. The Church must be rescued in our day, —again.

The Gospels are the true record from life in the first century. It was during this time of rebellious foment and change that the Holy Spirit had prepared for certain of the Lord’s followers to write about Jesus and his life and work. They called it Evangelion, Greek for “Good News.” According to the testimonial writings of the early Church Fathers, Matthew was the first to write a Gospel. He may have written his first version in Aramaic, the language of the common Jew. Church father Papias, quoted by Eusebius, offers this information:

“Matthew composed the sayings in the Hebrew language and everyone interpreted them as best as they could.”

(This could have been the impetus for Mark, with the aid of the Apostle Peter, to write his Gospel in Greek for the good of the church that was being scattered out of Israel even as they wrote.)

Who Was Matthew?

Matthew was one of the Lord’s original 12 disciples. They were also called The Apostles after the Greek word *apostolos*, meaning messenger. His Jewish name was Levi and he was a tax collector by profession. According to tradition and the biblical record, he was not simply a collector, he was a “*telones*,” the chief customs officer in charge of a major junction station. Levi was not a small-time money collector with a wooden stall by the side of the road. He was in charge of taking poll taxes (road usage taxes), from all travelers into Jerusalem and points north, and south.

His workers were also charged with taxing any agrarian produce, livestock, and wares that came into Jerusalem for sale or barter. All had certain taxes that were to be withheld as they came to the junction. Think of it as though it were an interstate truck weigh station today, where all trucks (and, in this case, all cars too) must exit to be immediately taxed for what they are carrying, including humans. Everything was inspected and taxed according to what it was. There were also Roman soldiers stationed at these junctions who would enforce whatever rule that Levi and his workers called true. At many stations, there were also bribes paid for quicker service and smoother passage.

From these payments, the Romans wanted their share first. Then, the Jewish Rulers took a cut. Next, the Chief Customs Officer would take his fee. All of these various pay-outs from the multitude of diverse travelers were the responsibility of the appointed customs official. He had to be trusted, diligent, and hard working. He had to have an eye for detail and a quick mind with money. He had to make scrupulous records. His life depended on it. And, he had to be able to converse with all sorts of people about their wares and their taxes. Levi (Matthew) was a sharp individual, and the perfect person to write the documentation of Jesus from the Jewish perspective. He was a

Jew, brought up in the area of Jerusalem. He was educated. He had prestige. He had some wealth. He was also viewed by most other Jews as a “licensed thief” and was not accepted in any synagogue.

Jesus called him away from that life. It is of real value for us as Christians to know that Jesus was the sort of person who could call Levi to be his disciple and that Levi walked away from that comfortable life to follow the Master. (Could it be for the precise purpose of later starting the Gospel written record ball rolling?) Levi lived with, heard the teachings and saw the miracles of Jesus for almost three years. As the Bible records, he was not of the “inner circle” of Peter, James and John. This is another good thing for documentation purposes. He was free to observe and make notes about the activities from a perfectly objective viewpoint. And Matthew records it as such. He is not of the inner circle, and says so.

There is good evidence to believe that Matthew was aided in his Gospel record-making by James, the half-brother of Jesus and the head of the Church at Jerusalem. As the half-brother of Jesus, James would have been invaluable in filling-in the blanks of Jesus’ family life. So, the likely place of the writing was in Jerusalem or the immediate vicinity. Church members were constantly making the case for Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. We see that the Gospel of Matthew includes many proof texts from the Old Testament that support that claim. He and James would have emphasized Jesus’ Davidic lineage. This lineage is followed through the family line of Joseph. Any claim to “legitimacy” would have to be through the “adoptive” father’s lineage, —and that would need to have direct connection to the family of King David. Joseph’s family tree did just that.

No person in Jewish society could be accepted and listened to if he was not legitimate. It seems that everyone knew that Jesus was the “son” of Joseph. And, no detractor ever brought up any disagreement on this fact within or without the biblical record. (Jesus was no “mamzer,” an illegitimate member of society according to the Mishnah, Ketubet 1:8–9.) The authorities said that he was evil, crazy, and a rogue rabbi, but no one ever accused him of being illegitimate.

In the first few chapters of Matthew, we have the “Reader’s Digest” version of the beginning of the Jesus story. The birth of Jesus, the visit of the Magi, the escape into Egypt and the return to Nazareth is written as though these stories were told by a family member, recounting how they were told within a family setting during Jesus’ life. James would have been the perfect person to aid Matthew with these details.

What Does the Text of Matthew Tell Us

The Gospel of Matthew centers on what the societal and religious customs were, and how Jesus saw that they had become perversions of God’s true intentions in many cases. From almost the very beginning of Jesus’ story, Matthew reveals that the lowest man on the common scale of success is the noblest and most kind, Joseph, and the highest on the scale, King Herod, is the most ignoble and cruel. This “king of the Jews” is not appointed by God but by evil dictators. He is not even of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but of Abraham, Issac and Esau. The Edomites of Esau produced the Idumeans who were the first Arabs. Herod, an Idumean and sworn enemy of the Jews

was an Arab. So, as Jesus begins to teach God's People, Herod's son, The Tetrarch, was in power over God's chosen people along with a cohort of Romans, Pharisees and Saducees. This was an upside-down kingdom in God's eyes. This is why the Apostle Paul wrote in Galations 4:4-5, "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (KJV)

In Matthew, Jesus is revealed as the One who came to set the record straight because the Jewish religion had become a religion of rules without relationships. This made it an idolatrous religion. The Jewish rulers used religion to keep power and the people used religion to medicate the pain in their lives and get along. Both of these uses were a perversion. Matthew takes great effort to show Jesus' teachings, which were an attempt to reverse these illegitimate uses of God's law and his People.

The Jewish leadership had fashioned 613 commands to follow; 248 affirmative religious hedges around the original Ten Commandments and 365 negative religious hedges around daily life and livelihood which were to be followed "religiously" no matter the circumstances within which the action was taken. This caused injustices to be rampant among the people. They found themselves "walking on religious eggshells" all the time and fearful of the powerful Pharisees and rabbis who had memorized all these rules. If the smallest of these rules was broken, even by accident, they had to pay the religious hierarchy through sacrifices in order to become right with God. (Remind you of any religion today?)

Jesus is shown in Matthew to be the Great Simplifier. He simplifies the rules by looking at them from a Love and Mercy viewpoint within the original intent of the Laws of Moses. As such, he was breaking down the mafia-like power-system of the religious leaders of his day. They made up their minds to kill him for this relational simplification fairly early-on in his ministry. The Gospel of Matthew makes this clear.

We can also easily read the mind of James as he contemplates all that he and Matthew wrote down about Jesus. As a leader of the Jerusalem Church, he later decided to expound on the Gospel truths by writing his own Book. The Book of James deals with the basics of correct Christian living; on what we might term "getting a grip on The Way."

Author and biblical scholar Mark L. Strauss remarks;

"Matthew seeks to show that Jesus is the culmination of salvation history. God's purpose to bring salvation to lost humanity is the culmination of salvation history. The prophecies have been fulfilled!"¹

Theologians have long separated the Book of Matthew into three distinct sections; Chapters 1-9, 10-21 and 22-28. The first section deals with Jesus as King of Kings and is a work of Matthew with the help of James, the second centers on teachings for the church and seems more the work of James with the aid of Matthew. The third section centers on the Passion Week of the Christ; all the work of Matthew and James in synchronization.

1. Strauss, Mark L., Four Portraits, One Jesus, Zondervan, 2007, p. 253

It is a perfect progression from the orthodoxy (precept) of what Matthew records; i.e., what God is really like and what He expects of his people, to the orthopraxy (practice) of James' telling what Jesus expects of his church. Let's consider one example. Looking at the connection between Matthew 7:1-5 and James 4:11-12 we find that the first is the orthodoxy of Jesus' teaching about judgmentalism in general and the second is the orthopraxy of particular situations one might find oneself in regarding judging a neighbor. It appears that the Gospel of Matthew is a springboard for the writing of the Book of James.

Other examples might be:

Matthew centers on "the right faith of the Israelite Fathers;"

James centers on "how to enact the right faith."

Matthew centers on stories of temptation and Jesus' triumph over it;

James centers on keys to handling temptation.

Matthew centers on the double-mindedness of the Jewish leaders/worldly Jews;

James centers on how to negate double-mindedness in daily living.

What About the Actual Writing Itself

Matthew's Gospel is called a synoptic Gospel. This means that it was a lot like two other Gospels; Mark and Luke. There are many similarities in these Gospel records. But why wouldn't there be? Certainly, there would be. The followers of Christ saw the same God/Man in action, just from different viewpoints. Let's take a look at Matthew's Gospel from the actual records we possess and see the similarities and differences as we study it and the other synoptic Gospels as we go along. But first, some logistics of the making of the Gospel.

Matthew is called Matthew because of its "sittybos." A sittybos (Gr.) was a written tag attached to an original document that states who the author was. So, the "tag" on the original scroll of the Gospel of Matthew would have said, "Of Matthew." When one took the tag off and unrolled the scroll, they would see, at the top of the work, the title "Evangel-ion" or "Good News." Everyone would know that this was the "Gospel of Matthew" because of those two things. Once a copyist had made a copy from the original writing, that copy looked just the same, except a copyist would place his initials at the bottom of the sittybos.

Most scholars believe that there were only about 15 years wherein scrolls of copies of the New Testament Gospels were made. In about AD 65, codex (book-like) copies began to be made. Then, by about AD 100, we have evidence that codex compilations of all four Gospels were beginning to be created. Of course, there were no "tags" needed on a compiled book, (everything was between the covers) so the copyists began to put the titles we now see in our Bibles; The Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John at the beginning of their particular Gospel. And, church fathers began to place them in order. Since this was a Jewish work, about the Jewish Messiah, church fathers began the compilation with Matthew. Then came Mark, Luke and John. More about the other Gospels and the reason for their ordering will come later in this booklet.

What Do We Have as Ancient Copies of the Gospel of Matthew?

The early copies were created on papyrus paper. At the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia there is a scroll copy fragment called P-1. This fragment is also called P. Oxy 2 because it was found at the site of the ancient city of Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, which is now the modern town of Behnesa, Egypt. It is the entire first chapter of Matthew's Gospel with the exception of verse 13 and verses 21–24. It has been dated by specialists from about AD 50–66.



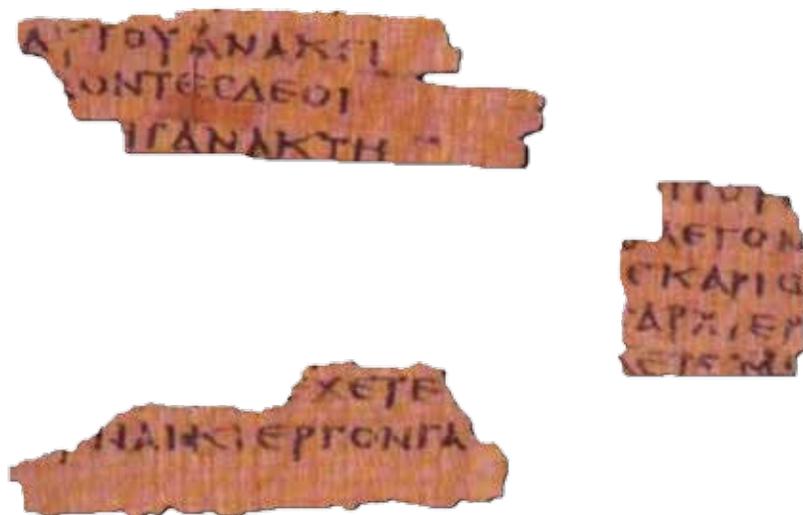
In the Magdalene College of Oxford in Oxford, England, we have a papyrus fragment named P-70. This fragment is composed of all of Matthew, chapters 2, 3, 11, 12, and 24 and it is dated from about AD 70. There is also a fragment of Matthew in the Oxford Museum called P. Oxy. 4404, which is dated about AD 100 and is of chapter 21, verses 34–43. It is important to note that these are copies and not the original. However, if you think about it, these dates mean that the original had to have been written at least several years before, which would make the original writing extant in about AD 50 at the earliest and about AD 66 at the latest.



Magdalene College Library, Oxford

There are three reasons to consider an early date for the original writing. First, by the year of AD 50, many of Jesus' disciples were traveling to the "uttermost parts of the earth" with the Gospel. They needed something to leave with new converts so their verbal message about Jesus could be referenced after they were gone. Some had already been martyred for their faith and who knew how long any of them would be around as eye-witnesses. Second, when we consider that AD 50–53 was twenty years after Jesus' life on earth as a man, many new Christians would not have seen him and needed those same teachings written down for them as they met in house gatherings. Third, AD 60–64 is when most Christians were leaving Jerusalem because of the Jewish zealots. They would want a written record of their faith as they went to other lands to live. All of this taken into consideration, a good approximation of the composition of the original Gospel of Matthew would be AD 50 to 55.

There are other proof text reasons for the early dating of the writing of the Gospel. We have what is called the Barcelona Papyrus, which resides in Barcelona, Spain. This fragment of the book of Matthew is of chapter 5 and is dated at AD 66. This fragment is a codex fragment, meaning it has writing on the front and back of the fragment. There is also evidence from what is known as the Magdalen Papyri located in the Magdalen College at Oxford. These are small fragments, also in codex form, dated to about AD 50–66. They were discovered by Luxor Hospital Chaplain Huleatt in 1901. The scripture is Matthew 26:22–24 and 31–32.



What is most crucial about these fragments is that they are not only in codex or book form, but they have what is called "nomina sacra" within them. Nomina sacra is theological shorthand which was only used when the readers were thought to be so familiar with the name and position of the "sacred person" that the copyist felt it was alright to save many brush-strokes by shortening a name or title that was used over and over again in the book. The nomina sacra in these fragments is KE for Kyrie (Lord) and IS for Iesou (Jesus). Copyists did not begin to use this shorthand until at least the second generation of copies as a rule. This means that the text these fragments were taken from must be dated about AD 55, and the original could not have been later

than about AD 50–52, and maybe as early as AD 45; only fifteen to twenty years after Jesus' resurrection.

Why is the Dating Important

It is very important for Christians to know that reliable scholars have dated the book of Matthew and the teachings therein to have been written within the lifetimes of those who saw our Lord, who lived with him and heard the teachings firsthand. Any falsehoods or hyperbole would not have been tolerated in the church by those who were still alive and remembered the events. Not only that, but these same men also wrote the experiences down in the prime of their lives, within 10 to 25 years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. That is closer in time than any other biographer of any great man of ancient times. Closer than any Greek philosopher, Roman statesman or ancient King. And, the verses on the fragments are almost perfectly recounted in all successive copies of the book of Matthew right down to the King James and many modern versions. If we can believe in the veracity of any ancient writing, we can believe in the Gospel of Matthew.

The same goes for the Book of Mark, which is next in our discussion.

The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel according to Mark highlights Jesus as God's Son. It is widely considered to be "Peter's Gospel" in that Mark spent a lot of time with Peter and was in his company when Peter went to Corinth and (perhaps), Rome for the final years of his life. Mark's Gospel is an excited, almost breathless account of Jesus' work as the Son of God. It emphasizes the restoration of mankind to fellowship with God through belief in Jesus. The text uses the Greek word for "immediately" (euthys) much more than any other Gospel record. This gives the reader the feel of "breaking news." Mark's central theme is an irony; the Messiah who suffers. Mark wastes no time with birth narratives. He, immediately, begins with Jesus' ministry activities.

Who Was Mark

The Gospel according to Mark has always been considered to have been the work of John Mark. John Mark was the son of a well-to-do Jewish woman who had a house in Jerusalem. She was an early believer in Jesus. We have no biblical record of John Mark's father. Probably he was not alive, else we would have some remark about him given the customs of the time. One short story gives us a glimpse into Mark's background. Acts, chapter twelve tells us that when the Apostle Peter was miraculously set free from prison by an angel of God:

"Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating." When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying." Acts 12:12 (NIV)

The ending verse of this same chapter tells that Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their journey from Antioch deeper into Greco-Roman territory. He continued to help the dynamic duo on their first missionary journey.

However, sometime around AD 47, during the middle of that first journey, probably in the city of Lystra, John Mark turns back to Jerusalem. The evangelical trio had landed in the province of Pamphylia, crossing over into a world more immersed in Roman custom than John Mark had ever seen before. Surely, he thought, they could depend on their fellow Jews as oasis' in Pamphylia and Galatia. But what should happen as soon as they began to preach but something strange and then stranger?

First, Jesus, through Paul, miraculously healed a crippled man. The "heathen Greco/Romans" begin to follow Barnabas and Paul as vestiges of their chief gods, Zeus and Hermes. They worship them. The chagrined Paul implores them to worship Jesus, King of the Jews and Lord of the Universe. The Jews then rise-up and try to stone him to death,- right in the middle of town, without judge or jury. It's hard to blame young John Mark for retreating from the front lines of this upside-down world.

However, this action obviously hurt and concerned the Apostle Paul, who refuses to have Mark as a team member for the next missionary journey a year later. This causes the famous rift between Paul and Barnabas recorded in Acts. John Mark was Barnabas' cousin and sentiment probably caused him to favor leniency for Mark. Barnabas took Mark and headed for Cyprus while Paul took Silas as his preaching companion on his second missionary journey. We hear no more of Barnabas and Mark in the Book of Acts. The next time we hear about Mark is in the Book of Colossians, when Paul, writing in about AD 60, remarks in his greetings to the church there that Mark sends his greetings, too, and instructs them to welcome him when he comes to visit them.

What caused the tremendous turn-about in Paul? It seems that Mark had proven himself during the decade they had been apart. Apparently, Mark had gone to Cyprus with Barnabas and had seen more work of God, with his older cousin to shelter him. After a short ministry, the two went back to Jerusalem and Mark had grown in the faith and in the realization that Jesus was part of his legacy as well as his Savior. And, who was in Jerusalem at that time? Peter and some of the other Apostles who had lived with Jesus. It turned out that Paul did John Mark and all Christians a great favor by insisting that he stay close to home, have time to mature and take notes which eventually became the Gospel of Mark.

The Importance of the Gospel

The Book of Mark is focused on the actions of the Gospel ministry of Jesus. It is the Gospel of a personal faith growing mature from a defeat of fear in the heart of the believer. It was apparently written more for the Gentile audience than the Jews. (There are points where Jewish customs are explained, which would not have been necessary with a Jewish audience.) Some biblical scholars believe that Mark sat under Peter's teaching after he returned to Jerusalem in about the year AD 51. There, he was influenced by the work of the church and then accompanied Peter on his travels by AD 58. So, we have Paul and Mark in Rome around AD 60, with Paul now under house arrest there. It is widely believed and attested to by the church fathers that Paul was martyred in Rome about AD 65–66, because he was the "ring-leader" of the Christians when they are accused by Emperor Nero of starting the great fire in the heart of Rome. Which fire, most historians believe, was started by Nero himself.

Historians relate that Nero had two problems in AD 64. The first was that he wanted to build a new palace complex to his glory. However, there was no adequate, unoccupied space in Rome for his grandiose plans. The second problem he had was that old, central Rome had become an urban eyesore of old buildings where low and lower-middle class people lived. The nobility were continually complaining about having to rub elbows with undesirable elements there, not the least of which were the Jews and these new religious zealots called Christians; trouble-makers all.

Nero decided to kill two birds with one stone and, in the dead of night, sent men from his Praetorian guard to torch the center city; burning it to the ground.

Later Roman historians wrote it was odd that while Rome burned, Nero had a party wherein he “fiddled” for the entertainment of his guests; “fiddled while Rome burned.” Of course, Nero had need of a culprit and so blamed the new cult of Christians who stubbornly worshipped only one invisible God and discouraged the worship of all others, including Nero. This annoying cult was already having the effect of taking money from the coffers of all the temples to other gods and, thus, from the taxes of the Roman treasury.

Mark would be in Rome with many trembling Christians. Having spent a lot of time with Peter, and seeing that the Lord’s Apostles are being “picked off” one by one, Mark takes his notes from Peter’s sermons and compiles them into a Gospel for the Roman Church. It emphasizes what Jesus did more than what he said. It is just the sort of visceral work that Peter would have taught to those persecuted Christians who needed encouragement in the faith.

One can imagine the words as Mark speaks to himself during this time. “Here I am in Rome with increasingly troubled Christians. I know what Matthew wrote about our Lord, but that was from a Jewish perspective. These new, brothers and sisters need to hear of the active and risen Savior who is also the God above all gods.” It is of particular note to realize that Mark, unlike any other Gospel writer, emphasizes Jesus’ healing of gentiles with most graphic detail.

In the Book of Mark, after the set-up of who Jesus is, his sinless life and his God/Man status, Mark centers on Jesus’ miraculous power as well as his relations to Jews and Gentiles. Then, Mark begins to emphasize Christ’s work as Savior and the center-focus always comes back to Jesus as the risen Lord. In the center of the Gospel, (9:9, 9:31 and 10:33–34), Jesus is quoted as saying to the Disciples that he would be killed and would rise from the dead. In Mark 12, Jesus tells unbelievers that he would rise from death. In the 13th chapter, Jesus tells that he will come in glory because he will have risen from the dead. In the 14th chapter, he tells believers and the Sanhedrin the same thing. And, of course, the 16th chapter is where the angels at the tomb remark to the women that Jesus was not there and had risen, just as he had told them.

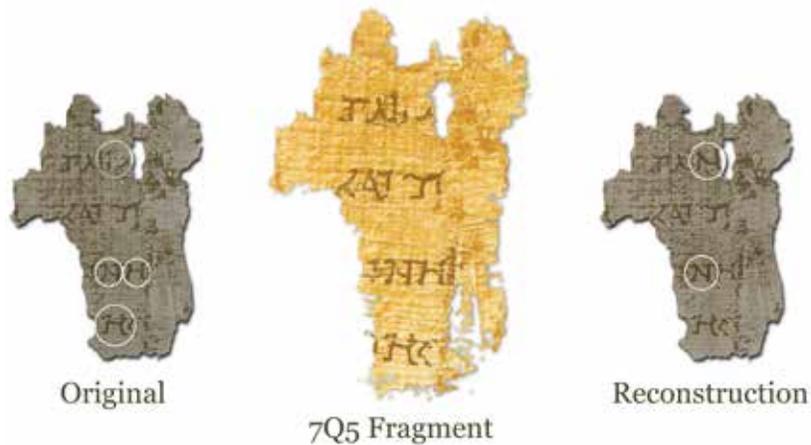
When we look at the books that Peter wrote, 1st and 2nd Peter, we see that they reveal the mind of the matured, yet still emotional, Apostle who wants the church to know that the Christian life is worth its attendant suffering. Second Peter particularly reveals the hope of Glory in Jesus Christ and is a call to virtue within a world given over to vice. The honest student of the Gospel of Mark can see the influence of Peter as the

Gospel prepares Christians for suffering and endeavors to replace fear with faith in the risen Lord. And, who but Peter would give the okay to the highlighted story in chapter 8, verses 30–31, where Jesus is rebuked by Peter and replies to him, “Get behind me Satan!...you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Who but Peter would recount the scene of the transfiguration to Mark and show his “immediate” reaction by wanting to place victory tents up and usher in the Messiah’s coming before He could suffer. This Gospel definitely rings true as Peter’s because it shows Peter’s humility and honesty, post-crucifixion.

There is a theory that Mark was written first and was the source for Matthew and Luke. This is doubted very seriously in most scholarly circles today. Mark did not need to have Matthew’s Gospel, nor did Matthew need Mark’s. Mark had walked with Peter for some years and Matthew had actually walked with Jesus. Most now believe that Mark is Peter’s Gospel from his simple, succinct, direct mind, which Mark compiled for Roman Christians in the mid-60s AD.

What are the Surviving Ancient Proof Texts

In further support of this argument, we have, in the Jerusalem Archive, a papyrus fragment called Fragment 7Q5, which was discovered in Cave Seven at Qumran in 1955. Its text is from Mark, chapter six and has been dated to between AD 66 and 68. We also have many other fragments of the Gospel of Mark dating from about AD 100, and we have what is called P-88, which is NOT a fragment but a codex of the entire Gospel, and is dated from AD 100 to 125.



The Gospel According to Luke

The Gospel of Luke is the third of the synoptic Gospels. It tells the same sort of chronological and systematic stories of Jesus Christ. However, Luke tells more of the “story” of the life and work of Jesus than either Matthew or Mark. He tells us how God became a baby and entered a world of social problems and human heartaches. As most know, Luke also wrote the Book of Acts. Taken together, they comprise the largest volume of material by a New Testament author. It is interesting to note that an unlikely duo, comprised of Paul, the Jewish Pharisee, and Luke, the Gentile physician, wrote more than half of the New Testament.

Who was Luke?

Luke was a physician who accompanied the Apostle Paul during much of his travels. He joined Paul's missionary group during the second missionary journey. The record seems to indicate that he was added to the team in Troas, the surviving little city a few miles from the infamous, destroyed city of Troy. (Acts 16:11) Paul undoubtedly felt that it would be handy to have a Gentile, Greek physician along because he had been badly beaten before and would be again. This was a providential move by the Holy Spirit. Luke became the documentarian during the time most theologians believe that Paul hit his full stride as the Prophet to the Gentiles. Luke was a well-educated Gentile believer. In the books of Colossians and Philemon, Paul calls him his "dear friend and doctor" and his "fellow worker."

By the time of Luke's Gospel writing, Luke had been with Paul in Rome and had probably been in touch with Mark there. It is surmised that he had access to Mark's notes, but wanted to give more of a history of Jesus from the beginning. Also, having accompanied Paul to Jerusalem and having been with him during his year-long Caesarian imprisonment, Luke had plenty of time to visit with Mary, the mother of Jesus in order to get her story of his birth and early life. (Caesarea was a city only a two-day's ride from Jerusalem. While Paul was captive, Luke had plenty of time to visit the environs of Jerusalem and meet with those who had been with Jesus.)

Some have called Luke, 'Paul's Gospel.' It emphasizes Jesus as the Savior of all mankind and is the set-up for the core message of Pauline Theology; "to know the full meaning of Christ crucified." It has also been called "The Silver Gospel;" leading all people to follow the ways of Jesus in his purity, holiness, grace and love. And Luke acknowledges in the very first verse of his Gospel that others, plural, have undertaken to write down an account of Jesus Christ. Our thought is that Doctor Luke wanted a more thorough Gospel for all Gentile readers; and a Gospel from Paul's point of view.

The church fathers assumed that the Gospel of Luke was written in about the mid-60s, around the same time that Mark had composed his version of the stories of Jesus. his "patient and friend," Paul had been imprisoned and was marked for death. Luke did not want all that he had learned to be lost to the ages. The Holy Spirit had put him with Paul not only as his physician, but as his documentarian. The great and wonderful stories of the actions (Acts) of Paul required a prologue, a reason for being. So, the story of Jesus and his ministry must come first, in order for 'The Acts' Luke had lived through as Paul's physician and friend to be most meaningful. Luke's Gospel was that first writing.

It is exciting to also realize that we very possibly know exactly when Dr. Luke came to the idea that he had to write a Gospel. In the book of Acts, chapter 20, verses 17–32, Paul is saying farewell to the Ephesian elders for the final time.

"Now, from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they came to him, he said to them; "You know, from the first day I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time – serving the Lord with all humility, with tears, and with the trials that came to

me through the plots of the Jews—and that I did not shrink back from proclaiming to you anything that was profitable, or from teaching it to you in public and from house to house. I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus. And now I am on my way to Jerusalem, bound in my spirit, not knowing what I will encounter there, except that in town after town the Holy Spirit testifies to me that chains and afflictions are waiting for me. But I count my life of no value to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the Gospel of God’s grace.

And now I know that none of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will ever see my face again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of everyone’s blood, for I did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole plan of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And men from among yourselves will rise up with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning each one of you with tears.

And now I commit you to God and to the message of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all who are sanctified.” (CSB)

Paul is giving his own obituary and fond farewell! And there is as yet no official record of what he has been saying. With the Church of Jesus Christ at stake, how could good Dr. Luke not be moved and challenged by this declaration of the great Apostle?

By the way, the historical Book of Acts has also been maligned by so-called “Christian theologians and scholars” of the recent past. It has been said that the Acts of the Church was compiled as a product of the Constantinian establishment in about AD 325–350.

The first and obvious refutation to this error is that we have the Codex Sinaiticus, which is an entire Bible cover to cover and has been dated to AD 350. Further, we have Papyrus P. 48, which is a Bible fragment dated to AD 170–200. This fragment is composed of Acts chapter 22, verse 30 through Acts chapter 23, verse 11. You may recall this is a record of Paul in Jerusalem speaking about Jesus Christ before the Sanhedrin and about his being raised from the dead.

This fragment is very well preserved and scholars surmise that some faithful Christian preserved it when the scroll was being discarded from use because it was so tattered. This faithful one decided to tear the portion out and keep it because it was so vital to the encouragement of the faith.

The passage is high drama which includes Paul’s crafty, yet true, way of getting the Jewish leaders so worked up against each other that his case becomes incidental. It concludes with the wonderful verse of encouragement to all Christians, verse 11, which says; “The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “*Take courage! As*

you have testified about me in Jerusalem, you must also testify in Rome.” Wouldn’t you hesitate to discard such a fragment of Good News revealing the fact of Jesus alive and visiting his disciple during a time of great danger?

From that same era, AD 170–200, we also have housed in the Oxford Library, fragment P. 29. This is of Acts 26, verses 7–8 and verse 20. Once again, we have a codex fragment. This is a book-form fragment with verses seven and eight on the front (recto) and verse twenty on the back (verso). Like the Magdalen Papyri, verse eight also employs *nomina sacra*, the capital letters TS for “Theos” or “God.” The bottom line of all this documentation is that Acts had to be written and copied before AD 150.

Now back to the Gospel of Luke.

As was Paul’s pattern of teaching, making sure that his listeners began with the proper background for understanding the subject, Luke takes note and begins the story of Jesus from before the beginning of the God/Man on earth. He begins with the prophecy of the birth of the last prophet of God before the Messiah; John the Baptist. From there, we have the most wonderful stories which set-up all succeeding theology of the Christ; the virgin birth with the Bethlehem narrative, (including the shepherds and angels), other faithful Jews who had looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, the genealogy of Jesus through his mother’s lineage, the work of John the Baptist, —and the New Testament introduction of the personhood of evil, Satan. Paul and Luke would want the novice to the Jewish religion and culture to know the whole story of the miraculous epiphany. The final effect is a Gospel the Gentiles could relate to and understand better than any other Gospel writing.

In the first four chapters of Luke, we have everything we need to know about Jesus as the true and long-awaited Jewish Messiah and Savior of Mankind; from the predictions and preparation for his birth through his statement during his sermon at his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, where he first proclaims that he is indeed the Messiah come to save all on the earth. No other writing and no previous Gospel gives us this most well-rounded, most human and divine exposition.

Luke specializes in the contrasts and oxymorons within the teachings of Jesus that Christians have come to love over the centuries because they are so pictorial. Some of these are; the wide and narrow doors, “he who loses his life for Christ will gain it but he who keeps his life will lose it,” a rich fool, a good Samaritan, “the humble will be exalted, the exalted humbled,” the Prodigal Son, Jesus inviting himself to eat with a shunned tax-collector, a friend’s betrayal and God’s Son’s crucifixion. Luke portrays the Man, Jesus, who is all about turning conventional wisdom on its head in order for truth to be shaken out of its pockets. Then Luke ends with the most vivid and story-like of the Passion narratives in all of the Gospel record.

A most interesting Lukan point of view is that his Gospel stories highlight the belief of Gentiles and the unbelief of the Jews. This is another sign to us that Paul and Luke’s task is to go to the Gentiles with the Gospel. Both the principal teachings of Jesus and the parables have a tendency to focus on Jesus purposely going to the outcasts of the world. Especially, those who humble themselves before God.

What About the Proof Texts for Luke

Among the proof texts we have today for Luke's veracity is what is named Papyri P-4, which is today housed in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. This fragment is of



P. 4



P. 75

the Gospel's first six chapters and is dated from AD 80–100. We have P-75, called the Bodmer Papyrus comprised of Luke, chapter 3 all the way through John, chapter 15, which is dated about AD 180. Interestingly, this papyri is not only a codex but it has Luke and John in the same codex, which tells us that collections of the New Testament Gospels were extant in book form within three generations of the actual writings. Finally, we have P-69 housed at Oxford in England which text is of Luke, chapter twenty-two, the middle of the crucifixion narrative, and dated to about AD 150.

Without the Gospel of Luke, we would lack a culturally objective, Gentile-written, Gospel of Jesus Christ. It could be called; 'The good, bad and ugly of the human condition and its reaction to a face-to-face encounter with the Almighty.'

AND, we know that his companion history of the Book of Acts has also been dated during the same era by the same author. The Acts is not only the historical record of how Christianity moved out from Jerusalem to the rest of the Roman world, but it is conclusive evidence that the message of God was commissioned by the Holy Spirit to both Jews and Gentiles against all odds. Acts might be alternatively titled, 'The good, bad and ugly of the human condition and its reaction to a face to face encounter with the first generation Church.'

The Gospel of John

John has been called "The Golden Gospel." It is the Gospel in which every necessary message from a sovereign and loving Almighty God is communicated in such a way that it is fully comprehensible in the mind and heart of mankind. It has also been called "The Theological Gospel" for that very reason. The writing focuses on showing Jesus as the Son of God in all his Divine Glory.

Who Was John?

The writer was the Apostle John, the youngest of the 12 Apostles, who lived with Jesus for almost three years. He was a Jew and was, with his brother James, from a priestly lineage. Some uninformed commentators have surmised that James and John were arrogant and boisterous because they were called “Boangernes” or “Sons of Thunder” by Jesus. However, this designation means that they were of priestly heritage. The voice of God was often described as sounding like thunder and priests gave the word of God to the people, thus “sons of the thunderous word of God.” The two brothers may have been arrogant at times because of their claim to the priestly line, but so were all the disciples arrogant and selfish at one time or another.

John reveals many eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ life and work. Early Christian Fathers wrote that John, the Apostle, penned the work carrying his name. The traditional and accepted date is of about AD 95 to 98 for the original writing. John may have been only aged 15–18 when he followed Jesus on earth during the late AD 20s, so this dating would have him writing his Gospel at about age 82–85. An old man for sure, but not unheard of in the first century.

It is recorded by Jerome that, “John, the Apostle whom Jesus most loved, the son of Zebedee and brother of James...most certainly of all the Evangelists wrote a Gospel, at the request of the bishops of Asia, against Cerinthus and other heretics and especially against the then growing dogma of the Ebionites, who assert that Christ did not exist before Mary. On this account, he was compelled to maintain his divine nativity. But there is said to be another reason for this work, in that when he had read Matthew, Mark and Luke, he approved indeed the substance of the history and declared that the things they said were true, but he related the events of the earlier period before John was shut up in prison, so that it might be manifest to those who should diligently read the volumes of the four Evangelists.”¹

What is the Gospel Focus

From the first verse of the Gospel we understand the course that John sets as he writes. John says, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.*” John is talking about Jesus Christ. He uses the phrase, “the Word was...”, which in Greek is “proston-theon” meaning “face to face” with God. This claim is the one that allows Jesus to be the Savior and substitute for our sin against God. It is also the witness that, since God sent his Son before we knew we were sinners, it is all about him. We can do no external action that “helps” God to save us. We can only accept his completed work of salvation.

The stories that John chooses to relay to us force us to meditate on the collision between very human men and the very God/Man. When Jesus meets with Nicodemus in chapter three, the second birth for man’s spirit is discussed. Chapter four and the story of the Samaritan woman at the well is the same discussion about a second chance, but from a different angle. The contrast is apparent and poignant; the same saving point told to both a Jewish ruler and Pharisee (Nicodemus) and an adulterous woman

1. Jerome, *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, p364–365

in the no-man's land of Samaria. Jesus' message is the same; connect with God and live eternally.

The Gospel of John also repeats the theme of healing over and over. There are stories of physical healing, but they always points toward spiritual healing. Probably the most intense scene about this is found in the 11th chapter where Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. The 'second chance' for all people through the death and new life of Jesus is the emphasis.

John sets-up the crucifixion of Jesus as something He knew that He came to do and as a never-to-be-forgotten picture of God coming to save us as a friend, lover, guide and example of what mankind can be when totally connected to God and his saving power. Jesus is portrayed as the Son of God, who is sovereign over all the universe. And, the Holy Spirit is introduced and described as the final personage of the Trinity to be every Christian's guide as we go forth repeating the Gospel and "evangelizing" the world. This is clearly evidenced in Jesus' own words of chapters 14, 15 and 16 of the Gospel record.

We love the way author Max Lucado states Jesus' sense of purpose in his book, *God Came Near*.

"Jesus was born crucified. Whenever he became conscious of who he was, he also became conscious of what he had to do. The cross-shaped shadow could always be seen. And the screams of hells imprisoned could always be heard. This explains the glint of determination on his face as he turned to go to Jerusalem for the last time. He was on his death march. This explains the resoluteness in the words, 'The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life —only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.' (John 10:17–18) So call it what you wish: an act of grace, a plan of redemption, a martyr's sacrifice. But whatever you do, don't call it an accident. It was anything but that."

The truth of God is also highlighted by John's Gospel. In the 18th chapter, Jesus has that memorable scene with Governor Pilate wherein he tells the Roman:

"You are right in saying that I am a King. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (NIV)

That phrase, "the truth" is "i Aletheia" in Greek. This phrase means, "THE reality" of the world. John reminds us that Jesus said he, his life and his work was THE reality of God and his "eternal life-making" in the world and that there are two sides. The choice is man's to make; take the side of truth and eternal life or the side of the lie and eternal death.

Once again, to quote author Max Lucado:

"All the world religions can be placed in one of two camps: legalism or grace. Humankind does it or God does it. Salvation is a wage based on deeds done – or salvation is a gift based on Christ's death. A legalist believes the supreme force behind salvation is you (him). If you look right, and belong to the right segment of the right group, you will be saved. The brunt of responsibility doesn't lie within God; it lies within you.

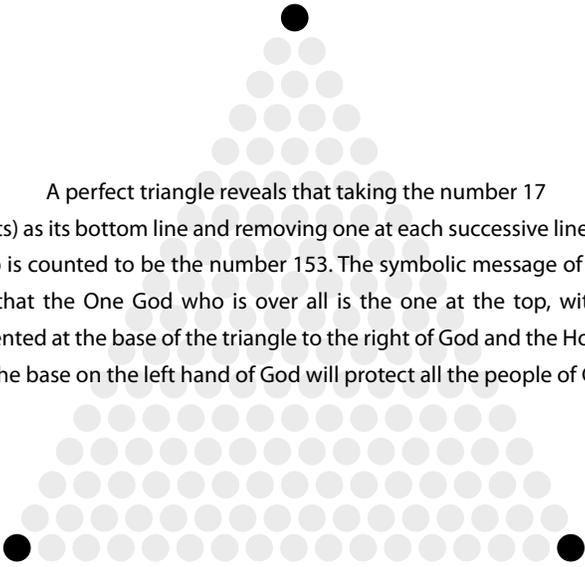
The result? The outside sparkles. The talk is good and the step is true. But look closely. Listen carefully. Something is missing. What is it? Joy. What's there? Fear. (That you won't do enough.) Arrogance. (That you have done enough.) Failure. (That you have made a mistake.) Spiritual life is not a human endeavor. It is rooted in and orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. Every spiritual achievement is created and energized by God.”
—*He Still Moves Stones*, Max Lucado

THE TRUTH

Only the “theological Gospel” would center the resurrection story around Mary of Magdala, the least and the lowest of the Lord’s disciples. John, in his old age, recounts the story of the greatest weekend of his life by making himself only a bit player, confused by the situation of the resurrection. However, John records that Mary, the humble outcast, was the one who was allowed to see the Savior first after his resurrection and who is told by Christ to give the good news to the Apostles. It occurs to every honest reader that this story must be true. Why would John make-up such a story that would seem to denigrate all the now martyred Apostles, and himself, while elevating the former prostitute Mary, if it wasn't true?

Why tell this story at all, John? John would tell us that Mary is the prototype of the greatest sort of Christian. She is broken in spirit, humble, caring, gentle, giving, loving, and truthful. Jesus responds to these true traits within us and he accepts us right where we are, but stands us up never to bow our hearts again to anyone but him and to anything but showing these traits to others in his name.

Finally, John recounts the seemingly innocuous story of “fish on the beach,” which explains for the church the perfect triangle of divine perfection and deliverance, — and our responsibility before our God. (The number of fish caught, 153, is one of a perfect triangle and, the pictorial analogy decoded means, the church is within the protective triangle of God, Son and Holy Spirit in order to do its work.)



A perfect triangle reveals that taking the number 17 (17 dots) as its bottom line and removing one at each successive line toward the top is counted to be the number 153. The symbolic message of the 153 fish is that the One God who is over all is the one at the top, with Jesus represented at the base of the triangle to the right of God and the Holy Spirit at the base on the left hand of God will protect all the people of God.

What About the Ancient Records of John

The papyri support for the veracity of the Gospel of John is found in many fragments. We have what is called P. Oxy 5, a copy which is dated to approximately AD 85–90, which is chapter sixteen, verses 1–11. This copy could have been made during the actual lifetime of the Apostle John! We also have P. Oxy 208, which is most of John, chapter 20 and dated to AD 125 and is housed in the British Library in London. There is P-52, which is called the Ryland Papyrus located at Ryland University in Manchester, England and dated from AD 110–125; only 25 years from the original. We also have P-5 in the British Library in London, England, dated to about AD 150. In addition, P-66, called the Bodmer Papyrus is an entire copy of the Book of John and dated to about AD 175. Finally, there is P. 90, which is in the Oxford Library and is dated to AD 180, containing the last verses of chapter 18 and the first seven verses of chapter 19 of John.



John 18 : 31-33

John 18 : 37-38

Gospels' Conclusion

What a great record we have of God's word to us about his marvelous salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord. Christians should know that we have the best documentation of any faith and should be able to encourage other potential Christians with this truth. And so, we have this heritage in writing today. We look at the men who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote the Gospels, and we see God's great gift of his relationship to as well as salvation of mankind.

Matthew – an outcast Jew reclaimed by the Master, who followed him for three years, soaking up the heart of his call to repentance. A brilliant man with an eye and experience for details, mentored by the half-brother of Jesus and the head of the church in Jerusalem. There were no better men to tell the story of Christ from a Jewish heritage and customs point of view.

Mark – a journeying Jew mentored by the Great Fisherman Peter. A vacillating, young loyalist turned staunch church leader. A struggler, who, once he saw the light of destiny for him, excitedly embraced and shared it. And Peter, the chief spokesman

of the Apostles who spent time in Jesus' inner circle, then became truly humbled by his momentary disloyalty and Jesus' forgiveness. No better men to tell the story of the actions of Christ toward mankind on our sometimes perilous and sin-plagued belief-journey through life.

Luke – a Gentile physician. A chance encounter in Troas, probably brought on by hearing stories about Paul's preaching and beatings, brings Luke to the real purpose of his life and livelihood. We are awestruck as we see the hateful acts sponsored by the Evil One, actually bringing together the Apostle Paul and the one who will be his physical healing agent and, more importantly, his biographer so Christians could heal in spirit and truth. No better men to tell the full story of the Epiphany of God come to earth and its healing story of new spiritual birth.

John – an elderly Jew who “had seen it all” physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Whose elderly eyes pictured and remembered the days he leaned on the breast of Jesus as a youth, experienced the miracles first hand, knelt at the cross, saw the empty tomb and lived through the birth of the church. No better man to tell the story of the universal kingdom and purposes of God through Jesus Christ and the love of God for his Church, forevermore.

Read the writings of these 7 extraordinary men again and afresh. Ask the Holy Spirit of Jesus to teach you just what you need to learn in order to further the Kingdom of God as you walk your path, as you seek your destiny in his service.

Amen and Amen.

THE PAULINE LETTERS

In the first century AD, the religious life of the average Jew was like the average Catholic or the average Baptist, —average. They followed the crowd and the absolute requirements of the faith while growing old and listening to the billowiest windbag in the area.

The average Jewish child entered synagogue school at either age four or five, according to the custom of the area and the requirements of the school. By age seven, he (girls were not allowed) was tested as to his knowledge of what we call the Book of Leviticus. The rabbi would have a one-on-one with the boy and call out a section of Leviticus. The boy would begin at the text and recite it verbatim. If he could not, this was a disgrace to the school and to the family. The word got out fast that the family was not being diligent in their schooling of the boy. Of course, the young boy must know the entire book by heart because he never knew where in the text the rabbi would ask him to recite. The average boy could do a pretty good job of this but most were far from perfect. The rabbi, knowing the stigma attached to failure, would pass the boy if he could make a good whack at it. Neither the boy nor the rabbi would be inclined to tattle-tell.

Why Leviticus? Two reasons, one positive and one negative. First, Leviticus is the compendium of the laws of sacrifices and offerings. Spiritual holiness of the supplicant is symbolized by these. There were five types of offerings: Burnt, Grain, Fellowship,

Sin and Guilt. God and the people had an “understanding.” He would be their God and they would be his people. They would love and serve and He would bless. He listed the steps required for their blessings and they followed the list. Leviticus is the book of relationship rules about offerings, sacrifices, property, marriage, worship, health practices, etc. This was good. Second, by the first century, the hierarchy of taxes imposed on the average family was oppressive. The Romans wanted their cut, the Temple priests and their cult wanted their cut and they piled on with over a thousand man-made rules that were hedges around God’s laws so that the people could come and pay for insurance that they were not breaking a rule. This was bad. From the earliest possible age, the rabbis made sure that the average man knew how to follow Leviticus. This perpetuated their system of peace with the Romans, the Priests; and paid their salary. Nice.

By age 13, Bar-mitzvah time, where the boy would be declared a young man, the boy would need to have a good grasp of the entire Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. This was easier because there are a lot of stories and there is a lot of repetition. The nicer rabbis would ask the boy to tell a few of the stories; always selecting one about the principal characters and one that was somewhat obscure. Once again, the rabbi might accept a mistake or a fudge as long as the young man was really trying.

Once the textual tests were over, the religious training was on-going, in an informal way by the rabbi. The learning then switched to the trade that the young man must master. Every day the young man would report to work as an apprentice. If his father was a tradesman, he would report to him and learn that trade. If his father was influential and wanted his son to learn another trade, he would arrange for the boy to report to another man for work. After five to seven years of apprenticeship, the man would be allowed to marry and open up his own business, if he so desired. The man’s life passage would then repeat his father’s. He would have children and the boys would go to synagogue school at four or five and the girls would be schooled at home by the mother until they were of marriageable age. That was the average.

Once in a while, the average was excelled. Once in a great while, the exceptionally excellent boy and young man was accepted into rabbinical college. These were the boys who were perfect in their recall of Leviticus and the books of Moses. These were the young men who could hold their own in a debate with the rabbi himself concerning the morals of the historical stories in the Pentateuch. These were the men who relished the calling of God and knew all the rules. (They were not necessarily the most compassionate young fellows, just the most right and righteous.) One Saul of Tarsus was at the top of his class. He became a Pharisee of Pharisees and darn proud of it. He learned his father’s trade of tent making, but this was not his passion. his passion was for the Jews to rise to the top by being on a par with all others around them in trade and sophistication as well as being the top notch people of God. This was a tall order for the “average young man,” nevertheless required by the Pharisees.

Some historians believe that Saul lost his father in death during his twenties, which spurred him on to honor his heritage even more. Why? To help bring the Messiah, through Jewish dedication and worship, aided in the unification of all the living and

the dead under his glorious reign. By the age of 30, Saul, the religious zealot, was in his prime. He was the pharisaic prodigy, headed for Jerusalem, the center of his world.

One thing that made Pharisees hopping mad was anyone who endeavored to upset the apple cart. If a person made speeches that endangered the peace and livelihood of the priesthood and the pharisaical system, they were tempting God to abandon them again, as in the Babylonian captivity. It also could cause the Roman authorities to punish the whole of Israel for disturbing the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. It could not be tolerated by the leadership. Saul had heard of this Jesus, the rogue rabbi, who had caused such disturbance that he had to be sacrificed himself for the good of the peace. Saul had been incredulous that Jesus' followers had continued to cause mischief even after their leader was crucified. Being the Pharisee of Pharisees, he was dedicated to go to all the synagogues in Israel to teach the average Jew the truth and gravity of the situation. Along the way, he would, in the name of God, arrest and imprison any of these rabble-rousers who were persisting in preaching these lies to the people.

Those who know the Bible will be able to refer to the Book of Acts where the Christian disciple Stephen is stoned by the leadership and Saul was there giving approval to his death. The story really picks up in Acts, chapter nine, with the conversion of Saul to Christianity on the Damascus road by the risen Jesus himself and is made God's instrument to go and evangelize the Gentile world. The now renamed Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, spends some time alone with God in the wilderness and re-enters society with greater passion than ever before. However, this time he excels in preaching the risen Savior, Jesus Christ. And, he has all the mental and verbal ammunition he needs to defend the faith, expound the Gospel and build the doctrine of the Church. He was a force majeure who had been being prepared since he was four years old to live out his bold destiny.

This is the destiny and legacy that we find in the 14* Pauline letters of the New Testament. These are the full spectrum of writings to the whole church, specific churches and individuals that we can take as Gospel-living instructions; whole church, specific churches and individuals alike. Paul was an expert on worldviews. He knew the historic Jewish worldview best, but, growing up in Tarsus, crossroads of trade and culture between the East and the West, he also was well-schooled in the Greco-Roman worldview. In his time alone with God, he was able to develop an objective view of the Jewish hierarchy and their selfish worldview also. A worldview is a network of related presuppositions, a set of filters through which knowledge is interpreted. A person's worldview structures reality for him. It includes fundamental convictions about right and wrong. Worldviews determine our acceptance and understanding of events in our human experience.

Paul developed a doctrine that claims to be universally and absolutely true. It also claims to be exclusively true. This exclusivity is what made (and makes) it extremely offensive to the pluralistic and democratic mind. Paul wrote that Christianity is the only true way, that Christ alone is the divine Savior and that only through him can anyone be right with God. He wrote in various letters about this worldview. We mention only a few here.

- “There is one God, the Father, by whom are all things...and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things” 1 Cor. 8:6
- “By means of him all things hold together” Col. 1:17
- “He carries along or upholds all things by the word of his power” Heb. 1:3
- “In God we live and move and have our being” Acts 17:28
- “He made all things to differ from each other” 1 Cor. 4:7, Rom 9:21, 1 Cor. 12:4–6

Paul reinforces, time and again, that Christian theology is not the result of a self-sufficient exploration of, and argument from our unaided experience to God who is beyond our experience but our theological tenants rest on the self-revelation to us of the transcendent Creator who comes to find us; God to man rather than man to God. This was (and is) an affront to all manmade religions,—even the religion that the Jews had begun to teach.

The entire Pauline Corpus is more easily explained and commented on by theological scholars. There are literally hundreds of current books that expound on the writings of Paul. That is not our task beyond what we have already done. Our task remains to verify the light of truth; that New Testament documents of a very early origin do exist. These, thankfully, include all the letters of Paul. Also, in the year 1905 the Delphi, or Gallio, Roman Inscription was discovered which fixed the date of Gallio’s proconsulship at AD 51–52, providing a way of dating Acts 18:12–17, and as a result, much of the rest of Paul’s ministry activities.

In general, historic artifacts and archeology have over and over again proved to be friends of the Bible. Let’s have examples. In the 1850s, critics of the Old Testament ridiculed it for mentioning a tribe of people (Hittites) which were unknown outside the Bible. Then, in 1871, archeologists uncovered Hittite artifacts. The Hittite civilization is today one of the best known cultures of the ancient world. In the early 1900s, critics of the Bible said that there were no New Testament documents earlier than the Constantine era in the AD 300s. They contended that much of it was made-up by the religionists of Constantine’s court. Then, the finds at Oxyrhynchus were made by Grenfeld and Hunt. This find was of over 100,000 papyri that were from the first to the third centuries AD; before Constantine in the fourth century. The Huleatt find in 1904 of the Magdalen Papyrus and the Beatty collection of the manuscripts followed in the 1930s. All were first to third century proven. Since then, over 36,000 writings of the early church fathers have been proven to be of the first 400 years after the Apostles and most perfectly align with the essence of today’s Bibles. Not to mention the Dead Sea Scrolls and their verified veracity.

Contrast this evidence with un-biblical sources that most unbelievers accept in their worldview. The earliest extant manuscript of a work by Plato dates from right before AD 900. This is called Oxford B and was found in a Patmos monastery. Plato lived roughly 350 B.C. This is a gap of over 12 centuries. The writings of Homer, critical to Western literature sources, are said to be 500 years earlier than those of Plato, 850

B.C., yet no evidence earlier than 300 B.C. has been found to date. And that is only inscription on a stone tablet which is construed as an outline of the Homeric epic. This is also a gap of over 5 centuries, – at least!

Any Greek writings of Sophocles, Herodotus and others have similar gaps between the supposed writing and the first extant copies. Any Roman writing is the same. And all of these have only a handful of copies known to us. By contrast, the earliest fragments of the New Testament date less than fifty years after the original writings and the bulk of our most important manuscripts dates from only 200–300 years after their historical composition. There are over 5,000 fragments and all, remarkably, agree over 95 percent of the time. When Christians defend our faith, we can conclude without fear or hesitation that we have what was written by the early followers of Christ, including Paul.

To mention a few of the earliest Pauline texts we have in our possession;

- Papyri #46 is the earliest, dated from AD 85–150, found by Sir Alfred Chester Beatty and kept in Dublin and the United States. (Paul was executed under Nero in about AD 64, so these copies of his letters have been authenticated to around 50 years later. This is extraordinary!)
- From the time of AD 250 and earlier, we have P 12, P 13, P 15, P 27, P 30, P 32, P 40, P 49, P 65, P 87, P 113, P 114, and P 118. They are, respectively, of Hebrews, chapter one; Hebrews, chapters 2–5/10–12; 1 Corinthians, chapters 7–8; Romans 8–9, 1 Thessalonians, chapters 4–5 and 2nd Thessalonians, chapter 1; Titus, chapter 1, verses 11–15 and chapter 2, verses 3–8; Romans, chapters 1–4 and 6 and 9; Ephesians, chapters 4–5; 1 Thessalonians, chapters 1–2; Philemon, Romans 2; Hebrews 1; and Romans 15–16.
- From the time of AD 250 through AD 600, we have over a dozen additional Pauline copies and from the same time, over a dozen activities and sayings attributed to Paul from copies of the Books of Acts and the writings of other New Testament Apostles. These copy fragments are over 90 percent in agreement and represent all of the letters of Paul that we have in our Bibles today with the exception of his last two letters to Timothy.
- From the time of AD 115 to the time of AD 400, we have fragments or whole commentaries concerning or quoting all of the books of the Bible and lives of the early martyrs from the seven earliest Christian Fathers that include: Justin Martyr – 330 accounts; Irenaeus – 1,819 accounts; Clement of Alexandria – 2,406 accounts; Origen – 17,992 accounts; Tertullian – 7,258 accounts; Hippolytus – 1,378 accounts and Eusebius 5,178 accounts; totaling 36,289 accounts. Most of these are commentaries on the Gospels. Coming in second by only a few thousand are commentaries on Paul's epistles.

Early Patristic Quotations of the New Testament

| Writer | Gospels | Acts | Pauline Epistles | General Epistles | Revelation | Totals |
|------------------------------|---------------|--------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Justin Martyr | 268 | 10 | 43 | 6 | 6 ³ (266 allusions) | 330 |
| Irenaeus | 1,038 | 194 | 499 | 23 | 65 | 1,819 |
| Clement of Alexandria | 1,107 | 44 | 1,127 | 207 | 11 | 2,406 |
| Origen | 9,231 | 349 | 7,778 | 399 | 365 | 17,992 |
| Tertullian | 3,822 | 502 | 2,609 | 120 | 205 | 7,258 |
| Hippolytus | 734 | 42 | 387 | 27 | 188 | 1,378 |
| Eusebius | 3,258 | 211 | 1,592 | 88 | 27 | 5,176 |
| Grand Totals | 19,368 | 1,352 | 14,035 | 870 | 644 | 36,289 |

This is not an exhaustive accounting of our documentary evidence of the Light of Truth on the veracity of Paul's writings. However, it is our opinion that it is enough. What think you, reader?

*Pauline authorship of the Book of Hebrews is attested to by most Bible scholars today and has been for the last hundred years. J. Vernon McGee, writer of the Thru the Bible books says, "Although the Authorized Version has the heading, "Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews," there is still a question as to authorship. In spite of the fact that the Pauline authorship cannot be stated in a dogmatic fashion, there is abundant evidence that Paul was the author. The writer has been in bonds (Hebrew 10:34). He wrote from Italy (Hebrews 13:24). his companion was Timothy (Hebrews 13:34). The writing is Pauline."¹

No less than the immanent scholars; Oliver B. Greene, William L. Pettingill, William R. Newell, B.F. Westcott and Arthur W. Pink have written that they are certain of Paul's authorship. Numerologically, we can't help but think that the Holy Spirit would not have left Paul with only 13 letters or epistles when 14 is the number of double completion by the way of Jewish thought.

1. McGee, J. Vernon, Hebrews, Thru the Bible Books, 1978, p. 10

THE UNIVERSAL OR GENERAL LETTERS

The Universals, which some have called the Catholic (universal) Epistles, are the New Testament Books of the Disciples Peter, John, James (the half-brother of Jesus) and Jude (another half-brother of Jesus). Looking at the men who wrote letters or epistles, we find great diversity within great unity. As a unit, they were all men who walked with Jesus during his time on the earth. Let's take a look at Peter first.

Peter was the “big fisherman.” He was not learned like Paul. He was probably very average in his religious studies; his rabbi winking at him because of his father's trade of fishing on the Sea of Galilee. What does a fisherman need to know that his rabbi cannot tell him. One thing Peter seems to know more than average about is the idea of the Messiah. When we decidedly hear from him in the Gospel accounts, he is speaking up about the Messiah and what He should and shouldn't do. Peter is the man of big ideology. He is focused on what happens in the future. This is probably because his past and present is not so comforting.

From his two letters in the New Testament we can tell that those who are currently suffering are on his mind. The writing encourages those Christians who are suffering persecution and homelessness that their hardships will be worthy trials. We are also well aware that these letters were written toward the end of Peter's life, a time of “mellowing-out” of his rashness. He tells his readers that trials are going to happen, but that they are to come because God wants to see his glory reflected in them. (1 Peter 1:7–8) He specifically teaches families to give of themselves and he entreats the elders to examine their attitudes, ambitions and actions as under-shepherds for the flock of Christians.

In his second letter, Peter makes a call for Christian virtue in a world given to vice. This writing would have been near the end of his life, in about AD 66. We know that Jerusalem was taken over by the Zealous Jews by this time and he would have been exiled, probably in Corinth, maybe in Rome. The end of this letter is where Peter endorses Paul's writings as Scriptures. (2nd Peter 3:15–16) This is all in what we would call the “plain talk” evident of a Fisherman, but also compassionate and nurturing as only the Lord Jesus could have tutored the elder Apostle.

The proofs of early writing for the letters of Peter are:

- From AD 300 or earlier, we have copies on papyri, P Oxy. 4934, 1st Peter 1:23–2:5/2:7–12 and P Bodmer VII and VIII. All of 1st Peter and 2nd Peter
- From AD 350, P 81 – 1st Peter, chapters 2–3
- From AD 650, P 74, 1st Peter, chapter 1–3 and 2nd Peter, chapters 2–3

These are from 250 to 500 years from the originals.

JOHN

The Apostle John, the youngest of the 12 original Apostles, is the writer of the gospel, three letters to the Church and The Revelation. We have previously addressed the Gospel under his name. The Revelation will come in the next section of this booklet.

As we have seen, John was a Jew and was, with his brother James, from a priestly lineage. James and John were called “Boangernes” or “Sons of Thunder” by Jesus. This designation means that they were of priestly heritage. The voice of God was often described as sounding like thunder and priests gave the word of God to the people, thus “sons of the thunderous word of God.” John was also called, the “disciple that Jesus loved,” an epithet of himself in the Gospel of John, since to name oneself in print was believed to show arrogance. He was one of the sons of Zebedee, a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. His mother was Salome, probably a sister of Mary, mother of Jesus. So, John was a cousin of Jesus. He was also one of three inner-circle Apostles; Peter and James, his brother, being the others.

John was not just a fisherman, but the son of a wealthy fisherman with several boats and crews. The family owned a home in Jerusalem and was known to the families of the high priests. At the crucifixion, he was given care of Mary, his aunt, by the Lord. He lived a long time after the Lord’s resurrection living mostly in Ephesus. As we will see in our discourse on Revelation, he was exiled to the island of Patmos during the persecution of Domitian and returned from there to Ephesus for the last few years of his life; around AD 95–97, where he wrote his three small letters to the church. There has been no shortage of commentary on the letters of John. A short mention of the need John felt for writing his three letters, will suffice here.

The heretic Cerinthus lived in Ephesus during the time of John and had stirred the church with his hypothesis that The Christ (Messiah’s Spirit) had joined Jesus at his baptism and left him before he died. The first letter of John was written to refute this heresy. John wanted to bear witness to the Word that was with God in the beginning and came intact as the God/Man Jesus. This was the genesis of 1st John. John also plainly made a blueprint of the assurance of salvation for those who believed in Jesus as the son of God, essence of God and God with us.

The last two letters are very short and of a semi-personal nature to close friends and supporters who were in a province of Asia during the time of John which was lorded over by a leader who was something of a dictator. John sent representatives with the letters to help quell the dictatorship.

The proof texts we have today are: P Oxy 402, which is of 1st John, chapter 4 and is dated to AD 225–250; only 130 to 155 years after the original. And we have P 74, (P Bodmer XVII) which has all three letters of John and is dated at about AD 650, held in the Bodmer Library, Cologny Geneva, Switzerland.

JAMES

The Book of James has been applauded and maligned for centuries. We will discuss some of the controversy, but first let's look at the author. He was the half-brother to our Lord Jesus, not the Apostle James. During Jesus' life on earth brother James did not believe that he was the Messiah. The Gospel of John, in chapter seven, verse five says, "Even his brothers did not believe in him." It seems that they, along with every other Jew of that day simply could not wrap their brains around the fact of a humble Messiah who would die for the salvation of Israel. The Jewish leaders and zealots had come to favor the Son of David as a warrior messiah who would sit as a king on an earthly throne much like David and Solomon did during the height of Israel's history.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, James would have been in the best position to spoil the new religion's claims. He could have told the world that Jesus was his older brother and they grew up together. He could have called into memory all the older brothers in the country and asked people if they had ever seen their brothers sin; which would have certainly been true for them as they recollected. However, we never see a quote from him personally in the New Testament until after the resurrection. There are reports that Jesus' mother and brothers came to reason with him on occasion, but not specific words in the Gospels from James.

For a moment, let's put ourselves in the shoes of James during the lifetime of Jesus. As a younger brother, he would naturally have been always in the shadow of big brother. Mary might have even been partial to Jesus as the oldest and the son of promise for her. As he grew into his teen years, he was probably teased by others that he was the brother of a strange young man who was becoming a rogue rabbi. During Jesus' ministry, James was not picked to be one of the Lord's twelve Apostles. He was the odd man out as the miracles of Jesus came by word of mouth back to Nazareth. What would your thoughts be if you were James? How about resentment and confusion? But Jesus and James had the tie that binds,— family.

The Lord had different plans for James than to be a carpenter in Galilee. He had grown up with Jesus. He had seen that Jesus was special. He had the family history to be a fantastic witness. So, 1st Corinthians 15:7 tells us that, after the resurrection, Christ Jesus appeared to the Apostles and to Peter and to over 500 other followers. But then, before he appeared to teach the Apostles again he made a house-call to his brother James. Can you imagine James sitting alone after hearing that his brother Jesus had resurrected, because Mary saw him in person? Now, the final blow to his ego is that a woman gets in line before him! Then, word comes to his incredulous ears that over 500 people have seen the risen Lord. That was quite a set-up for what would happen next.

This must have been some brotherly reunion because from the time of the resurrection on James was a pillar of the Christian community and head of the church at Jerusalem. We can imagine the scene. James is in the carpenter shop that he had inherited in Nazareth. He is hammering away. There is nothing better for a man to do when he is frustrated than to bang on some wood with a hammer, eh? Jesus appears in

his resurrected body and James knows immediately that something is up. Jesus never looked like this before. The discussion might have begun with events that only He and James shared when growing up. It could have progressed with Jesus reminding his half brother about the miracles and healings during his ministry and, then, reminding James about the Holy Scriptures' description of the Messiah.

Before Jesus disappeared, I am sure he promised, as he does to all of us, to never leave James or forsake him. What is the evidence of something like this happening? James never faltered in his faith after that and was known later in life as "old camel knees" because his knees were so calloused from kneeling in prayer to God through Jesus Christ. And, he wrote the New Testament book that carries his name. When Jesus comes to one, they must make a choice. James obviously made the right one. We see that in his epistle to the church.

As a pastor, James was interested in the salvation of his flock and the application of the Christian life that would be a witness among the Jews of the grace of God. He had a pretty good start. Peter had conducted a revival at Pentecost and 3,000 new, "baby" Christians began to meet and to pray for God's will to be done. Pastor James offers practical wisdom for living as the People of The Way. He would have agreed with Christian singer Ken Medema who said, "Don't tell me I have a friend in Jesus until you show me I have a friend in you."

The Book is a perfect balance of Christian practice that some have called "right living based on right doctrine." Topics are about trials producing great faith, keys to handling temptation, and wisdom for making good decisions, among others. He urges Jewish Christians, just as Paul had done with Gentile Christians, to have faith and produce good works; not to do good works to earn a place in heaven. James encourages the church to be good stewards of their Christian life. To show their Christian faith by their good works. his point was that faith is faith that works to bring others into a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. He then proceeds to go into details of relationships and apply the life that God approves to the days and times. There are many great expositions of the Book of James by theologians today. It is a book well worth studying.

Let's see the earliest proof texts of the church about the Book of James:

- P 20, which is also P Oxy 1171, is of James, chapters 2–3 and is dated to AD 250, and P 22 (P Oxy 1229) is of James, chapter 1; both less than two-hundred years after the original writing.
- P 100 (P Oxy 4449) is dated to AD 300 and is of James, chapters 3–5 (So, we have the entire book by AD 300).
- P 54 (P Prince 15, Garrett Deposits 7742) is of James, chapters 2–3 and dated to AD 500.
- P 74 (P Bodmer XVII) is dated to AD 650 and is of James, chapter 1.

JUDE

The tiny book (25 verses) of Jude is the next to last book of the Bible. The author is believed to be another half-brother of our Lord Jesus. His letter to the church was in response to the arrival of some false teachers who had infiltrated the church. He takes the position that the Gospel is worth fighting for. He implores Christians to be faithful to the truth that they had been given by the Apostles before these new teachers arrived.

Originally, Jude must have had some of the same difficulties and privileges of being a half-brother of Jesus that James did. However, from the content of this letter, he obviously got over his hesitancy to proclaim Jesus as Lord. The text is clear on this. Jude is a letter of encouragement for the People of The Way to stay the course of Christianity and keep the faith unto eternal life.

Some of the proof texts we have today of the Book of Jude are:

- P 72 (Bodmer VII and VIII), where Jude follows 1st and 2nd Peter in the papyri. This is dated no later than AD 300.
- P 78 (P. Oxy 2684) of the entire letter, dated also from AD 300.
- There are also several mentions of the pre-nicene church fathers of the Book of Jude.

REVELATION

The Revelation is the last book of the Bible. It was titled *Apo Calupsis*, from whence we get The Apocalypse. It literally means, “To lift the veil,” and was called the Revelation from Jesus Christ; lifting the veil of time to uncover the future for the church. It was written originally by the Apostle John on the island of Patmos while he was imprisoned there for the faith. John spent many years on the island, certainly most of Roman Emperor Domitian’s reign from AD 81–96. The Holy Spirit, through the pen of John, writes to the church of all ages to resist the demands of worshipping anything or anyone but Jesus Christ. It projects into the future and sees the protection of Christ’s true church and the end of the old earth. It also foresees the beginning of the new earth under the reign of Jesus Christ. John does not say that he formulated the Revelation but that the risen Jesus came to him personally with a visage so spectacular that he (John) fell down at his feet as though a dead man. When he got up, he wrote what Jesus commanded him to write. The time was probably AD 95.

John gives a play-by-play account of the end times and how Jesus will end the earth but protect his people and usher-in the new heaven and the new earth. There are so many sermons, videos and books on The Revelation that to try and give an extended account of it here is unnecessary. However, here is my attempt at a short outline of the true way of the future:

- Explanation of the genesis of the writing by John
- Encouragement to the church of Jesus Christ by Jesus Christ and the review of the church age; ending with the rapture of the people of The Way of Christ
- Heaven's preparations to end the old world
- The Tribulation of the earth
- Jesus glorious appearing to the doom of Satan and all opposition
- 1,000 years of Christ's reign on the new earth
- The Great White Throne judgement and the future of God's people
- Overall Theme – Jesus wins, and his church reigns with Him forevermore!

Here are some of the earliest documentary evidences of The Revelation:

- P 98 (P.IFAO inv. 237b) containing the text of Revelation, chapter 1, dated to AD 150.
- P 47 (P. Beatty Biblical III) containing Revelation 9–17 and dated to AD 250.
- P 18 (P. Oxy 1079) of Revelation 1, dated to AD 300.
- P 24 (P. Oxy 1230) of Revelation, chapters 5–6, dated to AD 350.
- P 115 (P. Oxy 4499) of Revelation, chapters 2–3, 5–6. 8–15, dated to AD 300.
- P 85 (Gr. 1028) of Revelation, chapters 9–10, dated to AD 400.
- P 43 (Inv. 2241) of Revelation, chapters 2, 15–16, dated to AD 600.

In the second century Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus and Tertullian all accepted the Revelation as scripture and attributed it to the Apostle John.

THE WRITINGS OF THE PATRISTICS

The early church fathers also wrote during the 1st through the 3rd centuries. To name and place all 36,000 plus references to scripture, particularly of the New Testament, would require an encyclopedia. This has already been done by various authors. However, we should not leave the early history of Bible documentation without mentioning a few.

Clement of Rome, AD 97 – wrote 65 short chapters to the Corinthian church, within which he has 150 quotes from the Old Testament, illustrations of Christ's resurrection and references to Paul's career as an evangelist.

Ignatius, AD 110 – wrote seven letters to the church, within which are pleas for church unity under persecution, against the Gnostics and the Docetists and comparing elders and bishops to the strings of a harp playing in one accord.

Polycarp, AD 110 – wrote letters which quote directly and indirectly from both Old and New Testaments; especially John's writings and gave 60 New Testament quotations including 20 from the Gospels and 34 from Paul's letters.

The Didache, AD 125 – a manual of church instruction concerning the ethical actions consistent with a Christian life, baptism, fasting, communion, and the coming of the Lord.

Justin Martyr, AD 150 – wrote an apology letter in 67 chapters concerning Christian morals, dogmas and about Jesus as the founder of Christianity as foretold by the Hebrew prophets.

Papias, AD 150 – wrote that Mark was the interpreter of (scribe for) Peter and that Matthew wrote a Gospel in the Hebrew language first.

Tertullian, AD 200 – wrote about the nature of the Trinity, quoting the New Testament in many passages of his writings.

CONCLUSION

For the New Testament, there are available today over 5,000 manuscript fragments or entire documents in Greek and at least 15,000 fragments in other languages, mostly in Latin. Nothing in antiquity comes even close to this number. Furthermore, the discrepancies in these are in almost all cases trivial, affecting no important fact or doctrine. The person of Jesus Christ is not changed in any respect by the various readings. By studying the papyrological evidence, there can be no doubt that what we have as the New Testament today in the protestant Bible is essentially the same as that possessed by Christians of the second century.

Why is all of this important to us? In the Christian belief system, everything depends on whether the main events actually took place. If they did not, our religion is without basis and our leader, Jesus, was a con artist. If the events did actually take place in history, ours is the true faith and the true story of God, man and the world. Each of us must decide.

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- Muhammad beheaded 900 men in one day

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