

The Historical Reliability of the New Testament

Dr Max Baker-Hytch & Dr Calum Miller

Skeptics rule the headlines...



“The contradictions and illiteracies of the New Testament have filled up many books by eminent scholars, and have never been explained by any Christian authority except in the feeblest terms of ‘metaphor’ and ‘a Christ of faith’.” **Christopher Hitchens**



“Jesus’ existence has not been historically established. No contemporary documentation of the event, no archaeological proof, nothing certain exists today.” **Michel Onfray**

...but not the academy



“There are no substantial doubts about the general course of Jesus’ life: when and where he lived, approximately when and where he died, and the sort of thing that he did during his public activity... I shall first offer a list of statements about Jesus that meet two standards: they are almost beyond dispute among scholars; and they belong to the framework of his life, and especially of his public career...” **E. P. Sanders**

...but not the academy



“...Jesus was born c. 4 BCE, near the time of the death of Herod the Great; he spent his childhood and early adult years in Nazareth, a Galilean village; he was baptised by John the Baptist; he called disciples; he taught in the towns, villages, and countryside of Galilee; he preached ‘the kingdom of God’; about the year 30 he went to Jerusalem for Passover; he created a disturbance in the Temple area; he had a final meal with the disciples; he was arrested and interrogated by Jewish authorities; he was executed on the orders of the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate.

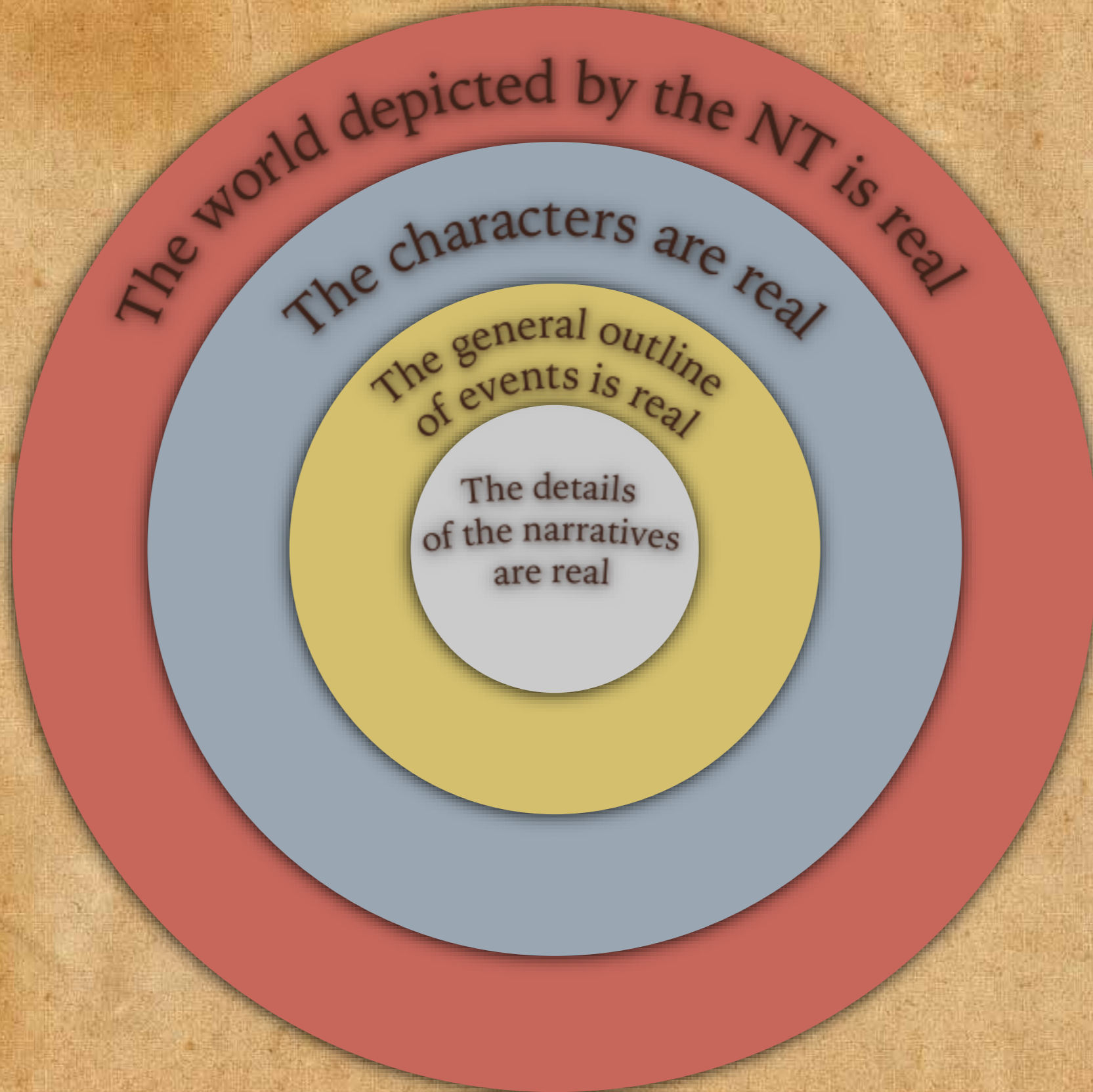
We may add here a short list of equally secure facts about the aftermath of Jesus’ life: his disciples fled; they saw him (in what sense is not certain) after his death; as a consequence, they believed that he would return to found the kingdom; they formed a community to await his return and sought to win others to faith in him as God’s Messiah.” **E. P. Sanders**

The historical reliability of the New Testament

	Greek New Testament Manuscripts	Latin manuscripts Tacitus' <i>Annals of Imperial Rome</i>
Complete copies	4	0
Partial Copies	340	2
Fragments	1000s	0



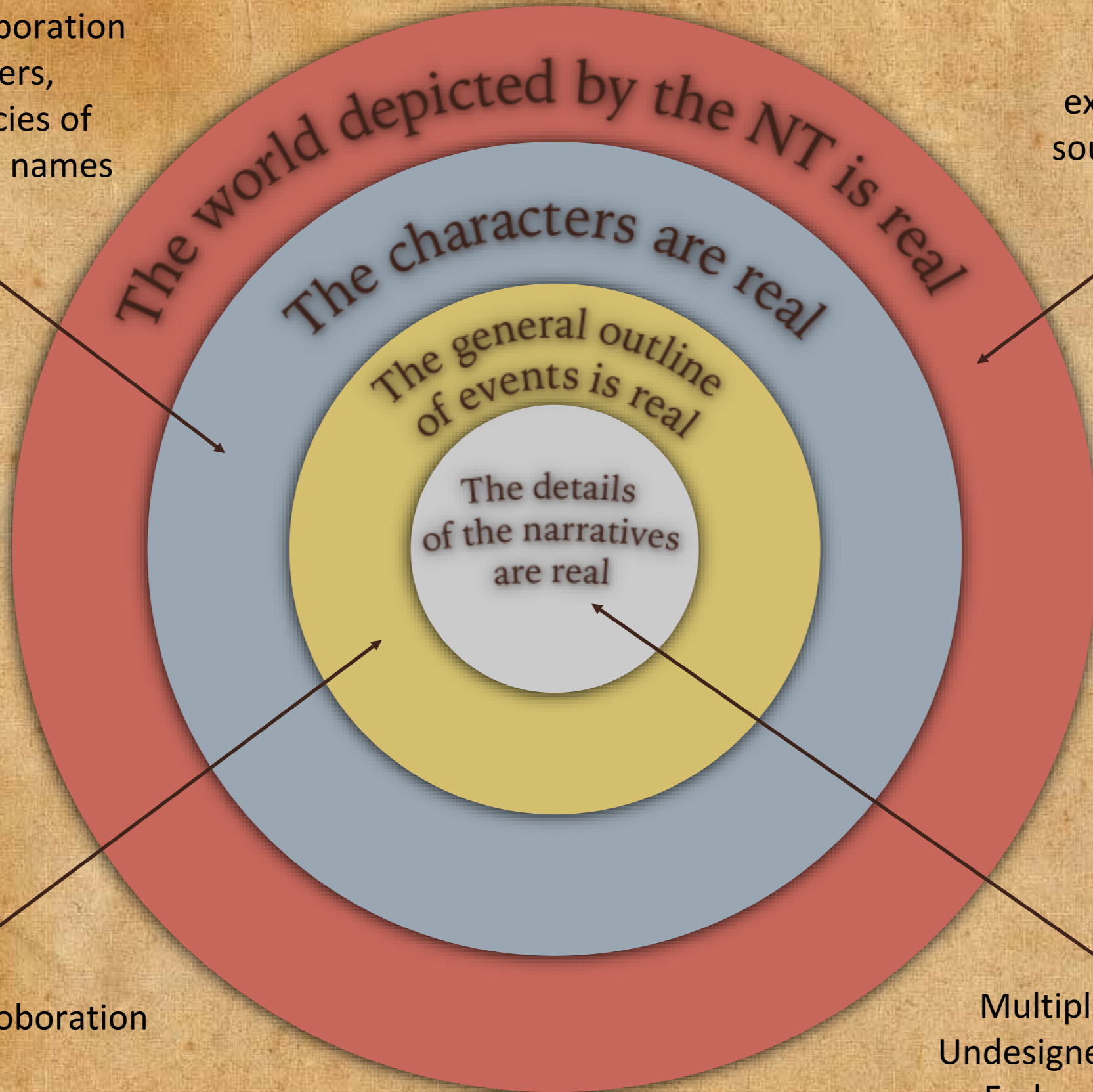
The historical reliability of the New Testament



The historical reliability of the New Testament

Extra-biblical corroboration
of key characters,
relative frequencies of
Palestinian Jewish names

Archaeology,
extra-biblical ancient
sources (e.g. Josephus)



Extra-biblical corroboration

Multiple attestation;
Undesigned coincidences;
Embarrassing details
Restraint; Evidence of general
carefulness

The world depicted by the NT is real



The world depicted by the NT is real

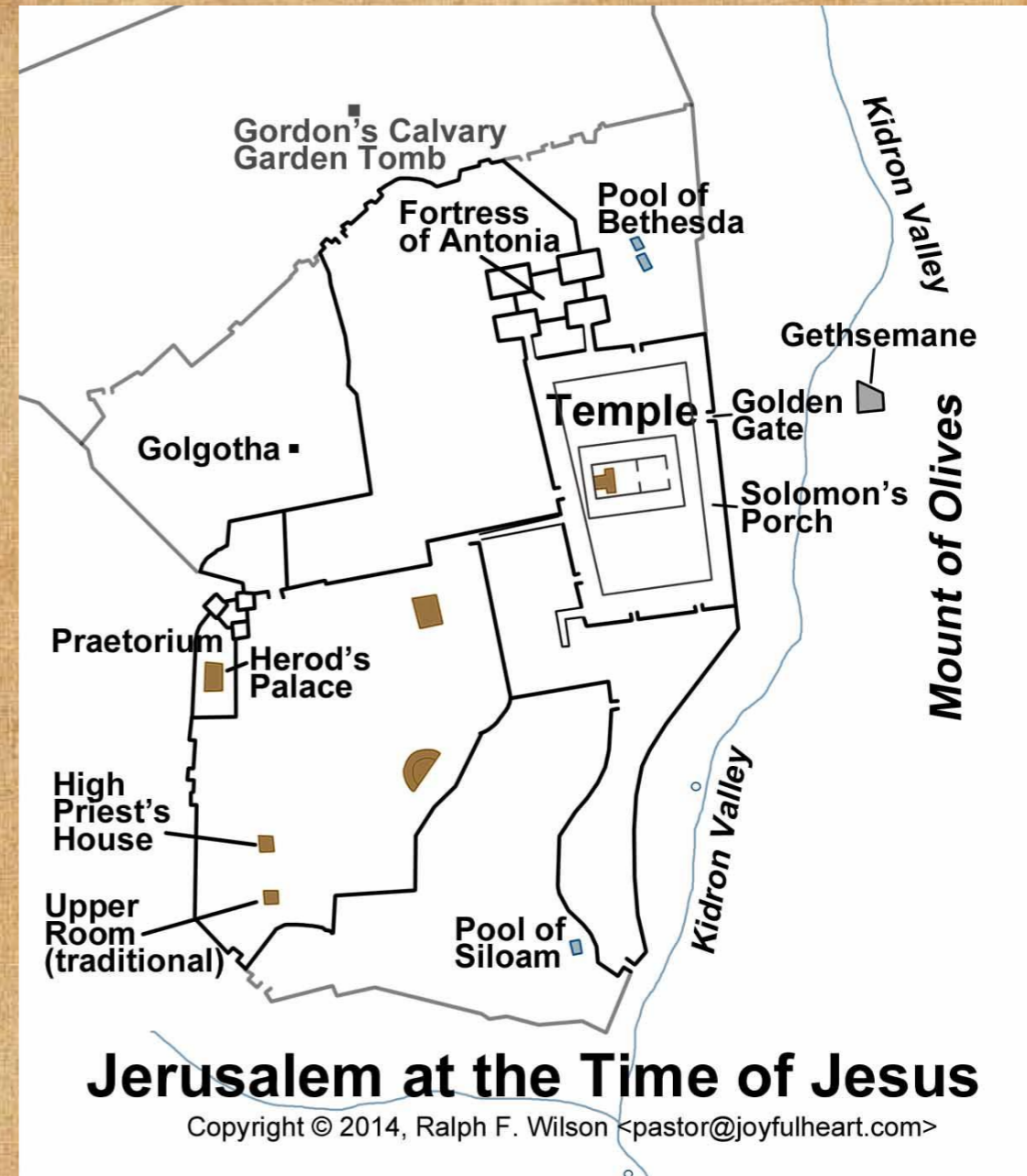
- The Gospels are generally held to have been written outside Palestine and after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.
- But they contain a great deal of historically accurate information about Palestine and specifically about Jerusalem as it was before AD 70.



The world depicted by the NT is real

Places in John

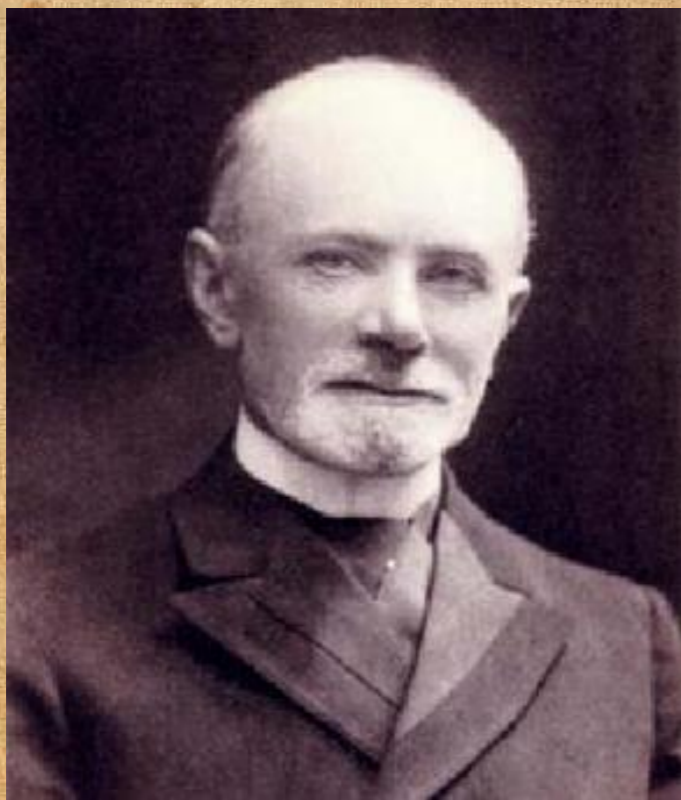
- Used to be argued that because of John's late date and places mentioned nowhere else in NT, many places in John were fictitious or symbolic – e.g. Bethesda or Siloam
- This view no longer tenable because of archaeology
- NB archaeology fairly recent



The world depicted by the NT is real

Places in John

John 5.2-5: “ Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Bethesda, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.”



“[T]he pool was a symbol of Judaism, and the five porticoes an allusion to the five books of the Law...”

Alfred Loisy, *The Fourth Gospel*, 1903, p. 386

The world depicted by the NT is real

Places in John

- But archaeology and literary records corroborate the name, location, porticoes and turbulence in the water
- The pool was excavated in 1956.



The world depicted by the NT is real

Capernaum

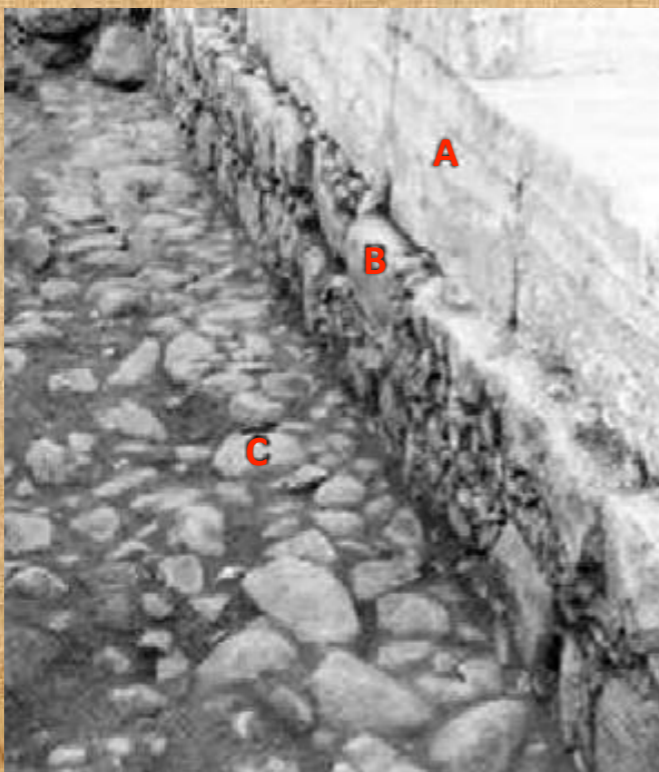


“A major collision between the gospel tradition and archaeology concerns the existence of synagogues and Pharisees in pre-70 C.E. Galilee. Historical logic implies that there would not have been any, since Pharisees fled to Galilee only after the fall of Jerusalem.”

Robert M. Price, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man* (2003), p. 14

The world depicted by the NT is real

Capernaum



- (A) Limestone walls of the 4th/5th century synagogue
- (B) Basalt wall of the 1st century synagogue,
- (C) Cobbled pavement of the 1st century synagogue

“The first-century Capernaum synagogue in which Jesus preached has probably been found. Because more than one synagogue may have existed in Capernaum at this time, we cannot be sure that this new find was Jesus’ synagogue. But this recently discovered first-century building is certainly a likely candidate. . . . The conclusion that this was a first-century A.D. synagogue seems inescapable.”

James F. Strange and Hershel Shanks, “Synagogue Where Jesus Preached Found at Capernaum,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9 (1983).

The world depicted by the NT is real

Capernaum

- A border town between territories, with customhouse and maybe small Roman garrison
- Roman remains found
- Evidence of fish trade, harbour, synagogue (close together), St Peter's house





The world depicted by the NT is real

Nazareth

“Nazareth is **not mentioned** even once in the entire **Old Testament**. *The Book of Joshua* (19.10,16) – in what it claims is the process of settlement by the tribe of Zebulun in the area – records twelve towns and six villages and yet omits any 'Nazareth' from its list. The **Talmud**, although it names 63 Galilean towns, **knows nothing** of Nazareth, nor does early rabbinic literature.

St Paul knows nothing of 'Nazareth'. Rabbi Solly's epistles (real and fake) mention Jesus 221 times, Nazareth not at all.

No ancient historian or geographer mentions Nazareth. It is first noted at the beginning of the 4th century.

None of this would matter of course if, rather like at the nearby 'pagan' city of Sepphoris, we could stroll through the ruins of 1st century bath houses, villas, theatres etc. **Yet no such ruins exist.**” (emphasis original)

- jesusneverexisted.com

The world depicted by the NT is real

Nazareth



The world depicted by the NT is real

Siloam

- “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent)” John 9:7
- Also mentioned in Old Testament
- Now located as one of two locations (or both) south of Jerusalem





The world depicted by the NT is real

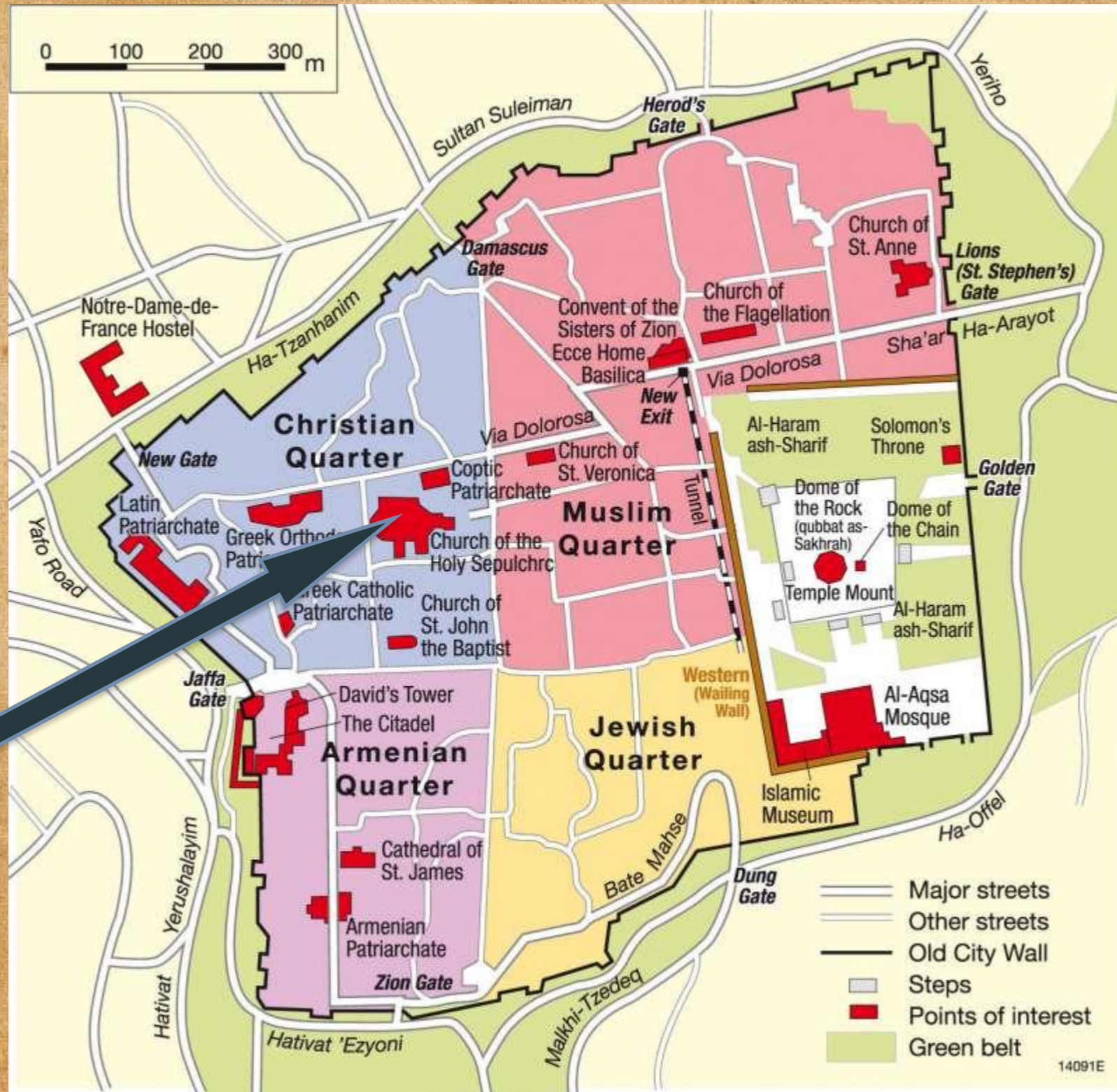
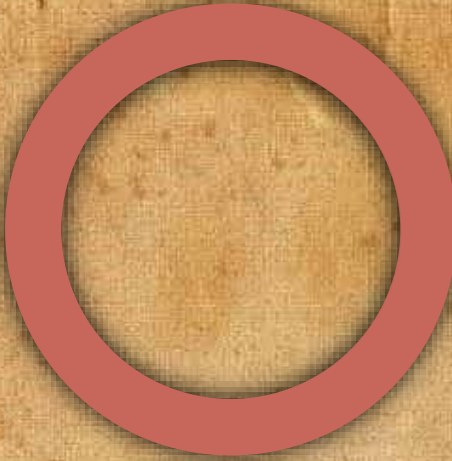
Golgotha

“So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him ... the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city ...

Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.” John 19:17-18, 20, 41-42

The world depicted by the NT is real

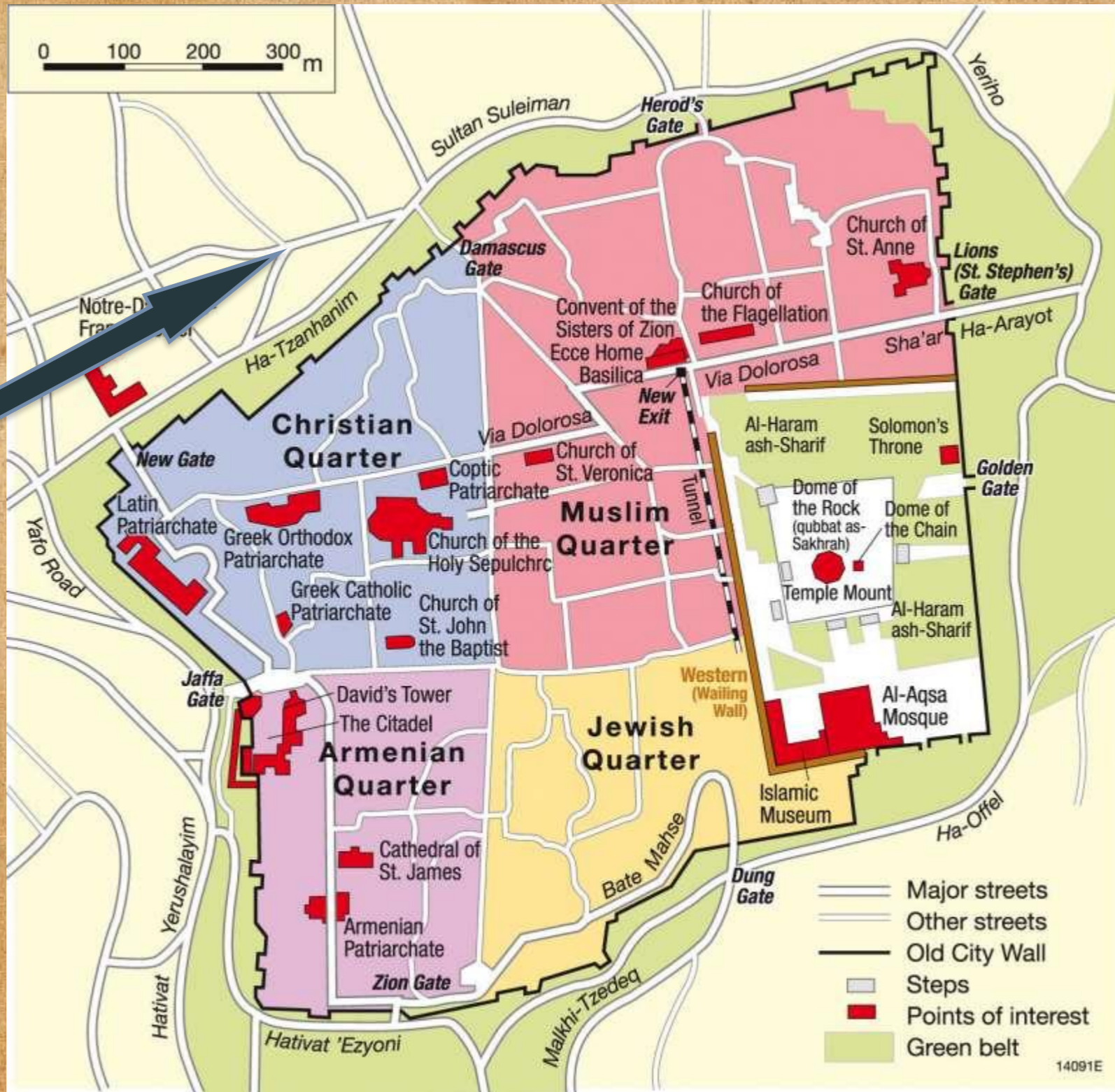
Golgotha



Probable site of
Jesus' tomb

The world depicted by the NT is real

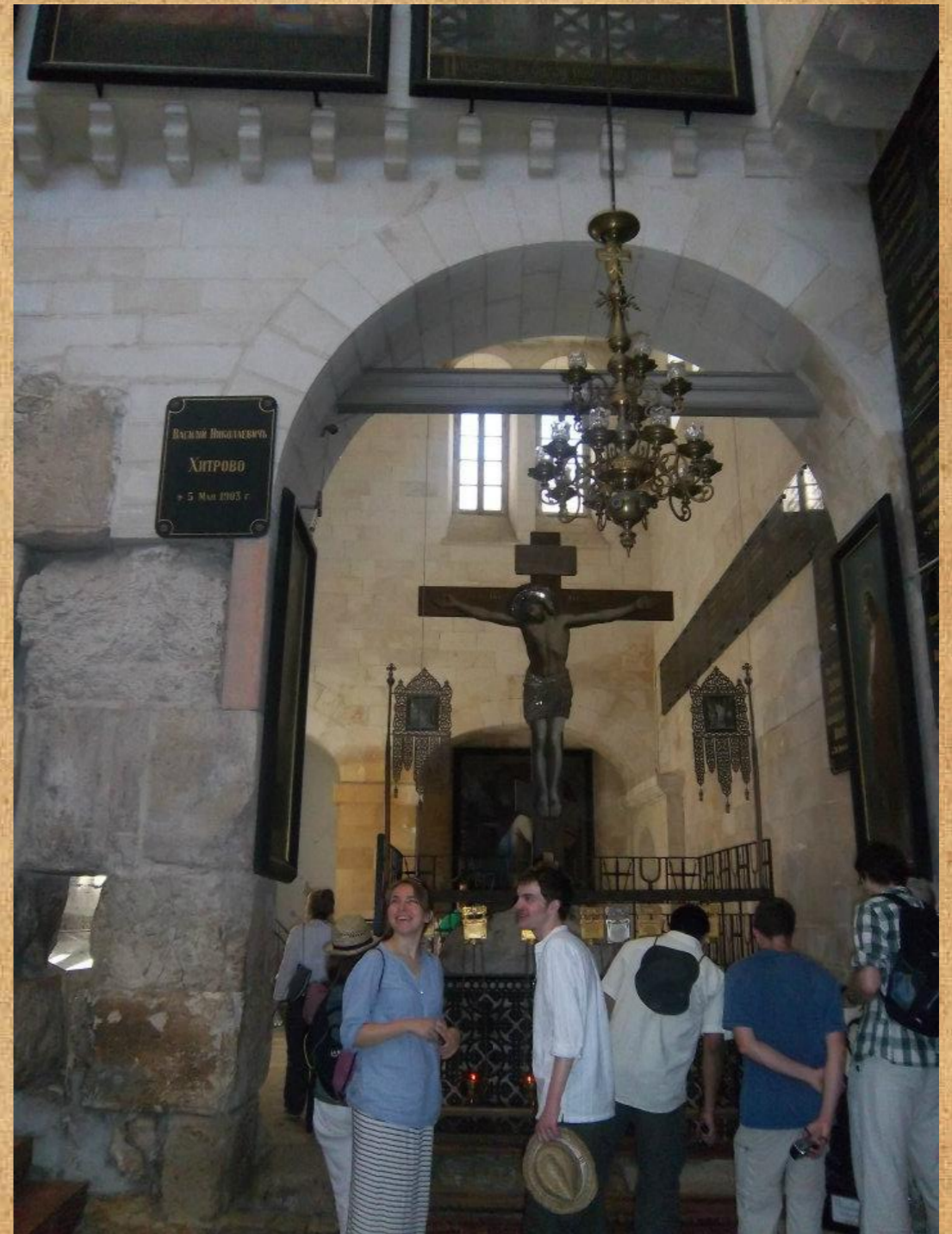
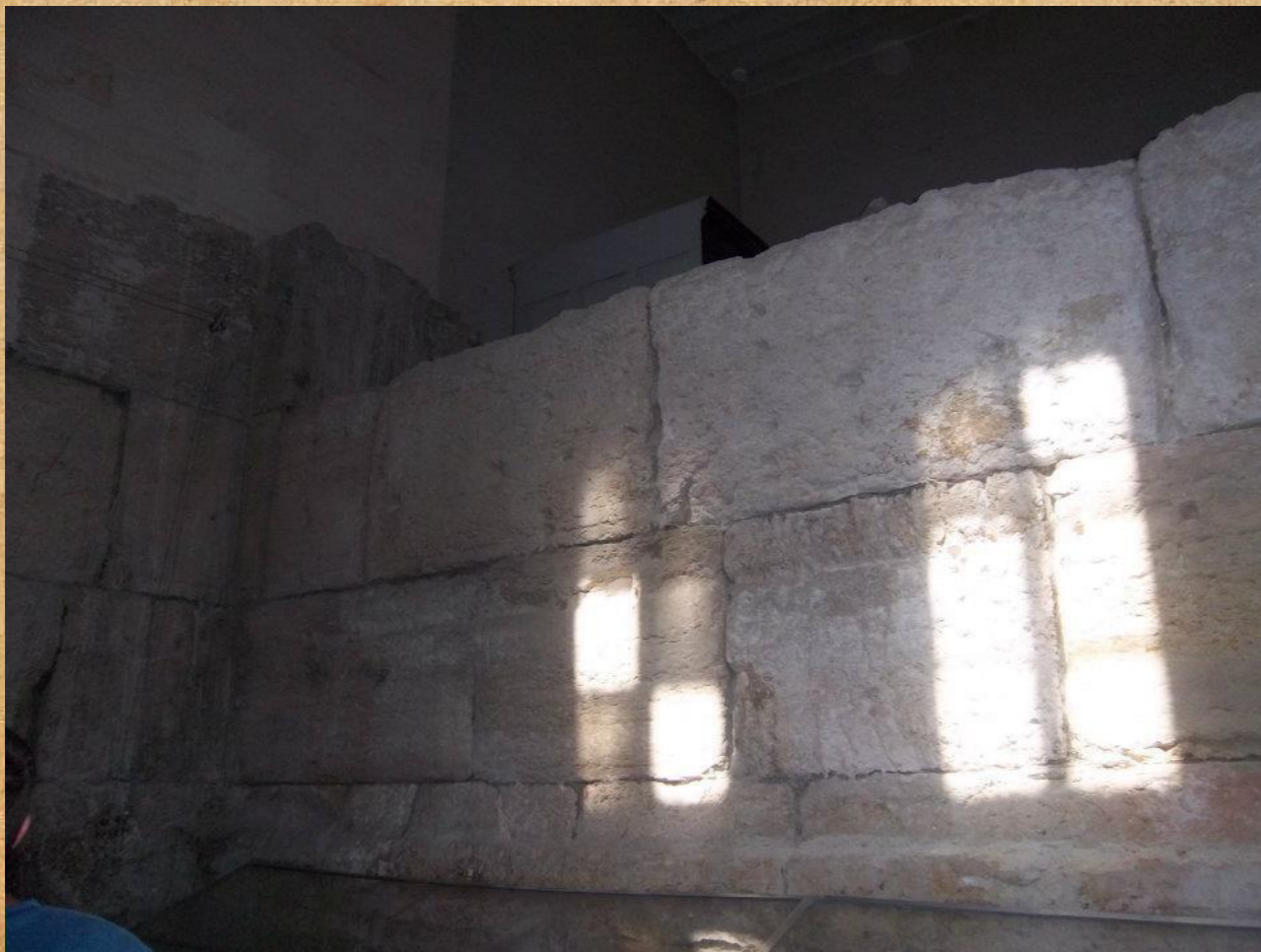
Golgotha



The world depicted by the NT is real

Golgotha

Walls built at time of Herod Agrippa (41-44AD)



The world depicted by the NT is real

Golgotha

Excavations show:

- Site originally a quarry, evidence of chisel marks and hewn rock; contains first-century tombs
- Originally a protruding, bare, rocky area
- Near gate known as Garden Gate (Josephus)



The world depicted by the NT is real

Golgotha

- Tombs in vicinity mentioned by Josephus
- And found in excavations!
- Only one in this area was an arcosolium
- Area levelled under Hadrian but still remembered despite change in city walls



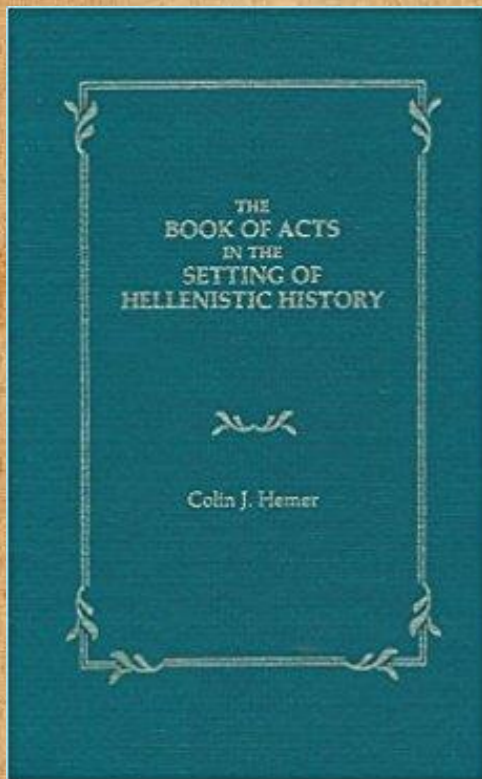
The world depicted by the NT is real

Luke's attention to detail

Colin Hemer identifies over 200 specific facts from the last 16 chapters of the book of Acts that have been confirmed by archaeological and historical research: details of local customs, ports, local trades, political figures, etc.

E.g., Acts correctly identifies the proper titles for numerous local/regional officials. Titles of local officials throughout the Roman Empire varied hugely and often changed from decade to decade.

- Governor of Cyprus is called the ἀνθύπατος (proconsul) (Acts 13:7)
- the magistrates of Philippi were στρατηγοί (governors) (Acts 16:20, 22)
- those of Thessalonica are simply πολιτάρχαι (rulers) (Acts 17:6, 8)
- the chief executive magistrate in Ephesus is a γραμματεὺς (town clerk) (Acts 19:35)
- the ruler of Malta is only a πρῶτος (chief man) (Acts 28:7)



The world depicted by the NT is real

Luke's attention to detail



“For Acts, the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . . . [A]ny attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.”

A. N. Sherwin White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, 1963, p. 189.

The world depicted by the NT is real

Customs



The Dead Sea Scrolls: “you must not let their bodies remain on the tree overnight; you shall most certainly bury them that very day.” (11Q19 64.7-13a)

Josephus: “the Jews are so careful about burial rites that even malefactors who have been sentenced to crucifixion are taken down and buried before sunset.”
(*Jewish War* 4.317)

The Romans do not require “their subjects to violate their national laws... “The Romans, by abstaining from all interference with the customs of the country [i.e. Israel] kept the nation at peace.” (*Against Apion* 2.211,273)



The world depicted by the NT is real

Religious and political context

“And **Sadducees** came to him, who **say that there is no resurrection**. And they asked him a question, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.”

Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, **have you not read in the book of Moses**, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.” Mark 12:18-27

The world depicted by the NT is real

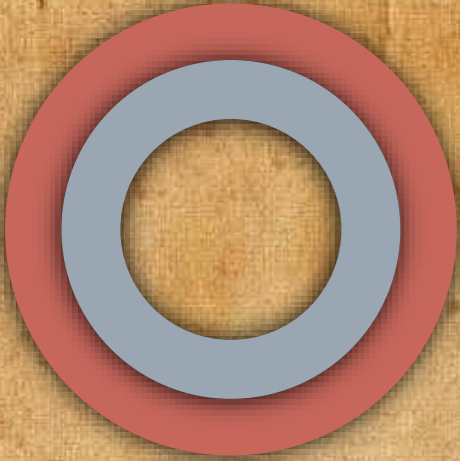
Religious and political context

Has been doubted that Galilee in Jesus' time was Jewish

But recent discoveries show cisterns at doorways, large stone pots (cf John 2) and lack of pig bones in Galilee from the period



The characters are real



The characters are real

The main characters



Flavius Josephus
(AD 37-100)

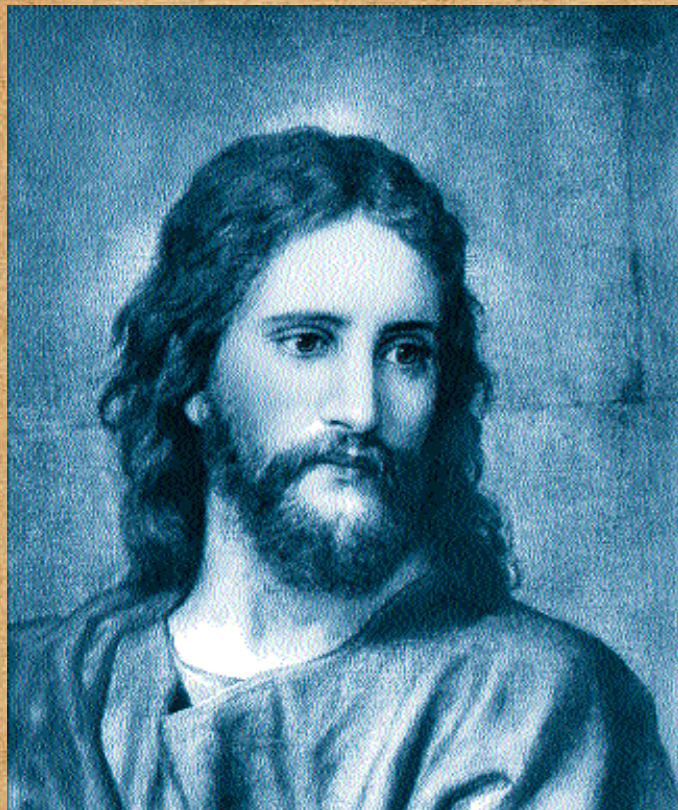
In his work *The Antiquities of the Jewish People* (ca. AD 93), the first-century Jewish historian Josephus makes references to various characters who appear in the New Testament, including:

- Jesus
- John the Baptist
- The Herod family
- Caiaphas the high priest
- Pontius Pilate
- James the brother of Jesus



The characters are real

Jesus



Many important figures of the Roman period are attested by a handful of literary sources at most.

Jesus is attested by at least *thirteen* different ancient sources, including at least six non-Christian sources:

Bart Ehrman: “No serious historian doubts the existence of Jesus... we have more evidence for Jesus than for almost anyone of his time period.”





The characters are real

The minor characters

Top five English baby boys' names in 1997?



The characters are real

The minor characters

Top five English baby boys' names in 1997?

1. Jack
2. Thomas
3. James
4. Joshua
5. Daniel



The characters are real

The minor characters

Top five Romanian baby boys' names in 2000?



The characters are real

The minor characters

Top five Romanian baby boys' names in 2000?

1. Andrei
2. David
3. Alexandru
4. Gabriel
5. Mihai



The characters are real

The minor characters

The patterns of Jewish names in the Gospels and Acts closely match the general naming patterns in the population of ancient Palestine as revealed by archaeology: even the incidental characters are very probably real.

Rank	Name as in English New Testament	Proportion of individuals in Ilan's onomastic database	Proportion of named individuals in the Gospels and Acts
All male names		100%	100%
1	Simon/Simeon	9.3%	10%
2	Joseph/Joses	8.3%	7.5%
Top 2 male names		17.6%	17.5%
3	Lazarus	6.3%	1.2%
4	Judas	6.2%	6.2%
5	John	4.6%	6.2%
Top 5 male names		34.7%	31.3%
6	Jesus	3.7%	3.6%
7	Ananias	3.1%	2.5%
8	Jonathan	2.7%	1.2%
9	Matthew/Matthias	2.4%	2.5%
10	Manaen	1.6%	1.2%



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All male names			2625	80	100%	100%
1	Simon/Simeon	Simon	243	8	9.3%	10%
2	Joseph/Joses	Joseph	218	6	8.3%	7.5%
Top 2 male names			461	14	17.6%	17.5%
3	Lazarus	Eleazar	166	1	6.3%	1.2%
4	Judas	Judah	164	5	6.2%	6.2%
5	John	Yohanan	122	5	4.6%	6.2%
Top 5 male names			913	25	34.7%	31.3%
6	Jesus	Joshua	99	3	3.7%	3.6%
7	Ananias	Hananiah	82	2	3.1%	2.5%
8	Jonathan	Jonathan	71	1	2.7%	1.2%
9	Matthew/Matthias	Mattathias	62	2	2.4%	2.5%
10	Manaen	Menahem	42	1	1.6%	1.2%
Top 10 male names			1269	34	48.3%	42.5%
Top 25 male names			1647	49	62.7%	61.3%
Top 50 male names			1947	57	74.2%	71.6%
Names only occurring once across all of our sources			207	3	7.9%	3.8%

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All female names			328	19	100%	100%
1	Mary	Mariam	70	6	21.3%	31.6%
2	Salome	Salome	58	1	17.7%	5.3%
Top 2 female names			128	7	39%	36.8%
3		Shelamzion	24	0	7.3%	0%
4	Martha	Martha	20	1	6%	5.3%
5 =	Joanna	Joanna	12	1	3.7%	5.3%
5 =	Sapphira	Shiphra	12	1	3.7%	5.3%
Top 5 female names			196	10	59.8%	52.6%
7	Bernice	Berenice	8	1	2.4%	5.3%
8 =		Imma	7	0	2.1%	0%
8 =		Mara	7	0	2.1%	0%
10 =		Cyprus	6	0	1.8%	0%
10 =		Sarah	6	0	1.8%	0%
10 =		Alexandria	6	0	1.8%	0%
Top 10 female names			236	11	72%	57.9%
Top 25 female names			285	17	87%	89.5%
Names only occurring once across all of our			31	2	9.6%	10.5%



The characters are real

The minor characters

Common ways of distinguishing between people with popular names in first-century Palestine:

- Father's name (e.g., Simon son of John)
- Names of husbands or sons added (e.g. Mary of Clopas)
- Nickname added (e.g., Simon the Zealot)
- Hometown (e.g., Joseph of Arimathea)
- Occupation (e.g., Simon the tanner)

All of these methods of distinguishing people with popular names are visible in the Gospels.



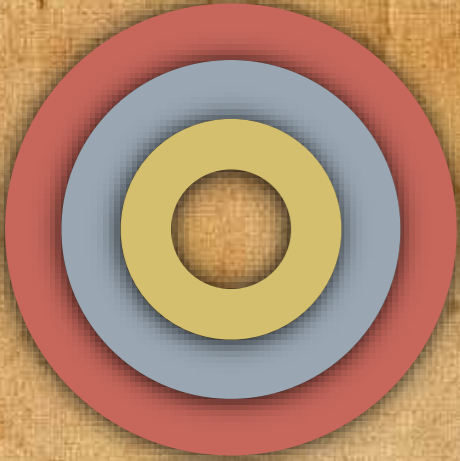
The characters are real

The minor characters



“[T]hese features of the New Testament would be difficult to explain as the result of random invention of names within Palestinian Jewish Christianity and impossible to explain as the result of such invention outside of Jewish Palestine.”

Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 2006, p. 84



The general outline of events is real



The general outline of events is real

Ancient non-Christian sources



Josephus (~93 AD): “Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man [if it be lawful to call him a man]; for he was a doer of surprising works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. [He was the Christ]. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for they reported that he appeared alive to them... And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.” (*Antiquities of the Jewish People*, 18.63-64)

“The high priest Ananus...convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ...” (*Antiquities*, 20.200)



The general outline of events is real

Ancient non-Christian sources



Tacitus (~116 AD): “Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.” (*Annals of Imperial Rome*, 15.44)



The general outline of events is real

Ancient non-Christian sources



Pliny the Younger (~112 AD): “[The Christians] were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.”
(Letter to the Emperor Trajan)

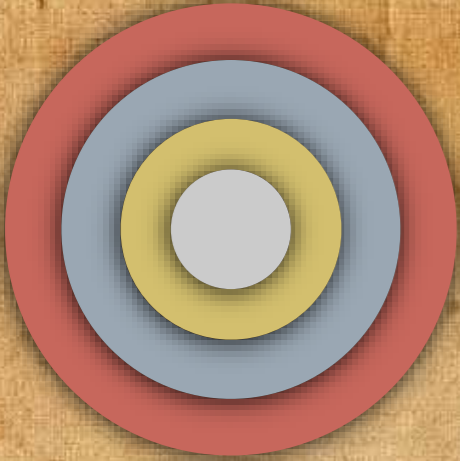


The general outline of events is real

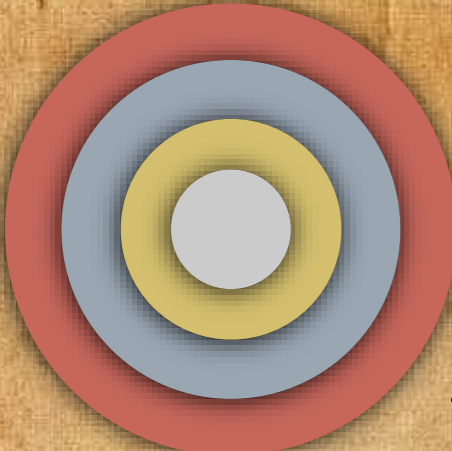
Ancient non-Christian sources

Taken together, the earliest non-Christian ancient sources attest that:

- He was known as a moral teacher and a wise man
- His followers believed him to be the Messiah
- He had a reputation as a miracle worker
- He was condemned to death by crucifixion under the authority of Pontius Pilate at the suggestion of the Jewish chief priests during the Passover
- The movement he founded stopped temporarily after his death
- It very quickly resumed
- His followers claimed he appeared to them alive
- He had a brother called James, who was executed by the Jerusalem leadership
- The Christian movement grew rapidly in Judea and soon spread as far as Rome
- Christians were subjected to violent persecution within the first few decades
- They would meet on a fixed day to worship Jesus together



The details of the narratives are real

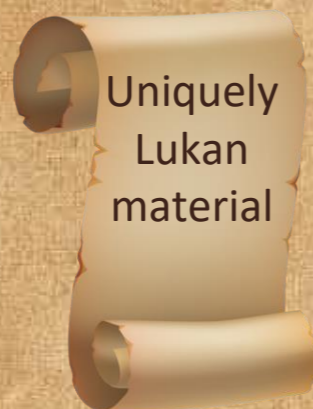
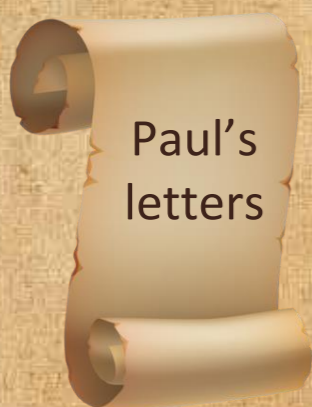


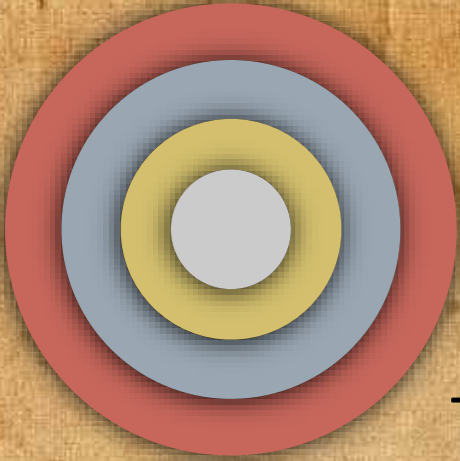
The internal evidence

Recurring motifs across the New Testament

The NT is not a single source but a *collection* of at least seven independent sources.

Most of the key events and themes of Jesus' life and the early church are attested independently by several sources.



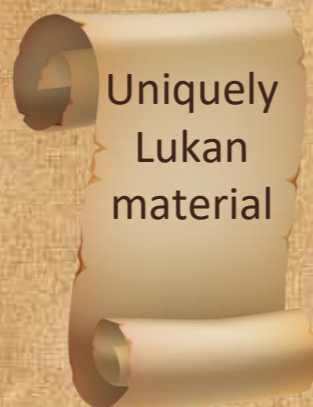


The internal evidence

Multiple Sources

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The internal evidence

The Test of Embarrassment





The internal evidence

The Test of Embarrassment

Several key events and themes of the Gospels would have been embarrassing for the early Christians, and hence are unlikely to have been invented...



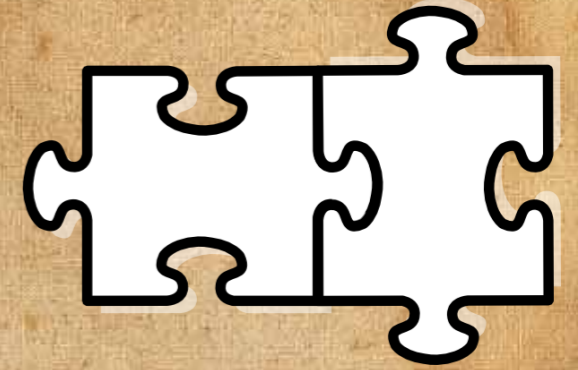
- The frequent idiocy of the male disciples
- The fleeing of the male disciples at the arrest of Jesus
- Peter's denial of Jesus
- The crucifixion itself
- The honourable burial of Jesus by a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the council which had condemned Jesus to death
- Women as the discoverers of the empty tomb—"Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex" (Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.815). "But who saw this? A hysterical female, as you say?" (*apud* Origen, *C. Celsus* 2.55)



The internal evidence

Undesigned Coincidences

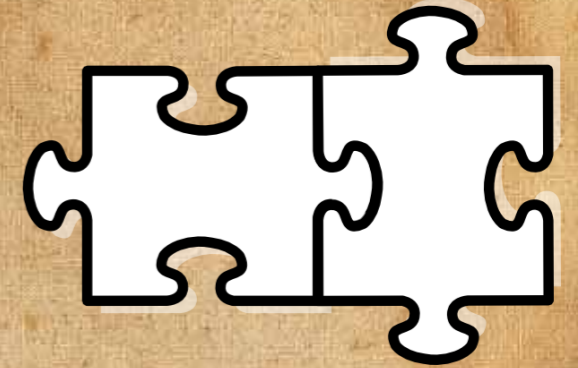
An undesigned coincidence is an instance where two or more sets of incidental details, usually (but not always) found in two separate sources, interlock in a satisfying way, but do so in a way that is subtle and unobtrusive and hence is unlikely to be the result of deliberate design.



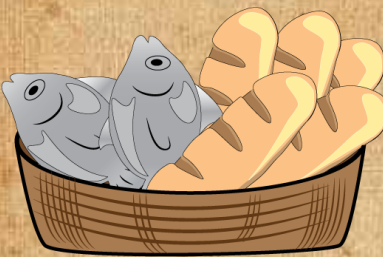


The internal evidence

Undesigned Coincidences



Why ask Philip?



John 6.2-5: “Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?””

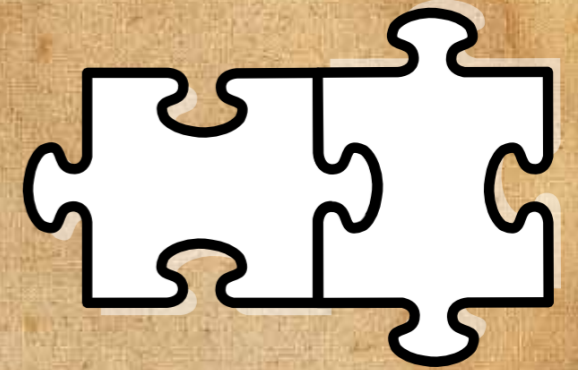
John 1.43-44: “The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida.”

Luke 9.10-11 “On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida... The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.”



The internal evidence

Undesigned Coincidences



The green grass

Mark 6.38-39: “And he said to them, “How many loaves have you? Go and see.” When they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass.”

John 6.2-5: “Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?””



The internal evidence

Restraint



- The Gospel authors avoided the temptation to speculate about Jesus' childhood and early years (contrast with the Apocryphal Gospels)
- Jesus is never quoted as saying anything about circumcision, even though it would have been very useful for early church leaders to be able to attribute teaching about this topic to Jesus
- The resurrection itself is not narrated (contrast with the Gospel of Peter)
- No narrative (only mentions) of the resurrection appearances of Jesus to Peter and James, despite the prominence of these two in the early church

Conclusions

- The historical narratives of the New Testament are basically accurate
- If the Gospels are basically accurate, then we need to take seriously Jesus' claims about himself and the claims about his resurrection

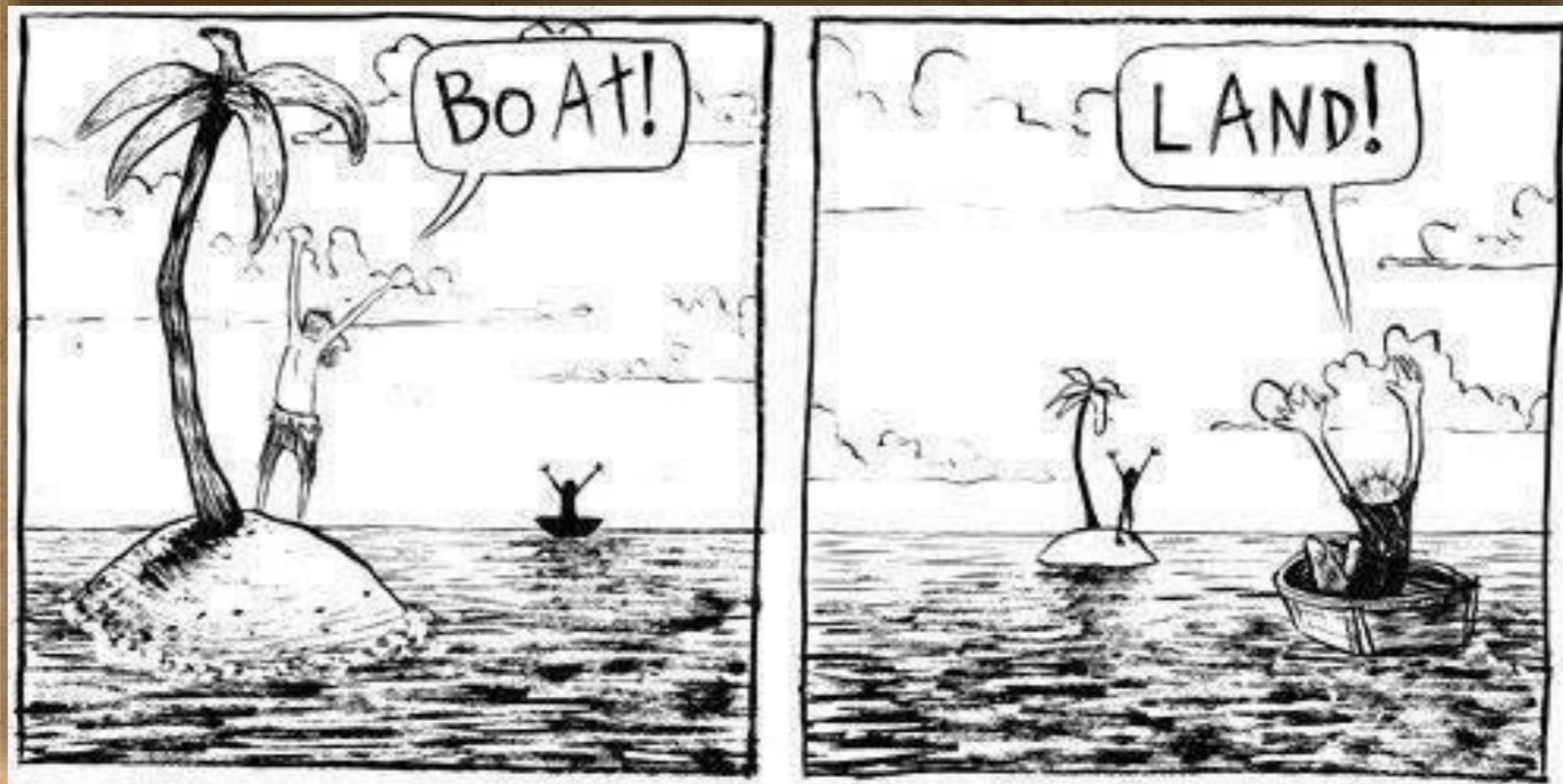
Email for handouts: c.miller@doctors.org.uk

The 'minimal facts' about Jesus

Just a few of the 'minimal facts' — those facts accepted by the vast majority of contemporary historical scholars

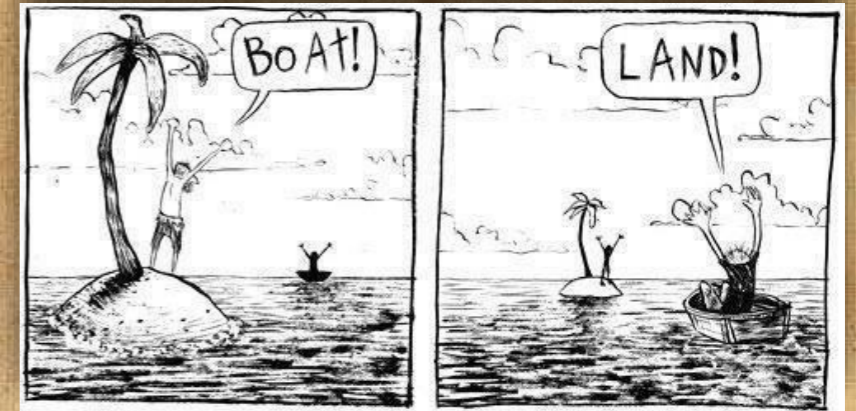
- Jesus was born around 4 BC and grew up in Galilee
- He was baptised by John the baptist before he began his ministry
- He called disciples, including an inner circle of twelve
- He preached the Kingdom of God and presented himself as playing the central role in it
- He befriended people on the margins of society
- His teaching strongly emphasised love, especially radical love of enemies
- He was widely viewed as a miracle worker, even by his opponents
- Just before the Passover (of 30 or 33 AD) he entered Jerusalem and drove merchants out of the temple
- He had a meal with his disciples involving bread and wine
- He was arrested and tried by the Jewish chief priests who handed him over to the Roman Governor to be executed
- He died from the rigours of Roman crucifixion
- The tomb in which he was buried was found empty by some of his women followers a couple of days later *
- His disciples were convinced that he had been raised and that he appeared to them alive on a number of occasions
- Previously skeptical James (the brother of Jesus) and hostile Paul (Saul) both converted because they were convinced the risen Jesus appeared to them
- The disciples established the Christian movement in Jerusalem and it grew extremely rapidly

Appendix: Contradictions



- Discrepancies in peripheral details often help to show independence between the different accounts, lack of collusion
- Exactly what we would expect from multiple eyewitness testimony
- Often resolvable
- Considerable rearrangement and paraphrasing allowed in ancient speechwriting
- Fits with oral performative variation, not layered tradition history

Appendix: Contradictions



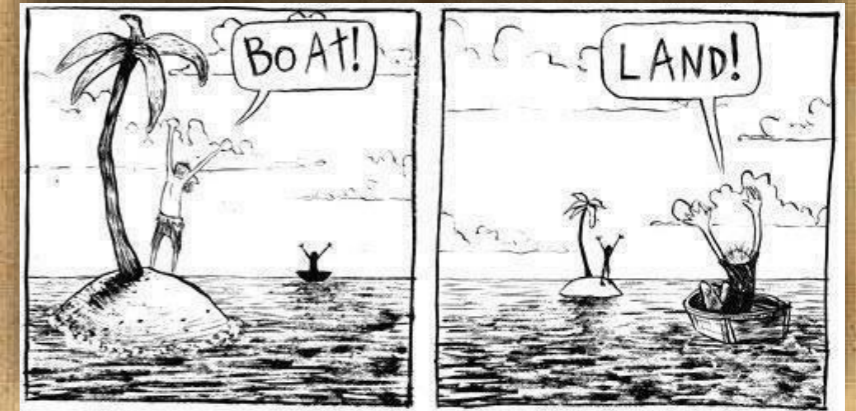
The healing of the centurion's servant

Matthew 8.5: "When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him ..."

Luke 7.3: "When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant."

- So did the centurion come himself, or did he send others as messengers?
- The answer: In the world of the first century, it was common to speak of someone's performing an action when it was by his authority, or by his provision, or by his request, that it was done.

Appendix: Contradictions



The women at the empty tomb

Mark 16.1: “When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.”

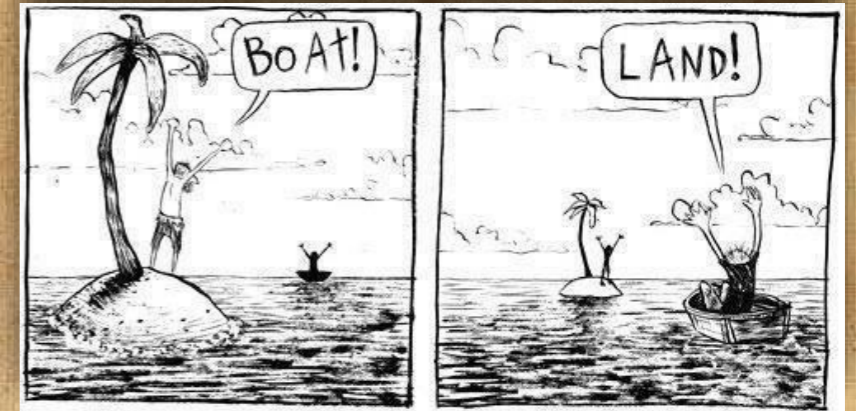
Matthew 28.1: “Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.”

Luke 24.10: “Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, ...”

John 20.1: “Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.”

- Which women were at the tomb?
- The accounts contradict one another only if it is assumed that each account is giving an exhaustive list of the women who went to them tomb. But there is no reason at all to assume that; in fact, Luke and John state/imply that other women were present besides those whom they name.

Appendix: Contradictions



Discrepancies are exactly what we would expect from independent accounts of the same event

Who made the public proclamation of the Declaration of Independence from the balcony of the Old State House in Boston on the morning of July 18, 1776?

* Some early sources say it was William Greenleaf, high sheriff of Suffolk County

* Other early sources say it was Colonel Thomas Crafts

- Actually, *both* Greenleaf and Crafts read the Declaration from the balcony. Greenleaf had a weak voice, and the crowd could not hear him clearly, so Crafts—who had a strong voice— repeated it after him loudly enough for all to hear.
- The apparent contradiction was caused by the assumption that it *could not be both*. But it was. The appearance of contradiction arises because most of us lack a key piece of information about the *context*.

Appendix: Oral transmission



Were the stories about Jesus preserved accurately?

Motivation

- Jesus' followers would have been concerned to preserve stories about Jesus carefully because it was Jesus who made them distinctive from Judaism at large—he was seen as the originator of the early church.
- Jesus was revered as Lord by the early Christians, so preserving the memory of his deeds and words was tremendously important.
- Many of his followers had given up their livelihoods to follow Jesus—they were evidently deeply devoted to him.
- Jesus was seen as a teacher; in ancient oral cultures students/disciples were expected to memorise their teacher's words.

Appendix: Oral transmission



Were the stories about Jesus preserved accurately?

Means

- Jesus' teaching was presented in memorisable forms—parables, pithy sayings—and he would very likely have repeated the central themes of his teaching hundreds of times throughout his ministry.
- Everything we know about ancient cultures in which literacy rates were low indicates that Jesus' followers would have begun committing Jesus' words and deeds to memory and rehearsing them even during his earthly ministry, especially given that he sent them out on preaching excursions.
- As Paul's letters clearly indicate, the early church was well-networked despite being geographically scattered throughout the Mediterranean region. Members of geographically diverse churches knew one another by name, wrote letters to each other, etc.
- Ancient norms of oral cultures involved rigorous community control over the retelling of stories: a certain degree of variation in the choice of words was normal, but the core of the story didn't change over time.

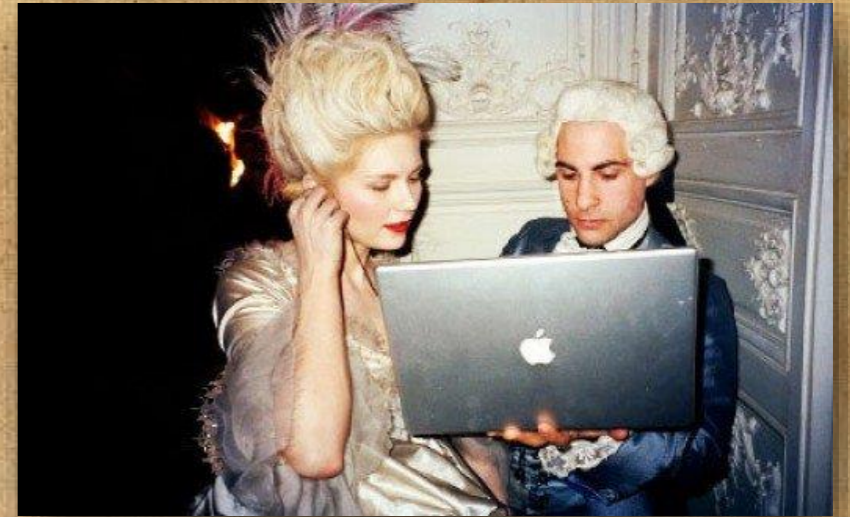
Appendix: Oral transmission



Evidence that the stories *were* accurately preserved

- Abundant evidence of careful preservation of details about places, names of characters (even minor characters), preservation of embarrassing details, etc.
- Numerous indications that the early church cared a lot about the testimony of the eyewitnesses: Paul went up to Jerusalem to meet with Peter and James; Luke's prologue states that he received information from the eyewitnesses; Papias (late 1st - early 2nd C) noted his desire to speak with the 'disciples of the Lord'.
- Indications that the early church maintained a careful distinction between pre- and post-Easter (i.e., didn't read back things into Jesus' earthly ministry based on their belief in Jesus as the risen Lord).
- The eyewitnesses were leaders in the early church; the need for an eyewitness to replace Judas.
- Lack of *agrapha* (sayings of Jesus that occur outside of the Gospels).

Appendix: Anachronisms



Themes that are alleged to be anachronistic

- *Enduring persecution as a theme of Jesus' teaching*: no reason to doubt that Jesus faced fierce opposition during his ministry; Paul confesses to having violently persecuted the early church prior to his conversion (Gal 1.14)
- *Allegedly evolving Christology*: but Paul, writing before any of the Gospels and clearly reflecting the beliefs of the early church at large (1 Cor 1.2), already has the highest Christology (e.g., 1 Cor 8.5-6; Phil 2.6-11)
- *Instructions on mission as a theme of Jesus' teaching*: maintained a careful distinction between pre- and post-Easter (i.e., didn't read back things into Jesus' earthly ministry based on their belief in Jesus as the risen Lord.)

Appendix: Authorship



Authorship of John's Gospel

- Early papyri with title “according to John”: P75 and P66
- Unanimous external testimony to Johannine authorship: Eusebius; Origen; Tertullian; Muratorian Fragment; Irenaeus; Tatian; Justin Martyr; Papias?; Apology of Aristides; Basilides; Ignatius; no alternative traditions or uncertainty
- Contains a considerable amount of corroborated historical and geographical information which is not derived from the Synoptics
- Jewish author; Palestinian native; Eyewitness; Member of inner circle; Beloved disciple (plausibly son of Zebedee in Jn 21)
- Independence from synoptics; early acceptance in church including heretics
- Undesigned coincidences
- Even if not son of Zebedee, probably another close disciple named John

Appendix: Authorship

Authorship of Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles

- All scholars agree that Luke and Acts were written by the same author.
- Unanimity in the manuscript tradition on the title “according to Luke”
- Unanimous external testimony to Lukan authorship: Muratorian Canon, anti-Marcionite prologue, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Eusebius, Jerome (also Acts)
- Luke was barely an important figure in early Church; little motivation to fabricate an attribution to Luke.
- The “we” sections in Acts (chapters 16, 20-28) are very probably a sincere claim to personal participation: they don't by any means occur in the most exciting parts of the narrative; the level of detail in the “we” sections is greater than elsewhere; first-person pronouns were almost never used fictitiously in ancient historiographic writing. The majority of scholars now accept that the author of Luke-Acts was indeed a travelling companion of the Apostle Paul.
- Alleged discrepancies between Acts and Paul's letters are actually very few, and are no greater than the discrepancies between other instances of a biography of a figure and the letters written by that figure. There are *vastly* more points of agreement between Acts and Paul, including dozens of undesigned coincidences.



Appendix: Authorship



Authorship of Mark's Gospel

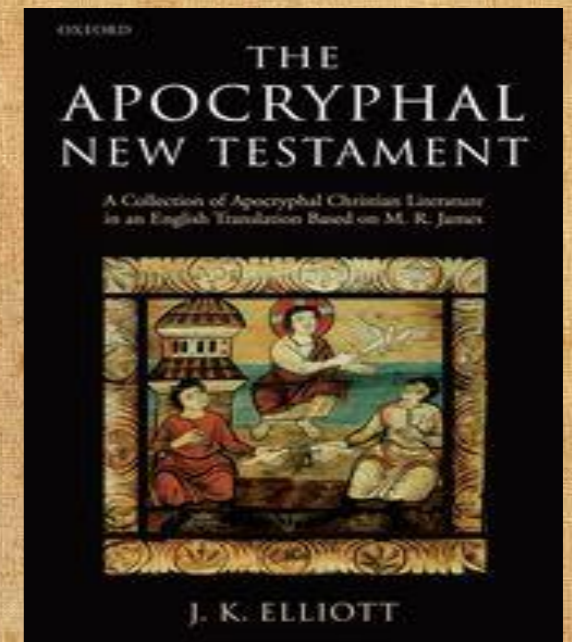
- Unanimity in the manuscript tradition on the title “according to Mark”.
- Strong indications that Mark's Gospel was written in Rome (e.g. numerous Latinisms) in the late 60s AD, during or shortly after Peter was preaching in Rome: it's very likely that Peter's testimony heavily shaped Mark's Gospel.
- Unanimous external testimony to Markan authorship and Mark's connection with the Apostle Peter: Jerome, Eusebius, Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Muratorian Fragment, Anti-Marcionite Prologue, Papias of Hierapolis.
- Luke uses Mark as a source; Luke was a careful historian, and had opportunities to meet eyewitnesses. It's unlikely Luke would have used Mark's Gospel if it didn't contain the testimony of an apostle.
- Mark was hardly a prominent figure in the early church; if later Christians had fabricated an authorship attribution for this Gospel, they would very likely have attributed it directly to an apostle rather than to a relatively obscure associate of the apostles.
- The internal evidence confirms that Mark's Gospel was based on Peter's testimony: Peter is the most prominent character besides Jesus; the story is told from his perspective.

Appendix: Arguments from silence



- The silence of historical sources on an event is only evidence against that event to the degree that we would **expect** the source to comment.
- In order for the silence of a source X about E to outweigh positive evidence of E's occurrence, we would need to be highly confident that X would have mentioned E if E occurred. We seldom have a situation like that with the events in the NT that are sometimes attacked with arguments from silence.
- E.g., 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 doesn't mention the empty tomb. But there are probable reasons why it wouldn't do, even though the empty tomb was known to Paul: (a) Paul is listing credible witnesses and women weren't viewed as credible witnesses; (b) "he was buried... he was raised" strongly implies an empty tomb for a 1st century Jew and so adding "and the tomb was found empty" would be wholly redundant.

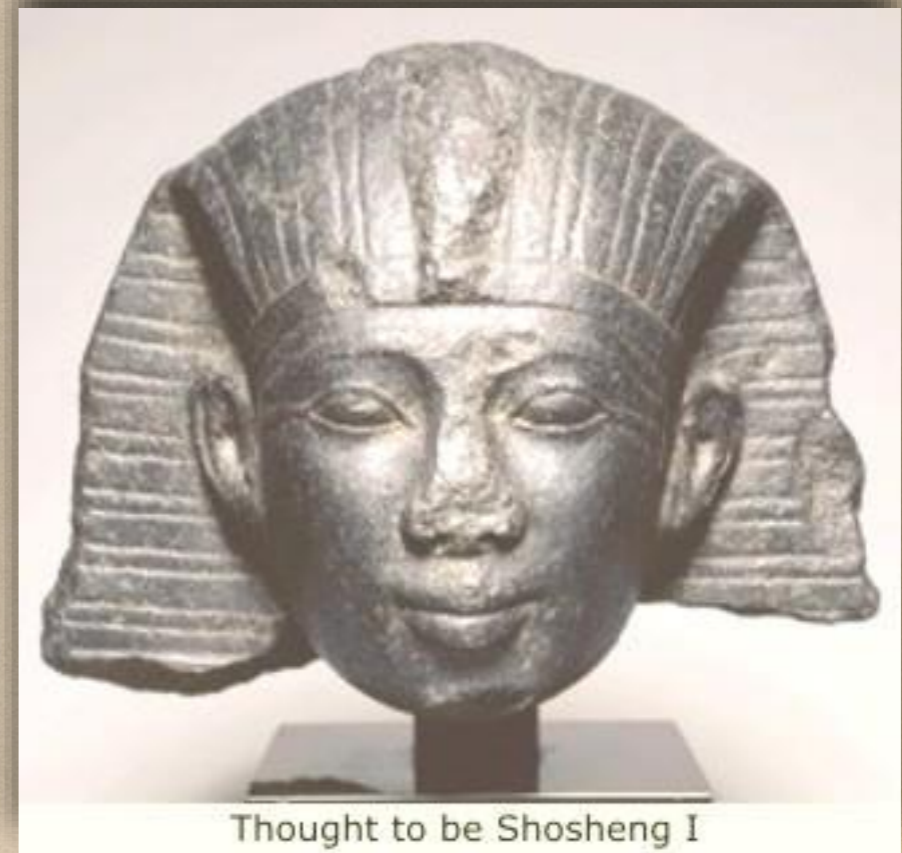
Appendix: The apocryphal gospels



- Do the Apocryphal Gospels contain historically valuable material about Jesus?
- Almost all scholars agree that Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John were written in the first century. Minimally, they were written in communities in which the eyewitnesses had been teaching, but there is a strong case for thinking that the authors themselves were closely connected to the eyewitnesses.
- By contrast, the Apocryphal Gospels ('Thomas', 'Peter', 'Mary', 'Philip', 'Judas', 'Bartholomew', etc.) are widely agreed to have been written in the second and third centuries and hence none of them are likely to be based on sources close to eyewitnesses.
- The Canonical Gospels are full of incidental details about landmarks, geography, customs, the socio-political climate, etc, a great many of which have been independently corroborated. By contrast, the Apocryphal Gospels have extremely few details of this sort, and show a marked lack of interest in the real historical setting in which Jesus lived.

Appendix: The Old Testament

- Basic framework of latter parts no longer in doubt
- External and archaeological corroboration of most non-Israelite leaders, many Israelite Kings, multiple events (including dating), Babylonian exile, etc.
- "In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem..." 1 Kings 14:25
- "This same Hezekiah closed the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them down to the west side of the city of David." 2 Chronicles 32:30



Appendix: The Exodus

- Cosmopolitan nature of Ramesses II's tenure
- Ramesside construction and inhabitation of Pi-Ramesses
- Egyptian military presence in Canaan
- Mention of Israel in Canaan only just after this time
- Format of covenant
- Tabernacle structure
- Significant demographic changes in Canaan around this time





Herod's palace at Masada



Western Wall



Qumran



Herod's hippodrome at
Caesarea Maritima



The details of the narratives are real



Grass in summer in
Galilee (near Caesarea
Philippi)



Bethsaida



Sea of Galilee (with
different 'sides', view
from Tabgha across to
north east side)