



## The Historicity of the New Testament

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One of the central claims of Christianity is that Jesus of Nazareth was the incarnate Son of God who died on the cross to atone for the sins of humanity and rose bodily from the dead. Our acceptance of these claims depends on whether or not the New Testament documents are reliable historical sources about Jesus. It is the purpose of this chapter to argue that it is reasonable to accept the substantial historicity of the New Testament. [1]

Detailed works have been written on this topic, but such detail is not possible here. Rather, this chapter will discuss the main features of five arguments bearing on New Testament historicity. Sources for further study will be offered in the notes. I will not discuss the archaeological confirmation of the New Testament or the extra-biblical evidence for the historicity of Jesus. These important facts have been nicely summarized elsewhere. [2]

For our purposes, let us assume that the New Testament is a collection of twenty-seven separate historical sources which, in turn, may have written or oral sources behind them. We will make no assumption which takes the New Testament as a divinely inspired document, although I believe such a position can be defended. [3]

### General Tests for Historicity

Historiography is a branch of study which focuses on the logical, conceptual, and epistemological aspects of what historians do. Critical

historiography studies, among other things, the different tests which should be applied to a document to determine whether or not it is historically reliable. [4] When many of these tests are applied to the New Testament documents, they show themselves to be as reliable as, or superior to, most other ancient documents.

For example, apologists have often appealed to three general tests for historicity: the bibliographical test, the internal test, and the external test. The internal test asks whether the document itself claims to be actual history written by eyewitnesses. More will be said about eyewitness testimony later. The external test asks whether material external to the document (in this case, archaeology or the writings of the early church fathers) confirms the reliability of the document. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into the external test. But it should be pointed out that the New Testament has been remarkably confirmed time and again by external evidence. This is not to say there are no problems; but to the unbiased observer, little doubt can be cast on the statement that archaeology has confirmed the historical reliability of the New Testament. [5]

The bibliographical test seeks to determine how many manuscript copies we have of the document and how far removed they are in time from the originals (see table 1).

**Table 1**

Author	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	No. of Copies
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,000 yrs.	10
Livy	59 B.C.-A.D.			
Plato ( <i>Tetralogies</i> )	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,000 yrs.	7
Tacitus ( <i>Annals</i> )	100 A.D.	1,100 A.D.	1,000 yrs.	10
also minor works	100 A.D.	1,000 A.D.	900 yrs.	
Pliny the Younger ( <i>History</i> )	61-113 A.D.			800
Thucydides				750 yrs.
Suetonius				8
Herodotus				8
Horace				8

Sophocles 430-406 B.C. 1,000 A.D. 1,400 yrs. 100  
Lucretius Died 55 or 53 B.C. .  
2  
Catullus 54 B.C. 1,550 A.D. 1,600 yrs. 3  
Euripedes 480-406 B.C. 1,100 A.D. 1,500 yrs. 9  
Demosthenes 383-322 B.C. 1,100 A.D. 1,300  
yrs. 200\*

Aristotle 384-322 B.C. 1,100 A.D. 1,400 yrs. 5\*\*  
Aristophanes 450-385 B.C. 900 A.D. 1,200 yrs.  
\*All from one copy. \*\*Of any one work.

From Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, rev ed. (San Bernardino, Calif.: Here's Life, 1979), p. 42.

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A brief perusal of the table indicates that for a representative sample of ancient historical works, we possess only a handful of manuscripts which are, on the average, one thousand years removed from their originals.

In contrast to this, the New Testament documents have a staggering quantity of manuscript attestation. [6] Approximately 5,000 Greek manuscripts, containing all or part of the New Testament, exist. There are 8,000 manuscript copies of the Vulgate (a Latin translation of the Bible done by Jerome from 382-405) and more than 350 copies of Syriac (Christian Aramaic) versions of the New Testament (these originated from 150-250; most of the copies are from the 400x). Besides this, virtually the entire New Testament could be reproduced from citations contained in the works of the early church fathers. There are some thirty-two thousand citations in the writings of the Fathers prior to the Council of Nicea (325).

The dates of the manuscript copies range from early in the second century to the time of the Reformation. Many of the manuscripts are early—for example, the John Rylands manuscript (about 120; it was found in Egypt and contains a few verses from the Gospel of John), the Chester Beatty Papyri (200; it contains major portions of the New Testament), Codex Sinaiticus (350; it contains virtually all of the New Testament), and Codex Vaticanus (325-50; it contains almost the entire Bible).

Too much can be made of this evidence, which alone does not establish the trustworthiness of the New Testament. All it shows is that the text we currently possess is an accurate

representation of the original New Testament documents. Most historians accept the textual accuracy of other ancient works on far less adequate manuscript grounds than is available for the New Testament.

In this regard, the following statement about the New Testament by R. Joseph Hoffmann is naive: "What we possess are copies of copies, so far removed from anything that might be called a 'primary' account that it is useless to speculate about what an original version of the gospel would have included." [7]

As I have shown, the copies of the New Testament are not far removed from the originals. Furthermore, Hoffmann is using the wrong sense of the term original as it is employed in historical investigation. As Louis Gottschalk points out, "[A primary source] does not, however, need to be original in the legal sense of the word original—that is, the very document (usually the first written draft) whose contents are the subject of discussion—for quite often a later copy or a printed edition will do just as well; and in the case of the Greek and Roman classics seldom are any but later copies available." [8]

Other tests for historicity have been formulated, some of which are these: a document has a high probability of reliability if it is a personal letter, is intended for small audiences, is written in unpolished style, [9] and contains trivia and lists of details. [10] The absence of these features does not necessarily mean the document is unreliable; but their presence makes the prima facie acceptance of the document stronger. Much of the New Testament, especially the apostolic letters and some of the sources behind the Gospels, is made up of personal letters originally intended for individuals and small groups. In addition, much of the New Testament is in unpolished style, and there are several examples of inconsequential detail in the Gospels (see Mark 14:51-52; John 21:2, 11). Further, in 2 Corinthians 12:11-12, Paul writes to a church which is questioning his apostolic authority. To defend himself, he reminds the believers that while he had been with them (approximately four years earlier) he had performed miracles and wonders. If this had not been the case, then Paul would have been a fool to use what everyone knew was a lie to defend himself.

These considerations show that when general tests for historicity are applied to the New Testament documents, they pass them quite well.

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### **The Presence of Eyewitnesses**

Prima facie it would seem that a strong case could be made for the fact that much of the New Testament, including the Gospels and the sources behind them, was written by eyewitnesses. This is mentioned explicitly in a number of places (Luke 1:1-4; Gal. 1; 2 Peter 1:16). Further, apostolic position in the early church was widely known to include the qualification of being an eyewitness (Acts 1:21-22; Heb. 2:3), a qualification which shows that the early church valued the testimony of eyewitnesses and believed she had eyewitnesses leading her. The early speeches in Acts refer to the knowledge of unbelieving audiences (e. g., Acts 2:22), and no historian I know of doubts that Christianity started in Jerusalem just a few weeks after the death of Jesus in the presence of friendly and hostile eyewitnesses. Finally, there is indirect testimony to eyewitness evidence in the Gospels. For example, if a number of pronouns in Mark (see 1:21, 29) are changed from the third-person plural *they* to the first-person plural *we*, they can easily be seen as eyewitness reminiscences of Peter, who gave Mark much of the material for his Gospel.

### **Arguments Supporting Eyewitness Influence**

Several reasons can be offered for trusting these claims. First, as Gottschalk reminds us, a document should be assumed trustworthy unless, under burden of proof, it is shown to be unreliable. [11] As Immanuel Kant showed long ago, a general presumption of lying is self-refuting, since if such a presumption is universalized (one always assumes someone is lying) lying becomes pointless (lying is impossible without a general presumption of truth-telling). [12]

Second, such a presumption of truth-telling is especially strong if the eyewitness passes these tests: he is able to tell the truth, he is willing to do

so, he is accurately reported, and there is external corroboration of his testimony. [13] I have already shown that the New Testament eyewitnesses are accurately reported in the manuscript tradition, and I have alluded to external confirmation of the New Testament. What about the first two tests?

It seems clear that the New Testament writers were able and willing to tell the truth. They had very little to gain and much to lose for their efforts. For one thing, they were mostly Jewish theists. To change the religion of Israel with its observance of the Mosaic law, Sabbath keeping, sacrifices, and clear-cut non-Trinitarian monotheism would be to risk the damnation of their own souls to hell. A modern atheist may not worry about such a thing, but members of the early church surely did. For another thing, the apostles lived lives of great hardship, stress, and affliction (see 2 Cor. 11:23-29) and died martyrs' deaths for their convictions. There is no adequate motive for their labors other than a sincere desire to proclaim what they believed to be the truth.

Third, the presence of adverse eyewitnesses would have hampered the spread of Christianity. Christianity began, and remained for sometime, in the same area where Jesus had ministered. If the early portrait of him was untrue, how could the apostles have succeeded there? Why would they have begun there in the first place?

Fourth, if the New Testament picture of Jesus was not based on the testimony of eyewitnesses, how could a consistent tradition about him ever have been formed and written? Assume that no eyewitnesses controlled the tradition about Jesus prior to the time the Gospels were written. Assume further that the scattered early believing communities were so caught up with the living "presence" of the resurrected Christ speaking to them through prophetic utterances in the church assemblies that they lost almost all interest in the historical Jesus as he really was. Then there would have been almost as many Christologies or portraits of Jesus and his significance as there were believing communities. Further, why would the churches tie themselves to four written sources if they could hear Christ "speak" afresh to them in their assemblies and if they felt free to make up sayings and stories about Jesus to meet the needs of their life setting? Eyewitness apostolic control over the tradition is the best

explanation for the emergence of a consistent, written portrait of Jesus.

### Three Objections to Eyewitness Influence

Certain objections have been raised against the eyewitness nature of the New Testament record of Jesus, however. Three of them are especially important. First, it has been argued that after the experience of the "Easter event" -a powerful, subjective feeling of the presence of the Christ after Jesus' death-the church lost interest in the biographical details of the historical Jesus who really lived. Rather, believers were interested in the ongoing experience of the Christ who was continually with them. In the early assemblies, prophets uttered sayings of the risen Christ as he spoke to his people through them. The church so identified the Christ who was speaking (the post-Easter experiences of "the Christ") with the Jesus who had spoken (the historical Jesus) that they lost interest in the latter. In fact, they freely made up episodes about Jesus which met their current needs. The Gospels are theological, kerygmatic, propagandistic works, not objective, historical biographies of Jesus. Thus, eyewitness testimony is irrelevant, given the nature of the Gospels.

Several things can be said against this objection. For one thing, David Hill has shown that there is no evidence that there ever were prophets in the early church who uttered "sayings of Jesus" which were attributed to the pre-Easter historical Jesus. [14] Those supporting such a view do so for two main reasons. First, a statement in Odes of Solomon 42:6 says, "For -I have risen and stand by them, and speak through their mouth." However, this document dates from 110-150 and shows heavy influence from a post-Christian heresy, Gnosticism. Thus, it forms no basis for interpreting how the early church understood utterances in their assemblies. These sayings were understood as utterances of the Holy Spirit (or on a few occasions, of the resurrected and glorified Christ) and not of the historical Jesus.

A second argument for the existence of these prophets points to utterances of Christ in the Book of Revelation (see Rev.1:17-20). But Revelation was written later than the Gospels and differs from them in its literary genre-Revelation is apocalyptic literature, not theological history. Further, utterances in Revelation are

acknowledged as sayings of the risen Lord. They are not attributed to the pre-Easter Jesus. In point of fact, the New Testament writers distinguish their inspired words from those of the historical Jesus (see 1 Cor. 7:25).

There is also good evidence that the Gospels are biographical. As G. N. Stanton has shown, the major examples of preaching in early Christianity come from Acts, and the sermons of Acts have, as an integral part, biographical details of Jesus' life. [15] C. H. Dodd has argued that the chronological order of Jesus' ministry as it is given in the sermons parallels nicely the order given in Mark. [16] This shows the Gospel writers were interested in historical detail. Furthermore, Paul himself showed interest in biographical details of Jesus' life (Rom. 15:3, 8; 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6-11). These details form the basis of moral exhortation.

It is antecedently incredible that converts to and inquirers about Christianity in its early years would not want to know a good bit about the person they loved. This is especially true in light of the embarrassment of the crucifixion. People would want to know what sort of person Jesus really was. Why had he been crucified? Was he a troublemaker? The passion narratives of Jesus' last hours on earth were formed and circulated early in the missionary and teaching ministries of the church. These narratives would lead converts to expect more details about Jesus, and such details are what the Gospels attempt to provide.

When the Gospels are compared with ancient biographies, they can be seen to be biographical as well. [17] Biographies were often written to instruct and exhort and were not mere chronicles of information. But this does not mean biographers did not attend to historical facts. It is a false dichotomy to say something has to be either history or a document which promotes a message. The fact that the Gospels are kerygmatic does not rule out their historical dimension, especially when they emphasize the inseparability of the historical and the theological in understanding the incarnation.

A second objection to the eyewitness nature of the New Testament record of Jesus argues that ancient people were less interested in facts than we are today and thus ancient historians were not

concerned or able to distinguish fact from fiction. So the presence or absence of eyewitnesses is not that important, since the value placed on factual reporting was not that great.

This objection does not accurately represent the nature of historical writing in the ancient world. [18] Many ancient Greek historians saw the importance of accurate reporting. Herodotus emphasized the role of eyewitnesses and the evaluation of sources. Thucydides attempted to evaluate the accuracy of reports coming to him, and when he invented a speech, he did so to represent, as well as possible, the views of the speaker. He did not feel free to invent narrative. Polybius held exacting standards. He advocated examining sources and evaluating eyewitnesses. Lucian stated that the historian's sole task is to tell the tale as it happened.

Roman historians were strongly influenced by the Greeks. Cicero affirmed that the historian must tell nothing but the truth. Livy was less critical and wrote to emphasize the greatness of Rome, but he did not feel free to invent stories. Tacitus attempted to test and evaluate his sources and did not wish to deliberately distort his information.

I will address the nature of Jewish oral tradition shortly. Suffice it to say here that it was concerned with accuracy. Furthermore, Josephus stated his commitment to truth and accuracy, and he tried to correct his sources when they were wrong.

Ancient historians were not as critical or precise as their modern counterparts. But the question "did it really happen?" made sense to them. The New Testament writers show a concern to preserve historical facts accurately (Luke 1:1-4; John 21:24; Heb. 2:3-4; 2 Peter 1:16). This does not prove they wrote history, but it clearly shows that they understood the difference between fact and fiction and that they were interested in the former.

A third objection against the eyewitness nature of the New Testament record of Jesus comes from D. E. Nineham. [19] Nineham argues that the Gospel materials present themselves in classifiable forms which met needs in the early church; thus, they are the result of a great deal of shaping at the hands of the early Christian

community. But Nineham's objection fails. There is no reason to assume that Jesus did not teach in consistent forms which could be easily memorized. Further, when the church orally circulated its information about Jesus this material may have been put into forms that could be memorized and passed on easily. But this does not mean believers fabricated the stories. It is a false move from the form of a narrative to its historical accuracy. [20] The forms of the Gospel material have more to do with preservation of the material than with creation of the material.

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### **The Gospels and Jewish Oral Tradition**

Over the last several years, trends in New Testament studies have been toward understanding the Gospels as Jewish documents with a Jewish influence shaping them. The Hellenistic influence on the genre and content of the Gospels has been seen as less significant. [21] This change is due in part to the influence of a school of New Testament studies known as the Scandinavian or Uppsala school founded by Harald Riesenfeld and Birger Gerhardsson. [22]

The classical form- and redaction-critical approach to the formation of the Gospels is roughly this. In light of their experience of the "risen Christ" and their expectation of his immediate return, persons in the early church were not interested in the historical Jesus per se, but created stories about Jesus to meet their current needs. These stories were then attributed to the pre-Easter Jesus. Thus, during the time before the Gospels were written, the Jesus tradition (the material about Jesus) was altered and expanded freely into various forms of material which were finally put into writing. The process of selection and shaping was marked heavily by the interests and theology of the Gospel writers themselves.

In contrast, the Uppsala school holds that the Jesus tradition was shaped consciously by the same principles that governed the shaping of Jewish oral tradition in general. According to this view, Jesus was an authoritative teacher or rabbi who trained his disciples to be his apprentices. In keeping with the practices of their orally oriented culture, they were capable of accurately memorizing massive amounts of material. The

disciples of Jesus took great care to memorize his teachings and deeds (they may have written down some of the material as well), and saw their responsibility as guardians of the tradition. Their role was to pass on the tradition faithfully and substantially unaltered. The Gospels, therefore, are in large measure the written results of a process of handling the tradition which preserved its accuracy.

Several arguments can be advanced to support this view. For one thing, Jesus' relation to his disciples was similar to that of Jewish rabbis to their pupils. [23] Second, the Gospels arose primarily in a Jewish milieu where there was respect for holy tradition and oral transmission. Third, this view explains the role of an apostle and his authority as it is presented in the New Testament, namely, as an authoritative, eyewitness guardian of the UP, tradition. Fourth, it explains the way the New Testament writers themselves refer to their own view of the way they handled the tradition about Jesus (see 1 Cor. 15:3-8; Gal. 2:1-10; Col. 2:7; 1 Thess. 2:13). When they refer to the way they handled the material about Jesus, they say that they "delivered over" to others exactly what they "received" These terms are the ones used in Jewish oral tradition to describe the way such tradition was passed on.

It seems, then, that the early disciples of Jesus wrote down some of Jesus' sayings and deeds, memorized a great deal of his teaching (they were capable of this in that culture), and passed it on with accuracy. Two major objections have been raised against the Uppsala view. [24] The first is that the Uppsala school bases its view on rabbinic practices and traditions that were late (A.D. 200); it is, however, unwarranted to parallel that tradition with practices current in A. D. 70. This objection is far too radical in its skepticism. Rabbinic practices in 200 were surely influenced by earlier practices. And the New Testament practices themselves give evidence that the accurate handing over of received tradition was a cultural and religious practice in New Testament times. Furthermore, when one compares the synoptic Gospels with one another, one finds that there is greater word-agreement in the words of Jesus than in the incidental details of the surrounding historical narrative. This is what one would expect if the material was handled as holy

tradition. [25]

The second objection, that one cannot draw parallels between rabbinic and Christian tradition, is clearly overstated. There may be differences between Jewish and Christian tradition, but there are many similarities, since Jewish culture provided the womb from which Christianity was born.

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## Marks of Historicity in the Gospel Materials

Several features of the Gospels attest to their substantial historicity. Some of these features are made more vivid when placed against the backdrop of a form- and redaction-critical approach. By way of review, this view holds that the Gospels were written between 70 and 95. Prior to this, there was a period during which material was freely created and modified in light of the community's experience of the "risen Christ." This material was intended to meet needs in the community, and it was transmitted orally. For example, after several years Jesus' return seemed to be delayed, and believers began to die. To comfort the bereaved, some community created a story of Jesus raising a widow's son (Luke 7:11-17). Eventually this story found its way into the Gospels. So, much of the Gospels reflects the needs and issues in the life setting of the early church (50-75) or in the life setting of the redactors of the Gospels at the time they were put into writing. With this scenario in mind, the following is a list of six general marks of historicity in the Gospels.

### The Form of Jesus' Sayings

Many of Jesus' sayings are in poetic or otherwise easily memorizable form. These forms are largely confined to the sayings in the tradition, as opposed to the narratives. [26] There is no good reason to attribute this to some early catechesis (a list of teaching materials formulated by a school in the early church) and not to Jesus himself, because the sayings present an internal unity and intentionality which evidences a single mind behind them. Further, it was common for a single rabbi to teach in forms that were easily memorizable, so it is not unreasonable to attribute

the same practice to Jesus himself.

### **Other Distinctive Features of Jesus' Sayings**

Other recognizable characteristics and terms are found in Jesus' words and hardly anywhere else. Jesus' use of the words *amen* and *abba is* unique. [27] There are sixty-four instances of threefold sayings (e.g., ask, seek, knock) in Jesus' words, and his use of questions is unique. [28] Jesus' use of the passive in contexts where he refers to God (e.g., "All things have been delivered to me by my Father" [Matt. 11:271] and his employment of the phrases *how much more*, *which of you*, and *disciple* is not duplicated by Paul, Peter, or other writers. [29] Aramaisms (phrases transliterated, rather than translated, into Greek from Aramaic) have sometimes been retained; even when they are not, there is often parallelism, assonance, and alliteration when the Greek is put back into Aramaic. [30] This makes sense if these sayings reflect the actual words of Jesus (he taught in Aramaic as well as Greek), but the church from 50 on was predominantly Greek-speaking. Finally, Jesus' use of parables is unique. [31]

### **The Presence of Irrelevant Material**

Some of the material in the Gospels is irrelevant to the issues facing the early church (50-90). So it is hard to attribute the creation of this material to the church. It must have been preserved, in spite of its lack of immediate relevance, because it came from Jesus himself. Especially noteworthy is Jesus' attitude of favor to Israel." [32] To this could be added Jesus' use of the phrases *the kingdom of God* and *the son of man*. [33] Jesus' controversies with the Pharisees (e.g., about keeping the Sabbath) and his comments on Corban practices were not relevant at the time the Gospels were written. [34] Finally, the Eucharist narrative does not seem to have played an especially prominent role in the early churches' celebration of the Lord's Supper. [35]

### **The Lack of Relevant Material**

The church failed to put into the Synoptic tradition material that would have helped the church a great deal during the period when the tradition was passed on orally. This is surprising if the Gospels were shaped to meet these needs. So

the failure to create sayings of Jesus to meet these pressing needs shows restraint in handling the Gospel materials. No saying of Jesus is to be found on several issues because no saying of Jesus was given on those issues.

Some examples are circumcision, charismatic gifts, baptism, food laws, Gentile missions (Paul could not appeal to a saying of the historical Jesus to justify his Gentile mission, several ministries of the Holy Spirit, rules governing assembly meetings, and church-state relations. [36] Perhaps the most significant omission, however, is the omission of Pauline statements. T. W. Manson has said it well:

The Pauline letters abound in utterances which could easily be transferred to Jesus and presented to the world as oracles of the Lord. How many are? None. It seems a little odd that, if the story of Jesus was the creation of the Christian community, no use should have been made of the admirable materials offered by one of the most able, active, and influential members of the community. [37]

### **Counterproductive Features**

If a document contains features which are embarrassing or counterproductive to the purpose for which it was written, then it has a high probability of being historical. [38] There would be no sufficient reason other than their facticity for including such features.

Instances of this occur frequently in the Gospels. Jesus' denial of being good is an example. [39] Jesus attitudes toward legalism, fasting, divorce, sinners, and women were radical and somewhat embarrassing. Several features of Jesus' character were stumbling blocks, including his displays of anger, his baptism, his death on a cross, and the fact that he was a carpenter from Nazareth. To this could be added the opposition to Jesus from his family. [40] Also, the portrayal of the disciples is often embarrassing (e.g., when they are in unbelief, show cowardice, or have difficulty with Jesus' teaching). The request of the sons of Zebedee is surely authentic, as is Matthew 23:8, 10, which would seem to condemn the churches' own practice of having official teachers.

## The Time Factor

### The Expansion of Christianity

Jesus was probably crucified in A. D. 33. [41] As Christianity expanded from that time, it began as a religion immersed in Jewish culture; it eventually penetrated Gentile culture as the gospel was spread. Palestine in the first century had been influenced to some extent by Hellenism, and many Jews at that time were at least bilingual, speaking Aramaic and Greek. [42] By Contrast, Hellenistic culture outside Palestine was not significantly influenced by Jewish thought-forms, nor did Gentiles speak Aramaic.

These features of first-century culture bear on the question of dating some of the materials in the New Testament. If a saying of Jesus or a christological title (e.g., "Lord") which shows Hellenistic influence is found in the New Testament, this is not necessarily a sign that the saying or title was created at a time when the church was predominantly Gentile. The saying or title could be early and attributable to Jesus himself, since Hellenistic influences were present in the Palestine of his day. On the other hand, if a saying or title translates easily from New Testament Greek back into Aramaic, or shows signs of Hebrew poetry or thought-forms, then such material is early. It would have originated at the latest in the early Palestinian church and at the earliest with Jesus himself. This will be important to keep in mind.

### Paul 's Letters

#### *General Dating*

Scholars disagree over how many of the New Testament letters attributed to Paul were really written by him, although a strong case can still be made that all thirteen are authentic. In the last one hundred years or so, almost all critics have accepted Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. Today the situation is more conservative. It is safe to say that a standard liberal view of Paul's letters accepts at least seven to nine as authentic Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus being excluded (some would add Colossians and 2 Thessalonians). [43]

Thus, an objective historian would agree that we possess from seven to thirteen letters from the hand of Paul. Most of these letters are dated from 49 to 65. Two important features of Paul's letters should be mentioned at this point. First, they exhibit a high, advanced Christology (i.e., Jesus is not presented merely as a Jewish prophet who bears wisdom from God, but as God himself, the Lord of heaven and earth). This means that a concept of a divine Jesus was already present, at the latest, within sixteen to twenty years after the crucifixion. As Martin Hengel, one of the world's leading New Testament scholars, puts it, "the time between the death of Jesus and the fully developed christology which we find in the earliest Christian documents, the letters of Paul, is so short that the development which takes place within it can only be called amazing." [44]

Second, Hengel points out that we cannot detect any evolutionary development of Christology within Paul's letters themselves. His later letters have substantially the same Christology as his earlier letters. Thus, Paul's static Christology must have been largely completed before he began his great missionary journeys when he began to teach his christological views; that is, by 48. From Paul's letters we can infer that the picture of a fully divine, miracle-working Jesus was not one that developed several decades after his death. Indeed, a full-blown Christology was present no later than fifteen years after the crucifixion.

Paul's letters contain a number of creeds and hymns (Rom. 1:3-4; 1 Cor. 11:23 ff.; 15:3-8; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-18; 1 Tim. 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:8; see also John 1:1-18; 1 Peter 3:18-22; 1 John 4:2). [45] Three things can be said about them. First, they are pre-Pauline and very early. They use language which is not characteristically Pauline, they often translate easily back into Aramaic, and they show features of Hebrew poetry and thought-forms. This means that they came into existence while the church was heavily Jewish and that they became standard, recognized creeds and hymns well before their incorporation into Paul's letters. Most scholars date them from 33 to 48. Some, like Hengel, date many of them in the first decade after Jesus' death.

Second, the content of these creeds and hymns centers on the death, resurrection, and deity of Christ. They consistently present a portrait of a miraculous and divine Jesus who rose from the dead. Third, they served as hymns of worship in the liturgy of the early assemblies and as didactic expressions for teaching the Christology of the church.

In sum, the idea of a fully divine, miracle-working Jesus who rose from the dead was present during the first decade of Christianity. Such a view was not a legend which arose several decades after the crucifixion.

#### *Galatians 1 and 2*

All scholars agree that Galatians was written by Paul. Paul tells us that he received his understanding of who Jesus was and what he did from a supernatural experience within a year or two after the crucifixion. He also points out that he went to Jerusalem three years later and the apostles there agreed that his message of a divine Son of God who was crucified and rose from the dead was correct. There is no reason to doubt that Paul visited the apostles, since he has no dear motive for lying and, further, such a visit fits well with the Jewish practice of looking to authorized teachers of a rabbi's doctrines for controls on doctrinal purity. Thus, belief in a divine, risen Jesus was in existence within just a few years after his death. [46]

#### *1 Corinthians 16:22*

1 Corinthians was written (ca. 55-56) to a Gentile congregation with little Jewish influence. In closing the letter Paul used the phrase *ma ranatha*. This phrase uses the Aramaic word *mar*, which means "God" or "Deity." [47] It addresses Jesus as God and implores him to come quickly. Why would Paul use an Aramaic word of dosing to a Greek-speaking congregation which did not understand Aramaic? The answer would seem to be that this had become a standard form of address by the time Paul had visited Corinth in 50. He communicated it to the Corinthians, so he knew they would understand it in his letter. Where did this form of address arise? It would surely be in the early Jewish church. Thus, once again we have historical evidence that belief in a divine

Jesus was not a late, Hellenistic view of a simple Jewish prophet from Galilee. Belief in a divine Jesus was early and originated in a Jewish context.

#### *1 Corinthians 15:3-8*

This passage is one of the earliest and most important of the pre-Pauline creeds in the New Testament and therefore it bears special mention. [48] Several features indicate that it is pre-Pauline:

§ The words *delivered* and *received* are terms descriptive of rabbinic treatment of holy tradition, indicating that this is holy tradition received by Paul.

§ Several primitive, early, pre-Pauline phrases are used ("the twelve," "the third day," "he was seen," "for our sins" [plural], "he was raised"). These phrases are very Jewish and early.

§ The poetic style is Hebraic.

§ The Aramaic *Cephas* is used; this was an early way of referring to Peter.

The formula is reserved and straightforward. It does not include speculation about how the resurrection took place or about details of the event itself. Thus, Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide says, "This unified piece of tradition which soon was solidified into a formula of faith may be considered as a statement of eyewitnesses for whom the experience of the resurrection became the turning point of their lives." [49]

When should this tradition be dated? 1 Corinthians was written in 55 and Paul first visited the Corinthians in 50, so the formula precedes that date. It was already a formalized statement before Paul shared it with the Corinthians. Most scholars date it from three to eight years after Jesus' death. This date fits well with the mention of James and Cephas, who were also mentioned in Galatians 1:18-19. It seems likely, therefore, that this formula was given to Paul at the meeting which took place three to four years after the crucifixion. A date of three to eight years also fits well with the heavily Semitic flavor of the formula. Of course, the facts reported the crucifixion and the resurrection experiences (if not the resurrection itself)-occurred before the stating of the formula.

From 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, therefore, we have a

very early historical testimony to the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

## The Gospels

Until recent years, a fairly standard dating of the Gospels was this: Mark at 70, Matthew and Luke at 75 to 85, and John at 95. This dating was based on the belief that Mark was the earliest Gospel. It was also assumed that the Gospels were a result of a fairly long period when the Jesus tradition was circulated in various forms which would have taken time to develop and stabilize. But as we have seen in our discussion of Jewish oral tradition, there is no reason to doubt that many of the structural forms of the tradition came from Jesus himself or the early disciples. Further, there is no way of knowing how long it would have taken for a tradition to be put into forms, since there is no comparable first-century tradition which can clearly be dated at various stages of its development.

Moreover, the Gospels are given these dates because of Jesus predictions of the fall of Jerusalem (70) in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. But again, this simply reflects an antisupernatural bias. Why could Jesus not have predicted this event? Scholars who deny this assume that the writer of Mark attributed these words to Jesus at a time when the events were imminent. But even if this is granted, or even if one grants that Luke's form of the statement has been shaped by reflection (and this need not be granted), the sayings still bear features in common with several Old Testament prophecies. If their form is a result of reflection, that reflection need not have been on an imminent event (the fall of Jerusalem in 70) but on Old Testament passages. Thus, these verses provide no clear indicators of their dating.

Even if these dates for the Gospels are accepted, the Gospels were still written during the time when eyewitnesses who had seen Jesus and had experienced his ministry were alive. One would, therefore, still be on good historical grounds for treating them as solid historical sources. But in recent years, there has been a trend in New Testament studies toward dating the Gospels earlier. [50]

In order to understand what follows, a brief word

is in order about the Synoptic problems. [51] The first three Gospels are called the synoptic Gospels and clearly have some sort of relationship among themselves. They have much in common in wording, sequencing, and inclusion of material. On the other hand, each Gospel has unique material. The Synoptic problem is the problem of stating what the literary relationship among the Synoptics is in such a way that their similarities and differences are explained. It is safe to say that there is no clear, acceptable solution agreed upon by all New Testament scholars. However, most would hold to what is called the four-source theory. According to this view, Mark is the first Gospel and Matthew and Luke used Mark in writing their Gospels—a stronger case being made for Luke's use of Mark than for Matthew's use of Mark. In addition, a Q source is postulated. Some scholars deny the existence of Q, and there is much in question about whether Q—if it existed—was an oral or written source and whether one or more versions of Q existed. Q is alleged to be that material which Matthew and Luke have in common but which is absent from Mark. [52]

So, according to the four-source theory, Q and Mark predate Matthew and Luke. It should also be kept in mind that Luke and Acts are two parts of the same document; Luke precedes Acts slightly. This means that if one can date Acts, then Luke would have been written prior to Acts. And since Luke used Matthew and Mark, then Matthew and Mark are to be dated even earlier. So a key to dating the Gospels is the date assigned to Acts.

Six arguments, taken together, provide a powerful case for dating Acts at 62 to 64. First, Acts has no mention of the fall of Jerusalem in 70, and this is quite odd since much of the activity recorded in Luke-Acts centers around Jerusalem. A large section unique to Luke focuses on Jesus' last movement to the Holy city the resurrection appearances occur around Jerusalem (see Luke 24:13), and Jerusalem plays a key role in the structure of Acts. The omission of any mention of the fall of Jerusalem makes sense if Luke-Acts was written prior to the event itself.

Second, no mention is made of Nero's persecutions in the mid-60s and the general tone of Acts toward the Roman government is irenic. This fits the pre-65 situation well. Neither the tone

of Acts nor the omission of an account of Nero's persecutions can be adequately explained by saying it was an attempt to appease the Roman government. It was not the nature of the early church to appease anyone-witness conflicts with Judaism and the Pharisees which are recorded in Luke's writings.

Third, the martyrdoms of James (61), Paul (64), and Peter (65) are not mentioned in Acts. This is also surprising since Acts is quick to record the deaths of Stephen and James the brother of John, leaders in the early church. These omissions are even more surprising when one realizes that James, Peter, and Paul are the three key figures in Acts. The silence in Acts about these deaths makes most sense if, again, we assume that Acts was written before they occurred.

Fourth, the subject matter of Acts deals with issues of importance prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 70. The falling of the Holy Spirit on different people groups (Jewish, Samaritan, Gentile), the divisions between Palestinian Jews and Hellenistic Jews, Jewish-Gentile relations centering on circumcision and the law of Moses, and other themes make sense prior to 70. At that time Jewish Christianity was wiped out and the importance of a record of how Gentile pagan converts are to relate to Jews in the church would be much lower than the importance of such a record prior to 70.

Fifth, several of the expressions in Acts are very early and primitive. More will be said about this later. But the phrases *the Son of man*, *the Servant of God* (applied to Jesus), *the first day of the week* (the resurrection), and *the people* (the Jews) are all phrases that readers would understand without explanation prior to 70. After 70, they would need to be explained. These phrases, therefore, indicate that Acts was intended for an audience which would remember these terms and their usage.

Sixth, the Jewish war against the Romans (from 66 onward) is not mentioned in Acts. As Hugo Staudinger argues, "The Jewish war is an important part of the history of the early Church. The original followers in Jerusalem lose their significance through the war. With the destruction of Jerusalem Jesus' prophecy is moreover

fulfilled. If Luke had been writing after 70, it would be incomprehensible that he should break off his narrative shortly before the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, and not indicate the fate of the followers in Jerusalem."

So a strong case can be made for dating Acts at 62 to 64. [53] But this means that Luke should be dated just prior to that. Further, Matthew and Mark should be dated even earlier, perhaps from the mid-40s to mid-50s. The picture of Jesus presented in the Synoptics is one that is only twelve to twenty-nine years removed from the events themselves. And they incorporate sources which are even earlier.

A word should also be said about Q. [54] Q is usually dated from 35 to 50, the earlier part of the range being more probable according to our analysis. Q contains stories of miracles that Jesus performed and it also has a high Christology-Jesus is the divine Son of God, greater than all the Old Testament prophets and sages, who has unusual power. So if Q existed, it provides another early historical testimony to a divine, miracle-working Jesus.

### The Historical Jesus of Radical Critics

New Testament critics have formulated several criteria for deciding which words of Jesus in the Gospels are actually his and which are later additions by the early church or Gospel writers. [55] By far the most accepted and most basic criterion is called the criterion of dissimilarity: an alleged saying of Jesus can be considered authentic only if it cannot be paralleled in early Judaism or the early church. In other words, if a saying of Jesus can be found in Jewish writings contemporaneous with Jesus, or in other parts of the New Testament, then the saying should not be accepted, since materials from either the Jewish or the Christian community could have been used to make up the saying. Such a criterion is surely too stringent. It is odd, to say the least, if a preacher does not preach in the idioms of his day. And it is also odd to say that such a discontinuity should be seen between Jesus and the early church.

So a great deal of material in the Gospels should be accepted as historically reliable even though it does not pass this criterion. On the other hand, if

a saying does pass the criterion of dissimilarity, then it is certainly historical. When the criterion of dissimilarity is applied to the sayings of Jesus, even the most radical of New Testament critics would accept some sayings as actually made by the historical Jesus (e.g., Matt. 11:16-19; 18:23-33; 20:1-6; 21:28-31; 22:1-14; Mark 2:19; 10:15; Luke 9:62; 10:29-37; 11:2, 5-8, 20; 14:28-32; 15:11-32; 16:1-9; 18:1-8, 9-14). [56]

When these sayings are analyzed, they reveal that Jesus held a high view of himself. He had authority to forgive sins and welcome outcasts in God's name. In him God's kingdom had come, and he acts as if he stands uniquely in God's place. In other words, even if the most radical, stringent criterion is applied to the words of Jesus, one still gets a picture of a unique, supernatural Christ. It is open to someone to say, as Albert Schweitzer did, that Jesus was mentally deranged and had a mistaken view of himself. But apart from the difficulty of proving such a claim—after all, Jesus consistently behaves under pressure as one in complete possession of his faculties—the point can still be made that the picture of a divine supernatural Christ is not one which was developed long after Jesus' death and superimposed onto a simple religious prophet from Nazareth.

## The Speeches in Acts 1-12

The evangelistic speeches in Acts 1-12 bear special mentions. These speeches have several features which indicate they are early records of events which occurred while Christianity was still young and which significantly predate Acts. In other words, they were sources already in existence when Acts was written and they were incorporated into the narrative of Acts.

For one thing, these speeches, in contrast to the speeches of Acts 13 and following, translate well into Aramaic. This is what one would expect if these record actual speeches given to Jewish audiences in the early days of Christianity.

Second, the speeches have a unique vocabulary, tone, style, and theology when compared to the rest of Acts. This points to the fact that in Acts 1-12, we are dealing with materials that were in existence before Acts was written. Third, the theology of these speeches is primitive; that is, it

does not reflect a great deal of developed thinking, and many of the emphases were dropped later in the history of early Christianity. For example, the messiahship of Jesus is emphasized, not his deity (although they are compatible). Primitive phrases ("Jesus the Nazarene;" "thy holy Child Jesus") are used in referring to Jesus. Further, a primitive concept of redemption is used: Jesus is seen in terms of his redemption of Israel as a nation. Fourth, when one compares 1 Peter, Mark (which tradition says came from Peter), and Peter's speeches in Acts, the language, style, and emphases are almost identical. This makes sense if one assumes that all three actually refer to statements which came from Peter himself. [58]

Finally, Acts 1 and 2 indicate that the earliest preaching of the gospel took place in Jerusalem seven weeks after the crucifixion. This is historically probable, since there is no reason for inventing the seven-week interval. In fact, such an interval would have raised doubts; people would have wondered why the disciples waited seven weeks to preach the resurrection.

Several lines of evidence converge to show that the speeches in Acts 1-12 are early and that the probability that they are accurate pieces of history is high. And once again, we see that a unique view of Jesus, including his resurrection, was present very shortly after the crucifixion.

In sum, a good deal of evidence shows that the picture of Jesus in the New Testament was present only a few years after the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. There simply was not enough time for a great deal of myth and legend to accrue and distort the historical facts in any significant way. In this regard, A. N. Sherwin-White, a scholar of ancient Roman and Greek history at Oxford, has studied the rate at which legend accumulated in the ancient world, using the writings of Herodotus as a test case. He argues that even a span of two generations is not sufficient for legend to wipe out a solid core of historical facts. [59] The picture of Jesus in the New Testament was established well within that length of time.

This chapter has brought together several pieces of evidence which cumulatively present an extremely strong case for believing that Jesus

was truly the divine Son of God who performed miracles, died on the cross, and rose bodily from the dead. Such a belief is far from being unsupportable. It can be given strong historical validation, and one is well within his epistemic rights in believing the substantial historicity of the New Testament documents. Thus, the following statement by R. T France seems to be correct:

All this, and much more, comes to us from the gospels as a compelling portrait of a real man in the real world of first-century Palestine, and yet one who so far transcended his environment that his followers soon learned to see him as more than a man. It is a portrait which we have, in strictly historical terms, no reason to doubt; it is the philosophical and theological implications which cause many to question whether things can really have been as the gospels present them. But we have seen above sufficient reason to be confident that the gospels not only claim to be presenting fact rather than fiction, but also, where they can be checked, carry conviction as the work of responsible and well-informed writers. The basic divide among interpreters of the gospels is not between those who are or are not open to the results of historical investigation so much as between those whose philosophical/ theological viewpoint allows them to accept the testimony of the gospels, together with the factuality of those records in which it is enshrined, and those, for whom no amount of historical testimony could be allowed to substantiate what is antecedently labeled as a 'mythical' account of events.

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1. For a defense of the full inerrancy of Holy Scripture, see J.P. Moreland, "The Rationality of Belief in Inerrancy," *Trinity Journal* (Spring 1986): 75-86.

2. For a summary of archaeology and the New Testament, see Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Archaeology and the New Testament;" in Introductory Articles, vol. 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), pp. 645-69. Two of the best summaries of extra-biblical evidence for Jesus are Gary R. Habermas *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus: Historical Records of His Death and Resurrection* (Nashville: Nelson, 1985), E F Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

3. It is sometimes said that Christians use circular arguments to prove the reliability of the Bible. For an analysis and refutation of this claim, see R. C. Sproul, "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis," in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), pp. 242-61. For a helpful study of circular arguments in general, especially their relationship to begging the question, see Oliver Johnson, *Skepticism and Cognitivism: A Study in the Foundations of Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 226-39.

4. A brief, helpful survey of various issues in historiography can be found in Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), pp. 285-304. More detailed discussions can be found in William H. Dray, *Philosophy of History* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964); Hans Meyerhoff, ed., *The Philosophy of History in Our Time* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1959); John Warwick Montgomery, *Where Is History Going?* (reprint ed.; Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1972); Sidney Hook, ed., *Philosophy and History: A Symposium* (New York: New York University Press, 1963).

5. In addition to Yamauchi, "Archaeology of the New Testament;" see Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, pp. 152-63.

6. See Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1968); Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). For a briefer treatment of the text of the New Testament, see Gordon D. Fee, "The Textual Criticism of the New Testament;" in Introductory Articles, vol. 1 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), pp. 419-33.

7. R. Joseph Hoffmann, "The Origins of Christianity: A Guide to Answering Fundamentalists," *Free Inquiry* 5 (Spring 1985):50.

8. Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*, 2d ed. (New York:

Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), pp. 53-54. For a good discussion of the concept of an original autograph in terms of the distinction between types and tokens, see Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Inerrancy of the Autographs" in *Inerrancy* ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), pp. 151-93.

9. Gottschalk, *Understanding History*, pp. 41-171.

10. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1970), p. 142.

11. Gottschalk, *Understanding History*, p. 89.

12. Thus, Van A. Harvey surely errs when he says that it is required of a modern historian that he adopt a standpoint of methodological skepticism. See *The Historian and the Believer* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 26. For a general theory of evidence based on a prima facie burden of proof for skepticism, see Roderick Chisholm, "A Version of Foundationalism," *Studies in Epistemology*, ed. Peter A. French et al., *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 5 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), pp. 543-64. For an excellent treatment of the legal aspects of testing the trustworthiness of witnesses and the application of this testing to the New Testament, see John Warwick Montgomery, *Human Rights and Human Dignity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), pp. 139-50.

13. Gottschalk, *Understanding History*, p. 150.

14. See David Hill, "On the Evidence for the Creative Role of Christian Prophets," *New Testament Studies* 20 (April 1974): 262-74; *New Testament prophecy* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981); see also David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

15. G. N. Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 70-77.

16. C. H. Dodd, *New Testament Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953), pp. 1-11.

17. In addition to Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth*, see Charles H. Talbert, *What Is a Gospel? The Genre*

of the Canonical Gospels (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

18. See A. W. Mosley, "Historical Reporting in the Ancient World," *New Testament Studies* 12 (October 1965): 10-26. See also the bibliography on page 7 of C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, 3d ed., rev. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981). It is sometimes objected that people in Jesus' day were gullible about miracles and miracle workers. It is alleged that miracle workers were plentiful in the ancient world, and that Jesus' miracles were fabricated to fit with the works of pagan or other Jewish miracle workers. For a good critique of this objection, see A. E. Harvey *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), pp. 98-119.

19. D. E. Nineham, "Eyewitness Testimony and the Gospel Tradition, I, II, III;" *Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (April 1958): 13-25; 9 (October 1958): 223-52; 11 (October 1960): 253-64.

20. See T. W. Manson, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles*, ed. Matthew Black (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), p. 5; Pierre Benoit, *Jesus and the Gospel*, 2 vols. (New York: Seabury, Crossroad Books, 1973), 1:28.

21. The most helpful survey of Hellenistic influence on the New Testament is Ronald H. Nash, *Christianity and the Hellenistic World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984). For a treatment of Aretologies, divine men, and the Gospels, see Howard C. Kee, "Aretology and the Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (September 1973): 402-22; "Huios," by W. V. Martitz, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), 8:338-40; Michael Green, ed., *The Truth of God Incarnate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 36-42; John W. Drane, "The Religious Background," in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, ed. 1. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 117-25.

22. See Harald Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition and Its Beginnings* (London: A. W. Mowbray and Company, 1961); Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written*

Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity (Uppsala: Gleerup, 1961); for brief summaries of this position, see I. Howard Marshall, *I Believe in the Historical Jesus*, *I Believe* series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp 195-96; Peter H. Davids, "The Gospels and Jewish Tradition: Twenty Years After Gerhardsson," in *Gospel Perspectives I* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), pp. 75-99. Gerhardsson has responded to criticisms from Morton Smith and Jacob Neusner and has summarized and updated his position in *The Origins of the Gospel Traditions*, trans. Gene J. Lund (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). In *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (New York: Seabury, Crossroad Books, 1981), Martin Hengel has criticized Gerhardsson and has tried to show that there is no precise parallel between Jesus and Jewish rabbis. Three things can be said in response to Hengel. First, Gerhardsson argues in *Origins of the Gospel Traditions* that the fundamental point of comparison between Jesus and rabbis is memorization of the leader's teaching. But this feature was widespread in the ancient world and is the most likely parallel to hold between Jesus and the rabbis. Second, Hengel seems to prove only that Jesus was more than a rabbi, not less than one, and the addresses to Jesus as rabbi in the Gospels seem to go beyond a mere form of address equivalent to "sir." Third, Moule points out (*Birth of the New Testament*, pp. 231-34) that the language in the New Testament indicates that the message of Jesus was a deposit to be guarded and protected from error. Thus, Hengel's remark that there was an emphasis on obedience instead of accuracy of learning and knowledge seems to be an overstatement. R. T France has pointed out that even if one does not see a close parallel between Jesus and first-century rabbis, there is still enough evidence about first-century educational practice in general to indicate that memorization was a major means of education and thus Jesus' teaching would have been accurately passed on to others. See R. T France, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1986), pp.106-11.

23. For practical implications of this point, see Cleon Rogers, "The Great Commission," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130 (July 1973): 258-67; John Lozano, *Discipleship: Towards an Understanding of Religious Life* (Chicago: Claret Center for

Resources in Spirituality, 1980), pp. 1-38.

24. See Marshall, *I Believe*, pp. 195-96.

25. See R. T France, "The Authenticity of the Sayings of Jesus," in *History, Criticism, and Faith*, ed. Colin Brown (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1976), pp. 101-43.

26. France, "Authenticity of the Sayings of Jesus," p. 123.

27. C. F D. Moule, *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1967), pp. 47-55.

28. C. Leslie Mitton, *Jesus: The Fact Behind the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp.136-39.

29. H. E. W. Turner, *Historicity and the Gospels* (London: A. R. Mowbray and Company, 1963), pp. 76-78.

30. Mitton, *Jesus*, pp.135-36.

31. Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (1954; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), pp. 11-12.

32. Moule, *Phenomenon of the New Testament*, pp. 66-67.

33. France, "Authenticity of the Sayings of Jesus;" p.113.

34. Everett H. Harrison, "Gemeindetheologie: The Bane of Gospel Criticism;" in *Jesus of Nazareth: Savior and Lord*, ed. Carl F H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 157-73.

35. R. P C. Hanson, "The Enterprise of Emancipating Christian Belief from History" in *Vindications*. ed. Anthony Hanson (New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1966), p. 56.

36. Moule, *Phenomenon of the New Testament*, pp. 72-75.

37. Manson, *Studies In the Gospels and Epistles*, p. 7.

38. Gottschalk, *Understanding History*, pp. 156-65.

39. A. R. C. Leaney, "Historicity in the Gospels," in *Vindications*, ed. Anthony Hanson (New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1966), p.120, To this may be added Mark 13:32; 15:34.

40. Mitton, *Jesus*, p.120.

41. See Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), pp. 95-114.

42. For the influence of Hellenism on first-century Palestine, see I. Howard Marshall, "Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity: Some Critical Comments," *New Testament Studies* 19 (April 1973): 271-87. On the language of Palestine in Jesus' day, see Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "The Languages Spoken by Jesus," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), pp. 127-43.

43. See Guthrie for a defense of the Pauline authorship of all thirteen New Testament epistles attributed to Paul.

44. Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), p. 31. See pp. 30-47 for an excellent summary of the chronology of New Testament Christology.

45. See Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, pp. 120-26; Hengel, *Jesus and Paul*, p. 78-96.

46. The best defense for taking Paul's own word for the origin of his christological views -his encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road- is Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

47. See I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology*, *Issues in Contemporary Theology* series (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1976), pp. 97-110; C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 35-46; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1981), pp. 295-96.

48. See Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, pp.124-27; Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983), pp. 97-100; R. H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection*

*Narratives* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 9-49; Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1973), pp. 81-96.

49. Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 99.

50. The following present arguments for an early dating of the Gospels and other New Testament books: E. Earle Ellis, "Dating the New Testament," *New Testament Studies* 26 (July 1980): 487-502; John A. T. Robinson, *Can We Trust the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977); *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976); John W. Wenham, "Gospel Origins," *Trinity Journal* (old series) 7 (Fall 1978):112-34. See the reply by Douglas Moo in *Trinity Journal* (new series) 2 (1981): 24-36; and the rejoinder by Wenham.

51. For an excellent brief summary of the Synoptic problem, see Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), pp. 274-79. The standard defense of the priority of Matthew is William Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem* (New York: Macmillan, 1964). For a defense of the view that Matthew and Mark are independent of one another, see John M. Rist, *On the Independence of Matthew and Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

52. The conclusion that Luke relied on Matthew and Mark is independent of one's acceptance of the four-source theory. It seems clear from Luke's own testimony (1:1-4) that he used sources to compose his Gospel, and Mark was surely one of them. When Matthew's chronological order diverges from that of Mark, Luke follows Mark's order; when Matthew's chronology matches, Luke feels free to differ. This is explicable on the assumption that Luke had Matthew and Mark before him, even if Matthew and Mark are independent of one another.

Besides the volumes by Robinson, a helpful discussion which favors a pre-70 date for John is Leon Morris, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 30-35. Still relevant is the classic argument for Johannine authorship of the fourth Gospel by B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (1881; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), pp. v-xxxvi.

53. Hugo Staudinger, *The Trustworthiness of the Gospels* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1981), p. 9. Many New Testament scholars have not accepted the early date for Acts because it implies an early date for the Gospels. As France has noted: "It is tempting to suggest that the early date has failed to find widespread acceptance not because it is unconvincing in itself but because the results of its acceptance would be too uncomfortable!" See *The Evidence for Jesus*, pp. 120-21.

54. Marshall, *I Believe*, p. 159; Leopold Sabourin, *Christology: Basic Texts in Focus* (New York: Alba, 1984), pp. 15-28.

55. J. P. Moreland, "An Apologetic Critique of the Major Presuppositions of the New Quest of the Historical Jesus," unpublished Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979, pp. 96-110; France, "Authenticity of the Sayings of Jesus."

56. See the excellent study by Royce Gordon Gruenler, *New Approaches to Jesus and the Gospels: A Phenomenological and Exegetical Study of Synoptic Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), chaps. 1-5.

57. See Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth*, pp. 67-85.

58. See E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), pp. 33-36.

59. A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (1963; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), pp. 186-93.

60. France, *The Evidence for Jesus*, p.138.