

Historical evidence: Discoveries outside of the bible, manuscript evidence, and prophesy

1. Ancient texts, documents, and discoveries outside of the bible

OLD TESTAMENT

- The Nuzi Tablets: The some 20,000 clay tablets discovered at the ruins of Nuzi, east of the Tigris River and datable to c. 1500 BC, reveal institutions, practices, and customs congruent to those found in Genesis. These tablets include treaties, marriage arrangements, rules regarding inheritance, adoption, and the like.

- Biblical Cities: Jerusalem, Babylon, Jericho, Haran, Hazor, Dan, Megiddo, Shechem, Samaria, Shiloh, Gezer, Gibeah, Beth Shemesh, Beth Shean, Beersheba, Lachish, and many other urban sites spoken of in the Old Testament have been excavated, confirming their existence and the historical accuracy of the OT

- Kurkh Monolith: confirms the reign of Ahab and also his coalition with the Syrian king Hadadezer of Damascus. He was also written about in 1 Kings ch. 16-22

- Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser: Discovered in 1846, it shows a man kneeling to pay tribute to a king, (in this case Shalmaneser III), and reads "tribute of Jehu son of Omri", a king of Israel written about in 2 Kings 9-10. After Ahab was killed in battle, Jehu purged the house of Ahab, killing all of the false prophets, Jezebel (Ahab's wife), and all of Ahab's family

- Mesopotamians, Egyptians, Sumerians, and Greeks all report a flood in primordial times. While some would point to this as an ancient myth that pervades all cultures, it gives credence to the idea that a flood likely happened, and all cultures had to do something to explain it.

- The Sennacherib Prism, The Cylinder of Cyrus the Great, Hezekiah's Siloam Tunnel Inscription, the Burial Plaque of King Uzziah, the Moabite Stone, hieroglyphic wall carvings in Thebes depicting Shishak's Invasion of Judah... the list goes on and on.

NEW TESTAMENT (in particular, the life and death of Jesus)

- Tacitus (Roman historian): Reporting on Emperor Nero's decision to blame the Christians for the fire that had destroyed Rome in A.D. 64, the Roman historian Tacitus wrote: "Nero fastened the guilt . . . 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 . . . Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome. . . ." Tacitus reveals that:

1. Christians got their name from an historical person called Christus (Latin for Christ)
2. Christ "suffered the extreme penalty", alluding to crucifixion
3. Christ was crucified during the reign of Tiberius by Pontius Pilate
4. Tacitus calls Christianity a "Mischievous superstition". Here we can only speculate what he means, but we can probably safely assume he's speaking of the resurrection

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

Pliny here says that:

1. Christians met regularly for worship, and that of the Christ as GOD
2. Christians bound themselves by a solemn oath to Jesus' moral teachings
3. "Food of an ordinary and innocent kind" counters the charge that was sometimes made of Christians, that they practiced ritual cannibalism (referring to the partaking of communion)

- Josephus (First Century Jewish historian)
 1. In his book "Jewish Antiquities", he tells of the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist.
 2. He also describes the condemnation of James by the Jewish Sanhedrin, and calls James "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ"
 3. And lastly, and most widely debated, he says "About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Christ. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared."

2. Manuscript evidence

OT: There are more than 14,000 manuscripts and fragments of the Old Testament, the two most notable being:

(1) Approx 10,000 that were discovered in the Cairo Geniza (storeroom) in 1897, dating as far back as AD 800;

(2) 190 from the Dead Sea Scrolls that were discovered in 1947, dating back to 250 B.C. In these was included a copy of every Old Testament book except for one. Comparison with the texts of a thousand years later shows little or no variation and change between them.

The latter is significant because it means that the gap between the last original OT manuscripts (the book of Malachi, written in around 400 B.C.) and the Dead Sea Scrolls is a mere 150 years.

NT: When it comes to the New Testament, the gap between the original manuscripts and the first known writings shrinks down to virtually nothing. Until recently, the earliest manuscripts that have been discovered date back anywhere from 130AD to 200AD.

However, recently there's been an archeological discovery that was announced by Dallas Theological Seminary professor Daniel B. Wallace, in which he claims that (according to the world's leading paleographers) that seven New Testament papyri were recently discovered: 6 were from the 2nd Century, and one fragment from the Gospel of Mark dates back to the 1st Century, during the time of the eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and resurrection.

Let's compare that with some other famous historical authors:

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Approximate Timespan	Number of copies today
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1400 yrs	49
Plato	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 yrs	7
Tacitus	circa 100 A.D.	1100 A.D.	1000 yrs	20
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs	643
Old Testament	1500-400 B.C.	250 B.C.	150 yrs	10,000
New Testament	41-98 A.D.	130 A.D.	30 yrs	5,600

Biblical evidence: Prophecy, Old Testament veracity, New Testament veracity

Prophecy

I'm going to stay light in this section. However, I will touch on a few quick points:

- a. Micah 5:2 revealed where Jesus would be born
- b. Isaiah 53 detailed Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection, as did Psalm 22 (a line of which Jesus himself quoted while on the cross "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")
- c. The book of Daniel, (written before 530 BC) accurately predicts the progression of kingdoms from Babylon through the Median and Persian empires to the further persecution and suffering of the Jews under Antiochus IV Epiphanes with his desecration of the temple, his untimely death, and freedom for the Jews under Judas Maccabeus (165 BC)

Old Testament veracity

1. In the Jewish Canon ("canon" means basically "rule, standard, or norm") of Scripture there were 24 books. They are exactly equivalent to the Protestant 39 books of the Old Testament, but were just arranged differently. In the Jewish arrangement, the first book was Genesis and the last book was Chronicles.

2. Jesus affirms the OT as Canon by mentioning prophets Abel (from Genesis, the first book and first martyr) and Zechariah (Chronicles, the last book, and the last martyr) in Matthew 24:35

3. Jesus affirms the entire OT elsewhere by referencing "The Law, The Prophets, and the Psalms" in Matthew 5:17-18 and in Luke 24:44-48

What are the Law and Prophets? The Pentateuch (first 5 books of the bible), and the Prophetic books (Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Micah, and many others. Basically, the last half of your OT from Isaiah to Malachi).

4. Jesus affirmed the historical existence of Jonah (Matt. 12:40), Noah (Matt. 24:37-38), and Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4-6).

Two caveats:

a. Flood could have been regional rather than worldwide (Scripture focuses on God's redemptive history, rather than everything that ever happened in the world; no woolly mammoths)

b. Creation story could be billions of years rather than literal 7 days (gap theory)

5. Jesus says that John the Baptist (his cousin) was the fulfillment of the prophesy of Elijah in Malachi 4:5 (Matthew 17:11-13)

6. In Luke 4, when Jesus is tempted in the desert, he answers quoting Deuteronomy.

In fact, Jesus quotes from the Old Testament at least 73 times, from 24 different books.

Overall, between Jesus and the Apostles, all OT books except Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon are quoted from, 250 of which are direct quotes, and another 750 of which are either partial quotes or are indirectly referenced.

New Testament veracity

1. The separation between the first writing of the Gospels and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a mere 30 years. Why not earlier?

Speculation at best: Some scholars say that there was no need of writings, since the accounts of Jesus were passed along by spoken word (no printing press or typewriters in that time).

Others say that the writings were a response to myths that were springing up surrounding the life of Jesus.

It's likely that the writers recognized the need to preserve an accurate account of Jesus' life, particularly as his story began to spread into circles outside of the Jews in Jerusalem (Luke 1, Acts 8).

2. Standard for Canon being either eye-witness reports (Luke and Acts, Mark), or men who saw Jesus face-to face (Peter, Jude, James, Paul).

Really, the only exception to this rule was the Epistle of Hebrews. In that case, the epistle was so widely received and accepted by the church, and the content so in keeping with the rest of Scripture, that it was accepted as canon.

3. Jesus' own brothers wrote books of the bible and called Jesus Lord (James, Jude)

4. The writers of the New Testament had nothing to gain. All were tortured, all but John were killed in horrible ways, and even he was boiled alive and then exiled when he didn't die.

5. The gospels are too self-incriminating to be fake. The disciples are constantly being shown as weak, cowards, and dullards, and the weakness of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane is incongruent with the typical picture of mythical saviors.

6. Paul's letters were circulated while eye witnesses were still alive. In fact, he references specific eye-witnesses to Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection in 1 Cor 15, and asks the Roman church to greet Rufus, whose father Simon of Cyrene carried Jesus' cross on the path to Golgotha.

7. Paul refers to Luke as scripture in 1 Timothy 5:18 ("the laborer is worthy of his wages" quoting Luke 10:7)

8. Peter refers to Paul's writing as scripture. (2 Peter 3:16 "...as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.")

9. The canon was not determined by a group of men in a dark room somewhere; it was confirmed by the Third Council of Carthage (AD 397) in the Western church, though it took another 100 years or so for the matter to be settled in the Eastern church.

It is extremely important to note that the full set of New Testament books was widely accepted by the church (with the two disputed books of Hebrews and Revelation), and the Councils were established as a response to false letters, and were unnecessary until the 4th Century.

10 Most importantly, all letters and gospel accounts are completely consistent in their message that Jesus was divine, that he died as a sacrifice for sins for man, that he was resurrected from the dead, and that he was to be worshiped as God