

# JESUS AND CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP

The Historical Reliability of  
the New Testament

REASONS WHY SOME  
QUESTION THE  
RELIABILITY OF THE  
NEW TESTAMENT

# RISE OF HISTORICAL CRITICISM

- Rise of Source Criticism
  - J. J. Griesbach in 1776—Mark relied on Matthew for his Gospel
  - By 1800 this had reversed—Matthew and Luke relied on Mark for their Gospels
  - H. J. Hotzmann in 1863—Matthew and Luke relied on Mark and Q for their Gospels
  - B. H. Streeter—Matthew relied on Mark, Q and M, and Luke relied on Mark, Q, and L for their Gospels

# RISE OF HISTORICAL CRITICISM

- The bottom line! The Gospels are not the result of eyewitness testimony.
  - E. Linnemann in 1992—Matthew, Mark and Luke did not have literary dependence on other Gospels.

# WHY THE DISTRUST OF THE NT?

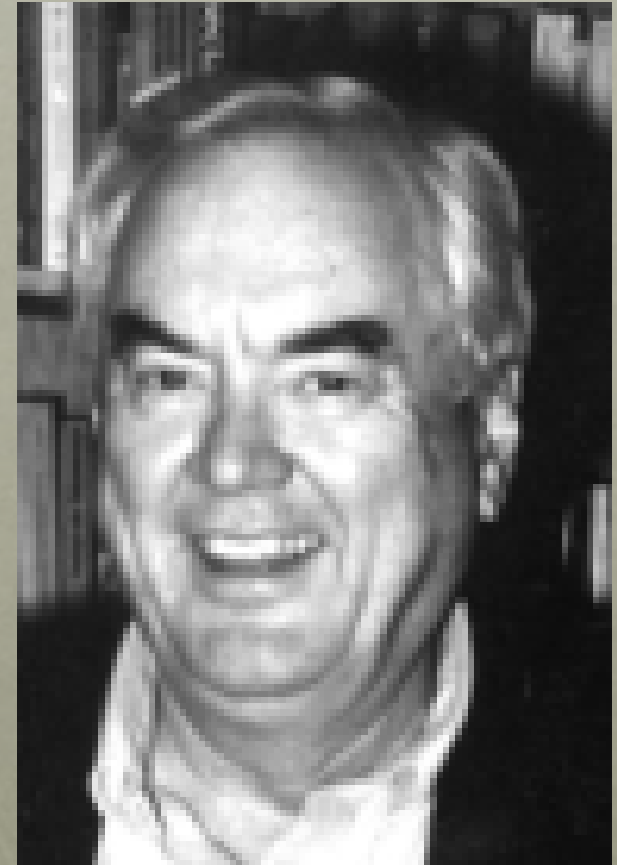
- Rejection of the Supernatural!

# REJECTION OF THE SUPERNATURAL

Robert Funk:

“The Christ of creed and dogma . . . can no longer command the assent of those who have seen the heavens through Galileo’s telescope. The old deities and demons were swept from the skies by that remarkable glass. Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo have dismantled the mythological abodes of the gods and Satan, and bequeathed us secular heavens.” (p. 2)

Preface of *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*



# REJECTION OF THE SUPERNATURAL

John Dominic Crossan says that Jesus “did not and could not cure that disease or any other one. . . .” Also Crossan says: “I do not think that anyone, anywhere, at any time brings dead people back to life.” (*Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, pp. 82, 95)



# REJECTION OF THE SUPERNATURAL

“Whenever scholars detect detailed knowledge of postmortem events in sayings and parables attributed to Jesus, they are inclined [the Jesus Seminar 100% inclined] to the view that the formulation of such sayings took place after the fact.”  
*(Five Gospels, p. 25.*



# WHY THE DISTRUST OF THE NT?

- Rejection of the Supernatural!
- Rejection of the Clear Reading of the Text

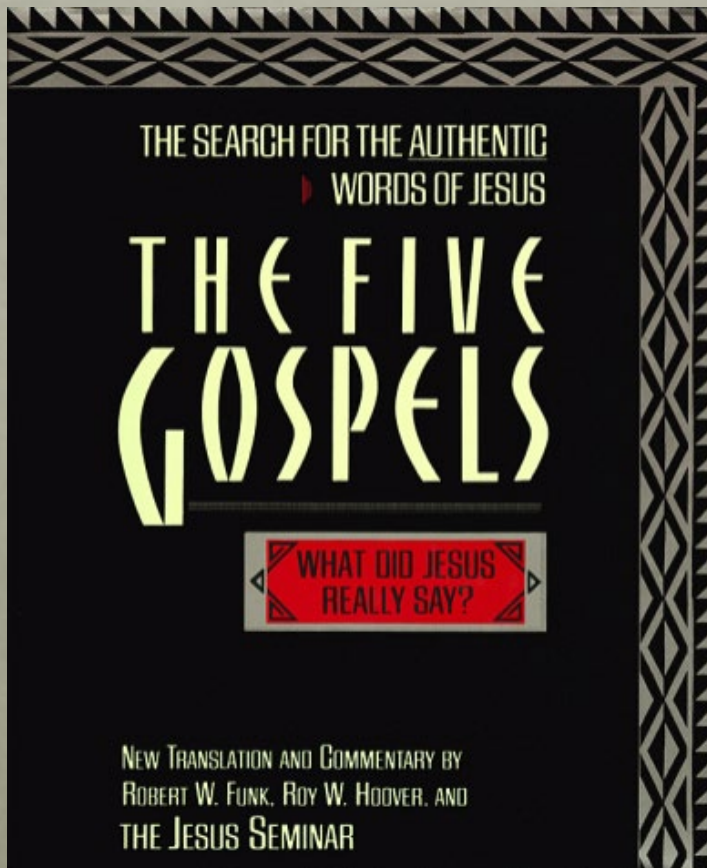
# REJECTION OF THE SUPERNATURAL

Borg says: "In Luke, of course, we have the famous story of them living in Nazareth but needing to go to Bethlehem for the census and that's why Jesus is born in a stable, in a manger, because there's no room in the inn. In Matthew--and this is one of the most striking differences--the family, apparently, lives in Bethlehem, and Jesus is born at home."



# The Results of the Jesus Seminar Search for Jesus

- **What did Jesus Really Say?**



# Voting Out the Words of Jesus

**Red**

**Jesus undoubtedly said this or something very like it.**

The historical reliability of this information is virtually certain. It is supported by a preponderance of evidence.

**Pink**

**Jesus probably said something like this.**

This information is probably reliable. It fits well with other evidence that is verifiable.

**Gray**

**Jesus did not say this, but the ideas contained in it are close to his own.**

This information is possible but unreliable. It lacks supporting evidence.

**Black**

**Jesus did not say this; it represents the perspective or content of a later or different tradition.**

This information is improbable. It does not fit verifiable evidence; it is largely or entirely fictive.

# LOOKING AT THE COLORS

□ Percentages of sayings voted red or pink:

- 11% Mark
- 17% Matthew
- 20% Luke
- 18% Thomas
  - Only one saying of the 139 in John was red or pink (4:44, "a prophet gets no honor in his own place")

□ Of the 387 acts of Jesus 10% were voted red or pink

□ Sayings voted gray had no consensus. Black and gray sayings were generally interpreted church-appropriated teachings



# LOOKING AT THE COLORS CONT'D

- On a book-by-book basis the four canonical Gospels and the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas reflect a red color in the following verses:

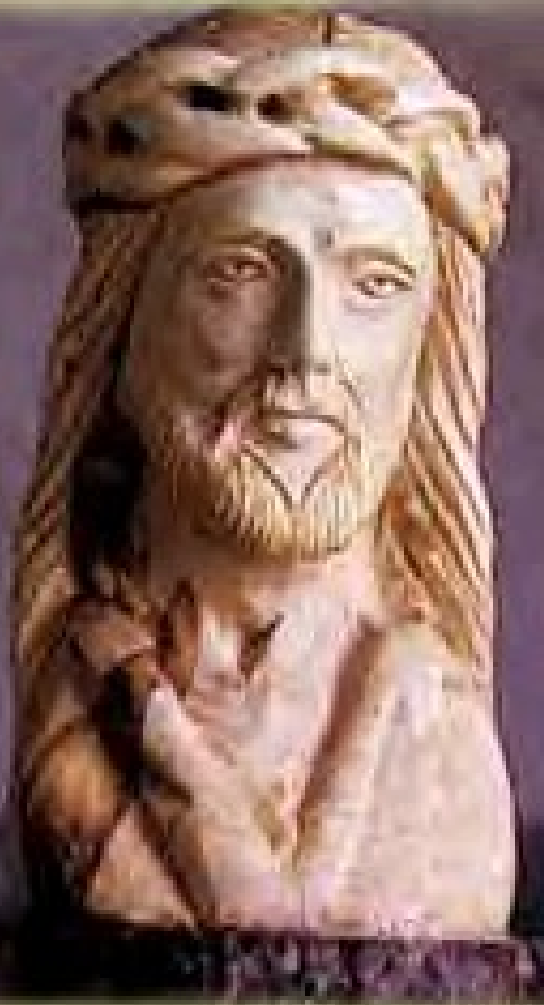
Mark 12:17b;

Matthew 5:39, 40, 41, 42a, 44b; 6:9b; 20:1-15;  
22:21c;

Luke 6:20, 21a, 21b, 27b, 30a; 10:30-35; 11:2b;  
13:20-21, 33; 16:1-8a; 20:25b;

John (nothing);

Thomas 20:2-4; 54; 100:2b



abc NEWS PETER JENNINGS  
reporting

# The Search for Jesus



# SUMMARY OF UNFOUNDED STATEMENTS IN PETER JENNINGS' THE SEARCH FOR JESUS

## Among its finds:

- Christians have merely subjective faith, while reporters communicate objective facts
- The New Testament contains contradictory versions of Christ's life
- There is no reliable evidence as to the authorship of the four Gospels
- Gospels were written 40 to 100 years after Jesus' crucifixion



# SUMMARY OF UNFOUNDED STATEMENTS IN PETER JENNINGS' THE SEARCH FOR JESUS CONT'D

- There was no visitation of angels announcing Christ's birth; no star in the East; no wise men from the East
- Jesus was not born in Bethlehem
- Virgin Birth is a myth--Mary was probably impregnated by a Roman soldier, and Jesus was illegitimate

# SUMMARY OF UNFOUNDED STATEMENTS IN PETER JENNINGS' THE SEARCH FOR JESUS CONT'D

- Christ's healings were merely psychosomatic
- On Palm Sunday, no one was really singing and shouting for joy for Jesus
- Jesus' speech about his body and blood at the Last Supper was a later addition by the gospel writers'
- Jesus did not die to atone for the sins of his people

# SUMMARY OF UNFOUNDED STATEMENTS IN PETER JENNINGS' THE SEARCH FOR JESUS CONT'D

- Jesus was not buried but left on the cross to be eaten by birds and wild dogs
- The resurrection story was borrowed from eastern pagan cults
- ALL OF THESE ASSERTIONS AND WE ARE SUPPOSED TO ACCEPT THESE WITHOUT A SHREAD OF PROOF**

See Christian Research Institute for development of thoughts, on which this list is dependent

THE NATURE OF  
HISTORICAL  
INVESTIGATION

# THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

- The Problem of Indirect Access to the Subject Matter of History



# THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

- ▣ The Problem of Indirect Access to the Subject Matter of History
- The Problem of the Fragmentary Nature of Historical Accounts



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- The Problem of Selection of Material



# THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

- The Problem of Indirect Access to the Subject Matter of History
- The Problem of the Fragmentary Nature of Historical Accounts
- The Problem of Selection of Material
- The Problem of Structuring and Arranging the Material of History





# THE NATURE OF HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

- ❑ The Nature of Historical Investigation
- ❑ The Problem of Indirect Access to the Subject Matter of History
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- ❑ The Problem of Selection of Material
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- The Problem of Value-Laden Language



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- ❑ The Problem of Value-Laden Language
- The Problem of Overall World View



THE PRESUPPOSITIONS  
AND METHODOLOGY  
OF HIGHER CRITICISM

# THE PRESUPPOSITIONS AND METHODOLOGY OF HIGHER CRITICISM

- Circular Reasoning—In which starts with a bias, looks for the support of the bias, and then is surprised when the bias holds true.
- Stylistic Diversity—Different variations of style indicate a different author.
- Linguistic Variation—Different use of words by an author indicates a different author.

# THE RELATION OF FAITH TO HISTORY

# THE RELATION OF FAITH TO HISTORY

- All People Believe Something
- All Historical Study Has Gaps
- History and Theology are not the same but they are also not inimical to one another

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE  
FOR THE RELIABILITY OF  
THE NEW TESTAMENT

Can We Trust the New  
Testament Accounts?

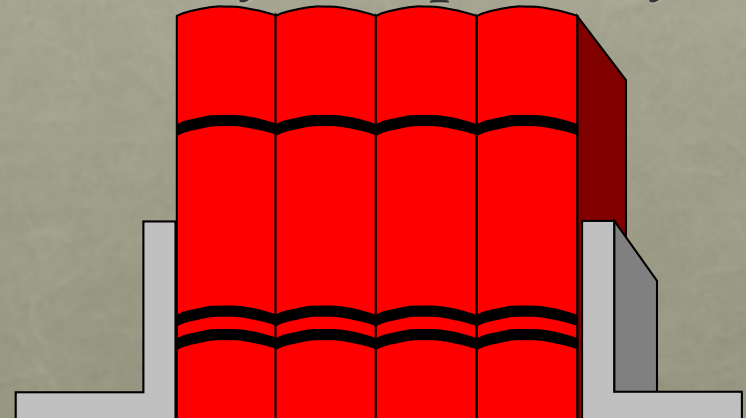
# EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

## Eyewitness Testimony



# EARLY WRITING OF THE GOSPELS

- The Formation and Relationship of the Gospels in Gospel Criticism Today
  - Mark was written first (circa A.D. 80)
  - Matthew and Luke depend on Mark for their material as well as Q and possibly M and L *et al*
  - John was written late first century and possibly early second century



# EARLY WRITING OF THE GOSPELS

- An Alternative to Current Gospel Criticism
  - The Gospels Arise Early in the History of the Church
  - The Gospels were Viewed in Early Christianity as being Written by Eyewitnesses or Associates of Eyewitnesses
  - Jesus promised the writing of the Gospels
  - The Importance of memory in the writing of the Gospels

# EARLY WRITING OF THE GOSPELS

- The historic order of the Gospels is Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
- Each of the Gospels is written for a particular audience with specific purposes and emphases
- The Gospel accounts reflect independent research and variety

# THE IMPORTANCE OF EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY

The importance of close contact in eyewitness testimony

Credible eyewitness testimony requires a sustained, up-close type of exposure



# THE IMPORTANCE OF EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY

What was from the beginning,  
what we have heard,  
what we have seen with our eyes,  
what we have observed, and have touched  
with our hands,  
concerning the Word of life— 1 Jn 1:1

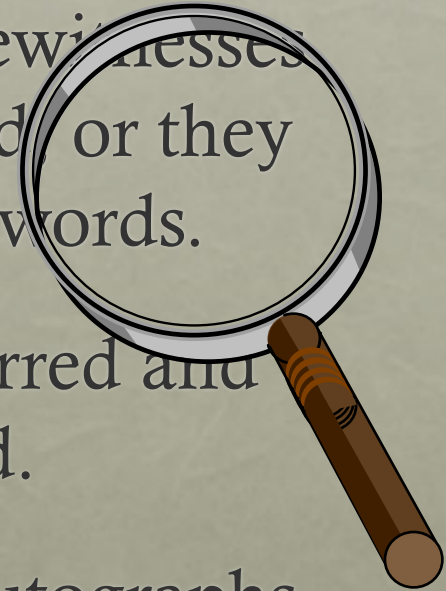
# THE IMPORTANCE OF EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY

- “For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.
- For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, a voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory: This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him!
- And we heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic word strongly confirmed. You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dismal place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.” (2 Pet 1:16–19 HCSB)

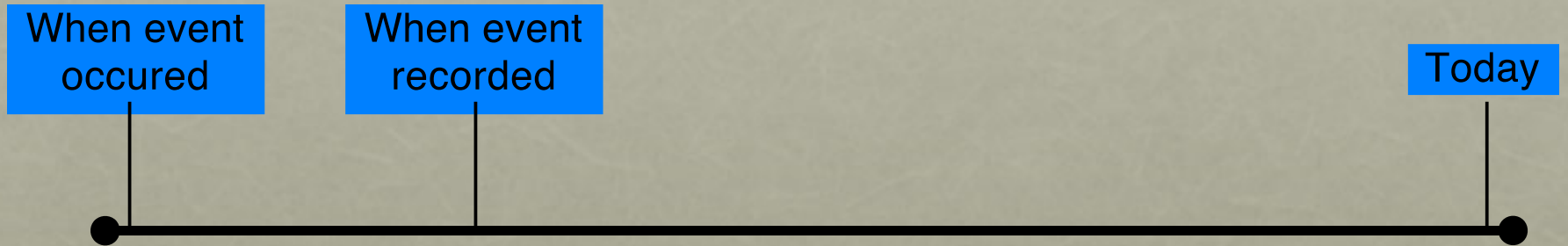
# THE IMPORTANCE OF EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY

## □ Factors that Support the New Testament texts

- Generally the New Testament authors eyewitnesses of the events and words that they recorded or they interviewed eyewitnesses to the events or words.
- Short time between when the events occurred and when these events and words are recorded.
- Short time span from the writing of the autographs and that of our copies of the New Testament.
- Multitude of manuscripts of the New Testament.



# The Credibility of Historical Events Determined by Temporal Proximity to the Record of the Event





# CONCLUSIONS OF A RESPECTED ARCHAEOLOGIST

“We can say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about A.D. 80, two full generations before the date between 130-150 given by the more radical New Testament critics of today.”

W. F. Albright, *Recent Discoveries in the Bible Lands*, p. 136

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE  
FOR JESUS

Documentary

# LITERARY DOCUMENTS

- Pliny (the Younger) (Epistles 10.96, Letter to Trajan, ca. A.D. 110: “(Christians) . . . maintained . . . that their fault or error amounted to nothing more than this: they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before sunrise and reciting an antiphonal hymn to Christ as God, and binding themselves with an oath—not to commit any crime, but to abstain from all acts of theft, robbery and adultery, from breaches of faith, from repudiating a trust when called upon to honor it. After this . . . it was their custom to separate, and then to meet again to partake of food. . . .”

# LITERARY DOCUMENTS

- **Tacitus**, Annals 15.44, ca. 115-117: “But all human effort, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. 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 hand of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate**, and a deadly superstition, thus check for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but also in the City, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world meet and become popular.”

# LITERARY DOCUMENTS

- **Mara bar Serapion**, Syriac MS, after A.D. 73 but probably in second or third century A.D.: “What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. **What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King?** It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea; the Jews, ruin and driven from their land, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. **Nor did the wise King die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he has given.”**

# LITERARY DOCUMENTS

- **Suetonius**, Life of Claudius 25.4, A.D. 120: “He expelled the Jews from Rome, on account of the riots in which they were constantly indulging, at the instigation of **Chrestus**.”

Life of Nero 16.2, A.D. 120

“Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a body of people addicted to a novel and mischievous superstition.”

Lives of the Caesars 26.2

This proves that a number of Christians lived in Rome by A.D. 54, approximately 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

# LITERARY DOCUMENTS

- **Lucian of Samosata**, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13, second century A.D.: “**The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day**—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was **crucified** on that account. . . .”

# LITERARY DOCUMENTS

- **Flavius Josephus**, Jewish Antiquities 18.63, 64, ca. A.D. 93:  
“About this time<sup>1</sup> arose **Jesus**, a wise man if indeed it be right to call him a man. For he was a doer of marvelous deeds, and a teacher of men who gladly receive the truth. He drew to himself many persons, both of the Jews and also of the Gentiles. He was the Christ. And when Pilate, upon the indictment of the leading men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those who loved him at the first did not cease to do so for he appeared to them alive on the third day—the godly prophets having foretold these and ten thousand other things about him. And even to this day the race of Christians, who are named from him, has not died out.”



# LITERARY DOCUMENTS

- Jewish Antiquities 20.200, ca. A.D. 93: “. . . he (Annas the younger) convened a judicial session of the Sanhedrin and brought before it the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ—James by name—and some others, whom he charged with breaking the law and handed over to be stoned to death.”
- James put to death in A.D. 62

# LITERARY DOCUMENTS

- **Babylonian Talmud**, Sanhedrin 43a, ca. A.D. 70-200:  
“Jesus was hanged on Passover Eve. Forty days previously the herald had cried, ‘He is being led out for stoning, because he practiced sorcery and led Israel astray and enticed them into apostasy. Whosoever has anything to say in his defence, let him come and declare it.’ As nothing was brought forward in his defence, he was hanged on Passover Eve.”

# LITERARY DOCUMENTS

- Sanhedrin, 43a, ca. A.D. 70-200: “(Rabbi) Ulla said, ‘Would you believe that any defence would have been so zealously sought for him? He was a deceiver, and the All-merciful says: ‘You shall not spare him, neither shall you conceal him.’ It was different with Jesus, for he was near to the kingship.”
- Sanhedrin, 43a, ca. A.D. 70-200: “The rabbis taught: Jesus had five disciples: Mathai, Naqai, Nezer, Buni and Todah.”

# LITERARY DOCUMENTS

*Teachings of the Twelve Apostles (Didache)*  
(A.D. 85)

Clement of Rome, *Letter to the Corinthians*,  
ca. A.D. 95: "The apostles received the  
Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ."

# LITERARY DOCUMENTS

Ignatius, Letter to the Trallians, 9., ca. A.D. 110-115: "Jesus Christ who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and those under the earth; who moreover was truly raised from the dead. . . ."

# LITERARY DOCUMENTS

Almost the entire New Testament can be reconstructed from the writings of the ante-Nicene Church Fathers' writings as well as from the Christian Apocrypha and Pseuopigrapha

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE  
FOR JESUS

Archaeological

# EARLIEST WITNESS TO THE AUTOGRAPHA

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**“It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible.”**

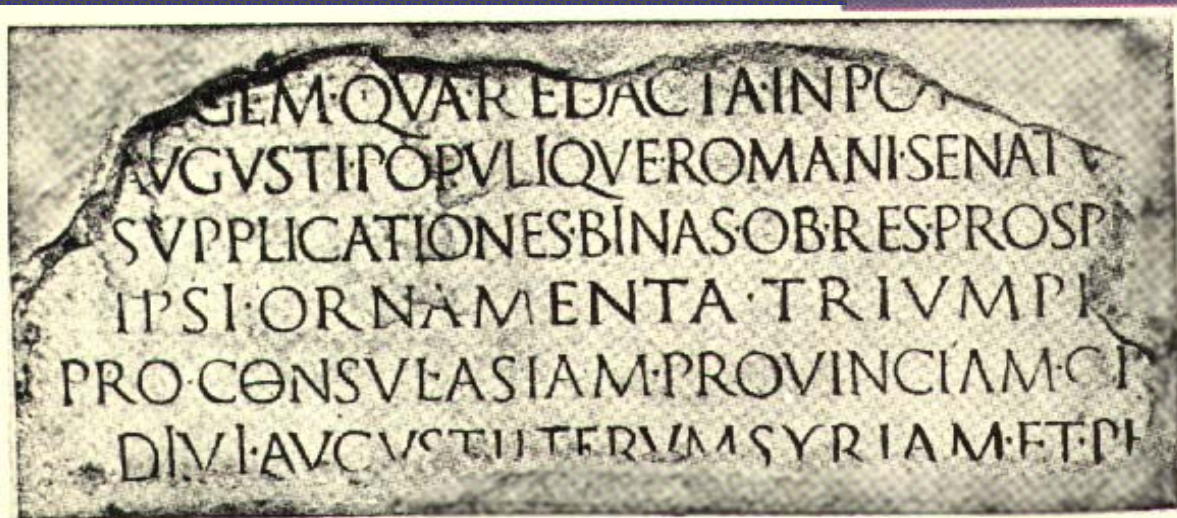
Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev*, 31.



# ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

- The Census in Luke (2:1-5)
- Discovery of Yohanan, a Crucifixion Victim
- Pontius Pilate Inscription
- Nazareth Decree
- Caiaphas Ossuary
- Simon of Cyrene Ossuary
- James Ossuary
- Many, many more .....

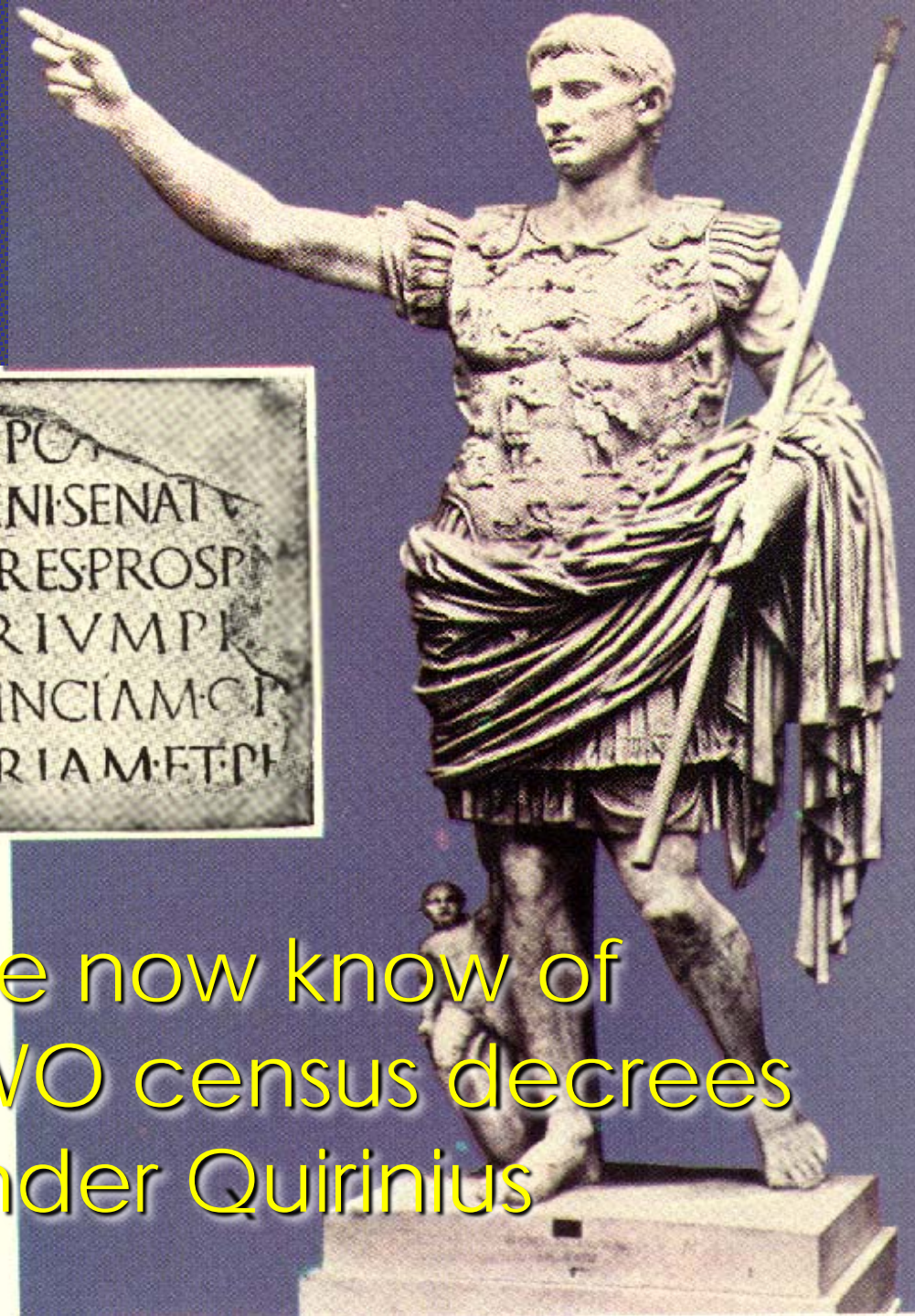
# Census of Quirinius



AND it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria).

(Luke 2 : 1-2)

We now know of  
TWO census decrees  
under Quirinius



# CENSUS OF QUIRINIUS

- It was once believed that there was no evidence of a census, or that Quirinus was governor of Syria, or that everyone had to return to one's ancestral home for the census.

# CENSUS OF QUIRINIUS CONT'D

- NEW EVIDENCE
- 1. We now know that Romans had a regular enrollment of taxpayers and held a census every 14 years. This began with Augustus & occurred in either 23-22, or in 9-8 B.C. The latter is the one to which Luke refers
- 2. Evidence demonstrates that Quirinius was governor of Syria around 7 B.C. This is known from an inscription found in Antioch. It is now believed that he was governor twice, once in 7 B.C. and once in A.D. 6.

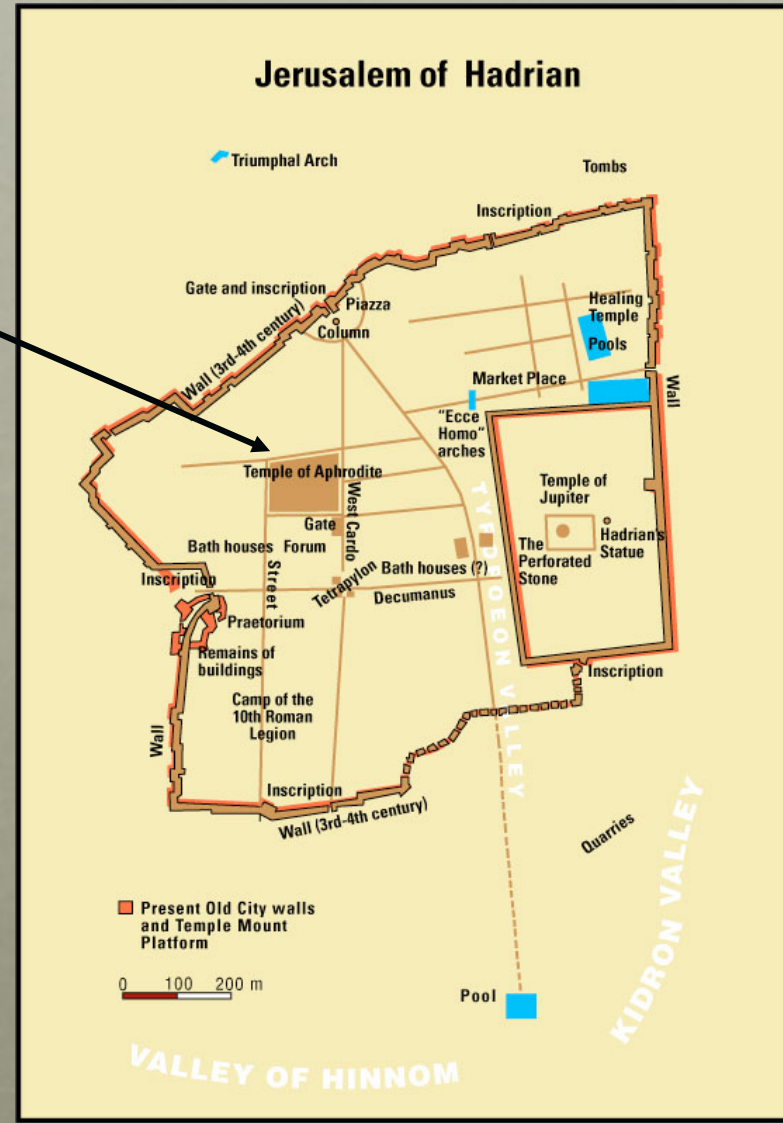
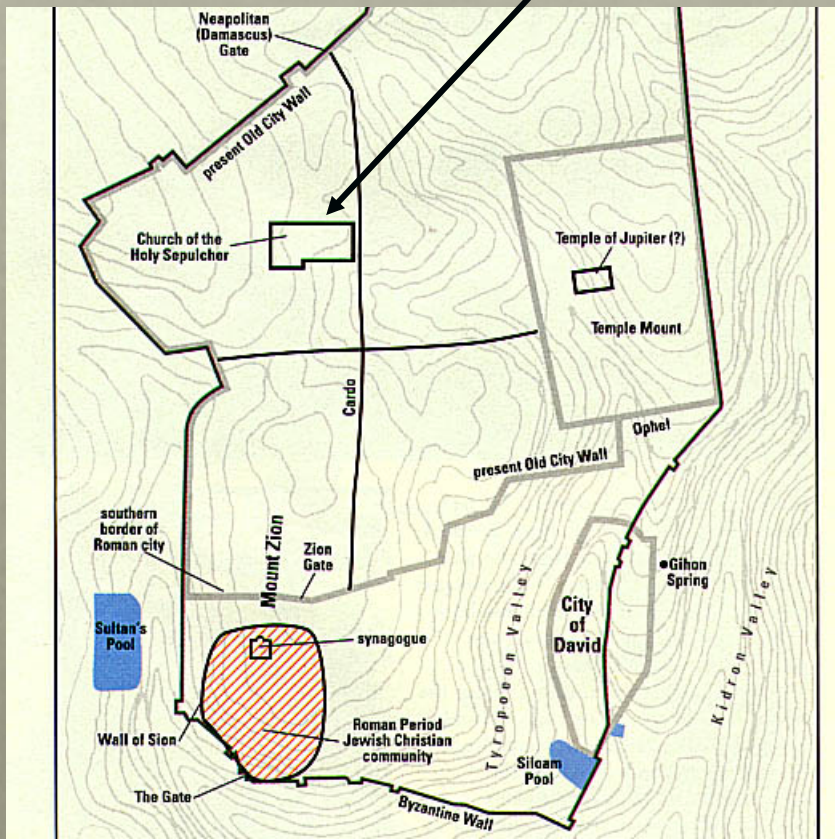
# CENSUS OF QUIRINIUS CONT'D

- 3. From a papyrus found in Egypt which gives directions for the conduct of the census, we now have greater information about enrollment required in the time, which coincides with biblical text: "Because of the approaching census it is necessary that all those residing for any cause away from their homes should at once prepare to return to their own governments in order that they may complete the family registration of the enrollment and that the tilled lands may retain those belonging to them."
- (See P. Maier & N. Turner)

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# Hadrian's Attempt to Erase Memory of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem

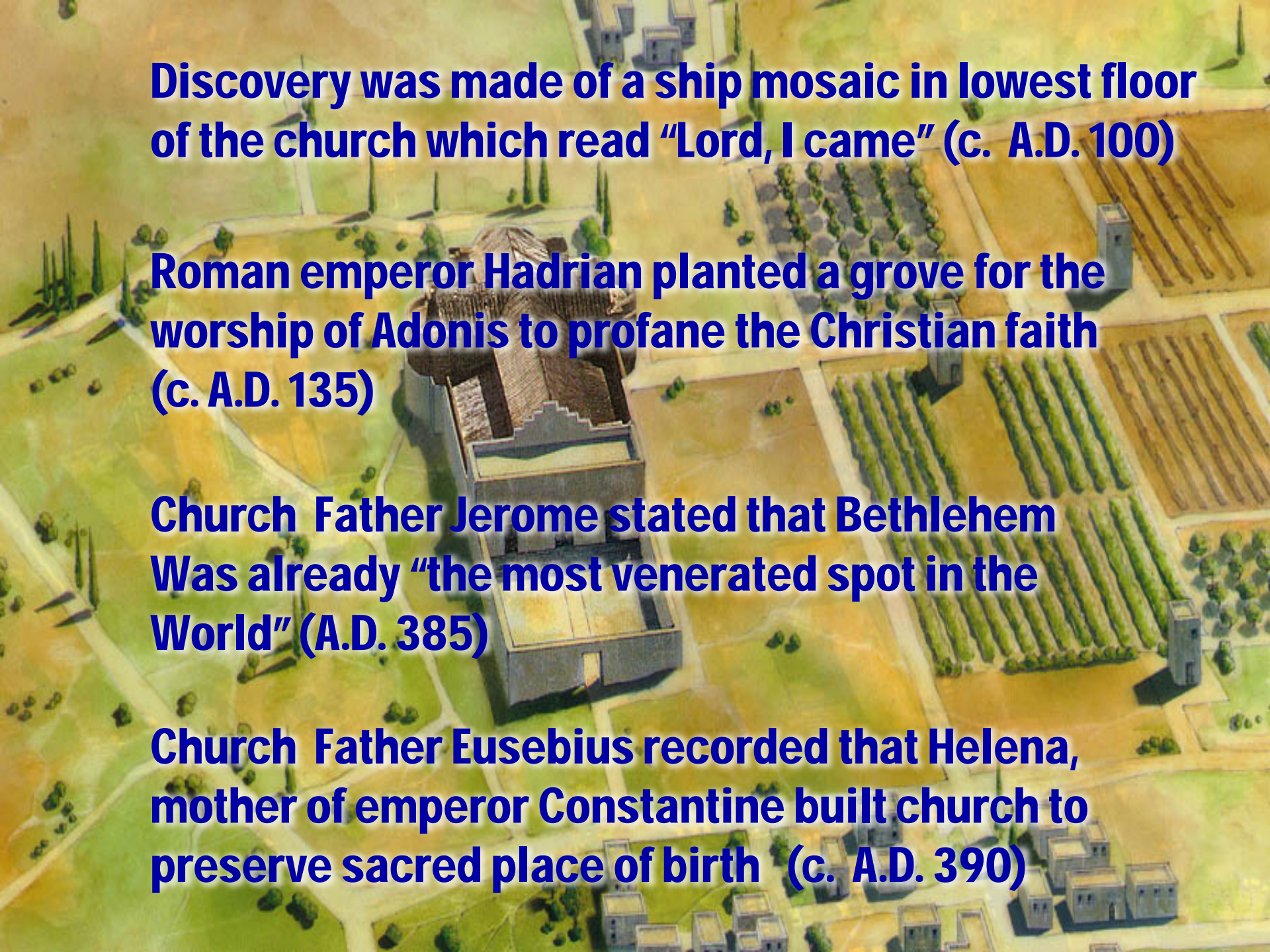


# Church of the Nativity







An aerial photograph of a historical site, likely Bethlehem, showing a large, multi-story building with a central tower and a series of steps leading up to it. The building is surrounded by green fields and a network of roads. In the background, there are more buildings and a large, open field.

Discovery was made of a ship mosaic in lowest floor of the church which read "Lord, I came" (c. A.D. 100)

Roman emperor Hadrian planted a grove for the worship of Adonis to profane the Christian faith (c. A.D. 135)

Church Father Jerome stated that Bethlehem Was already "the most venerated spot in the World" (A.D. 385)

Church Father Eusebius recorded that Helena, mother of emperor Constantine built church to preserve sacred place of birth (c. A.D. 390)

# Pontius Pilate Inscription

- The Census in Luke (2:1-5) (P. Maier & N. Turner)
- Discovery of Yohanan, a Crucifixion Victim
- History of Golgotha and Birthplace of Jesus
- **Pontius Pilate Inscription**



# PONTIUS PILATE

- In 1961, Italian archaeologist **Antonio Frova** found a fragment of a plaque that was used as a section of steps leading to the Caesarea Theater
- It reads:
  - **TIBERIEUM**
  - **(PON)TIUS PILATUS**
  - **(PRAEF)ECTUS IUDA(EAE)**



Pontius Pilate



# CAIAPHAS





Joseph Caiaphas



DO WE HAVE A NEW  
TESTAMENT FULL OF  
ERRORS?

# WHAT IS TEXTUAL CRITICISM?

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The process of evaluating different variants in a manuscript tradition, usually in the attempt to determine the most likely reading of the original text.

# TRANSMISSION

- Transmission is the copying as accurately as possible the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts and their copies. Historically, the transmission of the text has been almost as unique as its original inspiration.

# VARIATIONS IN THE TEXTS

“Amazingly there are only four passages in the New Testament that are seriously challenged. They are John 7:53-8:11; 1 John 5:7; Mark 16:9-20; & Acts 8:37. Even if these passages were dismissed as spurious, not one significant matter of faith would be disrupted. What is taught in these disputed passages is repeated in other passages that are beyond doubt. Not one contradictory notion is presented in any of these disputed passages. I find that amazing and faith building.”

John A. Smith, *The Inspiration & Authority of The Bible - Truth Lectures 2005*; pg 331.

# VARIATIONS IN THE TEXTS

- **The vast majority are very minor** (spelling, differences in phraseology, etc.; modern translations often note the differences in footnotes)
- **Only 1/2 of one percent is in question** (compared to 5 percent for the Iliad by Homer w/ 643 manuscripts)
- **It can be stated:** "No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading...It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain: especially is this the case with the New Testament." - **Sir Frederick Kenyon**

# DEGREE OF ACCURACY

“If Comparative trivialities such as changes of order, the insertion or omission of the the article with proper names, and the like are set aside, the words in our opinion still subject to doubt can hardly amount to more than a thousandth part of the New Testament.”

B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, Vol. 1, p.2

# EARLIEST WITNESS TO THE AUTOGRAPHA

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- “The interval, then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the *authenticity* and the *general integrity* of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.”
  - Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (1940), pp 288-289

# DEGREE OF ACCURACY

A. T. Robertson suggests that the real concern of Textual Criticism is of a “thousandth part of the entire text.”

A. T. Robertson, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 1925, p. 22



# QUALITY & QUANTITY OF MSS EVIDENCE

- The New Testament has more than 5,000 MSS
  - ▣ The Gospel of John is known within one generation of its writing (John Rylands Papyri A.D. 125) in A.D. 90)
  - ▣ Portions of Matthew and Mark are known which date within a decade of their writing in the 50s and 60s
  - ▣ More than 15,000 early translations of the New Testament are known in such languages as Syriac, Coptic, Latin, Italian
  - ▣ Textual scholars consider only 1,000th of the New Testament MSS to be in any question, and almost all of these are small issues such spelling, word order

# EXTERNAL EVIDENCE TEST— THE CHURCH FATHERS

“Indeed so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.”

Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 86

# COMMITMENT TO ACCURACY

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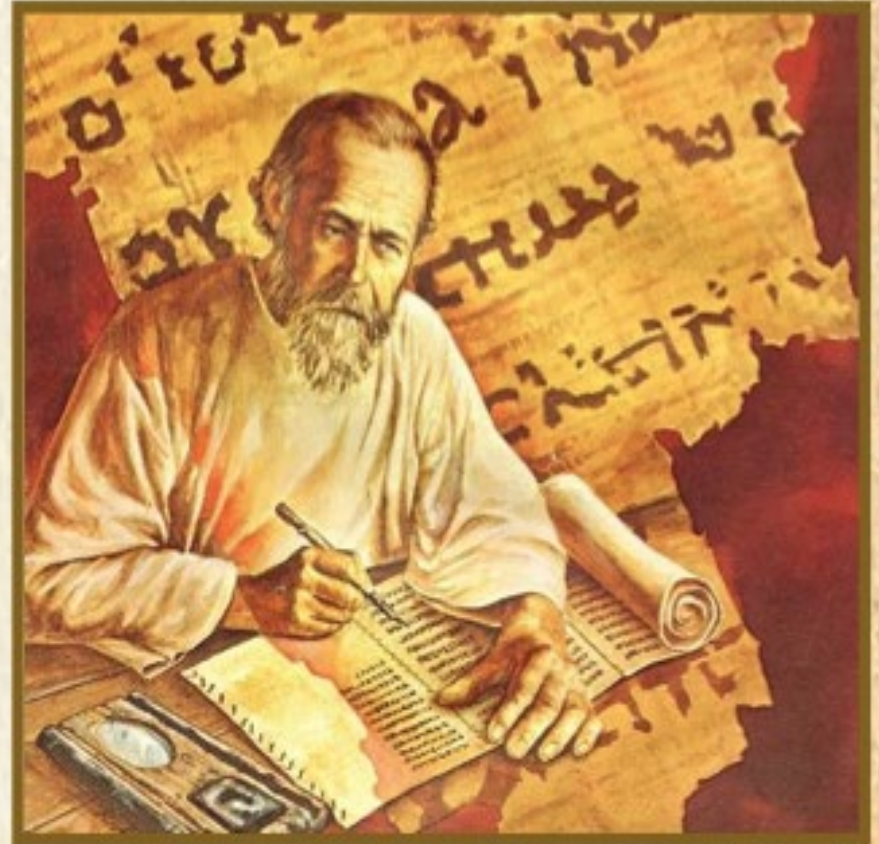
*We have given practical proof of our reverence for our own Scriptures. For although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable; and it is an instinct with every Jew, from the day of his birth, to regard them as the decrees of God, to abide by them, and, if need be, cheerfully to die for them.*

—Flavius Josephus (Contra Apion, Book I, sec., 8, p. 158)

# COMMITMENT TO ACCURACY

***My son, be careful in your work for it is the work of Heaven, lest you err either in leaving out or in adding one iota, and thereby cause the destruction of the whole world.***

**—Ishmael (1<sup>st</sup> century AD)**



**Qumran scribe  
(c. 1<sup>st</sup> century BC)**

# COMMITMENT TO ACCURACY

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- Do Christian scribes adhere to the concern for accuracy found among Jewish scribes.
  - Earliest documents would have been created within Jewish community
  - The amazing lack of series variants in the MSS tradition of the New Testament testifies to the commitment for accuracy.

# *The Anvil—God's Word*

Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith's door,  
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;  
Then looking in, I saw upon the floor  
Old hammers, worn with beating years of time.

“How many anvils have you had,” said I,  
“To wear and batter all those hammers so?”  
“Just one,” said he, and then, with twinkling eye,  
“The anvil wears the hammers out, you know.”

And so, thought I, the anvil of God's Word,  
For ages skeptic blows have beat upon;  
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,  
The anvil is unharmed—the hammers gone.

Author Unknown