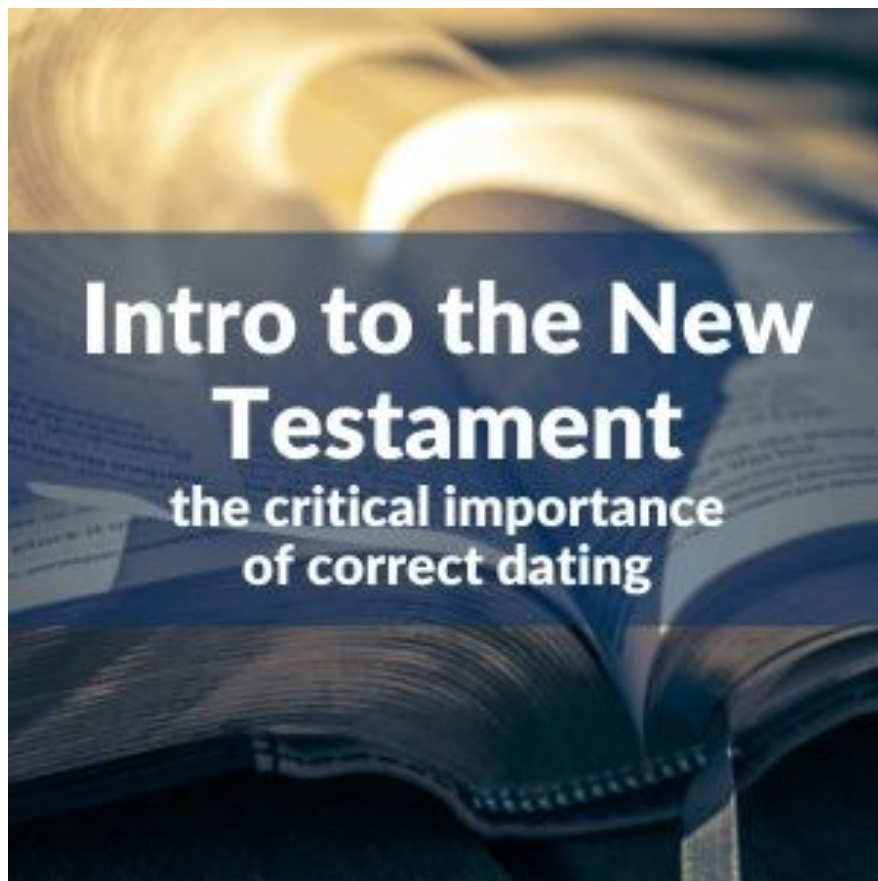


Handouts

Including

Notes, Questions,

Infographic



How do we know what we're told about Jesus is true?

- *Wasn't the New Testament written hundreds of years after He lived?*
- *How do we know it isn't just legends about a good teacher?*
- *And why did some books get included and others didn't?*
- *These questions and more we'll answer in our lesson today.....*

Introduction to the New Testament

the critical importance of correct dating

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The New Testament makes some extraordinary claims

- That the long-prophesied Messiah came into the world, lived, taught, died, and rose again to offer a restored relationship to God to all who believe in Him.
- For claims of such importance, naturally, not everyone believed them then or now and questions like these come up:
- *Wasn't the New Testament written hundreds of years after the events recorded in them?*
- *In the time between the events and the recording of them, did myth and legends replace reality?*
- *Therefore, are the stories of the miracles, the resurrection of Jesus, just wishful thinking?*
- *Also, shouldn't the books that were left out of the New Testament, e.g. the Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Mary and others have been included?*

We will answer these questions in Two Parts

- Part One of this lesson—How the history of the documents, in their collection, internally and externally show conclusively **WHEN they were written**.
- **Correct dating** is the essential, foundational fact that must be established because if a historical account was written by eyewitnesses within a few years of the events taking place it has much greater reliability than something written hundreds of years after an event.
- We will then do an **Introductory Lesson on the Gospels as we start Reading through the New Testament** and then—
- Part Two—we'll look at the New Testament non-canonical writings, particularly the **Gnostic "gospels" and Why they aren't included in our Bibles**

A very brief history of how we got the New Testament

- The Christian church made a huge impact on the ancient world—we'll see some non-Christian quotes on it shortly.
- It would only be natural that the leaders of this early movement would write to scattered churches as the new movement was growing—and they did.
- The earliest writings that form our New Testament were the letters—James, then the letters of Paul as you'll see when we get to that part of our reading.
- Then as those who personally knew Jesus were fewer and fewer, people who knew him or knew those close to him wanted to write down an account having eye-witness testimony.
- And that is how the Gospels came into being, the events took place first, but written later, which makes dating them important to confirm their trustworthiness of what they record.

Luke describes this process in the introduction of the book that bears his name

- **Dear friend who loves God:**
- **Several biographies of Christ have already been written using as their source material the reports circulating among us from the early disciples and other eyewitnesses. However, it occurred to me that it would be well to recheck all these accounts from first to last and after thorough investigation to pass this summary on to you, to reassure you of the truth of all you were taught. Luke 1:1-4, NLT**
- He goes on to write an exacting, precise, and accurate account.

Similar processes took place for the other books in the New Testament

- Each was written for a specific reason, either as was Luke's as an eyewitness biography of Jesus or as a letter to Christian churches.
- Collections of these letters and biographies began to be saved by various groups and were gradually recognized as Scripture equivalent to the Old Testament and passed down as the New Testament we have in our Bibles today.
- That exact process is covered in the Bible805 Lesson on Canonicity, available at <https://wp.me/pazrJD-yT>
- In this lesson we'll go into depth on how we date and verify the authenticity of these documents that forms the basis of the Gospels, the biographies of Jesus, for their inclusion in Holy Scripture.

Foundational in analyzing ANY historical document—WHEN it was written

- This is of foundational importance because obviously the closer any document was written to when the events actually happened increases the likelihood that those events are true.
- A variety of writings from the time in addition to the documents themselves if they refer to them—both positive and negative, is especially helpful.
- It takes hundreds of years for a historical figure to become the topic of myth, so for a religious figure correctly dating when the events of their life **were recorded** is especially important.

How we begin to date the documents of the New Testament—compare with dates outside the documents themselves

- **1st Key date:** Paul's death under Nero took place 67, 68 AD, attested to in church history, many writings.
- His death is not mentioned in Acts, (it ends with him under house arrest when he wrote the Prison Letters) so it is logical to assume that Acts was completed before 67 AD.
- The Gospel of Luke had to be written prior to Acts (he starts Acts talking about the "former letter,") which was the book of Luke, and it is agreed that it is probably the last synoptic gospel so Matthew, Mark, were written before it, so all the gospels probably sometime in the 60s AD.
- Obviously then, all of Paul's letters had to be written before 67 AD (when he died).

2nd KEY date: Destruction of Jerusalem & the Temple, 70 AD

- If all were written before this time, it is incredibly important as dating all the documents prior to 70 AD means that they were written by eyewitnesses—here is why that is the case—
- No NT book (Revelation included) **makes any mention of the destruction of the Temple**. It was an extraordinary, world-shattering event to all involved with the Jewish people and the new Christian faith. See Josephus for devastating descriptions of the entire war.

- Had it happened prior to the completion of the writing of the New Testament, it most certainly would have been mentioned, as many lesser tragedies and events are.
- **Current consensus among most scholars today is that the entire NT was written prior to 70 AD** because of this and many other reasons having to do with the construction of the documents themselves, which we will now look at.

How do we date manuscripts?

- We date manuscripts very quickly all the time without realizing we are doing it.
- Contrast a newspaper from 1880s and 20th century.
- You don't need a graduate degree to tell which is which.
- The paper, the type, the color or not, the illustrations all are immediate indications of when something was created.
- Biblical manuscripts are no different, as styles of writing and publication design are always changing.....in fact.....

We are in the midst of a huge documentary shift today—that future historians will use to date manuscripts and that is....

- We are shifting away from cursive writing.
- Already many cannot read or write it and, in a generation, or so, it most likely will be illegible to most.
- Future historians will be able to date handwritten documents based on if they are in cursive or not.
- What then are the differences in past manuscripts that enable us to date them?

Here are some of the criteria used to date manuscripts (just like today)—paper, how letters formed, use of color

- **What were they written on?**
 - Papyrus, in the earliest (200s and earlier, some later) really easy to see in the cross-hatching of the paper
 - Parchment, vellum (used more from 300 on)—smooth surface
- **How the letters are constructed**
 - Uncial is written entirely in capital letters commonly used from the 1st to 8th centuries AD by Latin and Greek scribes.
 - Miniscule (upper/lowercase) developing early 3rd century on and wide use 8th century on
- **Word spacing**, early MSS all words run together.
- **Illumination or illustrations of the pages was** not used until later, in monasteries primarily from 1000 to 1600 AD.
- The example here is very early as you can see from the criteria above and it is part of an almost complete collection of the Apostle Paul's writings dated from between 150-225 AD, found in Egypt.

Some early fragments of John's gospel

- John's Gospel from about 200
- 50-125 or later

Not only to we have fragments, but we have

3 complete Bibles very early, the first is Codex Sinaiticus 330-360

Importance of a codex

- Codex means "book" as opposed to a scroll
- Even if you only have a fragment, you can tell if it was a codex or not if it was written on the back—codex yes, scroll, not written on the back
- Codices also survived better; pages were protected, didn't curl and crack

- Leather pages (parchment=animal skins) and heavy wooden covers, why so many survived
- Paper didn't come to Europe until 1400's, the printing press followed in 1440s.

Another Codex, a complete Bible—the Codex Vaticanus

Codex Alexandrinus

- **From Alexandria**
- **400-440 A.D.**
- Given to King Charles of England, 1625
- Note: Charles was the son of James of the KJV, 1611—he did not have this early Greek manuscript when the KJV translation was made.

Later they began to decorate “illuminate” the Bible

- Though the lettering may be similar
- They began decorating with additional artwork
- Examples below from 1240-1260, 1079

Bit of typographic trivia, from early 1300s

- Manuscript showing the markings of the underlying design of the letters—see the finely drawn lines—you don't see these in many.
- They were first written and then the content written on and between the lines.
- If one could properly make your line of writing fit perfectly, the right way, the way it should be, it was said to be “justified,” as in being made right with God.
- That is where we get our term “justified type” today.

If you were shown this, when would you date it?

- Smooth, vellum pages, Lots of colored illustrations, upper- and lower-case letters

-
- Obviously medieval, after 1000 AD
 - Written in 1250-1299 AD
 - A section of the book of Matthew

What if you were shown this?

- Papyrus, uncial letters, words joined together

-
- Obviously very early!
 - Yes, 175 AD or so
 - End of the Gospel of Luke, beginning of the Gospel of John, p75

Not just a few examples, thousands

Manuscript conclusions

- When critics say that the Biblical accounts were not written until hundreds of years after the events, their comments on late authorship are simply ignorant as we have many manuscripts that by the obvious textual evidence conclusively date them prior to 100 AD.
- Statements about later dating, saying the Gospels are the result of the development of legend, have NO factual basis, but are the result of a philosophical view, not solid scholarship.
- Dating the manuscripts and what they record about Jesus based on textual evidence is a starting point, but there is more that we'll look at now.....

In addition to the manuscripts themselves, the dating of the content is also verified. . .

- By the writings of the ancient church fathers, who we know from many

sources lived after they were written and referred to them.

- One example, Justin Martyr, d. 165 AD quoted the New Testament over 330 times various places in it—**he couldn't quote from something that happened prior to 165 AD, if the stories about Jesus didn't develop until hundreds of years later.**
- Many others also extensively quoted NT content and based theology on it—from early 100's on.
- To emphasize the obvious, when critics say that the New Testament was written hundreds of years after the life of Christ, they totally ignore that it was quoted from long before when they claim it was even written.

Basic facts and timing of the Biblical history of Jesus verified by secular sources also

- **Though none of the following were believers, their accounts affirm the basic facts of the Christian faith, when they happened and how they had spread throughout the known world very early after the resurrection of Jesus (33 AD).**
- **Tacitus, a Roman historian (55 - 120 A.D.):** *"Christus, the founder of the [Christian] name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius. But the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also."*
- **Suetonius, a Roman historian (69 - 130 A.D.)** *"As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, [Claudius] expelled them from Rome."* Life of Claudius 25.4
- **PLINY THE YOUNGER, Roman governor of a province (63 - 113 A.D.)**, writing to Emperor Trajan, who didn't know what to do about Christians *"I asked them directly if they were Christians... They used to gather on a stated day before dawn and sing to Christ as if he were a god... All the more I believed it necessary to find out what was the truth from two servant maids, which were called deaconesses, by means of torture. Nothing more did I find than a disgusting, fanatical superstition."*

Josephus & the Testimonium Flavianum

- He witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and wrote a Jewish history from earliest times down to the history of James and John the Baptist.
- The complete text of the following is sometimes disputed (without good reason), but the core facts are accepted:
- ***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.***
- Flavius Josephus: *Antiquities of the Jews*, [Book 18, Chapter 3, 3](#)

CELSUS (write about 178 A.D.), a prolific writer against Christians

- **Note:** though he was not a Christian, he confirms, people, dates, events, though he attributes other reasons for them than the Bible does—while confirming **WHEN** and **THAT** they took place.
- **John the Baptist** *"If any one predicted to us that the Son of God was to visit mankind, he was one of our prophets, and the prophet of our God?"*

John, who baptized Jesus, was a Jew."

- **On Jesus' Miracles:** *"It was by means of sorcery that He was able to accomplish the wonders which He performed... Let us believe that these cures, or the resurrection, or the feeding of a multitude with a few loaves... These are nothing more than the tricks of jugglers... It is by the names of certain demons, and by the use of incantations, that the Christians appear to be possessed of [miraculous] power..."*
- **On the Apostles:** *"Jesus gathered around him ten or eleven persons of notorious character... tax-collectors, sailors, and fishermen... [He was] deserted and delivered up by those who had been his associates, who had him for their teacher, and who believed he was the savior and son of the greatest God..."*
- **On the Crucifixion:** *"Jesus accordingly exhibited after His death only the appearance of wounds received on the cross and was not in reality so wounded as He is described to have been."*
- **DO you see what he is saying? He affirms much of the New Testament, though ascribing different reasons for the events that took place, that he does not deny happened.**

Historical conclusions on the correct dating of the Gospels

- Put aside for a minute the theological implications.
- In a search for the historical Jesus, and the biographies and other materials written about Him (our New Testament) how solid is the picture based on:
 - Thousands of manuscripts from the earliest days,
 - Written by eyewitnesses,
 - Basic facts confirmed by secular and antagonistic sources,
 - Confirmed by 2,000 years of church scholars
- The only obvious, honest conclusion that the picture of the Jesus as presented in the Bible is historically accurate based on the confirmation of being written soon after He lived.

What an individual does with that is an entirely different issue

- The fact is that a man named Jesus lived in Palestine when the New Testament said he did, did the miracles described, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, rose from the dead, and so powerfully affected his followers that they immediately spread the news that this was the promised Messiah and forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation was possible through Him.
- We can trust that what they say happened when they say it happened.
- ***The documents that verify this were written soon after the events happened and are the best attested to in the history of all religions.***
- What a person does with these facts is a totally separate issue than the intellectually honest assessment of what happened and when it happened.
- ***For the one who has trusted Jesus as Savior, you can be assured that your faith has a firm foundation in our God who invaded history, who stepped into the world He created, to live, and die to redeem us.***

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- **Links to:**
- Podcasts, blogs, and eBooks
- Printables & merch of Bible verses & encouraging sayings
- Chronological Bible-reading schedules

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Intro to the New Testament, the importance of reliable dating

1. What are some common objections people have to the reliability and truth of the New Testament? What are some questions you have?
2. How do we know we can date the writing of all the books of the New Testament before 70 AD base on 1) The death of the Apostle Paul and 2) The Destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD?
3. What are some of the ways we can date manuscripts using the kind of material they were written on, how the letters were formed and if they were illustrated or not?
4. What did some of the secular Roman historians of the time (including Josephus) have to say about the Christian faith? What does this tell us about the basic facts of it?
5. What did Celsus, the vocal critic of the Christian faith tell us about when and what happened and how do his words actually help establish the truth of our faith?
6. APPLICATION— What does the firm evidence for the very early dating of the documents about Jesus and the Christian faith mean to you as a follower of Jesus?

The Number of New Testament documents we have in contrast to other documents of the ancient world, *and why it's important*

Author	Book	Date Written	Earliest Copies we have	Time Gap	Copies
Homer	Iliad	800 BC	c 400 BC	c 400 years	643
Herodotus	History	480-425 BC	c AD 900	c 1,350 years	8
Plato		400 BC	c AD 900	c.1,300 years	7
Caesar	Gallic Wars	100-44 BC	c. A D 900	c.1,000 years	10
New Testament		AD 50-100	c.AD 114 (fragment) & earlier c. AD 200 (books) c. AD 250 (most of N.T.) c. AD 325 (complete N.T.)	+50 years 100years 150 years 225 years	5366 original lang plus 15,000- translations
Gnostic Gospels	Gospel of Judas Gospel of Thomas and, at the most, 10 others	AD 150-300	c.AD 200-300	+50 years	1-3

What the chart about has to do with the reliability of the New Testament

Though we only have 8-10 manuscripts from some of the most famous writers of classical times, we consider these sources adequate for true history concerning them. In addition, in spite of an over 1,000 year gap between when most were written and the copies we have today, we consider them trustworthy because of the care and precision of the scribes who copied them.

On the other hand, for the New Testament we have an overwhelming number of copies of manuscripts—many thousands and from a very short period of time from when they were originally written.

By manuscript evidence alone (and there is much more evidence for the life and actions of Jesus when we look at historically contemporary writers, archeology, and even writers antagonistic to the Christian faith), we can say with great assurance that the New Testament and what it says about Jesus is true to the events as they happened. What a person decides to do with the facts presented in them—that Jesus lived, died, rose again and offers eternal salvation to all who believe in him—is an entirely different issue, but it is not intellectually credible to say that the biographies in the New Testament about him were written hundreds of years after he lived or the stuff of myths and legends.

This chart also shows the manuscript evidence for the Gnostic Gospels and provides evidence for why they are not included in the canonical New Testament. In summary they were written later, we have very few copies, and they do not come close to the historical verification of the canonical New Testament manuscripts.

For more about Jesus, the New Testament, and the Bible overall, go to www.Bible805.com.