



PRESENT DAY TRUTH

Did the Original Church Even Exist? — The Evidence from History, Archaeology & Prophecy

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

— 1 Peter 3:15

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD."

— Isaiah 1:18

THE CASE IN FIVE EXHIBITS · EVERY QUOTATION SOURCED · SCRIPTURE: KJV

A fair-minded skeptic will stop us at the door: "**How do you know any of it happened at all? Maybe the 'original church' is a legend.**" It's a serious question — and it deserves evidence, not "just believe." Christianity is the one world faith that stands or falls on **public, datable, checkable events**: a real execution under a named governor, in a real province, followed by a resurrection claim that could have been falsified on the spot if the body had been produced. Here is the evidence, in five exhibits — with the sources printed so you can verify every word.

EXHIBIT I — THE ENEMIES: WHAT HOSTILE WITNESSES CONFIRM

I Rome's Own Historians Record the Facts testimony from men with every reason to deny it

The strongest testimony in any courtroom comes from witnesses who oppose the defendant but admit the facts anyway. The early church had exactly such witnesses — **Roman officials and a Jewish historian who owed Christianity nothing.**

Tacitus, Annals 15.44 (c. AD 116) — Rome's greatest historian, no friend of Christians (he calls the faith a "mischievous superstition"), describing Nero's scapegoating after the fire of Rome (AD 64): "**Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, 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...**"

What Tacitus certifies — unintentionally

1) **Christ existed** — a real person, not a myth · 2) **He was executed** — "the extreme penalty," Roman crucifixion · 3) **Under Pontius Pilate, in Tiberius's reign** — exactly the names and era of Luke 3:1 · 4) The movement went **from Judaea to Rome within 30 years** — exactly the map of Acts.

Josephus, Antiquities 18.3.3 (c. AD 93) — the Jewish historian

"Now there was about this time **Jesus, a wise man...** a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure... And when **Pilate... had condemned him to the cross**, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him... And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, **are not extinct at this day.**" (Also 20.9.1: "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James.")

Pliny the Younger, Letters 10.96 (c. AD 112) — the Roman governor

Reporting to Emperor Trajan: Christians "were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and **sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god...**" and "the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms" — pagan temples "almost deserted."

Why hostile testimony matters

Within 80 years of the crucifixion, worship of Christ "**as to a god**" was the settled practice of ordinary believers — not a legend layered on centuries later. Myths do not empty temples within a single lifetime of their supposed invention.

The scholarly verdict: even skeptical specialists concede the foundation. Bart Ehrman (agnostic): Tacitus "confirms what we know from other sources, that Jesus was executed by order of the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate." John Dominic Crossan (Jesus Seminar): "That he was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be." A myth does not get executed by a named magistrate. **Note on honesty:** a few of Josephus's most explicitly Christian phrases were likely polished by later copyists — but the core facts (Jesus' existence, teaching, crucifixion under Pilate, His followers' survival) are accepted by the overwhelming majority of scholars, and the James reference is accepted as genuine by nearly all.

EXHIBIT II — THE EYEWITNESSES: DOCUMENTS WRITTEN CLOSE TO THE EVENTS

II "We Have Not Followed Cunningly Devised Fables"

The New Testament writers did not present themselves as storytellers of a misty past. They staked everything on **eyewitness testimony** — and wrote while thousands of other eyewitnesses were still alive to contradict them.

Luke 1:1–3

"...Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were **eyewitnesses**, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had **perfect understanding of all things from the very first**, to write unto thee in order..."

2 Peter 1:16 · 1 John 1:1, 3

"We have **not followed cunningly devised fables**... but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." "That which we have **heard... seen with our eyes... and our hands have handled**... declare we unto you."

1 Corinthians 15:3–8 — the earliest creed

Written c. AD 55, quoting a creed scholars date within **3–5 years of the cross**: "Christ died for our sins... he was buried, and... **he rose again the third day**... he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of **above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present**" — an open invitation to interrogate living witnesses.

Acts 26:26 · Acts 4:20

"This thing was **not done in a corner**." — Peter, before the very council that condemned Jesus: "We **cannot but speak** the things which we have seen and heard."

Luke can be checked — and he passes: in Acts he names cities and obscure official titles — *politarchs* in Thessalonica, *asiarchs* in Ephesus, *proconsuls* in Cyprus and Achaia. Critics once called some of these Luke's errors — until inscriptions proved he had used exactly the right local terminology. Sir William Ramsay, the archaeologist who began skeptical of Acts, concluded after decades of digging that Luke was "a historian of the first rank." **And the witnesses didn't behave like inventors:** the crucifixion was public; the resurrection was preached in the same city weeks later, where producing the body would have ended everything; the authorities' own story conceded the tomb was empty (Matthew 28:11–15). Men may die for a lie they believe — but not for a lie they *invented*.

EXHIBIT III — THE STONES: WHAT ARCHAEOLOGY HAS DUG UP

III The Spade Has Been the Skeptic's Embarrassment *the critics doubt; the dirt confirms*

For two centuries, critics dismissed biblical people and places as legend — David, the Hittites, Pontius Pilate himself. Then the shovels started digging. Discovery after discovery has vindicated the record.

The Pilate Stone (discovered 1961, Caesarea Maritima): for centuries Pilate was known only from the Bible and a few ancient writers — some critics doubted he existed. Then excavators found a limestone block he had dedicated: "...[PO]NTIUS PILATUS... [PRAEF]ECTUS IUDA[EA]E..." — **"Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea."** Right name, right office, right city, right emperor (Tiberius), right century.

The Caiaphas Ossuary (1990, Jerusalem)

An ornate limestone bone box inscribed "**Yehosef bar Qayafa**" — **Joseph, son of Caiaphas** — the high priest who presided over Jesus' trial (Matthew 26:57), exactly as Josephus names him.

The Erastus Inscription (1929, Corinth)

A first-century pavement honoring **Erastus, city treasurer** — the same name and office Paul mentions writing from Corinth: "Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you" (Romans 16:23).

The Pool of Bethesda (John 5:2)

Long mocked as a Johannine invention — a pool with "five porches." Excavated in Jerusalem: **exactly five porticoes** — four around the sides, one across the middle. The Pool of Siloam (John 9:7) was uncovered in 2004, right where John places it.

The Capernaum Synagogue (Mark 1:21)

The black basalt foundations of the **first-century synagogue where Jesus taught** lie directly beneath the later white limestone synagogue visitors see today.

Also: the Merneptah Stele (~1208 BC) — the earliest mention of Israel outside the Bible, proving Israel a nation in Canaan exactly when Scripture says · the Mesha Stele names Omri's dynasty · Assyrian and Babylonian records confirm biblical kings — Hezekiah, Manasseh, Jehoiachin (his ration tablets were found in Babylon), Nebuchadnezzar · the Cyrus Cylinder records the Persian policy of returning exiles (Ezra 1:1–4). Archaeologist Nelson Glueck summarized decades of excavation: "No archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference." **The 200-year pattern:** the critics doubt; the spade confirms. This book is rooted in checkable history — not myth.

EXHIBIT IV — THE MANUSCRIPTS: HOW THE RECORD REACHED US

IV The Best-Attested Book of the Ancient World *and it isn't close*

"The text has been copied for 2,000 years — how do you know it wasn't changed?" Fair question. The answer: we can compare **thousands of independent copies** — an evidence base no other ancient work comes near.

Ancient Work	Copies Surviving	Earliest Copy After Original
New Testament	5,800+ Greek · ~10,000 Latin · 9,300+ Syriac, Coptic, Armenian & others	Fragments within decades; substantial papyri within ~100 years
Homer, <i>Iliad</i>	~1,800	~400 years
Plato's dialogues	~210	~1,300 years

Tacitus, <i>Annals</i> (the very passage in Exhibit I)	~2 manuscripts for the later books	~900 years
Julius Caesar, <i>Gallic Wars</i>	~10 good copies	~900 years

The John Rylands Fragment (P52)
A scrap of John's Gospel dated c. AD 125–150 — within a lifetime of the apostle himself. Add 1,000,000+ Scripture quotations in the early church fathers, and the New Testament could be **reconstructed nearly entire** even if every manuscript vanished.

"But the copies differ!"
*They do — and that's the strength: thousands of independent copies let scholars spot every scribal slip. Result: nearly all variants are spelling or word order that translate identically; **no doctrine of Scripture rests on any disputed text** (Westcott & Hort: only ~1 word in 1,000 involves both real doubt and real difference of meaning).*

The consistency test: every educated person treats Tacitus and Caesar as solid history — on a handful of medieval copies copied ~900 years after the fact. The New Testament rests on thousands of copies, in multiple languages, beginning within a generation of the originals. Sir Frederic Kenyon, longtime director of the British Museum: "The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation." The record of the original church did not reach us on a thread. **It reached us on a rope of ten thousand strands.**

EXHIBIT V — THE PROPHECIES: HISTORY WRITTEN IN ADVANCE

V The One Evidence No Human Document Can Fake *the Messiah's biography, published centuries early*

Manuscripts prove the text hasn't changed. Archaeology proves the events were real. **Prophecy** proves something more: that the Author of the book stands outside time.

Micah 5:2 (~700 BC) — the birthplace
*"But thou, **Bethlehem Ephratah**... out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." — written seven centuries before a census sent Mary to Bethlehem.*

Isaiah 7:14 · 35:5–6 · 53:3–5
*Born of a **virgin**; a healer of the blind, deaf, and lame (the very credentials Jesus offered John the Baptist, Mt 11:4–5); "despised and rejected... **wounded for our transgressions**... the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."*

Psalms 22:16–18 (~1,000 BC) — the crucifixion psalm
*"They **pierced my hands and my feet**... They part my garments among them, and **cast lots upon my vesture**." — written centuries before crucifixion was even invented as a punishment.*

Psalms 69:21 · 34:20 · 16:10
*Gall and vinegar offered (fulfilled John 19:28–29) · **"not one of them is broken"** (fulfilled John 19:36 — the executed had their legs broken; His were not) · His body would not "see corruption" — the resurrection, foretold.*

Zechariah 11:12–13 · 12:10
*Sold for **thirty pieces of silver**, thrown "to the potter in the house of the LORD" (fulfilled Matthew 27:3–10) · "They shall look upon me whom they have **pierced**."*

Daniel 9:24–27 — the timetable
*The seventy-weeks prophecy foretold the very era in which Messiah would appear and be **"cut off, but not for himself"** — before Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70. Jesus staked His identity on that clock: "The time is fulfilled" (Mark 1:15).*

A myth does not arrive on schedule. These prophecies were copied and circulated — the Isaiah Scroll among the Dead Sea Scrolls (dated ~125 BC) still reads essentially as our Isaiah reads — generations to centuries before the events they describe. Fulfilled prophecy is God's own signature on the record: "I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe" (John 14:29).

THE VERDICT — AND THE ONLY QUESTION LEFT

VI Putting the Five Exhibits Together

1 · Enemies
*Rome's historian, Rome's governor, and a Jewish historian confirm **the Founder, the execution, the movement, and its explosive growth**.*

2 · Eyewitnesses
*Documents written within the lifetime of the events, by authors whose details check out — and who **died rather than recant**.*

3 · Stones
*The governor, the high priest, the pool, the synagogue, the treasurer — archaeology keeps finding the people and places the critics **said never existed**.*

4 · Manuscripts
*The best-attested text of the ancient world — by an order of magnitude — with **no doctrine resting on any doubtful reading**.*

5 · Prophecy
*The arrival announced in writing, **centuries in advance** — birthplace, manner of death, and timetable all on record before the fact.*

The Conclusion
*The original church existed. Its Founder lived, died under Pontius Pilate, and left an empty tomb neither Rome nor the Sanhedrin could explain. **The record can be trusted**.*

What the evidence does — and doesn't — do: it removes every excuse for refusing to consider Jesus of Nazareth; it does not force anyone to bow. God never overrides the will. He simply leaves the facts on the table and asks, as He asked through Paul before King Agrippa: "Believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest" (Acts 26:27).

VII The Invitation — the Jailer's Question

*"Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house**."*

— Acts 16:30–31

The evidence leads to one Person. The original Christians did not preach a system — they preached a risen Lord, and they invited everyone to test the claim and come. That invitation is now in your hands.

2 Peter 1:19

"We have also a **more sure word of prophecy**; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto **a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn...**"

John 20:30–31

"These are written, that **ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.**"

Your next step: (1) Read the Gospel of John with one question in mind: *who is this Man?* (2) Re-read Parts 1 and 2 of this series — what the original Christians practiced, and how history shows the faith was changed. (3) Test us: every source in this pamphlet is printed below — verify them all. (4) Then do the one thing the evidence can never do for you: talk to God. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17).

*"These were more noble... in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and **searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.**"*

— **Acts 17:11**

Primary sources cited in this pamphlet: Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44 (c. AD 116) · Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.3.3 & 20.9.1 (c. AD 93–94) · Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10.96 (c. AD 112) · Pilate Stone, Caesarea (disc. 1961) · Caiaphas Ossuary, Jerusalem (disc. 1990) · Erastus Inscription, Corinth (disc. 1929) · Pool of Bethesda & Pool of Siloam excavations · Dead Sea Scrolls, Great Isaiah Scroll (~125 BC) · Manuscript data: INTF Liste, Münster; standard textual-criticism references · Scholar assessments: Ehrman, Crossan, Ramsay, Kenyon, Westcott & Hort · All Scripture quotations: King James Version · Full article: **originalchristians.info**

Skeptical? Good — so were we. Check the sources; they're printed so you can. This is Part 3 of a series: Part 1 shows what the original Christians believed and practiced; Part 2 documents how the church changed. Write us with your hardest questions — no pressure, no cost, no obligation.

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why.bible — Why is the Bible true?

which.bible — Comparisons of Bible versions

what.bible — What does the Bible say about...?

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." — 1 Thessalonians 5:21 · "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." — John 17:17