

ANCIENT MANUSCRIPT COMPARISON CHART

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Approximate Time Span between original & copy	# of Copies	Accuracy of Copies
Lucretius	died 55 or 53 B.C.		1100 yrs	2	----
Pliny	A.D. 61-113	A.D. 850	750 yrs	7	----
Plato	427-347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200 yrs	7	----
Demosthenes	4th Cent. B.C.	A.D. 1100	800 yrs	8	----
Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300 yrs	8	----
Suetonius	A.D. 75-160	A.D. 950	800 yrs	8	----
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300 yrs	8	----
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1300 yrs	9	----
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200	10	----
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1000	10	----
Livy	59 BC-AD 17	----	???	20	----
Tacitus	circa A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1000 yrs	20	----
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1400	49	----
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	A.D. 1000	1400 yrs	193	----
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs	643	95%
New Testament	1st Cent. A.D. (A.D. 50-100)	2nd Cent. A.D. (c. A.D. 130 f.)	less than 100 years	5600	99.5%

NOTES:

- There are thousands more New Testament Greek manuscripts than any other ancient writing.
- The internal consistency of the New Testament documents is about 99.5% textually pure.
- In addition, there are over 19,000 copies in the Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic languages. The total supporting New Testament manuscript base is over 24,000.

EVIDENCE THAT THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS WRITTEN IN THE 1st CENTURY

In the 1830s German scholars of the Tübingen school tried to date the books as late as the 3rd century, but the discovery of some New Testament manuscripts and fragments from the 2nd and 3rd centuries, one of which dates as early as 125 AD (Papyrus 52), disproves a 3rd-century date of composition for any book now in the New Testament.

Additionally, a letter to the church at Corinth in the name of Clement of Rome in 95 AD quotes from 10 of the 27 books of the New Testament, and a letter to the church at Philippi in the name of Polycarp in 120 quotes from 16 New Testament books.

Ignatius of Antioch (35-107 A.D.) was a student of the Apostle John. He was martyred, killed by Lions in the arena in Rome. After his arrest and during his transportation to Rome, he wrote seven letters (later, some obviously spurious additional letters were attributed to him – these are ignored here). The letters of Ignatius, written very close to 107 A.D., quote from several New Testament books as well.

EVIDENCE FOR JESUS AND THE EARLY CHURCH FROM NON-CHRISTIAN WRITERS

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....

Another important source of evidence about Jesus and early Christianity can be found in the letters of **Pliny the Younger** to Emperor Trajan. Pliny was the Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. In one of his letters, dated around A.D. 112, he asks Trajan's advice about the appropriate way to conduct legal proceedings against those accused of being Christians. Pliny says that he needed to consult the emperor about this issue because a great multitude of every age, class, and sex stood accused of Christianity. At one point in his letter, **Pliny** relates some of the information he has learned about these Christians:

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.

Lucian of Samosata was a second century Greek satirist. In one of his works, he wrote of the early Christians as follows:

The Christians ... worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.... [It] was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.

Sometime after 70AD, a Syrian philosopher named **Mara Bar-Serapion**, writing to encourage his son, compared the life and persecution of Jesus with that of other philosophers who were persecuted for their ideas. The fact Jesus is known to be a real person with this kind of influence is important. Mara Bar-Serapion refers to Jesus as the “Wise King”:

What benefit did the Athenians obtain by putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as judgment for their crime. Or, the people of Samos for burning Pythagoras? In one moment their country was covered with sand. Or the Jews by murdering their wise king?...After that their kingdom was abolished. God rightly avenged these men...The wise king...Lived on in the teachings he enacted.

We can learn quite a bit about Jesus from **Tacitus and Josephus**, two famous historians who were not Christian. Almost all the following statements about Jesus, which are asserted in the New Testament, are corroborated or confirmed by the relevant passages in Tacitus and Josephus. These independent historical sources—one a non-Christian Roman and the other Jewish—confirm what we are told in the Gospels:³¹

1. He existed as a man. The historian Josephus grew up in a priestly family in first-century Palestine and wrote only decades after Jesus’ death. Jesus’ known associates, such as Jesus’ brother James, were his contemporaries. The historical and cultural context was second nature to Josephus. “If any Jewish writer were ever in a position to know about the non-existence of Jesus, it would have been Josephus. His implicit affirmation of the existence of Jesus has been, and still is, the most significant obstacle for those who argue that the extra-Biblical evidence is not probative on this point,” Robert Van Voorst observes. And Tacitus was careful enough not to report real executions of nonexistent people.
2. His personal name was Jesus, as Josephus informs us.
3. He was called Christos in Greek, which is a translation of the Hebrew word Messiah, both of which mean “anointed” or “(the) anointed one,” as Josephus states and Tacitus implies, unaware, by reporting, as Romans thought, that his name was Christus.
4. He had a brother named James (Jacob), as Josephus reports.
5. He won over both Jews and “Greeks” (i.e., Gentiles of Hellenistic culture), according to Josephus, although it is anachronistic to say that they were “many” at the end of his life. Large growth in the number of Jesus’ actual followers came only after his death.
6. Jewish leaders of the day expressed unfavorable opinions about him, Josephus records.
7. Pilate rendered the decision that he should be executed, as both Tacitus and Josephus state.
8. His execution was specifically by crucifixion, according to Josephus.
9. He was executed during Pontius Pilate’s governorship over Judea (26–36 C.E.), as Josephus implies and Tacitus states, adding that it was during Tiberius’s reign.