

How we got the New Testament Part 1

Galatians 4:4: *Now when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law.* One of the features of the *fullness of time was come* is when Jesus came, the conditions had to be right for the proclamation of the message that He was going to give. And these conditions were:

1. Rome was the conquering power and there was peace through the empire; no wars were being fought.
2. Alexander the Great, some 325 years before had spread the Greek language throughout the known world, so if something was written in Greek, most people could read it.
3. The Romans had constructed elaborate stone roads throughout the lands it occupied with them all leading to Rome, hence the saying. This made it possible for Paul and others to travel vast distances to tell people the gospel.

**Network of Roads
In the Ancient Roman World**

This map illustrates the extensive road network of the Roman Empire, connecting major cities and provinces. Key locations include Londinium, Eboracum, Augusta, Roma, Alexandria, and Constantinople. The map also shows the Atlantic Ocean, North Sea, Baltic Sea, Black Sea, and Mediterranean Sea. A compass rose indicates North (N).

Bible History Online



The Ignatian Way
just outside of
Amphipolis



The Ignatian Way just outside of Thessalonica

What were the books of the New Testament written on?

Biblical manuscripts, with a few minor exceptions such as verses written on amulets and pots, are written on one of two materials: **Papyrus** or **Parchment**. Each had advantages and disadvantages. Parchment was by far the most durable, but also the most expensive and it was difficult to get large numbers of sheets of the same size and colour. Writing on papyrus was done with a sharpened reed use as a stylus and dipped into a dilute aqueous mixture of charcoal and gum from trees for binding.

Papyrus sheets were easy to prepare, plentiful and relatively inexpensive.

Papyrus

Papyrus is made from the papyrus plant grown in water in Egypt, by dividing its stems with a knife and cutting them into thin strips, being careful to make them as wide as possible. The best quality material comes from the centre of the stalk, with lesser grades coming from nearer to the edges. The strips are placed upon a table and moistened with water. Then, they are laid upon the table lengthwise and trimmed to length, after which a cross layer is placed over them. These cross-braced sheets are then pressed together and dried in the sun.

Papyrus was cheap, but it wore out more quickly and, since it is destroyed by damp conditions, few documents survive to the present day, except from Egypt and even those usually badly damaged.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCR8n7qS43w>



Parchment

Parchment is a very different material, requiring much more elaborate preparation to make it smooth and supple. Ideally it is started with the skin of young (even unborn) animals. If the skin was from sheep or goats, it was called Vellum. This skin was first washed and as much hair as possible, removed. It is then soaked in lime, stretched on a frame, and scraped again. The scraping was a vital step: If any flesh at all remained on the skin, it would rot and cause the skin to give off a unpleasant odour. It is then wetted, coated in chalk, rubbed with pumice, and finally allowed to dry while still in its frame. This process obviously required much more effort, and special materials, than making papyrus, but the result is a writing material superior to anything else of the time.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-SpLPFaRd0



New Testament manuscripts are usually found on parchment because it is more durable although the earliest were written on papyrus. The earliest complete copies of the New Testament are Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. Both date to the early fourth century and were written on parchment.

In what language were the books of the New Testament written?

Although Jesus would have spoken Aramaic, and the Romans, Latin, the New Testament was written in Greek which thanks to Alexander the Great, was the universal language at the time.

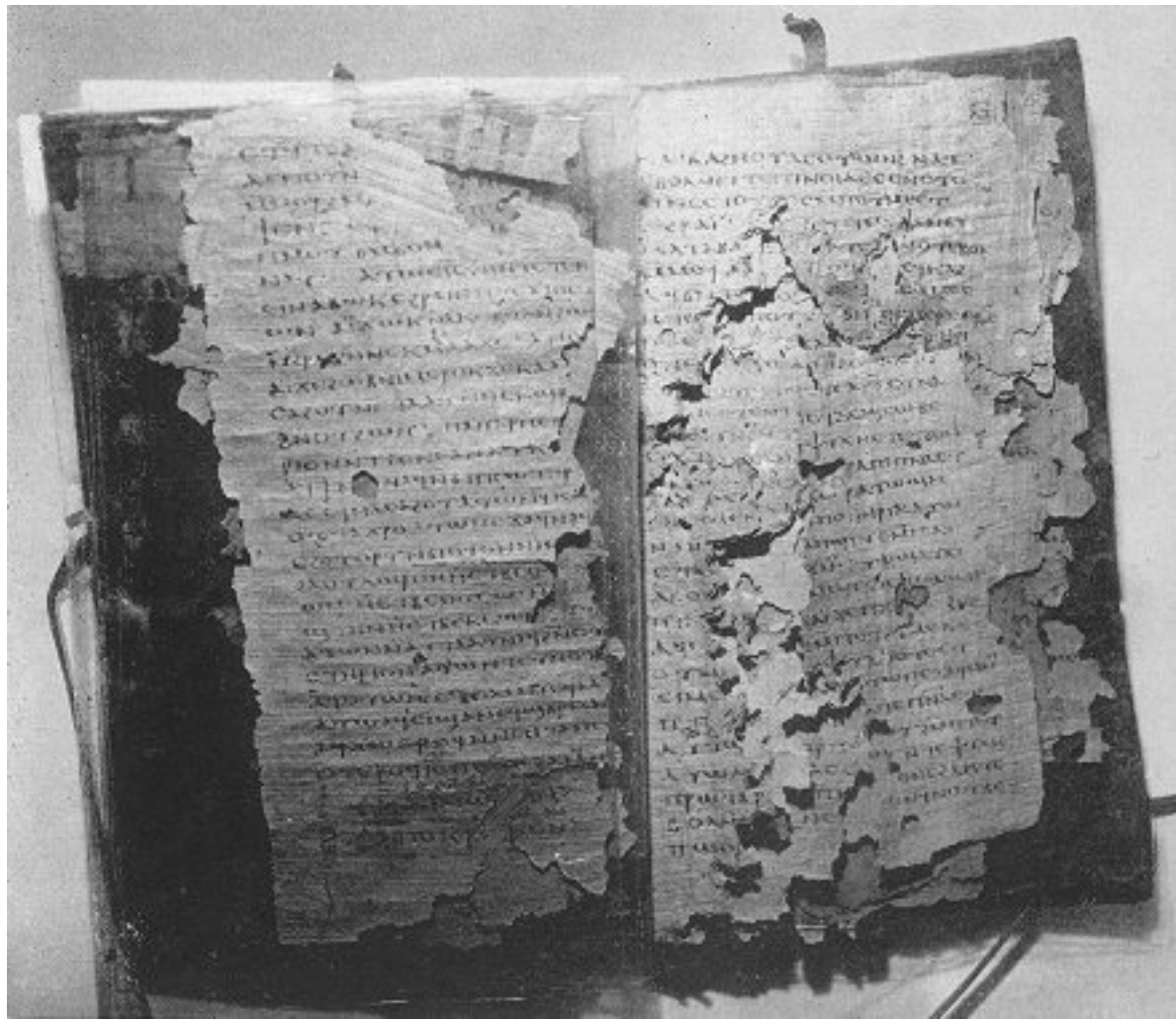
Before we go any further, let us pause for an explanation of terms

Scroll: A document wound on two spools.

Autograph: The original document.



Codex: A codex is simply a book format. This was a novel invention that came to replace scrolls. Scrolls were large, fragile and expensive. Codices were less expensive to produce, less fragile and easier to navigate through, as they could be flipped through quickly, page by page, unlike a scroll which had to be rolled back and forth.



An early Christian Codex (AD 300-350) on papyrus

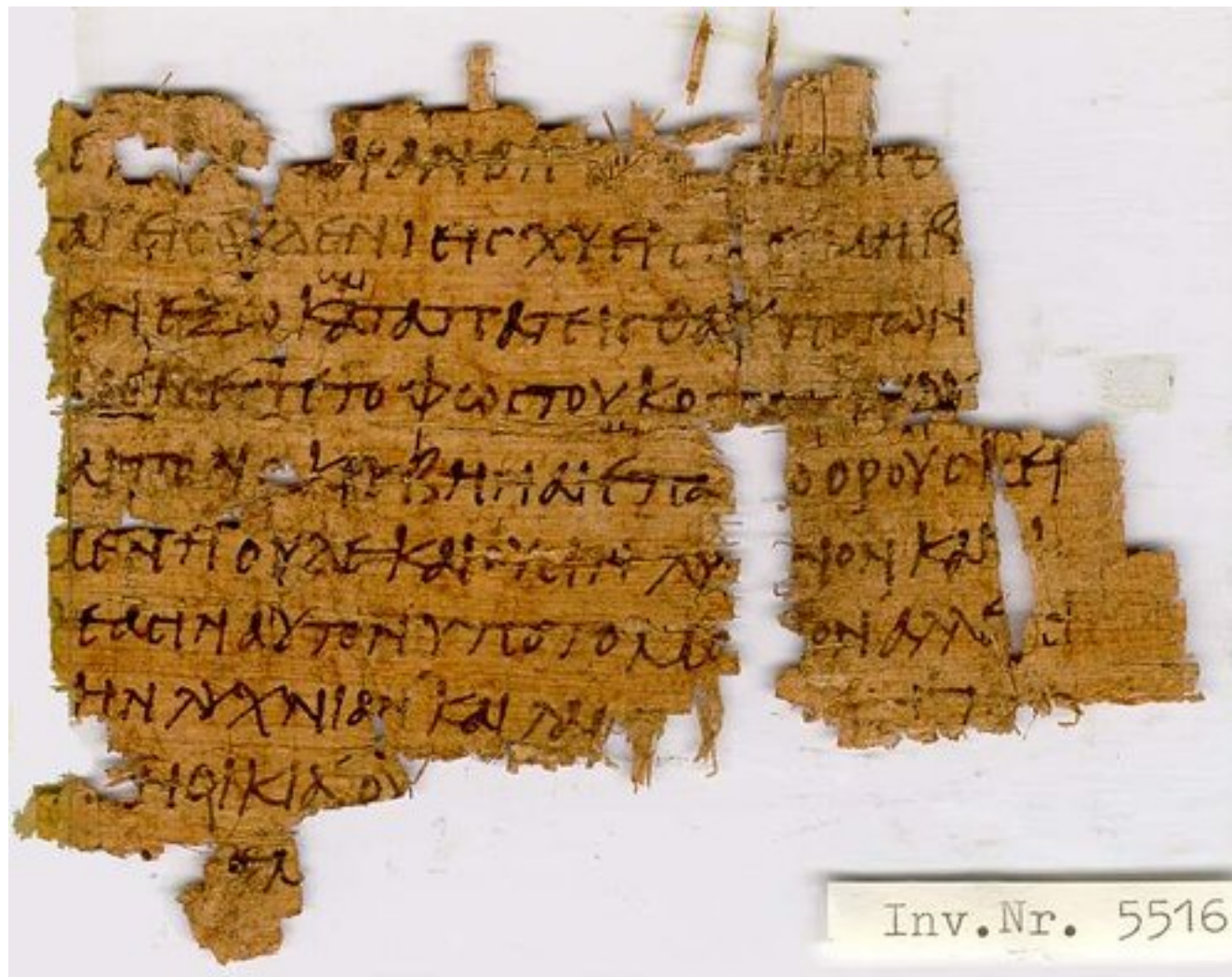
Uncials: All of the Greek New Testament originals were written in all capital letters with no spaces or punctuation, and all of the earlier manuscripts are in this style, whether on parchment or papyrus. This is because the Greek alphabet did not have punctuation until much later.

Minuscules are writings in a small, cursive Greek script and they largely replaced the uncials. This form of writing was popular during the period eighth to the fifteenth centuries. Most of the minuscules were written on parchment.

ΠΑΤΕΡΑΓΙΑΣΘΗΤΩ
ΤΟΥΝΟΜΑΤΟΥ·
ΕΛΘΑΤΩΗΒΑΣΙΛΙ
ΛΟΥΓΕΝΗΘΗΤΩ
ΤΟΘΕΛΗΜΑΤΟΥΩ
ΕΝΟΥΡΑΝΩΟΥΤΩ
ΚΑΙΕΠΙΓΗΣΤΟΝ

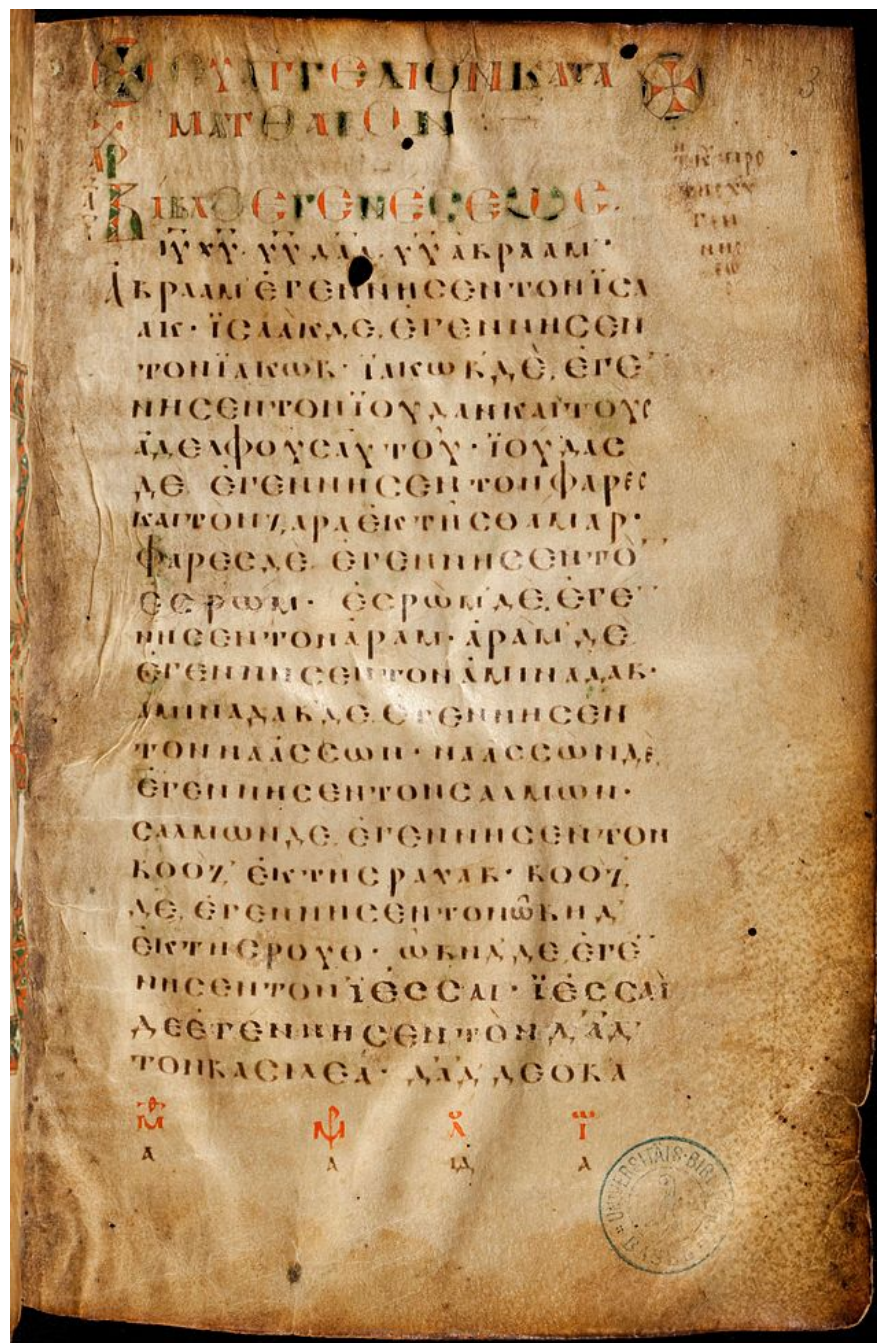
Uncial writing from Codex Sinaiticus Matthew 6:9-10

A fifth century papyri of Matthew chapter 6 in uncials



ὁ μὲν ἐκείνην ἐμ τοῖς δόμοις. ὁ δὲ
χρησόμενος. μὲν δὲ σοὶς ἐμοὶ ἀχρηστον.
δὲ αὐτὸν. τὸν ταῖτα ἐμὰ ἀποχρησ-
ταῖς ἐμὸν μὲν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἔχει
αἰσθητὴ ἐμ τοῖς δόμοις τὸν δὲ ἀποχρησ-
ταῖς οὐδὲ μὲν ἐκείνην ποιῆσαι. ἵν
τὸ ἀποχρηστικὸν. ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκείνην
χρηστικὴ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν. ἵνα αὐτὸν ἀποχρη-
στικὸν. ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν. ἀποχρηστικὸν αὐ-
τὸν δὲ ἐκείνην καὶ ἐκείνην καὶ

An example of Minuscule



Matthew chapter 1 on parchment

Who wrote the books of the New Testament and when were they written?

There are two events that have determined the latest possible date of the writing of the New Testament (except for John's writings) and are a major problem to liberal scholars who try to impose a late date for its writing.

1. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in AD70. This event was absolutely horrific for the Jews. According to the Jewish historian, Josephus it was slaughter on a massive scale with 1.1 million people being killed. Their whole way of life was changed permanently. There were no more daily sacrifices at the temple, no more High Priest going into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement to offer a blood sacrifice for the sins of the people and no more Jews coming from all over the Roman world to celebrate the Passover.

We know that the Temple sacrifices were no longer needed. But what is more astonishing is that Jesus predicted this massive destruction. As the disciples sat on the Mount of Olives looking down and admiring the beauty of the Temple, Jesus said that it will be destroyed to such an extent that there would not be as much as one of its exceedingly large stones standing on top of another (Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21). Josephus, who lived through this period and records this event only 25 years later, states that the fire was so intense that the Temple's gold melted and ran into the cracks between the stones so the Roman soldiers prised them apart in order to get the gold. They thereby fulfilled Jesus' prophecy of no stone standing on another.

2. The other event which places an upper limit on some of the New Testament books; thirteen in fact, was Paul's death at the hands of Emperor Nero who was probably the most despicable man who ever lived. This happened, according to the Wycliffe Bible Dictionary, sometime between AD 64 and AD 68 although many other sources say it was AD 64.

So apart from John's writing, all other books must have been written and in circulation prior to AD 70 and in the case of Paul's letters, before AD 68.

Because of the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple and the Jewish way of life the gospels of **Matthew**, **Mark**, and **Luke** were all written before A.D. 70. Basically, the book of Acts was written by Luke. But Luke fails to mention the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 nor does he mention the deaths of James (A.D. 62), Paul (A.D. 64), and Peter (A.D. 65). Since Acts is a historical document dealing with the church, we would naturally expect such important events to be recorded if Acts was written after the fact. Since Acts 1:1-2 mentions that it is the second writing of Luke, the gospel of Luke was written even earlier.

The gospel of John is thought to have been written by John the apostle. It is written from the perspective of an eyewitness of the events of Christ's life. The John Rylands papyrus fragment 52 of John's gospel dated to around AD 135 contains portions of John 18:31-33, 37-38. This fragment was found in Egypt and a considerable amount of time is needed for the circulation of the gospel before it reached Egypt. It is the last of the gospels and appears to have been written in the 80's to 90's.



Of important note is the lack of mention of the destruction of the Jewish temple in A.D. 70. But this is understandable since John does not mention Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of the Temple. He was not focusing on historical events and was probably living in Asia Minor at the time of his writing. John instead, focused on the theological aspect of the person of Christ and listed His miracles and words that affirmed Christ's deity. This makes perfect sense since he already knew of the previously written gospels.

Furthermore, 1, 2, and 3 John all contain the same writing style as the gospel of John and the book of The Revelation which is thought to have been written in the late 80's or early 90's.

Paul's writings

Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon were all written prior to AD 68 or more likely AD 64.

Hebrews

It is not known for sure who wrote the book of Hebrews. Authorship has been proposed for Paul, Barnabas, Apollos and others.

Paul is ruled out because it is written in a style quite different to Paul's letters in which he always states his authorship. As well, the writer states (2:3) that he was told of this salvation from those who heard Him i.e. Jesus. Jesus spoke directly to Paul (Galatians 1:12). The writer must have been well versed in the Old Testament; Hebrews is all about how the Law has been replaced by the new covenant with many OT references.

The book of Hebrews speaks of the sacrifice by the High Priest in the present tense (Heb. 5:1-3; 7:27; 8:4-5) which is strong evidence that the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple had not yet happened.

James

The author states that he is: James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are scattered abroad, greetings. The question is, "Which James?" Is it James, the son of Zebedee (Matt. 10:2-3); James, the son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:2-3), or the most commonly and accepted James who was the brother of Jesus? *Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brethren, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?* (Matt. 13:55-56). As well, Paul states in Galatians: *Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.* It is probable that James didn't believe in Jesus as the Messiah until Jesus appeared to him after His resurrection as is mentioned in 1 Cor. 15:7, *then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles.*

Josephus tells us that James was martyred by the order of the high priest Ananus after the death of the procurator Festus in A.D. 61 and the firmly held date for his death is AD 62 and obviously his letter was written before then and it could well be the first letter of the New Testament written.

1 and 2 Peter

Both letters clearly state that they were authored by Peter, an eyewitness of Jesus' life and post resurrection appearances. The clear opening statements of each letter tell us Peter was the author. *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus . . . ,* (1 Pet. 1:1) and *Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ* (2 Pet. 1:1).

The commonly held view is that Peter died in Rome during Nero's persecution of Christians around A.D. 65, so the letters were written before that time.

1, 2 and 3 John

First, a little bit of history; Polycarp was a direct pupil of the apostle John and he lived between AD 70 and 155, thereby connecting him to both the biblical apostles and the age of the early church fathers. It is recorded by Irenaeus that he heard Polycarp speak in his youth, and by Tertullian, that he had been a disciple of John the Apostle. Jerome wrote that Polycarp was a disciple of John and that John had ordained him bishop of Smyrna. Also, Eusebius, the first person to write a history of Christianity, says of Papias, a hearer of John, and a friend of Polycarp, said that he used testimonies from the First letter of John. Irenaeus, according to Eusebius often quoted this letter.

The writer of 1 John does not identify himself in the letter. However, the writer of 2 and 3 John refers to himself as "the elder." With regards to the first letter, authorship can reasonably be determined to be that of John the Apostle. The opening of John is written from the perspective of someone who was there with Jesus (John 1:1-4). The evidence for 2 John is almost as good. There is no second-century reference to 3 John, but that is not surprising, since it deals with a specific, local issue. Furthermore, the style of the three letters is very similar to that of the gospel of John. 1 John mentions the "word of life" (1 John 1:1) as does the gospel of John 1:1, etc.

It appears that the three letters were written after the Gospel of John since the letters seem to assume a knowledge of the gospel facts.

Date of writing varies from A.D. 60 to the early 90's.

Jude

Jude identifies himself as the brother of James (Jude 1). It is most likely that Jude, in true Christian humility, does not want to equate himself as the brother of Jesus as he is traditionally held to be and seems to be supported by scripture and named amongst Jesus' family Matt.

13:55-56. Instead, he mentions himself as a servant of Jesus, as James has also done.

The date of writing could be anywhere from A.D. 68 to the early 90's. However, since he was a brother of Jesus his letter must have been written during his lifetime, hence an earlier date is more likely. There is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem, which would have been included in the writing considering that Jude mentions judgments from God upon believers and unbelievers alike (Jude 5-12).

The Revelation

The author of the Book of The Revelation is John. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servant, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, (Rev. 1:1)

The Revelation was probably written at the end of John the Apostle's life. Eusebius, quotes Irenaeus who claims that Polycarp said that it was written toward the end of Domitian's reign (81-96) about AD 95 and this is universally accepted as being the year John wrote it.

Summary

Liberal theologians ascribe later dates for most of the NT books, but then they also deny the virgin birth and Christ's bodily resurrection so we need to pay little attention to them. Compelling evidence has been presented for the latest possible date of these writings and we can rest assured that by AD 95 all of the books had been written, copies made and they were well circulated some having been for 50 years.

How do we know that what was written was true?

We have looked at the material that the New Testament was written on, who wrote what and when, but how do we know what was written was true?

All of the New Testament writers were either present during the times and events that they wrote about or they received their information directly from eye witnesses.

For example, **Luke**, a Gentile, who wrote the most words of the New Testament, wrote both his gospel and the book of Acts to a person called Theophilus. Since he addresses it to “most excellent” Theophilus, it is thought that he was a man of distinction and quite possibly his publisher who also undertook its distribution.

Luke commences his gospel with the words:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,

² Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;

³ It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,

⁴ That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

Here Luke states his purpose in writing and his method. He wants to give his own account of the gospel events which, already in Luke's time, are being committed to writing by various authors. Luke combines his knowledge of other writings with the eyewitness testimony of people he knows. He also lays claim to a comprehensive understanding, not only of the historical data, but also of its theological significance.

Interestingly, only Luke gives the account of the boy Jesus talking to the teachers in the temple. (3:41-52). Luke might have spoke to Mary directly.

Similarly for the book of Acts which can be considered as a continuation of his gospel. However, in this case Luke accompanied Paul in much of his travels giving him first-hand experience.

John, the beloved disciple, writes at the end of his gospel (20:30-31):

³⁰ And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: ³¹ But 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.

As well, Jesus promised that after He goes back to the Father the Holy Spirit will come and **teach them and cause them to remember all that He has said**, John 14:26:

²⁶ But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

This assurance is repeated in John 16:4 and 1 John 2:27.

These verses, as well as Paul's statement that all scripture is God-breathed, gives ample assurance that what has been recorded in the Bible is true and that the writers have been guided by the Holy Spirit.

Archaeological/historical evidence

Many of the people, places and events mentioned in the New Testament have been verified by archaeology and we will cover this on August 13.

Written evidence from outside the Bible

During Jesus's death by crucifixion, the Bible states that darkness came over the land and lasted for three hours; this was evident to all who were in the area and it could not be ignored. His resurrection was proof of His deity and gave rise to Christianity which spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire. These points and more have been corroborated by non-Christian Roman and Greek historians and a Jewish historian. The full details are in *A Defence of the Bible*, pages 156-163. A summary follows:

- ✚ Jesus' death by crucifixion was confirmed by Josephus, the Babylonian Talmud, Lucian and Tacitus, and alluded to by Mara Bar Serapion. The fact that this occurred when Pontius Pilate was Governor of Judea, was stated by Tacitus and Josephus and under the reign of Tiberius Caesar by Phlegon and Tacitus.
- ✚ The darkness that came during the crucifixion has been mentioned by Thallus, Phlegon and Africanus.
- ✚ His worship by Christians who followed His teaching has been confirmed by Josephus, Lucian and Suetonius. Further, Pliny states that they worshipped Christ as deity.

- ✚ The fact that He was a powerful and revered teacher was stated by the Babylonian Talmud and implied by Lucian and Pliny.
- ✚ His performance of miraculous feats was indicated by Josephus and the Babylonian Talmud.
- ✚ That His followers were prepared to suffer the vilest of torture and death rather than reject Him has been confirmed by Tacitus and Pliny. The fact that Christianity started in Judea was mentioned by Tacitus.

Only the extracts of Josephus can be open to question since they have been handed down by Christian scribes. The others were handed down through Roman and Greek scribes and are free from any allegations of tampering.

I think that there is ample evidence to show that what was written is true and accurate.

What happened after the documents were written?

The receivers would have been familiar with the significance and value of the Old Testament scriptures with respect to how they should be handled physically and the care taken in copying to make the copy a facsimile of the one being copied.

Evidence to the high standing they had for these writings comes from the fact that Peter equated Paul's letters with Holy Scripture as in 2 Peter 3:15-16:

¹⁵ And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;

*¹⁶ As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, **as they do also the other scriptures**, unto their own destruction.*

In these words, Peter notes three important aspects of Paul's letters. **First**, he states some parts were hard to understand. **Second**, Peter notes that some had twisted Paul's words "to their own destruction." **Third**, Peter equates Paul's writings with the "other Scriptures." These other Scriptures were the Old Testament writings, works referred to as inspired by God by the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3:16-17), the apostle Peter (2 Peter 1:20-21), as well as Jesus (Matthew 5:17-20).

Peter here makes the clearest comment in the New Testament that Paul's writings are inspired.

As well, Paul calls Luke's writing (Luke 10:7) as scripture in 1 Timothy 5:18.

So even while the letters were still being written, they were regarded as being inspired by God and equivalent with Old Testament scripture and of course revered as such. As a consequence, they would have been accurately copied and circulated which is what we find.

Unfortunately, none of the autographs have survived and all we have is copies of copies and initially these would have been made on papyrus.