

“How Do We Know Christ Rose from the Dead? And Who Wrote the Bible?”

I have been struggling within myself for nearly all my life as to whether to believe that Christ actually rose from the dead. For without that fact, Christianity is an empty promise. So I ask myself, “What evidence is there?” The Bible is the only source of documentation we have to examine. I have often asked and never received an answer, as to exactly who wrote the Bible. The New Testament appears to have been written (opinions differ) from 75 to 400 years after Jesus was to have been around. Who put the pen to the paper on the originals? Who wrote the Old Testament? And when? Jesus was using a copy. Who compiled all the books of the O. T.? Why were they compiled before the coming of Christ? Did they come from a common geographical area, or were different continents involved? What language was used?

I hear statements like “They found hundreds of complete copies of the Bible in jars in the Dead Sea caves.” I try to envision how many thousands of papyri must have been preserved for that to be true. Do you have some light on this subject?

Thank you for your recent e-mail requesting answers regarding the Resurrection, and how the Old and New Testaments came to be developed.

I will try to give you an answer on each of your questions.

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There are a number of components that would suggest Christ actually rose from the dead. I believe this to be an historical event.

I liken the Resurrection to a space probe to Mars or Venus. Once it is launched, it is on the way to its destination upon the basis of the powerful impetus from its origination.

There is no doubt that something monumental must have occurred around 32 A.D.!

I would suggest you go back to the Probe Web site and you will find essays speaking to this issue. We suggest these:

[The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?](#)

[Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?](#)

[Who's Got the Body?](#)

[Jesus Must Have Risen: Disciples' Lives Changed](#)

[Cruci-fiction and Resuscitation](#)
[A \(Not So\) Brief Defense of Christianity](#)

There are many good reasons to believe this event actually occurred.

You cannot explain the origination of Christianity if you leave a dead Jew hanging on a Cross. The cowardice of the disciples was immediately replaced with a boldness and an affirmation, declaring that Christ arose from the Dead, and eleven of “the Twelve” sealed their belief in this event with the spilling of their own blood, becoming the first Christian martyrs.

The idea that they all got together and conjured this up among themselves is preposterous! They would not have died for what they knew was a lie. In effect, the rapid and dramatic spread of Christianity through out the Greco-Roman World is a second “booster” which changed the world that was. And we are still feeling the impact!

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I’m not sure where you got the idea that the New Testament was developed in a time frame from “75-400 years.” This is definitely not accurate, and needs clarification.

What we do have over those four centuries is a great deal of manuscript evidence of the New Testament. We need to start with the first century A.D., the century when all of the New Testament documents were written.

To do this, we need to establish and delineate the time frames of events, from the birth of Christ to the end of the first century A.D.

JESUS: Let’s start with His life. The span of his life begins around 6 B.C. We have a very firm date for Herod the Great. He died in 4 B.C. So, given the two years allowed for his order to slaughter the first born male infants up two years old in Bethlehem, Jesus’ birth could have occurred as early as 6 B.C. Doing the math suggests that Jesus may have been 38 years old when He was crucified. (The date for the crucifixion by most scholars is fixed at 32 A.D.)

Our first consideration is the time span from Christ’s resurrection to the end of the book of Acts. As you probably know, Acts is “Volume 2” (Luke’s Second Treatise) which follows his first Treatise, The Gospel of Luke.

You may remember that at the end of the Book of Acts, Luke is still Paul’s traveling companion, and they are both still alive and ministering. The dates for the writing of these are 58 A.D. for Luke and 66-67 A.D. for Acts.

We have a pretty firm date for the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul in Rome at the hands of Nero in 68 A.D. He served as Emperor from 50 to 68 A.D. If so, his suicide occurred in the same year he executed Peter and Paul.

Now you must recognize that the Four Gospels, Acts, and all the Epistles (letters) were written by the late Sixties, with John's Gospel and his three Epistles of John and his Book of Revelation coming a little later, around 90-95 A.D.

And even before any of the New Testament documents were written down, we know that there was an oral tradition already circulating: that is, a verbal collection of the sayings, stories, and actions of Christ.

CHURCH FATHERS: We also know that about 100 A. D. we have two epistles written by Clement, one of the early bishops of Rome. He wrote both of them to the Church at Corinth at just about the time John was writing the Book of Revelation. He speaks with some authority to them and perhaps other bishops and churches. And in these letters, there are indications that he was familiar with some of the writings and teachings of the Apostle Paul. You will remember that Paul gave instructions in some of his epistles, asking that the churches he wrote to should copy his epistles and send them to the other churches for instruction and encouragement.

All of this is to say, that the books which make up our New Testament were all written and being passed around and being copied within the first century A.D.!

Now it is true that we do not have one original scrap (we call the original the "autograph") of any of the New Testament documents. But we do have, through the combined writings and citations of the Church Fathers from 100 to 400 A.D., an enormous amount of material. With the exception of a few verses, we are able to reconstruct the entire New Testament from the Scripture quotations of the Church Fathers!

Let me give you an example. Let's say you were a teacher and you wrote the Prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) on the chalk board. Then you had all of your students copy those 18 verses in their notebooks. After they had done so, let's say you went back to the chalk board and erased the Prologue you wrote. Now, have we lost the Autograph? Yes. We have lost the original, but we have 25 copies of it that we can compare with each other and see where there might be a misspelled word, or a missing phrase or sentence, etc.

And this is what we call the science of "Textual Criticism." Obviously, the earliest extant manuscripts are the most valuable to us. For example, I was recently in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, Ireland and saw some of the most ancient manuscripts, portions of the New Testament (papyrus) which date back to the beginning of the second century (the 100s). You would be amazed at how much of the New Testament is in that library, from the second to the fourth Centuries! You could probably get the whole layout on the Web. (Please see my essay "[Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?](#)"). I was able to see with my own eyes, what I had always wanted to see, a little fragment from the Gospel of John (18:31-33) which is dated at 120 A.D. We have an actual fragment that is only about 24 years old from the time John wrote his gospel in 96 A.D.

So, you ask: "Who put the pen to the paper on the originals?" We have supplied the answer above. The authors begin with Matthew and end with John (the book of Revelation). And as stated above, the autographs, the original documents, were all written in the first century A.D. And again may I say that one little scrap of Scripture from the second century is more valuable than 10,000 paperback copies of *Good News for Modern Man*?!

OLD TESTAMENT: Now let's turn to the Old Testament. You ask,

Who wrote the Old Testament? And when? Jesus was using a copy. Who compiled all the books of the O. T.? Why were they compiled before the coming of Christ? Did they come from a common geographical area, or were different continents involved? What language was used?

First of all, we need to realize that while the Old and New Testaments are linked, they developed from two different time contexts: Judaism, and the Greco/Roman world. They spoke different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic/Greek and Latin). They lived in different places. They developed different cultures. And while they overlap in time to a small extent, the Jewish heritage is much older than the Greco/Roman world of Jesus' time.

The Hebrews (Jews) begin to appear in the Middle East at around 2000 B.C. (or 4,000 years from our time). Abraham, the Father and Founder, was living in Ur near where the mouths of the Tigris & Euphrates rivers flow into the Persian Gulf. The broader "Holy Land" would include Modern Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza, and Arabia: these constitute what we now know as Palestine, or Israel.

We begin to see archaeological indications of a definite the presence of Hebrews in the 1500 & 1400 B.C.

As language and phonetics developed, there came to be several distinct, Semitic dialects, out of which came the Hebrew alphabet and other cognate strains (Phoenician, Arabic, Ethiopic, Hebrew and Aramaic) throughout the Middle East.

At the time of the Exodus, we learn that Moses, educated by the Pharaoh in Egypt, was a man of letters. You may remember that Jesus alluded to this in John 5:46: "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for He wrote of me."

As the Jews began to settle in Israel, they became powerful. All along they recorded their history, either in writing or by oral tradition. The Old Testament books are a diverse collection of different kinds of Hebrew literature. All of this literature was preserved by creating scrolls from sheep or goat skins (synagogues all over the world still use them) upon which the precious documents were copied and preserved.

The creation of the official Old Testament canon we know today all came together around the sixth century B.C. (the historical time of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah).

THE SEPTUAGINT: Because of the spread of the Greek language (thanks to Alexander the Great), in 250 B.C. Jewish scholars felt the need to translate the Old Testament into Greek so the common people could read it. Jesus knew and read the Biblical Hebrew of the Scrolls when he read in the synagogues. And He no doubt spoke Aramaic (same Hebrew alphabet) to His disciples and to the crowds that gathered.

The value of the Septuagint is that we can examine the Greek translation of the O.T. by these scholars to see how the Hebrew text was rendered into Greek by these translators at that time.

DEAD SEA SCROLLS: Now a word about the Dead Sea Scrolls. You say,

I hear statements like 'They found hundreds of complete copies of the Bible in jars in the Dead Sea Caves'. I try to envision how many thousands of papyrus must have been

preserved for that to be true. Do you have some light on this subject

Yes, I do. Let me explain. When the Qumran Scrolls were first discovered, there was a great deal of excitement that we would find significant links to the four Gospels and clear connections to Jesus and the New Testament. But after study over six decades, there does not seem to be much overlap. I have been to Qumran, seen the caves, and I have read the entire translation of all the material that has been gathered and translated. (See Eusebius Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*).

And I can tell you that no such “hundreds of complete copies of the Bible have been found in jars in the Dead Sea caves.” There are many thousands of fragments, some as small as postage stamps with a few Hebrew words on them. Today, Qumran scholars continue to study the fragments, designated from each cave/location, and it is just one big puzzle-like task of trying to link one to another. It is a long and tedious process that will not be completed for a long, long time. And many fragments desired are either lost, overlooked, or stolen to sell.

The benefits of Qumran lie in the Old Testament fragments which can be compared with the Septuagint and the Hebrew Texts of the Synagogues. The outstanding example is the comparison of the Book of Isaiah. What is striking is the fact that there is very little variance between the two texts. The famous Qumran scroll and the official, Massoretic text used in synagogues today have a 95% agreement.

So, let's summarize the sequence of the development of the O.T.:

2000 B.C.	Authors begin writing, preserving literary heritage
465-424 B.C.	O.T. writings are gathered and the Canon formed (Ezra)
280-250 B.C.	Septuagint translation (Greek)
150 B.C.	Qumran Community (Essenes) Originated in the north (Damascus). Persecution drove them south to Qumran. (Dead Sea Scrolls)
45-96 A.D.	N.T. We have still another confirmation of the Old Testament text: all the O.T. verses which are quoted by the N.T. authors.

You can, and should have a certainty about this. _____, I hope this helps answer your questions.

Sincerely and warm regards,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

P.S. At one time in my life (college years), I was where you seem to be right now. I considered myself a Christian because I lived in America and hadn't killed anybody! But I came to understand that I was not a real Christian, and I didn't know how to become one. I finally understood what God was requiring of me, and I acted upon it. I find that most people don't know how to become a Christian. There are many in the pews who assume they are, but that can't explain why. That is a dangerous perspective.

If you want to explore this, I would suggest that you read two of my essays in this order:

["A Moral Life Won't Get Us to Heaven"](#)

["The Most Important Decision of your Life."](#)

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