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Welcome to  
Masters Breakfast

***Speaker - John Ray***

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# A Science Educator's Perspective on the Historicity of the Gospel Message.

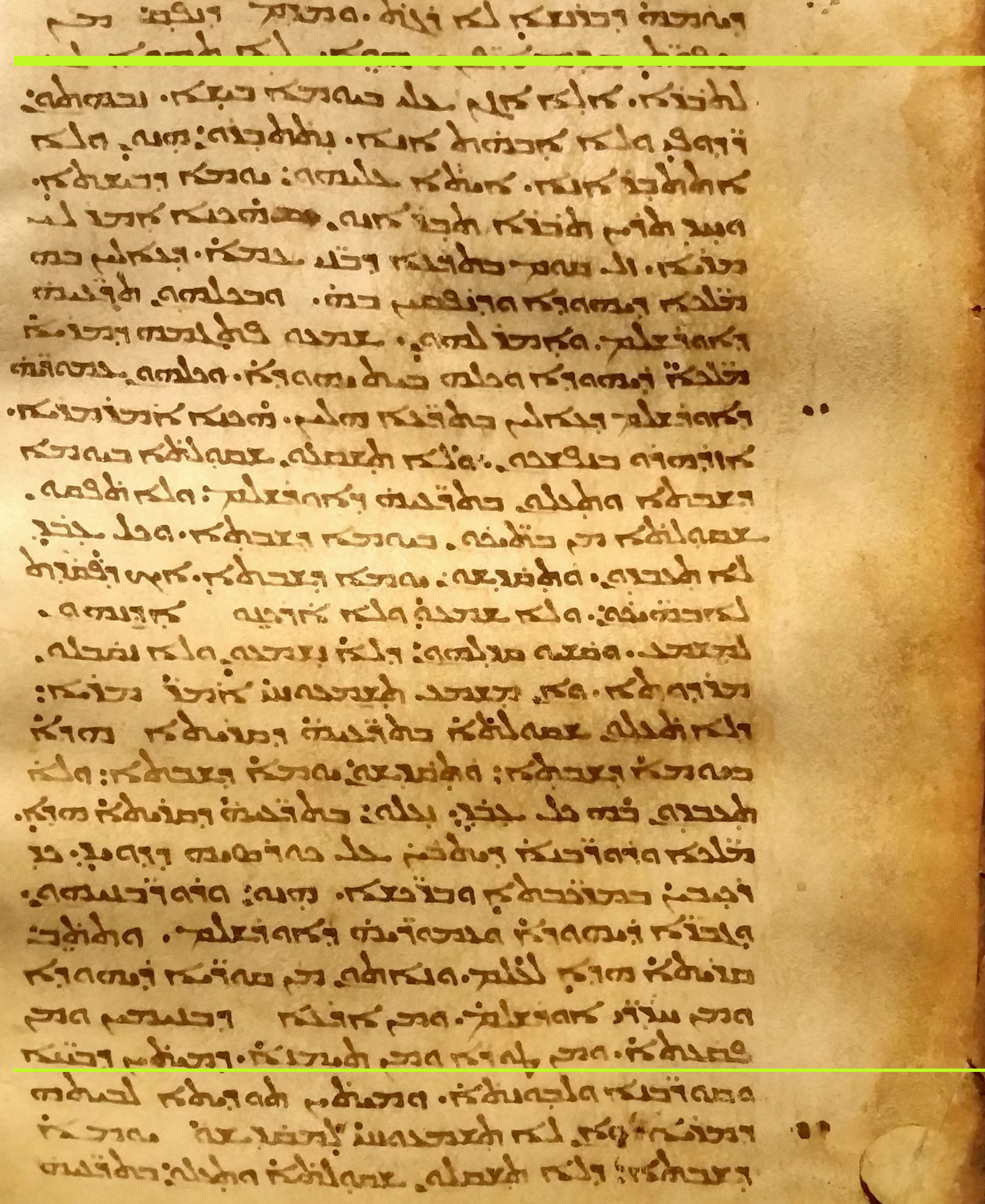
A painting depicting Jesus sitting at a table with his disciples. Jesus is in the center, wearing a white robe and a white head covering, with a bright light behind his head. He is looking towards the right. The disciples are seated around the table, some looking at Jesus, some looking at each other. The scene is set in a simple room with a white wall and a window in the background. The lighting is warm and focused on Jesus.

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The Bible: Ancient Words, Ever True

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JOHN RAY - NOVEMBER 2024



# The New Testament: Historically Significant

- The most significant book ever.
- Unique in Character
  - Time span, Geographical Production
  - Authorship, Literary Genres
  - Language, Teaching
- Unique in Impact
  - Circulation and Translation
  - Survival and Resiliency
  - Impact on Western Civilization

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What will be covered.

- 1. Early Manuscript Evidence for the New Testament**
- 2. Corroborating Writings of Early Church Fathers**
- 3. Non-Christian Historical Evidence**
- 4. Key Factors Behind the Impact of Christianity**
- 5. Appeal of Christian Beliefs and Practices**



# Early Manuscript Evidence for the New Testament

*The John Rylands Library Papyrus P52 A.D. 100-150*

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**High Number of Manuscripts:** There are over 5,800 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, with thousands more in Latin and other languages. This is more than any other ancient text. In comparison, works like Homer's *Iliad* or Caesar's *Gallic Wars* have only a fraction of this number, yet they're considered reliable historical documents. With so many copies of the New Testament, scholars can cross-reference them to identify variations and affirm the text's overall stability.

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**Early Manuscript Dates:** Some New Testament manuscripts date back to the 2nd century, within a few generations of the original writings. The shorter the time gap between the original and surviving copies, the more confidence scholars have that the documents accurately represent the original. For comparison, many ancient works we consider historical have gaps of several hundred years, while the New Testament's gap is often less than 100 years.

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**Textual Consistency:** Despite having many manuscripts, the variations between them are typically minor (e.g., spelling errors or word order changes), and they rarely impact the message. This consistency across thousands of copies supports the idea that *the core message and events were preserved accurately.*



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**Corroboration with Historical Context:** Many details within the Gospels, like specific political figures, cultural customs, and geographical descriptions, align with what we know from other historical sources, lending credibility to the texts.

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”The position I argue for in *Misquoting Jesus* does not actually stand at odds with Prof. Bruce Metzger’s position that the essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament.”

**Bart Ehrman**

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"To doubt that Jesus existed, and that he was crucified, is historically unsound and unscientific. The figure of Jesus is rooted firmly in history, even if we contest the theological interpretations around him."

**Gerd Ledemann (Jesus Seminar)**

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## **Conclusion**

The early manuscript evidence provides a highly reliable means of verifying that the New Testament we have today reflects the original writings. This solid transmission process, from the earliest writings to the thousands of preserved manuscripts, supports the New Testament's reliability as an accurate and trustworthy source for the Gospel message.



# Corroborating Writings of Early Church Fathers

- Widespread Quotation of the New Testament
- Establishment of Core Doctrines

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# Polycarp of Smyrna

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- Disciple of the Apostle John
  - 69AD TO 155AD



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# Polycarp quotes from the following:

Matthew (4 times)

Mark (once)

Luke (once)

Acts (twice)

Romans (once)

1st Corinthians (4 times)

2nd Corinthians (4 times)

Galatians (3 times)

1st Thessalonians (once)

2nd Thessalonians (once)

1st Timothy (3 times)

2nd Timothy (3 times)

Hebrews (twice)

1st Peter (9 times)

1st John (once)

3rd John (once)

Ephesians (4 times)

Philippians (3 times)

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Early church leaders, like Clement of Rome and Polycarp, quote New Testament writings extensively, providing early validation and consistent transmission. Other Christian Leaders from include Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian do the same.



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# Tertullian

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- Carthage
- 197 - 220 AD
- Wrote extensively on doctrine
- *Apology* and *Against Macron*



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"Come now, you who would indulge a better curiosity, if you would apply it to the business of your salvation, *run over the apostolic churches*, in which the very thrones of the apostles are still pre-eminent in their places, in which their *own authentic writings* are read, uttering the voice and representing the face of each of them severally. Achaia is very near you; (there is) Corinth. Since you are not far from Macedonia, you have Philippi; (and there is) Thessalonica. Since you can cross to Asia, you get Ephesus. Since, moreover, you are close upon Italy, you have Rome, from which there comes even into our own hands the very authority (of apostles) themselves."

**Tertullian : De Praescriptione Haereticorum,**

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# The Corroborating writings of the early church fathers validated the core doctrines.

- Direct Links to the Apostolic Teaching
- Consistency with New Testament Teachings
- Recognition of Canonical Authority
- Early Creeds and Statements of Faith
- Testimony on Worship and Sacraments
- Widespread Agreement Despite Geographic Distance

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The writings of the early church fathers ***validate the reliability of core Christian doctrines*** and demonstrate that these beliefs were established directly from apostolic teaching. By preserving early interpretations, affirming the New Testament's authority, **defending against heretical ideas**, and demonstrating consistent practices across regions, these writings collectively confirm that the central doctrines of the ***Christian faith were well-rooted and safeguarded from the start of the church's history.***

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# Non-Christian Historians



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# Non-Christian Historians

Tacitus

Suetonius

Pliny the Younger

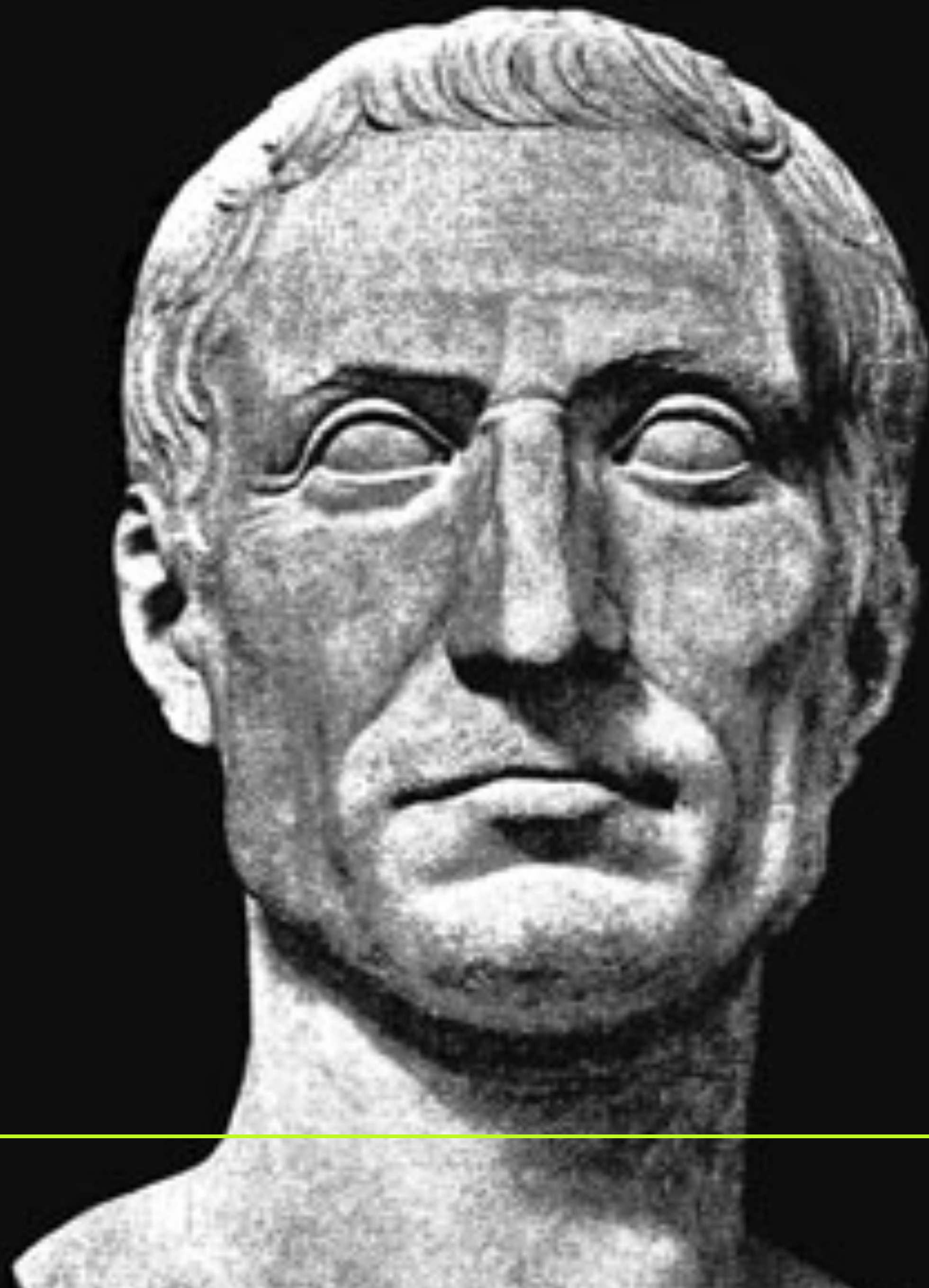
Josephus



# Publius Cornelius Tacitus

AD 56 – 120

- **Historical Existence of Jesus:** Tacitus refers to “Christus” (Christ), providing non-Christian acknowledgment of Jesus’ existence.
- **Crucifixion under Pilate:** He confirms that Jesus was executed under Pontius Pilate during Tiberius’s reign, supporting the Gospel accounts.
- **Growth of Christianity:** Tacitus notes the movement’s resilience and spread beyond Judea to Rome, illustrating the early and rapid expansion of Christianity despite persecution.



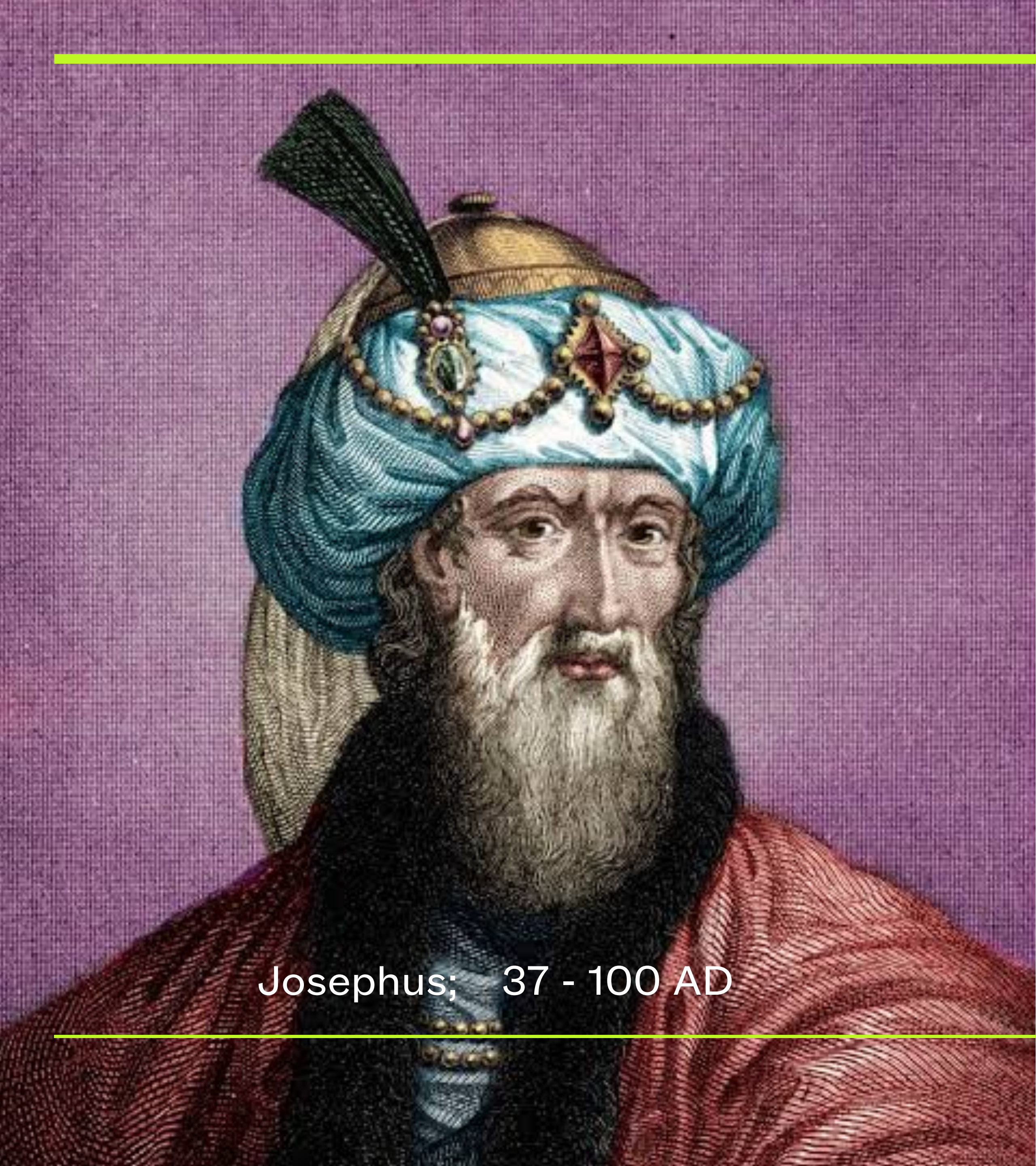
## Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus

69 to 122 AD

“Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome.”

- Confirms Early Christian Presence in Rome
- Supports the Historicity of Jesus
- Roman Response to Christian Movement





Josephus; 37 - 100 AD

# Flavius Josephus or Yosef ben Mattityahu

He refers to Jesus “wise man”, “doer of wonderful works”, condemned by Pontius Pilate, having many followers.

- Jesus as a Historical Figure
- Miracles and Teachings
- Crucifixion under Pilate
- Continued Influence
- James the brother of Jesus



# Pliny the Younger

Writing Around 112 AD

“They were in the habit of meeting on a fixed day before dawn and singing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and binding themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so.”

- Worship of Christ as Divine
- Ethical Commitment
- Persistence Despite Persecution

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## Conclusion on early non-Christian Roman historians

Roman historians provide a valuable, non-Christian perspective on early Christianity. They verify certain historical details about Jesus, confirm the early spread and resilience of the Christian movement, document beliefs and practices, and reveal the challenges Christians faced in the Roman world. *These accounts serve as crucial historical evidence that supports the reliability of the New Testament narratives and offers insight into the early church's distinctive identity and rapid expansion across the empire.*

# Key Factors Behind the Rapid Spread of Christianity



- Eyewitness Testimonies of the Resurrection
- A Compelling Message of Hope and Salvation\*
- Apostle Paul's Missionary Journeys
- Roman Infrastructure and the Pax Romana
- Widespread Use of Greek as a Common Language



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The spread of Christianity was driven by a combination of its compelling message, the care within Christian communities, effective use of existing infrastructure, cultural adaptability, and the unwavering commitment of early believers. Together, these factors created an environment where Christianity could flourish despite challenges, persecution, and the diversity of the Roman Empire.

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# Appeal of Christian Beliefs and Practices



- Inclusive and Transformational Message
- Ethics and Community Life
- Persecution and Martyrdom

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“Of what did the very earliest preaching look like before even a single New Testament book was ever written?”

- The Creeds. They were circulating among the christian communities from the very beginning.
- They were oral summaries of the Gospel Message that could be easily memorized. (Oral transmission)
- They are incorporated with the first written accounts.
  - 1 Cor. 15, Gal. 1 & 2. Romans 1, Romans 9
- If you consider other world religious teachers, Jesus made many significant claims that are more profound than that of any other founder of any major world religions.



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- Historical reliability of the New Testament is supported by early manuscripts, corroborative accounts by early church fathers, and non-Christian historical sources. Jesus is not the product of myth or legend.
  - The New Testament message's rapid spread can be attributed to the unique appeal of Christian teachings, the boldness of its early followers, and the conditions within the Roman Empire.
  - The historical evidence confirms both the integrity of the New Testament and the powerful impact of its message.
  - Consider what this historical evidence suggests about the transformative nature of the New Testament message. My challenge to those who are skeptical - You need to investigate these claims, keep an open mind.