

New Testament History

Sources

F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (1972)

C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, rev. ed. (1989)

Paul Maier, *The Genuine Jesus: Fresh Evidence from History and Archaeology* (2021)

J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (1921)

Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1

I. Background

A. Setting

1. Jewish: religious “spirit”
 - a. Custodians of Scripture, covenants, worship (Rom. 9:4-5)
 - b. Synagogues: teaching centers
 - c. Jewish diaspora: ready-made fields for the gospel
2. Greek: intellectual “soul” or “mind”
 - a. Universality of Greek language
 - b. Septuagint (LXX): Translation of the early church
 - c. Widespread Greek philosophy—for good or ill
 - 1) Tertullian: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”
 - 2) Justin: Philosophy a means to knowing God
3. Roman: physical “body”
 - a. Source of government, transportation infrastructure, etc.
 - b. Examples of Roman law in NT
 - 1) Philippi: Citizens beaten & jailed w/o a hearing (Acts 16:37-39)
 - 2) Jerusalem: No scourging w/o a hearing (Acts 22:25-28)
 - 3) Caesarea: Appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11)

B. Gospels: Life of Christ

1. “All that Jesus began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1)
2. Foundation of church history
 - a. Person and Work of Christ
 - 1) *Historical* nature of Christianity
 - 2) Christ of faith = Jesus of history
 - b. Scripture: Infallible record and authoritative guide
3. A single faith “delivered” by Christ and His apostles (Jude 3)
 - a. Not evolutionary
 - b. Not “competing Christianities”
4. Chronology of the Life of Christ—*Not on Test*
 - a. Jesus’ Birth: 4-6 BC
 - 1) Dionysius Exiguus (“Dennis the Little” or “the Humble”)
 - a) Calculated AD 1 c. 525 (at request of pope to help calculate Easter)
 - b) Popularized by the Venerable Bede *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*
 - 2) Problem: Josephus puts Herod’s death at 4 BC [Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.8.1 (death of Herod), 17.6.4 (lunar eclipse), 17.9.3 (Passover shortly thereafter)]
 - 3) Additional consideration: Matt. 2:16 (2 years old and under)
 - b. Other Chronological Evidence

- 1) John 3:1 → John the Baptist began ministry in 15th year of Tiberius (either AD 26, based on coregency, or AD 28)
 - 2) Luke 3:23 → Christ was “about thirty” at beginning of His ministry
 - 3) John 2:20 → Herod’s temple was 46 years in building (likely 18th year of his reign c. 20 BC), AD 26
- c. Jesus’ ministry: c. AD 27-30

II. Non-biblical Sources on NT Era

A. Roman writers

1. Historians (e.g., Tacitus on Nero’s persecution)
2. Letters of Pliny & Trajan on how to treat Christians

B. Jewish sources

1. Apocrypha
2. Dead Sea Scrolls
3. Josephus

C. Archaeology

1. Limitations
 - a. Necessity of interpreting artifacts
 - b. Incomplete, fragmentary evidence
 - c. “Fractions” of Archaeology (Edwin Yamauchi)
 - 1) Fraction that has survived
 - 2) Fraction that has been surveyed
 - 3) Fraction that has been excavated
 - 4) Fraction that has been examined
 - 5) Fraction that has been published
2. Benefits of archaeology to NT study (Unger)
 - a. Expedites scientific study of the NT (e.g., textual criticism)
 - b. Balances critical study of the NT (e.g., date of the Gospel of John)
 - c. Illustrates & explains the NT (e.g., proconsulship of Gallio)
 - d. Supplements the NT (e.g., Dead Sea Scrolls)
 - e. Authenticates the NT (e.g., Luke’s accuracy in Acts)
3. Significant Finds (from Keith Scoville, *Stone-Campbell Journal*, Spring 2001)
 - a. Dead Sea Scrolls (1947)
 - b. Pontius Pilate inscription at Caesarea (1961)
 - c. Galilee Boat (1986) dating from 120 B.C. – A.D. 40
 - d. Ossuary of Caiaphas (1990)

III. Expansion of the Church (AD 30-65)

A. Pattern (Acts 1:8)

1. Jerusalem
2. Judea and Samaria
3. Uttermost parts of the earth

B. In Palestine (AD 30-40)

1. Dominant figure: Peter
2. Pentecost
 - a. Remarkable sign of God’s blessing
 - b. First great ingathering of the church
 - c. An initial reach beyond Judea (Acts 2:6-11)

3. Conversion of Cornelius → Outreach to the Gentiles
4. Early persecution (Jewish, Herod Agrippa)
- C. Across the Mediterranean (AD 40-65)
 1. Dominant figure: Paul
 2. Paul's missionary journeys
 - a. Covering Asia Minor & into Europe
 - b. Sign of shift from Jewish to Gentile majority
 3. Council of Jerusalem
 - a. Challenge: Judaizers
 - b. Issue: Justification
 - c. Result: Gentiles need not follow the law
 - d. Christianity not ethnic → Christ the Savior of the world
 - e. Pattern of later church councils
 4. Paul's "fourth missionary journey" after Acts
- IV. Cataclysm (AD 60s)
 - A. James, the brother of Christ → killed by Jewish high priest
 - B. Nero's Persecution
 1. Divert blame for great fire of Rome
 2. Perhaps deaths of Paul & Peter
 - C. Jewish War
 1. Jewish uprising against Roman misrule
 2. Destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70)
 3. Capture of Masada (AD 73)
 4. Flight of Christians before the holocaust
 5. Increased distinction between Jews & Christians
- V. "Dark Ages" (AD 70-100)
 - A. "Dark" = less known
 1. Biblical sources: Mostly John, perhaps Jude
 2. Tradition as a source
 - a. Meaning: Stories & accounts not firsthand
 - b. Is tradition a valid source?
 - 1) How close chronologically?
 - 2) How close geographically?
 - 3) How inherently likely/unlikely?
 - 4) Are there corroborating details? (cf. Gonzalez, 38, on Thomas in India)
 - c. Example: Papias of Hierapolis
 - 1) Appears to distinguish between the Apostle John and John the elder
 - 2) Says Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew
 - 3) Says Mark based his Gospel on the preaching of Peter
 - 4) An early testimony to premillennialism
 - 5) Used as alleged witness to "Q": "Matthew compiled the sayings"
 - 6) Account of death of Judas
 - B. Apostle John
 1. Situation
 - a. Perhaps located in Ephesus
 - b. Exiled for a time on Patmos

2. Challenge: Growing Gnosticism (cf. 1 John 4:3)
3. Picture of Seven Churches (Rev. 2-3)
 - a. False teachings: Nicolaitanes & Jezebel
 - b. Persecution (Smyrna)
 - c. Apathy (Sardis, Laodicea)
 - d. Faithfulness (Ephesus, Philadelphia)
 - e. *Not* a pattern of church history