

Evidence for the Historical Jesus

Early Martyrs, Confessors and Church
Leaders

Definition

- Martyr
 - Killed for the faith
- Confessor
 - Confessed (perhaps in the face of death), but was not killed

Things were different then...

- Atheist – one who did not believe in the gods of the Roman empire
 - Emperor being one of those gods
- Rome typically tolerated other religions
 - As long as they didn't cause problems
 - Christians caused problems
 - Attendance at pagan temples decreased
 - Stopped buying and offering sacrifices
 - Vendors complained

Rome did something about that

- Christians were rounded up, ordered to deny Christ and Christianity
 - If not, they were put to death
 - Thousands burned alive or thrown to starved lions while spectators watched them being torn apart

Martyrdom Began with the Apostles

- All, except one (John), was martyred
- They chose death at the hand of persecutors rather than deny Christ. According to Eusebius:
 - Peter – crucifixion upside down
 - Paul – beheaded
 - James (brother of Jesus) – stoned and clubbed
 - James (brother of John) – killed by the sword
 - etc.

Clement of Rome

- Died A.D. 102, may have been the Clement mentioned by Paul:

*“Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with **Clement** and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”*

Philippians 4:3 (NIV)

Clement of Rome

- Origen says he was a disciple of the Apostles
- Eusebius says he was the Bishop of Rome from A.D. 92 to A.D. 101.
- Clement's letter to the Corinthians (A.D. 95) only extant document that remains from him

Clement of Rome

- This letter reports of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul
- Includes quotes from Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, 1 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Hebrews and Titus indicating that each of these works predates A.D. 95.
- Verified many historical details of Jesus' life

Reported by Clement of Rome

- Jesus was a Jew (descendant of Jacob)
- Jesus died (“the blood of Christ shed for our salvation”) and references scripture:
Most of all remembering the words of the Lord Jesus which He spake teaching forbearance and long-suffering: for thus He spake; “Have mercy, that ye may receive mercy: forgive, that it may be forgiven you. As ye do, so shall it be one to you. As ye give, so shall it be given unto you. As ye judge, so shall ye be judged. As ye show kindness, so shall kindness be showed unto you. With what measure yet mete, it shall be measured withal to you.”
- Speaks of the resurrection of Jesus

Ignatius

- Died A.D. 117 as a martyr
- Had been the bishop of the church at Antioch
- Quotes from Matthew, John, Acts, many of Paul's letters, James and 1 Peter.
 - “Conceived by Mary”
 - Crucifixion and resurrection occurred while Pontius Pilate was governor and Herod was tetrarch
 - Returned bodily following resurrection (he ate and drank with the disciples)

Papias

- b. A.D. 60-70, d. A.D. 130-140
- Wrote 5 book entitled “Expositions of Oracles of the Lord”
 - Extant during Eusebius’ time, now lost. Eusebius quotes Papias: *“On any occasion when a person came (in my way) who had been a follower of the Elders, I would inquire about the discourse of the elders – what was said by Andrew, or by Peter, or by Philip or by Thomas or James or by John or Matthew or any other of the Lord’s disciples, and what Arstion and the Elder John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I did not think that I could get so much profit from the contends of books as from the utterances of a living and abiding voice.”*

Papias

- Eusebius preserved what Papias said about the formation of the Gospels of Mark and Matthew

“And the Elder said this also: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately everything that he remembered, without however recording in order what was either said or done by Christ.”

Papias

- *“For neither did he hear the Lord, nor did he follow Him; but afterwards, as I said, (attended) Peter, who adapted his instructions to the needs (of his hearers) but had no design of giving a connected account of the Lord’s oracles. So then Mark made no mistake, while he thus wrote down some things as he remembered them; for he made it his one care not to omit anything that he heard, or to set down any false statement therein.”*
- *“So then Matthew composed the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as he could.”*

Papias

- Papias also included the complete story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11
 - Since this story does not appear in most of the oldest manuscripts of John this provides important early documentation of this historical detail in Jesus' life.

Polycarp

- A.D. 69 – 155.
- Disciple of the Apostle John
- Martyred in the stadium
 - When ordered to recant being a Christian, Polycarp replied:
“Fourscore and six years have I been His servant, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”
 - He was then thrust through with a sword and burned at the stake.

The Didache

- Written A.D. 95
- A church manual
 - Quotes from the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer
 - Documented that the Gospel accounts were accurate descriptions of history

Epistle of Barnabas

- Between A.D. 70 and 135
- Within the letter the name Barnabas is never given. Most scholars deny that the New Testament Barnabas was the author
 - This is not the same forged “Gospel of Barnabas”
- Whoever wrote it, the letter states that Jesus 1) was resurrected, 2) that he performed signs and miracles and that 3) he was the Son of God and 4) this dates to late 1st century or early 2nd century... early enough that eyewitness could dispute these statements.

Quadratus

- d. A.D. 138
- Wrote a letter dated A.D. 125 to Emperor Hadrian
“The deeds of our Savior were always before you, for they were true miracles; those that were healed, those that were raised from the dead, who were seen, not only when healed and when raised, but were always present. They remained living a long time, not only whilst our Lord was on earth, but likewise when he had left the earth. So that some of them have also lived to our own times.”

Aristides

- A.D. 100-200?
- Eusebius says that Aristides was a contemporary of Quadratus and that he addresses the defense of the Christian faith to Emperor Hadrian.
- Describes Christ as
“... the son of the most high God, revealed by the Holy Spirit, descended from heaven, born of a Hebrew Virgin.”

Justin Martyr

- A.D. 100-166
- Born Flavius Neapolis
- Grew up well educated, but ignorant of both Jewish Law and of Christianity
- He called himself a Samaritan
- Later in life he met a Christian and is reported that he investigated the Christian faith following this encounter and became a Christian

Justin Martyr

- Writings appealed to the Old Testament as prophetic of the events which occurred in Jesus' life
- Justin appealed to the hearer and non-Christian sources to verify what he reported
“Now there is a village in the land of the Jews, thirty-five stadia from Jerusalem, in which Jesus Christ was born, as you can ascertain also from the registers of the taxing made under Cyrenius, your first procurator in Judea.”

Justin Martyr

- *“And the expression, ‘They pierced my hands and my feet’ was used in reference to the nails of the cross which were fixed in His hands and feet. And after he was crucified they cast lots upon his vesture, and they that crucified Him parted it among them. And that these things did happen you can ascertain from the Acts of Pontius Pilate.”*

Justin Martyr

- In A.D. 166 along with 6 others, was scourged and beheaded at the instigation of Cynic philosopher, Crescens, whom Justin had confronted with the truth of the Gospel.

Hegesippus

- A.D. 100-200?
- Eusebius reports that he was a Jewish Christian and that he produced a 5 volume “Memoirs”
 - These are known to have survived until the 16th century, but are now lost

Hegesippus

- Eusebius quotes Hegesippus as saying
“The Corinthian church continued in the true doctrine until Primus became bishop. I mixed with them on my voyage to Rome and spent several days with the Corinthians, during which we were refreshed with the true doctrine. On arrival at Rome I pieced together the succession down to Anicetus, whose deacon was Eleutherus, Anicetus being succeeded by Soter and he by Eleutherus. In every line of bishops and in every city things accord with the preaching of the Law, the Prophets and the Lord.”

Irenaeus

- A.D. 120 to 190?
- Pupil of Polycarp (who was a disciple of John)
- His works rely heavily on the Old Testament, all the Gospels, and nearly all the Epistles.
- Regarding the origin of the Gospels...

Irenaeus

- *“Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.”*

Tertullian

- A.D. 160/79 – 215/20
- African theologian and lawyer
- Quotes the New Testament 7000 times of which 3,800 are from the Gospels.
- Also reports that the emperor Tiberius, at one time, seems to have been impressed with what he had discovered about the Christ of the Christians

Tertullian

- *“Tiberius accordingly, in whose days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligences from Palestine of events which had clearly shown the truth of Christ’s divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favour of Christ. The senate, because it had not given the approval itself, rejected his proposal. Caesar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all accusers of the Christians.”*

Origen

- A.D. 185-254
- Born in Egypt
- A.D. 202 his Christian father was martyred under the persecution of Septimus Severus.
- Quotes the New Testament over 18,000 times
- Said to have written 6000 works (books, homilies, letters, tracts)
- Put in chains and tortured and confined to the dungeon. Died shortly thereafter.

Eusebius

- d. 341/2
- His works have already been described
- Invaluable documentation when he worked to gather the early sources together into the earliest extant “History of the Christian Church”

Summary

- Even though a vast network of multiplication of reports sprang up in the early church, there was no controversy over what actually took place. There was controversy over how to interpret the facts, but not the facts themselves.
- Early writer constantly appealed to the availability of evidence from government records, eyewitness accounts and the moral integrity of their lives. They had nothing to gain by spreading lies. They gave up their possessions, their standing, even their lives standing up for the truth.
- Doubtful that so many people would have blindly submitted, even to death, without checking the facts