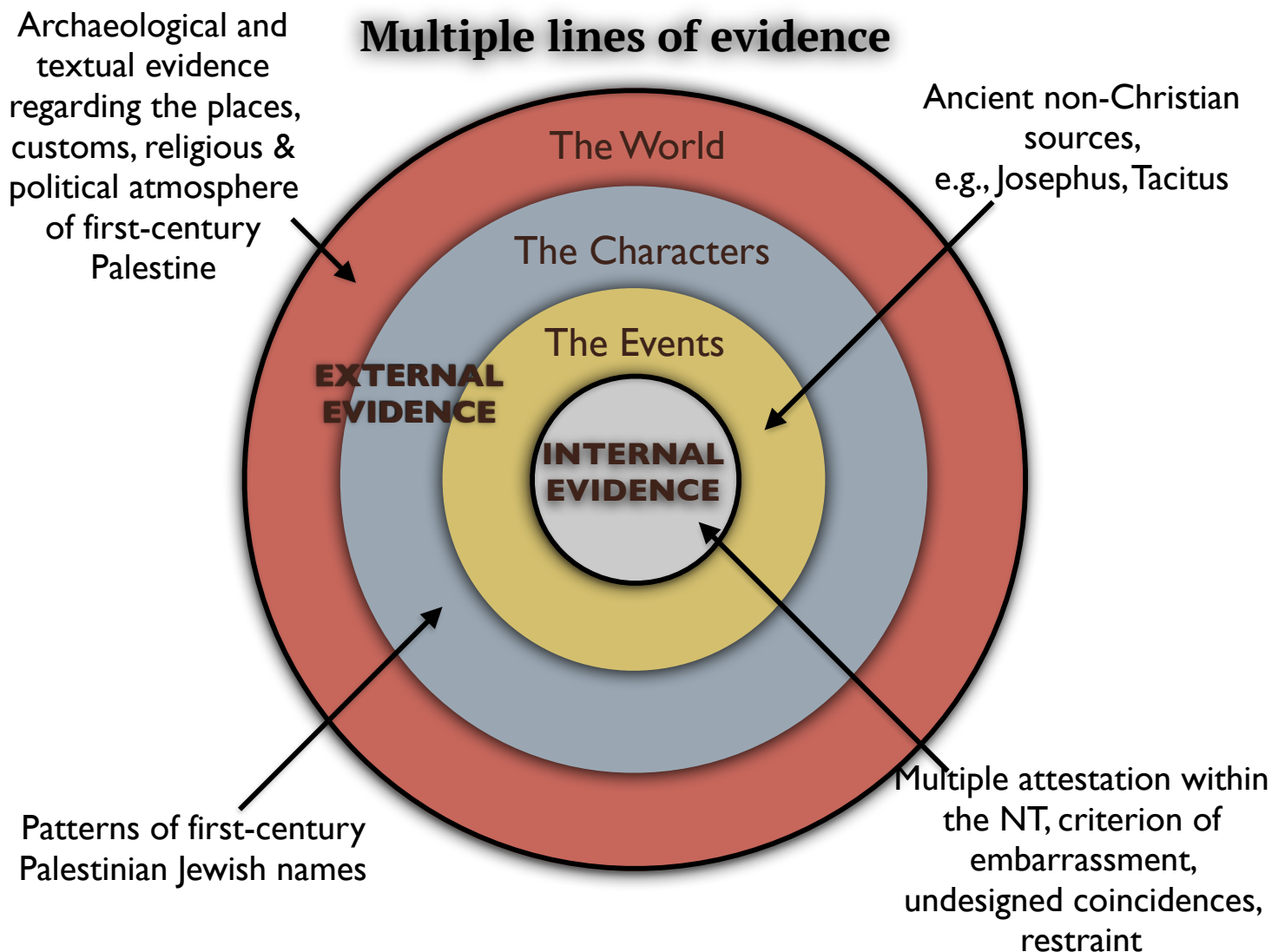


# The Historical Reliability of the New Testament

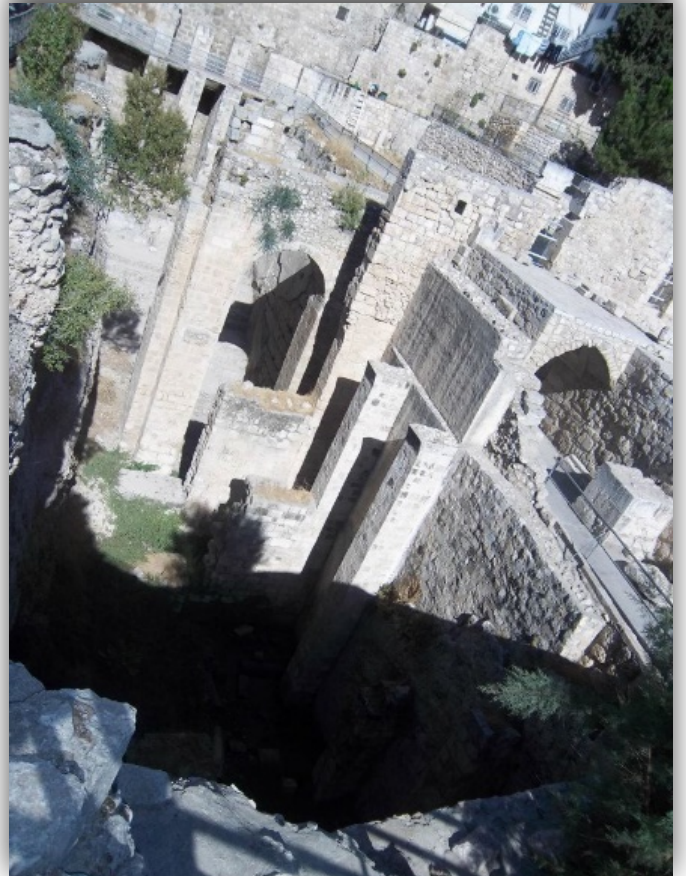
Dr Max Baker-Hytch & Dr Calum Miller



## The world depicted by the NT is real

### The Pool of Bethesda

- Archaeology and literary records corroborate the name, location, porticoes and turbulence in the water
- The pool was excavated in 1956.



## The world depicted by the NT is real

### Capernaum

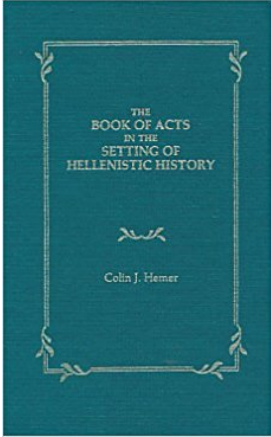
- A border town between territories, with customhouse and maybe small Roman garrison
- Roman remains found
- Evidence of fish trade, harbour, synagogue (close together), St Peter's house





## The world depicted by the NT is real

### Luke's attention to detail



Colin Hemer identifies over 200 specific facts from the last 16 chapters of the book of Acts that have been confirmed by archaeological and historical research: details of local customs, ports, local trades, political figures, etc.

E.g., Acts correctly identifies the proper titles for numerous local/regional officials. Titles of local officials throughout the Roman Empire varied hugely and often changed from decade to decade.

- Governor of Cyprus is called the ἀνθύπατος (proconsul) (Acts 13:7)
- the magistrates of Philippi were στρατηγοί (governors) (Acts 16:20, 22)
- those of Thessalonica are simply πολιτάρχαι (rulers) (Acts 17:6, 8)
- the chief executive magistrate in Ephesus is a γραμματεὺς (town clerk) (Acts 19:35)
- the ruler of Malta is only a πρῶτος (chief man) (Acts 28:7)



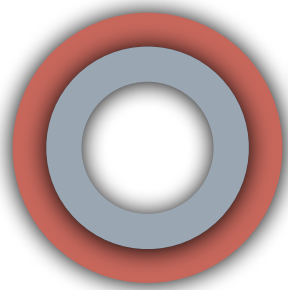
## The world depicted by the NT is real

### Religious and political context

“And **Sadducees** came to him, who **say that there is no resurrection**. And they asked him a question, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.”

Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, **have you not read in the book of Moses**, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.” Mark 12:18-27





## The characters are real

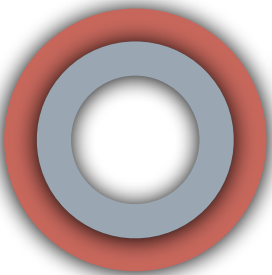
### The main characters



Flavius Josephus  
(AD 37-100)

In his work *The Antiquities of the Jewish People* (ca. AD 93), the first-century Jewish historian Josephus makes references to various characters who appear in the New Testament, including:

- Jesus
- John the Baptist
- The Herod family
- Caiaphas the high priest
- Pontius Pilate
- James the brother of Jesus

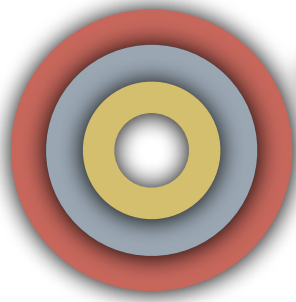


## The characters are real

### The minor characters

The patterns of Jewish names in the Gospels and Acts closely match the general naming patterns in the population of ancient Palestine as revealed by archaeology: even the incidental characters are very probably real.

Rank	Name as in English New Testament	Proportion of individuals in Ilan's onomastic database	Proportion of named individuals in the Gospels and Acts
All male names		100%	100%
1	Simon/Simeon	9.3%	10%
2	Joseph/Joses	8.3%	7.5%
Top 2 male names		17.6%	17.5%
3	Lazarus	6.3%	1.2%
4	Judas	6.2%	6.2%
5	John	4.6%	6.2%
Top 5 male names		34.7%	31.3%
6	Jesus	3.7%	3.6%
7	Ananias	3.1%	2.5%
8	Jonathan	2.7%	1.2%
9	Matthew/Matthias	2.4%	2.5%
10	Manaen	1.6%	1.2%



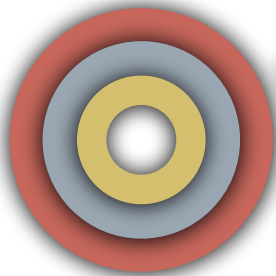
## The general outline of events is real

Ancient non-Christian sources



**Josephus (~93 AD):** “Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man [if it be lawful to call him a man]; for he was a doer of surprising works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. [He was the Christ]. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for they reported that he appeared alive to them... And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.” (*Antiquities of the Jewish People*, 18.63-64)

“The high priest Ananus...convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ...” (*Antiquities*, 20.200)

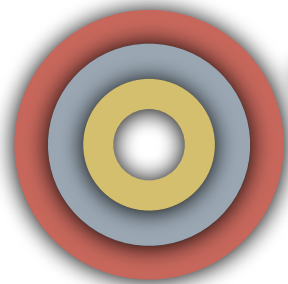


## The general outline of events is real

Ancient non-Christian sources



**Tacitus (~116 AD):** “Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.” (*Annals of Imperial Rome*, 15.44)

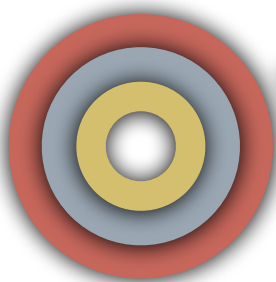


## The general outline of events is real

Ancient non-Christian sources



**Pliny the Younger (~112 AD):** “[The Christians] were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.” (*Letter to the Emperor Trajan*)



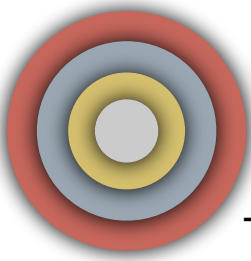
## The general outline of events is real

Ancient non-Christian sources

**Taken together, the earliest non-Christian ancient sources attest that:**

- Jesus was known as a moral teacher and a wise man
- His followers believed him to be the Jewish Messiah
- He had a reputation as a miracle worker
- He was condemned to death by crucifixion under the authority of Pontius Pilate at the suggestion of the Jewish chief priests during the Passover
- The movement he founded stopped temporarily after his death
- It very quickly resumed
- His followers claimed he appeared to them alive
- He had a brother called James, who was executed by the Jerusalem leadership
- The Christian movement grew rapidly in Judea and soon spread as far as Rome
- Christians were subjected to violent persecution within the first few decades
- They would meet on a fixed day to worship Jesus together



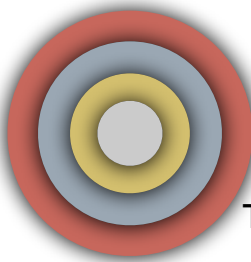
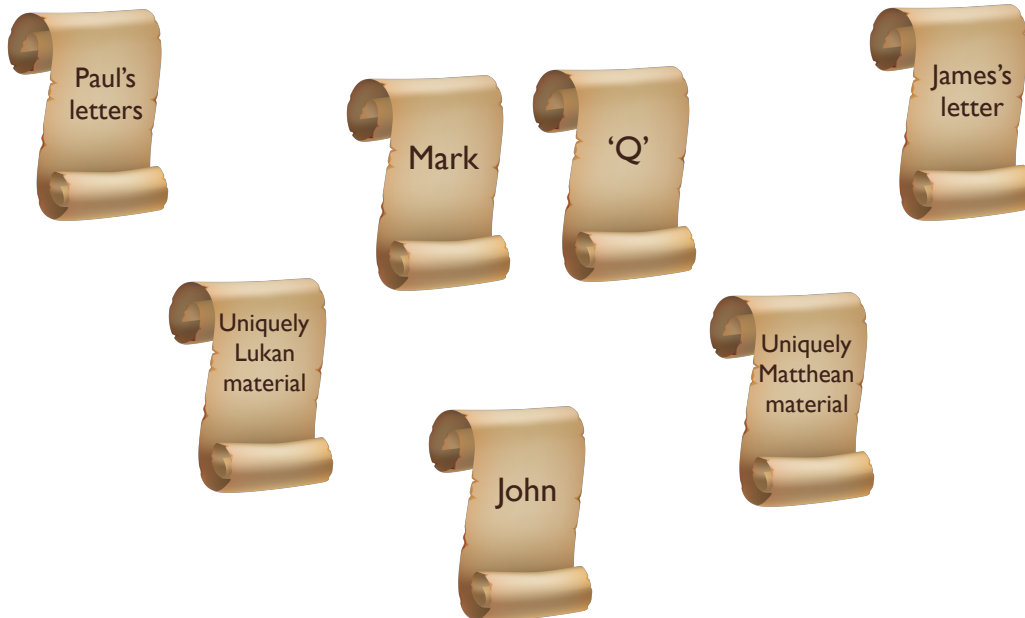


## The internal evidence

### Recurring motifs across the New Testament

The NT is not a single source but a *collection* of at least seven independent sources.

Most of the key events and themes of Jesus' life and the early church are attested independently by several sources.



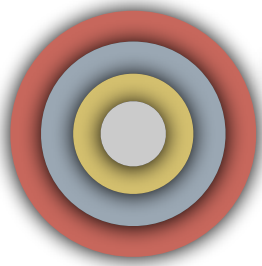
## The internal evidence

### Paul corroborates various facts about Jesus' life

This is important because Paul's letters are the earliest Christian writings (written just 20 or so years after Jesus' crucifixion), and Paul undoubtedly knew several of the key eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry (e.g. Peter, James the brother of Jesus)

#### **The seven letters of Paul which all scholars accept as genuine attest the following key facts about Jesus (and more besides):**

- Jesus was born of a Jewish woman and hence was Jewish himself (Galatians 4.4); he was a direct descendent of King David (Romans 1.3)
- He had several brothers (1 Corinthians 9.5), including one named James (Galatians 1.19)
- He appointed a group of twelve disciples (1 Corinthians 15.5), and Peter had a special role (Galatians 2.9)
- His ministry focussed on Israel rather than the Gentiles (Romans 15.8)
- He summarised his ethical teaching as compassion (Galatians 6.2)
- He declared that he would return again in glory (1 Thessalonians 4.15), and that his return would be at an unexpected hour, like a thief coming in the night (1 Thessalonians 5.2)
- His followers believed him to be the Jewish Messiah (Romans 9.3-5)
- He had a special meal with his disciples and spoke of the bread and wine as his body and blood, and he was betrayed on that same night (1 Corinthians 11.23-25)
- He was executed by Roman crucifixion (Philippians 2.8); the Jewish authorities were involved in bringing about his death (1 Thessalonians 2.15)
- He was buried rather than left to the elements (1 Corinthians 15.4)
- He was resurrected from the dead and appeared to many of his followers (1 Corinthians 15.4-8)



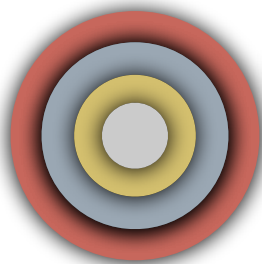
## The internal evidence

### The Test of Embarrassment



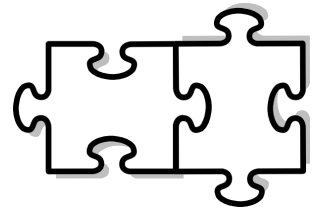
Several key events and themes of the Gospels would have been embarrassing for the early Christians, and hence are unlikely to have been invented...

- The frequent idiocy of the male disciples
- The fleeing of the male disciples at the arrest of Jesus
- Peter's denial of Jesus
- The crucifixion itself
- The honourable burial of Jesus by a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the council which had condemned Jesus to death
- Women as the discoverers of the empty tomb—"Let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex" (Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.815). "But who saw this? A hysterical female, as you say?" (*apud* Origen, *C. Celsus* 2.55)



## The internal evidence

### Undesigned Coincidences



#### Why ask Philip?



**John 6.2-5:** "Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"

**John 1.43-44:** "The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida."

**Luke 9.10-11** "On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida.... The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place."