



Part Three New Testament 1

By

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We started our special series, *Convince Me There's A God*, almost nine years ago. The purpose was simply to answer the question atheists have asked me for almost 50 years – why did I leave atheism for Christianity since (in their opinion) there is no evidence for it? I thought it might be helpful to present the evidence that convinced me of God's existence and the truth claims of Christianity, so the *Convince Me There's A God* series was born.

So far we've looked at some of the scientific, philosophical, historical and textual evidence that was available for me to investigate in 1971. Let's continue!

We most recently looked at the **Intertestamental Period** that ran from the end of the 5th century BC to the early part of the 1st century AD. That time is also known as the “Silent Period” because God did not speak to His people through prophets as He had done for centuries before.

The final Old Testament prophet was a man named Malachi. His name means “messenger” and that was the purpose of his letter. God gave a clear message to Malachi that included a prophecy about another “messenger” who would “prepare the way before” God. Who would that messenger be and when would he come?

“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the Lord of hosts.” Malachi 3:1

We see several important things in this one verse of the Old Testament written toward the end of the 5th century BC:

1. God would “send” His messenger to Israel.
2. That messenger who would “prepare the way” before God the Lord.
3. The Lord, whom the people Israel sought after, would suddenly come to His temple.
4. God further identified the “Lord” who would come to His temple as “the Messenger of the covenant” in which the people delighted.
5. God emphasized the fact of the coming of the Lord, the Messenger, by saying – “Behold, He is coming,’ Says the Lord of hosts.”

Malachi, who was God’s messenger to the people of Israel at the end of the 5th century BC, prophesied that God would send two future messengers. One would “prepare the way” before God. The other is identified as “Lord” and “Messenger of the covenant.”

Malachi doesn't begin or end with chapter 3 verse 1. There is more detail about the Messenger who would come:

“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire And like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness.” Malachi 3:2

God spoke powerfully, clearly and fiercely through Malachi. In the chapters leading up to chapter 3 verse 1, God chastised the Israelites for their polluted offerings (chapter 1) and corrupt spiritual leaders (chapter 2). God offered Israel a time of future hope by promising a messenger and the Messenger, but it would not be without difficulties for some –

“For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the Lord of hosts, ‘That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the

wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this,' Says the Lord of hosts."

Malachi 4:1-3

Notice also that God promised to those who feared His name "The Sun of Righteousness" who would arise "with healing in His wings." This prophecy was in the context of God judging the wicked while also protecting those who feared His name. The wicked would be burned up, while the righteous would be healed. They would grow in size and trample the wicked. The wicked would be "ashes" under the soles of the feet of those who feared God "On the day that I do this."

God also promised to send "Elijah" to Israel. That's interesting since Elijah lived during the 9th century BC and Malachi wrote at the end of the 5th century BC.

[We should also note that the Bible reports Elijah did not die – he was taken to Heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2).]

“Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” Malachi 4:4-6

Remember these words from Malachi because they will be important to our study in the near future.

The “Messenger” After Malachi

Where do we find these “messengers” of God? Where is the “Lord” who would “suddenly” come to His temple? Did they come to Israel during the Intertestamental Period? At a later time? Is the coming of the “messengers” still future?

The Jewish writings of the Intertestamental Period do not demonstrate that Malachi’s prophecy was fulfilled during the time of those writers. In fact, Jews who lived during the rule of ancient Persia, Greece and Rome continued to look for the deliverance promised to them in the prophetic writings (*Nevi'im*).

It is in the writings of the New Testament of the Bible that claims are made that God sent both of His messengers to Israel during the early part of the 1st century AD.

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’ ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’ John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, 'There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'" Mark 1:1-8

You might notice that Mark's quote is from Isaiah 40:3 –

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God."

Malachi was the last of God's prophets to prophesy to Israel about God sending a special "messenger," but he was not the first. Isaiah prophesied centuries before Malachi.

The King James and New King James versions of Mark 1:2-3 do not mention the name of Isaiah because his name is not included in the 1550 Stephanus Greek New Testament (Textus Receptus). Instead, the word προφήταις (prophets) was used without mentioning Isaiah.

Ὡς γέγραπται ἐν τοῖς προφήταις, Ἰδοῦ, ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου

Many other versions of Mark 1:2-3 do include Isaiah's name because they use other Greek texts (e.g. 1904 Nestle, 1881 Westcott and Hort). They used the words Ἡσαΐα τῷ προφήτῃ (Isaiah the prophet).

Καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Ἡσαΐα τῷ προφήτῃ Ἰδοῦ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου·

There is no question about which prophet is referred to in Mark 1:2 because the quote comes directly from Isaiah 40:3.

Mark is not the only Gospel to mention this –

“For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’” Matthew 3:3

“... as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’” Luke 3:4

“He said: ‘I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.’” John 1:23

[The Textus Receptus does include Isaiah's name in similar references in Matthew, Luke and John. It's only excluded in Mark's Gospel.]

Comparing Old and New

Here is the full context of Isaiah 40:3:

“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God. ‘Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the Lord’s hand Double for all her sins.’ The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Isaiah 40:1-5

Here is the larger context of the Gospel accounts –

“... the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths

straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” Luke 3:2-6

“Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’ Then they said to him, ‘Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?’ He said: ‘I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” John 1:19-23

Keep in mind that the nation of Israel had not heard a “new Word” (prophecy) from God for more than 400 years. Jews knew the prophecies about God sending a “messenger” and a “voice” that would cry out in the wilderness, but generations had come and gone with no fulfillment of those prophecies. In light of that it’s interesting to see how the Jews of the early 1st century AD responded to the preaching of John the son of Zacharias.

We just read in John's Gospel account that "the Jews" (Jewish leaders in Jerusalem) sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John about his identity. Was he the Christ (Messiah)? Was he Elijah? Was he the Prophet (possibly the promised prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15)? John's answer was that he was not. He was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" John claimed to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

Evidence

That's what I was most interested in finding. It's what journalists do. We ask questions of many witnesses and search through documents and other information that will help us find answers to our questions about a story.

The biggest story of my career happened 50 years ago when I investigated evidence for the existence of God. I was not only a journalist – I was also an atheist. Atheists don't believe in the existence of God, so why bother investigating claims that must be false?

Good question!

I wrote this at the beginning of the *Convince Me* series almost nine years ago –

"I was a journalist and radio talk show host in the late 60s and early 70s, so I was used to arguing with people. That's what talk show hosts did then—and still do. I enjoyed talking with people who believed in God because they were passionate about their belief. I was passionate in my belief as well, so it made for heated arguments over the airwaves.

One day I interviewed a science professor on my program who presented some arguments that challenged my thinking about the existence of God. I asked a lot of questions and took many mental notes. I was going to check on what he had to say. I spent several months investigating the 'God' issue and finally came to a new conclusion that changed the direction of my life."

The New Testament

My investigation eventually came to the New Testament. I had found much of the scientific evidence and philosophical arguments for the existence of God important and insightful. I was also impressed with the evidence for the reliability of the Old Testament from textual, historical, and archaeological evidence. So, that left the New Testament.

My interest in the New Testament was the same as the Old Testament. Were the texts reliable? Were the statements concerning historical events, people and places supported by historical evidence outside of the texts? Did archaeological evidence support references in the texts that could be confirmed or denied by archaeological findings?

[Just a reminder that the evidence I'm sharing here is what was available to researchers in 1971. We will share evidence that came to light after that in a future series.]

Jesus Christ

It didn't take long to identify the primary purpose of the New Testament –

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” Matthew 1:1

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark 1:1

The first verses of the first two texts in the New Testament are about someone named **Jesus Christ**. He is called “the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” and “the Son of God.”

I recognized the names David and Abraham from my investigation of the Old Testament. I also recognized the name “God” from the Old Testament. So, this Jesus Christ had three fathers? David, Abraham and God? I had lots to learn about Jesus.

As we mentioned in our last report the nation of Israel had not heard a new prophetic Word from God in more than 400 years after Malachi wrote his prophetic text. Malachi said that God would send a “messenger” and a “voice” that would cry out in the wilderness. However, after many generations, God was silent, that is until a man named John (called “the Baptist”) came on the scene in the early part of the 1st century AD –

“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’” Matthew 3:1-3

“John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, ‘There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy

to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Mark 1:4-8

“... the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” Luke 3:2-6

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.” John 1:6-9

We have a consistent story about John the Baptist from what are known as the “Gospel” accounts in the New Testament.

Investigative journalists look for both *consistent* and *conflicting* information when interviewing witnesses and researching documents and other evidence. We don't expect witnesses to give us identical information, but we do look for both consistencies and inconsistencies in their personal accounts about an event or series of events.

What I found in the Gospel accounts about John the Baptist were **consistencies**.

John the Baptist claimed to be “the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord;’ a claim of fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy –

“Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’ Then they said to him, ‘Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you

say about yourself?' He said: 'I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said.'" John 1:19-23

John was quoting Isaiah 40:3 – a direct connection to an Old Testament prophecy.

John claimed that he was the “voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord” and that he was paving the way for someone else who would follow him –

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Matthew 3:11-12

"And he preached, saying, 'There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'" Mark 1:7-8

“Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, John answered, saying to all, ‘I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.’” Luke 3:15-17

“John answered them, saying, ‘I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.’” John 1:26-27

The Gospels are consistent in what they report about what John said concerning both himself and the “One” who would follow him.

So, who was that person who would follow John the Baptist? Were the Gospel accounts consistent or conflicting with that information?

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” Matthew 3:13-17

“It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” Mark 1:9-11

“When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which

said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.'

Luke 3:21-22

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.' And John bore witness, saying, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.'" John 1:29-34

The Gospel accounts are consistent with the information that John the Baptist pointed to Jesus of Nazareth as the one who would follow John, along with a "voice from Heaven" identifying Jesus as the beloved Son of God.

An investigative reporter **observes** information carefully before making any **interpretations**. I observed that the Gospel accounts were consistent in what they reported about John the Baptist and his relationship with Jesus of Nazareth, but made no interpretations at that time. Looking at evidence is part of the process, not the end of the process. There was much more to see and learn before I would reach a conclusion.

Two Messengers

John the Baptist claimed to be the promised “messenger” who would “prepare the way of the Lord” –

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God.’ Isaiah 40:3

It’s interesting to note that the Isaiah reference speaks of the voice of the one in the wilderness preparing the way of the “Lord” and making straight in the desert a highway for “our God.”

Here’s the Malachi reference Mark used –

“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,’ Says the Lord of hosts.” Malachi 3:1

The Gospel writers referred to John the Baptist as being the “messenger” of God who would prepare the way before God and someone else called “the Messenger of the covenant.”

Malachi, believed to be the last of the Old Testament prophets, prophesied that God would send two messengers to Israel at a future time. One would prepare the way for the other.

The Gospel writers claimed that John the Baptist was the first messenger who prepared the way for the second Messenger, Jesus of Nazareth.

Broad View

Investigative reporting looks at a story from both broad and narrow views. Here are some examples of what I saw as I looked at reports about the two messengers –

First messenger, Old Testament – “Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me.”

First messenger, New Testament – “As it is written in the Prophets: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’ The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’ John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.”

Second Messenger, Old Testament – “And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, ‘Says the Lord of hosts.’”

Second Messenger, New Testament – “It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

Narrow View

Second Messenger, Old Testament – “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He *is* like a refiner’s fire And like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness.” Malachi 3:2-3

Second Messenger, New Testament – “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Both views, broad and narrow, are seen in the Old Testament prophecies concerning the first and second messengers.

Messenger Exchange

John the Baptist appears prominently at the beginning of all four Gospel accounts, but soon disappears from view. Why? As John said – “It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.”

John the Baptist was arrested and placed in prison sometime after baptizing Jesus and said these words concerning his relationship with Him –

“You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His

testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” John 3:28-36

The Messiah

John the Baptist said that he was not “the Christ.” What or who was “the Christ”?

That question became prominent in my investigation of the New Testament. The word “Christ” is used hundreds of times in the New Testament. The English word “Christ” comes from the Greek word *Christós* (Χριστός), meaning “anointed.” The Greek word was the translation of the Hebrew word *mashiach* (מָשִׁיחַ), also meaning “anointed.” The English version of the Hebrew word is “Messiah.”

The Hebrew word is found almost 40 times in the Old Testament and several of them are well known as prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah (Christ) to Israel. One of the most prominent is found in the prophecy of Daniel –

“Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times. ‘And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate.” Daniel 9:24-27

The first Old Testament verse that seemed to point to an “anointed one” of God is Genesis 3:15 where God said these words to the serpent (Satan) –

“And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

Other Old Testament references that I looked at as possibly referring to a Messiah include –

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.” Genesis 49:10

“I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult.” Numbers 24:17

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.” Deuteronomy 18:15

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another.” Job 19:25-27

“Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.’ He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: ‘Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion.’ ‘I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, And rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.” Psalm 2

“They shall fear You As long as the sun and moon endure, Throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing, Like showers that water the earth. In His days the righteous shall flourish, And abundance of peace, Until the moon is no more. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth. Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, And His enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles Will bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba Will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; All nations shall serve Him. For He will deliver the needy when he cries, The poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, And will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; And precious shall be their blood in His sight. And He shall live; And the gold of Sheba will be given to Him; Prayer also will be made for Him continually, And daily He shall be praised. There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, On the top of the mountains; Its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; And those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; All nations shall call Him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who

only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory.” Psalm 72:5-19

“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. The Lord has sworn And will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.’ The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries. He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; Therefore He shall lift up the head.” Psalm 110

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord’s house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His

ways, And we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore." Isaiah 2:2-4

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings. The Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father's house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah." Isaiah 7:14-17

"Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, As when at first He lightly esteemed The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, And afterward more heavily oppressed her, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, In Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the

land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation And increased its joy; They rejoice before You According to the joy of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian. For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, And garments rolled in blood, Will be used for burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” Isaiah 9:1-7

“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; But with

righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist.” Isaiah 11:1-5

“Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men; So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider.” Isaiah 52:13-15

“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was

wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked— But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And

He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.” Isaiah 53

Other Old Testament chapters you can check include: Jeremiah 23, Jeremiah 30, Ezekiel 17, Ezekiel 21, Hosea 1, Hosea 6, Joel 3, Amos 9, Micah 2, Micah 4, Micah 5, Zephaniah 3, Haggai 2, Zechariah 2, Zechariah 3, Zechariah 6, Zechariah 8, Zechariah 9, Zechariah 11, Zechariah 12, Zechariah 13, and Zechariah 14.

'Christ' in the New Testament

The New Testament refers to Jesus of Nazareth as “the Christ” hundreds of times. Here are several examples from the Gospels –

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew 1:18

“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:11

“Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” Matthew 16:16

“Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.’” John 4:42

“And many of the people believed in Him, and said, ‘When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?’” John 7:31

“ She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.’” John 11:27

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” John 17:3

“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” John 20:30-31

Claims of 'the Christ'

Did Jesus of Nazareth believe He was the Messiah of Israel? Did He make that claim or was it only others who thought that?

The Gospel of Luke records this interesting exchange between Jesus and two men after He rose from the dead –

“Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Luke 24:25-27

Jesus said these words to His disciples a short time before He ascended back to Heaven –

“Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and

thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” Luke 24:44-49

This next portion of the New Testament may be the most telling of all. Jesus of Nazareth prayed these words to God the Father and claimed in that prayer to be the Christ –

“Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: ‘Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” John 17:1-5

The earliest preaching and teaching of Jesus' apostles was that Jesus is the Christ.

"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Acts 2:38

"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." Acts 5:42

"Then all who heard were amazed, and said, 'Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?' But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ." Acts 9:21-23

"So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.'" Acts 16:31

“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ.” Romans 1:1-6

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:9

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” 1 Peter 1:3-5

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” 1 John 1:1-4

“I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Revelation 1:9

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Revelation 22:20-21

Jesus of Nazareth prayed to God that He was the Christ and claimed to His followers that the Old Testament writings (Law, Prophets, Psalms) were about 'Him.' Jesus said He was the Christ – the Messiah of Israel. Either He was lying or telling the truth – or was deluded.

That was something I noted during the investigation into the New Testament. Jesus of Nazareth believed He was Israel's promised Messiah, His disciples believed He was the promised Messiah, and many of the people who heard Him speak believed He was the promised Messiah. So, was He? Was Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah written about in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms?

[One other option I personally believed at the time was that Jesus was a myth, a legend. He never existed. We'll look at how that option stands up later in the investigation.]

Messianic Prophecies Fulfilled?

Christians claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. So what? Claims are easy to make, but hard to prove. How do we know that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah?

Before I list some of the prophetic claims Christians made to me when I was an atheist, let me share something about how atheists view these claims.

First, many atheists don't believe Jesus even existed. For those who will accept that someone named Jesus lived in Israel in the early 1st century, atheists don't believe He was anyone special who did anything special.

Second, atheists believe it would have been easy for Jesus and/or His followers to make up stories about His life that would fit with Old Testament prophecies.

It's easy for atheists to dismiss the claims of prophetic Messianic fulfillment, so that's what they do.

As for our Jewish friends, they don't believe Jesus fulfilled ALL of the Messianic prophecies, so He couldn't be the Messiah.

“More than 1,000 years after Jesus’ crucifixion, the medieval sage Maimonides (also known as Rambam) laid out in his Mishneh Torah specific things Jews believe the messiah must accomplish in order to confirm his identity — among them restoring the kingdom of David to its former glory, achieving victory in battle against Israel’s enemies, rebuilding the temple (which the Romans destroyed in 70 CE) and ingathering the exiles to the land of Israel. ‘And if he’s not successful with this, or if he is killed, it’s known that he is not the one that was promised by the Torah,’ Maimonides wrote.”

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Interestingly enough, our Muslim friends do believe Jesus was the promised Messiah, though not in the same way Christians understand it. The term *al-Masih* (the Messiah) occurs in the Qur'an 11 times. Here are two examples –

“When the angels said: “O Mary! Allah gives you the good news of a Word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, who is illustrious in this world and the hereafter, and who is one of those brought near [to Allah].” Surah 3.45

“O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion or utter anything concerning Allah but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, His Word that He sent to Mary, and a Spirit from Him [that He sent]. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and do not say ‘Three.’ Desist, it is better for you! Allah is one God. Far exalted is He above having offspring. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth. Allah is sufficient a disposer of affairs. The Messiah would never scorn to be a servant to Allah, nor would the angels who are nearest to Allah. As for those who scorn His service and are arrogantly proud, He shall gather them all to Himself to answer.” Surah 4.171-722

My own view at the time of this investigation was that Jesus was a myth/legend and His followers made up stories to make it look like someone named Jesus lived in Israel in the early 1st century AD and fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.

As I looked at the evidence through the worldview lens of atheism, I believed several things about Jesus of Nazareth –

1. Jesus was a myth/legend invented by early Christians who wanted to have their own religion for personal power and prestige
2. The New Testament was not credible as an historical document .. it could not be trusted or verified
3. Even if someone named Jesus did live in Israel during the 1st century AD and had a following, anyone could have made up stories about His life to match Old Testament prophecies

So, with all of that in mind – we'll look at some of the prophecies I found difficult to dismiss "if" Jesus was not a myth/legend and really did exist.

Investigating Messiah

The easy thing for an atheist to do is dismiss the claims of Christianity. The hard thing is investigate those claims with an open mind. That was my challenge as an atheist – to look at the evidence without putting it through my atheist lens.

How do you do that? Through some objective investigative process that can research evidence logically and reasonably. I used the process that I had been taught in college and experienced in the laboratory of real-life journalism to look at the various evidences that Christian scholars presented to me.

I discovered that some Christians claimed the Bible contains about 400 Messianic prophecies. Some said less than 400. Many of the prophecies were restated one or more times in the Old Testament, so the number of different prophecies was even smaller.

What I was interested in finding were those prophecies that, if Jesus of Nazareth was a real person, could not be manipulated by people.

I viewed Messianic prophecies as falling into two basic categories –

1. Prophecies that could be manipulated by a human being
2. Prophecies that could not be manipulated by a human being

Here are some that fell into the first group –

1. Claim to be the Messiah
2. Claim to fulfill Old Testament prophecies
3. Person crying out in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord;
4. Make His paths straight”
5. Display character qualities of the Messiah (went about doing good, faithful, meek and lowly, not deceitful, teaching, preaching righteousness, taught in parables, confounded wise people, a leader of men, minister to poor, etc)
6. Use magic, slight of hand, misdirection or helpers in group of people to give the appearance that a miracle had occurred
7. Royal greeting by followers in Jerusalem while Jesus of Nazareth sat on donkey
8. Appearance at the 2nd Temple
9. Hold final supper to replicate OT prophecy

10. Silent before accusers (hard to do, but possible for a man to do that)
11. Buried in rich man's tomb (might have set that up with someone in advance)

Here are some that fell into the second group –

1. Where Messiah would be born (Bethlehem)
2. To whom He would be born (e.g. virgin)
3. Being firstborn into a poor family
4. Born into a family with Messianic lineage (line of David)
5. What Messiah's parents would name him (Yeshua-Joshua-Jesus)
6. Parents fleeing to Egypt while child is a toddler
7. Working miracles that were really miracles (water to wine, sight to the blind, healing sick, raising dead, walking on water, stopping storms)
8. Where Messiah would die (e.g. outside Jerusalem city gates)
9. The method of death (e.g. national rulers counseled together to arrest and kill, false accusations, betrayed by a friend for 30 pieces of silver, arrest, friends fled, hated without cause, trial, scourging, violent death/crucifixion/lifted up, not a bone broken, side pierced, hands feet pierced, crucified with transgressors/thieves, humiliated/

ridiculed/rejected publicly, garments divided by lot, given vinegar for thirst)

10. Death of betrayer

11. Darkness at time of death (during the daytime)

12. Buried in rich man's tomb (seems unlikely that a rich member of the ruling Sanhedrin would have agreed to be part of a plot to fool people into thinking Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah)

13. The supernatural resurrection of Messiah (body would not see corruption/decay)

14. The supernatural ascension from earth to Heaven to sit at the right hand of God (exalted publicly)

15. Name remembered in all generations

I didn't believe in anything supernatural when I was an atheist, so I did not believe miracles were possible. However, for the sake of an honest, objective investigation I made note of what witnesses said they saw and heard firsthand even if I did not believe them. Though I noted it just to be fair, eyewitness testimony became powerful evidence as I concluded the investigation.

If anyone could fulfill the prophecies listed in my second group, that would be something to seriously consider because a human being could not make those things happen.

So, how did I interpret the lists? I didn't – at least not for awhile. Interpretation follows observing and asking questions for interpretation. To try to interpret evidence before following a proven investigative process is to set oneself up for failure.

Investigating Gospel Texts

The four narratives of the life of Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) were the basis for Christian claims that Jesus fulfilled Messianic prophecies. So, the next step for my investigation was to look at the credibility of those texts.

The study of ancient texts is known as *paleography* (from the Greek – “old writing”). That was not my educational or occupational background, so I learned as much I could to understand about verifying the texts of the New Testament.

The process included learning about how texts were written at different time periods in history. Paper, as we know it, did not exist in the ancient world. Most ancient texts were written on **papyrus**, which was made from the papyrus plant. While very popular in the ancient world, papyrus writing had a limited lifespan unless kept in very dry storage. Important documents were copied as originals or old copies were impacted by mold destruction.

Other writing materials of the ancient world included clay tablets, stone, bone, wood, leather, metals, potsherds, and parchments (vellum). Papyrus was used in ancient Egypt and adopted by the Greeks and was a popular writing surface during the 1st century AD.

The inks used on papyrus in ancient times included burning organic materials like oil or wood and pulverizing the ash (charcoal) before mixing with water. Brushes made from reeds were often used to apply the material mix on the papyrus.

Knowing how ancient texts were written helped with dating the manuscript along with why they were copied. Another copying purpose was to share an important text with other people (like multiple churches) so that the information was spread widely.

The texts of the New Testament were written primarily in Koine Greek, so that became an important focus just as understanding Hebrew and Aramaic were for texts of the Old Testament. Christians believed that Jesus of Nazareth lived, died and rose from the grave in the early part of the 1st century AD, so I was interested to see how close to that time the New Testament texts had been written.

It was my understanding as an atheist that the authors of the New Testament wrote at least one to two hundred years after the time Jesus was supposed to have lived in Israel. That would rule out eyewitnesses being the real authors. Even though some of the texts were supposedly written by disciples of Jesus, that couldn't be true if the texts were written centuries after the supposed events occurred. The textual information, I believed, was based on myth and legend with no way of verifying it was true. Everyone who might have known what really happened would have died long before people started writing texts that eventually became part of the New Testament.

I also thought that the pool of available ancient textual evidence was shallow. So, you might imagine my surprise when I learned that the "pool" of evidence was much deeper than I could have ever imagined.

Thousands – not dozens, not scores, not even hundreds – thousands of ancient manuscripts and fragments of New Testament writings in Koine Greek had been found, some of them dating from early-to-mid second century AD.

That's impressive, but still not convincing. Anything written in the second century would still be too late for people alive and following Jesus in the early part of the first century to write anything in the second century.

The only problem with that was the discovery of Christian writings prior to the dating of earliest New Testament texts that quoted from those texts.

What? How can someone quote from something that hasn't been written yet?

I discovered that there were three important areas to look at when testing the New Testament texts –

1. Greek manuscripts
2. Translations into other languages
3. Quotes from early Christian writers

Clement of Rome wrote a letter to Christians in Corinth. The letter is dated toward the end of the first century AD. Clement quoted or referred to almost half of New Testament texts (13 out of 27) in his letter to the Corinthians. Clement was believed to have known both the apostles Paul and Peter and have become the bishop of Rome

Ignatius of Antioch wrote in the early part of the 2nd century AD and would have been contemporary with Clement of Rome. Ignatius, believed to have been a disciple of the Apostle John, quoted from several New Testament texts (8 out of 27). Ignatius wrote many letters during his ministry including one to fellow bishop Polycarp of Smyrna.

Polycarp of Smyrna also wrote in the early part of the 2nd century AD and would have been contemporary with Ignatius and Clement (though younger than both). Polycarp, also believed to have been a disciple of the Apostle John, quoted from many New Testament texts (17 out of 27).

Papias of Hierapolis was also a contemporary with Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp. He is believed to have been a disciple of the Apostle John and may have known others who said they saw Jesus Christ. Papias wrote *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord* in five books, but most of that material has been lost. Irenaeus of Lyons, a disciple of Polycarp and 2nd century bishop, and early Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (early 4th century bishop), quoted from Papias' books in their writings. They wrote that Papias included notes about who wrote the Gospels of Matthew and Mark and said that Mark interpreted for the Apostle Peter.

The number of Greek manuscripts which contained all or part of the New Testament was about five thousand when I was investigating in 1971. Some of the most interesting papyri were in museum collections. I found that important because the papyri could be viewed and tested. One of the collections was in the Beatty Museum in Dublin, Ireland.

The **Chester Beatty New Testament** papyri, made public in 1931, was important to textual study because it predated other texts by at least a hundred years. The manuscripts included the earliest surviving codex that contained all four Gospels and the Book of Acts in one book. It also contained the earliest copy of the collection of Paul's epistles and the Book of Revelation. The

discovery had opened up the investigation into New Testament texts all the way back to the end of the 2nd century AD.

Another important collection is the **Bodmer New Testament** papyri. Though smaller in number than the Beatty collection, the Bodmer Papyri were significant in dating some of the New Testament texts to the 2nd century AD.

The Bodmer Papyri were found near Dishna, Egypt, in 1952. The manuscripts were taken from Egypt to Switzerland and purchased by Martin Bodmer. The papyri, made public in 1854, are currently housed in the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana near Geneva.

I also found the *St. John's Fragment* at **Rylands Library** interesting. It is a small piece of papyrus (P52) from John's Gospel dated to the early part of the 2nd century AD.

Investigating anything in the early 70s would eventually take you to books, films, slides, photo albums, and microfilm. The Internet didn't exist yet, so libraries were a great place to go during an investigation.

Here are some of the papyri of New Testament texts from various collections:

P32 – Pauline

P46 – Pauline

P52 – Gospels

P66 – Gospels

P77 – Gospels

P90 – Gospels

P98 – Revelation

P103 – Gospels

P104 – Gospels

GA189 – Acts and General Epistles

We have looked at the discovered Greek manuscripts that date to the 2nd century AD and quotes from early Christian writers that date from the late 1st century to early 2nd century. Now we'll look at translations into other languages that date to the 2nd century.

Translations

New Testament texts include these statements by Jesus of Nazareth –

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” Matthew 28:18-20

“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:7-8

The followers of Jesus of Nazareth soon learned that taking the Gospel of Christ into all of the world would include translating apostolic texts into a variety of languages.

The process began when the Greek king of Egypt, Ptolemy II, invited 72 Jewish scholars to translate the Torah (Genesis – Deuteronomy) from Hebrew into Greek. The translation would become part of the royal library at Alexandria, Egypt. That was in the middle part of the 3rd century BC. The rest of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) were translated into Greek during the 2nd century BC. The Septuagint was eventually used by Jews in many countries. So, the idea of translating texts into other languages was something understood and even desired by the time the New Testament texts were written.

Some of the early translations of New Testament texts included Syriac, Latin and Coptic.

Syriac Translation of New Testament Texts

According to Book of Acts the persecution of Christians started by Saul of Tarsus in Jerusalem scattered followers of Jesus of Nazareth “throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” (Acts 8:1) This persecution may have started within 1-2 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. We learn from Acts 11 that “those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.” (Acts 11:19) Saul of Tarsus went to the high priest and asked for letters to the synagogues of Damascus, Syria. Saul had heard that followers of Jesus of Nazareth may have traveled as far north as the Syrian city and he wanted to find and arrest them. It was during his journey to Damascus that Saul said he was blinded by a bright light and heard the voice of the risen Jesus.

Saul, who became known as Paul, spent time in Damascus before returning to Jerusalem and then returning to his home in Tarsus. Barnabas, who was a follower of Jesus in Jerusalem, was asked by the apostles to travel through Syria to check out a report that the Gospel was being preached to Gentiles as well as Jews. Barnabas went as far as Antioch and confirmed that Gentiles were becoming Christians. Barnabas then traveled to

Tarsus to ask Saul (Paul) to help minister at the church in Antioch. They spent year in Antioch teaching “a great many people.” (Acts 11:26)

What language did the people speak in Syria? Ancient Syriac. It would be reasonable to think that Syrian Christians would eventually translate the Greek texts of the New Testament. If, as I believed as an atheist, the New Testament was written at least a hundred years after the 1st century, then there couldn't be any evidence of a Syriac translation until at least the 3rd century.

I was right – partially. The oldest known Syriac translations of the New Testament dated to the 4th and 5th centuries. However, I discovered that the form of text they preserved dated back to end of the 2nd century. I also read about a 2nd century text known as the *Diatessaron*, written by a Syrian Christian name Tatian who was a student of Justin Martyr. *Diatessaron* was a harmony of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) written about 170 AD. Fragments have been discovered in several ancient languages including Syriac, Greek and Latin. There was some thought that Tatian may have written in his native Syrian language. That would have placed the Syriac translation of the four Gospels many years “before” I believed the original Greek texts would have been written.

Latin Translations of New Testament Texts

The information I found dated the oldest Latin versions of the New Testament to North Africa at the end of the 2nd century into the 3rd century AD. Though the Roman Empire did its best to destroy all of the New Testament texts during the 3rd and early 4th centuries, some were still in use when freedom of religion was finally allowed after the Edict of Milan (313 AD).

Codex Bobbiensis, one of the oldest Old Latin manuscripts of the New Testament, is dated to the early 5th century and contains large portions of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. The codex is currently housed in the Turin National University Library. One of the interesting aspects of the Old Latin translation is that researchers believed it might represent a page from the New Testament used by Cyprian when he was bishop of Carthage during the 3rd century AD. A palaeographic study determined it was a copy of a 2nd century papyrus script.

We also know something about the Old Latin version because of what Jerome wrote later in the 4th century while revising the Latin translation of the Gospels for the bishop of Rome –

“You urge me to revise the old Latin version, and, as it were, to sit in judgment on the copies of the Scriptures which are now scattered throughout the whole world; and, inasmuch as they differ from one another, you would have me decide which of them agree with the Greek original. The labour is one of love, but at the same time both perilous and presumptuous; for in judging others I must be content to be judged by all; and how can I dare to change the language of the world in its hoary old age, and carry it back to the early days of its infancy? Is there a man, learned or unlearned, who will not, when he takes the volume into his hands, and perceives that what he reads does not suit his settled tastes, break out immediately into violent language, and call me a forger and a profane person for having the audacity to add anything to the ancient books, or to make any changes or corrections therein? Now there are two consoling reflections which enable me to bear the odium—in the first place, the command is given by you who are the supreme bishop; and secondly, even on the showing of those who revile us, readings at variance with the early copies cannot be right. For if we are to pin our faith to the Latin texts, it is for

our opponents to tell us which; for there are almost as many forms of texts as there are copies. If, on the other hand, we are to glean the truth from a comparison of many, why not go back to the original Greek and correct the mistakes introduced by inaccurate translators, and the blundering alterations of confident but ignorant critics, and, further, all that has been inserted or changed by copyists more asleep than awake? I am not discussing the Old Testament, which was turned into Greek by the Seventy elders, and has reached us by a descent of three steps. I do not ask what Aquila and Symmachus think, or why Theodotion takes a middle course between the ancients and the moderns. I am willing to let that be the true translation which had apostolic approval. I am now speaking of the New Testament. This was undoubtedly composed in Greek, with the exception of the work of Matthew the Apostle, who was the first to commit to writing the Gospel of Christ, and who published his work in Judæa in Hebrew characters. We must confess that as we have it in our language it is marked by discrepancies, and now that the stream is distributed into different channels we must go back to the fountainhead. I pass over those manuscripts which are associated with the names of Lucian and Hesychius, and the authority of which is perversely maintained by a handful of disputatious persons. It is obvious that these writers could not amend anything in the

Old Testament after the labours of the Seventy; and it was useless to correct the New, for versions of Scripture which already exist in the languages of many nations show that their additions are false. I therefore promise in this short Preface the four Gospels only, which are to be taken in the following order, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, as they have been revised by a comparison of the Greek manuscripts. Only early ones have been used. But to avoid any great divergences from the Latin which we are accustomed to read, I have used my pen with some restraint, and while I have corrected only such passages as seemed to convey a different meaning, I have allowed the rest to remain as they are.” Jerome Preface to the Four Gospels

Coptic Translations of New Testament Texts

The Coptic language was a language used in Egypt during the time of early Christianity. The primary dialects that impacted New Testament texts were **Sahidic** (Upper Egypt) and **Bohairic** (Lower Egypt).

Sahidic Versions

MS 193 – *Crosby-Schøyen Codex* dates from the 3rd century and includes 1 Peter

MS 2650 – *Codex-Schøyen* dates from early 4th century and includes the Gospel of Matthew

British Library MS. Oriental 7594 – dates to the late 3rd or early 4th century and includes the Book of Acts

Michigan MS. Inv 3992 – dates to the 4th century and includes 1 Corinthians and Titus

Berlin MS. Or. 408 and British Museum Or. 3518 – dates to the 4th century and contains Book of Revelation, 1 John, and Philemon

Codex Bodmer XIX – dates to the 4th century and includes the four Gospels

Codex Bodmer XIX – dates to 4th or 5th century and includes portions of Matthew and Romans

Bohairic Versions

Codex Bodmer III – dates to the 4th century and includes the Gospel of John

Codex Glazier – dates to the 4th or 5th century and includes about half of the Book of Acts

Other Coptic versions include the Fayyumic and Akhmimic dialects.

Evidence

Once I saw the evidence for early Greek, Syrian, Latin and Coptic manuscripts, along with the letters of early Church Fathers quoting from New Testament writings during the 2nd century, dating the writing of the New Testament **much** earlier than I had thought, it was no longer a stretch because of the evidence. It dawned on me during my investigation that if Christians were quoting New Testament texts in the late part of the 1st century and early part of the 2nd century, the original texts were probably written close to the time Christians claimed they were written.

Next eBook

In the next part of our report we will look at the evidence for the Pauline epistles having been written in the middle of the 1st century. We will also look at the evidence for the authenticity of epistles written by other apostles of Christ (known as the “general” epistles).

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