

200AD

5. IRELAND
EVIDENCE OF ORAL TRADITION

The oldest manuscripts of Paul's letters are stored in a beautiful museum in the grounds of Dublin Castle, and amongst them is the earliest example of Christian oral tradition.

The early Christians rehearsed and celebrated the teachings and deeds of Jesus even more intensely than we rehearse and celebrate our favourite pop songs. In one manuscript, Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth of a fixed summary of the Christian faith which he had passed onto them years earlier, and which he himself had received shortly after his conversion. This 'creed' provides evidence that the narrative of Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and appearances was passed on orally decades before it was written up in the Gospels. Mainstream scholars date this summary to within months of Jesus' death.

50AD
Oral tradition
30-50AD

0AD



200AD

150AD
Roman writers
75-175AD

100AD

50AD

0AD

2. ROME
ROMAN HISTORIANS KNEW OF JESUS

In AD 114 Tacitus, Rome's greatest historian, finishes his *Annals*. Much of our knowledge of Rome's emperors comes from this work. Tacitus tells us that Emperor Nero blamed Christians for the great fire of Rome, and in passing confirms some basic facts about Jesus: he was a religious teacher from Judea who was executed by order of the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate.

Head of Ancient History at Macquarie University, Professor Alanna Nobbs says it's surprising that a Roman historian would mention a person like Jesus at all, because they had a 'fixed idea' that history should be about warfare and the deeds of the Emperors.

Yet Tacitus is not alone amongst Greco-Roman writers in recording key facts about Jesus – authors like Pliny, Suetonius and Thallus also mention him.



200AD

150AD

100AD


50AD
Archeology
4BC-67AD

0AD

6. GALILEE
ARCHEOLOGY DEBUNKS 'PAGAN' JESUS THEORY

Scholars once described Jesus' home district of Galilee as a region heavily influenced by Greek culture. Some reasoned from this that Jesus must have got his ideas from Greco-Roman philosophers. But the 1st century Galilee archaeologists are now uncovering is deeply Jewish.

Archeologist Sean Freyne says, "The archaeological evidence shows... markers of Jewish identity that are very clear and very plain." Artifacts such as bowls for use in Jewish purification rites, and a lack of pig bones.



200AD

Jewish writers
AD
90-200AD

100AD

50AD

0AD

3. OXFORD
JESUS THE JEWISH TEACHER


Leading Jewish scholar, Professor Geza Vermes from Oxford University, says Jesus' teachings fit firmly into the Jewish tradition:

"This teaching [of Leviticus 19:18] to love one's neighbour was particularly emphatically expressed in the teaching of Jesus – a particularly generous attitude to everybody, not just your friends."

This helps explain why the great Jewish historian of the time, Josephus Flavius, is favourable towards Jesus.

"For Josephus, Jesus was a wise man and a performer of baffling deeds," says Professor Vermes.

From Josephus we can pinpoint the place and time of Jesus' career and crucifixion, and his fame as a teacher and miracle-worker. Most importantly, we know that some hailed him the Messiah, God's appointed king.



200AD

150AD

100AD

50AD
Christian writers
48-90AD

0AD

4. LONDON
CAN WE TRUST THESE MEN?

Many people think the early Christian writings can't be trusted to report facts about Jesus because they're too biased. But that is not how historians see it. While in London we witnessed a clash between two rival faiths – Arsenal and Tottenham. Speaking to the fans, we discovered their bias did not stop them from accurately reporting key moments in the game. There was no question that the way they saw the event was coloured by the team they support, but that didn't destroy the value of their testimony. For the same reason historians treat the New Testament texts as valid historical sources about the life of Jesus.



200AD

Gnostic Gospels
120-200AD
150AD

100AD

50AD

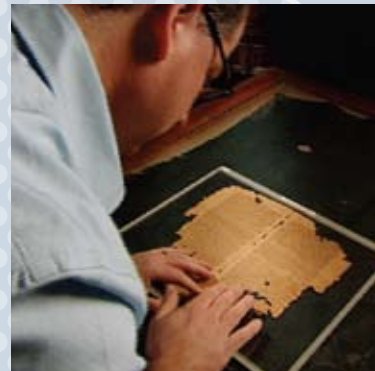
0AD

1. CAIRO
JESUS HAD A GIRLFRIEND?

The Coptic Museum in Cairo houses the only copy of the Gospel of Philip. This is the text from which people have extracted the idea that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and had children.

However, the manuscript is too badly damaged to be certain what it says about Jesus kissing Mary.

More significantly, historians say it was written too late to tell us anything authentic about the life of Jesus.



200AD

150AD

100AD

50AD

Hebrew Scriptures
< 250BC

8. JERUSALEM
JEWISH TANAKH EXPLAINS TRUE JESUS

Historians regard the Tanakh – what Christians call the Old Testament – as vital for understanding what Jesus was on about. For example, Mark's Gospel records Jesus deliberately organising a ride into the city on a young donkey. In doing this Jesus was choosing to reveal his identity by acting out one of the most famous prophecies in the Tanakh about the arrival of God's king. Or take the last supper. Leading Jesus scholar Dr Tom Wright explains that when Jesus picked up the cup and said, 'This is the new covenant in my blood', the whole story of Israel "comes rushing forward and takes on new meaning".



200AD

150AD

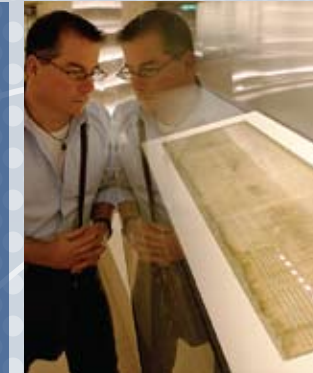
100AD

50AD
Dead Sea scrolls
300BC-68AD

0AD

7. DEAD SEA
ANCIENT SCROLLS UNMASK JESUS' JEWISH CRITICS

In the 1940s Bedouins discovered ancient Jewish documents we now call the Dead Sea Scrolls. Professor James Charlesworth from Princeton University, says we now better understand the Jewish background to Jesus' teachings. In some cases Jesus was criticising the teachings of the scroll authors - the Essenes.



THE CHRIST FILES

With the release of a four-part documentary series based on his book, *The Christ Files*, DR JOHN DICKSON takes us on a journey to uncover the historical facts about Jesus.