

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

THE EARLY CHURCH

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PART 13: THE NEW TESTAMENT

LUKE THE PHYSICIAN

The book known as the Gospel of Luke is named after the man who penned it with the same name. It was compiled from interviews of those who knew Jesus well such as the mother of Jesus. These people were eyewitnesses of the God-man's teachings, miracles, and encounters. The narrative is filled with so many details that it rivals Matthew's account.

The Book of Acts is what Luke personally experienced during the early years of the church. **Acts 1:1-2**

Who was Luke? He was a well-educated man, a physician, who traveled with Paul until the apostle's death.

"Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you." (Colossians 4:14)

*"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry."
(2 Timothy 4:10-11)*

Eusebius was born in Antioch and was a Christian historian. He lived from AD 260-65 to 339 and became the bishop of Caesarea in AD 314. Eusebius identified Luke as a doctor by profession from the city of Antioch. Eusebius recorded that Luke *"has left us, in two inspired books... One of these books is the Gospel... The other book is the Acts of the Apostles."*¹

MARK'S GOSPEL

Mark wrote his account around AD 55-59.

He was an associate of the apostle Peter, who stated that Marcus was like a son to him. **1 Peter 5:13**

Marcus was a nephew to Barnabas. **Colossians 4:10**

Luke wrote that when the apostle Peter was set free from prison by an angel, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Mary was a sister to Barnabas. **Acts 12:12-14**

¹ Eusebius: Church History, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 1, Second Series, Christian Literature Company, 1890, p.136-37



Marcus was also called John Mark; he was chosen to be part of the missionary trip with Paul and Barnabas, but he abandoned them halfway through the tour and returned to Antioch. **Acts 15:36-40**

At the end of his life, the apostle Paul sent for Mark, who had proved himself to be a trustworthy man of God. **2 Timothy 4:11**

Some believe that the young man who fled naked when Jesus was arrested was none other than Mark since he is the only one that documented the incident. **Mark 14:51-52**

OTHER GOSPELS

Matthew wrote his gospel account between AD 55-65.

Luke wrote his Gospel account between AD 58-65.

John wrote down his version of the life of Jesus before the war with the Romans started in AD 67.

WRITTEN MATERIAL

By the time of Jesus' birth, each synagogue had a set of scrolls, with each scroll containing a book of the Old Testament. These were written on sheep or goat skin. The standard length of one of the Mosaic Torah scrolls is 89.3 feet long and 19 inches tall and it is sown together from 43 panels. Each scroll weighs around 20 to 25 pounds.

The New Testament writers used parchment since it is thinner and can be rolled up easier. Paul wrote to the different churches and the scrolls were sent by messengers to specific churches with the intent that the letters should be circulated. **Colossians 4:16**

As the churches started to spread throughout the Roman Empire, the gospel accounts and letters from the apostles were copied repeatedly – thousands of times – and sent to different churches. At the close of the first century there were many copies in circulation, not only in the Roman Empire, but also in Babylon to the east and Ethiopia to the south. The King James Bible is based upon 5,322 such manuscripts that survived over time.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

There were a number of other gospel accounts written in addition to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The same can be said of the additional epistles. Many of the writings promoted heresy and were rejected by the early church. Some works like the writings of Enoch were not understood and therefore were not considered canon, books distinguished by their divine qualities, church acceptance, and apostolic connection.

It is obvious that Jesus reigned in heaven after the ascension and He ensured the different canon texts were accurate. This could only be accomplished by eyewitnesses.

- ❖ Clement of Rome became the bishop over the church in Rome and died around AD 100. He acknowledged eight books of the New Testament in his writings.
- ❖ Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, had access to fifteen such books in AD 108.
- ❖ Ignatius of Antioch had seven New Testament books in AD 115.

- ❖ Bishop Hippolytus of Rome had a collection of 22 New Testament books in AD 235.

There were a number of councils where the Christian leadership wanted to canonize (close) the New Testament:

- ❖ Muratorian Canon in AD 170
- ❖ Council of Laodicea in AD 363
- ❖ Council of Hippo AD 393
- ❖ Council of Carthage in AD 397

It is obvious that the original writings of the apostles and the other New Testament writers did not survive, but there were copies constantly being made which circulated among the churches. The New Testament as we have it today was eventually established and preserved by the churches throughout the Roman Empire, as well as Asia, North Africa, and Ethiopia. There are over 5,322 manuscripts – complete and fragments – which survived and form the basis for the King James Bible.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The King James Bible is the most accurate version for English speaking people. It came into being 414 years ago and the translators were guided by the Holy Spirit, who ensured it was accurate.

The apostle Peter made a statement that has withstood the test of time:

“Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.” (2 Peter 1:15-18)

It was in the spring of 1966 that I watched Billy Graham on television. When he gave the invitation to follow Jesus, there was a strong emotion that swept over my soul and I was deeply convicted of my sins. I had made a decision for Christ as a young child. Then as teenager, I recommitted my life to Christ, but later embraced gross sin. As an adult, I recommitted my life to Christ and I wept over the many sins I had committed.

It was only when I started to read the Bible, that I finally realized the book I held in my hands was the word of God. It contained truth that kept me grounded and became a spiritual anchor. The scriptures point to Jesus, and once we are born again, they govern our behavior. What does God want you to do? **Matthew 5:17-19**

EARLY CHURCH DOCTRINE

Let's recap the doctrine of the early church.

1. A person must be born again. **John 3:1-7**
2. Only through Jesus can a person be saved. **Acts 4:10-12**
3. Jesus paid for our sins on the cross. **1 Peter 2:24**
4. We must repent of our sins. **Acts 3:19**
5. Confess Jesus is Lord with your mouth. **Romans 10:8-13**
6. You receive eternal life the moment you are born again. **John 10:27-29**

CONCLUSION

This message concludes this forensic study of the early church. The goal was to examine the background of the people whose lives were directly impacted by Jesus and their written testimony.

Have you ever considered the fact that the apostles, the 70 others, and the 39 women – the core group of the church – had no written material aside from the Old Testament. None of the Gospels and epistles were written, and since all the founders of the early church had personally been with Jesus, they recounted what He taught them and what Jesus had done.

The common belief was that the second return of Jesus was imminent. This is why they felt no need to build a structure, which future generations would have as a foundation.

The time period of the early church was from AD 33 to about 63; a period of some 30 years. Luke reported the arrest of Paul and how he was taken to Rome as prisoner where he was under house arrest for two years.

The Jewish uprising prophesied by Jesus took place in AD 67 and put down three years later. Luke did not record the destruction of the temple in the Book of Acts. Why would he omit this significant event and how every Jew was slaughtered and/or driven from Jerusalem in AD 70?

Neither Paul nor the gospel writers recorded this horrible event. The only logical reason for excluding this grisly outcome is the fact that all the written accounts were finished before AD 67. We know that John recorded the Book of Revelation around AD 90, but he did not mention the destruction of Jerusalem.

Remember, it's not so important how you begin your life after salvation, but how you finish it!

Do you have an ear to hear with?