Evidence for the Resurrection by Noah Greenberg

Two Caveats to this message:

1. Logic, reason, and intellect are not the final authority. Faith is required. Hebrews 11 says that without faith is it impossible to please God.
2. The purpose of this message is not to give you fuel to go and call you atheist or nonbelieving friend to start an argument with them. The purpose is to show that there is evidence for the resurrection. It is not followed with blind faith. That said, this is not meant to be offensive but defensive. It is to be able to defend the faith not attack others.

Why?

Scripture encourages reasoned defense of the faith (aka apologetics)

- 1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.
- Acts 17:2–3 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ."
- Acts 18:4 He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

Strengthening believers in apologetics is important for teachers

- Ephesians 4:14 - that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,
- Colossians 2:6-8 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Why is the resurrection important?

- 1 Corinthians 15:12-19 "Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! Then also

those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.

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The Strategy: Five Possible Theories

We believe Christ's resurrection can be proved with at least as much certainty as any universally believed and well-documented event in ancient history. To prove this, we do not need to presuppose anything controversial (e.g. that miracles happen). But the skeptic must also not presuppose anything (e.g. that they do not). We do not need to presuppose that the New Testament is infallible, or divinely inspired or even true. We do not need to presuppose that there really was an empty tomb or post-resurrection appearances, as recorded. We need to presuppose only two things, both of which are hard data, empirical data, which no one denies: The existence of the New Testament texts as we have them, and the existence (but not necessarily the truth) of the Christian religion as we find it today.

The question is this: Which theory about what really happened in Jerusalem on that first Easter Sunday can account for the data?

There are five possible theories: Christianity, hallucination, myth, conspiracy and swoon.

1. Jesus died. Jesus rose. [Christianity]

2. Jesus died. Jesus didn't rise—apostles deceived. [Hallucination]

3. Jesus died. Jesus didn't rise—apostles myth-makers [Myth]

4. Jesus died. Jesus didn't rise—apostles deceivers [Conspiracy]

5. Jesus didn't die. [Swoon]

Thus either (1) the resurrection really happened, (2) the apostles were deceived by a hallucination, (3) the apostles created a myth, not meaning it literally, (4) the apostles were deceivers who conspired to foist on the world the most famous and successful lie in history, or (5) Jesus only swooned and was resuscitated, not resurrected. All five theories are logically possible, and therefore must be fairly investigated—even (1) ! They are also the *only* possibilities, unless we include really far-out ideas that responsible historians have never taken seriously, such as that Jesus was really a Martian who came in a flying saucer. Or that he never even existed; that the whole story was the world's greatest fantasy novel, written by some simple fisherman; that he was a literary character whom everyone in history mistook for a real person, including all Christians *and* their enemies, until some scholar many centuries later got the real scoop from sources unnamed.

The reason we can reasonably disregard the idea that Jesus never existed comes from the sheer amount of extra-biblical evidence for his existence.

Roman Sources:

- Tacitus (c. 116 AD): In his Annals, this Roman historian mentions "Christus" (Christ), who was executed by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius, and whose followers, the Christians, were persecuted.
- Pliny the Younger (c. 112 AD): Writing to Emperor Trajan, he describes Christians singing hymns to Christ "as to a god," confirming early worship of him.
- Suetonius (c. 121 AD): Mentions unrest in Rome caused by "Chrestus," likely a reference to Christ, during Claudius's reign.

Jewish Sources:

- Josephus (c. 93 AD): In Antiquities of the Jews, he mentions Jesus as a "wise man" and doer of "wonderful works," and later refers to "James, the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ".
- The Talmud (2nd-5th Century AD): Contains references to "Jeshu" (Jesus) being hanged on the eve of Passover and accused of sorcery, confirming his execution and presence.

If we can refute all other theories (2-5), we will have proved the truth of the resurrection (1). The form of the argument here is similar to that of most of the arguments for the existence of God. Neither God nor the resurrection are directly observable, but from data that *are* directly observable we can argue that the only possible adequate explanation of this data is the Christian one.

We shall take the four non-believing theories in the following order: from the simplest, least popular and most easily refuted to the most confusing, most popular and most complexly refuted: first swoon, then conspiracy, then hallucination and finally myth.

Refutation of the Swoon Theory: Nine Arguments

Nine pieces of evidence refute the swoon theory:

(1) Jesus could not have survived crucifixion. Roman procedures were very careful to eliminate that possibility. Roman law even laid the death penalty on any soldier who let a capital prisoner escape in any way, including bungling a crucifixion. It was never done.

(2) The fact that the Roman soldier did not break Jesus' legs, as he did to the other two crucified criminals (Jn 19:31-33), means that the soldier was sure Jesus was dead. Breaking the legs hastened the death so that the corpse could be taken down before the sabbath (v. 31).

(3) John, an eyewitness, certified that he saw blood and water come from Jesus' pierced heart (Jn 19:34-35). This shows that Jesus' lungs had collapsed and he had died of asphyxiation. Any medical expert can vouch for this.

(4) The body was totally encased in winding sheets and entombed (Jn 19:38-42).

(5) The post-resurrection appearances convinced the disciples, even "doubting Thomas," that Jesus was gloriously alive (Jn 20:19-29). It is psychologically impossible for the disciples to have been so transformed and confident if Jesus had merely struggled out of a swoon, badly in need of a doctor. A half-dead, staggering sick man who has just had a narrow escape is not worshiped fearlessly as divine lord and conquerer of death.

(6) How were the Roman guards at the tomb overpowered by a swooning corpse? Or by unarmed disciples? And if the disciples did it, they knowingly lied when they wrote the Gospels, and we are into the conspiracy theory, which we will refute shortly.

(7) How could a swooning half-dead man have moved the great stone at the door of the tomb? Who moved the stone if not an angel? No one has ever answered that question. Neither the Jews nor the Romans would move it, for it was in both their interests to keep the tomb sealed, the Jews had the stone put there in the first place, and the Roman guards would be killed if they let the body "escape."

The story the Jewish authorities spread, that the guards fell asleep and the disciples stole the body (Mt 28:11-15), is unbelievable. Roman guards would not fall asleep on a job like that; if they did, they would lose their lives. And even if they did fall asleep, the crowd and the effort and the noise it would have taken to move an enormous boulder would have wakened them. Furthermore, we are again into the conspiracy theory, with all its unanswerable difficulties (see next section).

(8) If Jesus awoke from a swoon, where did he go? Think this through: you have a living body to deal with now, not a dead one. Why did it disappear? There is absolutely no data, not even any false, fantastic, imagined data, about Jesus' life after his crucifixion, in any sources, friend or foe, at any time, early or late. A man like that, with a past like that, would have left traces.

(9) Most simply, the swoon theory necessarily turns into the conspiracy theory or the hallucination theory, for the disciples testified that Jesus did not swoon but really died and really rose.

Refutation of the Conspiracy Theory: Seven Arguments

Why couldn't the disciples have made up the whole story?

(1) Blaise Pascal gives a simple, psychologically sound proof for why this is unthinkable:

The apostles were either deceived or deceivers. Either supposition is difficult, for it is not possible to imagine that a man has risen from the dead. While Jesus was with them, he could sustain them; but afterwards, if he did not appear to them, who did make them act? The hypothesis that the Apostles were knaves is quite absurd. Follow it out to the end, and imagine these twelve men meeting after Jesus' death and conspiring to say that he has risen from the dead. This means attacking all the powers that be. The human heart is singularly susceptible to fickleness, to change, to promises, to bribery. One of them had only to deny his story under these

inducements, or still more because of possible imprisonment, tortures and death, and they would all have been lost. Follow that out. (Pascal, Pensees 322, 310)

(2) If they made up the story, they were the most creative, clever, intelligent fantasists in history, far surpassing Shakespeare, or Dante or Tolkien. Fisherman's "fish stories" are never that elaborate, that convincing, that life-changing, and that enduring.

(3) The disciples' character argues strongly against such a conspiracy on the part of all of them, with no dissenters. They were simple, honest, common peasants, not cunning, conniving liars. They weren't even lawyers! Their sincerity is proved by their words *and* deeds. They preached a resurrected Christ and they lived a resurrected Christ. They willingly died for their "conspiracy." Nothing proves sincerity like martyrdom. The change in their lives from fear to faith, despair to confidence, confusion to certitude, runaway cowardice to steadfast boldness under threat and persecution, not only proves their sincerity but testifies to some powerful cause of it. Can a lie cause such a transformation? Are truth and goodness such enemies that the greatest good in history—sanctity—has come from the greatest lie?

In the midst of the tyranny of the persecutors, an innumerable throng of people, both simple and learned, flocked to the Christian faith. In this faith there are truths proclaimed that surpass every human intellect; the pleasures of the flesh are curbed; it is taught that the things of the world should be spurned. Now, for the minds of mortal men to assent to these things is the greatest of miracles....This wonderful conversion of the world to the Christian faith is the clearest witness....For it would be truly more wonderful than all signs if the world had been led by simple and humble men to believe such lofty truths, to accomplish such difficult actions, and to have such high hopes. (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 6)

(4) There could be no possible motive for such a lie. Lies are always told for some selfish advantage. What advantage did the "conspirators" derive from their "lie" ? They were hated, scorned, persecuted, excommunicated, imprisoned, tortured, exiled, crucified, boiled alive, roasted, beheaded, disemboweled and fed to lions—hardly a catalog of perks!

(5) If the resurrection was a lie, the Jews would have produced the corpse and nipped this feared superstition in the bud. All they had to do was go to the tomb and get it. The Roman soldiers and their leaders were on their side, not the Christians'. And if the Jews couldn't get the body because the disciples stole it, how did they do that? The arguments against the swoon theory hold here too: unarmed peasants could not have overpowered Roman soldiers or rolled away a great stone while they slept on duty.

(6) The disciples could not have gotten away with proclaiming the resurrection in Jerusalem-same time, same place, full of eyewitnesses—if it had been a lie. William Lane Craig says,

(7) If there had been a conspiracy, it would certainly have been unearthed by the disciples' adversaries, who had both the interest and the power to expose any fraud. Common experience shows that such intrigues are inevitably exposed (Craig, ibid).

Refutation of the Hallucination Theory: Thirteen Arguments

If you thought you saw a dead man walking and talking, wouldn't you think it more likely that you were hallucinating than that you were seeing correctly? Why then not think the same thing about Christ's resurrection?

(1) There were too many witnesses. Hallucinations are private, individual, subjective. Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene, to the disciples minus Thomas, to the disciples including Thomas, to the two disciples at Emmaus, to the fisherman on the shore, to James (his "brother" or cousin), and even to five hundred people at once (1 Cor 15:3-8). Even three different witnesses are enough for a kind of psychological trigonometry; over five hundred is about as public as you can wish. And Paul says in this passage (v. 6) that most of the five hundred are still alive, inviting any reader to check the truth of the story by questioning the eyewitnesses—he could never have done this and gotten away with it, given the power, resources and numbers of his enemies, if it were not true.

(2) The witnesses were qualified. They were simple, honest, moral people who had firsthand knowledge of the facts.

(3) The five hundred saw Christ together, at the same time and place. This is even more remarkable than five hundred private "hallucinations" at different times and places of the same Jesus. Five hundred separate Elvis sightings may be dismissed, but if five hundred simple fishermen in Maine saw, touched and talked with him at once, in the same town, that would be a different matter. (The only other dead person we know of who is reported to have appeared to hundreds of qualified and skeptical eyewitnesses at once is Mary the mother of Jesus [at Fatima, to 70,000]. And that was not a claim of physical resurrection but of a vision.)

(4) Hallucinations usually last a few seconds or minutes; rarely hours. This one hung around for forty days (Acts 1:3).

(5) Hallucinations usually happen only once, except to the insane. This one returned many times, to ordinary people (Jn 20:19-21:14; Acts 1:3).

(6) Hallucinations come from within, from what we already know, at least unconsciously. This one said and did surprising and unexpected things (Acts 1:4,9)—like a real person and unlike a dream.

(7) Not only did the disciples not expect this, they didn't even believe it at first—neither Peter, nor the women, nor Thomas, nor the eleven. They thought he was a ghost; he had to eat something to prove he was not (Lk 24:36-43).

(8) Hallucinations do not eat. The resurrected Christ did, on at least two occasions (Lk 24:42-43; Jn 21:1-14).

(9) The disciples touched him (Mt 28:9; Lk 24:39; Jn 20:27).

(10) They also spoke with him, and he spoke back. Figments of your imagination do not hold profound, extended conversations with you, unless you have the kind of mental disorder that isolates you. But this "hallucination" conversed with at least eleven people at once, for forty days (Acts 1:3).

(11) The apostles could not have believed in the "hallucination" if Jesus' corpse had still been in the tomb. This is a very simple and telling point; for if it was a hallucination, where was the corpse? They would have checked for it; if it was there, they could not have believed.

(12) If the apostles had hallucinated and then spread their hallucinogenic story, the Jews would have stopped it by producing the body—unless the disciples had stolen it, in which case we are back with the conspiracy theory and all its difficulties.

(13) A hallucination would explain only the post-resurrection appearances; it would not explain the empty tomb, the rolled-away stone, or the inability to produce the corpse. No theory can explain all these data except a real resurrection. C.S. Lewis says,

Refutation of the Myth Theory: Six Arguments

(1) The style of the Gospels is radically and clearly different from the style of all the myths. Any literary scholar who knows and appreciates myths can verify this. There are no overblown, spectacular, childishly exaggerated events. Nothing is arbitrary. Everything fits in. Everything is meaningful. The hand of a master is at work here.

Psychological depth is at a maximum. In myth it is at a minimum. In myth, such spectacular external events happen that it would be distracting to add much internal depth of character. That is why it is ordinary people like Alice who are the protagonists of extra-ordinary adventures like Wonderland. That character depth and development of everyone in the Gospels—especially, of course, Jesus himself—is remarkable. It is also done with an incredible economy of words. Myths are verbose; the Gospels are laconic (concise).

There are also telltale marks of eyewitness description, like the little detail of Jesus writing in the sand when asked whether to stone the adulteress or not (Jn 8:6). No one knows why this is put in; nothing comes of it. The only explanation is that the writer saw it. If this detail and others like it throughout all four Gospels were invented, then a first-century tax collector (Matthew), a "young man" (Mark), a doctor (Luke), and a fisherman (John) all independently invented the new genre of realistic fantasy nineteen centuries before it was reinvented in the twentieth.

The stylistic point is argued so well by C.S. Lewis in "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism" that I strongly urge you to read it as it is the best comprehensive anti-demythologizing essay I have seen.

Let us be even more specific. Let us compare the Gospels with two particular mythic writings from around that time to see for ourselves the stylistic differences. The first is the so-called Gospel of Peter, a forgery from around A.D. 125 which John Dominic Crossan (of the "Jesus

Seminar"), a current media darling among the doubters, insists is earlier than the four Gospels. As William Lane Craig puts it:

In this account, the tomb is not only surrounded by Roman guards but also by all the Jewish Pharisees and elders as well as a great multitude from all the surrounding countryside who have come to watch the resurrection. Suddenly in the night there rings out a loud voice in heaven, and two men descend from heaven to the tomb. The stone over the door rolls back by itself, and they go into the tomb. The three men come out of the tomb, two of them holding up the third man. The heads of the two men reach up into the clouds, but the head of the third man reaches beyond the clouds. Then a cross comes out of the tomb, and a voice from heaven asks, 'Have you preached to them that sleep?' And the cross answers, 'Yes.' (*Apologetics*, p. 189)

Here is a second comparison, from Richard Purtill:

It may be worthwhile to take a quick look, for purposes of comparison at the closest thing we have around the time of the Gospels to an attempt at a realistic fantasy. This is the story of Apollonius of Tyana, written about A.D. 250 by Flavius Philostratus....There is some evidence that a neo-Pythagorean sage named Apollonius may really have lived, and thus Philostratus' work is a real example of what have thought the Gospels to be: a fictionalized account of the life of a real sage and teacher, introducing miraculous elements to build up the prestige of the central figure. It thus gives us a good look at what a real example of a fictionalized biography would look like, written at a time and place not too far removed from those in which the Gospels were written.

The first thing we notice is the fairy-tale atmosphere. There is a rather nice little vampire story, which inspired a minor poem by Keats entitled Lamia. There are animal stories about, for instance, snakes in India big enough to drag off and eat an elephant. The sage wanders from country to country and wherever he goes he is likely to be entertained by the king or emperor, who holds long conversations with him and sends him on his way with camels and precious stones.

Here is a typical passage about healing miracles: 'A woman who had had seven miscarriages was cured through the prayers of her husband, as follows. The Wise Man told the husband, when his wife was in labor, to bring a live rabbit under his cloak to the place where she was, walk around her and immediately release the rabbit; for she would lose her womb as well as her baby if the rabbit was not immediately driven away.' [Bk 3, sec 39]

(2) A second problem is that there was not enough time for myth to develop. The original demythologizers pinned their case onto a late second-century date for the writing of the Gospels; several generations have to pass before the added mythological elements can be mistakenly believed to be facts. Eyewitnesses would be around before that to discredit the new, mythic versions. We know of other cases where myths and legends of miracles developed around a

religious founder—for example, Buddha, Lao-tzu and Muhammad. In each case, many generations passed before the myth surfaced.

The dates for the writing of the Gospels have been pushed back by every empirical manuscript discovery; only abstract hypothesizing pushes the date forward. Almost no knowledgeable scholar today holds what Bultmann said it was necessary to hold in order to believe the myth theory, namely, that there is no first-century textual evidence that Christianity began with a divine and resurrected Christ, not a human and dead one.

Some scholars still dispute the first-century date for the Gospels, especially John's. But no one disputes that Paul's letters were written within the lifetime of eyewitnesses to Christ. So let us argue from Paul's letters. Either these letters contain myth or they do not. If so, there is lacking the several generations necessary to build up a commonly believed myth. There is not even *one* generation. If these letters are *not* myth, then the Gospels are not either, for Paul affirms all the main claims of the Gospels.

Julius Muller put the anti-myth argument this way:

One cannot imagine how such a series of legends could arise in an historical age, obtain universal respect, and supplant the historical recollection of the true character [Jesus]....if eyewitnesses were still at hand who could be questioned respecting the truth of the recorded marvels. Hence, legendary fiction, as it likes not the clear present time but prefers the mysterious gloom of gray antiquity, is wont to seek a remoteness of age, along with that of space, and to remove its boldest and most rare and wonderful creations into a very remote and unknown land. (*The Theory of Myths in Its Application to the Gospel History Examined and Confuted* [London, 1844], p. 26)

Muller challenged his nineteenth-century contemporaries to produce a single example anywhere in history of a great myth or legend arising around a historical figure and being generally believed within thirty years after that figure's death. No one has ever answered him.

(3) The myth theory has two layers. The first layer is the historical Jesus, who was not divine, did not claim divinity, performed no miracles, and did not rise from the dead. The second, later, mythologized layer is the Gospels as we have them, with a Jesus who claimed to be divine, performed miracles and rose from the dead. The problem with this theory is simply that there is not the slightest bit of any real evidence whatever for the existence of any such first layer. The two-layer cake theory has the first layer made entirely of air—and hot air at that.

William Lane Craig summarizes the evidence—the *lack* of evidence:

“The Gospels are a miraculous story, and we have no other story handed down to us than that contained in the Gospels....The letters of Barnabas and Clement refer to Jesus' miracles and resurrection. Polycarp mentions the resurrection of Christ, and Irenaeus relates that he had heard Polycarp tell of Jesus' miracles. Ignatius speaks of the resurrection. Quadratus reports that

persons were still living who had been healed by Jesus. Justin Martyr mentions the miracles of Christ. No relic of a non-miraculous story exists. That the original story should be lost and replaced by another goes beyond any known example of corruption of even oral tradition, not to speak of the experience of written transmissions. These facts show that the story in the Gospels was in substance the same story that Christians had at the beginning. This means...that the resurrection of Jesus was always a part of the story." (*Apologetics*, chapter 6)

(4) A little detail, seldom noticed, is significant in distinguishing the Gospels from myth: the first witnesses of the resurrection were women. In first-century Judaism, women had low social status and no legal right to serve as witnesses. If the empty tomb were an invented legend, its inventors surely would not have had it discovered by women, whose testimony was considered worthless. If, on the other hand, the writers were simply reporting what they saw, they would have to tell the truth, however socially and legally inconvenient.

(5) The New Testament could not be myth misinterpreted and confused with fact because it specifically distinguishes the two and repudiates the mythic interpretation (2 Peter 1:16). Since it explicitly says it is not myth, if it *is* myth it is a deliberate lie rather than myth. The dilemma still stands. It is either truth or lie, whether deliberate (conspiracy) or non-deliberate (hallucination). There is no escape from the horns of this dilemma. Once a child asks whether Santa Claus is real, your yes becomes a lie, not myth, if he is not literally real. Once the New Testament distinguishes myth from fact, it becomes a lie if the resurrection is not fact.

(6) William Lane Craig has summarized the traditional textual arguments with such clarity, condensation and power that we quote him here at length. The following arguments (rearranged and outlined from *Knowing the Truth About the Resurrection*) prove two things: first, that the Gospels were written by the disciples, not later myth-makers, and second, that the Gospels we have today are essentially the same as the originals.

(A) Proof that the Gospels were written by eyewitnesses:

1. Internal evidence, from the Gospels themselves:

   a. The style of writing in the Gospels is simple and alive, what we would expect from their traditionally accepted authors.
   b. Moreover, since Luke was written before Acts, and since Acts was written prior to the death of Paul, Luke must have an early date, which speaks for its authenticity.
   c. The Gospels also show an intimate knowledge of Jerusalem prior to its destruction in A.D. 70. The Gospels are full of proper names, dates, cultural details, historical events, and customs and opinions of that time.
   d. Jesus' prophecies of that event (the destruction of Jerusalem) must have been written prior to Jerusalem's fall, for otherwise the church would have separated out the apocalyptic element in the prophecies, which makes them appear to concern the end of the world. Since the end of the world did not come about when Jerusalem was destroyed,

the so-called prophecies of its destruction that were really written after the city was destroyed would not have made that event appear so closely connected with the end of the world. Hence, the Gospels must have been written prior to A.D. 70.

e. The stories of Jesus' human weaknesses and of the disciples' faults also bespeak the Gospels' accuracy.

f. Furthermore, it would have been impossible for forgers to put together so consistent a narrative as that which we find in the Gospels. The Gospels do not try to suppress apparent discrepancies, which indicates their originality (written by eyewitnesses). There is no attempt at harmonization between the Gospels, such as we might expect from forgers.

g. The Gospels do not contain anachronisms; the authors appear to have been first-century Jews who were witnesses of the events.

We may conclude that there is no more reason to doubt that the Gospels come from the traditional authors than there is to doubt that the works of Philo or Josephus are authentic, *except* that the Gospels contain supernatural events.

2. External evidence:

a. The disciples must have left *some* writings, engaged as they were in giving lessons to and counseling believers who were geographically distant; and what could these writings be if not the Gospels and epistles themselves? Eventually the apostles would have needed to publish accurate narratives of Jesus' history, so that any spurious attempts would be discredited and the genuine Gospels preserved.
b. There were many eyewitnesses who were still alive when the books were written who could testify whether they came from their purported authors or not.
c. The extra-biblical testimony unanimously attributes the Gospels to their traditional authors: the Epistle of Barnabas, the Epistle of Clement, the Shepherd of Hermes, Theophilus, Hippolytus, Origen, Quadratus, Irenaeus, Melito, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Dionysius, Tertullian, Cyprian, Tatian, Caius, Athanasius, Cyril, up to Eusebius in A.D. 315, even Christianity's opponents conceded this: Celsus, Porphyry, Emperor Julian.
d. With a single exception, no apocryphal gospel is ever quoted by any known author during the first three hundred years after Christ. In fact there is no evidence that any inauthentic gospel whatever existed in the first century, in which all four Gospels and Acts were written.

(B) Proof that the Gospels we have today are the same Gospels originally written:

1. Because of the need for instruction and personal devotion, these writings must have been copied many times, which increases the chances of preserving the original text.

2. In fact, no other ancient work is available in so many copies and languages, and yet all these various versions agree in content.
3. The text has also remained unmarred by heretical additions. The abundance of manuscripts over a wide geographical distribution demonstrates that the text has been transmitted with only trifling discrepancies. The differences that do exist are quite minor and are the result of unintentional mistakes.
4. The quotations of the New Testament books in the early Church Fathers all coincide.
5. The Gospels could not have been corrupted without a great outcry on the part of all orthodox Christians.
6. No one could have corrupted *all* the manuscripts.
7. There is no precise time when the falsification could have occurred, since, as we have seen, the New Testament books are cited by the Church Fathers in regular and close succession. The text could not have been falsified before all external testimony, since then the apostles were still alive and could repudiate such tampering.
8. The text of the New Testament is every bit as good as the text of the classical works of antiquity. To repudiate the textual parity of the Gospels would be to reverse all the rules of criticism and to reject all the works of antiquity, since the text of those works is less certain than that of the Gospels.

1 Corinthians 15:1-9