

**How Does the New Testament Stack Up Against Other Ancient Records?
A Study of the New Testament as the Best Authenticated Record in Ancient History**

- “There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a **wealth of good textual attestation** as the New Testament.”¹
- “No other ancient book is so **well authenticated** [as the New Testament.]”²
- “The New Testament is far and away the **best attested work** of Greek or Latin literature in the ancient world.”³

I. Overview

The New Testament stands in a class by itself. No other record in the ancient world comes remotely close to the level of authentication and evidence for the New Testament:

- Greater documentation preservation – both quality and quantity;
- Superior eyewitness testimony;
- Stronger corroborating evidence.

When experts apply the same historical and critical standard to the New Testament and other ancient works of history, the New Testament is an overwhelming winner.

For this study, we will examine comparative proof. In other words, how does the New Testament stack up against other ancient works under three key historical criteria:

- Documentation: How Do Ancient Records Compare on Preserved Proof?
- Eyewitnesses: Do Other Ancient Records Have Comparable Proof?
- Corroborating Proof: Do Other Ancient Records Have as Much Supporting Data?

When the evidence is tallied up, the New Testament outscores the other ancient records by a wide margin. Based on the comparative proof, the New Testament has no equal among the ancient records when measured against the quantity, quality, and early dates of the supporting evidence.

¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments: How We Got Our English Bible*, p. 178 (1963) (bold added).

² Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 229 (2004) (bold added).

³ Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, & Daniel Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Mislead Popular Culture*, p. 71 (2006) (bold added).

II. Documentation: How Do Ancient Records Compare on Preserved Proof?

For ancient records, originals no longer exist. How do historians reconstruct such originals? The well-recognized tool is textual criticism (or the bibliographic test): (1) how many copies exist; and (2) how close in time are the copies to the original. Based on these criteria, the New Testament far outpaces the authenticity and attestation of other ancient records.⁴

A. What the Skeptics Are Saying

Until recently, scholars universally acknowledged that the New Testament copies met “an extraordinarily high degree of accuracy.”⁵ Then Bart Ehrman (atheist professor) published the pop-culture book, *Misquoting Jesus*, challenging the New Testament as “error-ridden copies” with “the vast majority of these [copies] are centuries removed from the originals.”⁶

Astonishingly, Bart Ehrman said the opposite in the very same year. In a leading text co-authored with the premier expert on textual criticism (Bruce Metzger), Bart Ehrman admitted:

We can appreciate **how bountiful the attestation is for the New Testament** if we compare the surviving textual materials of other ancient authors who wrote during the early centuries of Christianity.

* * *

In contrast with these [other historical] figures, the textual critic of **the New Testament is embarrassed by the wealth of material**. Furthermore, the work of many ancient authors has been preserved only in manuscripts that date from the Middle Ages (sometimes the late Middle Ages), far removed from the time at which they lived and wrote. On the contrary, the time between the composition of the books of the New Testament and the earliest extant copies is relatively brief. Instead of the lapse of a millennium or more, as is the case of not a few classical authors, several papyrus manuscripts of portions of the New Testament are extant that were copied within a century or so after the composition of the original documents.⁷

In other words, no other ancient record comes remotely close to the accuracy of the New Testament. Given that Bart Ehrman signed his name to this scholarly book that tells the truth, his pop-culture book (*Misquoting Jesus*) should be discarded as untrustworthy.

⁴ Clay Jones, “The Bibliographical Test Updated,” *Christian Research Institute*, p. 3 (Apr. 12, 2023) (<https://www.equip.org/articles/the-bibliographical-test-updated/>); Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 229 (2004); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 12-13 (2024).

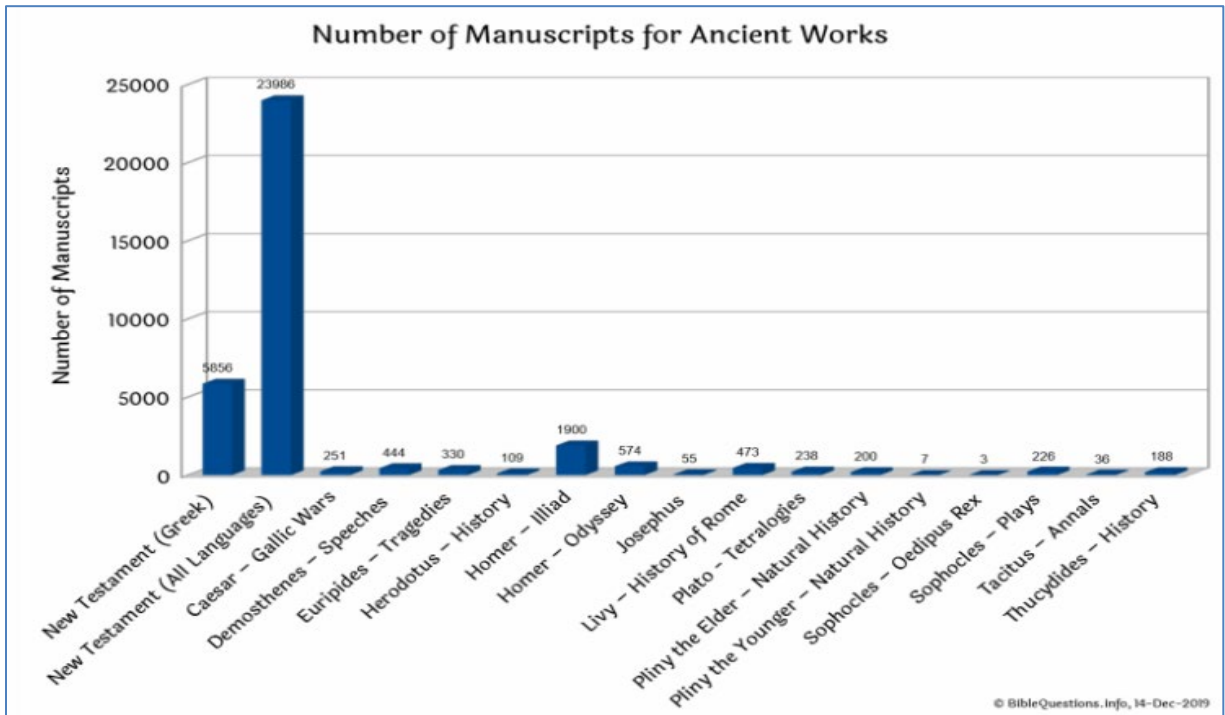
⁵ Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*, p. 609 (2016).

⁶ Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p.7 (2005).

⁷ Bruce Metzger & Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 4th Ed., pp. 50-51 (2005) (bold added) (<https://archive.org/details/TheTextOfNewTestament4thEdit/page/n5/mode/2up>).

B. Quantity of Copies Compared (How Many?)

For the first prong of the bibliographical test, the New Testament has an unmatched number of copies, thus allowing us to zero in on the original text with great accuracy.



As this chart shows, the New Testament manuscripts dwarf the rest of the ancient texts by more than an order of magnitude.⁸

With this “wealth of material,” experts like Bruce Metzger apply textual criticism tools to determine what the original said with greater accuracy than any other ancient work.⁹ If someone challenges whether the original words of the New Testament have been preserved, this attack applies ten-fold (or more) to the Greek and Roman works that historians have long accepted as accurate and well-attested.¹⁰

⁸ Paul Gibson, “How does the Quantity of New Testament Manuscripts Compare to Other Ancient Manuscripts?” *Bible Questions.info* (Dec. 14, 2019) (<https://biblequestions.info/2019/12/14/how-does-the-quantity-of-new-testament-manuscripts-compare-to-other-ancient-manuscripts/>).

⁹ Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 229 (2004) (finding a 99.5% accuracy rate far above other ancient works); Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*, p. 659 (2016) (99% accuracy for the original text).

¹⁰ Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, & Daniel Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Misperceive Popular Culture*, p. 70 (2006) (if skeptics reject the New Testament, then “whatever doubts we cast on the text of the New Testament must be cast a hundredfold on virtually any other ancient text”).

C. Dating of Originals vs. Copies (How Early?)

As the second benchmark for authenticity, historians compare the gap between the original record and the earliest copies of that record. Again, the New Testament easily prevails.

New Testament. The earliest New Testament fragments date from about AD 114-30, followed by books around AD 200-25, most of the New Testament by AD 250, and finally the full New Testament by AD 325.¹¹ Furthermore, the early Church fathers began citing and quoting the New Testament books between AD 95 and AD 110.¹²

Other Ancient Works. In stark contrast, the other ancient works generally have gaps of time between the original and copy of 400 years to **over 1,000 years**.¹³

Author	Ancient Work	Original vs. Copy Dates	Time Gap
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 BC vs. 400 BC	400 years
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480-425 BC vs. AD 10 th Century	1,350 years
Plato	<i>Tetralogies</i>	400 BC vs. AD 895	1,300 years
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100-44 BC vs. AD 9 th Century	950 years
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 BC – AD 17 vs. early AD 5 th C.	400 years
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	AD 100 vs. AD 850 to AD 1100	750-950 years
Pliny the Elder	<i>Natural History</i>	AD 49-79 vs. AD 5 th C. fragment vs. AD 15 th Century manuscript	400 years 750 years
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	BC 460-400 vs. 3 rd C. BC fragment vs. AD 900 manuscript	200 years 1,350 years
Demosthenes	<i>Speeches</i>	300 BC vs. BC 1 st C. fragment vs. AD 9 th or 10 th C. manuscripts	200 years 1,400 years

As confirmed by this data, the New Testament copies reflect dates much closer – hundreds of years closer – to the dates of the original text.

In summary, the New Testament beats the other ancient records on both prongs of the well-established historical criteria.¹⁴

¹¹ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. 38 (1999); see also Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 15-16 (2024).

¹² Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 235-36 (2004) (Clement citing 11 books by AD 95; Ignatius citing 24 books by AD 107; Polycarp citing 18 books by AD 110).

¹³ Clay Jones, "The Bibliographical Test Updated," *Christian Research Institute*, (Apr. 12, 2023) (<https://www.equip.org/articles/the-bibliographical-test-updated/>); see also Paul Gibson, "How does the Quantity of New Testament Manuscripts Compare to Other Ancient Manuscripts?" *Bible Questions.info* (Dec. 14, 2019) (<https://biblequestions.info/2019/12/14/how-does-the-quantity-of-new-testament-manuscripts-compare-to-other-ancient-manuscripts/>); Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. 38 (1999); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 13-14 (2024).

¹⁴ See, e.g., Bruce Metzger & Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, pp. 49-51 (2005).

- “Since the New Testament manuscripts outstrip every other ancient manuscript in sheer number and proximity to the autographs (originals), the New Testament should be regarded as having been accurately transmitted.”¹⁵
- “[T]o be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested as the New Testament.”¹⁶

On a comparative basis, the New Testament stands alone at the top as the best attested and authenticated record in ancient history.

III. Eyewitnesses: Do Other Ancient Records Have Comparable Proof?

Ancient historians not only valued eyewitness testimony above other sources of proof, but they even mocked those who tried to write history without eyewitnesses.¹⁷ In today’s historical arena or the courtroom, eyewitness testimony serves as compelling – even decisive – evidence.¹⁸

A. Eyewitness Testimony in the New Testament

Eyewitness testimony lays a cornerstone for the New Testament, as indicated by a host of sources. This topic will be addressed in greater detail in the next session.

New Testament’s Plain Language. Eyewitness testimony surfaces in multiple passages of the New Testament.¹⁹

Early Church Sources. The Church’s early leaders and sources (e.g., Muratorian Fragment, Papias, Irenaeus, Polycarp, and Tertullian) confirmed such eyewitness testimony.²⁰

¹⁵ Clay Jones, “The Bibliographical Test Updated,” *Christian Research Institute*, (Apr. 12, 2023) (<https://www.equip.org/articles/the-bibliographical-test-updated/>).

¹⁶ John Warrick Montgomery, *History and Christianity*, p. 29 (1964); see also Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, & Daniel Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Mislead Popular Culture*, p. 70 (2006) (if skeptics reject the New Testament, then “whatever doubts we cast on the text of the New Testament must be cast a hundredfold on virtually any other ancient text”).

¹⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 8 (“The ancient historians – such as Thucydides, Polybius, Josephus, and Tacitus – were convinced that true history could only be written while events were still within living memory”); *id.*, p. 9 (“Good historians were highly critical of those who relied largely on written sources”); p. 23 (“Polybius’s savage criticism of the work of historian Timaeus, who relied entirely on written sources”) (2017).

¹⁸ Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 38, 45 (2024) (“the strongest evidence possible”); Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, p. 29 (2008) (“best evidence”); Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 109 (2007) (“strongest evidences that these events did happen”).

¹⁹ See, e.g., Luke 1:2 (“eyewitnesses”); 2 Peter 1:16 (“eyewitnesses”); John 19:42 (“he who has seen has testified”); Acts 1:21-22 (“witness”); 1 Corinthians 15:3-9 (multiple witnesses); 1 John 1:1 (eyewitness).

²⁰ See, e.g., Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Truth*, pp. 109-10 n. 1, p. 110 n. 3 & 5 (2007); Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, p. 69 (2003); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 295 (2017).

Legal Experts. Legal professionals who really know eyewitness testimony have identified such evidence that supports the New Testament.²¹

Top Eyewitness Scholars. Multiple scholars have found that eyewitnesses serve a critical role in supporting the New Testament.²²

In summary, the New Testament authors published their works within the living memory of the eyewitnesses who saw, heard, and even touched Jesus.²³

B. Comparison with Ancient Records

Many other ancient records were not written until long after the eyewitnesses had died – meaning that they lacked verification by first-hand testimony from eyewitnesses.

Buddha’s Sayings (500-year gap). The written form of Buddha’s sayings did not occur until 500 to 900 years later:

Buddhists possess nothing that corresponds to the New Testament. The “continuing tradition” is all that is clearly attested. The bulk of the selections in this book was written down between A.D. 100 and 400, in other words **about 600 to 900 years** after Buddha’s demise. For the **first five hundred years** the [Buddhist] Scriptures were orally transmitted.²⁴

Given this delay of over 500 years, no eyewitnesses remained to confirm or deny whether Buddha actually spoke these words.²⁵

Krishna’s Sayings (4,200-year gap). Krishna’s “words were not recorded for approximately 4200 years later.”²⁶

²¹ W. Mark Lanier, *Christianity on Trial*, pp. 193-96 (2014); J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity*, pp. 19-20 (2023); Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, pp. 14-15 (2016).

²² See, e.g., Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 23-26, 37-38, 44-47, 51-52, 83-86, 117-18, 259-60, 157-65 (2024); Richard Bauckman, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, multiple pages (2017); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 59-60 (2024); Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, pp. 145 (2009); Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One*, p. 189 (2016); Darrell Bock in James K. Beilby & Paul Eddy, eds., *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, pp. 247, 251 (2009); Timothy Paul Jones, *Misquoting Truth*, pp. 107-20 (2007).

²³ See e.g., Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 7 (2017); Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*, p. 143 (2000); Craig Blomberg, “Where Do We Start Studying Jesus?” *Jesus Under Fire*, p. 29 (1995) quoted in Josh & Sean McDowell, *Evidence for the Resurrection*, pp. 143 (2009); see also Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*, p. 17 (2016).

²⁴ Edward Conze, editor & translator, *Buddhist Scriptures*, pp. 5-6 (1959) (https://archive.org/details/buddhistscripturesedwardconze_202003_470_X/page/n3/mode/2up).

²⁵ *Id.*, p. 6 (any effort to identify the original words “leads to nothing but ill will and fruitless disputes”).

²⁶ Gary Habermas, *The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ among the Major World Religions*, p. 21 (2016).

Muhammad's Biography (140-year gap). At least 140 years passed before anyone wrote Muhammad's biography:

For these reasons and others, third, *no one wrote a biography of Muhammad's life until about 140 years after Muhammad died*. By that time, there were certainly **no eyewitnesses** of Muhammad's life, and people were generations removed from the events they discussed.²⁷

Alexander the Great's Biographies (250-400-year gaps). While Diodorus wrote a biography in the first century BC (250-300 years after Alexander's death), the better works by Plutarch and Arrian published in the early second century AD – a gap of over 400 years.²⁸

Julius Caesar's Biography (over 150-year gap). Suetonius wrote *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* more than 150 years after Julius Caesar's death.²⁹

In summary, the New Testament authors not only wrote during the lives of the eyewitnesses, but they also wrote much closer to the time of the events:

After all, critical scholars have long criticized the Gospel of John for being written some 65 years after the crucifixion, although Tacitus and Suetonius wrote about the first two Caesars approximately 100 to 160 years after their deaths! The distance from the death of Julius Caesar to those Roman historians is **more than double the distance** from Jesus's crucifixion to the composition of John.³⁰

Thus, the New Testament is not only built on the best historical evidence (eyewitness testimony), but it offers greater reliability than other ancient sources written long after the eyewitnesses died.

IV. Corroborating Proof: Do Other Ancient Records Have as Much Supporting Data?

As another measure of reliability, historians ask how many independent sources support an ancient record. Again, the New Testament enjoys a wealth of independent sources attesting to its reliability and authenticity.

²⁷ Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One*, p. 260 (2016) (italics in original; bold added); see also Edwin Yamauchi, *What's so Special about Jesus? Compared with Buddha, Muhammad, Socrates and Zoroaster*, p. 4 (1971) ("Some two centuries after the prophet's death, Al-Bukhari undertook to sift through some 600,000 traditions to obtain 7,000 *Hadith* which he believed were authentic") (<https://institute.wycliffecollege.ca/resources/So%20Special%20About%20Jesus.pdf>).

²⁸ Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*, p. 18 (2016).

²⁹ Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 118 (2024); see also Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament*, p. 18, n. 33 (2016) ("Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* . . . begin with Julius, who died about 115 years before Suetonius's birth").

³⁰ Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 119 (2024).

A. Multiple Sources for the New Testament

A wealth of independent sources confirms the New Testament's reliability, including: (1) non-Christian sources; (2) early Church fathers; and (3) the New Testament itself.

Non-Christian Sources. A host of non-Christian historical sources (some hostile to Christianity) offer confirmation of many key New Testament facts. These sources include Josephus (Jewish historian), Tacitus (Roman historian), Suetonius (Roman historian), Pliny the Younger (Roman administrator), Emperor Trajan, Emperor Hadrian, Mishnah and Talmud (two Jewish sources), Lucian (Greek historian and satirist), Mara bar Serapion (Syrian writer), and Celsus (Greek philosopher).³¹ These key facts include the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.³²

Christian Sources. Within 80 years of Jesus' crucifixion, early Church fathers corroborated key details about Jesus' life, death and resurrection.³³ Furthermore, early Church records quoted the New Testament so extensively that historians could reconstruct nearly the entire New Testament without the copies of the 5,700 Greek manuscripts.

- Bruce Metzger & Bart Ehrman. "Besides textual evidence derived from New Testament Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic has available the numerous scriptural quotations included in the commentaries, sermons, and other treatises written by early Church fathers. [Note omitted]. Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the **reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.**"³⁴
- Norman Geisler & Frank Turek. "Because the early church fathers – men of the second and third centuries such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, and others – quote the New Testament so much (36,289 times, to be exact) that **all but eleven verses of the New Testament can be reconstructed just from their quotations.**"³⁵

³¹ Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 167-209 (2024); John Dominic Crossan in James Beilby & Paul Eddy, eds., *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, p. 86 (2009); Darrell Bock, *id.*, p. 100; Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 90-99 (2024); see also Bryan Windle, "Top Ten Historical References to Jesus Outside of the Bible," *Bible Archaeology Report* (2022) (both Christian & non-Christian sources) (<https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2022/11/18>).

³² Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 223 (2004); see also Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, pp. 384-385 (1998) quoted in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. 60 (1999).

³³ These early Church fathers included: (1) Clement writing from Rome (about AD 95); Ignatius writing from Smyrna in Asia Minor (about AD 107); and (3) Polycarp writing from Smyrna in Asia Minor (about AD 110). Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 235-36 (2004).

³⁴ Bruce Metzger & Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament*, 4th ed., p. 126 (2005) (bold added).

³⁵ Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 228 (2004) (bold added).

New Testament Sources. In addition to the Christian and non-Christian sources above, the New Testament itself contains a host of independent sources, including Mark, Q (independent material common to Luke and Matthew), L (material unique to Luke), M (unique material in Matthew), John, Acts, the Epistles, and other letters.³⁶

B. Comparison of New Testament to Other Ancient Records

Other ancient records simply do not have the same extraordinary level of corroboration reflected in the New Testament sources discussed above.

Historical Leaders. Emperor Tiberius (AD 14-37) reigned over the vast Roman empire for over twenty years,³⁷ but more independent sources refer to Jesus:

Just how many non-Christian sources are there that mention Jesus? Including Josephus, there are ten known non-Christian writers who mention Jesus within 150 years of his life. By contrast, over the same 150 years, there are nine non-Christian sources who mention Tiberius Caesar, the Roman *emperor* at the time of Jesus. So discounting all the Christian sources, Jesus is actually mentioned by one more source than the Roman emperor. If you include the Christian sources, **authors mentioning Jesus outnumber those mentioning Tiberius 43 to 10.**³⁸

In fact, many accounts of ancient history “rest on just one ancient source,” thus making two sources quite unusual.³⁹

Religious Leaders. Similarly, other religious leaders lack the wealth of evidence supporting Jesus as a historical figure:

Even the Gospels and Acts, which are usually considered to be the latest of this information [compared to the Epistles and creeds], date far closer to the events in question than virtually any sources

³⁶ See, e.g., Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 6-7 (2020); Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?* pp. 171-72 (2012) (“at least seven” independent accounts in the Gospels); Darrell Bock in James Beilby & Paul Eddy, eds., *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, pp. 101-02 (2009) (independent sources in Epistles); James Dunn, *id.*, pp. 96-97 (same); Luke Timothy Johnson, *id.*, p. 92 (same); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 578 (2017) (early creeds); Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, pp. 386, 454, n.56 (2024) (early creeds); Justin Bass, *The Bedrock of Christianity*, pp. 85-86 (2020) (early creeds); Benjamin Shaw, *Trustworthy*, pp. 55-56 (2024) (early creeds); James Dunn in James Beilby & Paul Eddy, eds., *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, p. 97 (2009) (Acts as a source); Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?* p. 172 (2012) (Acts as a source); A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, p. 189 (1963) (“For Acts, the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming”).

³⁷ John Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Vol. I, p. 90 (191).

³⁸ Norman Geisler & Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, p. 228 (2004) (bold added; italics in original).

³⁹ Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church*, p. 197 (1998).

for any other major religious founders. **There is nothing like this mountain of evidence in ancient history for any other persons.**⁴⁰

V. **Conclusion**

No other ancient record in history comes close to the quantity, quality, and early dates found in the documentation and evidence that lay the historical foundation for the New Testament. When measured against the same historical criteria applied to other ancient records, the New Testament represents the most reliable and best authenticated work in all ancient history.

David Z. Bodenheimer
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⁴⁰ Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 477 (2024) (bold added).