

A CASE FOR CHRIST

WHAT'S THE BEST EVIDENCE FOR JESUS?



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What's the best evidence for Jesus? Many Christian apologists and Jesus scholars make a case for the historical Jesus. Having read so much material over the years, this is how I approach the issue. To a great extent I'm summarizing the best arguments, as I see them. But I also have some reservations about the stereotypical apologetic. Because apologist are influenced by other apologists, and scholars read other scholars, that has a conditioning effect, which produces a stereotypical apologetic. The standard apologetic has some good elements, but the conditioning effect fosters tunnel vision, so that other lines of evidence are neglected. In addition, there are bad elements in the standard apologetic.

I. Preliminaries

1. The historical Jesus

The "historical Jesus" is often a downsized Jesus or even a naturalized Jesus. What's left over after the NT is filtered through the sieve of standard criteria. A historical reconstruction of the real Jesus, once we peel back the layers. However, the scope of my post isn't the "historical Jesus" in that residual sense, not about a reconstructed Jesus, hidden behind the NT record, but about the NT Jesus in toto.

Of course, there is a Jesus who stands behind the NT record, independent of the NT record. A Jesus who is, in a sense, bigger than the NT. But for me, the real Jesus corresponds to the NT Jesus. While Jesus is ontologically prior to the record, yet our knowledge of Jesus is epistemologically dependent on the NT record.

2. "Bias"

A stock objection to using the Gospels is the allegation that the Gospels are partisan sources since their writers are Christian. But that's a confused objection:

i) The fact that an author has a viewpoint doesn't mean he's biased. The real question is the source of his viewpoint. Suppose a kid who grew up in the tropics moves to Canada, and sees his first snowman. He excitedly tells his parents about the snowman sighting. Should his discount be reported because he's now a believer in snowmen? But his newfound belief in snowmen isn't a reflection of bias. Prior to his encounter with the snowman, he had no predisposition to believe in snowmen. Indeed, his default plausibility structure might be skeptical of reports about the existence of snowmen. His viewpoint is due to a formative experience rather than a prior belief.

ii) But even in the case of viewpoints that do reflect bias, that doesn't automatically discredit the report. I sometimes see moving objects in the sky. They may be too small or distant for me to clearly make them out. But if the motion is geometric, I assume that's an airplane, and if the motion is erratic, I assume that's a bird. My identification is "biased" because I know about planes and birds, so I use that background knowledge as an interpretive frame of reference. But my predilection doesn't discredit my observation.

iii) If traditional NT authorship is correct, then all the NT writers were converts to Christianity. Nearly all of them were Jewish converts to Christianity, while one (Luke) was a gentile convert to Christianity, although he was probably an intellectual convert to Judaism (Godfearer) prior to his Christian conversion. So all of them came to believe in Jesus.

And, once again, if traditional NT authorship is correct, then all of them came to believe in Jesus by knowing Jesus or knowing people who knew Jesus. That's not bias any more than coming to believe in something generally based on eyewitness experience or eyewitness testimony is bias.

Of course, critics who complain about the Gospels as "biased" sources usually deny that they are based on firsthand knowledge of Jesus. But that needs to be separated from the allegation of bias. Those are distinct issues.

3. Eyewitness memory

i) Another stock objection is the alleged unreliability of eyewitness memory. In particular, people remember events better than words. So how can the Gospels be an accurate record of what Jesus said?

ii) A similar objection is that the phenomenon of the omniscient narrator. Gospel writers sometimes relate incidents which they wouldn't ordinarily be privy to.

Many Christian apologists and evangelical scholars offer naturalistic explanations. And sometimes those make sense. However, treating the Gospels as naturalistic records of supernatural agents and events erects a false dichotomy. The Gospels aren't merely reports about a world containing miracles, revelations, angels and demons—detached from the world they narrate, for the Gospels are products of the same kind of world. So it's artificial to bifurcate the nature of the Gospels from the nature of the world they recount, as if the writers had to be limited to natural means of knowledge. As if fallible, unaided memory, direct observation, or informants was necessarily all they had to go by. For instance, consider Elisha's clairvoyance (2 Kgs 6). It's a philosophical and theological mistake for apologists and evangelical scholars to eliminate inspiration from consideration. Inspiration and revelation are no more or less credible than what the Gospels report.

iii) A related objection is whether "peasants" and fishermen like James, John, and Jude could write good Greek. Now, there are plausible naturalistic explanations, but over and above that, xenoglossy is a gift of the Spirit (according to Acts). So if it came to that, it would be possible for James, John, and Jude to be supernaturally enabled. For that matter, verbal inspiration might do the trick.

But supernatural explanations aren't considered, even by scholars who believe in NT miracles. It illustrates the default secular paradigm that unconsciously conditions so much NT scholarship, even among evangelicals or apologists.

4. Tradition

"Traditions" about Jesus uses the word "tradition" loosely and

misleadingly. For instance, Eusebius has a number of historically useful anecdotes about the apostles. By the time that gets down to him, those are traditions.

By contrast, it's misleading to classify 1 Cor 15:3-8 or Heb 2:4 as "traditions". Rather, those are examples of living memory. While tradition can preserve living memory, tradition is one or more steps removed from living memory.

5. As is often noted, the documentary evidence for Jesus satisfies standard criteria like multiple attestation and the criterion of embarrassment.

II. Non-Christian sources

Christian apologists appeal to non-Christian sources as part of their cumulative case for the historical Jesus, viz. Tacitus, Josephus. You can find this reproduced in many print and online resources. One classic monograph is F. F. Bruce's *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*. A more recent example is Peter Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*, chap. 1.

While this is useful corroborative material, that doesn't mean non-Christian sources are preferable to the NT. Apologists sometimes reach for non-Christian sources to deflect the claim that the NT is a biased source, but that's an ill-conceived objection (see above), and we shouldn't back away from using the NT as our major source.

1. Hostile sources

A subset of non-Christian sources are hostile sources. These have particular apologetic value since a hostile witness is making concessions despite his bias to the contrary. Some pagan critics of Christianity unwittingly corroborate Christianity. Jason Engwer has done a number of posts on that topic. For now I'd like to focus on two interesting examples:

i) The Talmud

Jesus was hanged on Passover Eve. Forty days previously the herald had cried, "He is being led out for stoning, because he has practiced sorcery and led Israel astray and enticed them into apostasy. Whosoever has anything to say in his defense, let him come and declare it." As nothing was brought forward in his defense, he was hanged on Passover Eve. Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 43a.

One day Yehoshua ben Peraḥya was reciting Shema and Jesus came before him with the same request. Yehoshua ben Peraḥya intended to accept his request, and signaled him with his hand to wait until he completed his prayer. Jesus did not understand the signal and thought: He is driving me away. He went and stood a brick upright to serve as an idol and he bowed to it. Yehoshua ben Peraḥya then said to Jesus: Repent. Jesus said to him: This is the tradition that I received from you: Whoever sins and causes the masses to sin is not given the opportunity to repent. And the Master says: Jesus performed sorcery, incited Jews to engage in idolatry, and led Israel astray. Had Yehoshua ben Peraḥya not caused him to despair of atonement, he would not have taken the path of evil. Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 107b.

Although the second anecdote is garbled and polemical, it's striking how these Talmudic anecdotes correspond to the allegations of Christ's enemies in the Gospels. Notice how they grant the supernatural abilities of Jesus, but chalks that up to witchcraft. For detailed analysis:

http://legacy.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Tyndale/staff/Instone-Brewer/prepub/07_Instone_Brewer.pdf

ii) Pliny

In his letter to Emperor Trajan (c. 111 AD), Pliny recounts information from Christians he interrogated. It documents Christian worship extending back to the 1C. Among other things, it mentions that Christians worshipped Jesus as God (or a god, the Latin is ambiguous). These were Christians who refuse to honor Roman civic religion, on pain of death and torture. So for them, the one God was inclusive of Jesus.

iii) Alexamenos graffito

A c. 200 AD graffito from the Roman Palatine depicting a worshiper standing before a crucified man with a donkey head, with the caption "Alexamenos worships his god":

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_Romana/gladiators

Cf. G. M. A. Hanfmann, "The Crucified Donkey Man: Achaïos and Jesus," Günter Kopke & Mary B. Moore, eds. *Studies in Classical Art and Archaeology: A Tribute to Peter Heinrich von Blanckenhagen* (Locust Valley, NY 1979), 206-7; Felicity Harley-McGowan, 'The Alexamenos Graffito', in Chris Keith, Helen Bond & Jens Schröter (eds), *The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, expected 2019).

Although the Alexamenos graffito is fairly late, it predates the Council of Nicea by a wide margin, and so it's a useful witness to early Christian belief in the crucified God.

III. The Gospel titles

1. It's often alleged that the Gospels are anonymous. Even if the Gospels were formally anonymous, each Gospel has internal evidence consistent with traditional attributions.

2. But to my knowledge, there are no anonymous Greek manuscripts of the Gospels. All our extant manuscripts of the Gospels have named authors. And there's uniformity to the titles. The same Gospels are always attributed to the same authors.

3. Some scholars think the titles are editorial additions. But that's a postulate that raises further questions:

i) Christians scribal activity wasn't centralized. There was no command-and-control to coordinate the activity of scribes. They acted independently of each other. So it's very hard to explain the uniformity of attribution if all four Gospels originally circulated anonymously.

As I understand the process, a scribe copies a preexisting copy. Either that's read aloud, and he copies what he hears, or else he has a copy in front of him which he transcribes. He copies what he sees or hears. If our extant manuscripts have titles, that's because because the copies they copied also had titles. So the process is regressive. Our extant copies bear witness to earlier copies that no longer exist. Earlier copies that also had titles. That process repeats until it terminates in the Ur-text or autograph. Either the Ur-text was anonymous or entitled. If it was anonymous, then the title had to be added by scribes later in the transmission process. But since we have multiple streams of transmission, and scribes worked independently of each other, it's hard to explain the uniformity if the titles are editorial additions. If the Gospels were originally anonymous, and titles were only introduced later into the process of transmission, surely there'd be considerable diversity in the authorial attributions. Scribes wouldn't know what other scribes did. Scribes wouldn't be aware of most other copies in circulation. So they couldn't imitate each other even if they wanted to.

Theoretically, all our manuscripts could go back to four individual copies that had titles, even though the autographs were anonymous. But isn't that antecedently quite unlikely? What's the likelihood that all our surviving manuscripts of Matthew go back to a single copy, all our surviving manuscripts of Mark go back to a single copy, as well as Luke and John? So the simplest, most plausible explanation is that our extant manuscripts have uniform authorship because scribes copied earlier manuscripts with the same titles, in a repeated process that traces all the way back to the autographs.

ii) But let's assume for argument's sake that Mark originally circulated anonymously. Yet after Matthew, Luke, and John were written, it would be necessary for them to have names, to differentiate one Gospel from another. So even if (ex hypothesi) the autograph of Mark was originally anonymous, we'd expect the autographs of Matthew, Luke, and John to be entitled.

For more on (i-ii), cf. M. Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Trinity 2000), 48-56.

iii) It was, moreover, customary for ancient historians to entitle their writings. Cf. B. Pitre, *The Case for Jesus* (Image 2016), 207-8n10. As one scholar notes:

The clearest case is Luke because of the dedication of the work to Theophilus (1:3), probably a patron. It is inconceivable that a work with a named dedicatee should have been anonymous. The author's name may have featured in an original title, but in any case would have been known to the dedicatee and other first readers because the author would have presented the book to the dedicatee. R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Eerdmans, rev. ed, 2017), 301.

iv) In addition to the titles, the authorship of the Gospels is multiply-attested in other Christian sources (e.g. church fathers, Muratorian canon).

Assuming that traditional authorship is correct, what does that tell us about Gospels individually?

IV. Mark

i) Mark's family hailed from the Greek-speaking Jewish Diaspora (Acts 4:36), so he might well be a native Greek speaker. Probably bilingual.

ii) He lived in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12), which was a very literate community. So he might well have been able to read and write. And the Gospel of Mark is written in rustic Greek.

iii) According to Acts 12:12, his mother's home was in Jerusalem. Her home was one of the founding house-churches. That would give Mark access to many eyewitnesses to the ministry of Christ, including apostles residing in Jerusalem. So he had a wide range of informants at his disposal.

iv) Given that he was an early Christian disciple living in Jerusalem, I think it's quite likely that he himself was an eyewitness to the public ministry of Christ. This is a neglected argument in Christian apologetics.

v) Here's a defense of Mark's geography:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4THNIOCxbE>

V. Matthew

1. Assuming traditional authorship, this Gospel was written by one of the twelve disciples. He had extensive firsthand knowledge of Christ's public ministry, both in and outside Jerusalem. All the stuff about the Sadducees and halakhah make sense if Matthew was written in the 50s-60s, but little sense after the fall of Jerusalem, when the Sadducees lost their power base, when Judaism had to reinvent itself in the wake of the temple's destruction, making the priesthood irrelevant, when the headquarters of Christianity shifted from Jerusalem to gentile urban centers throughout the Roman Empire.

2. As a tax collector, he'd have to speak Greek with his Roman employers and be able to write tax receipts. As one scholar notes:

The Roman administrators of the province and their Roman and Jewish subordinates on the local level are likely to have made ample use of writing, both in the form of documents and letters...It almost goes without saying that the Jews who collaborated with the Romans in the administrative realm had to be loyal supporters of the foreign government and knowledgeable of Greek, that is, they must have belonged to the most assimilated circles of the Jewish population. C. Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Mohr Siebeck 2001), 489-90.

In addition, what you do for a living may simply reflect the job market. It's not uncommon for people to be overqualified for the work they do. They take whatever is available.

3. A stock objection to traditional authorship is that Matthew appears to use Mark as a source. There are, however, some problems with that objection:

i) A person can be a source as well as a book. The Apostle Matthew would be one of Mark's sources while the Gospel of Mark is one of Matthew's sources. If Mark quoted the Apostle Matthew, and the Gospel of Matthew quotes the Gospel of Mark, in a sense Matthew is quoting himself.

ii) In addition, Mark might have sources of information Matthew didn't have. As one scholar notes:

Even more important, history gives us other examples of eyewitnesses who relied on other people's testimony when composing biographies of their own teachers. For example, when writing his account of the death of Socrates, the ancient Greek writer Xenophon (who was a disciple of Socrates) used the "reports" (Greek *exengeile*) of another disciple named Hermogenes (see Xenophon, *Apology*; 1.2,10). The reason was that Xenophon was not present at the trial and death of Socrates, whereas Hermogenes was. In the same way, it is entirely possible that the apostle Matthew could have relied on the Gospel of Mark's record of Peter's testimony, especially for any events at which Matthew himself was not present—such as the early days of Jesus's ministry (see Matthew 3-8), or the events of Jesus's passion and death, which Matthew did not witness because he had fled the scene (see Matthew 26-28). It is not as if all the apostles were witnesses to everything that happened in the life of Jesus. Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus* (Image 2016), 29.

iii) To take another comparison, Matthew wasn't an eyewitness to the events in Mt 1-2, so he had to rely on other sources of information—presumably, members of Christ's family, like Mary, James, and Jude.

VI. Luke

1. The Gospel was written by a Gentile convert to Christianity. Probably a Godfearer.

2. Sources:

i) The Gospel of Mark is apparently one source. However, since Mark and Luke were both members of the Pauline circle, Luke was probably in a

position to get information from Mark in person (cf. Col 4:10,14; Phlm 24; 2 Tim 4:11).

ii) Luke had contact with Mnason (Acts 21:16), an early disciple.

iii) Luke had contact with James (brother of Jesus) and other Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-18).

iv) Many scholars have noted intriguing parallels between Luke's Gospel and John's Gospel, which would make sense if Luke knew the Apostle John.

v) In addition:

Luke apparently had up to two years for any interviews with Judeans in Judea (Acts 21:15; 24:27; 27:1), C. Keener, *Acts* (Baker 2012), 1:180.

That would give Luke access to potentially hundreds (or thousands) of eyewitnesses, including relatives of Jesus.

vi) Furthermore:

The genealogy Luke provides (Lk 3:23-38) has the marks of an authentic traditional genealogy that was probably preserved by Jesus's family. Matthew supplies a different genealogy (Mt 1:1-16) which may represent something more like an official list of the heads of the clan of David, the heirs apparent to David's throne. R. Bauckham, "The Family of Jesus," C. Keith & L. Hurtado, eds. *Jesus Among Friends and Enemies* (Baker 2011), 104. Cf. R. Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (T&T Clark, chap. 7).

vii) One commentator has argued that Luke had access to a Hebrew Gospel: J. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Eerdmans 2015), 14-18; *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition* (Eerdmans 2009).

viii) Finally:

These sources point to a cooperative relationship between Luke, the Jacobean mission based on Jerusalem; with the Petrine mission, which was active in Caesarea and with which Mark was associated, and with the Johannine mission, which before AD 66, was also active in Judea. E. E. Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Brill 1999), 401-2.

So Luke had a wide range of informants with firsthand knowledge of Jesus to draw upon in writing his Gospel.

VII. John

1. Assuming traditional authorship, the Gospel of John and 1 John are a witness to the historical Jesus by the inmost member of his apostolic circle.

2. It's often alleged that an Aramaic-speaking fisherman couldn't write the Gospel of John (or 1 John). But there are several problems with that objection:

i) John's Gospel is probably a transcription of oral history. John dictated his Gospel to a scribe. If the scribe was bilingual, John could speak in Aramaic while the scribe translated his statements into Greek.

ii) John's Gospel is written in very simple Greek—simpler than Matthew and much simpler than Luke.

iii) Galilee was a bilingual region. Take a Roman colony like Tiberias, located on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. So John might well know street Greek to conduct business with gentiles living around the Sea of Galilee. Likewise, the hellenized, cosmopolitan community of Sepphoris is about 10 miles north of Nazareth.

iv) However, there's some evidence that John had a priestly bloodline. Take the intriguing passage in Jn 18:15-17. If John was a relative of the high priest, that would explain his entree to the palace of the high priest, as well as his discriminating knowledge of the personnel:

It seems to me that the evangelist himself already wanted to give the

impression—he is in fact sometimes fond of ambivalent statements—that this is the beloved disciple, but omitted the epithet because in this context the predicates "on friendly terms with the high priest" and "whom Jesus loved" did not go well together".

Finally, mention should be made here of the mysterious "other disciple" who gains direct access to the palace of Annas, at that time the most influential man in Jerusalem, because he was well acquainted with him or a friend of his (18:15f.). He can therefore introduce Peter into the palace. We should have no doubt that the beloved disciple is meant here.

We could also go on to ask—as was often done earlier—whether the report of Polycrates of Ephesus in his letter to Victor of Rome about John "who was a priest and wore the high-priestly plate on his forehead" is connected with Jn 18:16, "he was known (or related) to the high priest", indeed whether Polycrates, who was born about 125 AD and bound to earlier Asian Christianity by many ties of family relationships, and of course knew very much more than he writes in the letter, wanted in this way to indicate that the disciple "who reclined on the Lord's breast was, like John the Baptist, of priestly descent.

Even if we doubt John of Ephesus's direct authorship of the Apocalypse in the time of Domitian, the report of his stay on Patmos is to be taken seriously in historical terms. It is surely no legendary fiction. How otherwise would one arrive at this very small unknown island in the Aegean about forty miles west of Miletus? Insignificant provincials were not banished to islands; even among Roman citizens that was reserved for members of the upper class. For serious crimes—and banishment was a possibility only in such cases—ordinary people were either executed or deported to the mines as state slaves. Two high priests, Ishmael and Helkias, were kept in Rome as hostages in 61/62, and Ishmael was subsequently banished to Cyrene, where he was later beheaded. For John to be banished to Patmos indicates that he had high social status. M. Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (SCM/Trinity Press 1996), 79,125-126.

John alone mentions the name of the high priest's servant, Malchus (18:10)...and later one of the high priest's servants (whom John alone among the evangelist clearly distinguishes from the temple constables

(18:18) is known to be a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off (18:26).

So if Mary and her sister came from such stock (and it is difficult to see what motive there would have been for inventing this connection in such a defamatory context) it could help to explain the family's high-priestly contacts (Jn 18:15f.) and even the curious statement by Polycrates...

There is little doubt that John is historically accurate in depicting Annas thus as very much the power behind the throne and one who still enjoyed the courtesy title of "high priest"...Only John informs us that Caiaphas was Annas' son-in-law... J. Robinson, *The Priority of John* (Meyer-Stone 1987), 64,122,246.

If some of John's relatives were priests, reaching, on occasion, even into the high priesthood, he might well have some formal education in literate, polyglot Jerusalem.

v) So why was he a fisherman? To my knowledge, because there was a glut of priests, they worked on a rotating basis (cf. Lk 1:8-9). So what did you do for a living when it wasn't your shift? What about helping out with the family fishing business? And once he became a Christian, that ousted him from the Jewish establishment.

3. Even if the Fourth Gospel wasn't written by the Apostle John, so long as the narrator was an eyewitness, it's still historically valuable. In addition, I incline to the view of scholars like Robinson and Morris that the epilogue was occasioned by the death of Peter rather than John. So I date the Fourth Gospel to the 60s.

VIII. Undesigned coincidences

Drs. Timothy and Lydia McGrew have rehabilitated, expanded, and refined a neglected argument for the historicity of the Gospels. For an overview:

http://whatswrongwiththeworld.net/2017/01/classifications_of_undesig

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/august-web-only/defending-accuracy-of-scripture-one-coincidence-at-time.html>

<https://seanmcdowell.org/blog/unique-evidence-for-the-new-testament-interview-with-lydia-mcgrew-about-unintended-coincidences-1>

<https://apologetics315.com/2018/03/book-review-hidden-in-plain-view-undesigned-coincidences-in-the-gospels-acts-by-lydia-mcgrew/>

<https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2017/10/how-the-bibles-obscure-coincidences-demonstrate-its-reliability-an-interview-with-lydia-mcgrew/>

For a detailed popular exposition:

Lydia McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View* (2017)

For a technical philosophical defense:

<https://philpapers.org/rec/MCGUCA>

IX. Archeology

1. In *Can We Trust the Gospels?* (Crossway 2018), Peter Williams marshals a battery of evidence to demonstrate that the canonical Gospels reflect intimate knowledge of the time and place of Jesus, based on place names, proper names, bodies of water, roads, gardens, botanical terms, finance, local languages, Jewishness, and usual customs (chap. 3).

Williams also draws attention to differences which reflect the different backgrounds of the Gospel writers, given traditional authorship. For instance:

Otherwise, it is simply "the sea". This is what we would expect if Mark's Gospel really were written by the fisherman Peter, for whom this would have been the sea par excellence. Luke is rather different. It uses the word sea only three times and never in reference to a particular body of water. If, as is traditionally thought, Luke came from Antioch on the Orontes, not far from the Mediterranean, he certainly would not have thought of

the tiny Sea of Galilee as the sea. He just calls it "the lake" (58).

2. Unbelievers like Bart Ehrman and Richard Carrier allege that the Gospels were penned by authors far removed in time and place from Palestine. Yet that raises the question of how to account for their local knowledge (as documented by Williams). Carrier treats the Gospels as historical fiction, where the writers sprinkled the narratives with tidbits of authentic knowledge to create the illusion of verisimilitude. But did 1C writers have access to an atlas, almanac, or encyclopedia of Palestine?

3. I'd also note in passing that it's useful to distinguish between native knowledge and acquired knowledge. For instance, when I see a picture with a number of cars in the picture, I can roughly date the picture because I know the difference between cars from the 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, &c. For cars before I was born, that's based on the fact that, like many boys, I read books with pictures of classic cars. By contrast, cars from the 50s and 60s were part of my childhood, so I automatically recognize cars from that period.

Likewise, suppose you're visiting from out of town, or supposed you just moved to a new town, and you need to get directions. Would it be better to ask a native or ask someone who moved there, say, 5 years ago? On the other hand, a native knows where everything is and how to get there. But there's a catch. Although a native knows where your destination is and how to get there, that doesn't mean he can explain it to a visitor. Because he grew up there, he knows all the routes without necessarily knowing the names of streets and distances. Although he knows how to get there, he may not be able to tell you how to get there because his knowledge is based on experience rather than description. He drives places without having to think about the route. Although he has a mental map, it's not like a street map with all the street names and mileage. Rather, it's based on landmarks. Or what are landmarks to the natives.

4. Here's a useful perspective on the NT text:

<http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2015/05/new-article-evans-on-books-autographs.html>

X. Paul

1. Apologists typically cite 1 Cor 1:3-8 as primitive "tradition" (oral history) about the Resurrection. Paul got that from Christians in the know. And that is, indeed, a significant data point.
2. Prior to his conversion, Paul interrogated many 1C Christians, so he heard many repeated anecdotes about the life and teaching of Jesus from eyewitnesses.
3. In addition, it's quite likely that Paul and Jesus were sometimes in Jerusalem at the same time. Their lives overlap in time and place. Paul was a younger contemporary of Jesus who lived in Jerusalem at the same time Jesus blew into town as part of his public ministry. So Paul had many occasions to see and hear Jesus. Jesus was a major attraction. So it's dubious to assume that Paul's knowledge of Jesus was confined to the Damascus road vision or testimonial evidence. There's every reason to suppose he had firsthand knowledge of Jesus prior to the Resurrection. Cf. Stanley Porter, *When Paul Met Jesus: How an Idea Got Lost in History* (Cambridge 2015)

XI. Hebrews

By his own account, the author of Hebrews was a second-generation Christian who knew people who knew Jesus (Heb 2:3). In addition, he was a member of the Pauline circle (Heb 13:23). Ramsey Michaels identifies Timothy as the probable author:

<http://triablogue.blogspot.com/2010/05/authorship-of-hebrews.html>

XII. James

1. According to traditional authorship, James was written by a brother of Jesus. As such, he'd know Jesus as well as anyone, and better than most.

I don't think there's a serious reason to doubt the attribution. Although it would be prestigious in the early to have dominical pedigree, James doesn't capitalize on that association in a way a forger would.

After mentioning the proximity of Nazareth to "the urban Hellenism of nearby Sepphoris," Bauckham goes on to say:

James lived for some thirty years in the cosmopolitan city of Jerusalem, where some 10-20% of the population were Jews whose vernacular or mother tongue was Greek. These were Jews from the Diaspora who settled permanently in Jerusalem. The so-called "Hellenists" in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1) were Christian converts from among these Greek-speaking Jews...Finally, in the composition of his letter he could easily have had the assistance of a more Hellenized Jew than himself, a native Greek speaker with a good Greek education, since there were certainly such people in the Jerusalem church. [Cf. Josephus (*Contra Apionem* 1.50)]. R. Bauckham, *James* (Routledge 1999), 24.

2. Although the letter doesn't contain much Christology, there's what it takes for granted. Would James even be in this position if his brother was dead? Died in ignominy?

3. In addition, there's the striking designation in Jas 2:1. Warfield takes this to mean James equates Jesus as Yahweh and the Shekinah. B. B. Warfield, *The Lord of Glory* (Guardian Press reprint), 265. Bauckham thinks the background derives from Christological exegesis of Ps 24:7-10. R. Bauckham, *James* (Routledge 1999), 139; *The Fate of the Dead* (SBL 1998), 243-44. That, too, equates Jesus with Yahweh. Cf. J. Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41* (Baker 2006), 361-64; A. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: 1-41* (Kregel 2011), 583-88.

XIII. 1-2 Peter

1. If the apostolic pedigree of one or both letters is authentic, they constitute a witness to the historical Jesus by a member of his inner circle. The traditional authorship of 1 Peter is sometimes challenged on the grounds that the Greek is too refined. For a linguistic defense of apostolic authorship:

<https://www.ibr->

2. The traditional authorship of 2 Peter is the most widely disputed of any NT book. That's in part because the style is so different from 1 Peter, and in part because the style is said to be incongruous for a fisherman. From my reading, the best defense of Petrine authorship is by Ellis, who argues that 2 Pet incorporates preexisting source material. By his reckoning, 55% of 2 Peter is composed for "preformed traditions". Cf. E. E. Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Brill 1999), 120-33. On that analysis, the style of 2 Peter reflects the style of whatever sources he edited into his letter. So we wouldn't expect a consistent style.

3. Moreover, is there such a thing as a Petrine style? He wasn't a rhetorician. He wasn't a professional essayist who carefully honed an unmistakable prose style.

4. Incidentally, we could say the same thing about Revelation. Although the style is different from John's Gospel and 1 John, Revelation quotes and paraphrases so many OT passages that the style mirrors the underlying source material.

XIV. Jude

1. If written by a brother of Jesus, this is an important witness to the historical Jesus. I see no reason why a forger would write under the name of Jude. Although Jude, as a brother of Jesus, might have some prestige in the early church, he was in the shadow of his older brother James. If a forger is going to ride on the coattails of the dominical family, why not *The Gospel According Mary* or *The Acts of Mary*? Why settle for Jude?

2. There's some debate about whether the Greek is too good for a Jewish peasant. That invites the same explanations as Peter, James, and John (see above).

3. On the one hand, Jude reflects a 1C Palestinian Judeo-Christian provenance. Cf. R. Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus* (T&T Clark 1990), chap. 4. In addition, as another scholar notes:

While writing in Greek, Jude nevertheless used the Hebrew version of the Scriptures rather than one of the Greek translations. Furthermore, the quotation from 1 Enoch 9 shows the imprint of an Aramaic, not Greek source. K. Jobes, *Letters to the Churches* (Zondervan 2011), 241.

On the hand, if the recipients are Messianic Palestinian Jews, why was it written in Greek rather than Aramaic? Likewise, the opponents seem to have typical pagan vices rather than Jewish vices.

One explanation is that Jude is writing with a view to gentile mission in Roman Palestine. His writing naturally reflects the framework of his Palestinian Jewish background. But that's directed at gentiles in Palestine and thereabouts. However, that stream of Christianity dried up after the fall of Jerusalem. Cf. R. Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church," *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, R. Bauckham, ed. (Eerdmans 1995), 426-7.

4. In v5, identifies the Yahweh of the Exodus and wilderness wandering as a Christophany:

Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.

On both internal and external grounds, "Jesus" (rather than "Lord") is most likely the original reading. On the one hand, it is "the best attested reading among Greek and versional witnesses". On the other hand, it's represents the harder reading (*lectio difficilior*). Cf. B. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (UBS, 2nd ed., 1994), 657-8.

Some commentators balk at that identification. If, however, Jesus is God Incarnate, and if he said and did things to manifest his true identity to observers like his brother Jude, then it's not surprising that Jude says that.

XV. Revelation

See VII & XIII (above).

XVI. Argument from prophecy

The argument from prophecy is hard to summarize. There are roughly two kinds of argument from prophecy. One is focussed on a particular oracle. The other on tracing out an unfolding messianic motif across the OT.

T. D. Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible's Portrait of the Messiah* (Regent College Publishing, 2003)

Herbert Bateman et al. *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King* (Kregel, 2012)

J. Alec Motyer, *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to Our Understanding of Christ* (Kregel Academic & Professional; 1st ed., 2004)

O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets* (P & R Publishing, 2008)

Michael Rydelnik's *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (B& H 2010)

John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (IVP, 2009)

XVII. Argument from miracles/religious experience

Many Christian apologists overemphasize the documentary evidence for Christianity. But the evidence for Christianity isn't confined to ancient documentary evidence. Christianity is a living religion of a living Savior God.

Craig Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, 2 vols. (Baker, 2011)

Craig Keener, "The Historicity of Nature Miracles", Graham H. Twelftree, ed. *The Nature Miracles of Jesus* (Wipf and Stock 2017), chap. 2.

Rex Gardner, Healing Miracles: A Doctor Investigates (Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1986)

<http://www.premierchristianity.com/Blog/Derren-Brown-wants-to-see-objective-evidence-for-miracles-Challenge-accepted>

Robert Larmer, The Legitimacy of Miracle (Lexington Books, 2013), appendix.

Robert Larmer, Dialogues on Miracle (Wipf & Stock, 2015), appendix.

<https://epistleofdude.wordpress.com/2017/11/07/visions-of-jesus/>

Tom Doyle, Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World? (Thomas Nelson 2012)

David Garrison, A Wind In The House Of Islam: How God Is Drawing Muslims Around The World To Faith In Jesus Christ (Wigtake Resources LLC 2014)

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