¶ 5.1



1

Non-Christian Writers.

What do outside sources say about Jesus and the early church?

2



Gospel Comparisons.

How do the primary texts hold up as historical sources?

Historical Investigation

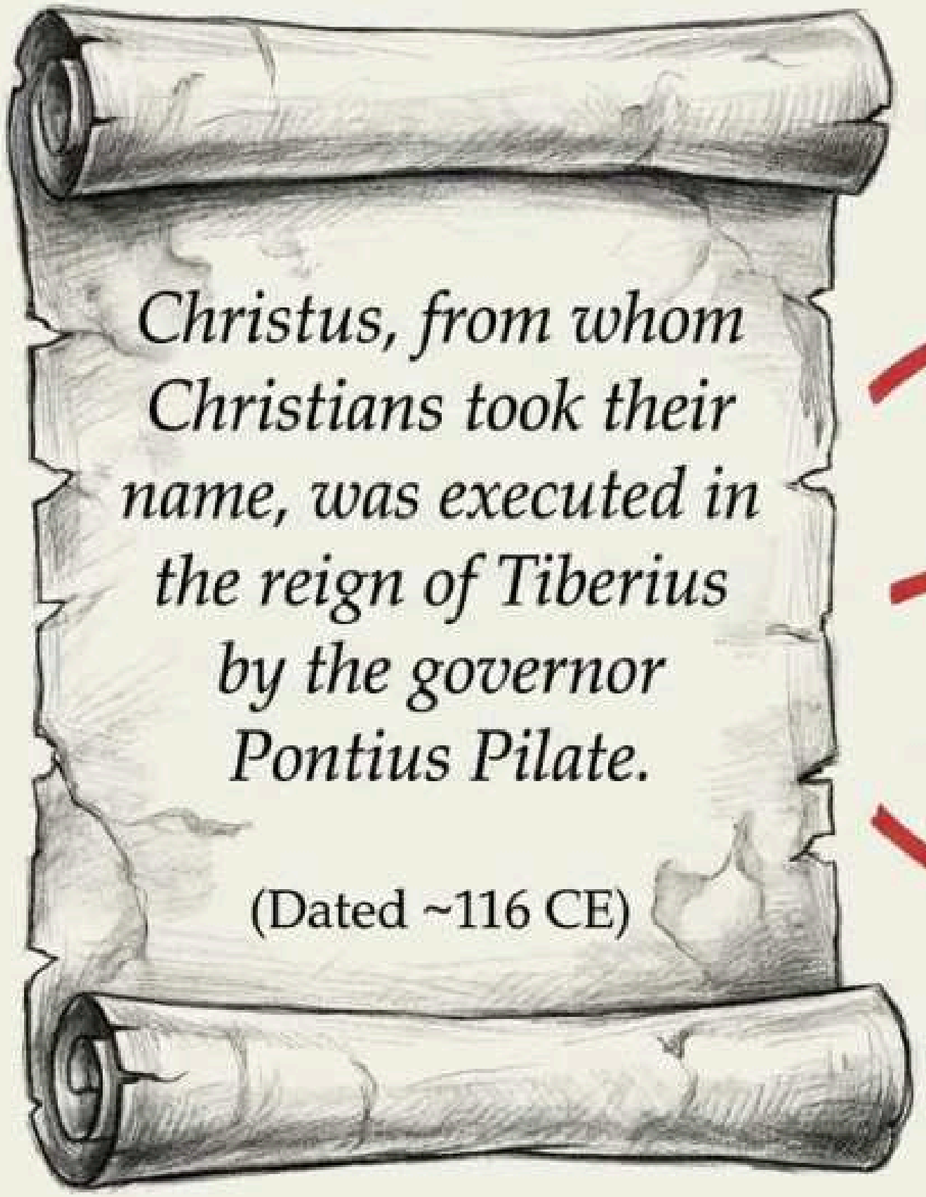
3



Historians' Conclusions.

What is the agreed-upon historical core?

¶ 5.2



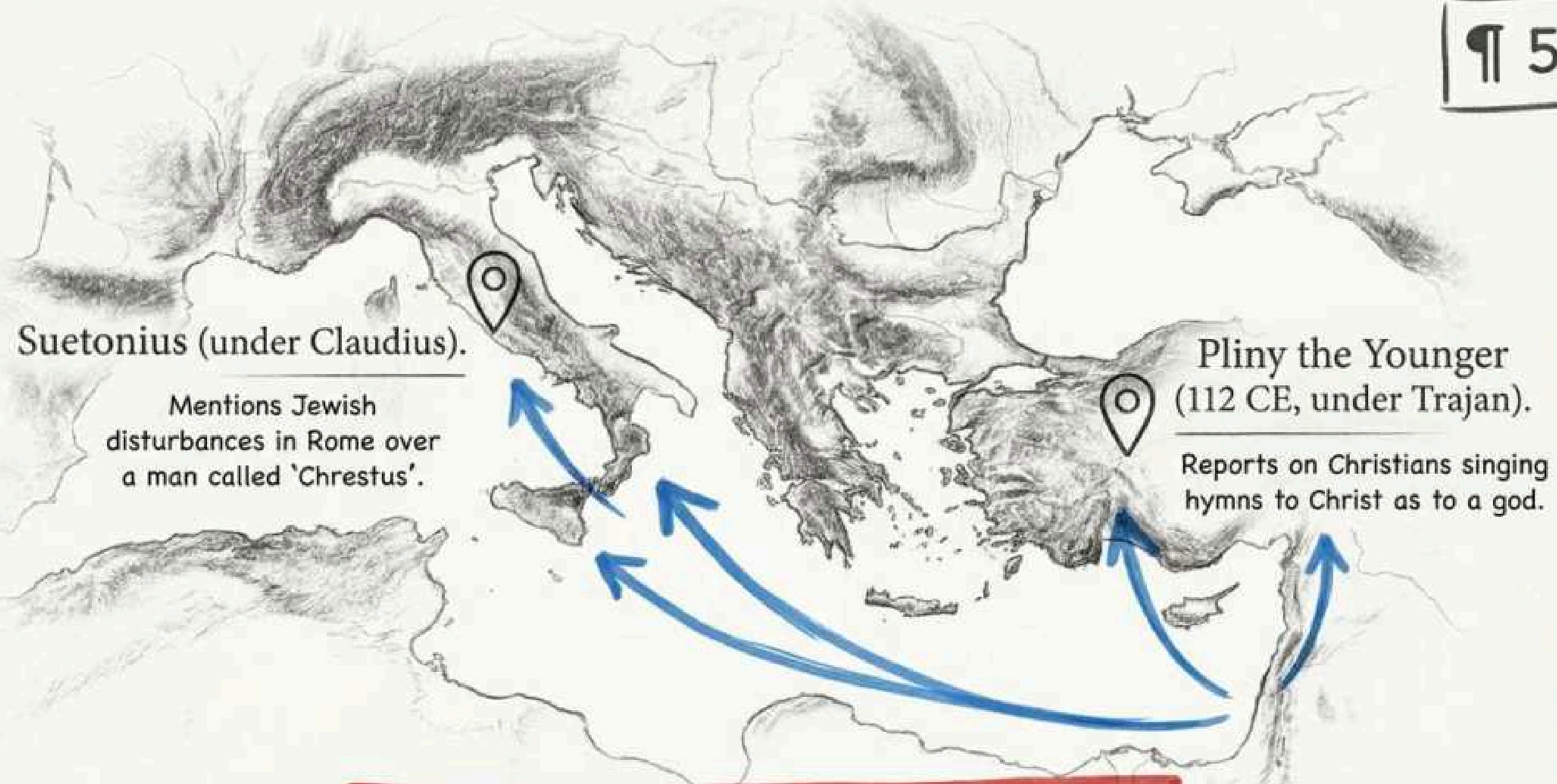
Source: Tacitus (Roman Historian)

Stance: Hostile (Disliked Christians)

Historical Value: High. Independent witness with zero motive to flatter or invent the movement's origins.

Source: Josephus (Jewish Historian, 90s CE)	
Testimonium Flavianum (Jesus as a wise teacher condemned by Pilate).	 **Caution.** Most scholars agree a shorter original was later expanded by Christians.
The James Passage (Mentions James as the brother of Jesus, called Christ).	 **Accepted.** Widely recognized as an authentic, unedited historical reference.

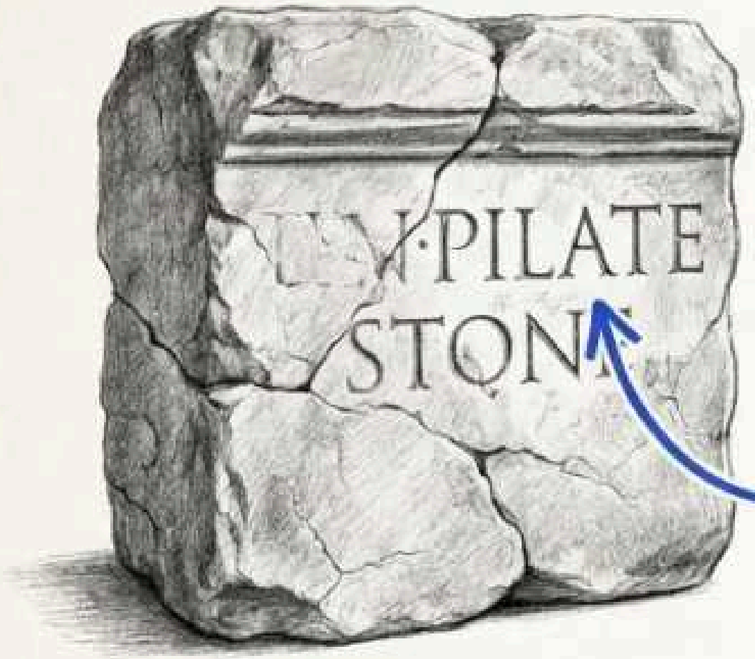
¶ 5.4



Neither saw Jesus, but both prove the astonishingly fast spread of the movement.

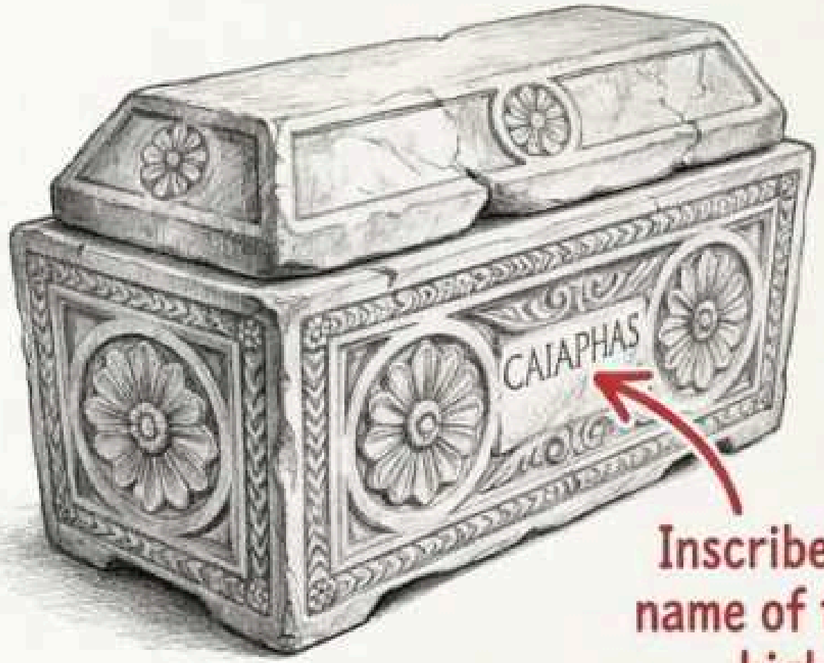
The Historian's Whiteboard

¶ 5.5



The Pilate Stone
(Caesarea, 1961)

Confirms Pontius Pilate's actual historical office as prefect of Judea.



The Caiaphas Ossuary
(Jerusalem)

Inscribed with the name of the gospels' high priest (identification debated).

Takeaway: While not mentioning Jesus directly, these finds prove the gospel writers knew the exact political and physical landscape of the 1st-century real world.

¶ 5.6

The Synoptic Gospels

(Shared material, read side-by-side).

Mark + **Q** = **Matthew**

First written — Lost sayings collection

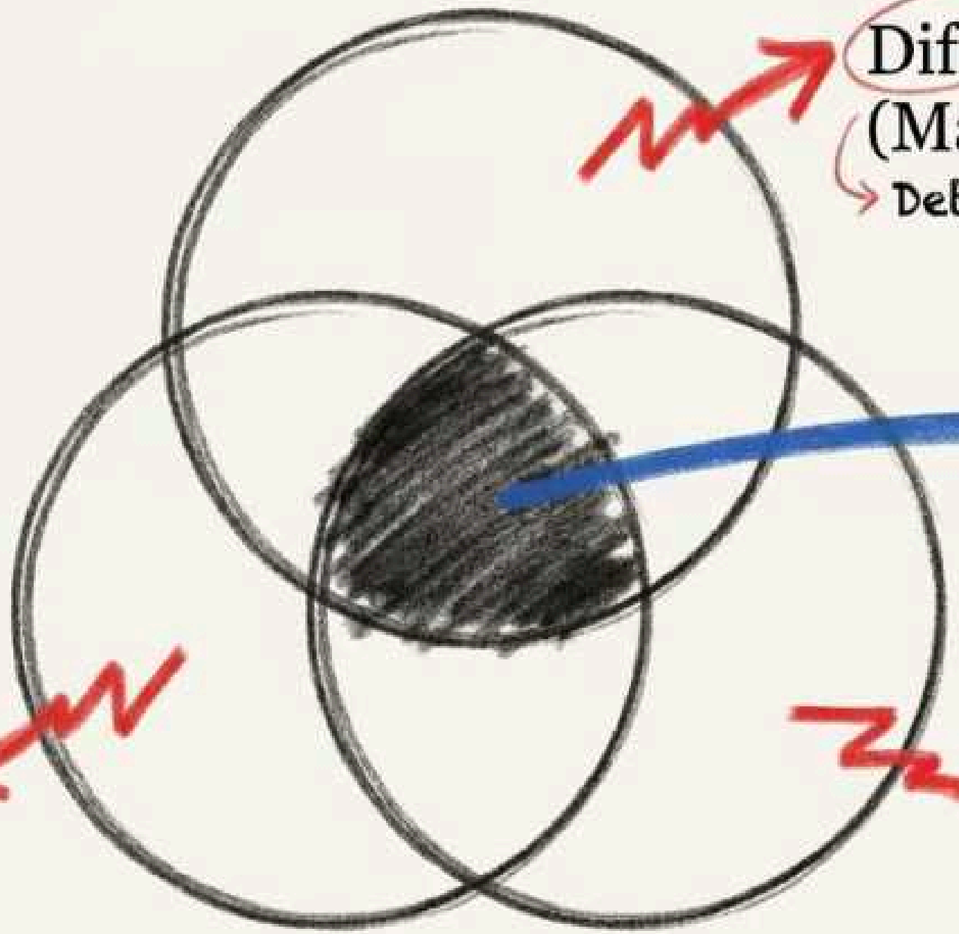
Mark + **Q** = **Luke**

John

Independent source. Differs radically in style and content.

The Historian's Whiteboard

¶ 5.7



Different Genealogies (Matthew vs. Luke)

Detail 1

Shared Core Facts.

Four accounts are a historian's strength. Independent sources confirm the main events.

Differing Birth Stories

Detail 2

Empty Tomb Variations

Detail 3

Scholars and believers handle these peripheral differences in different ways, but the central overlap remains historically robust.



Modern Journalism
Chronological, exact transcription, objective reporting.

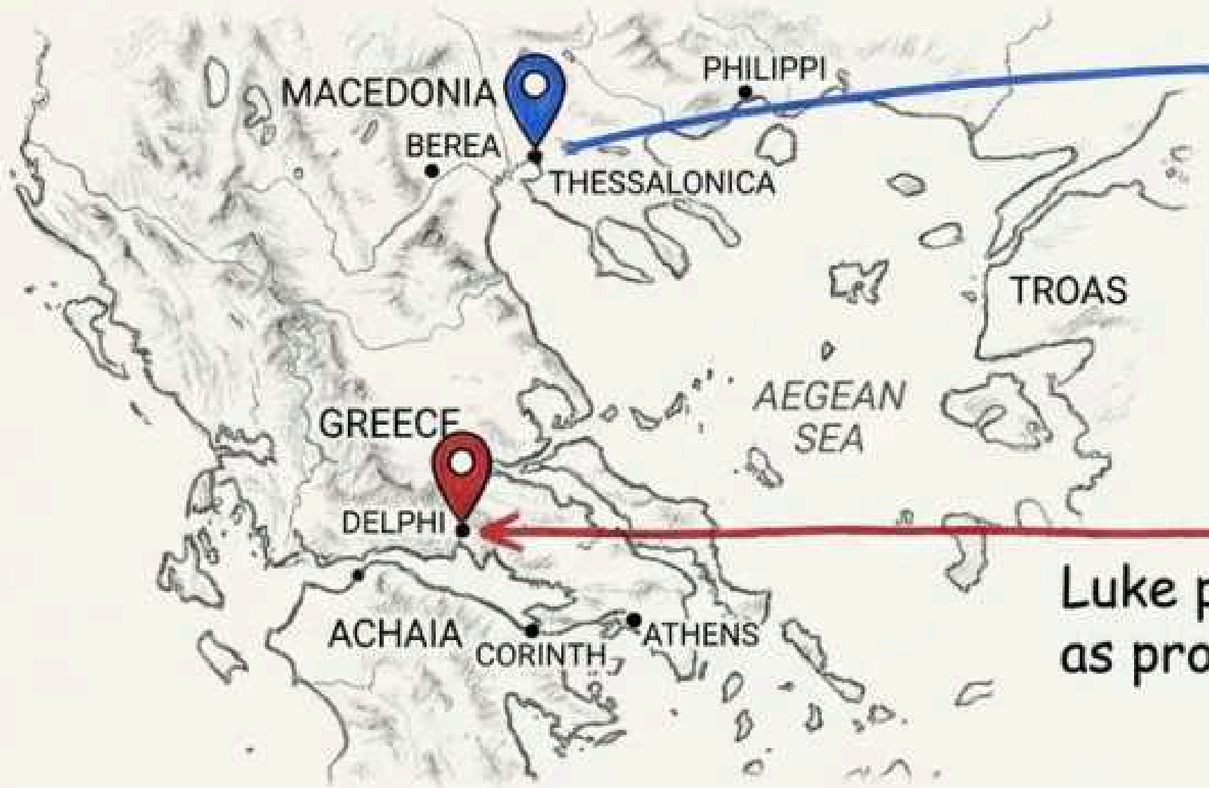


Ancient Biography (per Richard Burridge)
Designed to teach and honor a subject's life. Authors freely arranged episodes by theme, paraphrased sayings, and composed summaries.

Judging ancient texts by modern journalistic standards asks for something the authors never intended.

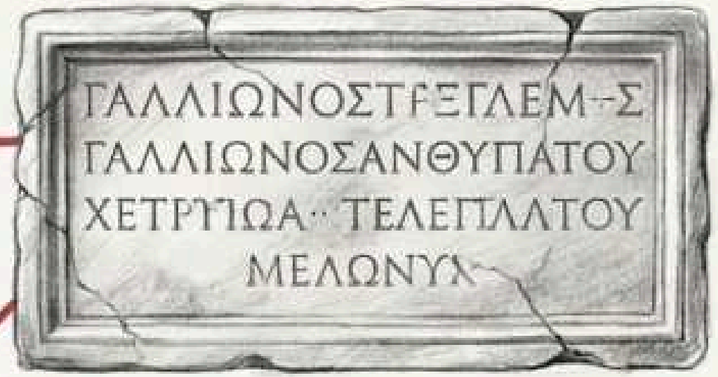
The Historian's Whiteboard

¶ 5.9

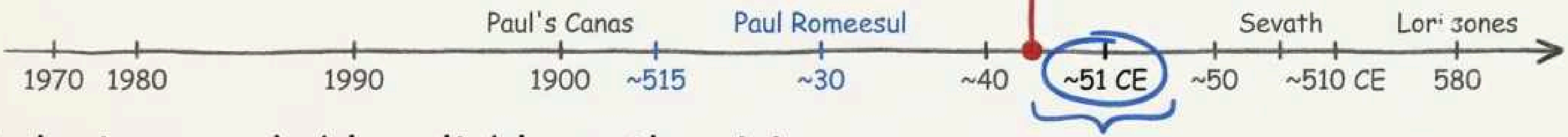




Luke calls rulers Politarchs. Title confirmed by rare stone inscriptions.



Luke places Gallio as proconsul.



Luke is remarkably reliable on the civic and political details of the Roman world.

Precisely anchors Paul's stay in Corinth.

The Historian's Whiteboard

¶ 5.10

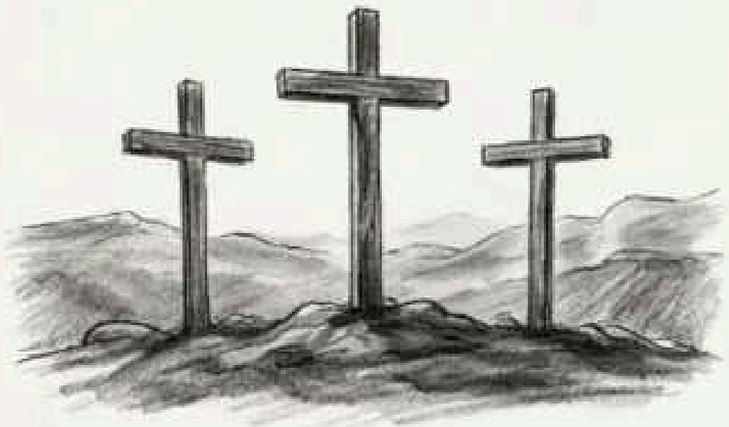


The Unsolved Puzzle.

Despite many proposed sposed solutions, no general agreement exists.
Honest scholars admit this 10-year contradiction remains unresolved.

The Historian's Whiteboard

¶ 5.11



The Creedal Formula. Paul passes on what what he received: Christ died for sins, was buried, raised on the 3rd day, and appeared to Peter, the Twelve, and 500+ people.



~30 CE

50s CE

The Crucifixion

Only 20 Years.

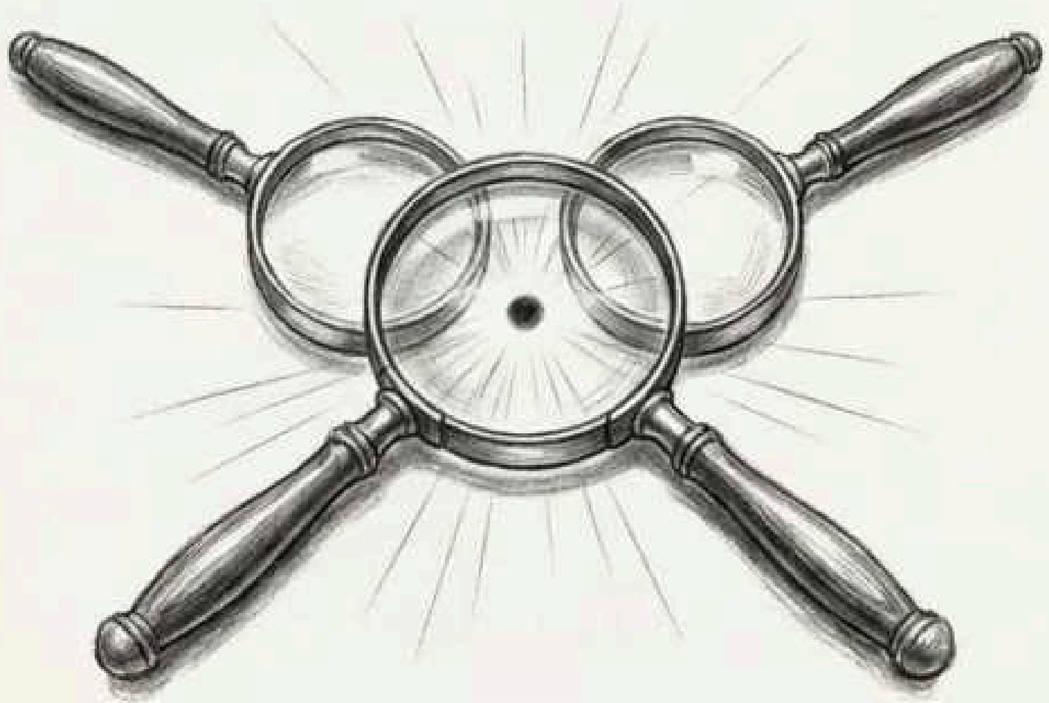
Paul's First *Corinthians*

Note: Many scholars date the origins of this formula to within just a few years of the crucifixion.

The Historian's Whiteboard

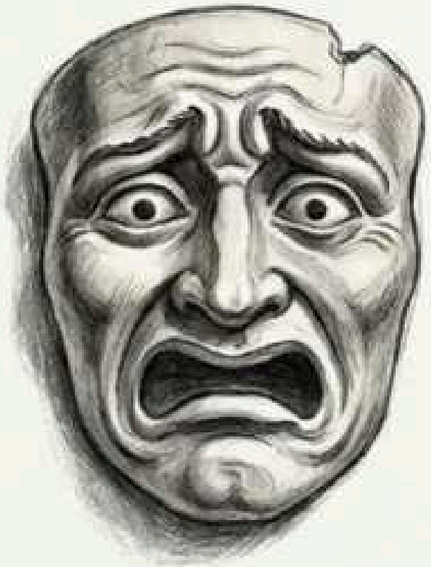
¶ 5.12

Tool 1: Multiple Attestation



Do several independent sources report the same event?

Tool 2: Criterion of Embarrassment

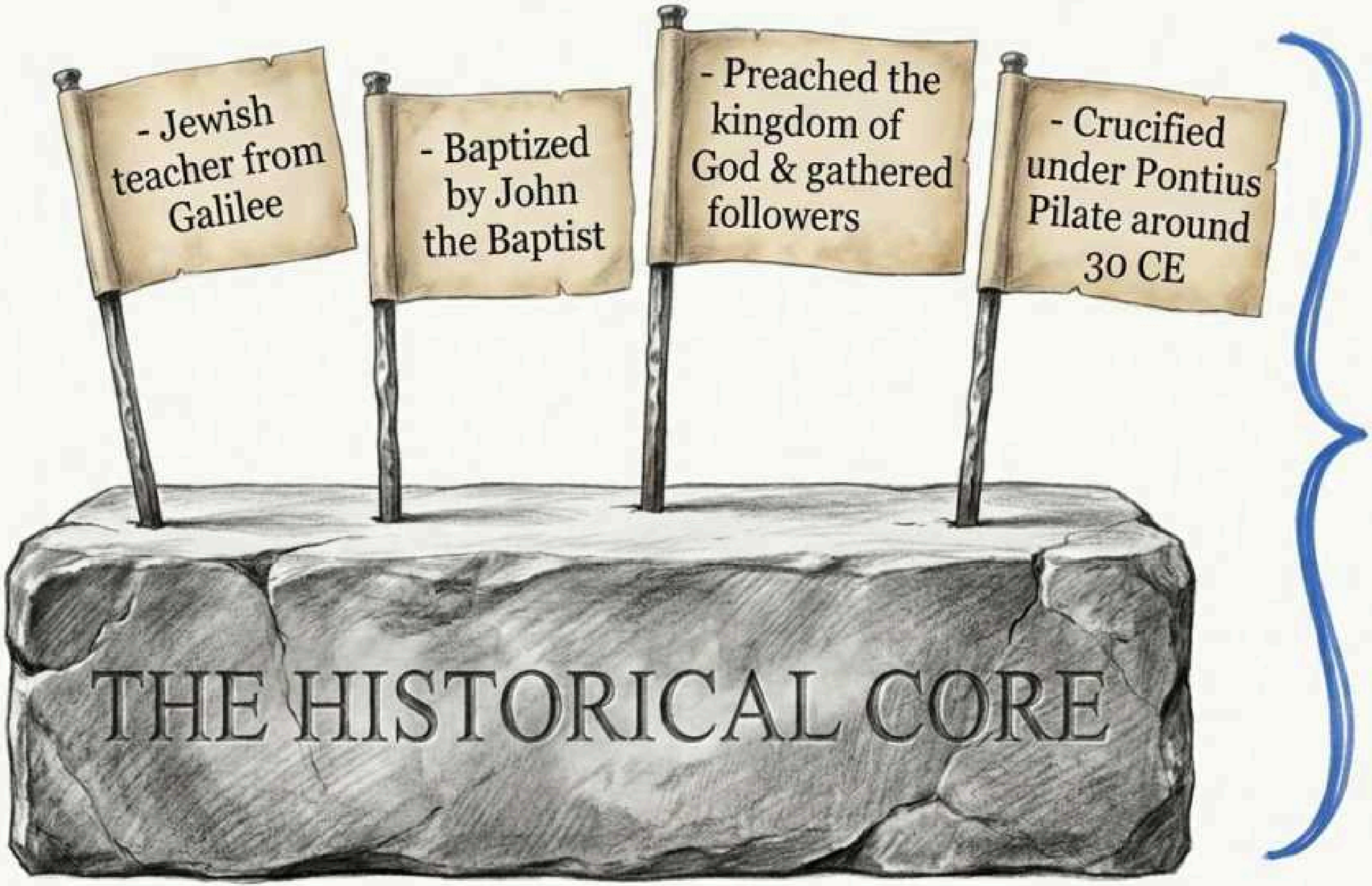


Would the early church have found this fact awkward to invent?

- Examples: Jesus being baptized by John (implying subordination) or facing a humiliating crucifixion.

These tools are imperfect, but they allow scholars to isolate highly probable historical facts.

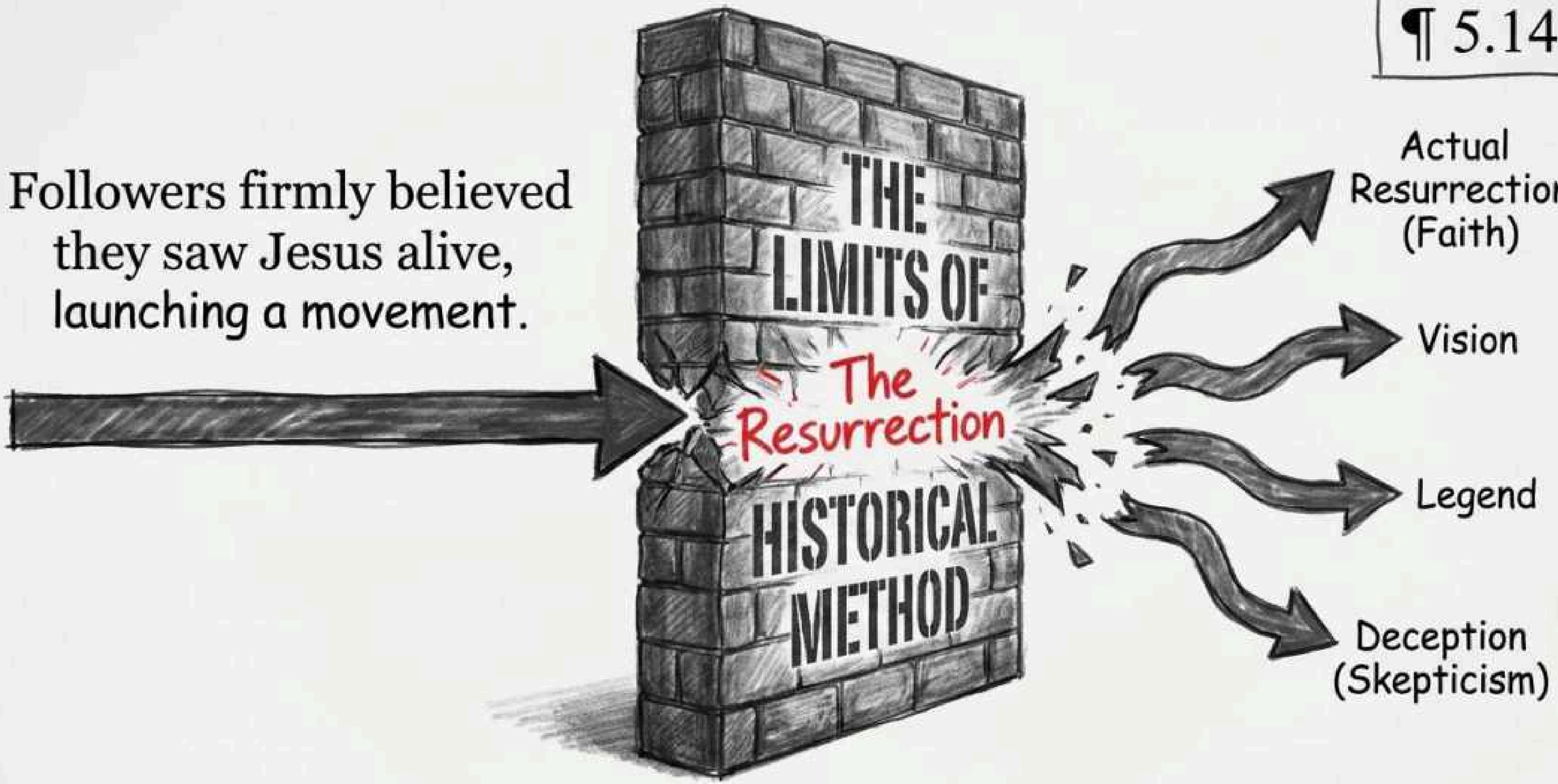
¶ 5.13



Consensus:
Agreed upon by believers and nonbelievers alike. The view that Jesus never existed is held by virtually no serious historians.

¶ 5.14

Followers firmly believed they saw Jesus alive, launching a movement.



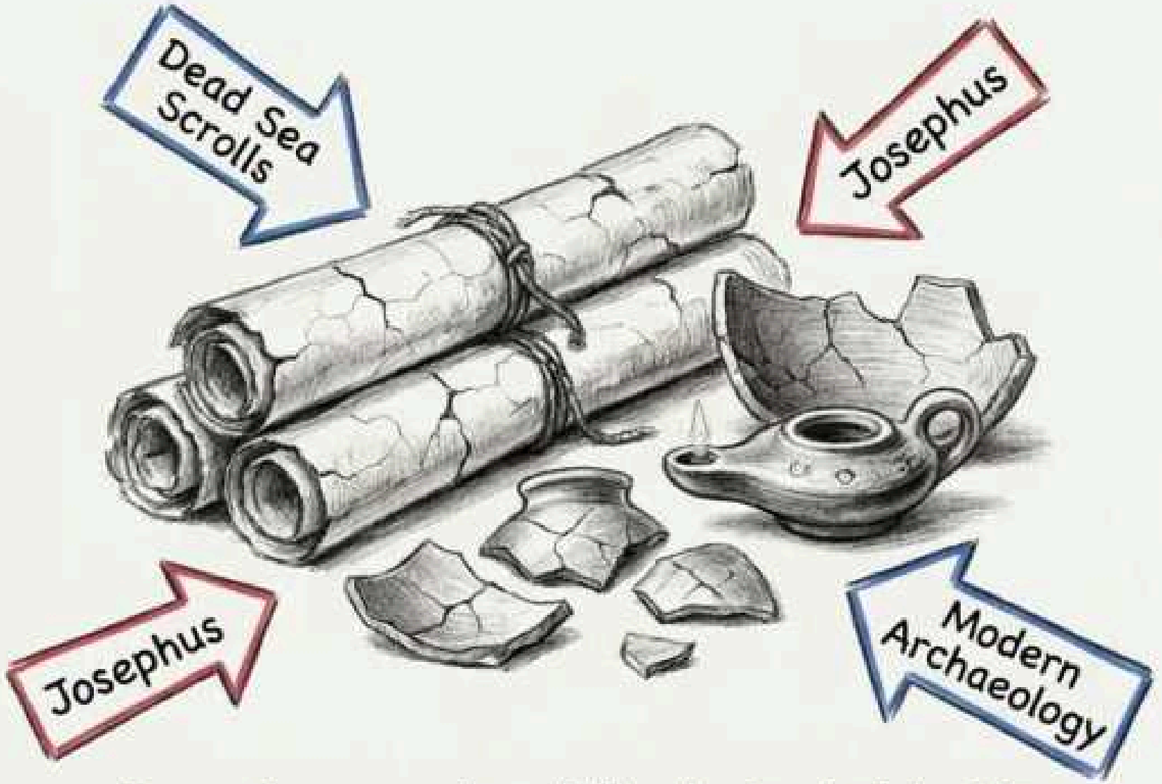
Believers and skeptics reach entirely different conclusions from the exact same evidence.

1906 Review



Schweitzer found that over a century of research, each scholar's "Life of Jesus" merely reflected the scholar's own face.

The Paradigm Shift



Jesus is now placed firmly back into his 1st-Century Jewish context.

Improved methodology proves why historical humility is wise.

¶ 5.16

Strengths

Early, numerous, and reasonably well-preserved sources.

Context

Deep, accurate knowledge of the 1st-century geographical and political setting.

Verdict:
The broad historical framework is highly strong.

Complications

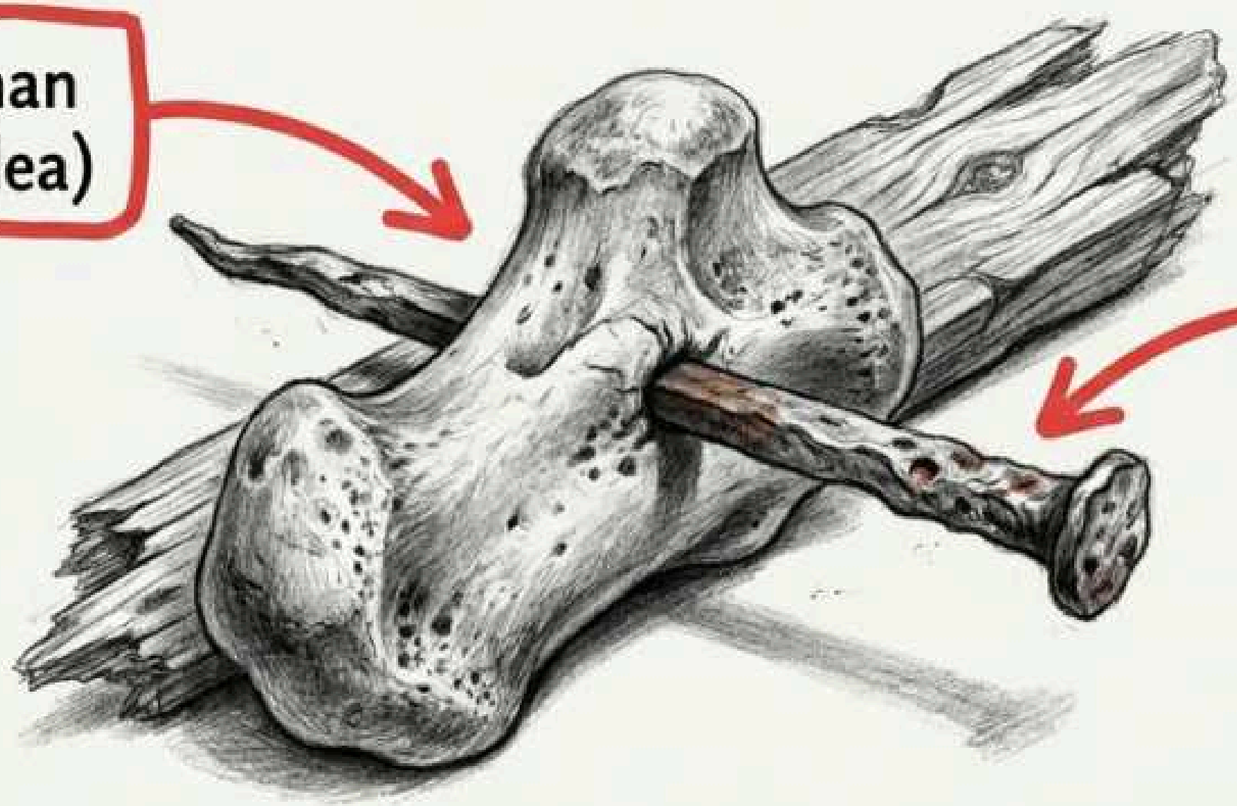
Differences in peripheral details and distinct religious aims.

Boundaries

Supernatural claims that fall strictly outside historical testing.

Giv'at ha-Mivtar Tomb Discovery, 1968

Victim: Yehohanan
(1st-century Judea)

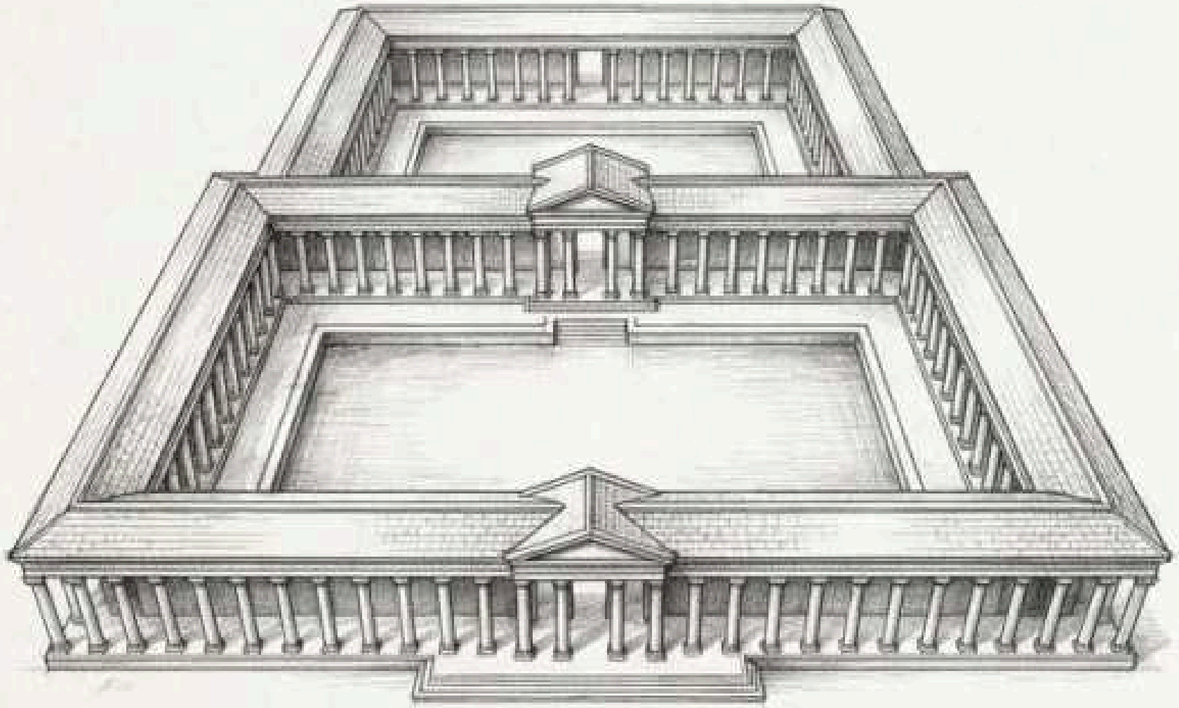


Significance:
The ONLY skeletal evidence of a Roman crucifixion victim from 1st-century Judea.

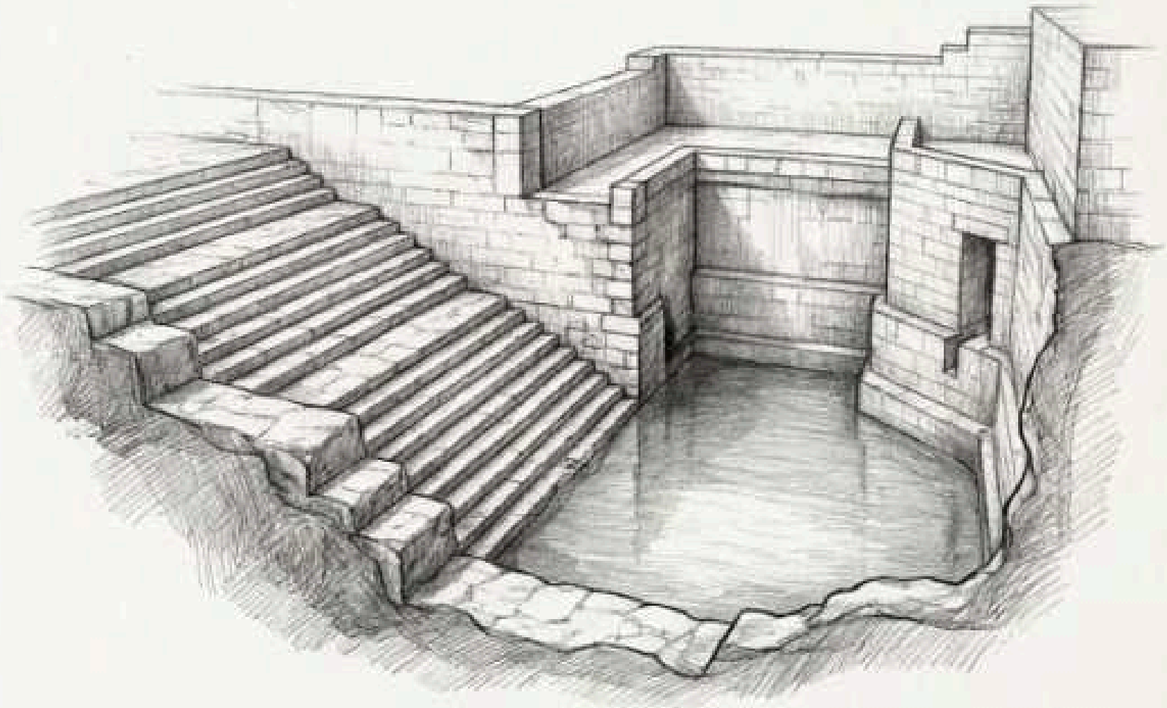
It tells us nothing about Jesus himself, but proves the Gospel accounts of execution perfectly match the brutal reality of Roman practice in Judea.

Historian's Whiteboard

¶ 5.18



Pool of Bethesda. John claimed it had five porticoes. Excavators confirmed a double pool north of the temple with portico traces.



Pool of Siloam. Uncovered in 2004 during sewer repairs. A massive stepped pool from the Second Temple era.

Once dismissed as purely symbolic, John's geography reflects precise knowledge of Jerusalem before its destruction by Rome in 70 CE.

¶ 5.19

Read Ancient Genres
(Understand biography vs. journalism)



Weigh Historical Disagreements
(Acknowledge puzzles & differing details)

Respect the Boundary of Faith
(Distinguish historical core from theological claims)

History provides the irrefutable framework of a 1st-century Galilean teacher crucified under Pilate. The rest requires weighing evidence, recognizing historical limits, and engaging with the texts on their own ancient terms.