

Defending Early High Christology with Archaeology and New Testament Letters

In this session, philosopher and apologist Peter S. Williams will critique the claim that belief in Jesus' divinity was a late development detached from the historical Jesus. In response to proponents of a late high Christology such as Dan Brown (in his novel *The Da Vinci Code*) and John Loftus, we will draw upon fascinating archaeological discoveries as well as key passages in the New Testament letters. In particular, we will see that the Epistle of James displays a high Christology within a Jewish Christian context prior to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and plausibly as early as the mid 40's AD.

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Mark Mittleberg: 'The common claim today is that belief in Jesus as a unique, divine person arose long after he walked the earth. Such books as *The Da Vinci Code* have popularised the notion that it was not until the Council of Nicea, three centuries after Jesus, that Christians started worshipping him as the divine Son of God... the best historical scholarship shows that simply is not the case.' – *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask (with answers)* (Tyndale, 2010), p. 102.

Miracle	Type	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
In all four gospels					
1. Feeding 5,000 people	Nature	6.35f.	14.15f.	9.12f.	6.5f.
In three gospels including John					
2. Walking on water	Nature	6.48f.	14.25f.		6.19f.
3. Peter's mother-in-law	Healing	1.30f.	8.14f.		4:38f.
4. Roman centurion's servant	Healing (at a distance)		8.5f.	7.1f.	4:47f.
In all three synoptic gospels					
5. Man with leprosy	Healing	1.40f.	8.24f.	5.12f.	
6. Paralyzed man	Healing	2.3f.	9.2f.	5.18f.	
7. Man with shrivelled hand	Healing	3.1f.	12.10f.	6.6f.	
8. Calming the storm	Nature	4.37f.	8.23f.	8.22f.	
9. Gadarene demoniac(s)	Exorcism	5.1f.	8.28f.	8.27f.	
10. Raising Jairus' daughter	Revivification	5.22f.	9.18f.	8.41f.	
11. Haemorrhaging woman	Healing	5.25f.	9.20f.	8.43f.	
12. Demon-possessed boy	Exorcism	9.17f.	17.14f.	9.38f.	
13. Two blind men	Healing	10.46f.	20.29f.	18.35f.	
In two gospels (Mark and Matthew)					
14. Canaanite woman's daughter	Exorcism (at a distance)	7.24f.	15.21f.		
15. Feeding of 4,000	Nature	8.1f.	15.32f.		
16. Fig tree withered	Nature	11.12f.	21.18f.		
In two gospels (Mark and Luke)					
17. Possessed man in synagogue	Exorcism	1.23f.		4.33f.	
In two gospels (Matthew and Luke)					
18. Blind, mute, and possessed man	Exorcism		12.22	11.14	

► Miracles of Jesus that appear in more than one gospel.

Every *category* of miracle performed by Jesus is attested by multiple, early, independent sources.

Even *specific* miracles are attested in this way.

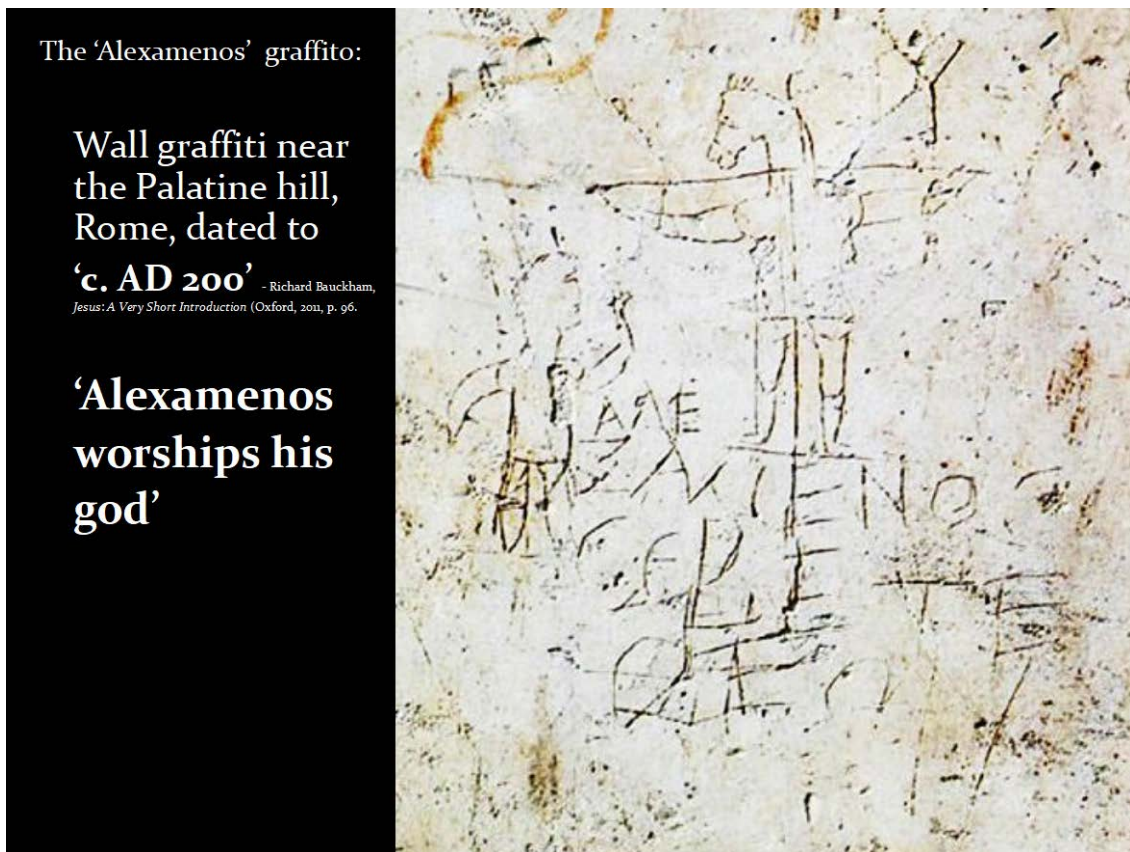
This testimony includes eyewitnesses' reports (John, Matthew/Q), and follows close upon the reported events by comparison with most other works of ancient history.



Greek inscription:

‘The God-loving
Akeptous has
offered the table to
God Jesus Christ
as a memorial’

c. 230 AD, Megiddo House Church



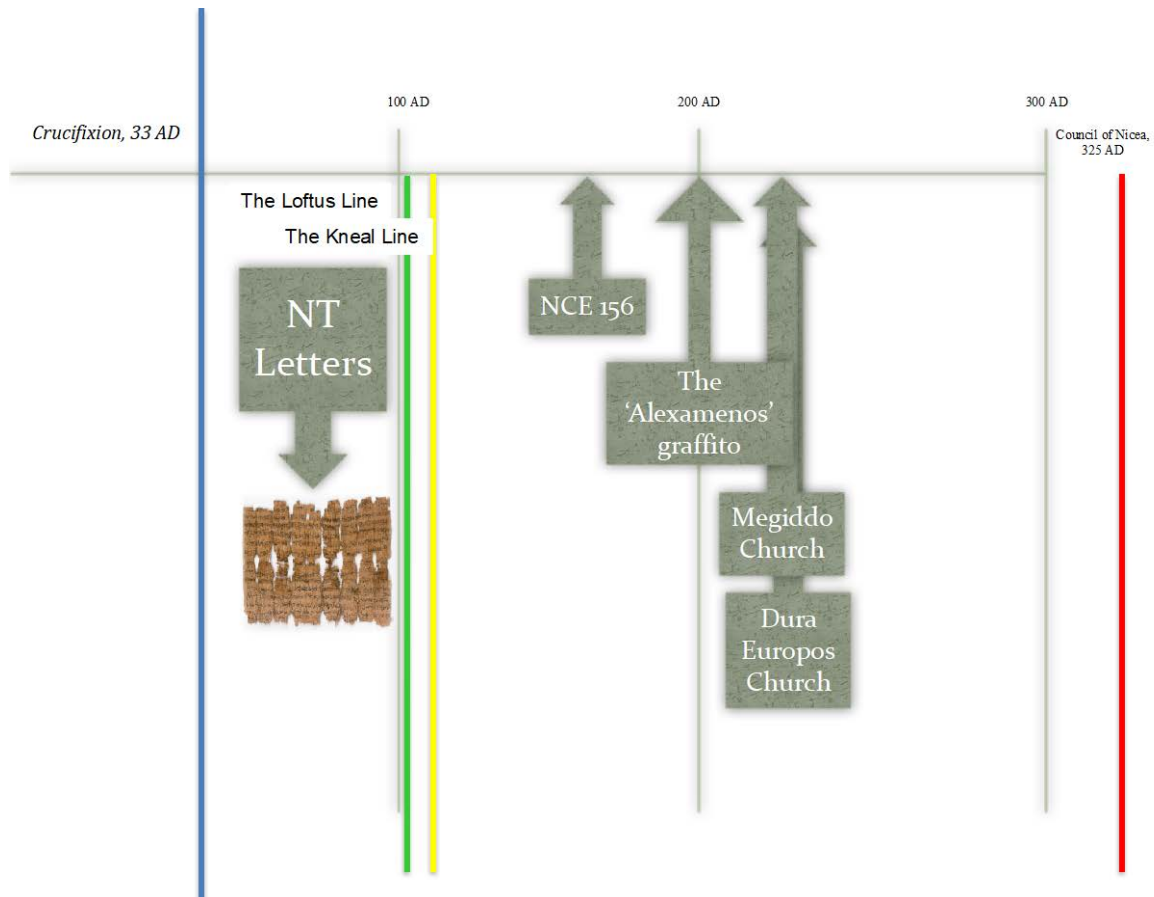
The ‘Alexamenos’ graffito:

Wall graffiti near
the Palatine hill,
Rome, dated to

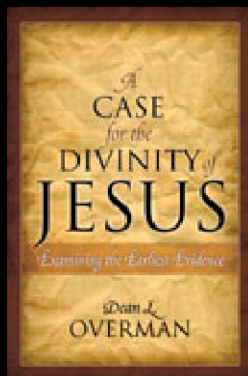
‘c. AD 200’

- Richard Bauckham,
Jesus: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford, 2011, p. 96.

‘Alexamenos
worships his
god’



Dean L. Overman:



'the earliest literary sources in our possession that we know for certain were written within decades of Jesus' death... contain devotional creeds, hymns, and liturgical formulae that preexisted these literary sources and were then incorporated into them. They present compelling evidence of a pattern of worship of Jesus of Nazareth as a resurrected, divine being, dating from a time almost contemporaneous with the events they describe...'

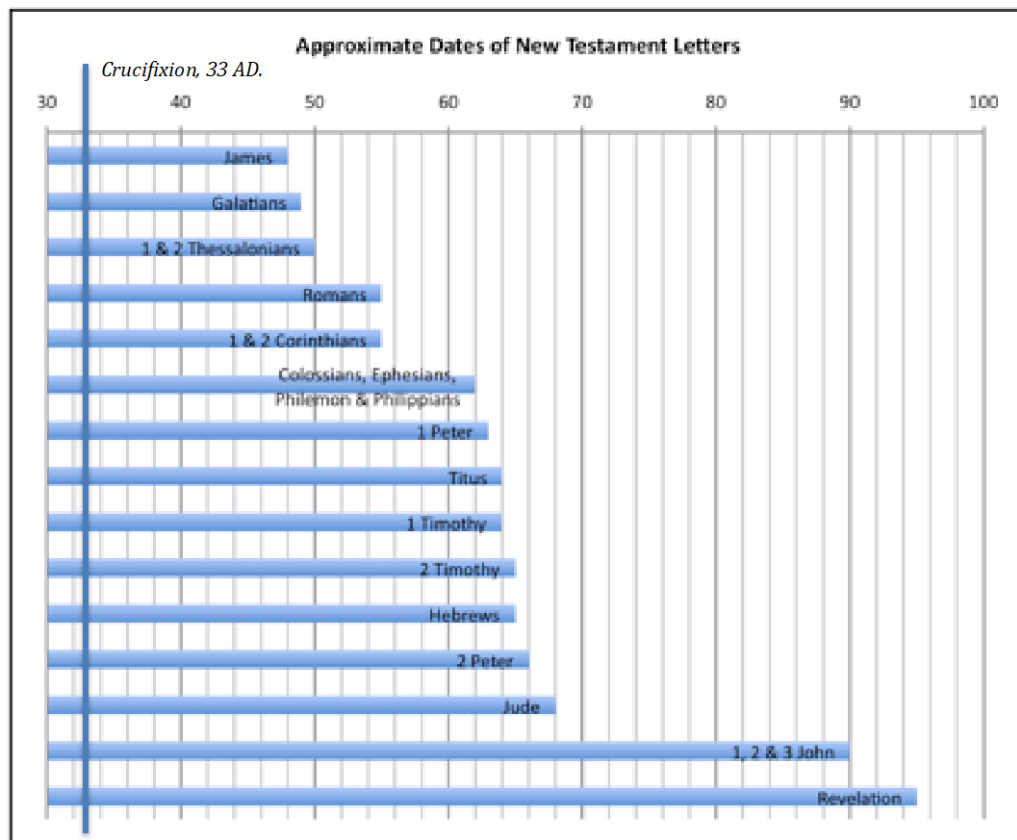
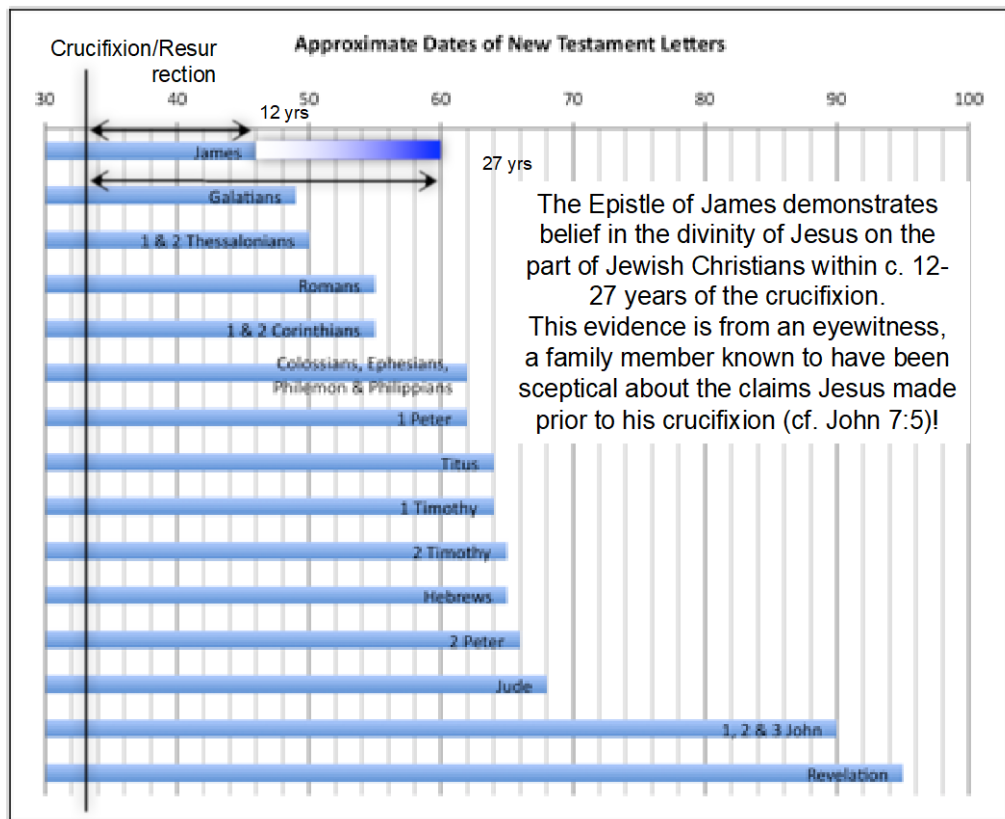


Chart draws upon data from sources including *NIV Thompson Student Bible* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Kirkbride Bible Company, 1999), *The Apologetics Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman, 2007) & Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014).



The High Christology of James

- ▣ James refers to **‘the Lord Jesus Christ’** (James 1:1), describing his readers as **‘believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ’** (James 2:1), and talks about **‘the ones who are *blaspheming* the noble [beautiful] name of him to whom you belong’** (James 2:7, *my italics*).
- ▣ Although βλασφημοῦσιν can mean speech that ‘speaks evil of’ or which ‘reviles’ non-divine persons, the context clearly favours taking the term as a reference to **‘blaspheming’ in the strongest sense** (and this is how the majority of English translations understand the reference).



The evidence shows that:

- High Christology was *not* the result of a 70+ year evolution of thought.
- Within c. 12-27 years of the crucifixion, Jewish monotheists (likely including Jesus' brother James) were treating Jesus as God.
- Jesus made claims to divinity.
- That James the brother of Jesus went from being skeptical about Jesus' claims (cf. John 7:5) to believing he was divine (Josephus/James) despite his embarrassing crucifixion lends credence to the early creedal claim that James met the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 15).
- This suggests James believed his brother was divine *within two years of the crucifixion!*

Recommended Resources:

YouTube Playlist, “The Letter of James”

www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWj8AI8iIBbygZkJQtuVGu-i

YouTube Playlist, “Christology”

www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWgjXlj2cVn_ZjOE8Wd9dVbv

Peter S. Williams (Audio), “High Christology in the Epistle of James”

www.podbean.com/media/share/pb-6gna4-5a41e6

“Digging for Evidence: Archaeology and the Historical Reliability of the New Testament,”
Christian Evidence Society (2016)

http://christianevidence.org/docs/booklets/digging_for_evidence.pdf

“9 Archaeology Finds That Confirm the New Testament,” *Christianity Today* (2017)

www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2017/March-2017/9-archaeology-finds-that-confirm-the-New-Testament

Douglas J. Moo, *James* (IVP Academic, 2009)

Alec Motyer, *The Message of James* (IVP, 2000)

Dean L. Overman, *A Case for the Divinity of Jesus* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009)

Peter S. Williams, *Understanding Jesus: Five Ways to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Paternoster, 2011)

Peter S. Williams, *Getting at Jesus: A Comprehensive Critique of Neo-Atheist Nonsense About the Jesus of History* (Wypf & Stock, forthcoming).