



Lighthouse of Iowa

Keeping in touch with Iowa's Churches of Christ

October 2021

Jesus & the Evidence

By John Morris

INTRODUCTION

Some doubt that Jesus ever existed. But they're in the minority. The overwhelming minority. There's just too much evidence to the contrary.

The first century Roman historian, Tacitus (born c. AD 55), mentions Jesus in his *Annals of Imperial Rome*.¹ Tacitus' contemporary, Josephus (born c. AD 37), references Jesus twice in his *Antiquities of the Jews*.² The Roman administrator, Pliny the Younger (born AD 61), mentions Jesus in a letter to the Emperor Trajan.³ And the second-century satirist, Lucian of Samosata (born AD 125), speaks of Jesus in his work *The Death of Peregrine*.⁴

None of these authors was a Christian, yet each spoke of Jesus as a known historical figure, one who had impacted his world in recent times.

So the question before every thinking person is not "Did Jesus exist?" but rather, "What's the truth about him?" Was Jesus really the Son of God as Christians believe, or was he something less? **And how can we know?**

The New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (sometimes called "the gospels") claim to be historical records of Jesus' life, particularly his ministry. And in their accounts, they write that Jesus said and did all the things that Christians claim

for him: that he said he was the Son of God, that he performed miracles, that he rose from the dead, that he said he is the only way to God. Monumental claims. But not the sort of things one can be expected to believe without evidence.

So is there evidence to support the historical reliability of the gospels? Absolutely.

PUT THEM TO THE TEST

Concerning any historical document, there are three basic tests that can be applied to determine its reliability.⁵ They are:

1. The Bibliographical Test (*Is the text we have now what was originally written?*)
2. The Internal Evidence Test (*Does the text bear the marks of credible history?*)
3. The External Evidence Test (*Is there evidence outside the text to support its claims?*)

These tests are identical for both secular and sacred documents. No exceptions exist for either category. If a historical work is trustworthy, it will pass these tests. If it's not, it won't.

Let's apply the first of these tests to the gospels, and see how they do.

THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST

As already mentioned, this test seeks to answer the question, "Is

the text that we are reading now a trustworthy transmission of what was originally written?" The gospels were written nearly 1,400 years before the invention of the printing press, and so for well over a millennium their dissemination among believers, as well as their transmission from one generation to the next, depended upon the work of scribes. Scribes made copies, and then copies of copies.

At some point, the original documents were lost to history, and the copies were all that remained.⁶ The question naturally arises, then, "Are the copies accurate?" Though careful and highly trained, ancient scribes certainly *were* capable of making mistakes. And they did (more on that later). So how can we have any confidence that the gospels we're reading now bear any resemblance to the originals? Let's see what the evidence reveals.

Number of Manuscripts⁷

To begin with, consider that we have over 5,800 ancient manuscripts (i.e., copies in the original language) of the New Testament (the portion of the Bible containing the gospels). **No other ancient work boasts even half that number** (the New Testament's closest competitor is Homer's *Iliad* for which we have fewer than 2,000 copies). And that number—over 5,800—doesn't include the thousands of ancient

translations of the New Testament, or the many quotations from the New Testament found in commentaries, sermons, letters, etc. produced by early Christians. Inclusion of the translations, alone, would bring the number to over 24,000. This mountain of material puts us in a very good place. With so many samples available for scrutiny, scholars have been able to make an extensive examination of the gospels' paper trail. Those thousands of documents have been meticulously and painstakingly checked, re-checked, and cross-checked. And what has all this labor revealed? That with only the very rarest of exceptions, the substance of the original narratives is beyond all question. The text of the gospels was not "lost in transmission."

Age of Manuscripts

In addition to the number, the age of these manuscripts is also extremely significant. The interval of time between the earliest of them and the original compositions is uniquely small among ancient writings. For example, the oldest surviving manuscript of Homer's *Iliad* was copied 400 years after the original was penned. In the case of Tacitus' *Annals of Imperial Rome*, the gap between the oldest surviving copy and the original is over 700 years. For Josephus' *The Jewish War*, it's over 800 years.⁸ For Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, it's over 900 years. And for the works of Herodotus and Plato, the oldest manuscripts that are of any use to us post-date the originals by at least 1,300 years! **Yet the**

existing texts of all these ancient books are routinely regarded as reliable by scholars.

How do the gospels compare? We possess manuscripts that date to within 50-100 years of the originals.⁹ **Unparalleled by any other ancient work.** As Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director of the British Museum, has said: "[I]n no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament."¹⁰ To call into question the reliability of the gospel texts, then, is to call into question all of ancient history! That is something no reputable scholar would be willing to do.

Variation among Manuscripts

"But there are variations in how the copies read," someone will say. And that is true. Upon comparison, we do find that there are variant readings in the manuscripts. Scribes did make mistakes. For example, we observe in Matthew 1:18 that some manuscripts read "the birth of Jesus Christ," while others read "the birth of Christ Jesus." Another reads "the birth of Christ," while yet another "the birth of Jesus." Four variant readings. But are they significant? No. The substance of the passage remains firmly intact. Even atheist Bart Ehrman has admitted: "*To be sure, of all the hundreds of thousands of textual changes found among our manuscripts, most of them are completely insignificant, immaterial, and of no real importance for anything other*

than showing that scribes could not spell or keep focused any better than the rest of us."¹¹

CONCLUSION

So as far as the text of the gospels is concerned, we can be confident that we have a reliable record of what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote all those years ago. As one respected scholar has noted: "...if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt."¹²

The question for us is not whether we have what the gospel writers intended for us to have, but whether or not we can believe it.

ENDNOTES

1. *Annals of Imperial Rome*, 15:44
2. *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3 and 20.9.1
3. *Epistulae (Letters)*, vol. 2, 10:96
4. *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13
5. *Introduction to Research in English Literary History* (Sanders), p. 143ff
6. This is a universal reality. We do not possess the original of *any* ancient document.
7. Manuscript totals and dates taken from: <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-08.13.14.pdf>
8. *The Case for Christ* (Strobel), p. 60
9. *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible* (Holden, Geisler), p. 373
10. *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p. 5
11. *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 207
12. *The New Testament Documents* (Bruce), p.



Chariton

Meeting times: Sundays: 10:00 a.m. (no evening services)

Location: Call for information.

For information call: Albert Schreck (641) 535-2381 or Brian Schreck (641) 203-2137

☆ Quiet month at Chariton.



October Birthdays

☆ 16 – Tammy Schreck

October Anniversaries

- None

Dean Avenue

Meeting times: Sundays: 9:30 a.m. ♦ Wednesdays: 6:30 p.m.

Location: 2907 Dean Ave., Des Moines, Iowa / P.O. Box 57398, Pleasant Hill, IA 50327

For information call: John McNeece (515) 263-9428

- Tad and Nate Morris met with us. Tad gave us two good lessons for our edification.
- Jim and Candy Meek vacationed in Colorado.
- Tammy Fitzgerald has developed a bad sore on her foot and has been staying with her parents, Don & Cathy James for their help. She is now in the hospital with an infection in her leg. She is also receiving cortisone shots in her back. She will have an MRI to determine if the infection is in the bone. She may have to have her foot amputated. She is feeling depressed and needs our prayers. She is in Mercy Hospital in Room 560.

Visitors: Candy Meek, Brita, Charlie and Maverick Head, Elsie Chapman, Shawn Head, Marilyn McClurg, Miles & Clint Wood, and Rodney Ingle family.

October Birthdays

- None

October Anniversaries

☆ 10 Frank and Claudia Meek

Fairview

Meeting times: Sundays: 10:00 a.m. ♦ Wednesdays: 7:00 p.m.

Location: 1001 S. 22nd St, Clarinda, Iowa 51632

For information call: Richard Negley (712)542-3728 or Marvin Negley (712)542-2792

- A big thank you to the Fenton family for being with us and helping with our morning services on September 19th.

Visitors: Keith & Leta Fenton; Gerry & Ashley Fenton & family; Michail & Aubryn Fenton & family; Darrell & Linda Barnes; Paul Negley & Family.

October Birthdays

☆ October 24 – Tammie Driftmier

October Anniversary

- None

Martensdale

Meeting Times: Sundays: 10:00 a.m. & 1:00 p.m. * Wednesdays: 7:00 p.m.
Location: 10985 44th Lane, Prole, Iowa (1.5 miles east of Martensdale, IA on Hwy. 92)
For information call: Duane Proudfit (515) 961-4470 or Mike Penick (515) 681-0279

- Mike and Tracy Penick spent some time away by taking a cruise.
- Wednesday September 22, we enjoyed a sermon from brother Jay Graham who spent a few days in the area.
- Dick and Phyllis Bown traveled to Lone Jack, Missouri, for a wedding shower for their grandson, David Stanley and his fiance, Grace Sanderfer.
- Jenna Wheeler and Teresa Bown traveled to Missouri to attend a wedding shower for Jordan Bown and Evan Haas.
- Tom and Dianne's daughter Ciera and Family visiting from Oklahoma City worshipped with us on Sunday.
- Other visitors this month have included Kathy (Pam Deckler's cousin); Sharon Stevens; Megan Schreck; Jordan Bown; Evan Haas and Stephanie Stephens and her children.

October Birthdays

- ☆ 7 – Brenna Ingle
- ☆ 9 – Keturah Ingle
- ☆ 15 - Zechariah Hounsom
- ☆ 30 - Wendy Hounsom

October Anniversaries

- ☆ None

Pleasant Hill

Meeting Times: Sundays: 9:30 a.m. ♦ Wednesdays: 6:30 p.m.
Location: 5091 E. University, Pleasant Hill, Iowa
Website: pleasanthillchurchofchrist.org
Contacts: Mike Warner 515-967-4529 / Marty Williamson 515-556-2394 / Marc Hermon 515- 554-3567

- Thank you to all who attended the Labor Day weekend meeting. If you were unable to make the study, we encourage you to listen to evangelist's excellent lessons under the audio section of the Pleasant Hill Church of Christ website.
- We welcomed Bailey Righi to the Pleasant Hill congregation. She transferred her membership from Blue Springs Church of Christ. Bailey graduated recently from ISU and is currently pursuing her master's degree. Bailey is a computer programmer/application developer at Zirious in West Des Moines. The congregation has

truly enjoyed getting to know her and appreciate her servant heart.

- The angels rejoiced on September 19 when Dominique Blackman confessed her Savior and was baptized for remission of sins. We are grateful for the faith that was instilled in Dominique through her grandmother, Margaret Franklin, and sweet sister, Diamond.
- Randy Ingle was admitted to Iowa Lutheran Hospital for 6 days. Randy suffered an allergic reaction to medicine and was also treated for bacterial blood infection.

During the hospital stay, Randy was placed in ICU and had intubation overnight. Praise God for His healing hand! Continue to surround Randy in love and prayers for a full recovery.

- Tom Brady was admitted to Lutheran Hospital for a few weeks for encephalopathy. All glory to God for His continued mercy for this beloved servant. Please lift him and Fred up in prayer as Fred faithfully gives him around the clock care from home now.
- Kelly George went in for surgery on September 17. Unfortunately, the blood clot behind his leg was unable to be fixed due to the clot causing most of arteries in his leg to die so there was no location to perform the bypass to. His body is working on repairing itself, so doctors put Kelly on blood thinners & an artery increaser to help with blood flow. Thanks for encouraging Kelly during this medical trial.
- Joyce Jones had surgery at Mercy Hospital on September 20 to remove a stone in her throat glad. She was hospitalized overnight. Please continue to pray for a full recovery!
- Congratulations to Miles & Kelsey Wood! Their family moved to a new home in Pleasant Hill this month
- Ryan Zinnel had Lasik surgery. Praise God all went well.
- Bruce Harvey had two outpatient procedures to burn nerves in his back this past month. Please pray this will give him relief.
- Betty Warren has suffered a few falls this month. Please petition for a speedy recovery and send cards of cheer.
- Hallelujah! Stephen Thompson and Brenda Fillman Bohall each received a clear scan (no cancer). We praise God for his continued mercy!
- Randy, Theresa & Kinnick Ingle, opened their home to the congregation for the Cy-Hawk game. Over 30 were

in attendance. We sincerely appreciate the Ingle's generous hospitality! Another party is scheduled Friday, 10/1.

- Thank you to all who attended Camp Hermon and this month's ITBS study at the Marc Hermon home. During Camp Hermon several families enjoyed fellowship around a campfire, fishing, singing, an outdoor movie theater, and overnight tenting. Saturday afternoon over 25 Bible students were in attendance for ITBS. Alan Klein taught a lesson on "Lord, Teach Me To Pray!" We praise God for such a wonderful group of young people who love to be with Christians and study from God's Word!

Save The Date! Next ITBS, God willing, is scheduled for Saturday, October 23 at 4 p.m. Justin and Brittney Dowdy will be hosting. Marc Hermon will teach a lesson on "The Fruits of the Spirit."



October Birthdays

- ☆ 10/1 – Don Burkman
- ☆ 10/1 – Pat Thompson
- ☆ 10/3 – Randy Ingle
- ☆ 10/4 – Bev Brady
- ☆ 10/6 – Joyce Ingle
- ☆ 10/10 – Betty Miles
- ☆ 10/15 – Josiah Pritchard
- ☆ 10/27 – Sammy Pritchard
- ☆ 10/30 – Kelsey Wood
- ☆ 10/31 – Ryan Zinnel

October Anniversaries

- ☆ 10/5 – Kelly & Allison George

Vandalia

Meeting Times: Sunday: 9:45 a.m. and Wednesday: 7:00 p.m.

Location: 2.5 miles east of Runnells, Iowa on F70, then 1 mile north on 131st St.

For information call: Greg Ingle (515) 994-2824 or Charles Ingle (515) 966-2537

Website: <https://vandaliacoc.com>

- Joy Cummings has an appointment at Mayo for a second opinion on November 16. In the meantime, she is continuing to work on building up her immune system through nutrition. Grateful and thankful to God for ALL things!!

- Chelsie Rankin has moved from Gardner, Kansas to Iowa and is currently living with Trent and Leah Fiorentin.

- The group gave Cameron Burkman a surprise pizza party after services on the 12th to help him celebrate his 16th birthday.
- Greg and Margaret spent a few days in Clear Lake.
- Micah and Briana Heartsill are the proud parents of a baby girl, Elsie Faye, born Monday, Sept. 13. She joins big brothers Corin and Reuben. CONGRATULATIONS!
- Ladies Bible Study has begun again after a summer break. We enjoy our time studying from God's Word and our fellowship together.
- Vandalia Cemetery Association will be holding its annual auction at the Prairie City Community Building on Saturday, Oct. 2 beginning at 10 a.m.



- **Visitors in September were:** Chelsie Rankin, Sue Schreck; Jenika and Travis Schreck, Sam McDonald, and Wes Kirscher.

October Birthdays

- ☆ 3 Joy Cummings
- ☆ 13 Nathan Fiorentin
- ☆ 15 Eva Fiorentin
- ☆ 16 Josephine Fiorentin
- ☆ 19 Brittney Dowdy
- ☆ 28 Matthew Clark

October Anniversaries

- ☆ 31 Drew Cummings & Miriam McDonough

Copies of the *Lighthouse of Iowa* can be found at the following two Church websites:

Vandalia Church of Christ: <https://vandaliacoc.com/lighthouse-of-iowa.html>

Pleasant Hill Church of Christ: <http://www.pleasanthillchurchofchrist.org/library.php>
(select *Iowa Lighthouse* under the Library tab)

“The only idea man can affix to the name of God is,
that of a first cause, the cause of all things.
And incomprehensibly difficult as it is
for man to conceive what a first cause is,
he arrives at the belief of it,
from the tenfold greater difficulty of disbelieving it.”

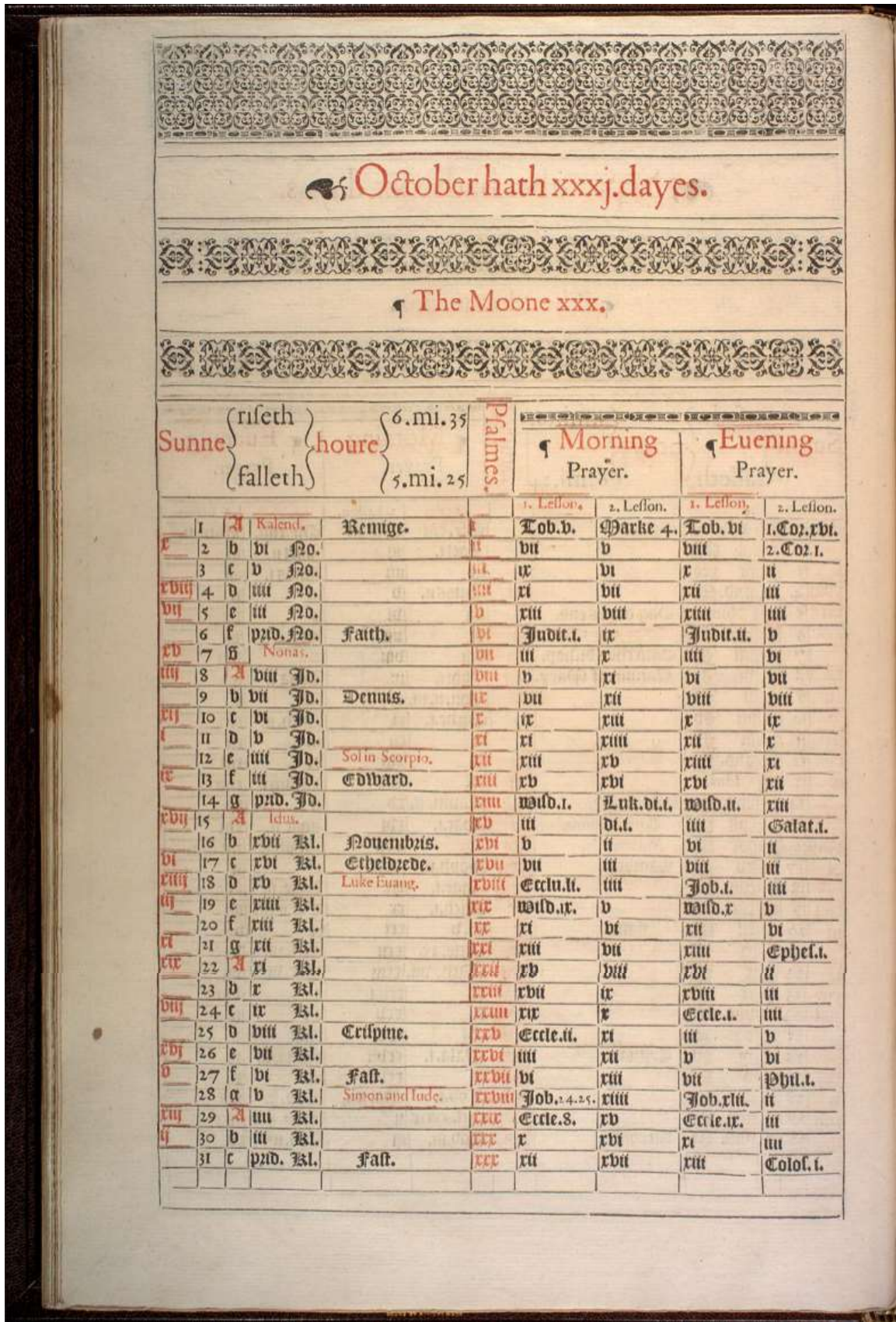
—Thomas Paine
Age of Reason - 1794

Daily Bible reading schedule for the month of October

from the original King James Bible printed in 1611.

The first KJV off the press had a Farmers' Almanac type of monthly reading schedule, including times for sunrise, sunset, and full moon. For a more modern format of all 12 months go to

http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Scotland/Kalendar_1637.htm



Sunne		riseth		6. mi. 35		Palme.	Morning Prayer.		Eueing Prayer.	
		falleth		5. mi. 25			1. Lesson.	2. Lesson.	1. Lesson.	2. Lesson.
	1	A	Kalend.	Remige.			Tob. v.	Marke 4.	Tob. vi	1. Cor. xvi.
	2	b	vi Id.				vi	v	viii	2. Cor. i.
	3	c	v Id.				v	vi	v	
vi	4	d	iiii Id.				vi	vii	vii	
vii	5	e	iii Id.				vii	viii	viii	
	6	f	vi Id.	Faith.			viii	ix	viii	v
ix	7	g	Nonas.				viii	x	viii	vi
x	8	A	viii Id.				viii	xi	ix	vii
	9	b	vii Id.	Dennis.			ix	xii	viii	viii
xii	10	c	vi Id.				x	xiii	ix	ix
	11	d	v Id.				x	xiiii	x	x
	12	e	iiii Id.	Sol in Scorpio.			xi	xv	x	xi
xv	13	f	iii Id.	Edward.			xii	xvi	xi	xii
	14	g	vi Id.				xiii	xvii	xii	xiii
xvii	15	A	Idus.				xiii	xviii	xiii	xiiii
	16	b	xviii Kl.	Novembus.			xiv	xix	xiii	Salat. i.
xix	17	c	xvii Kl.	Etheldrede.			xv	xx	xiiii	
	18	d	xvi Kl.	Luke Euang.			xvi	xxi	xv	Job. i.
xxi	19	e	xv Kl.				xvii	xxii	xvi	
	20	f	xiiii Kl.				xviii	xxiii	xvii	vi
xxiii	21	g	xiii Kl.				xix	xxiiii	xviii	Ephes. i.
	22	A	xii Kl.				xx	xxv	xix	ii
xxv	23	b	xi Kl.				xxi	xxvi	xx	iii
	24	c	x Kl.				xxii	xxvii	xxi	iiii
xxvii	25	d	ix Kl.	Cecilyne.			xxiii	xxviii	xxii	v
	26	e	viii Kl.				xxiiii	xxix	xxiii	vi
xxix	27	f	vii Kl.	Fast.			xxv	xxx	xxiiii	Phil. i.
	28	g	vi Kl.	Simon and Jude.			xxvi	xxxi	xxv	ii
xxxi	29	A	v Kl.				xxvii	xxxii	xxvi	iii
	30	b	iiii Kl.				xxviii	xxxiii	xxvii	iiii
xxxiii	31	c	vi Id.	Fast.			xxix	xxxiiii	xxviii	Colof. i.