

# Did the New Testament Writers Tell the Truth? Part 2

*Why would the apostles lie? . . .*

*If they lied, what was their motive, what did they get out of it?  
What they got out of it was misunderstanding, rejection, persecution,  
torture and martyrdom. Hardly a list of perks!"*

—PETER KREEFT

## MEMORY VERSE

*... and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.  
(I Corinthians 15:14).*

## REVIEW OF THE CONCLUSIONS FROM THE EVIDENCE SO FAR:

1. Does Truth Exist? Yes, it's self defeating to say it doesn't.
2. Does God Exist? Yes, as evidenced by the:
  - a. Beginning of the universe (Cosmological Argument)
  - b. Design of the universe (Teleological Argument/Anthropic Principle)
  - c. Design of life (Teleological Argument)
  - d. Moral Law (Moral Argument)
3. Are Miracles Possible? Yes, since God exists miracles are possible. In fact, the greatest miracle—the creation of the universe out of nothing—has already occurred.
4. Is the New Testament True? We are investigating that now. We know we have an accurate copy of the original New Testament documents, but do those documents tell the truth?

During this lesson, we will continue investigating the six lines of testimony that begin with the letter "E" and show the New Testament documents are historically reliable. Here are the six "E"s:

- Early Testimony
- Eyewitness Testimony

- Embarrassing Testimony
- Excruciating Testimony
- Expected Testimony
- Extra-Biblical Testimony

We covered Early, Eyewitness and Embarrassing in the last lesson. Now let's turn our attention to Excruciating, Expected and Extra-Biblical Testimony.

## **EXCRUCIATING TESTIMONY**

The apostles and early believers were nearly all Jews (Luke is the only author of any New Testament writing who was not a Jew). When Jesus arrived in Israel, the Jews already had a nearly two thousand-year relationship with the God of the universe. They were God's "chosen people" with a rich tradition of religious practices. Such a group would appear to have no motive to invent a new religion, and certainly no motive to invent a new religion that would get them excommunicated from the synagogue and then beaten, tortured and killed! Yet upon the alleged resurrection of Jesus, thousands of pious Jews changed their theology and historic religious practices almost overnight. And many of them paid the ultimate price for affirming the claim that Jesus had risen from the dead (Early writers who wrote about apostles being martyred include: Luke, Josephus, Hegesippus, Clement, Polycarp, Ignatius, Tertullian, Origen, and Dionysius of Corinth.)

**1. Frank highlights the differences in the beliefs of the apostles before and after the resurrection. Why would these pious Jews change their beliefs so drastically?**

**2. How does Frank describe an "impact event"? Describe an "impact event" in your life.**

**3. How would the resurrection qualify as an "impact event"?**

4. From a temporal perspective, why did the New Testament writers have every motive to say that the resurrection did NOT happen?
  
5. Critics often claim that you cannot trust the New Testament documents because they were written by biased and converted people who were not objective. Explain why this objection not only fails, but the fact that these people were converted needs to be explained.

*Many people will die for a lie they think is the truth,  
but no one will die for a lie they know is a lie.*



**Peter's Denial of Christ**

**6. Many people will die for a lie they think is the truth, but no one will die for a lie they know is a lie. How does that statement explain the central difference between martyrs of Islam and the martyrs of the New Testament?**

## **WHAT ABOUT ISLAM AND THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST?**

Based on Sura 4:157, Muslims claim that Jesus never really died (a substitute replaced Him on the cross), and therefore did not resurrect from the dead. There are several problems with this claim.

- First, there is no evidence for it! It's simply an assertion from the Qur'an which was written 600 years after Jesus walked the earth.
- Second, it contradicts all the eyewitness testimony from Christian sources and the references from non-Christian sources.
- Third, it requires us to believe absurdities. Did Jesus' family mistake him for someone else? Did the Roman executioners not know whom they were crucifying? If Jesus wasn't killed, then why did Roman guards guard the tomb? If Jesus did not die and rise from the dead, then who did the miracles after His alleged resurrection? Was everyone following the wrong guy for 40 days? If there was no resurrection, why did everyone die for a known lie, and how did the church experience explosive growth in the face of persecution?
- In short, why should a document written 600 years after the life of Jesus be considered more reliable than all the eyewitness accounts we have from the first century? It would be like someone accepting a book written 500 years from now saying Abraham Lincoln wasn't really killed. Everyone who was there was wrong: his wife and bodyguard who were next to him when he died, the news media who covered the story, the doctors who saw him die—they were all wrong. It takes more faith to believe that than the real story!

## **EXPECTED TESTIMONY**

This is the evidence from Old Testament prophecy. Since Jesus was predicted in the Old Testament, perhaps we should expect testimony of His arrival in the first century.

Some have made the claim that Jesus is predicted hundreds of times in the Old Testament. While a case can be made to support that claim, we think it unnecessarily overstates the case. For our purposes, we only need to cite a handful of passages to make a good case that at least some of the Old Testament has divine inspiration. Let's take a look at those passages.

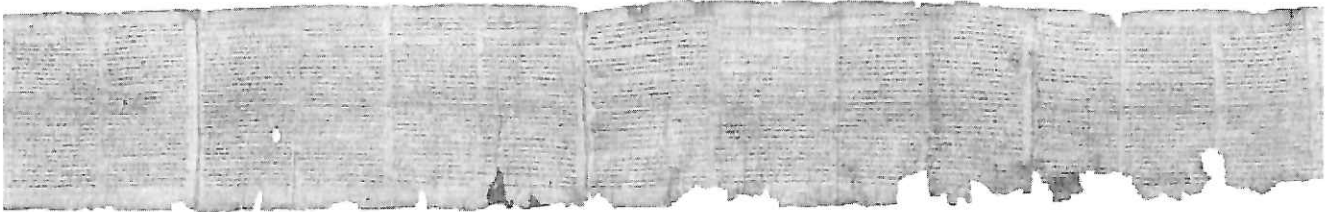
Frank provides this illustration of a bulls-eye to point out that only one person in history seems to fit the criteria made by these predictions in the Old Testament.

**7. Look up each of the verses in the bulls-eye. Read around them to get the proper context. What do they seem to be saying about the Messiah?**

- **Genesis 3:15**
  
- **Jeremiah 23:5**
  
- **Jeremiah 33:15**
  
- **Micah 5:2**
  
- **Isaiah 9:6**
  
- **Malachi 3:1**
  
- **Daniel 9:24**
  
- **Isaiah 53**

**8. Which of these bulls-eye prophecies do you find most persuasive and why?**

## **THE GREAT ISAIAH SCROLL**



Perhaps the clearest and most comprehensive messianic prophecy is the "suffering servant" passage from Isaiah 52:13 to Isaiah 53:12. The entire book of Isaiah was found in one scroll among the Dead Sea scrolls discoveries. The "Great Isaiah Scroll" is the oldest complete biblical manuscript discovered so far. It has been carbon-14 dated at least four times, and an analysis of the style of the writing ensures that the scroll originates from AT LEAST 100 years before the life of Christ (100 B.C.). It contains the entire "suffering servant" passage, and let's us know that Jesus was expected long before He arrived.

**9. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. List some of the characteristics of the Servant from Isaiah 52:13-53:12.**

## 10. How will the coming Messiah suffer for His people?

11. Until the Isaiah Scroll discovery, the oldest scroll of the Old Testament discovered was the Masoretic text dated to 1000 AD, 1100 years later than the Isaiah scroll. The differences discovered between the two scrolls were insignificant, showing that the scribes faithfully copied the text for over 1,000 years. Briefly describe why the Isaiah scroll is so important to the whole of Scripture and to people who put their trust and faith in Jesus Christ.

## COULD ISAIAH 53 BE REFERRING TO ISRAEL?

Traditionally, the most prominent Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 53 was that it was predictive of the Messiah. It was only after contact with Christians that a shift in interpretation occurred just after 1000 A.D. Some Jewish scholars have since said that the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 is the nation of Israel. But there are at least three reasons that interpretation is implausible: 1) Israel is not sinless (53:9). In fact, a common theme throughout the Old Testament is the sinfulness of Israel!; 2) Israel is not a lamb who submits without any resistance (53:7); and 3) Israel does not die as a substitutionary atonement as the Servant does (53:4-6, 8, 10-12).

## EXTRA-BIBLICAL TESTIMONY

I am often asked, "Are there any non-Christian writers who mention Jesus and the apostles?" The answer is "yes." A combination of numerous secular sources (Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian, Thallus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, the Jewish Talmud, etc.) reveals a storyline congruent with the eyewitness testimony of the New Testament. While none of these writers were eyewitnesses to the events, notice how much they agree with New Testament events (See F.F. Bruce, *Jesus & Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*):

- Jesus lived during the time of Tiberius Caesar.
- He lived a virtuous life.

- He was a wonderworker.
- He had a brother named James.
- He was acclaimed to be the Messiah.
- He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
- An eclipse and earthquake occurred when He died.
- He was crucified on the eve of the Jewish Passover.
- His disciples believed He rose from the dead.
- His disciples were willing to die for their belief.
- Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome.
- His disciples denied the Roman gods and worshiped Jesus as God.

However, the question about non-Christian sources is often asked by people who assume that such non-Christian references would be more trustworthy than those made in the New Testament documents. Somehow people think that the New Testament writers were biased and they embellished the story. Therefore, we should only trust them where they are corroborated by secular sources.

**12. Why is that assumption nonsense? In other words, why should we have more confidence that the New Testament writers are telling the truth than the non-Christian writers?**

**13. If Jesus really rose from the dead, how might that cause the Christian writers to be more accurate rather than less accurate?**

## **BONUS! ENEMY TESTIMONY**

While Frank didn't mention this in the video, we could add one more "E" to our list of testimonies in support of the historicity of the New Testament documents. It's Enemy Testimony.

One of the best ways to discover if a historical writing is telling the truth is to see if any enemies of the story admit something about the story is true. For example, if your



mother says you are brave, that's nice, but if your archenemy admits that you are brave, this should convince people that you really are brave. Notice that there is much enemy testimony concerning Christ's resurrection:

- The greatest enemy was converted (Saul).
- Many Jewish priests were converted (see Acts 6:7, cf. Acts 15:5).
- Thousands of unbelievers were converted (Acts 2:41).
- "Stiff-necked" enemies made up stories to explain the empty tomb, implicitly admitting the tomb was empty (see Matthew 28:11-15). Justin Martyr and Tertullian, writing about 150 and 200 AD respectfully, claimed that the Jews were still saying the disciples stole the body throughout the second century (which, of course, implies the tomb was empty).
- Skeptics, committed to anti-supernaturalism for centuries, still cannot explain why the tomb was empty.

## **IN SUMMARY, WE SEE THAT THE NEW TESTAMENT IS CLEARLY:**

### **Early Testimony**

- It was written by eyewitnesses or their contemporaries, most or all before A.D. 70.
- The most important creed in the New Testament, 1 Cor. 15:3-8, is earlier than A.D. 40.

### **Eyewitness Testimony**

- The writers were meticulously accurate citing over 140 historically confirmed details.
- More than 30 historical figures are mentioned, all of whom have been confirmed by outside sources.
- They included divergent details but all agreed on the major events.

### **Embarrassing Testimony**

- They included several embarrassing details that they wouldn't have made up (they were scared, scattered, skeptical disciples who ran away at the first sign of trouble, while the women were the brave ones who went down and discovered the empty tomb!)
- They also included difficult and demanding sayings of Jesus that they would not have invented.

### **Excruciating Testimony**

- Although Jews themselves, they abandoned many of their most valued Jewish beliefs.
- Many of the writers and early believers died because they believed in the resurrection, and could have saved themselves by denying it.

### **Expected Testimony**

- Messianic prophecies from the Old Testament are only fulfilled by Jesus.
- The greatest prophecy (Isaiah 53) is part of the Isaiah scroll—one of the Dead Sea Scrolls—that predates Christ by at least 100 years.

### **Extra-Biblical Testimony**

- There are ten ancient non-Christian writers that mention Jesus and Christianity within 150 years of Christ's life.
- A compilation of these non-Christian references reveals a storyline congruent with the New Testament documents.

### **Enemy Testimony**

- The greatest enemy, Saul, was converted and became the greatest apostle.
- Many priests were converted (a detail that would be easily refuted if false).
- The Jews claimed that the disciples stole the body – thereby admitting that the tomb was empty.

## **TOOLBOX**

- Dr. Michael Brown is probably the top Messianic Jewish apologist today. He's written several volumes answering Jewish objections to Jesus being the Messiah. Orthodox Jews try to refute his arguments and he responds ably in his books and on the Internet. Go to [http://realmessiah.askdrbrown.org/Messianic\\_Objections](http://realmessiah.askdrbrown.org/Messianic_Objections) and read Dr. Brown's defense of Jesus being the Messiah, particularly his defense of Jesus being the Suffering Servant from Isaiah 52-53.
- Visit [www.answering-islam.org](http://www.answering-islam.org)
- Visit [www.GaryHabermas.com](http://www.GaryHabermas.com)
- An excellent book on the evidence for the Resurrection is *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, by Dr. Gary Habermas and Dr. Mike Licona.