

Did the New Testament Writers Tell the Truth? (Part 1)

*We did not follow cleverly invented stories
when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,
but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*

— SIMON PETER

MEMORY VERSE

We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible. (Acts 10:39-40)

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?

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY TO CHRISTIANITY

If you are like most of us, we learned facts about history for school without ever questioning them. How many of those historical events were based on the testimony of eyewitnesses? What evidence do we have that they really were eyewitnesses? And even if they were eyewitnesses, can they be trusted to tell the truth?

Those are questions few of us ask of most historical accounts, but when it comes to the Bible, those questions and more abound. People may not question a story about Abraham Lincoln or Alexander the Great, but they'll try to punch every hole they can in what the Bible says. *The more that is at stake, the more skeptical people get.* People understand that if the Bible is true, the implications for them personally are great (and many people don't want to submit to those implications).

The more we question the documents that comprise the Bible, the more we'll see they do tell us the historical truth. That is critical because without credible, historical evidence, we could not know that there was a person named Jesus who made the claims and performed the miracles that confirm Christianity is true.

The primary evidence we will look at is the written testimony about Jesus. If the testimony of many people who personally witnessed and wrote of the life and works of Jesus Christ is credible, then you are one step closer to knowing the truth about who Christ is and discovering the purpose for your life.

WHY YOU NEED TO KNOW THE EVIDENCE

You may not even question whether the facts about Jesus Christ are true—you just believe them! But on college campuses or in the working world, you will run into views quite the opposite of yours. And some of the people will be actively trying to talk you, or someone you know, out of Christianity. They may mock and challenge Christian views. They may insist that Jesus Christ was just a nice person, or a "good religious leader," or maybe that He really didn't exist at all.

If you are not prepared with an intelligent defense of Christianity (as the Bible itself commands), then you will not be able to take advantage of the opportunity to act as God's ambassador who can help change lives forever. You can't give what you haven't got. Now is the time to prepare yourself with the evidence that the New Testament documents actually do tell us the truth about events in the first century.

During this lesson and the next, we will investigate six lines of testimony that begin with the letter "E" and show the New Testament documents are historically reliable—that the major events they record actually happened. Here are the six "E"s:

- Early Testimony
- Eyewitness Testimony
- Embarrassing Testimony
- Excruciating Testimony
- Expected Testimony
- Extra-Biblical Testimony

We'll cover the first three in this lesson, and the next three in lesson 10.

EARLY TESTIMONY

- 1. Are the New Testament Documents Early? Explain briefly why the dates of the New Testament documents are important.**

- 2. Frank says that most, if not all of the books in the New Testament were written by 70 A.D. What monumental event happened in 70 A.D. that no New Testament document mentions (other than Jesus predicting it)?**

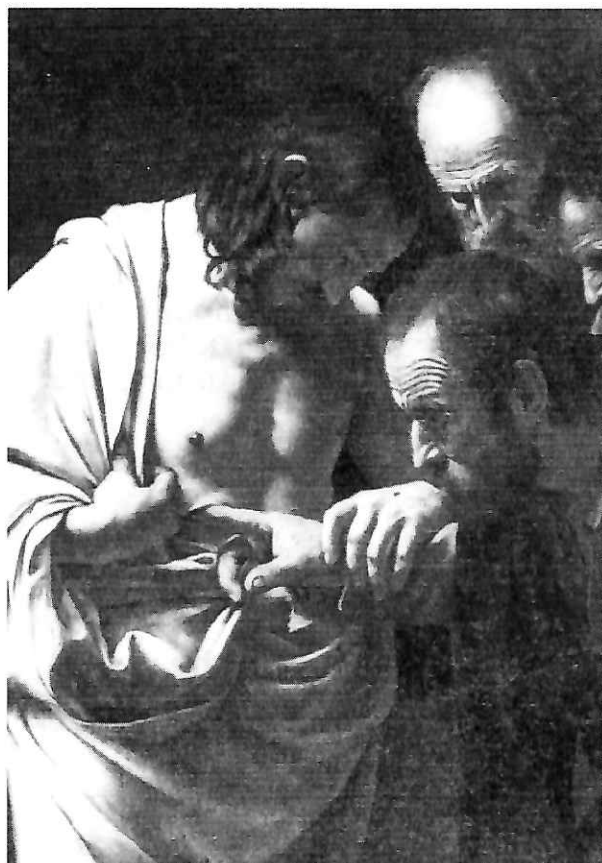
- 3. Believers and critics agree that I Corinthians was written by the mid-fifties A.D. and the creed in I Corinthians 15:3-8 is earlier than 40 A.D. back to the resurrection itself. Why is this creed considered such good testimony that Christ really did rise from the dead?**

- 4. List the people named by the Apostle Paul as eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ in 1 Cor. 15.**

EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY

Were They Really Eyewitnesses?

5. The New Testament writers were very confident in the verifiability of their testimony. Paul, especially, challenged people to test his story. In Acts 26 Paul claims King Agrippa is a witness of the historical events of Christianity. Read Acts 26. Why do you think Paul was so confident?



6. Through archaeology, ancient writings, and other means of investigation, scholars have verified that in the second half of the book of Acts alone, there are 84 confirmed eyewitness details and the Gospel of John has 59 historically reliable or historically probable details in it. In your opinion, what is the implication of these facts on John and Luke's trustworthiness as authors?

Eyewitness Evidence: Thomas

7. How do these facts impact your confidence in believing the miracles John and Luke record in their writings?

8. Many will not believe the New Testament documents because they contain miracles. Why is an anti-supernatural bias illegitimate?

9. More than 30 figures are named in the New Testament who have been cited by non-Christian writers and/or confirmed through archaeology. Why is it unlikely that the New Testament writers would include these actual historical figures in an invented story?

*“The New Testament is
too embarrassing to be false.”*

EMBARRASSING DETAILS

10. “The principle of embarrassment” is one criteria by which historians assess whether a historical document is telling the truth. The principle of embarrassment states that if something is embarrassing to the author or authors, it’s probably true. Why is it probably true?

11. Think of some of the embarrassing details the New Testament writers revealed about themselves. If you were a man making up the New Testament story to get people to follow you and Jesus, what would you have written regarding:

- **Your intelligence? (Compare this to Mark 9:32, Luke 18:34, John 12:16)**
- **Your bravery (would you have made up that you denied Christ and ran away)?**
- **Who discovered the empty tomb? (All four Gospels say the women did.)**
- **Your acceptance and faith in the resurrected Christ?**
- **How other people viewed Jesus (would you have said that people thought he was drunkard, demon possessed and "out of his mind")? (Matthew 11:19, Mark 3:21-22, John 7:20)**

The last thing the Jews were expecting was a sacrificial Messiah who would be killed at the hands of their oppressors. They expected the Messiah to conquer their oppressors. Consequently, the death and resurrection story is not something they would make up or borrow from anyone else, especially in light of the fact that the Jews believed that anyone hung on a tree was under God's curse (see Deuteronomy 21:23).

12. The New Testament said that Jesus was buried in a Jewish tomb. Why would they NOT say that if they were inventing the resurrection story?

13. How did the Jews admit that Jesus really was in their tomb?

14. Paul rebukes Peter for being wrong about a theological issue in Galatians 2:11. Why does this show that they were not inventing theology?

CHRISTIANS STUDY SCIENCE AND HISTORY

Many of the claims of Christianity can be investigated and verified. In fact, all of the founders of modern science were Christians. They believed that investigating the creation provided evidence for the Creator. Moreover, Bible-believing Christians, who realized that theology was the Queen of all Sciences, founded nearly all of our nation's first hundred or so universities. Harvard's charter stated, that the purpose of one's studies was "to know God and Jesus Christ" (see John 17:3).

15. Christianity is based on historical claims that can be verified (e.g., creation, resurrection). How does that differ from most other world religions?

TOOLBOX

- There is a very good book that provides evidence for the Christian worldview on a number of topics with short, to-the point articles. The book is called *Evidence for God* by Michael Licona and William A. Dembski.
- Go to www.Apologetics315.com to get a wealth of resources on many apologetics topics.
- Listen to fascinating radio interviews with Dr. Tim McGrew about the “Undesigned Coincidences” in the Bible. Go to www.crossexamined.org/radio, click on the iTunes stream, and listen to the July 30 and August 11, 2011 shows. Dr. McGrew has You Tube presentations on the topic as well.
- Get the book *Cold Case Christianity* by cold case homicide detective J. Warner Wallace. Also visit his website at www.pleaseconvinceme.com.