

# Were the NT Authors Trustworthy Historians?

Welcome to Fellowship Bible

## Here's what we've learned so far

- Conversations that Count :
  - o Know the gospel & be willing to share it with a world full of broken and hurting people
  - o We need to get over our fear of making a mistake
- The Bible :
  - o Has not been corrupted over 2000 years of textual transmission (week 1)
  - o Is truly unique among all literature in several ways / one of which is that it contains a whole host of predictions about a messiah that would all be fulfilled in a man named Jesus. (week 2)
  - o Today will be our third and final entry in this series pertaining to the defense of the NT
    - Because we've left the skeptic a little wiggle room

"I'll grant that the book is textually intact. The Bible in your hand is an accurate copy. I'll grant that this guy named Jesus seems to have fulfilled these predictions that were written hundreds of years before he lived. But how do we know these NT authors reported on him accurately? Maybe they made up stories to make Jesus look like the promised messiah of Israel."

**"The NT is an accurate copy"** : But is it an accurate copy of the truth or an accurate copy of a lie?"

## We are seeking to discover if the major events as described in the NT really happened.

- To some this task seems impossible. How can you know the past with certainty?
  - o We can't go back in time to witness historical events again.

## We will use the same standard **a jury would use** to determine if a defendant committed a crime.

- Keep in mind, if history cannot be known, then no jury could ever reach a verdict.
- We're looking to see if we can conclude "Beyond Reasonable Doubt" that what is said really happened
- Historians must discover past events similar to how police and forensic scientists do at a crime scene
  - o Shall we do a little CSI this morning???

## Consider Yourself a Forensic Scientist showing up to a crime scene

- They need several specific things to be able to piece together what happened
- **Put yourself in their shoes.** What are we looking for? (DRAW)

Witness Testimony

Corroborating Evidence

## Witness Testimony

### 1) Do we have eye witness testimony?

**"Many have undertaken"** to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good

*also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."*

*(Luke 1:1-4)*

*John says "...that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, this we proclaim to you concerning the Word of Life"*

*(1 John 1:1)*

*"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."*

*(1 Peter 1:16)*

*Paul said, "... Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born."*

*(1Cor 15:8)*

- Yeah but these guys have an agenda. I need an account from someone who was there who wasn't a Jesus follower. Who didn't have an interest in promoting him as something supernatural...
  - o That's like saying that you don't think a Jew at Auschwitz can accurately report on the holocaust. (They were connected to the events in a way that creates biased reporting)
- I'm not saying we limit the scope to the Biblical authors but if they were there (eye witnesses) then in any court of law, their testimony is preferred to hearsay testimony... right?

## **2) Is the testimony early?**

- When did these guys provide their testimony?
  - o Some critics assert that the NT books were written around 150 AD or later
  - o This would rightly be problematic b/c that would be long after the death of the eye witnesses
    - immediately discrediting their "testimony" as a forgery
- Most agree that the NT books were written before 100 AD
  - o I personally believe that the NT was largely completed before AD 70
  - o Not all of the books, but most of them..... why do I take this position?
- Before making my defense, allow me to start with an analogy
  - o If you picked up a book titled **"The History of the World Trade Center"**.
  - o In reading the back cover discovered that it was written by a long term tenant whose business was proudly based there for many years.
  - o If you flipped to the end of the book and discovered that the writer concluded their account with the towers still standing.... what would you have to conclude?
    - **It was written before Sept 11, 2001**
    - Who makes a "history" and leaves out the single most defining part of the story?
- If you are a Jew, your whole life is in a sense centered around **the temple in Jerusalem**
  - o The dwelling place of God on earth where you come to visit every year to offer sacrifices
  - o Your people have been doing this for over 1,000 years and deeply rooted in your identity
- Do you know that 37 years after Jesus death in a well documented war with the Romans
  - o **The Jewish temple is decimated**

- Jerusalem itself as a city is leveled
- Tens of thousands of your countrymen are killed
- And three of your central NT figures (Peter, James and Paul) are killed
  - But the New Testament mentions none of this... (completely silent !)
  - The burning of Rome (64AD) but Acts end with Paul awaiting trial in Rome
- What inference do we have to make if the NT is completely silent on these enormous events?
  - If its just an oversight, its an oversight the size of the world trade center falling being omitted

### 3) Eye Witness Character

- How do we know these guys told the truth?
- Let's face it, all of us have lied about something or other.
  - Did the NT authors tell the truth when they wrote about Jesus or did they fabricate lies to try to support their views?
- What are the marks of authenticity in testimony? When do you feel like you can believe what is said
  - Witness examiners in a court of law are looking for several things

**Divergent Details** : Are the eye witnesses accounts of the events they describe somewhat different?

- Two eyewitnesses will rarely ever see all the same details
  - They will never describe an event with exactly the same words.
- They'll record the same major events but will always differ on the details.
  - Listen to my sermon and write down every other sentence
- If two witnesses provide a testimony that is word for word similar, what do you assume?
  - They got their stories together (collusion)
- Are there divergent details for example in each of the 4 gospels?
  - Yes, and its interesting that these differences tend to tell us a bit about the author
    - What was Matthew's profession? (Tax Collector : he has a financial lens)
    - Story of Peter catching a fish with a coin in its mouth to pay for the temple tax (17:27)
    - Parable of the unforgiving servant (large debt vs smaller debt) (18:21-35)
    - Parable of the workers in the vineyard (more work for same pay) (20:1-16)
    - The detail that the soldiers at Jesus tomb were bribed to change the story (28:12-15)
  - Additionally when stories are repeated between the gospels we see slightly varying details
    - Who was there when a specific miracle happened
    - Details related to Jesus crucifixion etc.
    - Could do a full hour on these minor differences / they're fascinating

**Embarrassment** :

- When a testimony incl details that are embarrassing / not helpful to their case = prob speaking truth
  - Why? Because of the tendency most of us have to leave out anything that makes us look bad.
- In short, do the New Testament authors provide details that make the authors themselves look bad?
  - Remember, the people who wrote down the NT were themselves characters in the story and at times they depict themselves as complete morons.

**Dim Witted** : They fail to understand what Jesus is saying multiple times (Mark 9:32, Luke 18:34, John 12:16)

**Uncaring** : They fall asleep on Jesus twice when he asks them to pray for him in his hour of need (Mark 14:32-41)

**Rebuked** : Peter is called “Satan” by Jesus (Mark 8:33) and then he is corrected by Paul on a theological issue (Gal 2:11)

**Cowards** : Every one of them but one fled when Jesus goes to the cross. Peter even denies him three times after promising to never disown him (Matt 26:33-35). It’s the women who discover the empty tomb b/c the disciples are still hiding.

- What would the NT look like if it was “edited” by the authors?

“The disciples would have left out their ineptness, their cowardice, their rebukes, their denials and depicted themselves as bold believers who stood with Jesus to the end and then marched down on Easter Sunday to the empty tomb where Jesus would have congratulated them on their great faith.”

“**Whatever weaknesses** they may have had, the biblical authors are universally presented in scripture as scrupulously honest, and this lends credibility to their claim, for the Bible is not shy to admit the failures of his people.”

Stress Test : **Does the testimony hold up under pressure**

- I want to make one final point about the credibility of the NT authors
    - o I want to look at some American history to make my point
  - Team USA had a swimmer that made a fool of himself at the Rio Olympic games
    - o **Ryan Lochte** said he was mugged and had money stolen from him with a gun pointed to his head
      - In Rio (a town known for petty crime) this would be plausible but it was considered a disgrace to the host city who worked hard to up security & protect the athletes
  - When his team-mates who were with him during this event were taken into custody for questioning
    - **The story changed**
      - These men risked only embarrassment (national pride)
      - Yet they recanted their story when sternly questioned (the lie lasted about 48 hours)
  - Why? When punishment awaits a liar, the truth tends to emerge
- 
- Eleven of the twelve disciples were martyred for their faith
    - o Only John survived martyrdom and he was exiled to the island of Patmos
  - Each of these twelve men could have saved their skin by recanting their beliefs.
    - o Instead Peter chose the cross, James chose death by stoning and Paul chose to be beheaded
    - o Would these men and others who died similarly choose to die for a known lie??
      - Liars make lousy martyrs

“**Twelve powerless men**, peasants really, were facing not just embarrassment or political disgrace, but beatings, stonings, execution. Every single one of the disciples insisted, to their dying breaths, that they had physically seen Jesus bodily raised from the dead. Don’t you think that one of the apostles would have cracked before being beheaded or stoned? That one of them would have made a deal with the authorities? None did.”

(J.P Moreland)

## Corroborating Evidence :

- Do the other puzzle pieces on the crime scene (so to speak) fit what is being said?
- Is there additional corroborating evidence that supports the testimony?

## Historically Confirmed People

- The NT Writers Include more than 30 Historically Confirmed People in Their Writings
  - o There is no way that the NT writers could have gotten away with writing outright lies about
  - o Pilate, Caiaphas, Festus, Felix and the entire Herodian bloodline.
  - o Somebody would have exposed them for falsely implicating these people in events that never occurred.

## Archaeology

- Archeologists recently uncovered the **pool of Bethesda**, previously not found in Israel
- **In 1961 an inscription referring to Pontius Pilatus Prefect of Judea** was discovered in Caesarea
  - o Prior to this it was thought by critics that Pilate was an invented character b/c there was no record of him anywhere
- As recently as 1992 the burial **grounds of Caiaphas** and his family were unearthed in Jerusalem

“It is worth noting that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a single Biblical reference”  
Nelson Glueck : (noted Jewish archeologist)

“The Bible is supported by archeological evidence again and again. The fact that the record can be so often explained or illustrated by archeological data shows that it fits into the framework of history as only a genuine product of ancient life could do....Names of places and persons turn up at the right places and in the right periods”  
(Millar Burrows of Yale)

## Jesus Outside the Scriptures

- One of my favorite courses in seminary was called the Search for the Historical Jesus
  - Day 1 of class the professor said you won't be needing your Bibles
  - From now until then we will be looking through the extrabiblical writings that mention Jesus of Nazareth to see what we can learn about Jesus simply by scouring those sources
    - o Does their account line up with the New Testament or is it different?
  - I discovered that there are 22 different sources written before 150 AD that mention Jesus
    - o I have a paper on the website that details the findings from **5 of the 22 sources**
1. Christians were named for their founder, Jesus Christ, who was widely accepted as a wise and virtuous man, recognized for his good conduct.
  2. He lived during the reign of Tiberius Caesar, (AD 14-37)
  3. and had many disciples, both Jews and Gentiles
  4. to whom he would teach ethical principles regarding absence from sin.
  5. He was recognized as being able to affect nature through the performance of miracles ('sorcery')
  6. Some of these miracles were healings,

7. others were resurrections from the dead
8. These miracles were well attested
9. and could be checked out by eye witnesses of the events.
10. He was brought into custody and accused of leading Israel astray.
11. For this he was given a trial at which no one stepped forward to defend him.
12. He was given into the hands of the Roman Procurator Pontius Pilate
13. who condemned him to die
14. by method of crucifixion
15. Jesus death ended the 'superstition' for a while,
16. but it broke out again because the disciples reported that Jesus had risen from the dead
17. and appeared to them on the third day after crucifixion.
18. Consequently, the disciples continued his teachings
19. especially in Judea where the teaching had its origin
20. but also in Rome.
21. After this event, Jesus was worshipped as deity by early believers.
22. A day of worship seems to have been established. (Possibly Sunday)
23. Perhaps he was the messiah concerning whom the Old Testament prophets spoke and predicted wonders.

The Jesus portrayed through 'unbiased' historical record bears an uncanny resemblance to the Jesus depicted in the gospel accounts.

<b>Witness Testimony</b>	<b>Corroborating Evidence</b>
Eye Witness?	Archaeology
Early Testimony?	Extrabiblical Confirmation
Divergent Details?	
Embarrassment?	
Stress Tested?	

In light of all we've covered this morning, I believe we can determine that Matthew, Mark, Luke, John (and yes even Paul) should be considered credible witnesses.