



Is the New Testament Reliable?

2nd Peter 1:15-21
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2nd Peter 1:15-21

15. And I will also make every effort that after my departure you may be able to recall these things at any time.
16. For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.
17. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, a voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory: This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him!

18. And we heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with Him on the holy mountain.
19. So we have the prophetic word strongly confirmed. You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dismal place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.
20. First of all, you should know this: no prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation,
21. because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, moved by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God.



Is the New Testament Reliable? ***How Do We Know?*** ***6 Questions to Investigate***

Is Christianity Based on a Philosophy or Actual Historical Events?



1

- Does it have to be true to be truth?
- F. F. Bruce: "Does it matter whether the New Testament documents are reliable or not?... [Some will say] it may be... the story of Jesus as it has come down to us may be myth or legend, but the teaching ascribed to Him—whether He was actually responsible for it or not—has a value all its own, and a man who accepts and follows that teaching can be a true Christian even if he believes that Christ never lived at all."

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Is Christianity Based on a Philosophy or Actual Historical Events?



- 2nd Peter 1:16 "For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ..."
- Luke 1:1 "Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us"

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Ignatius

(Executed somewhere between 98 – 117 AD)
Pupil of Apostle John, Bishop of Antioch

"He was carried in the womb, even as we are, for the usual period of time... And when he had lived among men for thirty years, He was baptized by John, really and not in appearance... He was condemned: He was crucified in reality, and not in appearance, not in imagination, not in deceit. He really died, and was buried, and rose from the dead..."

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F.F. Bruce

The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?

"That Christianity has its roots in history is emphasized in the Church's earliest creeds, which fix the supreme revelation of God at a particular point in time, when 'Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord. . . suffered under Pontius Pilate'."

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Is Christianity Based on a Philosophy or Actual Historical Events?



- 1st Corinthians 15:14-15, 32 "And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is **without foundation**, and so is your faith. In addition, we are found to be false witnesses..."
- Paul tells us, it does have to be true to be truth!

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Is There Eyewitness Testimony?



- 1st John 1:1 "What was from the beginning, what **we have heard**, what **we have seen with our eyes**, what **we have observed**, and **have touched** with our hands, concerning the Word of life"
- 2nd Peter 1:16 "...we were **eyewitnesses** of His majesty"
- 1st Corinthians 15:5-6 "He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then He appeared to over 500 brothers at one time, **most of whom remain to the present**, but some have fallen asleep."

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Luke 1:1-4

1. Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us,
2. just as the original **eyewitnesses** and servants of the word handed them down to us.
3. It also seemed good to me, since I have **carefully investigated** everything from the very first, to write to you **in orderly sequence**, most honorable Theophilus,
4. so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.

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Is the Eyewitness Testimony Reliable?



1. Is it sincere?
 - **James**: **beheaded** as the first martyr of the Apostles (Acts 12:1-2)
 - **Peter**: Executed by **crucifixion** (head-down, at his own request) around AD 64 during the persecutions of Emperor Nero, or later in AD 67.
 - **Andrew**: **Crucified** at Patras in Achaia. A later tradition describes him as being crucified in a spread-eagled position.

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Is the Eyewitness Testimony Reliable?



1. Is it sincere?

- **John:** Boiled in oil before dying a natural death at Ephesus around 98-100 AD.
- **Bartholomew:** Traditionally he met his death by being flayed or skinned alive, and then beheaded at Derbent, north of present day Baku on the Caspian Sea or what is now India.



Is the Eyewitness Testimony Reliable?



1. Is it sincere?

- **Thomas:** Speared to death near Madras on the east coast.
- **James the Less:** Martyred in Egypt
- **Jude and Simon the Zealot:** killed in Persia
- **Paul:** beheaded in Rome
- Con-men may lie for money, but they will not die for a lie!



Sincerity Beyond Reasonable Doubt



- In 112 AD, Pliny the Younger, Governor of Bithynia, wrote to Emperor Trajan asking how he should treat Christians
- Had been killing Christian men & women, boys & girls
- He was asking if he should continue killing them all or just certain ones
- Also, Pliny had made Christians bow down to statues of Trajan
- "Made them curse Christ which a genuine Christian cannot be induced to do."



Is the Eyewitness Testimony Reliable?



2. Is it sincere, *but mistaken*?

- Acts 1:3 "After He had suffered, He also presented Himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, **appearing to them during 40 days** and speaking about the kingdom of God."
- Not a "group hallucination" or wishful thinking – too much time to come to one's senses & to verify the facts.



Is the Record of the Eyewitness Testimony Reliable?



4

- Could the record have been embellished by people who came later?
- Theological liberalism
 - e.g. Quest for “Historical Jesus”
 - e.g. “Jesus Seminar”
 - Purpose, as they see it, to free Americans from the naïve belief that the Jesus of the Bible is the ‘real’ Jesus
- The Da Vinci Code...

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The Da Vinci Code

“The Bible is a product of *man*, my dear. Not of God. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, editions, and revisions.”

Page 231 (Page 250-251 in paperback)

[Constantine the Great] omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned.”

Page 234

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Is the Record of the Eyewitness Testimony Reliable?



- We know that the Bible we read today is what was written by the original writers because of...
 1. How close in time the copies are to the originals
 2. The number of copies

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How close in time the copies are to the originals



- **Plato** (Tetralogies) 427-347 BC
 - We have only 7 ancient copies
 - Earliest copy: 900 AD
 - The earliest one was copied 1200 years after being written
- **Roman historian Tacitus** 100 AD
 - 20 copies of “Annals”
 - Earliest copy: 1100 AD
 - 1,000 years after being written
- **Homer’s Iliad** (900 BC) (2nd best manuscript evidence behind NT)
 - 643 copies
 - Earliest copy: 425 BC
 - 500 years after being written

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Is the Record of the Eyewitness Testimony Reliable?



Rylands Papyri (P52)
John 18:31-33, 37
Found in Egypt, 1920
Dated to approx. 130 AD
(John died approx. 98 AD)

- Over 5,000 Greek Manuscripts
 - Within 140 years of the originals
- 25,000+ manuscripts in other languages (Latin, Coptic, Syriac)
 - e.g., Latin translation of Old & New Testaments dating to 150 AD by African Missionaries
- 30,000+ quotations from Church Fathers of New Testament within 300 years of Jesus
 - All but 11 verses in the New Testament are found quoted in the writings of the earliest Christians.

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Chester Beatty Papyri



Discovered: 1930
Contains most of the New Testament, including the four Gospels and Acts
Dates to before 250 AD

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F. F. Bruce

The New Testament Documents

"No classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus (about 488-428 BC) or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest manuscripts of their works which are of any use to us are over 1300 years later than the originals.

But how different is the situation of the New Testament in this respect!..."

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The Record of the Eyewitness Testimony is Reliable!



Mike Licona

- When comparisons are made between copies, scholars can reproduce a text that is roughly 98.5% pure to what the original said.
- The remaining 1.5% is mostly matters of spelling and word order and impact no major doctrine or practice.

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Is There Evidence That Corroborates Their Testimony?



- **Thallus:** Samaritan-born historian, In AD 52, attempted to explain the darkened sky at the time of Christ's death
- **Josephus:** Jewish historian (born 37 AD) records crucifixion & resurrection reports
- **Tacitus:** (born 52-54 AD) Historian, wrote of Pilate's execution of Jesus

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How Does the Record Compare with Conflicting Testimony?



- 2nd Thessalonians 2:15 "Therefore, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught, either by our message or by our letter."
- 2nd Thessalonians 2:2 "Not to be easily upset in mind or troubled, either by a spirit or by a message or by a letter as if from us, alleging that the Day of the Lord has come."

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Gospels Among the Dead Sea Scrolls?

"Because Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits, and embellished those gospels that made him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned... Fortunately for historians," Teabing said, "some of the Gospels that Constantine tried to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950's, hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert."

The Da Vinci Code, chapter 55
page 254 in paperback >

Dead Wrong on the Dead Sea Scrolls



- Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in 1947, not the 1950's
- There are no writings about Jesus in the scrolls – No Gospels
- The scrolls found at Qumran are copies of Old Testament books and the writings of the sectarian Jewish group who lived there
- Most all of the writings were written before Christianity

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Some Christian Scriptures Were Destroyed



- In 303 AD Diocletian ordered the destruction of the sacred books of the Christians.
- This is before the Council of Nicea in 325
- This is before Constantine became Emperor in 306
- So the charge that Christians are the book-burning suppressers of expression has it exactly backwards! They are the victims.

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80 Gospels?

"More than *eighty* gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only relatively a few were chosen for inclusion—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them... The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by pagan emperor, Constantine the Great."

The Da Vinci Code, chapter 55
page 251 in paperback

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Mark D. Roberts



- Only four gospels were ever seriously considered for the NT canon
- There is no evidence that *eighty* gospels ever existed
- In Nag Hammadi Library, there are only four documents with the name "gospel" attached (Truth, Thomas, Philip, and Egyptians)
 - Gospel of Mary is included in English versions of the Nag Hammadi Library, but it wasn't found there.
- The *Early Christian Writings* website, which uses the term gospel quite liberally, and includes most early Christian writings, has only twenty-one so-called "gospels" – not 80.

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The Gospels vs. "The Lost Gospels"

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| • Matthew: 58–75 AD | • Gospel of Thomas: 200 AD |
| • Mark: 65-70 | • Gospel of Peter: 150 |
| • Luke: 70-90 | • Apocalypse of Peter: 100-150 |
| • John: 65-98 | • Gospel to the Hebrews: 80-150 |
| • Acts: 85- | • Gospel of Barnabas: 80-120 |
| • Possibly, Luke & Acts written before 64 AD | • Gospel of Philip: 175-250 |
| | • Gospel of Mary Magdalene: 120-180 |
| | • Gospel of Judas: Existed: 180
– Earliest copy: 300, |

Would you be more likely to believe a book about George Washington written by someone who lived during his lifetime, or one written by someone who lived 100 years later and who wrote under someone else's name? >

“The Lost Gospels”

- Except for the Gospel of Thomas, all the others were written more than 100 years after Jesus.
- Teachings in these differ from what we know the apostles taught
- Never quoted by any known author during first 300 years after Christ
- Never read in Christian assemblies
- Not included in the lists of accepted books & letters
- Not the subject of commentaries
- Some were specifically rejected by the Church

Mike Licona

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How Does the Record Compare with Conflicting Testimony?



- Origen (AD 185-254):
“I know a certain gospel which is called The Gospel according to Thomas and a Gospel according to Matthias, and many others have we read... Nevertheless, among all these we have approved solely what the church has recognized, which is that only the four gospels should be accepted.”

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Weird Stuff

- Gospel of Thomas
 - “Blessings on the lion if a human eats it, making the lion human”
 - “Let Mary go away from us because women are not worthy of life... For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”
- Gospel of Philip
 - “The saints are served by evil powers, for they are blinded by the Holy Spirit into thinking that they are serving an (ordinary) man whenever they do so for the saints.”

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Questions Asked as the Early Church Determined Which Books to Use



- Was it written by an Apostle or someone in direct contact with an Apostle? ...during the Apostolic era?
 - The church automatically rejected any book written under a pseudonym (assumed name).
- Is the book consistent with the teachings of the Apostles?
- Is the book Christ-centered?
- Had the book already received wide acceptance in the church?
- Does the book bear the marks of spiritual power?

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How Does the Record Compare with Conflicting Testimony?



- Sir William Ramsey
 - Tried to disprove the truthfulness of the New Testament by trying to prove that Luke was a fairy tale full of errors. As a historian he became convinced that Luke was an incredible historian and became a Christian himself.



“The Anvil? God’s Word”

Last eve, someone passed beside a blacksmith's door, and heard the anvil ring the vesper chime. Then looking in, he saw upon the floor old hammers, worn with beating years of time.

"How many anvils have you had," he asked, "to wear and batter all these hammers so?"

"Just one," said the blacksmith, and then added with twinkling eye, "The anvil wears the hammers out, you know."

Just so, the anvil of God's Word, for ages skeptic blows have beat upon.

Yet though the noise of falling blows was heard, the anvil is unharmed-the hammer's gone!

