

The Reliability of The New Testament

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In this paper I will attempt to address the reliability of the New Testament. This will be accomplished using manuscript evidence, archaeological evidence, scientific evidence, and historical evidence.

What is the manuscript evidence for the New Testament? Manuscript: a book or document written before the invention of printing.<sup>1</sup> The amount of evidence supporting the New Testament is amazing. God truly intended us as His creation to be able know that the New Testament is valid. There are a total of over 24,000 manuscripts that attest to the original documents of the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> This includes Approximately 5,600 plus partial and complete Greek manuscripts.<sup>3</sup> Also the Gospels boast of over 2,300 manuscripts and fragments surviving from the earliest centuries of the Christian church.<sup>4</sup> There are over 10,000 Latin Vulgate and 9,300 other early versions.<sup>5</sup> In comparison to other documents in the world from ancient history the New Testament is the most documented. The next closest one is Homers Iliad which only has 600 plus manuscripts supporting it. Aristotle's writings have only 50 manuscript copies of any one of his original works and the time of removal is over 1100 years before the earliest copy. The P52 John Rylands fragment is the earliest New Testament manuscript which is between 50-250 years removed from the original events. This is a piece of papyri measuring about 3.5 by 2.5 inches in size and written on one side is John 18:31-33 and on the other side is 18:37-38. So far this is the earliest known fragment of the New Testament in any language.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dictionary.com

<sup>2</sup> Joe Holden, Apologetic Evangelism Course Notes

<sup>3</sup> Metzger, Bruce M., *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968)

<sup>4</sup> Blomberg, Craig L., "Gospels: Historical Reliability," in Joel B. Green, Scott McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IVP),

<sup>5</sup> Joe Holden, Apologetic Evangelism Course Notes

<sup>6</sup> The university of Manchester The John Rylands University Library

**Manuscript breakdown:**

Greek	
Uncials	307
Minuscules	2,860
Lectionaries	2,410
<u>Papyri</u>	<u>109</u>
TOTAL	5686 + Greek manuscripts
Manuscripts in other languages	
Latin Vulgate	10,000 +
Ethiopic	2,000 +
Slavic	4,101
Armenian	2,587
Syriac Pashetta	350 +
Bohairic	100
Arabic	75
Old Latin	50
Anglo Saxon	7
Gothic	6
Sogdian	3
Old Syriac	2
Persian	2
<u>Frankish</u>	<u>1</u>
SUBTOTAL	19, 284
GRAND TOTAL	24,970 <sup>7</sup>

In conclusion I have to say that the evidence we have through manuscripts alone and of how close they were written time wise to the actual events is so great it seems almost imposable to see the New Testament any other way but being reliable.

Next lets look at the archaeological evidence.

Archaeology's repeated affirmation of the New Testament's accuracy provides important corroboration for its reliability. This is in stark contrast with how archaeology has proved to be devastating for Mormonism.<sup>8</sup>

Through the years there have been numerous archaeological findings that support the reliability of the New Testament. The Gospel of Luke and Acts have many references to people, cities, rulers, travel, coins, sea routs.

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<sup>7</sup> McDowell, Josh, *New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), Joe Holden, Apologetic Evangelism Course Notes

<sup>8</sup> Lee Strobel, *The Case For Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998],143.

But the question is then asked was Luke a historian that could be trusted? In the book *The Case For Christ* Lee Strobel answers this question in his interview with John McRay, PH.D. McRay's reply to Lee's question of Luke's reliability is as stated, "He's erudite, he's eloquent, his Greek approaches classical quality, he writes as an educated man, and archaeological discoveries are showing over and over again that Luke is accurate in what he has to say."<sup>9</sup> What a statement to the credibility of Luke.

One of the oldest findings is the James Ossuary. An ossuary is a limestone box that was used to keep the bones of the dead after the decay of the flesh occurred in the tomb. Tombs were rare and expensive and needed to be reused. This particular ossuary bears the inscription "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus" The 2,000-year-old ossuary—a box that held bones—bears the inscription "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." Until now, all references to the three men have been found only in manuscripts. (Hillary Mayellfor, *National Geographic News*, October 21, 2002). The Pool of Bethesda is mentioned in John 5:2. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. (John 5:2-4 NKJV) The New Testament was the only known place that this pool was mentioned until 1888. That is when the remains of the pool was unearthed during an excavation near the Church of St. Anne.

We also have evidence of a crucifixion victim that was found in 1968 in a cave in Jerusalem. After analysis of the victims wounds it was confirmed that they were in fact consistent with the crucifixion of Christ described in the New Testament. There are many

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<sup>9</sup> Strobel, *The Case For Christ*, 129.

other archaeological finds that prove the reliability of not only the New Testament but also the Old Testament as well.

The scientific evidence that supports the reliability of the New Testament. John 1:1-3 states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." (NKJV) This scripture not only states the existence of Christ before the earth's creation, and His deity. But also confirms His creation of everything. Science provides evidence of our universe having a beginning. With science we also now have an understanding of the structure of molecules and cells in our bodies and then there is our DNA. all of this is so perfectly balanced and in order like a well oiled machine. It is impossible for these things to have just happened by chance. I see that science supports that there is a creator and the scripture reference above shows that Christ is that creator.

Now let's look at the historical evidence that proves the reliability of the New Testament. There are three principles that are used to test all historical documents which should also be used to test the reliability of the Scriptures. The Bibliographical Test (check manuscripts), The Internal Evidence Test (prophecy, eyewitness), and The External Evidence Test (archaeology, non-Christian eyewitness). The Bibliography Test was already covered in the section above pertaining to the evidence in manuscripts. For the Internal Test we need to look at eyewitness accounts such as Luke 1:1-4 "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed." (NKJV) Also we see what I believe to be one of the greatest testaments to

Christ's resurrection the staggering account of all of the people that saw Him after His death.

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (NKJV)

Then there is the need to understand the evidence of oral tradition. During the Bible times huge chunks of scripture were memorized. Although oral story telling may have permitted for certain freedoms. Fixed points of the narrative were required to remain unchanged. These are called a Vox. This preserved the facts of Gods Word. With the Exterior Evidence Test traditions about Jesus appear in various pieces of literature. These ancient non-Christian sources have value in that they offer data from a secular perspective, often clarifying and corroborating with the gospel record.<sup>10</sup> We have Greco-Roman sources such as Tacitus and Suetonius. then there is the Jewish testimony of Josephus. Flavius Josephus is thought to be the most important witness to Jesus from the

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<sup>10</sup> Joe Holden, Apologetic Evangelism Course Notes

Jewish culture. Here is a statement from him. "Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ: and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."<sup>11</sup>

In conclusion, if after all of the evidence we have today about the New Testament is examined and one comes to the conclusion that it is not reliable and throws it out. Then shouldn't all of the other history, poetry, and philosophy music, plus any other findings pertaining to this life be thrown out as well?

For my personal application I have to say that this class has truly challenged me. I now know how to explain Christ in His deity and in his human nature. How our scientists and archaeologists have found and continue to find revealing evidence that supports the Bible. This is great because a lot of people out there think that science and the Bible are completely separate. Also I can now refer to the notes that I have written down for future references. I can accurately communicate with those that believe in evolution the facts about everything having a beginning that is not partial and evolving but is complete. I do have to say though, I am very very lost in a lot of this. I almost have a sense of lacking intelligence when it comes to all that I have listened to and read during the course of this class.

I thought I knew about the Bible, but after taking this class and especially after trying to write this paper I have concluded that I have so much more to learn and am in a great

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<sup>11</sup> Josephus, Complete Works, 379, Joe Holden, Apologetic Evangelism Course Notes

need to apply my self to the study of the Bible. I am thankful that Jesus says, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." (John 14:26 NKJV)

All in all I do see a difference in me and in the way I look at and think of the Bible, Jesus Christ, the world I live in and the people I am around. Also my thinking of the universe and all that is in existence has changed. I have a better understanding of how history, archaeology, and science point to the Bible not away from it. The greatest take away for me is I can stand firm on the fact that the New Testament is reliable and the world around me continues to point to the truth that God sent His Son to us. Fully God and fully man, completing the task needed to save me and the all those in the world. So loving is God that He gives us an opportunity to understand the who, what, when, and where of the Bible, and His redemptive plan. Not making it a lofty thing that is out of reach. I know I feel like all of this is out of reach at times but I am finite. I rest in the Word of God, that He himself will teach me through His Word and through others that are submitted to Him and His Word.

Thank The Lord!



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