

REASONS TO BELIEVE

PART II: Authenticity of the New Testament

(No. 1057 – 4/16/14 - NLC)

I. CHRISTIANITY IS BASED ON HISTORICAL FACTS

- A. As pointed out in the previous study (Part I), if Christ's virgin birth, miracles, death and resurrection did not actually happen, then the whole foundation of Christianity collapses (**1 Cor. 15:17**): *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*
- B. If the history of the Early Church and the spread of Christianity recorded in Acts and the Epistles cannot be historically documented, then we should believe all the critics who say the New Testament was written long after the deaths of the original apostles and is filled with mythical legends and embellishments.
- C. HOWEVER, if it can be shown that the New Testament documents are authentic, written by the traditional authors, then the evidence for Christianity is overwhelming!
- D. In this study, we will focus to two important aspects of the historical record of Jesus Christ:
 - 1. Importance of eyewitness accounts
 - 2. Reliability and preservation of written documents

II. AUTHENTICITY OF WRITTEN DOCUMENTS

- A. Abundance of historical records
 - 1. The written records of Christian origins are preserved in far greater numbers and variety than those of ANY OTHER PERSONAGE OR HAPPENING in the entire history of the world prior to the invention of the printing press in 1450!
 - 2. No one ever doubts that Julius Caesar was once the emperor of Rome, but the manuscript evidence for the New Testament is incomparably superior to any historical record of Caesar!
 - 3. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote the *Annals of Imperial Rome* around A.D. 116 — Books 1-6 exist today in one

manuscript that was copied around A.D. 850; Books 11-16 are in another manuscript from the 11th century, and Books 7-10 are lost!

4. We have only 9 Greek manuscripts of the 1st century historian Josephus copied in the 10th century or later.
5. By contrast, we have over **5,000 handwritten copies of the Greek New Testament** and at least 15,000 more in other languages — nothing remotely comparable exists for any other ancient history!
6. Furthermore, there are nearly twice the number of manuscripts of writings of early Christians (certain were known as the Apostolic Fathers who wrote during the period A.D. 90 -160) that contain numerous quotations from the New Testament; scholars agree that even if all New Testament manuscripts had been lost, it would be possible to reconstruct it altogether just from the quotations of these early Christian writers!

B. Accuracy of manuscript copies

1. Prior to the invention of printing, all documents were copied by hand by scribes
2. Although there are minor discrepancies in the 20,000 different manuscripts, caused either by careless copying or even by deliberate alterations, because of the sheer volume of manuscripts the origin of any variant readings can be traced and the original text verified.

C. Archaeological evidence

1. The Book of Acts
 - a) The physician Luke, a highly educated man and author of Acts and the Gospel bearing his name, was a very careful historian (**Luke 1:1-4**): *¹Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³Therefore, 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,*

⁴so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

- b) Acts, which documents the first 30 years after Christ, makes references to numerous places, times, customs and events of the Roman, Greek and Jewish worlds of that time.
 - c) If Luke were a careless reporter or Acts was just an accumulation of mythical legends and traditions written down long after the events took place, it should be full of factual mistakes.
 - d) Sir William Ramsay, the greatest of all New Testament archaeologists, made the most extensive studies anyone has ever undertaken on the authenticity of the New Testament (as a skeptic!) said this about Luke:
“Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense... In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.”
- 2. Descriptions in the New Testament of Jerusalem, Judaea and Samaria and references to customs and political situations have frequently been confirmed by archaeological and historical studies
 - 3. No statement in the New Testament has been refuted by any unquestioned scientific or historical find!

III. THE AUTHORS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

- A. Skeptics often level a number of challenges concerning the authors of the New Testament:
 - 1. “We cannot trust that the Gospels or epistles were actually written by the people whose names are attached to them.”
 - 2. “The authors were frauds involved in a conspiracy to spread myths and legends about Christianity.”
- B. From the earliest writings of the Church Fathers, there has never been any dispute over the authors of the four Gospels or the majority of the epistles
- C. There would be no logical reason to falsify information concerning Mark and Luke – they were unlikely candidates to write Gospels – they weren’t even among the 12 disciples!

- D. Matthew was a hated tax collector – not exactly the “front man” you would want to use to start a new religious movement!
- E. Contrast this with the fictitious names of authors given to the apocryphal gospels written much later – names like Philip, Peter, Mary, and James which carried a lot more weight than names like Matthew, Mark or Luke!
- F. History confirms that the New Testament authors were willing to suffer and die for their convictions – all died as martyrs except John; men may be willing to die for an unworthy cause which is false, but never if they know it to be so (e.g. Islamic suicide bombers & martyrs)!
- G. The New Testament writers were not, as some maintain, subject to some form of mass delusion or hysteria
 - 1. Many of the events described took place in public among crowds of people where it would be impossible for mass deception
 - 2. One good example is the feeding of the 5,000, one of the few miracles reported in all four gospels!
 - 3. There were more than 500 eyewitnesses of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection (**1 Cor. 15:3-7**): ³*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,* ⁴*that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,* ⁵*and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.* ⁶*After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.* ⁷*Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.*
 - 4. It is utterly absurd to think that such numbers of people could all have been deluded or making up fictitious tales!

IV. THE WITNESS OF THE ORDINANCES

- A. Christian churches everywhere practice in some form the two ordinances commanded by Christ: baptism and the Lord’s Supper

- B. Both commands are recorded in the Gospels (Mat. 28:19; 26:26-28)
- C. Church literature confirms that these practices were prevalent in all of the early churches even before they had the written New Testament that commanded these observances!
- D. Suppose Philip had never heard about baptism or the Lord's Supper until 20 or 30 years later when he received copies of the Gospel of Matthew or Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians.
- E. He would have rejected the documents as fraudulent because they were proposing two supposedly apostolic ceremonies that none of his churches had ever known about!
- F. After the days of Christ, no writings could ever have gained acceptance as authentic in the churches if the practices of baptism and the Lord's Supper were not already being observed regularly

V. THE EFFECT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT ON WORLD HISTORY

- A. The witness of almost 2,000 years of Christianity, with its tremendous impact on world history is proof that something of unique power and importance took place to get it started – effects must have causes!
- B. In John 8:12, Jesus claimed to be the “light of the world” (we will examine the validity of this and other amazing claims that He made later); whether He was insane or imaginary, consider some of the effects He has had on the world:
 - 1. The world's greatest literature, most beautiful paintings and sculptures and most glorious music have all been inspired by Jesus Christ!
 - 2. Most of the hospitals, most of the great educational institutions and most of the world's charitable organizations were originally founded in His Name!
- C. Jesus claimed that heaven and earth would pass away, but His words would never pass away (Mat. 24:35); His words have in fact been heard, read, loved and obeyed by more people in more nations than those of any other man who ever lived!

- D. The world's entire historical timeline is based on Jesus Christ!
 - 1. B.C. = "Before Christ"
 - 2. A.D. = "Anno Domini" (Latin for "in the year of our Lord")
- E. The body of facts has no rational explanation if Jesus is not actually God in human form – if Christianity is false, the existence of a fallacy of such scope constitutes a greater miracle than if it were true!