

Christian Apologetics

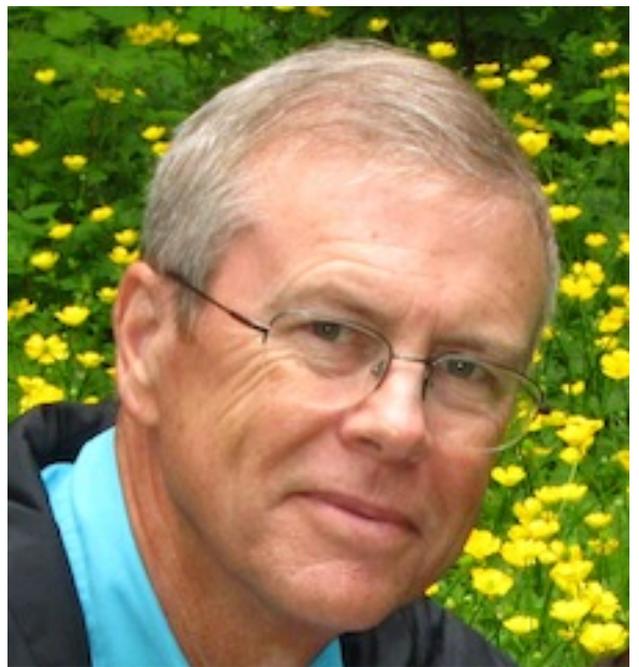
Evidences for a logical and rational faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God

- Introduction To Christian Apologetics
- The Historical Jesus
- Our Dependence Upon The New Testament
- Evidence For Early Existence Of The New Testament
- Archaeological Support For The New Testament
- Manuscript Attestation For The New Testament
- The New Testament: Truth Or Lie?
- For Your Further Study

These outlines were developed in the course of my ministry as a preacher of the gospel. Feel free to use them as they are, or adapt them to suit your own personal style. To God be the glory!

They are also available in a **PDF file**, suitable for printing.

Mark A. Copeland
ExecutableOutlines.com



"CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS"

Introduction To Christian Apologetics

INTRODUCTION

1. In **1Pe 3:15**, all Christians are commanded to be ready to make a "defense" for the reason of their hope in Christ...
 - a. The word "defense" is from apologia, which means "a speech in defense of what one has done, or of truth which one believes"
 - b. The formal use of this word is used by Paul in **Ac 22:1; 1Co 9:3**
2. Peter, however, uses the word in the context of an informal inquiry by a friend or neighbor...
 - a. E.g., someone asking "Why are you a Christian?"
 - b. To such Peter says that we should be ready to give reasons why we believe
3. In this series of lessons on **"CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS"**, we shall examine some of the evidence that exists for placing one's faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God
4. In doing so, I hope to accomplish two objectives:
 - a. To **STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH** in Jesus Christ
 - b. To **HELP PREPARE OURSELVES** to be able to do the very thing enjoined by Peter in **1Pe 3:15**

[In this lesson, I wish to establish some "BASICS" for Christian apologetics that are important for all to realize...]

I. THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS "AN INTELLIGENT, RATIONAL FAITH"

A. IT APPEALS TO THE "MIND" AS WELL AS TO THE "HEART"

1. God expects us to use our minds - **Mt 22:36-38; Jn 8:32**
 - a. I.e., we do not have to commit "INTELLECTUAL SUICIDE" in order to have faith!
 - b. This is important, for as one person said, "My heart cannot rejoice in what my mind rejects!"
A "WEAK FAITH" may be the result of the heart trying to believe in something the mind cannot accept
But the "STRONG FAITH" God requires involves both the mind and the heart
2. So it is important that we present reasons why we believe in an INTELLIGENT and RATIONAL manner
 - a. "We cannot pander to a man's intellectual arrogance, but we must cater to his intellectual integrity." - PAUL LITTLE

B. DOES THIS MEAN WE CAN OFFER 100% PROOF?

1. No, but there is virtually nothing of which we can be 100% sure (e.g., who our parents are)
2. Yet, we often make 100% commitments with less than 100% proof; e.g., flying on an airplane...
 - a. We cannot be 100% certain that we will have a safe journey
 - b. But the statistical evidence is strong enough to convince us that we will
 - c. So though we may not have 100% certainty of arriving safely, when we step on the plane we make a 100% commitment!
3. So the question becomes: IS THERE ENOUGH EVIDENCE OR PROOF TO WARRANT MAKING A 100% COMMITMENT TO CHRIST?

- a. I believe that there is
- b. Certainly enough evidence to commit myself 100% FOR HIM, rather than be 100% AGAINST HIM!

There is no other alternative - **Mt 12:30**

Jesus is like an airplane; either we get on board totally, or we get left behind!

[So the Christian faith is to be an INTELLIGENT, RATIONAL FAITH. As an example, consider the next "BASIC"...]

II. THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS "A HISTORICAL, FACTUAL FAITH"

A. CHRISTIANITY APPEALS TO HISTORY, AND THE FACTS OF HISTORY

1. "The facts backing the Christian claim are not a special kind of 'religious' fact. They are the cognitive, informational facts upon which all historical, legal, and ordinary decisions are based." - CHARLES PINNOCK
2. It will be my purpose in future lessons...
 - a. To present these HISTORICAL FACTS
 - b. Then demonstrate that the CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION is more logical than any other

B. BUT TO BRIEFLY ILLUSTRATE THAT CHRISTIANITY IS BASED UPON HISTORICAL FACTS...

1. Consider **Lk 2:1-5; 3:1-2**
2. Notice the appeal to time, places, people and events that actually existed in history

C. THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, THEREFORE, IS A HISTORICAL FAITH THAT APPEALS TO CERTAIN FACTS OF HISTORICAL OCCURENCE

1. Not a PHILOSOPHICAL faith appealing to philosophies of men
2. Not a faith based upon MYTHS and LEGENDS

[As we consider the evidences for the Christian faith, it is also important to bear in mind that...]

III. THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS "AN OBJECTIVE FAITH"

A. IT IS A FAITH IN AN "OBJECT": JESUS OF NAZARETH!

1. Faith in WHO He was: The Christ, the Son of God
2. Faith in WHAT He did: He rose from the dead on the third day

B. IT "DOES" MAKE A DIFFERENCE "WHAT" WE BELIEVE!

1. The old cliché "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe in something" is inconsistent with the Christian faith
2. Consider **Jn 8:24; Ro 10:9**
 - a. Note that it is not faith IN OF ITSELF that is important
 - b. But IN WHOM (the object) our faith is based!

[And then consider that...]

IV. THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS "BASED ON PRINCIPLES OF TRUTH"

A. SUCH AS "TRUTH IS ALWAYS OPEN TO EXAMINATION"

1. So is the Christian faith
 - a. Cf. **Ac 2:22** - Peter appealed to the crowd to examine what they themselves knew
 - b. Cf. **Ac 26:24-26** - Paul invited Agrippa to examine the evidence

2. Unlike some religions (esp. "Jehovah's Witnesses" and the "Mormons"), the CHRISTIAN FAITH is open to honest examination

B. SUCH AS "TRUTH IS ALWAYS OPEN TO NON-TRUTH (FALSIFICATION)"

1. That is, it is open to be proven wrong
2. To illustrate, if you don't believe Jesus was raised from the dead...
 - a. Use the evidence that is available, and...
 - b. Attempt to prove by it that He wasn't!
 - c. Do this and then we shall see which interpretation of the facts is more logical (intelligent and rational)

[Before I close this lesson, I wish to address one last question: "If the Christian faith is such an intelligent, rational, historical and factual faith, then why do many people reject it?"]

V. WHY PEOPLE REJECT CHRIST

A. AS IN THE DAYS OF CHRIST, IT IS USUALLY DUE TO ONE OF THREE REASONS...

1. **IGNORANCE - Jn 7:40-43**
 - a. Some rejected Jesus as the Christ because they were ignorant of the historical facts concerning His birth
 - b. So many do today for a similar reason: LACK OF ACCURATE INFORMATION!
2. **PRIDE - Jn 12:42-43**
 - a. Pride in wanting to be approved by men kept them from confessing Jesus as the Christ
 - b. Today, many do not want the RIDICULE or REJECTION one might face for following Christ
3. **MORAL PROBLEM - Jn 3:19-20**
 - a. Some people reject the evidence because it would mean having to change their LIFESTYLE
 - b. Today, many people in efforts to justify their immorality...
 - Accept only that evidence which supports theories which allows them to continue their lifestyle
 - Reject any evidence which may support a doctrine which would condemn their behavior and require a change

B. WHAT IT OFTEN BOILS DOWN TO IS THIS...

1. The rejection of Christ...
 - a. Is not so much a problem of the "MIND" but of the "WILL"!
 - b. Is not so much "I CAN'T" but "I WON'T"!
2. There is enough evidence to convince the honest and sincere seeker
3. But there is not enough evidence to force a man against his will when he is determined to reject it!

CONCLUSION

1. It is with these "BASICS" in mind that I shall endeavor to give evidence that warrants faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the Son of God
2. I shall not attempt to prove anything "beyond a shadow of a doubt," for that is not possible
3. But I shall try to show that it is more logical to believe in Jesus, than for one not to!

And we shall begin by examining the evidence that demonstrates Jesus to be a true, historical figure, a person who actually lived!

The Historical Jesus

INTRODUCTION

1. In the previous lesson, we laid the foundation for a study in Christian apologetics: That the Christian faith is...
 - a. AN OBJECTIVE FAITH
 - With Jesus of Nazareth as the object of that faith
 - That He is the Son of God, who died for our sins and rose from the dead
 - b. A HISTORICAL FAITH
 - Based upon real people, places, and events
 - That actually took place in history
 - c. AN INTELLIGENT, RATIONAL FAITH
 - Which invites people to use their minds
 - To examine the historical evidence which logically supports placing one's faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God
2. With these things in mind, we begin by considering the evidence...
 - a. Which establishes Jesus of Nazareth as a HISTORICAL FIGURE
 - b. One who actually lived in Palestine during the First Century A.D.

[Some might wonder...]

I. WAS THERE EVER ANY QUESTION?

A. THERE HAVE BEEN SKEPTICS WHO BELIEVED JESUS WAS JUST A "MYTH"...

1. This concept was popular with some scholars of the 1800s'
2. It is rarely found today, except among those...
 - a. Who are ignorant of the facts
 - b. Who purposely suppress the evidence (e.g., as was done in formerly communist-dominated countries)

B. TODAY, NO SERIOUS HISTORIAN (EVEN THOSE WHO ARE ATHEISTS) DISPUTES THE FACT THAT JESUS EXISTED...

1. H. G. WELLS
 - a. An atheist, he spoke of Jesus in his book, Outline Of History
 - b. "...one is obliged to say, 'Here was a man. This part of the tale could not have been invented.'"
2. WILL DURANT
 - a. Ex-professor of Philosophy of History at Columbia University
 - b. He spent two chapters in The Story Of Our Civilization depicting Jesus as a historical figure right along with the Caesars
3. ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA
 - a. Used over 20,000 words to describe Jesus
 - b. More than Aristotle, Cicero, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, or Napoleon

[So there appears to be sufficient evidence to have convinced these and others like them that Jesus actually lived.]

What is this evidence...?]

II. THE EVIDENCE FOR A HISTORICAL JESUS

A. AMONG "PAGAN" SOURCES...

1. THALLUS (a Samaritan historian, ca. 52 A.D.)
 - a. Wrote attempting to give a natural explanation for the darkness which occurred at the crucifixion of Jesus
 - b. Note carefully:
 - He did not deny the existence of Jesus
 - But only tried to explain away the strange circumstances surrounding His death
2. LETTER OF MARA-SERAPION (written to his son, ca. 73 A.D.)
 - a. He tells of the deaths of Socrates, Pythagoras, and of Jesus
 - b. "What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king?...Nor did the wise king die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given."
3. CORNELIUS TACITUS (Roman historian, ca. 112 A.D.)
 - a. Writes of Jesus in his ANNALS
 - b. "Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberias."
4. PLINY THE YOUNGER
 - a. Governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, ca. 112 A.D.
 - b. Wrote to the emperor Trajan about Christians and their devotion to Christ
5. SEUTONIUS (Court official and annalist under Hadrian, 120 A.D.)
 - a. "As the Jews were making constant disturbance at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome."
 - b. Luke makes reference to this same expulsion in **Ac 18:1-2**

B. AMONG "JEWISH" SOURCES...

1. THE TALMUD
 - a. Consists of two separate books dealing with Jewish law, written during the period from 100 A.D. to 500 A.D.
 - b. Speaks frequently of Jesus of Nazareth...
 - In unfriendly terms, of course
 - But never disputing his status as a historical figure
2. FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS
 - a. A Jewish general turned Roman historian, born 37 A.D.
 - b. Makes several references to Jesus in his History Of The Jews
 - c. E.g., "...and brought before it the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ, whose name was James."

[Such is the evidence which must be taken into account by any intelligent and rational person.

But what are the implications of such evidence?]

III. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS EVIDENCE

A. WHAT IT "DOES" DO...

1. It provides a solid basis upon which one can intelligently believe in Jesus as a person who actually existed in history
2. It exposes the shallow thinking of any who would try to mark off Jesus as a myth
3. It requires everyone to give some sort of answer to the question posed by Jesus Himself: "But who do you say that I am?" - **Mt 16:15**

B. WHAT IT "DOES NOT" DO...

1. The evidence we have seen thus far DOES NOT prove Jesus to be the Son of God
2. In fact, it does not tell us anything about Jesus except:
 - a. That He lived and died during the First Century A.D.
 - b. That He must have done something significant to gain some notoriety by the historians

C. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT JESUS, WE MUST LOOK ELSEWHERE...

1. There have been many fanciful stories written about Jesus
2. But the Christian considers the twenty-seven books known as the New Testament to be the only reliable source of information about Jesus
3. But are they?
 - a. Is the New Testament reliable as a historical document?
 - b. Can we even be sure that what we have is actually what was penned by the original authors of the New Testament?

CONCLUSION

1. The next study shall begin an attempt to answer these questions
2. For now, we have simply laid one block as we build a foundation upon which we can rest our faith...
 - a. We have seen that it is more logical to believe that Jesus did in fact exist
 - b. To assert that He is a myth is groundless
3. And since He actually existed, that requires our giving some answer to the question Jesus asked: "WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?"
4. Will our answer be "LORD!", or "A CAREFULLY CONTRIVED LIE!"
 - a. As we shall see, these are the only two choices we have
 - b. The evidence we shall continue to examine should help give us the right answer!

Our Dependence Upon The New Testament

INTRODUCTION

1. We have seen the evidence from UNBIASED SOURCES that establishes Jesus of Nazareth...
 - a. As a person of history
 - b. Who lived and died in the First Century A.D.
2. But we also pointed out that such sources tell us nothing about...
 - a. Who He was
 - b. What He did ...to earn such a reputation that, centuries later, His teachings and life still has so much influence in our society
3. For the Christian, the only record which describes in any detail the life and death of Jesus is the NEW TESTAMENT
 - a. But as a HISTORICAL DOCUMENT, is it reliable?
 - b. Can we trust it to be accurate in relating facts of history concerning Jesus, His life, death and resurrection?
 - c. Can we even have confidence that what we have today in the form of the New Testament is an accurate copy of that penned by the original authors?
4. These are some of the questions we shall attempt to answer as we begin to examine **"THE HISTORICAL RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT"**

[But first, for CHRISTIANS to appreciate the importance of this subject, it may help to demonstrate how dependent our faith is on the reliability of the New Testament as a historical document...]

I. WHY DO WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD?

A. THE "ANSWERS" WE MOST LIKELY WOULD GIVE ARE...

1. "Because of the miracles He did"
2. "Because He fulfilled hundreds of the Messianic prophecies found in the Old Testament"
3. "Because He rose from the dead"

B. BUT WHERE DOES ONE LEARN ABOUT THESE THINGS?

1. Where do we read about His miracles? THE NEW TESTAMENT!
2. Who says that He fulfilled the Messianic prophecies? THE AUTHORS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT!
3. What evidence is there for the resurrection of Jesus Christ? AGAIN, IT IS PRIMARILY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT!

II. WHAT IF IT WERE SHOWN CONCERNING THE NEW TESTAMENT...

A. THAT IT WAS WRITTEN OVER 100 YEARS AFTER THE EVENTS SUPPOSEDLY HAPPENED?

1. Then the New Testament was not written by eyewitnesses, nor by those whose names are connected with it (Paul, Peter, etc.)!
2. It was the general consensus of many scholars in the last century that the New Testament was in fact composed during the Second Century A.D., not the First
3. If such is true, then the New Testament is a FORGERY!

B. THAT IT IS FILLED WITH ERRORS IN REFERENCE TO GEOGRAPHY, PEOPLE, AND EVENTS?

1. Then how could we trust the authors of the New Testament to be accurate in describing supernatural events, when they were careless with describing the natural ones?
2. This would make the New Testament an UNRELIABLE RECORD!

C. THAT THE MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE IS VERY SCARCE, AND A THOUSAND YEARS REMOVED FROM THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS?

1. Then we would have no way of testing the accuracy of the copyists, who for hundreds of years preserved the New Testament only by making copies by hand
2. Then our faith in Jesus would be based upon shallow ground, upon a document which is historically questionable!

III. OUR FAITH IN JESUS IS DEPENDENT ON THE NEW TESTAMENT BEING RELIABLE AS A HISTORICAL DOCUMENT!

A. "BLIND FAITH" MAY SEEM ADEQUATE FOR SOME...

1. For children who believe whatever their parents say
2. For people who are never placed in an environment where their faith is challenged (like state universities)
3. For people who are not trying to convince others to trust in Jesus for their salvation

B. BUT IF WE DESIRE TO HAVE A "STRONG FAITH" FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS...

1. Then we need to understand our dependency upon the New Testament
2. We need to know how to demonstrate the evidence which supports it as a reliable, historical document!

CONCLUSION

1. Hopefully, we now appreciate the need to carefully examine the evidence for the historical reliability of the New Testament
2. In doing so, we shall apply the same kind of tests applied to any ancient document to determine its reliability!
3. The next study will examine what is the "ACID TEST" for any ancient document claiming to be a historical record of certain events...

Evidence For Early Existence Of The New Testament

INTRODUCTION

1. The New Testament presents itself as a historical record of events that supposedly occurred during the First Century A.D.
2. How reliable is it? How do we determine the reliability of any ancient document that professes to record events of history?
3. To establish the reliability of ANY historical document, one of the first questions to be raised is: "How soon after the events took place were they recorded?"
4. Applied to the New Testament, this involves trying to determine what evidence there is for THE EARLY EXISTENCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT...

I. WHY EVIDENCE FOR THE EARLY EXISTENCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT IS CRUCIAL

A. IF SOME EVENT IS RECORDED LONG AFTER IT OCCURRED...

1. It is not likely to have been written by "eyewitnesses"
2. It is not likely to have been written when "other eyewitnesses" were around to confirm or dispute its accuracy
3. Its credibility would be weakened; for example, which would be the more credible source for information about an event that occurred during The Civil War Between The States...
 - a. A present day writer depending totally upon second-hand sources?
 - b. Or diaries and letters written by eyewitnesses of the event?
4. Of course, it would be necessary to show that such diaries and letters were authentic and where possible shown to be accurate

B. DURING THE LAST CENTURY, SOME SCHOLARS ASSERTED THAT THE GOSPELS AND THE BOOK OF ACTS DID NOT EXIST BEFORE 130 A.D.

1. This would mean the Gospels and Acts were not written by eyewitnesses!
2. Rather, it was written by frauds who misrepresented themselves as eyewitnesses!
 - a. For the author of Acts claims to have been present during some of the events described in that book - cf. "we" in **Ac 16:11-12**
 - b. The author of the Second Epistle Of Peter claims to have been an eyewitness of the Transfiguration - **2Pe 1:16-18**

[Written by eyewitnesses and others who lived during those times, or a book written by liars in a effort to deceive...these are the only choices we have! This is why it is important to establish the early existence of the New Testament!]

II. THE EVIDENCE FOR THE EARLY EXISTENCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. INTERNAL EVIDENCE...

1. THE ENDING OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

- a. The book ends abruptly with Paul in prison, awaiting trial - **Ac 28:30-31**
- b. A plausible explanation is that Luke wrote ACTS during this time, before Paul finally appeared before Nero
- c. This would be about 62-63 A.D., meaning that ACTS and LUKE (which came first - cf. **Ac 1:1** with **Lk 1:1-4**) were written within thirty years of ministry and death of Jesus

2. NO MENTION OF THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM IN 70 A.D.

- a. Matthew, Mark and Luke record Jesus' prophecy that the temple and city would be destroyed within that generation - e.g., **Mk 13:1-4,14,30; Lk 21:5-9,20-24,32**
- b. History records that in 70 A.D. Jerusalem with its temple was destroyed, exactly as Jesus foretold!
- c. Yet not a single book of the New Testament refers to this event as having happened!
Such would be very unlikely if they had been written after 70 A.D.
For that event helps to verify Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, and it is hard to imagine that any writer after 70 A.D. would not make mention to the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy!
- d. This has prompted some scholars to conclude that ALL of the books of the New Testament were written prior to 70 A.D. - e.g., John A. T. Robinson, in his book REDATING THE NEW TESTAMENT

B. POPYRI FRAGMENTS...

1. CHESTER BEATTY BIBLICAL POPYRI (dated 200-250 A.D.)
 - a. Made public in 1931
 - b. Contains the Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles, and Revelation
2. PAYPRUS BODMER II (dated 200 A.D.)
 - a. Discovery announced in 1956
 - b. Contains fourteen chapters of John, and portions of the last seven chapters
3. EARLY CHRISTIAN POPYRI (dated 150 A.D.)
 - a. Made public in 1935
 - b. Written by someone who had the four gospels before him and knew them well
4. JOHN RYLANDS MSS (dated 130 A.D.)
 - a. This is oldest fragment of the NT
 - b. **"Because of its early date and location (EGYPT), some distance from the traditional place of composition (ASIA MINOR), this portion of the gospel of John tends to confirm the traditional date of the composition of the gospel."** - GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE, Geisler & Nix

C. PATRISTIC WRITINGS...

1. EPISTLE OF POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS (dated 120 A.D.)
 - a. A personal acquaintance of John, the apostle
 - b. He quotes from the Synoptic Gospels, Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 2 Thessa- Ionians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and 1 John
2. LETTERS OF IGNATIUS (dated 115 A.D.)
 - a. Written to several churches in Asia Minor
 - b. He quotes from Matthew, John, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus
3. EPISTLE OF CLEMENT TO THE CORINTHIANS (dated 95 A.D.)
 - a. This letter was written to encourage the church to respect their elders
 - b. He quotes from the Synoptic Gospels, Acts, Romans, 1 Corin- thians, Ephesians, Titus, Hebrews, and 1 Peter

III. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS EVIDENCE

- A. **THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS IN EXISTENCE AND WELL KNOWN BY THE END OF THE FIRST CENTURY A.D.!**

1. As stated by Nelson Glueck, former president of the Jewish Theological Seminary in the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, and renowned Jewish archaeologist: **"In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written between the forties and eighties of the First Century A.D."**
2. **"We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after 80 A.D."** - W. F. Albright, biblical archaeologist

B. THUS THE NEW TESTAMENT PASSES THE "ACID TEST" FOR THE AUTHENTICITY OF "ANY" DOCUMENT OF ANTIQUITY

1. It was written in the same generation in which the events took place
2. It was circulated among the very people about whom these documents spoke while they were still alive to deny them!
 - a. E.g., remember Clifford Irving and his "biography" of Howard Hughes?
 - b. It was quickly denounced as a fraud by those who knew best and soon lost its credibility
3. The fact that the first generation preserved the New Testament for posterity shows their regard for the genuineness of its contents

CONCLUSION

1. But the "ACID TEST" is only the FIRST test any historical document must pass
2. So what if it was written early...
 - a. How do we know that what we read today is an accurate representation of the original "autographs" (the manuscripts actually penned by the authors)?
 - b. How can we be sure that in the passing of time the content of the original did not become corrupted through mistakes in copying?

These questions shall be examined in the next study...

Archaeological Support For The New Testament

INTRODUCTION

1. In examining the question of the New Testament's reliability as a HISTORICAL DOCUMENT...
 - a. We saw in the previous study that the New Testament passes the "ACID TEST"
 - b. That is, it was written in the same generation in which the events to place
It was circulated among the very people about whom these documents spoke
While they were still alive to confirm or deny it
2. So it was written early...WERE THE AUTHORS ACCURATE in their depiction of the events which took place?
3. This is where the science of ARCHAEOLOGY can be very helpful in determining the historical reliability of the New Testament:
 - a. If the archaeologists prove that the New Testament is filled with errors concerning people, places, and events...
 - b. Then the New Testament could not be trusted as an accurate record of the life of Jesus and the early church!
4. Not too long ago, some discounted the Biblical record because it frequently referred to things not mentioned by any source outside the Bible
5. But discoveries by archaeologists in recent years have vindicated the New Testament and silenced the skeptics!

[In this study we shall consider just a few examples of how archaeology has confirmed the New Testament as a reliable document...]

I. A CENSUS, AND QUIRINIUS GOVERNOR AT THE TIME OF JESUS' BIRTH? - Lk 2:1-3

A. IT WAS ONCE ARGUED THAT LUKE WAS IN ERROR...

1. In other words, that there was no such census
2. Also, that Quirinius was not governor of Syria at that time
3. And that people did not have to return to their ancestral home

B. BUT ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES HAVE PROVEN OTHERWISE...

1. We now know that the Romans:
 - a. Had a regular enrollment of taxpayers
 - b. Held censuses every 14 years (begun by Augustus Caesar)
2. An inscription found in Antioch tells of Quirinius being governor of Syria around 7 B.C. (evidently he was governor twice!)
3. A papyrus found in Egypt says concerning the conducting of a census: "Because of the approaching census it is necessary that all those residing for any cause away from their home should at once prepare to return to their own governments in order that they may complete the family registration of the enrollment..."

II. WHO IS THIS LYSANIAS? - Lk 3:1

A. THE ONLY LYSANIAS KNOWN TO ANCIENT HISTORIANS...

1. Was one who was killed in 36 B.C.
2. This caused some to question Luke's reliability

B. HOWEVER, AN INSCRIPTION WAS FOUND NEAR DAMASCUS...

1. It speaks of "Freedman of Lysanias the tetrarch"
2. And is dated between 14 and 29 A.D.!

III. WHOEVER HEARD OF "THE PAVEMENT" (GABBATHA)? - Jn 19:13

A. FOR CENTURIES THERE WAS NO RECORD OF THE COURT CALLED "THE PAVEMENT" OR "GABBATHA"...

1. This caused many to say "It's a myth"
2. And, "See, it (the Bible) is not historical"

B. BUT WILLIAM F. ALBRIGHT IN "THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PALESTINE" SHOWS OTHERWISE...

1. This court was the court of the Tower of Antonia
2. The court was destroyed in 66-70 A.D. during the siege of Jerusalem
3. It was left buried when the city was rebuilt in the time of Hadrian
4. And was not discovered until recently!

IV. ICONIUM A CITY OF PHRYGIA? - Ac 14:6

A. ARCHAEOLOGISTS AT FIRST BELIEVED LUKE'S IMPLICATION TO BE WRONG...

1. That Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia and Iconium was not
2. They based their belief on the writings of Romans such as Cicero, Strabo, and Pliny
3. Who indicated that Iconium was in Lycaonia
4. Thus, archaeologists said the book of Acts was unreliable!

B. BUT IN 1910, SIR WILLIAM RAMSAY FOUND A MONUMENT...

1. Which showed that Iconium was indeed a Phrygian city
 - a. Two inscriptions in the Phrygian language found at Iconium in 1910 prove that the Phrygian language was in use there for 2 centuries after Paul's visits
 - b. Confirming the interesting topographical detail in Acts (see **Jour. Hell. Stud., 1911, 189**).
2. Xenophon, who marched with Cyrus' expedition through Phrygia into Lycaonia, calls Iconium the last city of Phrygia
3. Other ancient authorities who knew the local conditions well speak of Iconium as Phrygian until far into the Roman imperial period

V. WHOEVER HEARD OF "POLITARCHS"? - Ac 17:6

A. CONCERNING THE TERM "RULERS OF THE CITY" (GREEK "POLITARCHS")...

1. Since the term is not found in the classical literature of the Greeks...
2. ...it was assumed that Luke was wrong to refer to such an office

B. HOWEVER...

1. Some 19 inscriptions have now been found that make use of this title
2. Five of these are in reference to Thessalonica!

CONCLUSION

1. This is just a sampling of the evidence, for entire books have been written providing further examples
2. Just how accurate is the New Testament in its historical description?

"It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference." -- NELSON GLUECK (noted Jewish archaeologist)

3. Of special interest is the testimony of SIR WILLIAM RAMSAY...

a. Concerning his background:

He was trained in the German historical school of the mid- nineteenth century

He was taught that the book of Acts was a product of the mid- second century A.D.

He was firmly convinced of this and started out his career in archaeology to prove it

b. However, he was compelled to a complete reversal of his beliefs due to the overwhelming evidence uncovered in his research

c. His conclusion:

"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 greatest of historians."

4. What have we established thus far in this series of lessons?

a. That Jesus was a historical figure

b. That the New Testament was written during the generation in which the events occurred

c. That its reliability as a historical document continues to be confirmed by the field of archaeology

5. But another question remains... "How can we be sure that the New Testament we have today is the same as that penned by the original authors?"

Our next study will address that question...

Manuscript Attestation For The New Testament

INTRODUCTION

1. In an effort to demonstrate the RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AS A HISTORICAL DOCUMENT...
 - a. We considered evidence which confirms that the New Testament was WRITTEN AND BEING CIRCULATED SOON AFTER THE EVENTS TOOK PLACE; e.g.:
 - The internal evidence
 - Papyri fragments
 - Patristic writings
 - b. We noted that ARCHAEOLOGY CONFIRMS THE NEW TESTAMENT RECORD (as we have it today) in those areas which can be checked; e.g., references to:
 - People
 - Places
 - Events
2. But ONE MORE QUESTION REMAINS in order to establish beyond a reasonable doubt the historical reliability of the New Testament:

"What assurance is there, that what we have today in the form of the New Testament, is that which was penned by its original authors?"
3. In other words, since we don't have the original "AUTOGRAPHS" (the manuscripts penned by the authors), how do we know...
 - a. There hasn't been SIGNIFICANT CHANGES OR ERRORS made in the process of copying over the years?
 - b. There hasn't been COLLUSION (secret cooperation for deceitful purposes) among those who possessed the early copies of the originals?
4. This is where "THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST" in attesting ancient manuscripts can be applied to help answer such questions!

[The answer this "test" gives to the historical reliability of the New Testament is an amazing one! But first, it may help to briefly explain...]

I. THE "BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST"

A. THIS TEST IS APPLIED TO ALL ANCIENT HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS...

1. Such as:
 - a. Julius Caesar's "Gallic War"
 - b. "Histories" of Tacitus
 - c. "Annals" of Tacitus
 - d. The New Testament
2. In an effort TO ESTABLISH THE LIKELIHOOD THAT WHAT COPIES WE HAVE:
 - a. Are faithful representatives of the originals
 - b. And have come to us free of changes, errors, or collusion

B. QUESTIONS RAISED IN THIS TEST...

1. **"How many copies of the document in question are available?"**
 - a. In order to compare them with one another

- b. The more, the better
- 2. **"Where were the copies found?"**
 - a. If they all came from one place, collusion is possible
 - b. But if they are from places far removed by time and location, collusion is unlikely
- 3. **"What length of time passed between the original and the earliest copies?"**
 - a. If the earliest copies we have were written hundreds of years after the original, a lot of changes could have been made and we would not know it
 - b. But a short interval of time would increase our assurance in the reliability of the copies
- 4. **"What variances exist between the copies?"**
 - a. If the copies of a document are filled with significant differences, then it would not be possible to know what the original author wrote!
 - b. But if the variances are few and minor, then the process of copying over the years has been faithful to the original!

[What answers do we find when these questions are applied to the New Testament? And how does the New Testament compare with other historical documents of antiquity?]

II. THE "BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST" FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. HOW MANY COPIES OF NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS ARE AVAILABLE?

- 1. Over 4,000 Greek manuscripts; 13,000 copies of portions of the New Testament in Greek!
- 2. Compare this with other ancient historical writings:
 - a. Caesar's "Gallic Wars" - only 10 Greek manuscripts
 - b. "Annals" of Tacitus - 2
 - c. Livy - 20; Plato - 7; Sophocles - 100

B. WHERE WERE THESE COPIES FOUND?

- 1. Various places: Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Greece, Italy
- 2. Such varied locations would make COLLUSION very difficult

C. WHAT LENGTH OF TIME PASSED BETWEEN THE ORIGINAL AND THE EARLIEST COPIES?

- 1. We saw in the previous lesson that several POPYRI FRAGMENTS have been dated to within 50-100 years
- 2. We have several nearly complete New Testament GREEK MANUSCRIPTS which were copied within 300-400 years, for example:
 - a. Codex Sinaiticus, found near Mt. Sinai
 - b. Codex Alexandrinus, found near Alexandria in Egypt
 - c. Codex Vaticanus, located at the Vatican in Rome
- 3. But COMPARE THIS WITH MANUSCRIPTS OF VARIOUS CLASSICAL HISTORIES:
 - a. "Histories of Thucydides" - earliest copy is 1300 years removed from the original
 - b. "Histories of Herodotus" - earliest copy is 1350 years removed from the original
 - c. Caesar's "Gallic War" - 950 years
 - d. Roman History of Livy - 350 years (and the earliest copy is only a fragment)
 - e. "Histories" of Tacitus - 750 years
 - f. "Annals" of Tacitus - 950 years (and there are only two manuscripts)

D. WHAT VARIANCES EXIST BETWEEN THE COPIES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT?

- 1. It is true that there are SOME VARIATIONS between the many thousands of manuscripts available

- a. But the vast majority are very minor (spelling, differences in phraseology, etc.; modern translations often note the differences in footnotes)
 - b. Only 1/2 of one percent is in question (compared to 5 percent for the Iliad)
2. Even then, it can be stated: **"No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading...It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain: especially is this the case with the New Testament."**
- SIR FREDERICK KENYON (authority in the field of New Testament textual criticism)

CONCLUSION

1. In regards to the "BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST" in attesting the manuscript evidence for the New Testament:
 - a. The New Testament not only passes with flying colors...
 - b. It does better than ANY other historical document come down to us from antiquity!
2. **"The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be as beyond all doubt."** -- F. F. BRUCE
3. JOSH MCDOWELL makes some interesting comments:

"After trying to shatter the historicity and validity of the Scripture, I came to the conclusion that they are historically trustworthy. If one discards the Bible as being unreliable, then he must discard almost all literature of antiquity."

"One problem I constantly face is the desire on the part of many to apply one standard or test to secular literature and other to the Bible. One needs to apply the same test, whether the literature under investigation is secular or religious."

"Having done this, I believe one can hold the Scriptures in his hand and say, 'The Bible is trustworthy, and historically reliable.'"
4. Why then would anyone question the New Testament record concerning Jesus?
 - a. It is because reference is made to miracles, such as the resurrection of Jesus from the dead
 - b. In our next study, we shall consider whether it is reasonable to believe that the New Testament is a LIE when it speaks of such things...

The New Testament: Truth Or Lie?

INTRODUCTION

1. Up to this point I have tried to demonstrate the following FACTS:
 - a. Jesus actually lived
 - b. The New Testament has good reasons to be considered as a RELIABLE HISTORICAL DOCUMENT...
 - It was circulated soon after the events took place
 - Archaeology confirms the New Testament record in every area that can be checked
 - The bibliographical test gives us every reason to believe that what we have today is what was written by the original authors
2. But what are we to do with the testimony of the New Testament concerning the miracles of Jesus, and the report of His resurrection from the dead?
 - a. Archaeology cannot confirm or deny the truthfulness of such things
 - b. Each of us must decide whether the New Testament at this point is telling the TRUTH, or that a LIE was carefully orchestrated by the eight writers of the New Testament!
3. But are these the only alternatives? That the New Testament is either telling the truth or is a carefully orchestrated lie?

[YES! To understand why, consider...]

I. WHY THERE ARE ONLY TWO ALTERNATIVES

A. THE WRITERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT LEAVE US NO OTHER ALTERNATIVE!

1. As Paul explained in his letter to the Corinthians, either Jesus rose from the dead, or he and other "eyewitnesses" are in fact "false witnesses" - **1Co 15:14-15**
2. Peter, also, states that either the events (like the transfiguration) occurred as described by the "eyewitnesses", or they are "cunningly devised fables"! - **2Pe 1:16-18**

B. WE CANNOT SAY THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN SINCERELY DECEIVED!

1. Especially in reference to the resurrection of Jesus
 - a. They claim they ate and drank with Him afterwards - **Ac 10:39-41**
 - b. They claim they saw and touched Him - **1Jn 1:1-4**
2. They leave us NO ROOM for saying they were but MISTAKEN or DECEIVED!
 - a. Some skeptics have tried to offer this as an alternative
 - b. That perhaps in their grief and loss over the crucifixion of Jesus they "hallucinated" or saw grief-inspired "visions" of Jesus
 - c. But "hallucinations" and "visions" are highly individualistic experiences
 - One person might see the hallucination or vision
 - But several or many people don't see the same vision at the same time!
 - d. As outlined in the gospels and also **1Co 15:4-8**, the resurrection appearances of Jesus were often witnessed by many at the same time (over 500 on one occasion!)

[So they leave us no choice; either the New Testament is a "Book Of Truth," or it is a "Book of Lies."

Which is more logical, more rational, to believe? To help us decide, consider...]

II. THE IMPLICATIONS IF THE NEW TESTAMENT IS NOT TRUE

A. THE NEW TESTAMENT IS A CAREFULLY ORCHESTRATED LIE!

1. We have seen the great accuracy they used in describing events, places, and people (as confirmed by archaeology) - **Lk 2:1-5**
2. If the record of miracles and the resurrection is false, then they very carefully intertwined fact and fiction!

-- IS IT REASONABLE TO BELIEVE THAT?

B. THE AUTHORS SUFFERED EXTREME HARDSHIP FOR WHAT THEY KNEW WAS A LIE!

1. Many people will lie if they can get something out of it (such as money, power)
2. But what did the apostles get out of it? - cf. **1Co 4:9-13**
3. What did Paul get for holding to his testimony? - cf. **2 Co 11:24-29**
4. How do we know they really suffered this hardship?
 - a. The fact that the letters of the New Testament were even saved!
 - b. For example, consider the letters **1 & 2 Corinthians**...

These letters are filled with rebuke of the Corinthians

The Corinthians would have every reason not to save these letters which exposed their faults

The Corinthians had first hand knowledge as to whether the apostles and Paul really suffered the hardship spoken of in their letters

If they knew the accounts of such hardship to be false, they would have quickly destroyed these letters written by a liar who embarrassingly wrote about their problems!
5. So especially the author of half the books of the New Testament (Paul) suffered extreme hardship for a lie, if the New Testament is not true

-- IS IT LOGICAL TO BELIEVE THAT?

C. THE AUTHORS WHO WERE MARTYRED KNEW THEY WERE DYING FOR A LIE!

1. History and tradition record that:
 - a. JAMES was stoned to death
 - b. PAUL was beheaded
 - c. PETER was crucified
2. If the New Testament is a lie, they went to their deaths KNOWING they were dying for a lie!

-- IS IT RATIONAL TO BELIEVE THAT?

D. IN SUFFERING AND DYING FOR A LIE, THEY WENT AGAINST EVERYTHING JESUS AND THEY THEMSELVES TAUGHT!

1. "But let your 'yes' be 'yes', and your 'no' be 'no'." - JESUS (**Mt 5:37**)
2. "Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor..." - PAUL (**Ep 4:25**)
3. "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking" - PETER (**1Pe 2:1**)

-- DOES IT MAKE SENSE TO BELIEVE THAT?

E. IN FACT, THE BOOK WITH THE WORLD'S HIGHEST STANDARD AND LOFTIEST GOALS WAS COMPOSED BY LIARS, FRAUDS, AND DECEIVERS!

1. What book presents a higher standard of love and morality than the New Testament?
2. For example, Jesus' "Sermon On The Mount" (**Mt 5-7**) and Paul's "Discourse On Love" (**1Co 13**)

-- CAN YOU BELIEVE IT?

CONCLUSION

1. This is what you MUST believe if you do not believe the New Testament when it speaks of the miracles and resurrection of Jesus Christ:
 - a. It is a carefully orchestrated lie!
 - b. The authors suffered extreme hardship for what they KNEW was a lie!
 - c. Those authors who were martyred KNEW they were dying for a lie!
 - d. In suffering and dying for a lie, they went against everything Jesus and they themselves taught!
 - e. And somehow, these liars, frauds, and deceivers came up with a book containing the world's highest standard morality and loftiest goals!
2. I am convinced that those who do not believe the New Testament are those who:
 - a. Have never read the New Testament carefully
 - b. Are not aware of the evidence which supports it as a historical document
 - c. Have not considered the logical implications of simply regarding it as a mixture of fact and fiction!
3. But to those who will read it, I believe that they will find...
 - a. That it has "the ring of truth" to it
 - b. That it will produce the faith necessary to believe in Jesus (cf. **Ro 10:17**), and through such faith find eternal life (cf. **Jn 20:30-31**)!
4. There is a saying: "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."
 - a. What I have tried to do is remove any obstacles that might hinder anyone from drinking of "the water of life" (i.e., the New Testament)
 - b. But no one can present enough evidence to FORCE someone to read the New Testament if they are determined not to!

Have you read the New Testament? Even more important, have you OBEYED the New Testament?

For Your Further Study

The evidences supporting the Christian faith are numerous and this study has only skimmed the surface. For a more indepth study on this subject, I recommend beginning with the following books:

EVIDENCE THAT DEMANDS A VERDICT, Vol. I (Josh McDowell, Here's Life Publishers, San Bernadino, California, 1986, 388 pages)

THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS: Are They Reliable? (F. F. Bruce, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975, 120 pages)

These two books can be ordered from:

Florida College Bookstore

1-800-922-2390

119 Glen Arven Ave.

Temple Terrace, FL 33617

