**truth or Truth Week #5**

**(The Historical Jesus and the New Testament Documents)**

Book Recommendations:

The New Testament Documents - F.F. Bruce

General Introduction to the Bible - Norm Geisler

Bible Difficulties - Gleason Archer

Cold Case Christianity - J. Warner Wallace

The Complete Works of Josephus

Skeptic question: “How can we know that Jesus really existed if there is virtually no mention of Him in anything other than the Bible?”

Flavius Josephus was the greatest Jewish historian of all time. He was the historian for the Roman Emperor after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. In his *Antiquities of the Jews* he wrote:

“At this time, there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; according he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”

Including Josephus there are 10 known non-Christian sources who mention him within 150 years of his life. (Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Plegon, Thallus, Seutonius, Lucian, Celsus, Mara Bar-Serapion, the Jewish Talmud)

There are only 9 non-Christian sources who mention Tiberius Ceasar, who was the Roman Emperor during the time of Jesus.

3 of the non-Christian sources that mention Jesus, Celsus, Tacitus and the Jewish Talmud, could actually be considered anti-Christian.

10 Facts we can know about Jesus from non-Christian history:

1. Jesus lived during the time of Tiberius Ceasar.
2. He lived a virtuous life.
3. He was a wonder-worker.
4. He had a brother named James.
5. He was acclaimed to be the Messiah.
6. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
7. He was crucified on the eve of the Jewish Passover.
8. Darkness and an earthquake occurred when he died.
9. His disciples believed that he rose from the dead.
10. His disciples were willing to die for their belief.

When it comes to the New Testament documents, we have to ask ourselves 2 questions:

1. Do we have an accurate copy of the original documents that were written in the first century?
2. Do those documents tell the truth?

Manuscript - a handwritten copy of a biblical text. It can be a whole bible, whole book or just fragment.

With most ancients documents, we don’t have the originals.  To reconstruct the original documents of ancient literature, we use the science of textual criticism. it helps to have many manuscripts, and to have manuscripts that were written not long after the original.

The New Testament documents have more manuscripts, earlier manuscripts and more supported manuscripts than any other piece of classical literature.

At last count, there were about 5,700 handwritten Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. There are about 9000 manuscripts in other languages. The average Greek manuscript is about 450 pages. We have about 2.6 million pages of Greek New Testament.

-<http://www.csntm.org/> - close to 2500 manuscripts logged.

The earliest undisputed fragment we have is a portion of the book of John which dates between 117 and 138 A.D.

With the manuscripts we have, there is an estimated 400,000 “errors”. These so called “errors” are extremely important in determining what the original actually said.

These variants are spread throughout about 5700 manuscripts. Most of these variants are inconsequential. There are so many variants because there are so many manuscripts.

How to reconstruct - if you have 10 copies of the same book, and one of the books has two words out of order in a particular sentence, you compare it to the other 9 to find out what the sentence is supposed to say.

Flour butter eg\*s sugar

Flour butter \*ggs sugar

Flour butter \*\*\*s sugar

Flour butter egg\* sugar

Plato’s Dialogue     1,250 years from original                 20 copies

Homer’s Illiad         500 years from original                  643 copies

Herodotus  The Historios   1350 years from original                 8 copies

Aristotles Assorted Works   1400 years from original              5 copies

Julius Ceasar Galic Wars      950 years from original               10 copies

Sophocles Assorted Works    1400 years from original            193 copies

New Testament        30-300 years from original         5700 copies

New Testament Scholar and Princeton professor Bruce Metzger estimated that  the Hindu Mahabharata is copied at 90% accuracy and the ancient work that is the closest to the New Testament is Homer’s Iliad which has been copied at 95%. The New Testament scholars agree that the New Testament has been copied with an accuracy of 99.5% and the .5% in question nothing in that .5% affects any Christian doctrine.

Why wouldn’t God preserve the original?

If we had the originals, people might idolize them or worship them. Someone could change it and rewrite something, and we would be basing all subsequent copies on a lie. The variants affirm authenticity.

Even if we had no manuscripts, using quotes of the early church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandra, Origen, Turtullian etc, we could reconstruct the entire New Testament minus 11 verses.

We can be confident that the New Testament we have is accurate.

**Do those documents tell the truth?**

1. Do we have early testimony?
2. Are these actual eyewitness accounts?
3. Testimony from multiple, independent sources
4. Are the eyewitnesses trustworthy?
5. Is there any archaeological evidence that affirms the testimony?

All New Testament books were written before A.D. 100. - about 70 years after the death of Jesus. We know this because in letters written between 95-110 A.D. passages are quoted from 25 of 27 books of the New Testament. Jude and 2 John were not mentioned. Jude was Jesus’ brother and would not have been alive past A.D. 100 and 3rd John was mentioned in these letters, so logically 2 John had to have already been written.

Most if not all books were written before A.D. 70 - 40 years after Jesus death. We know this because Jerusalem and temple were destroyed in A.D. 70.  Not only did the writers not mention it, but they actually spoke of the temple and the city of Jerusalem as if it were still in tact.

We know from church history that Paul died during the persecution of the Emperor Nero. His rule ended in 68 A.D. so Paul would have had to have completed his letters and died prior to 68A.D.

Many of the New Testament books were written in the 50’s, in fact even liberal scholars agree that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians sometime between 55-56 A.D.

**1 Corinthians 15:3-8 - one of the earliest writings we have**. Scholars recognize that this little portion is a creed that Paul was repeating for his readers.

If the Crucifixion was in A.D. 30- 33 and Paul's Conversion was as early as A.D. 34 and his first meeting in Jerusalem was around A.D. 37, then we could see that the time between the event of Christ's crucifixion and Paul receiving the information about His death, burial, and resurrection (in Jerusalem) would be as short as 3-7 years, depending which date you use for the crucifixion.

Jesus Seminar puts the creed no later than 33A.D within one year of Jesus death.

New Testament Scholar Gary Habermas  has identified at least 40 other early creeds in the New Testament.

Now that we know that we have early testimony, do we have eyewitness testimony?

Peter, Paul and John claim to be eyewitnesses. Luke and the writer of Hebrews claim to be informed by eyewitnesses. Paul specifically lists 14 people who were eyewitnesses of the resurrection (12 apostles, james and himself). And of course he claims there were 500 others.

Not only do the apostles claim to be eyewitnesses, but on several occasions they actually assert that everyone knows this is true. This was written while people who could refute that would still be alive.

Luke got 84 specific facts had to do with geography, weather patterns, politics, industry, topography, art and numerous other details specific to a particular region. These 84 facts have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research.

Skeptical scholar William Ramsay: “I began with a mind unfavorable (to acts), it did not lie then in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely, but more recently I found myself often brought into contact with the book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities, and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne in upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth.”

Luke also records 35 miracles in Acts.

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“On the whole … archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine. Archaeology has in many cases refuted the views of modern critics.” – Millar Burrows, Professor of Archaeology, Yale University

**How do we know the NT writers told the truth?**

**They told embarrassing things about themselves**.

1. They never seem to understand what Jesus is saying. (Mark 9:32)
2. They are uncaring - They keep falling asleep while Jesus is praying (Mark 14:32-41)
3. They get rebuked - (Jesus calls Peter “Satan” , Paul rebukes Peter over a theological issue)

      4.    They are cowards - When Jesus gets arrested all but one runs and hides The women bravely

              stand by Jesus and are the first to discover the empty tomb.

“Sooner let the law be burnt than delivered to women.” - Talmud

“The world cannot exist without males and females-happy is he whose children are males, and woe to him whose children are females.” - Talmud

Josephus reports that a woman’s testimony was not admissible in a court of law.

**They include embarrassing details and difficult sayings of Jesus.**

1. Mark records that even Jesus own mother and brothers thought he was “out of his mind” (Mark 3:21, 31)
2. His own brothers don’t believe him in John 7:5.
3. He was thought to be a deceiver by some in John 7:12.
4. He gets deserted by many of his followers John 6:66.
5. He offends the Jews so badly that they want to stone him in John 8.
6. Jesus is called a drunkard in Matt. 11:19.
7. He is called demon possessed in Mark 3:22, John 7:20, 8:48.
8. He’s called a madman (John 10:20).
9. His feet are wiped with the hair of a prostitute which could have been perceived as a highly inappropriate sexual advance. (Luke 7:36-39)
10. Was crucified. (Deut. 21:23, Gal. 3:13 - cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree)

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**They include demanding sayings of Jesus**

1. Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
2. If anyone divorces his wife , except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress.

**They carefully distinguished Jesus’ words from their own**

1. In the first century, theological disputes arose. Hints at the gnostic influence arising, it would have been so so easy to put words in Jesus mouth to settle these things.

**They include divergent details**

**They abandoned their long-held beliefs and practices, adopted new ones and didn’t recant their new beliefs even under threat of death.**

1. End the system of animal sacrifice and replace it with the sacrifice of Christ
2. End the binding supremacy of the law of Moses
3. They worship Jesus as God. For centuries Judaism was stricly monotheistic.
4. They stopped observing the Sabbath, which according to the law was punishable by death.
5. They had always believed that the Messiah a conquering hero, and Jesus came as a sacrificial lamb.
6. Circumcision is replaced by baptism and communion.

J.P Moreland: “They believed that these institutions were entrusted to them by God. They believed that to abandon these institutions would be to risk their souls being damned to hell after death. Now a rabbi named Jesus appears from a lower- class region. He teaches for three years, gathers a following of lower and middle class people, gets in trouble with the authorities and gets crucified along with 30,000 other Jewish men who are executed during this time period.

But five weeks after he’s crucified, over 10,000 Jews are following him and claiming that he is the initiator of a new religion. And get this: they are willing to give up or alter all 5 of the social institutions that they have been taught since childhood have such importance both sociologically and theologically. Something very big was going on.”

All the New Testament writers except John were martyred for their beliefs. Most of them in horribly gruesome ways. No one recanted. No one gives themselves up to be tortured and killed for something they know is a lie.

Charles Colson:  “I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”

Their willingness to sit in prison and tortured and ultimately killed serves as the most compelling evidence that they were telling the truth.

Islam and miracles-

1. Several times Muhammad was challenged to do miracles to prove he was from God. He never took the challenge
2. The Quran is clear that he is just a man; a prophet but just a man.
3. There are no clearly defined miracles in the Quran.

Some miracle claims surfaced about 1-200 years after his death because Christian were asking for a sign. These miracles were recorded in the Hadith, a later collection of Muhammad’s writing and sayings. The most reliable author of the Hadith, Al Bukhari along with a majority of Muslim scholars admit that most of Muhammad’s alleged miracles are not authentic.