

Can I Trust the Bible?

By Dave Loucks

When I was young, I attended church, but I would characterize my faith as the “faith of my parents”. If you asked *why* I believed what I was being taught in church, I would have said it was because I trusted those who taught it.

But I had not personally investigated the matter (nor did I have a personal relationship with Christ).

Later I met people who said they *had* investigated the matter, but had come to the conclusion that the teachings and stories of the Bible were false.

Today there are many books and prominent authors who claim that the Bible “got it wrong”.

I realized that believing them would also require faith since I would be trusting what they said was accurate. The Bible claims to be written by eyewitnesses. An eyewitness provides powerful testimony -- unless that witness' testimony or their character can be called into question.

So how do we corroborate events in the Bible?

- Flavius Josephus (A.D 93 in *Antiquity of the Jews*), a former Jewish general but who defected to the Roman side and took Roman citizenship), wrote
 - That Jesus was claimed to be the Messiah, that he was crucified and that some claimed he was resurrected.
 - That John the Baptist was killed by Herod by beheading (as the Bible states)
 - That James was the (half) brother of Jesus and he (James) was killed under the order of the High Priest Ananus in A.D. 62). Since the book of James was written prior to his death, the book must predate A.D. 62, placing it well within the lifetimes of any eyewitnesses who could have disputed it. (This point is discussed further later).
- Pliny the Younger wrote (c. A.D. 112) to the emperor Trajan asking for advice on how to quell the Christian movement that had grown so strong that its adherents would not disavow Christ even under the penalty of death. From his letter we also learn:
 - Christians were sent to Rome for trial (confirming Biblical account)
 - They held Christ to be God
 - They possessed exemplary moral character
 - Women held office in the church (deaconesses)
 - Large numbers were being added to the church

- The spread of the Gospel had negative financial repercussions to those selling items for pagan worship
- Within 80 years of the crucifixion of Christ (A.D 32 + 80 = A.D 112) men and women were so convinced of the message of the Gospel that they were willing to go to their deaths voicing those convictions.
- Many others including Cornelius Tacitus, Suetonius, Lucian of Samosata, Mara Bar-Serapion, Justin Martyr, Thallus, Tertullian, Emperor Trajan, Emperor Hadrian and others writing from between A.D. 90 and A.D. 200 all describe Jesus and his followers and their acts with accounts that match the Bible.
- The Jewish commentaries (Talmud and Tosefta) make multiple references to Jesus, his miracles (attributed to sorcery), not only that he had disciples but that many, many others followed him (“led Israel astray”), and how he was crucified (not stoned as per Jewish custom ... which points to a Roman execution), that his home town was Nazareth, his disciples healed the sick in Jesus’ name and how Joseph was not Jesus’ biological father ... all agreeing with Biblical accounts.
- There are in excess of 24,000 ancient copies of the New Testament. While the oldest *complete* version dates to 250 to 300 years after the death of Jesus (fragments have [been dated earlier](#)), the textual agreement between each of those copies is better than 99.5%. This implies that if any errors (or forgeries) were added, they had to be made before A.D. 250 (otherwise some of the copies would not agree with the others). But the ancient writer Papias (who lived until A.D. 150-167) mentions being aware that Matthew’s Gospel was written only 7-10 years after Jesus’ crucifixion.
- Contrast that with other texts written about people from antiquity:
 - Aristotle: Only 49 known documents survived with the oldest dating to no earlier than *1400 years* after the original
 - Plato: 7 copies with the oldest dating to 1200 years after the original
 - Euripides: 9 copies with the oldest dating to 1500 years after the original
- Clearly, the magnitude and quality of the Biblical documents are far superior to *any* other document from antiquity.
- Many of the events in the Bible cast the Apostles in an unfavorable light (their competition to sit at His right and left hand in His kingdom, their flight after Jesus’ arrest, the failure of Christ to work miracles in Galilee, references by some of Jesus’ insanity, Jesus’ confessions of ignorance about the future, moments of bitterness and much more. If a story were being fabricated to gain adherents, why include material that would dissuade new converts?
- Every Apostle except John died as a martyr. They were willing to die for something they claimed to be eyewitnesses of. It seems unlikely that all would die for what they knew was a lie?

- There is no mention in any of the books of the New Testament about:
 - The fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70)
 - Nero's persecution and slaughter of the Christians (A.D. 64)
 - Martyrdom of James (A.D. 62)
 - Martyrdom of Paul (A.D. 64-68)
 - Martyrdom of Peter (A.D. 65)

With none of the books of the New Testament mentioning any of these major events, then one conclusion is that each book was written prior to any of these events. Consider then, if the book of Acts, authored by Paul's traveling companion, Luke the physician, made no reference to the execution of Paul (which would have been a difficult to imagine oversight if it had already occurred). If we, then, expect that the final chapter of Acts was completed prior to A.D. 64-68 (Paul's death) then Luke's *earlier* book (Gospel of Luke) by definition was written earlier. As previously mentioned, Papias stated that Matthew's and Mark's Gospels pre-dated Luke's Gospel, placing those dates even earlier.

Note, then that all books of the New Testament were written within the lifetime of the people mentioned in those books. If the events or people mentioned were falsified by the writers, there would have been people who could have disputed it – but there is no record of any doing so.

Other than [some fragments](#), many of the 1st century documents no longer exist (or cannot be found), but documents from the 2nd century *have* survived and those authors claim to *have* viewed the 1st century documents.

Finally, while anything can be forged with enough effort, the early Christians were described by all sources as possessing the highest moral character. It would have been out of place for such people to have gone to such an effort to fabricate such an elaborate plan.

I enjoyed teaching this class. Please feel free to replay either the video or audio recordings and download the class materials. As the students in this class quickly learned, I included more material in the notes than we had time to cover in class!