

*“We have no ancient sources about Jesus and Christianity from ‘neutral’ observers. Whether we are dealing with Roman writers like Tacitus or Jewish writers like Josephus or the New Testament writers themselves, none of these writers is attempting to give us an ‘objective’ assessment of the data, if by ‘objective’ one means value free or purely neutral. Thus, all the relevant ancient data must be critically sifted and evaluated . . . we must always ‘consider the source’ of the information as we evaluate its interpretation of the data.”* **New Testament History: A Narrative Account, Ben Witherington III**

The New Testament records the virgin birth, miracles, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but many are skeptical of the New Testament’s claims concerning Christ.

### **(I) CENTRAL QUESTION:**

So how can we know if the claims of the New Testament are true?

We must first explore the \_\_\_\_\_ (1) of the New Testament

### **(II) ORIGIN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT:**

Jesus’ disciples first proclaimed Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection right after his resurrection and accession back to Heaven. This oral message [eventually] took on a \_\_\_\_\_ (2) form.

It’s essential message appears in the \_\_\_\_\_ (3).

#### **(A) The Four Gospels**

(1) The three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) were penned before AD \_\_\_\_\_ (4).

(a) Matthew, one of the 12 disciples, recorded his first-hand account.

(b) Mark recorded the Apostle \_\_\_\_\_ (5) recollections

(c) Luke, missionary companion of the Apostle Paul, consulted many eye-witnesses.

(2) John, also an eyewitness of Christ, penned his gospel toward the end of the 1st century.

### (B) The NT Epistles

Many New Testament Epistles were written before these gospel accounts.

(1) James, the Brother of Jesus, penned his book around AD \_\_\_\_\_ (6), just over a decade after Christ's death.

(2) Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians around AD 47 to 48. These early epistles all clearly refer to Jesus as Lord, a reference to his \_\_\_\_\_ (7).

(C) So we see that the New Testament epistles were written by the apostles during a period in history where the eye-witnesses were still alive, therefore they:

(1) Were personally able to \_\_\_\_\_ (8) the writings of the New Testament

(2) Prevented any \_\_\_\_\_ (9) from developing in the accounts.

So what are the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament and how many do we have?

### (III) EARLIEST MANUSCRIPTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Early papyrus copies rapidly circulated throughout the \_\_\_\_\_ (10). Scholars have discovered about 120 of these early manuscripts. Some even have large portions of the New Testament while others contain a single book or page. They date from about \_\_\_\_\_ (11) to about \_\_\_\_\_ (12).

(A) For example, the Apostle John wrote the fourth gospel at the end of the 1st century. A small papyrus fragment with a small portion of the gospel of John copied onto it was found in Egypt dating to the early 2nd century.

(1) This shows \_\_\_\_\_ (13) these gospels traveled.

(2) In 30 years, people had copied and transported this gospel far from its origin in Ephesus.

(3) \_\_\_\_\_ (14) of copies were made

(4) It would have been \_\_\_\_\_ (15) for anyone to \_\_\_\_\_ (16) and \_\_\_\_\_ (17) them all.

This is why we can be assured that we have what was originally written by the apostles themselves.

How reliable is the recorded information of the New Testament authors?

## IV. RELIABILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORS

### (A) Eye-Witnesses

- (1) Many of the men who wrote the New Testament actually \_\_\_\_\_ (18) the events they \_\_\_\_\_ (19).
  - (a) The Apostle Peter said, "We were \_\_\_\_\_ (20) of his majesty."
  - (b) The Apostle John . . . says, "We have \_\_\_\_\_ (21), have looked upon, and our hands have handled . . ." referring to Jesus.
  - (c) John also says, "And the Word Jesus Christ became flesh and dwelt among us, and \_\_\_\_\_ (22) his glory."
- (2) Some skeptics claim that none of the New Testament gospel writers met Jesus.
  - (a) The gospel of John bears all the marks of a true eye-witness account.
  - (b) It was clearly written by a Palestinian Jew, of the 1st century who was familiar with Jewish customs, religion, and geography.
  - (c) One critic, Sir William Ramsey . . . investigated Luke's gospel and the Book of Acts.
    - (i) Ramsey was surprised to find the books to be \_\_\_\_\_ (23) \_\_\_\_\_ (24) with great precision and concluded that the works were \_\_\_\_\_ (25).
    - (ii) As a result, he \_\_\_\_\_ (26) and become a great \_\_\_\_\_ (27) of the faith.

. . . our next question . . . "Why [were] the 27 books of the New Testament were accepted, while others were not?"

## (V) THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON: A BRIEF HISTORY

### (A) Inclusion in the Canon

- (1) A book was included in the New Testament, if:
  - (a) An Apostle, or a close \_\_\_\_\_ (28) of an apostle, wrote it
  - (b) The books were written in the \_\_\_\_\_ (29) century
  - (c) The books would not contradict themselves or the Old Testament scriptures
  - (d) They would be widely accepted by the early \_\_\_\_\_ (30)

### (B) Recognition of the Canon

- (1) The first person known to us to establish a complete list of New Testament books was Marcion around \_\_\_\_\_ (31). History remembers Marcion merely because he established a shortened canon list, including the gospel of Luke and the letters of Paul.

- (2) By AD 180 . . . the \_\_\_\_\_ (32) canon was complete.
- (3) The 2nd century Muratorian canon is a list of books regarded as authoritative in the early church at that time. It lists the four gospels, Acts, all 13 of Paul's letters, plus the letters of John, Jude, and Revelation.
- (4) By the end of the \_\_\_\_\_ (33), other books (such as 1 Peter and 1 John) have also gained wide-acceptance. The Eastern church had also adopted Hebrews and the West accepted Revelation.
- (5) Some people claim that . . . Constantine exerted a great influence on the books chosen for the New Testament and even \_\_\_\_\_ (34).
- (a) No where is there any indication that Constantine tried to influence the selection or contents of the books of scripture.
- (b) It would have been impossible for him to change the contents of individual books because \_\_\_\_\_ (35) for over 200 years.
- (6) The first person to publish a list of New Testament books exactly as it is today was Athenasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in his Easter letter in \_\_\_\_\_ (36). Since then, few have questioned the contents of the canon, at least until recent times.

## VI. TRANSMISSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT OVER THE CENTURIES

### (A) Is the New Testament Full of Errors?

- (1) Some critics claim that all we have today in our manuscripts and translations are the accumulated \_\_\_\_\_ (37) of centuries of \_\_\_\_\_ (38) with little or nothing resembling the original manuscripts from the 1st century.
- (2) In the earliest period of copying, there were some still living (e.g. Papias and Polycarp) who \_\_\_\_\_ (39) the authors of the New Testament.
- (3) There also remained some who were \_\_\_\_\_ (40) of those recorded events.
- (4) Those witnesses would have quickly pointed out any errors introduced by later copyists.

### (B) What Happened to the Original Manuscripts?

- (1) The NT writings were completed during the 1st century AD.
- (2) However, their original fragile papyrus documents disappeared within years

after they were written generally due to \_\_\_\_\_ (41).

(3) Yet the test of those original documents remained in existence, preserving copies and maintained through many subsequent generations that spanned the centuries.

(C) Are the Copied Manuscripts Reliable?

(1) The New Testament has been copied \_\_\_\_\_ (42), which naturally leads to copyists errors, arising in some of the manuscripts.

(2) Fortunately, if the great number of New Testament manuscripts \_\_\_\_\_ (43) the number of scribal errors.

(3) It also increases proportionately the means of \_\_\_\_\_ (44).

(4) The vast number of manuscripts ensures the spotting of \_\_\_\_\_ (45) and also the ability to confidently preserve the \_\_\_\_\_ (46) of the originals by comparing the numerous copies of manuscripts.

(D) Stable Transmission of the New Testament

(1) Copies were not made at a single \_\_\_\_\_ (47).

(2) They [were not] deliberately conformed to a single master copy imposed by \_\_\_\_\_ (48).

(3) So the independence of the scribes at different locations created multiple lines of \_\_\_\_\_ (49).

(4) When these independent lines agree on their text, their testimony is of the highest value. Through this process the common text accurately preserves the original writings of the apostles.

(E) Vast Number of New Testament Manuscripts

(1) To all this should be added the \_\_\_\_\_ (50) of manuscript copies available.

(2) Between the 1st century and the 16th, there exist over 24 thousand manuscripts when you include Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and other ancient languages. In the Greek language alone, there are over \_\_\_\_\_ (51) manuscripts.

This evidence serves as overwhelming confirmation of the integrity of the New Testament texts being preserved. There's no other document in all of antiquity that even comes close to what we have in the Bible.

## (VII) TRANSLATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXTS

(A) Can the Greek writings [of the New Testament] . . . be accurately translated into

everyday languages of today?

(1) Absolutely!

(a) Numerous other works of classical Greek and Latin antiquity are known to the modern reader \_\_\_\_\_ (52) and the general reliability of such translations are \_\_\_\_\_ (53).

(b) As long as the translator renders accurately and precisely what the Greek New Testament text itself states, here should be little question regarding the accuracy of meaning being conveyed from the original text to our \_\_\_\_\_ (54).

### **KEY SCRIPTURES:**

*2 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:1; John 1:14*

### **RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING:**

-Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey, *Walter A. Elwell*

-How We Got the Bible, *Neil R. Lightfoot*

-New Testament History: A Narrative Account, *Ben Witherington III*

-The New Testament Story, *Ben Witherington III*



1. origin
2. written
3. four gospels
4. 70
5. Peter's
6. 45
7. deity
8. validate
9. myth
10. Roman Empire
11. AD 100
12. AD 700
13. how quickly
14. Hundreds
15. impossible
16. collect
17. change
18. witnessed
19. recorded
20. eye-witnesses
21. seen with our eyes
22. we beheld
23. historically accurate
24. completely authentic
25. trusted Christ
26. defender
27. companion
28. 1st
29. church
30. AD 140
31. gospel
32. 2nd century
33. their content
34. they had circulated among the churches
35. AD 367
36. errors
37. copying the text
38. personally knew
39. eye-witnesses
40. wear and tear
41. thousands of times
42. increases
43. increases
44. correcting the errors
45. scribal errors
46. exact wording
47. location
48. church authority
49. text transmission
50. vast number
51. 5400
52. only in translation
53. hardly questioned
54. modern translations