

New Testament Reliability  
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- I. Introduction
  - A. Introduction to Apologetics
  - B. Apologetics as a Species of Evangelism and Discipleship
  - C. Case Study in Apologetics—Matthew 9:2-9 (c.f., Mark 2, Luke 5)
  - D. Key Issues in Apologetics
    1. Existence of God
    2. Historicity of Jesus
    3. Reliability of the New Testament
    4. Jesus' Resurrection
  - E. Goal of Apologetics (1 Corinthians 9:22)
  
- II. Reliability of the New Testament
  - A. Importance of the Issue
  - B. Structure of the New Testament
    1. Meaning of "Testament"
      - a. Hebrew *berith* & Greek *diatheke* mean "covenant" (Ex 24:8; Jer 31:31; Mt. 26:28)
      - b. Old Latin (ca 150) translated Greek *diatheke* with *testamentum*
      - c. Jerome, in his revision of Old Latin ("Vulgate")(382-404) allowed *testamentum* to remain
      - d. English translations (e.g., KJV of 1611) continued the error by transliterating *testamentum* by "Testament"
    2. 27 writings make up the New Testament—Matthew through Revelation
    3. Chapter and verse divisions
      - e. Chapter divisions—Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, 13<sup>th</sup> c
      - f. Verse divisions—Robert Etienne ("Stephanus") 4th ed of Greek NT, 1551
      - g. Italics, marginal notes, dates, references to other passages
  - C. Scope and Limitations
    1. What "New Testament Reliability" Means
      - a. Historical/Archaeological Reliability (writings comport with known history)
      - b. Textual Reliability (original wording can be confidently reconstructed)
    2. Application to New Testament Truth Claims
  - D. Four Links in the Chain of Scripture
    1. Revelation—"God revealing truth we otherwise would not know" 1 Tim 6:16
      - a. General—Psalm 19:1; Rom. 2:14
      - b. Special—Hebrews 1:1-2
    2. Inspiration—"God's influence upon the writers of Scripture" (2 Tim. 3:16)
    3. Canon—27 authoritative books inspired by God
    4. Text—the original wording of New Testament Scripture
  - E. Determining Reliability of the New Testament
    1. Historical ("Higher") Criticism ("historical-critical method" "literary criticism")
      - a. Authorship (e.g., "synoptic problem")
      - b. Date of writings
      - c. Genre/Structure
  
      - d. Methodologies of Higher Criticism

- (1) Source criticism
- (2) Form criticism
- (3) Redaction criticism
- (4) Tradition criticism
- e. Faulty assumptions of higher criticism
  - (1) Subjective arguments
  - (2) Assumption of oral tradition altering the accounts (telephone game)
2. Textual (“Lower”) Criticism
  - a. Witnesses to the text
    - (1) Greek manuscripts (abbreviated “mss”) 5,960
      - (a) Papyrus--141
      - (b) Uncial--324
      - (c) Minuscule—3,011
      - (d) Lectionaries—2,484
    - (2) Important mss
      - (a) P<sup>45,46,47</sup> Chester Beatty Papyri (P<sup>45</sup> Gospels, ca 200; P<sup>46</sup> Paul’s epistles ca 175; P<sup>47</sup> Revelation ca 200)
      - (b) P<sup>52</sup> John Rylands (John 18, ca 125)
      - (c) P<sup>66, P75</sup> Bodmer Papyri, Chester Beatty Library (P<sup>66</sup> John, ca 200; P<sup>75</sup> Luke, John, ca 175-200)
      - (d) Codex Sinaiticus (ms Aleph, ca 325)
      - (e) Codex Vaticanus (ms B, ca 325)
      - (f) Codex Alexandrinus (ms A, ca 400)
      - (g) Ephraemi Rescriptus (ms C, ca 400)—a palimpsest
      - (h) Codex Bezae (ms D, ca 400)
    - (3) Versions (abbreviated “vss”)
      - (a) Number—20,000
      - (b) Significance
    - (4) Citations from early church writers
      - (a) Number
      - (b) Significance
3. Practice of Textual Criticism
  - a. Why textual criticism is necessary
    - (1) no autographs
    - (2) existing copies differ.
  - b. The nature and number of variations (“variant readings”)
  - c. How variants occur in copying
    - (1) unintentional errors
      - (a) faulty eyesight—John 17:15 in ms B
      - (b) faulty hearing—Rev. 1:5, *lusanti* (“freed”) or *lousanti* (washed”)
      - (c) errors of the mind—assimilation from parallel passages, use of synonyms, changing word order, misspelling
      - (d) errors in judgment—Rom. 8:1
    - (2) intentional changes
      - (a) spelling
      - (b) harmonization—the Lord’s prayer (Lu 11:2-4 cf Mt 6:9-13)
      - (c) filling in material—“scribes” cf “scribes and pharisees”
      - (d) conflation—Luke 24: 53
      - (e) doctrinal changes-- Romans 14:17 in ms 2000
      - (f) adding detail—Rev. 4:8, titles of books, adding amanuensis

- d. Significant variant readings
  - (1) Mark 16:9-20
  - (2) John 7:53-8:11
  - (3) 1 Timothy 3:16
  - (4) Romans 8:1
  - (5) 1 John 5:7-8
  - (6) John 1:18
- e. Restoring the Original Text--Applying the Art and Science of Textual Criticism
  - (1) Weigh external evidence (age of mss, age of text-type)
  - (2) Weigh internal evidence (transcriptional probabilities—what would writer most likely have written, cf John 3:13 use of verb with preposition)
  - (3) use of critical apparatus in Greek New Testaments

#### F. The Case for the New Testament Canon

1. Defining “canon”
  - See “The Question of Canon” Michael Kruger (IVP Academic, 2013).
2. Eusebius’ Categories of New Testament era writings
  - a. Homologoumena—20 of 27
  - b. Antilegomena—Heb, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Rev.
  - c. Apocrypha—Epistle of Clement, Didache
  - d. Pseudepigrapha—Gospel of Thomas, etc.
3. New Testament Writings Whose Authenticity is Questioned by Skeptics
  - a. Matthew
  - b. Mark
  - c. Luke
  - d. John
  - e. Ephesians
  - f. Colossians
  - g. 2 Thessalonians
  - h. 1 Timothy
  - i. 2 Timothy
  - j. Titus
  - k. 2 Peter
4. Defending the NT Canon
  - a. Key to Old Testament Canon—Jesus (c.f., Jews, New Testament)
  - b. Key to New Testament Canon—apostolicity (“apostolic approval)
  - c. Evidence within the NT of a Canon being sorted and formed
    - (1) Selecting—John 20:30
    - (2) Reading—1 Thes. 5:27
    - (3) Circulating—Rev. 1:11
    - (4) Collecting—2 Peter 3:15-16
    - (5) Quoting--Jude 17 (2 Peter 3:2); 1 Tim. 5:18 (Luke 10:7)
  - e. Importance of Canon to the Early Church
    - (1) Recognition—1 Thes. 2:13
    - (2) Need to know which writings to read and study—2 Tim. 3:16
    - (3) Need to refute heretics and false teachers—2 John 9-11
    - (4) Missionary activity—which books to take and teach from
    - (5) Persecution—which books are worth dying for

## G. The Case for the Reliability of the Gospels

1. When were the Gospels written?
  - a. The importance of the issue
  - b. Late dates (usually “liberal” view)
    - (1) Matthew—A.D. 80
    - (2) Mark—A.D. 65-70
    - (3) Luke—A.D. 75-85
    - (4) John—A.D. 90-95 (F.C. Baur thought John’s Gospels was written A.D. 170)
  - c. Earlier dates (usually “conservative” view)
 

(see *Redating the New Testament*, John A.T. Robinson (Westminster), 1976.)

    - (1) Matthew—A.D. 61-75
    - (2) Mark—late 30s to early 60s
    - (3) Luke—the 60s
    - (4) John—65-70
      - (a) John 5:2—not grammatically an historical present
      - (b) no reference to fall of Jerusalem
  - d. Reliability regardless of dates of writing
    - (1) Eyewitnesses were alive regardless of accepting early or later dates
    - (2) Events recorded in the Gospels are the types that can be easily remembered
    - (3) Fluidity in describing events
    - (4) Comparing the dates of the Gospels with other ancient biographies
      - (a) Tacitus—Tiberias (75 years after Tiberias lived)
      - (b) Suetonius—*Lives of the Caesars* (150 years after Julius Caesar lived)
      - (c) Arrian and Plutarch—Alexander the Great (400 years after Alexander the Great lived)
2. Who wrote the Gospels?
  - a. Importance of Issue
  - b. The genre of the Gospels—ancient *bioi* (biographies) see Richard Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Greco-Roman Biographies*, 1992
    - (1) John 20:30-31—selected account of the life and sayings of Jesus
    - (2) Luke 3:1—historical context (not “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away”)
  - c. The “Anonymous” view claims
    - (1) Titles (e.g., “Gospel According to Matthew”) were added later
    - (2) assumption of lengthy period of oral tradition, plus anti-supernaturalism
  - d. Traditional/historical view
    - (1) Papias (A.D. 60-130) confirms Matthew wrote a Gospel and Mark wrote a Gospel (which he says were the recollections of the Apostle Peter)
    - (2) Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202) confirms Luke and John wrote Gospels (Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp (A.D. 69-155) who was a student of the Apostle John)
    - (3) Every extant ms that has the beginning of a Gospel has a Gospel writer’s name affixed
    - (4) Evidence from Justin Martyr, Tatian (*Diatessaron*), Anti-Marcion Prologues, Muratorian Canon, the *Didache*
    - (5) There is no surviving tradition of anyone other than Matthew, Mark, Luke and John writing the Gospels
  - e. Synoptic problem (Why do Mt, Mk and Lu sometimes agree word for word?)
    - (1) Apostolic view—Matthew wrote first
    - (2) Modern consensus—Mark wrote first
    - (3) there is obvious literary dependence between the Synoptics
    - (4) The “Q” hypothesis

3. Were the New Testament writers biased?
  - a. What “bias” means
  - b. Bias of skeptics
  - c. The criterion of embarrassment (see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*; Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996) 223.
  - d. Declaration against interest-exception to hearsay rule in court proceedings
  - e. Examples of embarrassing details
    - (1) Mark 3:21 (Jesus’ family thinks he is delusional)
    - (2) Mark 14:53-72 (Peter denies Jesus three times)
    - (3) Matthew 26:36-43 (“Watch and pray” yet the disciples fell asleep)
    - (4) Matthew 7:23-27 (disciples’ lack of faith)
    - (5) John 19:25-27 (three women at the cross, only one disciple—John)
4. Are there “Lost Books” of the New Testament?
  - a. The claim—many “gospels” were excluded due to the Church (or Constantine) (cf, Dan Brown, *The DaVinci Code*)
  - b. The truth
    - (1) only the Canonical Gospels provide verifiable historical truth about Jesus
    - (2) nearly all of the “lost gospels” were written at least 120 years after Jesus
    - (3) most “lost gospels” were written either as pious fiction or Gnostic forgeries
    - (4) the “lost gospels” were neither lost nor are they “Gospels” (they were rejected by the early Church).
    - (5) NT scholar Raymond Brown: (from the “lost gospels”) “we learn not a single, verifiable new fact about the historical Jesus’ ministry, and only a few new sayings that might possibly have been his.”
  - c. Examples of “Lost Gospels”
    - (1) Gospel of Thomas
    - (2) Gospel of Judas
    - (3) Gospel of Peter
    - (4) Gospel of Mary
    - (5) Gospel of Philip
5. Has the text of the New Testament books been changed over the years?
  - a. The NT autographs are missing, and our copies have variation in wording
  - b. NT textual criticism establishes the original wording
  - c. Only 1/1000 of the NT text has variations that need textual analysis
  - d. No doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a variant reading
  - e. By way of comparison, the text NT is more reliable than any 10 pieces of literature of antiquity combined (see my essay, “Manuscript Comparison Factor”)
  - f. The NT has three times more manuscript evidence in the first 300 years after the original writing than the average Greco-Roman writings have in the first 1,000 years
  - g. Rejection of the death and resurrection of Jesus are never based upon textual problems—they are based upon *a priori* assumptions or anti-supernatural positions
6. Reliability in Light of History and Archaeology
  - a. Nelson Glueck—*Rivers in the Desert; History of the Negev*, (1959) p. 31: “It may be stated categorically that no archaeology discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.”
  - b. “I know of no finding in archaeology that’s properly confirmed which is in opposition to the Scriptures. The Bible is the most accurate history textbook the world has ever seen.” Dr. Clifford Wilson, Former director of the Australian Institute of Archaeology

## H. The Case for the Reliability of the Book of Acts

1. Sir William Ramsay—called Luke, “a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy...this author should be placed with the greatest of historians.” *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1925), p. 4.
2. Colin Hemer—documents 84 facts in the last 16 chapters of Acts that history and archaeology have confirmed. *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. C.H. Gempf (Tübingen: Mohr, 1989).
3. Accuracy of Luke and Acts “...there exists in scholarship no clear conclusive evidence of distortion and some contemporary scholars have rejected the Lucan accounts based more on naturalistic philosophical principle than actual evidence of distortion.” Craig S. Keener. *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Test. Accounts*, 2011.

## I. The Case for the Reliability of the Pauline Epistles

1. Ephesians
  - a. Regarded as genuine until the 19<sup>th</sup> c.
  - b. Claims to be written by Paul (as an apostle)
  - c. Listed as Pauline in Marcion’s canon (ca 140) (under name “Laodiceans”)
  - d. Could be an encyclical homily
2. Colossians
  - a. skeptics think it deals with 2<sup>nd</sup> century issues (Gnosticism)—too late for Paul
  - b. vocabulary and style possibly not Pauline
  - c. acceptability of pseudepigraphy
  - d. Dunn—why write to Colossae—Paul did not establish that church
  - e. skeptical arguments are very subjective
  - f. Paul may have purposely written in a different (Asiatic) style (Witherington)
  - g. Patristic assumption is Colossians was Pauline (with no hard contrary evidence)
  - h. Barth—*in dubio pro reo* (give the accused the benefit of the doubt)
3. 2 Thessalonians
  - a. 2 Thes 3:17 is not how Paul typically ends letters (Paul saying he wrote salutation)
  - b. Skeptics say 1 Thes is warm & genuine; 2 Thes is commanding and cold
  - c. 2 Thes 1:1 “Paul, Silvanus, Timothy”—could be a collaborative effort
4. Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus)
  - e. Internal evidence
    - (1) Paul is listed as the writer
    - (2) No evidence of an early Christian practice of writing in Paul’s name (Epistle to Laodiceans appears in 4<sup>th</sup> c.; Third Corinthians originated in Acts of Paul, spurious source recorded by Tertullian, *de Baptismo*, 17)
  - f. External evidence (as strong as for Paul’s other epistles except Rom, 1 Cor)
    - (1) Number of similarities in language between Pastorals & Clement’s Epistle to Corinth
    - (2) There are indications Pastorals were known and used by Polycarp and Justin; by time of Irenaeus Pastorals definitely regarded as Pauline
    - (3) Skeptics say Marcion’s Canon omits them because he did not know them.
    - (4) Skeptics cite Pastorals missing from Chester Beatty Papyri (and ms B)
    - (5) Skeptics say the Pastorals don’t fit into Acts, and postulation a second Roman imprisonment is a desperate attempt to support Paul as writer.
    - (6) The abrupt ending of Acts does not end with Paul’s martyrdom; his letter to the Philippians suggests he expects to be freed and continue ministry

- (7) Pastorals have too advanced ecclesiastical content, e.g., bishops (but Ephesian Church had been established for 8-9 years by time of 1 Tim)
- (8) 175 hapaxes

## J. The Case for the Reliability of the General Epistles (Hebrews through Jude)

### 1. Hebrews

- a. Origen considered thoughts to be Pauline but not style; he concluded, "But who wrote the Epistle God only knows certainly."
- b. Some think Clement of Rome or even Luke wrote Hebrews
- c. Philo of Alexandria theory—some treated Hebrews as Philo's interpretation of Christianity ("Philonism")

### 2. James

- d. James ("the Less") son of Alphaeus or James brother of Jesus?
- e. Date of letter:
  - (1) The historical James wrote the letter prior to the Galatians controversy (Gal 2:11–14), and prior to the Jerusalem council (Acts 15);
  - (2) The historical James wrote the letter in response to Paulinism of some sort;
  - (3) The historical James wrote his letter after the events recorded in Galatians and Acts, but is not in dialogue with Paul or Paulinism.
- f. Pseudepigraphic?
  - (1) The Greek in the Epistle of James is rather accomplished.
  - (2) The Epistle of James appears to borrow from 1 Peter.

### 3. 1 Peter

- a. Did Peter have the capability to write 1 & 2 Peter? Acts 4:13 *agrammatoi* "unlettered" (i.e., illiterate);
- g. Petrine authorship attested by Irenaeus (140–203), Tertullian (150–222), Clement of Alexandria (155–215) and Origen of Alexandria (185–253). Polycarp (69-156) and Papias alluded to this letter (authorship never debated in antiquity)
- h. 1 Peter contains 35 references to Hebrew Bible but uses LXX.

### 4. 2 Peter

- a. "Peter" is spelled differently from 1 Peter and the rest of NT except Acts 15:14
- b. Use of Jude in 2 Peter is used by skeptics to deny Peter wrote
- c. 2 Peter shares a number of shared passages with the Epistle of Jude, 1:5 with Jude 3; 1:12 with Jude 5; 2:1 with Jude 4; 2:4 with Jude 6; 2:6 with Jude 7; 2:10–11 with Jude 8–9; 2:12 with Jude 10; 2:13–17 with Jude 11–13; 3:2f with Jude 17f; 3:14 with Jude 24; and 3:18 with Jude 25.
- d. for most scholars the issue is settled—Peter did not write 2 Peter

### 5. Jude

- a. Writer does not call himself an "Apostle" (there is an Apostle Jude)
- b. Jude is identified with Thaddeus in the Gospels (also called Lebbaeus)
- c. Jude of James", one of the twelve apostles (Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13); "Judas, (not Judas Iscariot)", apparently an apostle (John 14:22); the brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3); the writer of the Epistle of Jude, who identifies himself as "the brother of James" (Jude 1). Catholic tradition generally holds all four to be the same person, while Protestants generally believe 1 and 2 to be one person
- d. "Jude of James" likely means "son of" (not "brother") see NIV, RSV;
- e. Protestant scholar Darrell L. Bock writes that it must mean "son" not "brother"

### K. The Case for the Reliability of Revelation

1. Papias of Hieropolis (70-153) appeared in his writings to distinguish between John the Evangelist and John the Elder, (Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006) and many biblical scholars now contend that the latter was the author of Revelation.
2. The writer identifies himself as “John” (Rev 1:1)

### III. Summary and Conclusion

The New Testament is the only reliable historical record of the life and teachings of Jesus. The New Testament also contains letters (“epistles”) from certain writers with a connection to the Apostles, a reliable book of Church history (“Acts of the Apostles”) and a book of end time events (“Book of Revelation”). The evidence shows that the first four books of the New Testament (“Gospels”) were ancient biographies. The historical reliability of the content of the Gospels is confirmed by known history and archaeology, and the Gospels were written when eyewitnesses were still alive. The Gospels were either written by eyewitnesses (Matthew and John) or written by those who investigated and recorded the testimony of the eyewitnesses (Mark and Luke). The Gospels show evidence of truthfulness and integrity in their content, confirmed by their inclusion of embarrassing details about Jesus and the disciples. No evidence that any historical accounts of Jesus were left out of the New Testament, and later efforts to embellish accounts of the life of Jesus add nothing to the canonical Gospels. The New Testament is bibliographically (i.e., based upon the quality of manuscript evidence) the most well-attested work of antiquity by far. Despite some scholars claiming some of the epistles are not authentic (i.e., not written by the traditional writers), there was consistent affirmation in the early church of the authenticity of the entire New Testament, and most contrary views arose in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These challenges, which are typically based upon subjective criteria or an anti-supernatural worldview, have been thoroughly address by Christian scholars and apologists. As Jesus said in His prayer to God the Father, “Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

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