

Is it True that Everything We Have Been Taught About Jesus is False?

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“What I mean,” Teabing countered, “is that almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false...” (Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), p. 235.)

At heart, this statement in *The Da Vinci Code* is an attack on the Bible, since it is our primary source of information about Jesus. Is the Bible untrustworthy? Is the information in it false? Have “our fathers” been feeding us a lie all these 2,000 or so years?

Our research has shown just the opposite. If you are going to trust ANY information from the first few centuries A.D., then you must also accept the Bible. Let us explain why...

Can it be proved that the New Testament text is historically reliable and accurate?

Christians and skeptical non-Christians, including members of religious cults, have different views concerning the credibility of the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. For the Christian, nothing is more vital than the very words of Jesus Himself who promised, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Mt. 24:35). Jesus’ promise is of no small import. In other words, if His words were *not* accurately recorded in the Gospels, how can anyone know what He really taught? The truth is, we couldn’t know. Further, if the remainder of the New Testament cannot be established to be historically reliable, then little if anything can be known about what true Christianity really is, teaches, or means.

Christians maintain that anyone who wishes can prove to their own satisfaction that, on the basis of accepted bibliographic, internal, external and other criteria, the New Testament text can be established to be reliable history. Textu-

ally, we have restored over 99 percent of the autographs and there is simply no legitimate basis upon which to doubt the credibility and accuracy of the New Testament writers. Further, the methods used by the critics (rationalistic, higher critical methods) which claim “assured results” proving the New Testament unreliable, have been weighed in the balance of *secular* scholarship and been found wanting. Their use in biblical analysis is therefore unjustified as we documented in *The Facts On the False Views of Jesus: The Truth behind the Jesus Seminar* (1997) and in *Knowing the Truth About the Reliability of the Bible* (1997). Even in a positive sense relative to the biblical text, the fruit they have born is minuscule while, negatively, they are responsible for a tremendous weight of destruction relative to people’s confusion over biblical authority and their confidence in the Bible. (Although even fair-minded biblical critics would have to agree that higher criticism’s 200-year failure to prove its case by default strengthens the conservative Christian view as to biblical reliability.)

In this sense, the critics who continue to advance discredited theories conform to the warnings of Chauncey Sanders, associate professor of military history, The Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama. In his *An Introduction to Research In English Literary History*, he warns literary critics to be certain they are also careful to examine the evidence *against* their case:

...he must be as careful to collect evidence against his theory as for it. It may go against the grain to be very assiduous in searching for ammunition to destroy one’s own case; but it must be remembered that the overlooking of a single detail may be fatal to one’s whole argument. Moreover, it is the business of the scholar to seek the truth, and the satisfaction of having found it should be ample recompense for having to give up a cherished but untenable theory.¹

In order to resolve this issue of New Testament reliability, the following ten facts cannot logically be denied:

Fact One—The existence of 5,300 extant Greek manuscripts and portions, 10,000 Latin Vulgate and 9,300 other versions, with the Papyri and early Uncials dating much closer to the originals than for any other ancient literature;

Fact Two—The lack of proven fraud or error on the part of *any* New Testament author;

Fact Three— The writings of reliable Christian sources outside the New Testament;

Fact Four—The existence of a number of Jewish and secular accounts about Jesus;

Fact Five—Detailed archaeological data concerning the New Testament;

Fact Six—The existence of many powerful enemies of Jesus and the apostolic church who would have proven fraud or pointed out other problems if they could;

Fact Seven—The presence of living eyewitnesses to the events recorded;

Fact Eight —The positive appraisals by conservative and even some liberal

authorities bearing on the issue of the genuineness of traditional authorship and the early date of the New Testament books;

Fact Nine —The consistent scholarly, factual reversals of the conclusions of higher criticism which undermine its own foundations and credibility; and

Fact Ten—Legal and other testimony as to New Testament reliability.

The above facts demonstrate the truth of the conservative view of the New Testament in the following manner.

Fact One—the corroboration from textual transmission

To begin, the historical accuracy of the New Testament can be proven by subjecting it to the three generally accepted tests for determining historical reliability. Such tests are utilized in literary criticism and the study of historical documents in general. (These are discussed by military historian Chauncey Sanders in his *An Introduction to Research in English Literary History*.²) These involve the 1) bibliographical test, 2) internal test and 3) the external examination of the text.

The bibliographical test

This seeks to determine whether or not we can reconstruct the original manuscript from the extant copies at hand. For the New Testament we have 5,300 Greek manuscripts and manuscript portions; 10,000 Latin Vulgate and 9,300 other versions; plus 36,000 early (100-300 A.D.) patristic quotations of the New Testament—such that all but a few verses of the entire New Testament could apparently be reconstructed from these alone.³ What does this mean?

Few scholars question the general reliability of ancient classical literature on the basis of the manuscripts we possess. Yet this is vastly inferior to that of the New Testament. For example, of sixteen well-known classical authors (e.g., Plutarch, Tacitus, Suetonius, Polybius, Thucydides, Xenophon, etc., the total number of extant copies is typically *less than ten* and the earliest copies date from 750 to 1600 years *after* the original manuscript was first penned).⁴

We need only compare such slim evidence to the mass of biblical documentation involving over 24,000 manuscript portions, manuscripts, and versions, the earliest fragment and complete copies dating between 50 and 300 years after originally written.

Given the fact that the early Greek manuscripts (the Papyri and early Uncials) date much closer to the originals than for any other ancient literature; given the overwhelming additional abundance of manuscript attestation, any doubt as to the integrity or authenticity of the New Testament text has been removed no matter what any critic claims. Indeed, this kind of evidence supplied by the New Testament (both amount and quality) is the dream of the historian. No other ancient literature has ever come close to supplying historians and textual critics with such an abundance of data. Consider the chart below. “A” is the documentation establishing the reliability of the ancient classics. “B” is the documentation for the reliability of the New Testament. If “A” is accepted as historically reliable, who can logically deny the reliability of “B”?

A	B
Documentation for ancient classics: a few copies dated 750-1700 years after the original.	Documentation for New Testament: thousands of copies, the earliest dating 50-300 years after the original.

Dr. F. F. Bruce, former Ryland's Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, asserts of the New Testament: "There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."⁵ Professor Bruce further comments, "The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical writers, 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 regarded as beyond all doubt."⁶

Further, Dr. Rene Pache remarks of the great Princeton scholar B. B. Warfield that he "goes on to say that the great bulk of the New Testament has been transmitted to us without, or almost without, any variations. It can be asserted with confidence that the sacred text is exact and valid and that no article of faith and no moral precept in it has been distorted or lost."⁷

It is this wealth of material that has enabled scholars such as Westcott and Hort, Ezra Abbott, Philip Schaff, A. T. Robertson, Norman Geisler and William Nix to place the restoration of the original text at 99% plus.⁸ Thus, no other document of the ancient period is as accurately preserved as the New Testament:

Hort's estimate of "substantial variation" for the New Testament is one-tenth of 1 percent; Abbot's estimate is one-fourth of 1 percent; and even Hort's figure including trivial variation is less than 2 percent. Sir Frederic Kenyon well summarizes the situation:

"The number of manuscripts of the New Testament... is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or another of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world."

Scholars are satisfied that they possess substantially the true text of the principal Greek and Roman writers whose works have come down to us, of Sophocles, of Thucydides, of Cicero, of Virgil; yet our knowledge depends on a mere handful of manuscripts, whereas the manuscripts of the New Testament are counted by hundreds and even thousands.⁹

In other words, those who question the reliability of the New Testament must also question the reliability of virtually every ancient writing the world possesses! So how can the New Testament be rejected when its documentation is 100 times that of other ancient literature? Because it is impossible to question the world's ancient classics, it is far more impossible to question the New Testament.¹⁰ In principle, to throw out the New Testament is to throw out ancient history. This is something no one can do.

In addition, none of the established New Testament canon is lost or missing, not even a verse as indicated by variant readings. By comparison, the books of many ancient authors are missing: 107 of Livy's 142 books of history are lost and one half of Tacitus' 30 books of *Annals* and *Histories*; for Polybius, only five complete books remain from forty.

Finally, the Gospels are extremely close to the events which they record. The first three can be dated within twenty years or so of the events cited and this may even be true for the fourth gospel. This means that all four Gospels were written during the lives of eyewitnesses and that abundant opportunity existed for those with contrary evidence to examine the witnesses and refute them.

The Gospels, then, pass the bibliographical test and must, by far, be graded with the highest mark of any ancient literature we possess.

Fact Two—the internal evidence test (corroboration from content accuracy)

This asserts that one is to assume the truthful reporting of an ancient document, unless the author of the document has disqualified himself by the presence of either fraud or error. For example, do the New Testament writers contradict themselves? Is there anything in their writing which causes one to objectively suspect their trustworthiness?

The answer is no. There is *lack* of proven fraud or error on the part of *any* New Testament writer but there *is* evidence of careful, eyewitness reporting throughout the New Testament. The caution exercised by the writers, their personal conviction that what they wrote was true and the lack of demonstrable error or contradiction indicate that the Gospel authors and, indeed, all the New Testament authors pass the second test as well (Lk. 1:1-4; Jn. 19:35; 21:24; Acts 1:1-3; 2:22; 26:24-26; 2 Pet. 1:16; 1 Jn. 1:1-3).

For example, the kinds of things the Gospel writers include in their narratives offer strong evidence for their integrity. They record their own sins and failures, even serious ones (Mt. 26:56, 72-75; Mk. 10:35-45). They do not hesitate from recording accurately even the most difficult and consequential statements of Jesus (Jn. 6:41-71). They forthrightly supply the embarrassing and even capital charges of Jesus' own enemies. Thus, even though Jesus was their very Messiah and Lord, they not only record the charges that Jesus broke the Sabbath, but that He was 1) born in fornication, 2) a blasphemer and a liar, 3) insane and 4) demonized (Mt. 1:19, 25; Jn. 8:41; Mt. 26:65; Jn. 7:20, 48; 8:41, 48, 52; 10:20, 33, etc.)!

To encounter such honesty in reporting incidents of this nature gives one assurance that the Gospel writers placed a very high premium on truthfulness.

Fact Three—the external evidence test (corroboration from reliable sources outside the New Testament)

This seeks to either corroborate or falsify the documents on the basis of additional historical literature and data. (In this section we will look at Christian

sources; in the next section, non-Christian sources.) Is there corroborating evidence for the claims made in the Gospels outside the New Testament? Or are the claims or events of the New Testament successfully refuted by other competent reports or eyewitnesses? Are there statements or assertions in the New Testament which are demonstrably false according to known archaeological, historic, scientific or other data?

The New Testament again passes the test. For example, Luke's careful historical writing has been documented from detailed personal archaeological investigation by former critic Sir William Ramsey, who stated after his painstaking research, "Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness."¹¹ A. N. Sherwin-White, the distinguished historian of Rome, stated of Luke: "For [the book of] Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. Any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd."¹²

Papias, a student of the Apostle John¹³ and Bishop of Hierapolis around 130 A.D., observed that the Apostle John himself noted that the Apostle Mark in writing his Gospel "wrote down *accurately*... whatsoever he [Peter] remembered of the things said or done by Christ. Mark committed no error...for he was *careful of one thing*, not to omit any of the things he [Peter] had heard, and not to state any of them falsely."¹⁴

Further, fragments of Papias' *Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, ca. 140 A.D. (III, XIX, XX) assert that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John are all based on reliable eyewitness testimony (his portion on Luke is missing).¹⁵

We have now briefly examined relevant bibliographic, internal and external evidence for the New Testament. These criteria force us to concede the historical accuracy and reliability of the Gospel accounts; they pass persuasive tests which determine their integrity. Even two hundred years of scholarly rationalistic biblical criticism (such as form, source, and redaction approaches) have proven nothing except that the writers were careful and honest reporters of the events recorded and that these methods attempting to discredit them were flawed and biased from the start.¹⁶

In conclusion, it is not only a demonstrable historical fact that Jesus lived and taught what the New Testament says He lived and taught, it is also a fact that the New Testament is the best documented and most accurately preserved book of ancient history.

What this means is that we can trust what the authors say as being true. When we examine the evidence for something like the resurrection of Jesus as given in the New Testament, this means there is no logical, historical or other basis upon which to doubt what is being stated is true.

Fact Four—corroboration from non-Christian sources

The existence of both Jewish and secular accounts, to a significant degree, confirm the broad picture of Christ we have in the New Testament.¹⁷

Scholarly research such as that by Dr. Gary R. Habermas in *Ancient Evidence*

for the Life of Jesus and other texts indicates that “a broad outline of the life of Jesus” and His death by crucifixion can be reasonably and directly inferred from entirely non-Christian sources.¹⁸ For example, concerning Jesus’ death by crucifixion and resurrection from the dead:

Using only the information gleaned from these ancient extrabiblical sources, what can we conclude concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus? Can these events be historically established based on these sources alone? Of the seventeen documents examined in this chapter, eleven different works speak of the death of Jesus in varying amounts of detail, with five of these specifying crucifixion as the mode. When these sources are examined by normal historical procedures used with other ancient documents, the result is conclusive.

It is this author’s view that the death of Jesus by crucifixion can be asserted as a historical fact from this data....¹⁹

Further, he points out that the resurrection of Christ itself can be indirectly inferred from non-Christian sources.²⁰

Fact Five—corroboration from archaeology

There exists detailed archaeological confirmation for the New Testament documents.²¹ As archaeologist Dr. Clifford Wilson, author of *New Light on the New Testament Letters, New Light on the Gospels, Rock, Relics and Biblical Reliability*, and a 17-volume set on the archaeological confirmation of the Bible, writes concerning Luke:

Luke demonstrated a remarkably accurate knowledge of geographical and political ideas. He referred correctly to provinces that were established at that time, as indicated in Acts 15:41; 16:2, 6-8. He identified regions, such as that referred to in Acts 13:49, and various cities, as in Acts 14:6. He demonstrated a clear knowledge of local customs, such as those relating to the speech of the Lycaonians (Acts 14:11), some aspects relating to the foreign woman who was converted at Athens (Acts 17:34), and he even knew that the city of Ephesus was known as “the temple-keeper of Artemis” (Acts 19:35).... he refers to different local officers by their exact titles—the proconsul (deputy) of Cyprus (Acts 13:7), the magistrates at Philippi (Acts 16:20, 35), the politarchs (another word for magistrates) at Thessalonica (Acts 17:6), the proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12), and the treasurer at Corinth (Aedile)—which was the title of the man known as Erastus at Corinth (Acts 19:22; Rom 16:23)....

Luke had accurate knowledge about various local events such as the famine in the days of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:29); he was aware that Zeus and Hermes were worshiped together at Lystra, though this was unknown to modern historians (Acts 14:11, 12). He knew that Diana or Artemis was especially the goddess of the Ephesians (Acts 19:28); and he was able to describe the trade at Ephesus in religious images (Acts

19:26, 27)....

At these points, archaeology has had something significant to say, sometimes where the biblical record had previously seemed to be in error. One good example relates to those magistrates at Philippi. In Acts 16:20, 35 we read of the magistrates being referred to as “praetors.” Strictly, their title should have been *duumvir*, but it was as though they called themselves, “senior magistrates” instead of magistrates.” Ramsay showed by an inscription recovered in another Roman colony, Capua, that Cicero had spoken of the magistrates: “Although they are called duumvirs in the other colonies, these men wish to be called praetors.”

This is a point at which critics had thought Luke was in error, but the fact is Luke was better informed than those who opposed him. His writings constantly bear this impress of authenticity. He was an eyewitness of so much that is recorded in the Acts, and the source documents have now been recognized as first-class historical writings.²²

The above is only a minuscule portion of the data underlying his conclusion that “Those who know the facts now recognize that the New Testament must be accepted as a remarkably accurate source book.”²³

Fact Six—corroboration from enemies’ silence

The complete inability of the numerous enemies of Jesus and the early Church to discredit early Christian claims (when they had both the motive and ability to do so) argues strongly for their veracity in light of the stupendous nature of those claims (e.g., concerning Christ’s messiahship and resurrection) and the relative ease of disproof (documenting Jesus’ failure to fulfill specific prophecies; producing Jesus’ body).

Fact Seven—corroboration from eyewitnesses

The presence of hundreds of eyewitnesses to the events recorded in the New Testament would surely have prohibited any alteration or distortion of the facts, just as today any false reporting as to the events of the Vietnam War or World War II would be immediately corrected on the basis of living eyewitnesses and historic records.

Some argue that the gospel writers’ reporting of miracles can’t be trusted because they were only giving their religiously excited “subjective experience” of Jesus, not objectively reporting real miraculous events. They *thought* Jesus did miracles, but were mistaken.

What is ignored by critics is what the text plainly states and the fact that the gospel writers could not have gotten away with this in their own day unless they had been telling the truth. They claimed that these things were done openly, not in a corner (Acts 26:26), that they were literally eyewitnesses of the miraculous nature and deeds of Jesus (Lk. 1:2; Acts 2:32; 4:20; 2 Pet. 1:16), and that their testimony should be believed *because* it was true (Jn. 20:30-31; 21:24).

Indeed, they wrote that Jesus Himself presented His miracles in support of His claims to be both the prophesied Messiah and God incarnate. In Mark 2:8-11 when He healed the paralytic, He did so “that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—a clear claim to being God. In John 10:33 when the Jews accused Jesus of blaspheming because as supposedly only a man He was yet claiming to be God, what was Jesus’ response? “Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may learn and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father” (Jn. 10:37-38), another obvious claim to deity. When John the Baptist was in jail and apparently had doubts as to whether or not Jesus was the Messiah—after all if Jesus was the Messiah, John probably reasoned, he should not be in jail—what did Jesus do? He told John’s disciples to go and report about the miracles that Jesus did which were in fulfillment of specific messianic prophecy (Mt. 11:2-5). Many other examples could be added.

The truth is that the teachings and miracles of Jesus, as any independent reading of the gospels will prove, are so inexorably bound together that if one removes the miracles, one must discard the teachings and vice versa. It is logically impossible to have any other Jesus than the biblical one. But it is precisely the biblical Jesus—His deeds and teaching—which have such abundant eyewitness testimony, as any reading of the Gospels and Acts proves.

Fact Eight—corroboration from date of authorship

The fact that both conservatives (e.g., F. F. Bruce, John Wenham) and liberals (Bishop John A. T. Robinson) have penned defenses of early dating for the New Testament is a witness to the strength of the data for an early date. For example, in *Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke*, noted conservative British scholar John Wenham presents a convincing argument that the synoptic Gospels are to be dated before 55 AD. He dates Matthew at 40 AD (some tradition says the early 30’s); Mark at 45 AD and Luke no later than 51-55 AD.²⁴

German papyrologist Carsten Peter Thiede has argued that the Magdalen papyrus, containing snippets of three passages from Matthew 26, currently housed at Oxford University, are actually the oldest extant fragments of the New Testament, dating from about 70 AD. Thiede’s book, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (Doubleday, 1995), points out that the Magdalen papyrus is written in Uncial style which began to die out in the middle of the first century. In addition, the fragments are from a codex, containing writing on both sides of the papyri which may have been widely used by Christians in the first century since they were easier to handle than scrolls. Further, at three places on the papyri the name of Jesus is written as KS which is an abbreviation of the Greek word *kyrios* or Lord. Thiede argues that this shorthand is proof that early Christians considered Jesus a sacred name just as the devout Jews shortened the name of God to YHWH. This would indicate a very early belief for the deity of Christ. “New papyrus discoveries, Thiede believes, will eventually prove that all four gospels, even the problematic one ascribed to John, were written before AD 80 rather than during the mid-

second century. He argues that a scroll fragment unearthed at the Essene community of Qumran in 1972 almost certainly contains a passage from Mark's gospel and can be accurately dated to AD 68. In Thiede's opinion, recent research has established that a papyrus fragment of *Luke* in a Paris library was written between AD 63 and AD 67."²⁵

Even liberal bishop John A. T. Robinson argued in his *Redating the New Testament* that the entire New Testament was written and in circulation between 40 and 65 AD.²⁶ And, liberal Peter Stuhlmacher of Tübingen, trained in Bultmann's critical methodology of form criticism says, "As a Western scripture scholar, I am inclined to doubt these [Gospel] stories, but as a *historian*, I am obligated to take them as reliable." And, "The biblical texts as they stand are the best hypothesis we have until now to explain what really happened."²⁷

In our view, the Synoptics may even have been completed before 40 AD, within ten years of the death of Christ. One reason for this is cited by Wenham:

Good reasons for making a written record are likely to have arisen quite soon. For instance, a reliable source of instruction would be needed when no qualified teacher was available; it would be felt necessary to secure accuracy in the substance of what was being taught in the scattered Christian community; probably a need would be felt for a form of witness to those outside the church. Torrey gives a sense of the urgency that characterized the early church: "The truth *must* be made known to all the Jews, everywhere, and as soon as possible.... As soon as the adherents of the new faith became a veritable sect, their need of a 'gospel' was imperative. It was a literary age in a literary people, but this was not all. The Israelites were 'a people of the book' (to use Mohammed's term); meaning, that their faith was based on a divine revelation which was written down. Here was a new and most important chapter, to be added to the record. No other means of presenting the new truth with authority and in consistent form could compare, in its appeal to the Jews at home and abroad, with the written announcement...."²⁸

We feel it is more reasonable to conclude an earlier date for the writing at least of the Synoptics, i.e., in the mid to late 30s than it is to accept a "later" date of the 40s-70s. Obviously, once we accept that the Synoptics were written by 40 AD, the destructive results of higher criticism vanish for then there was not sufficient time for changes to have been made in the gospels and they must stand as written. The same is true for the New Testament as a whole.

Indeed, it is becoming an increasingly persuasive argument that all the New Testament books were written before 70 AD—within a single generation of the death of Christ and perhaps earlier.

The implications of this are not small. A New Testament written before 70 AD virtually destroys the edifice on which higher critical premises regarding the New Testament are based. If true, insufficient time now remains for the early church to have supposedly embellished the records with their own particularist views. What the New Testament reports, it reports accurately.

Fact Nine—corroboration from critical methods themselves

Even critical methods indirectly support New Testament reliability. Although higher critical theories in general reject biblical reliability *a priori*, nevertheless, when such theories “are subjected to the same analytical scrutiny as they apply to the New Testament documents, they will be found to make their own contribution to validating the historicity of those records.”²⁹

Fact Ten—corroboration from legal testimony and former skeptics

Finally, we must also concede the historicity of the New Testament when we consider the fact that many great minds of legal history have, on the grounds of strict legal evidence alone accepted the New Testament as reliable history—not to mention also the fact that many brilliant skeptical intellects of history and today have converted to Christianity on the basis of the historical evidence (Saul of Tarsus, Athanagoras, Augustine, George Lyttleton and Gilbert West, C. S. Lewis, Frank Morison, Sir William Ramsay, John Warwick Montgomery, etc.)

Lawyers, of course, are expertly trained in the matter of evaluating evidence and are perhaps the most qualified in the task of weighing data critically. Is it coincidence that so many of them throughout history have concluded in favor of the truth of the Christian religion?

For example, in his day, Irwin Linton represented cases before the Supreme Court. He wrote *A Lawyer Examines the Bible* (1943, 1977) in which he stated:

So invariable had been my observation that he who does not accept wholeheartedly the evangelical, conservative belief in Christ and the Scriptures has never read, has forgotten, or never been able to weigh—and certainly is utterly unable to refute—the irresistible force of the cumulative evidence upon which such faith rests, that there seems ample ground, for the conclusion that such ignorance is an invariable element in such unbelief. And this is so even though the unbeliever be a preacher, who is supposed to know this subject if he know no other.³⁰

Then there are hundreds of contemporary lawyers who, on the grounds of strict legal evidence, accept the New Testament as historically accurate. Examples include the eminent Lord Chancellor Hailsham who twice held the highest office possible for a lawyer in England, that of Lord Chancellor. He wrote *The Door Wherein I Went* wherein he upholds the truth of the Christian Religion.³¹ Another example is Sir Norman Anderson, who is one of the greatest authorities on Islamic law, yet is also a Christian. He is convinced of New Testament authority and reliability.

Certainly, such men were well-acquainted with legal reasoning and have just as certainly concluded that the evidence for the historic truthfulness of the Scriptures is beyond reasonable doubt. As apologist, theologian and lawyer, John Warwick Montgomery observes in *The Law Above the Law* considering the “ancient documents” rule (that ancient documents constitute competent evidence

if there is no evidence of tampering and they have been accurately transmitted); the “parol evidence” rule³² (Scripture must interpret itself without foreign intervention); the “hearsay rule” (the demand for primary-source evidence) and “cross examination” principle (the inability of the enemies of Christianity to disprove its central claim that Christ resurrected bodily from the dead in spite of the motive and opportunity to do so)—all these coalesce directly or indirectly to support the preponderance of evidence for Christianity while the burden of proof proper (the legal burden) for disproving it rests with the critic, who, in 2,000 years, has yet to prove his case.³³

We must, then, emphasize that to reject the New Testament accounts as true history is, by definition, to reject the canons of legitimate historical study. To reject the Gospels or the New Testament is to reject primary historical documentation in general. If this cannot be done, the NT must be retained as careful historical reporting. The New Testament has proven itself reliable in the crucible of history. It is the New Testament critic who has been unable to prove his case. Nor are the implications small.

Legal scholar J. N. D. Anderson observes in *Christianity: The Witness of History*:

...it seems to me inescapable that anyone who chanced to read the pages of the New Testament for the first time would come away with one overwhelming impression—that here is a faith firmly rooted in certain allegedly historical events, a faith which would be false and misleading if those events had not actually taken place, but which, if they did take place, is unique in its relevance and exclusive in its demands on our allegiance. For these events did not merely set a “process in motion and then themselves sink back into the past. The unique historical origin of Christianity is ascribed permanent, authoritative, absolute significance; what happened once is said to have happened once for all and therefore to have continuous efficacy.”³⁴

Notes

¹ Chauncey Sanders, *An Introduction to Research in English Literary History* (NY: MacMillan, 1952), p. 160. His comments were specifically in reference to the authenticity or authorship of a given text.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 143ff.

³ Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, rev. 1979, pp. 39-52; and Norman Geisler, William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), pp. 238, 357-367.

⁴ Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, p. 42; Newman, “Easter Week Narratives,” 281-284.

⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1963), p. 78.

⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971), p. 15.

⁷ Cited in Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, tr. Helen I. Needham (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 193, citing Benjamin B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the Old Testament*, p. 12ff; “The Greek Testament of Westcott and Hort,” *The Presbyte-*

- rian Review*, vol. 3 (April 1982), p. 356.
- ⁸ Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, pp. 43-45; Clark Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), pp. 238-239, 365-366.
- ⁹ Robert C. Newman, "Miracles and the Historicity of the Easter Week Narratives," in Montgomery, ed., *Evidence for Faith*, p. 284.
- ¹⁰ See John Warwick Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact* (New York: Nelson, 1978); F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*; John Warwick Montgomery, *History and Christianity*; Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976), pp. 322-327.
- ¹¹ William M. Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1959), p. 81, cf. William F. Ramsay, *Luke the Physician*, 177-179, 222 as given in F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, pp. 90-91.
- ¹² A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) from N. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, p. 326.
- ¹³ Gary R. Habermas, *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus: Historical Records of His Death and Resurrection* (New York: Nelson, 1984), p. 66.
- ¹⁴ Philip Schaff, Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd series, vol. 1, Eusebius: Church History, Book 3, Chapter 39, "The Writings of Papias" (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 172-173.
- ¹⁵ Habermas, *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus*, pp. 66, 177.
- ¹⁶ E.g., Gerhard Meier, *The End of the Historical Critical Method* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1977) and Josh McDowell, *More Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972).
- ¹⁷ Habermas, *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus*; cf., F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, chs. 9-10.
- ¹⁸ Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, pp. 112-115.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.
- ²¹ See our chapter on archeology in *Ready With An Answer* and F. F. Bruce, "Are the New Testament Documents Still Reliable?", *Christianity Today* (October 28, 1978), pp. 28-33; F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, chs. 7-8; Sir William Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discoveries on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1979); C. A. Wilson, *Rocks, Relics and Biblical Reliability* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977), ch. 2; *New Light on New Testament Letters* and *New Light on the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975); Edwin Yamauchi, *The Stones and the Scriptures*, Section II (New York: Lippincott, 1972).
- ²² Wilson, *Rocks, Relics and Biblical Reliability*, pp. 112-114.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.
- ²⁴ John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: 1992), pp. 115-119, 136, 183, see pp. xxv, 198, 147, 200, 223, 238-239, 243-245. Mark: "The substantial truth of the patristic tradition about Mark could be maintained without necessitating a date somewhere after the mid-60s, and a date as early as the mid-40s becomes possible." (p. 147)
 "I shall argue in the next chapter...that there is some direct evidence that Luke's gospel was highly valued throughout the Pauline churches in the mid-50s, and I am inclined to believe that Matthew and Mark are referred to in Luke's preface,..." (p. 221)
 "On the face of it the synoptic apocalypse makes a date before 70 probable for all three gospels—there is not a suggestion of Jesus' momentous prophecy having been fulfilled... [other considerations] makes 55 the latest possible date for Luke. Mark is to be dated c.45, after Peter's first visit to Rome in 42-44. Matthew is to be dated before the dispersal of the apostles in 42." (p. 223)
 "Any date between 44 and the writing of Luke in the early 50s is, however, possible.... Dates assigned to Matthew vary between the 30s of the first century and the middle of the second century. Cosmas of Alexandria (died c.550) put it during the persecution which followed the

death of Stephen, which might be as early 33.... In his *Chronicon* Eusebius places the writing of the gospel in the third year of the reign of Caligula, that is, in 41."

"Dates like these in the 30s and 40s (which we might describe as "Eusebian") are favored by many orthodox scholars right down to the 19th century. (pp. 238-239)"

In his "Conclusions" section he states his conviction that "Mark's gospel was probably written about 45" and that the universal tradition of the early church places Matthew's gospel at around 40. (p. 243) In addition, "Luke's gospel was apparently well known in the mid-50s" and "Luke knew Mark's gospel" meaning that Luke should be dated in the early to mid 50s.

²⁵ John Elson, "Eyewitness to Jesus?," *Time*, April 8, 1996, p. 60.

²⁶ John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

²⁷ in Richard S. Ostling, "Who Was Jesus?," *Time*, August 15, 1988, p. 41, emphasis added.

²⁸ Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke*, p. 200.

²⁹ F. F. Bruce "Are the New Testament Documents Still Reliable?," p. 33.

³⁰ Irwin Linton, *A Lawyer Examines the Bible* (San Diego: Creation-Life-Publishers, 1977), p. 45.

³¹ "The Door Wherein I Went" in *The Simon Greenleaf Law Review*, vol. 4, 1984-1985), pp. 28-36.

³² **parol evidence rule** - n. if there is evidence in writing (such as a signed contract) the terms of the contract cannot be altered by evidence of oral (parol) agreements purporting to change, explain or contradict the written document. (<http://dictionary.law.com/definition2.asp?selected=1452&bold=|||>)

³³ Montgomery, *The Law Above the Law*, pp. 87-88.

³⁴ J. N. D. Anderson, *Christianity: The Witness of History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970), pp. 13-14.