

Why Should We Trust The Bible

Last episode, we gave a general overview of the doctrine of revelation - or the different ways that God has revealed himself to us. We gave a brief overview of the two different types of Revelation - general and special. We said that general revelation is done through nature, science, philosophy, and a few other things. But, we can't learn everything we need to know about God and His plan without him telling us some things directly. When God speaks to people directly, we call this special revelation. This takes the form of God speaking directly to people with an audible voice (like to Adam, Jacob, Isaac, and Moses), through the words of the prophets, in the person of Jesus Christ, and through the written words found in the Bible.

Most of us have probably never heard the actual voice of God. And, we don't have Jesus in the flesh with us to talk to and ask questions of like the Apostles did. But, we DO have a collection of books that have been handed down for generations that proclaim to be the Word of God.

We're going to take a few sessions to talk about the Bible now because it is the primary source that we get our theology from. But, depending on this book isn't without it's own set of challenges.

The words in this book were written over 3500 years ago for the Old Testament and 2000 years ago for the accounts of Jesus' life. And, apart from Paul and Luke, most of these men were uneducated commoners. They were shepherds and fishermen - not educated scribes and teachers.

And what about the documents themselves? The original manuscripts are long gone. We don't even have copies of the originals. Or copies of the COPIES of the originals. What we have are copies of the copies of the COPIES of the originals. At best.

So, why should we trust the Bible? Why should we make it the guide we continually turn to in our lives? Why should we believe it when it talks about Jesus coming back to life? Or why should we believe it when John tells us how the world will end and what will happen to everyone on the day of judgement?

You may have heard many of the criticisms I just laid out. You may have these doubts yourself. There are many reasons people give on why we should not trust the Bible and I want to take time now to address those. Because I do think that the Bible is trustworthy. In fact, I will make the case today that NO OTHER BOOK in history has been as well preserved as the Bible.

We are going to take a top down approach to examining the evidence. I like to picture it as if there is a person standing in a large room with a Bible 30 or 40 feet away, and a bunch of

roadblocks and obstacles between the two that the person must overcome before they have a clear path. The goal, of course, is for the person to open the Bible, read it, and have their life transformed. But, before that, we need to clear a few of these obstacles out of the way.

The first category of evidence we will look at are external evidences. These are pieces of evidence that one can build a case around for why the Bible is worth investigating without having to even open it up.

The second category we will examine is the internal evidence. Are there clues inside the text itself that point towards the trustworthiness of the accounts it contains?

The Bible As An Ancient Work

The first thing I want to consider is the Bible as an ancient work of history. One reason people reject the Bible is that it makes supernatural claims. But, if we set those claims aside for a moment and just consider it as an ancient work how does it stand up next to other ancient works? Much of what we know about the ancient world and its figures comes from ancient writings much like the Bible. So, how does it compare to those?

First, let's look at the life of Alexander The Great. We know a lot about his life, his military conquests, and many of the other things he did. This information comes primarily from two authors - Arrian and Plutarch.

Next, we have the biographies of twelve Caesars starting with Julius Caesar and going to Domitian. Julius Caesar wrote a lot about his life and conquests. We get info on the other Caesars from a Roman historian named Suetoneus. Another historian from whom we get much of our knowledge regarding the 1st century Greco-Roman world is Livy (59 BC - 17 AD). And, we also have a historian named Tacitus wrote a biography for Tiberius Caesar - the emperor on the throne when Jesus was executed.

We know about ancient Greek culture and politics through the orations of a politician named Demosthenes. Theucydides gave us his great work on the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta. And, finally, we have Herodotus - the "father of history" who, in his work *Histories*, gives us a detailed account of the Greco-Persian War.

With those things in mind, let's now go through the external evidence for why the Bible is trustworthy

1. The Bible Was Written Early

Textual critics use several factors including the language used, the absence of events, the inclusion of events, and other narrative clues to determine when a text was first written

Historians agree that Jesus most likely died in either 30 or 33. Based on the criteria above, scholars have dated the manuscripts of the New Testament from 40-45 A.D. (the epistle of James) to 95 A.D. (Revelation). There are competing theories as to which gospel was written first, but the prevailing theory is that it was Mark between 50-55 A.D.

25 years between when an event occurred and when it was documented seems like a big gap. But, consider this. Plutarch's writings on Alexander the Great came 400 years after Alexander's death. The sources for Tiberius Caesar - 80 to 180 years after his death. So, a 25-year time gap is nothing compared to the gaps we have for some of our most famous ancient historical figures.

As another comparison let's take one of the most tragic events to happen in US history in the past several decades - 9/11. That was 23 years ago. I still remember the details of that day pretty well. Enough that I could write a few pages about it. And that's me - 3000 miles away from the event only seeing it on TV. Imagine all the things that the eyewitnesses of the actual events could still recall to this day. For the rest of their lives, really. 25 years is nothing for those kinds of impactful events.

2. The Gospels Are Eyewitness Testimony

In his book [Cold-Case Christianity](#), former homicide detective J. Warner Wallace gives a list of criteria he used in his investigations to determine if someone was a reliable eyewitness.

First off, were they present? We can look at how they describe the area the event took place in, certain things that were happening that day, etc and determine if they were actually present.

For example, my 17 year old daughter has been performing in musical theater since she was 5. Recently, she was in a performance of Beauty and The Beast. If someone said they saw her perform, they should be able to accurately describe the venue she performed in. They only perform in one venue. So, if the person gets the venue wrong, they weren't there.

Next, were their accounts corroborated? Did anyone else say the same thing they did? Or did anyone else have details in their account that line up with the this account.

My wife and I both say we saw our daughter perform. If you interview us separately, parts of our account should be the same. We should both be able to tell you the role she played, what her costume looked like, and the scenes she was in for instance.

We also need to ask if they they were accurate? Now, they could be wrong about a couple details. But, they need to be accurate on the main details. For instance, my wife could probably tell you the pattern on the dress she wore. But, if you ask me, I would just say "it was blue".

And, finally, were they biased? Does the person giving the account have anything to gain by fabricating a story or maybe something to lose by telling the truth?

Jim writes a chapter on each one of those criteria in his book and shows how the gospel writers meet EVERY SINGLE ONE of those criteria. In fact, it was because they met all of the criteria that Jim started paying attention to what they reported. As an atheist.

In other words, the people whose names are attributed to the Gospels are the ones who wrote them shortly after the events they record. We don't have one eyewitness account of the life of Jesus - we have 4. All of the things they record - the cities, the people, the buildings, the geography - are all accurate to the time they record. Also, these men had nothing to gain and everything to lose by writing and doing what they did. They had no motivation to lie. Based on all of this, we can comfortably say that the Gospels were written by people who were actually there to witness the life of Jesus of Nazareth

3. We Could Reconstruct Jesus' Teachings From Secondary Sources

The writings of the early followers of Jesus didn't stop with the apostles. We have writings from many of the early church fathers - who would have been students taught by the apostles. These would be people like Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius. They continued the tradition of writing letters to churches giving them advice. They also wrote out many of their thoughts as they worked through theological topics and issues of the day. And many of their writings either directly quote the Bible or they are lessons and ideas from the teachings of Jesus that are rephrased.

There are dozens of secondary sources in the first 2 Centuries. Just by looking at the letters of three of these men - Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius - we get the following ideas that are also taught in the New Testament

- ◆ The Old Testament predicted Jesus' coming
- ◆ Jesus is Divine
- ◆ The Apostles (and many others) learned directly from Jesus
- ◆ Jesus performed Miracles
- ◆ Jesus' mother was a virgin when he was born
- ◆ Jesus was a real person who lived, taught, cared for others, was arrested, and was executed

- ◆ Jesus rose from the dead as evidence of his divine nature

Sounds familiar right? If the secondary sources say the same thing as the primary sources then that's another reason to believe the primary sources. In this case, the Gospels.

4. We Have "An Embarrassment Of Riches"

When working with ancient manuscripts, historians rely on multiple copies of an original work in order to ensure the copies that we have accurately represent the original. Up until the printing press was invented in the 1500s, everything was copied by hand. Scribes make mistakes. So, the more copies we have for comparison, the closer we can get to what the original said. For example, if we have 3 manuscripts that say "Jesus wept" and one that says "Jesus, the Son of the Most Holy, may he reign forever and ever Amen wept", we can assume that the odd one out has stuff added to it. If 3 manuscripts word it one way, and one words it a different way, you go with the ones that agree.

Let me give you an example of how having multiple copies of a manuscript helps reconstruct the original.

Let's say my buddy Charles and I plan to go on a hike one Saturday morning. We're going to drive out of town to this really cool trail up in the mountains. We had to coordinate a time for me to be picked up. And we all know the wonders of Autocorrect. Let's say I send him the following text.

"Pack me up at home around 6 AM. We can grub breakfast in the wash."

Well, that was an autocorrect fail. So, I text him again.

"Pick up at home me about six AM. We can get brake fluid on the way."

Well, I'm pretty sure he knows I don't want to get brake fluid. But, because I like to be clear, I text him again.

"Me at Puck's home at sax AM. On the way breakfast we can get."

Alright, I give up...

But, you get the point. Where is he picking me up? At what time? What are we doing after he gets me? So, you can see how having numerous copies for comparison can help you come to a conclusion about what the original message said - even if there are copiest errors or things get changed around a bit.

I listed the ancient historians at the beginning because I think it would be helpful to compare the New Testament documents with them. They gave us the works in which we get most of what we

know about the ancient Greco-Roman world - the figures, the wars, the way of life, etc. And, if the New Testament has a similar amount of copies for comparison, we should trust it the same way we do our other sources of ancient history.

In a video titled "[An Embarrassment of Riches](#)" ^[1], Dr. Dan Wallace gives these statistics for comparing the New Testament manuscripts to the works of other ancient authors.

First, the ancient historians Livy, Tacitus, and Suetonius. For Livy, the earliest manuscripts we have of his work are from 300 years *after* he wrote them. And we have about 30 copies. For Tacitus - considered by many to be one of the greatest historians of the day - 1000 years and 20 copies. Suetonius. For him, we have about 8. But, the earliest copies are from the 9th century.

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For Heroditus (remember - the "father of history") we have 8 copies. 8. The Father of History. And the earliest manuscripts are from a thousand years later.

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As you can see, much of what we know about ancient history comes from manuscripts that are copies from hundreds - if not a thousand - years after the originals were created. And we have between 8-20 copies for comparison to get to the original texts.

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So, how does the New Testament stack up? Well, now you're about to see why this section is entitled "An Embarrassment of Riches". As far as copies go, we have about 5800 manuscripts of the New Testament in Greek *alone*. We have another 10,000 in Latin (which started in the 2nd century). Hundreds more in Coptic, Syriac, Georgian, Gothic, Arabic, and many others. In total, we have around 15,000 copies not in Greek. Well over 20,000 with Greek

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Now, keep in mind, with these ancient documents they aren't all complete copies. There are a lot of fragments and pieces missing. The earlier you go the less there usually is of them left. That goes for both the New Testament and the other ancient works. But, this isn't really an issue because we have multiple copies of the same thing to reference against each other.

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Now, let's talk about the age of the New Testament manuscripts. The oldest manuscript we have - a fragment of the Gospel of John - is from AD 100-150 We have as many as 10-12 that can be dated to the 2nd century. Within 300 years, we have over 100 manuscripts in Greek alone.

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The average classical author has fewer than 20 copies of his works still in existence. For visual reference, if we took those manuscripts and stacked them on top of each other that would be about a 4-foot high stack. The New Testament - almost a mile high.

5. The Bible Is Corroborated By Outside, Hostile Sources

The final external reason we should trust the Bible is that many of the events it discusses are backed up by outside sources. Even better for our case, many of them are *hostile* to Christianity. None of these sources are praising Jesus or Christians. But, we can gather lots of facts from their writings that do corroborate many of the historical claims in the Bible.

Who are these sources? They are historians of the day who wrote about their dealings with Christians in their letters and books.

There are many external sources in ancient history that document things about Jesus and his followers. We're going to briefly look at 6.

First, we have Thallus. He was an ancient historian between 50-89 AD. Like many ancient historians, his works are lost to us today. But, we know of some things he said based on someone else commenting about his writings. In the 3rd century, historian Julius Afrikanus writes:

On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun. [2]

Here, Julius informs us that in one of his books about history, Thallus noted that the sky went dark on a given day when it should not have. Thallus didn't know what was going on, so he chalked it up to an unexpected eclipse.

Julius goes on to describe the patterns and seasons of the moon and why it could not have been an eclipse because it was the wrong time of the year for that to happen.

Further on in the passage, he cites another ancient historian - Phlegon - who also documented an eclipse had occurred.

Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth—manifestly that one of which we speak. But what has an eclipse in common with an earthquake, the rending of rocks, and the resurrection of the dead, and so great a perturbation throughout the universe? [2-1]

Not only did Phlegon record an eclipse, but he also recorded earthquakes at the time Jesus was crucified.

Cornelius Tacitus

Next, we have Cornelius Tacitus, another ancient historian who lived between 56-120 AD. He wrote about Nero and the fires that destroyed Rome in his work *Annals*. Tacitus records that Nero blamed the destruction of Rome on the Christians

Yet no human effort, no princely largess nor offerings to the gods could make that infamous rumor disappear that Nero had somehow ordered the fire. Therefore, in order to abolish that rumor, Nero falsely accused and executed with the most exquisite punishments those people called Christians, who were infamous for their abominations. The originator of the name, Christ, was executed as a criminal by the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius; and though repressed, this destructive superstition erupted again, not only through Judea, which was the origin of this evil, but also through the city of Rome, to which all that is horrible and shameful floods together and is celebrated.^[3]

Tacitus goes on to document some of the things Nero did to Christians and they aren't pretty. But, here we have a Roman historian who is clearly a hostile witness (he said Christians "were infamous for their abominations"). And, he records that Jesus was executed as a criminal under Pilate.

Mara Bar-Serapion

Next, we have Mara Bar-Serapion, who was a Syrian Stoic philosopher. In a letter he wrote to his son sometime around 73 AD, he writes

What else can we say, when the wise are forcibly dragged off by tyrants, their wisdom is captured by insults, and their minds are oppressed and without defense? What advantage did the Athenians gain from murdering Socrates? Famine and plague came upon them as a punishment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea and the Jews, desolate and driven from their own kingdom, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates is not dead,

because of Plato; neither is Pythagoras, because of the statue of Juno; nor is the wise king, because of the "new law" he laid down.^[4]

So, Mara writes to his son about how certain ancient cities faced calamity after they persecuted a major figurehead of the day. One of those cities he refers to is Jerusalem and how the Jews were dispersed after Jesus was executed.

Pliny, The Younger

Next, we have Pliny, The Younger who lived between 98-117 AD. He was a magistrate in the Roman Empire and wrote several letters back and forth with Emperor Trajan. In one of his letters written in 113 AD, he describes putting Christians on trial and some of the things he discovered. He writes:

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to *Christ as to a god*, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food—but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but *depraved, excessive superstition*.
(emphasis mine)^[5]

So, in this letter written in 113 AD We have a hostile witness recording that Christians were worshipping Christ as a god and that they held to superstitions. Like that he rose from the grave. So, for Christians to have existed this early on means that Christ had to have existed this early on.

Josephus

Finally, we have Flavius Josephus. Josephus was an ancient Jewish historian who was quite prolific. A great deal of what we know about the ancient world comes from Josephus. He lived between 37 – 100 AD. One of his major works is known as *Antiquities*. There is a passage in it where he writes about Jesus and his execution. This passage is so famous to historians, it's been given a specific name; *The Testimonium Flavianum*. It reads:

“About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, **if indeed one ought to call him a man**. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. **He was the Messiah**. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. **He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him**. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.”^[6] (Translation from Loeb Classical Library, emphasis mine)

Now, many people will object to this passage. Can you see why? Josephus was a Jew. But, the author of this passage holds some very Christian beliefs. So, more than likely, a scribe who was a Christian embellished some of the passage and added in things Josephus didn't really say. But, for us, that's OK. Because here's what we get if we remove the questionable passages:

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man,[...]. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher [...]. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. [...]. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease.[...] And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.

So, even in this much more neutral version, we get a number of important pieces of evidence; Jesus lived, he won over many Jews and Greeks, the “principled men” among the Jews had him crucified, Pilate oversaw the execution via crucifixion, his followers claimed to have seen him after he died and they still persist throughout Rome to this day.

That's six different, non-Christian sources we have to back up the events of the New Testament. We actually have more sources for the life of Jesus than we do for Julius Caesar!

So what claims from the New Testament are supported by these sources? Here are some of the facts they attest to as well as the sources that back up these facts.

1. Jesus lived (1,2,3,4,5,6)
2. He was a Jew (3,6)
3. He was a wise teacher (3,6)
4. Jesus was an accurate predictor of future events (4)
5. He was brought up for execution by the Jewish leaders (3,6)
6. Jesus was executed by crucifixion (2,6)
7. The crucifixion was administered by Pontius Pilate (2,6)
8. Tiberius was the emperor at the time of the execution (6)

9. The sky was darkened on the day Jesus died. (1,4)
10. There were earthquakes on the day Jesus died. (1,4)
11. Groups of Jesus' followers existed. (2,5,6)
12. Early Christians believed supernatural events revolving around the life of Jesus (2,5,6)
13. Early Christians met regularly to worship Jesus as a god (5)
14. The early church consisted of many different ethnic groups, free people, slaves, men, and women. (5,6)
15. People of low social status (women and slaves) held offices in the church. (5)
16. Early Christians had a strong moral code that they followed. (5)
17. The early Christians were persecuted (2,5)

Now, these sources don't seem to believe in the supernatural events that happened in the New Testament. But, they do document the natural events (earthquakes and the sky darkening on the day Jesus was executed). And, even though these sources didn't believe in the supernatural events, more importantly, they tell us that *the first Christians did*.

The External Evidence Tells Us The Bible Can Be Trusted

Despite being a collection of writings from over 2000 years ago, we can trust that the Bible we have today is what was written originally. It was written shortly after the events it records, the people who authored it were eyewitnesses to the events they document, many of the things from the New Testament can be found in contemporary secondary sources, we can follow what the students of the authors believed to see that the message was unaltered, we have tens of thousands of copies of the manuscripts to make sure we can accurately reproduce the originals, and even non-Christians of the day back up some of the things found in the New Testament.

No other historical work can make those claims. And yet, we trust *them*. So, why not the Bible?

Why We Should Trust The Bible – The Internal Evidence

Now we move onto the internal evidence for why we should trust the Bible. Remember in the beginning I talked about removing roadblocks. At this point, we've used things from outside the Bible to get people to hopefully at least give it a shot. We could picture it like they used to be 50 feet away and now at least they are standing in front of the book ready to open it. They are probably still skeptical. They've heard about the talking snakes and talking donkeys and people

coming back from the dead. A lot of that sounds like myth and fairytale. But, at least now they are ready to have a look inside.

There's still a lot of obstacles we have to deal with *inside* the Bible, too. I was certainly that way once. See, I knew it was written by men. I knew men make mistakes. I know men seek power and have agendas. I knew it was written in ancient languages and it had been translated over and over and over again. So, how could I trust a book that was written 2000 years ago by people who make mistakes and have a desire to craft a narrative that puts them in power?

My position has obviously changed. So what changed? How did I go from being highly critical of the Bible to making it one of my favorite things to make the case for and being convinced that this is God's Word?

Well, first and foremost, I actually read it.

See, the whole time I was criticizing the Bible I had never really read it. I mean, I had read *parts* of it when I was in Sunday school as a kid. But, after I had gone off to college, I never cracked a Bible open again. Once I did start reading it, several of my hurdles – and a lot of the most common charges people make - were removed pretty quickly.

Did The Writers Have A Hidden Agenda?

First off, my roadblock of "the agenda". Why did I think there was an agenda? Because I'm a Gen-Xer and Gen-Xers think *every* institution has a hidden agenda. My only basis to think this of the church was that it had seen success and had a lot of influence. I had this image in my head of the massive stone churches in Europe full of finely crafted items of unspeakable value. I grew up in the era of Jimmy Swaggert and Jim and Tammy Faye Baker. I heard preachers on TV say that the viewers' salvation was connected with how much money they would send to his ministry. And I saw sex scandal after sex scandal where women were taken in by the draw of power and charisma. Therefore, there had to be a nefarious agenda of manipulation of the masses by men of power.

But, when I read the New Testament, I saw the life of Jesus of Nazareth, saw the lives of the apostles after Jesus' resurrection, and read their teachings. These men lived a life of meager means. They traveled light. They didn't make impassioned pleas for people to give them money like I saw the televangelists of the 80s and 90s do.

In fact, I saw just the opposite of what I had seen on TV, In his letters, Paul often reminds the recipients how he worked amongst them as a tentmaker to earn a wage (Acts 18:3-4), that he never asked them to support him while he was there (Acts 20:33-34), and that the guys who were coming around preaching and asking for money shouldn't be trusted (1 Timothy 6:5, Acts 20:33).


There was nothing in these pages that set up a structure of power. There were no words about gaining financial wealth. In fact, they were encouraged to live modestly and give to others. There was no talk of coming under compliance of authority apart from God and Jesus. The apostles in Acts gave all the glory to God whenever they performed miracles. A few times, people fell to the ground and started worshiping the apostles as gods, but the apostles quickly stopped it (Acts 14:8-18). Paul even gave the church in Galatia instructions to ignore *him* if he changed anything he had originally taught them (Galatians 1:8).

As for scoring all the ladies, the apostles did - and taught to do - the exact opposite (Titus 1:6, 1 Timothy 3:2). And, at that time, this teaching was completely counter to the culture. Most men had a wife to bear him children and manage the house, a servant girl or two, and a favorite prostitute at the local temple. But, Jesus and the apostles taught one man, one woman. Paul even encouraged those who could do it to remain celibate (1 Corinthians 7:8-9).

What I quickly realized was that the church I saw now wasn't the church I saw when the New Testament was written. The church had gained money and power. And there were certainly plenty of instances of sexual impropriety - even abuse. But, these things weren't what was originally taught.

Do The Gospel Accounts Conflict With One Another?

One thing I had always thought was that the Gospels were too different from one another. You would think that if this book was directed by a supernatural force, the authors would at least be able to get their stories straight. But, the Gospel accounts aren't the same. The accounts aren't told in the same order, some have parts that others do not, and in some areas, they don't appear to agree on the number of things - like how many people visited Jesus' tomb and how many angels they saw.

When I read J. Warner Wallace's book [Cold-Case Christianity](#)  I realized that the slightly different accounts actually *helped* show that the authors were eyewitnesses. Wallace talks about interviewing eyewitnesses in his book. And, when you interview eyewitnesses, it's a bad sign if their stories are exactly the same. That means they corroborated together before the cops showed up to make sure they were telling the same story.

In reality, though, each one of us pays attention to certain details differently. If you ask two people who witnessed something to describe it, they will probably have some overlap. But, they will toss in different details based on things that were important to them or the things they could see based on their perspective.

We talked about this earlier in the section on eyewitness testimony. Another show my daughter was in recently was *The Music Man*. If you asked my wife - who saw the performance from the

audience perspective - she would tell you about things going on downstage. For example, in this scene, she would have told you my daughter (on the left), was standing next to the piano with a feather duster. I would have said "no, I didn't see that". Why? Because I am off stage to the left of this shot and Izzy's back is to me. I couldn't see the feather duster.

If you asked me, though, you would have seen this. And I would have told you about all of the stuff from the stage crew perspective - how we got stuff off and on the stage, how the actors hide behind the set pieces, etc. But, we would both tell you what role our daughter had, what songs she sang, and what her costume looked like.

The Gospel accounts are the same way. Each author saw and heard different details of the same events. They were also writing for different audiences. Matthew's Gospel is written for a Jewish audience. You can tell because he quotes more Old Testament Scripture than any other author. And Luke's purpose was to "give an orderly account". He felt the need to do this because the other accounts of the time weren't done in an orderly way. Matthew and Mark are organized in more thematic ways than chronological.

Let's have a look at one section of the Gospels to demonstrate how we can resolve many apparent contradictions. Here's the passages in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John that describe Jesus' tomb being empty

Mat 28,1-6 **1**Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. **2**And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. **3**His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. **4**And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. **5**But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. **6**He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

Mar 16,1-6 **1**When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. **2**And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. **3**And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" **4**And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back- it was very large. **5**And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. **6**And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.

Luk 24,1-7 **1**But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. **2**And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, **3**but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. **4**While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. **5**And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? **6**He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, **7**that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise."

Joh 20,1-2 **1**Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. **2**So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Now, you may read those accounts side by side and think "are these guys even describing the same scene"? How many people went to the tomb? Matthew has 2, Mark lists 3, Luke just says "they", and John only says 1 name. And, just how many angels were there? One or two? And where were they? Inside or outside?

Remember, these accounts are eyewitness testimony. And eyewitnesses can describe things differently as certain details stick out to them. For example, I ride the bus to work every morning. If my wife asked someone about my bus ride, one person might say "Dave got on the bus and went to work". Someone else might say "Dave got on the bus with some high school kids. He got off on the corner of Main and First". And a 3rd person might say "Dave got on the bus and was talking with another guy. They got off the buss next to Ralph's. Dave walked one way and the other guy went into the store."

Even though none of those accounts are exactly the same, none of them are contradictory. In each of the accounts, I got on the bus and then got off the bus.

Now, they WOULD be contradictory if one person said "Dave got on the bus, nobody else got on the bus at the same time, and he didn't get off the bus until it made it's way back to the bus station". But, if one person described the scene as "Dave got on the bus" and someone else described it as "Dave and some other people got on the bus" there is no contradiction.

So, with that in mind, let's go look at the Bible passages again. Matthew says "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb". Mark says "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices". Luke says "they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared". And John says "Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark".

So any of these accounts say "only Mary Nagdalene went"? No. And I'm pretty sure "they" means more than one. Which also means at least 2. Which also means one and some more. So, just listing Mary Magdalele doesn't mean the others weren't there too. Make sense?

Having accounts that differ slightly is actually a GOOD thing. Imagine you're a cop. And you have to go investigate a crime scene. If you interview 4 witnesses and they all tell the exact same story, what are your thoughts? Probably that they got together to make sure they had their stories straight, right? But, if they differ a bit - one adds this detail, one adds another detail - but they still tell the same story overall, that makes it more trustworthy.

The gospels give the same accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. They differ in some details, but not at their core. In fact, if they were almost identical retellings, we should worry that they conspired to make sure they got all of their facts straight.

The New Testament Authors Included Embarrassing Testimony

Another thing that stuck out to me when I read through the Gospels is how the followers of Jesus were portrayed. Keep in mind that the apostles are the men who founded the church after Jesus left. These are the pillars. These are the men who wrote the vast majority of the New Testament. Many traditions even put the title of Saint before their names.

And yet, when you read through the Gospels they look more like The Twelve Stooges than twelve saints. They frequently misunderstand Jesus' teachings, they argue with one another, Jesus rebukes them constantly, and they often act out foolishly. And, the ultimate sign that they didn't get what was going on was that they all ran and hid when Jesus was arrested. They turned their backs on him.

Historians have a term for this kind of account and it is a way for them to evaluate if something is true or not. It's called embarrassing testimony. If you want to make yourself look good, you don't include stuff that makes you look bad. You only put the embarrassing stuff in if you're telling the truth.

Look at Peter and the picture that is painted of him in the Gospels. Peter is the man that the Roman Catholic church claim as the first Pope. And yet, in the pages of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, he looks like a fool. He almost drowns at sea trying to walk on water, Jesus calls him Satan at one point, he lops off the ear of someone when Jesus gets arrested (for which Jesus scolds him), and he denies he even knows Jesus later on when asked.

All throughout the book of Acts, the apostles are chased out of town after town, beaten, arrested, and even killed. They aren't portrayed as glorious conquering heroes. They don't walk

into a place, start waving their arms around, and the people lovingly fall in line. In fact, they often meet a lot of opposition. And it's all written in the pages of the Bible.

Jesus Got It Right

Finally, and this was one of the biggest eye-openers for me, as I read through the pages of the Gospels I realized Jesus got it right. He accurately described how the hearts of mankind worked, their motivations, and what would happen to his followers. All the scandals we have seen in the church - greedy pastors, the sexual improprieties, the thirst for power, and the craving for attention that some fall into - Jesus called *all* of that. He said all of those guys would show up. And gave reasons for why it would happen.

I came to *really* know Jesus in 2014. There were a few reasons I started reading the Bible, but one of them was because I saw a lot of hate being turned towards Christians in the public square. Every other day I heard statements like "Christians hate (insert marginalized group here)" and I thought to myself *I don't remember being taught to hate ANYONE when I used to go to church. In fact, just the opposite!*

So, imagine my surprise when I read what Jesus taught and I didn't see any guarantees of material success or a life without problems. Jesus predicted the exact opposite, actually. He gave principles that *could* unite everyone, but he knew the hearts of men. He predicted that his words would be really divisive (Matthew 10:34-39). He said there is a cost associated with following him (Luke 14:25-28). You'll lose friends, you'll lose family, and you're livelihood may be affected. And, you may even lose your life.

There was one other thing Jesus got right that really sealed the deal for me. More important than realizing there was no hidden agenda, that the Gospels weren't contradictory, and that the church I saw wasn't how Jesus taught it to be - more important than [any other roadblock I had put up](#) - I realized that Jesus got *me* right. This man from Nazareth who lived 2000 years ago, through the writings of his followers, had called out every single thing I saw wrong with myself. No matter what front I would put up on the outside, I knew the dark, ugly, dirtiness that lived within. And he did, too.

I'm not trying to turn this into my personal testimony. For the sake of brevity, let's just say that the other things I found in the pages of the Bible - grace, forgiveness, love, patience - saved my life.

So, after I had all of my roadblocks removed - and I saw that the original manuscripts were written early by people who were actually there to witness the events, that the authors didn't have an agenda, that the accounts were corroborated by outside, hostile sources, that we have an extraordinary amount of copies that allow us to determine what the originals said, and how Jesus accurately described the world and how it works (including me) - I was left with a choice.

I could either bury my head in the sand and try to continue stumbling through life. Or I could turn to the words of the Designer of life and seek His wisdom for how I ought to live my life. For me, the choice was pretty clear.



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