

Preparing to Give an Answer: Part 4

The Reliability & Authority of Scripture

Room For Doubt Seminar – Lowell, IN Church of Christ

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Introduction

- A. The Bible is reliable and authoritative (Jn. 20:30-31; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- B. Key questions
 - 1. When, how, and by whom were the Bible books written and compiled?
 - 2. Which books properly belong in the Bible (the canon)?
 - a. Old Testament canon: The “law and the prophets” (Matt. 22:40; Lk. 24:44; Acts 24:14; Rom. 3:21).
 - b. New Testament canon (cf. 2 Peter 3:15-16).

I. Some Archaeological Connections.

- A. Black Obelisk of Shalmanezar (Assyrian king) and Jehu (king of Israel) [c. 840 BC].
- B. Prism of Sennacherib (Assyrian king) refers to Hezekiah (king of Judah) as a “caged bird.” (2 Kings 19; 2 Chron. 32; Isa. 36-37) [c. 701 BC].
- C. Cylinder of Cyrus (king of Persia) and the return to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity (Ezra 1:1-3 (Ezra 6:1-5; 2 Chron. 3:23; Isaiah 44:28). [c. 539 BC].
- D. Some New Testament examples.
 - 1. The Pilate Stone refers to Pilate (cf. Lk. 3:1).
 - 2. Pool of Bethesda (cf. Jn. 5:2).
 - 3. Caiaphas Ossuary refers to Caiaphas (mentioned in Mathew, Luke, John, and Acts).

II. Divine “Inspiration” of Scripture.

- A. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 “All Scripture is inspired by God.”

“... from childhood you have known the **sacred writings** which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. **All Scripture is inspired by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. [“inspired”: *theopneustos* = God breathed] (NASV)

- B. 2 Peter 1:20-21 Writers were “carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (ESV)

- C. The Holy Spirit will prompt remembrance ((Jn. 14:16-17, 25-26; 16:12-13; Lk. 12:11-12; Mk.13:11).

III. Eyewitness Testimony and the New Testament. (See CHART: “Earliest N.T. Books & Events”)

- A. 1 John 1:1-4 We have HEARD, SEEN, and TOUCHED.
- B. 2 Peter 1:16-21 We were EYEWITNESSES.

C. The crucial role of the APOSTLES.

1. Apostles must be EYEWITNESSES (Acts 1:1-5, 21-22).
2. The Apostles preached the resurrected Christ, which they had personally witnessed (Acts 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 4:5-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43).

D. **The Apostle Paul** became an EYEWITNESS of the resurrected Jesus and preached the resurrection the rest of his life (e.g. Acts 9:1-30; Acts 26:1-23; 1 Cor. 15).

1. In the **book of Acts** (by Luke): 13:16-43; 17:1-3, 16-33; 21:37-40; 22:1-21; 23:1-11; 24:10-21; 26:1-29).
2. In **Paul's letters**.
 - a. Galatians (1:1, 11-12) [AD 48-53]
 - b. 1 Thessalonians (1:9-10; 4:14) [AD 51]
 - c. 1 Corinthians (15:1-4) [AD 55]

IV. The Testimony of Mark and Luke (Not Apostles nor Eyewitnesses).

A. **Mark and his Gospel.** [John Mark in Acts 12:25; 15:37,39; Barnabas's cousin in Col. 4:10]

1. A traveling companion with **PETER** and **PAUL**. (Acts 12:25; 13:2-5; Col. 4:10; Philemon 24; 1 Pet. 5:13)
2. **Papias** (c. 125): Mark "had become the interpreter of Peter." (Papias was a close associate of Polycarp who was a disciple of the apostle John.)
3. **Irenaeus** (c. 170): Mark was "a disciple and interpreter of Peter." [Irenaeus was Polycarp's disciple; Polycarp was John the apostle's disciple.]

B. **Luke** and His Gospel and the book of Acts (Acts 16:10,13,16; 28:1-2,10,16; Philemon 24; Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11).

1. Luke: A frequent traveling companion with **PAUL**.
2. Luke: The author of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts (Lk. 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2).

Luke 1:1-4 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us,² just as those who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses** and ministers of the word have **delivered them to us**,³ it seemed good to me also, **having followed all things closely for some time past**, to **write an orderly account for you**, most excellent Theophilus,⁴ **that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.** (ESV)

V. Oral and Early Tradition.

A. **Maintain** the "**traditions**" (1 Cor. 11:2; 15:1-4; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6,14) [c. 55 AD]

B. **Remember** what was spoken (2 Peter 3:1-2; Jude 1:17).

VI. Early Non-New Testament Testimony.

Gary Habermas (a N.T. historian) points out that at least 39 different ancient sources outside the N.T. provide over 100 facts just about the Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

A. **Josephus** (37-100): Jewish historian.

1. Revolt of Judas (Acts 5; *Jewish War* 2.118).
2. The "so-called Christ" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XX).
3. Execution of John the Baptist (Mk. 6; Matt. 14; *Jewish Antiquities* 18.116-119).
4. James, the brother of Jesus, killed. (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.200; cf. Matt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3).
5. Death of King Agrippa (Acts 12:21-23; *Jewish Antiquities*, 18.3).

B. **Tacitus** (56-117): Roman Senator. Speaks of the **death of Jesus**.

C. **Seutonius** (69-122): Roman biographer. Refers to **expulsion of Jews from Rome** (cf. Acts 18:1-2).

VII. The Reliability of the Gospels

A. Two typical skeptic claims:

1. “We have no original manuscripts of any New Testament book. All we have are copies. And the copies we have of the Greek New Testament exhibit over 200,000 variations.”
2. “The New Testament Gospels are filled with contradictions.”

B. What about all the **copies**?

1. We have no *original* manuscripts [“autographs”] of the NT—only copies (about 5,800).
2. The copies purportedly contain 200,000 to 400,000 variations.

Bart Ehrman: “Not only do we not have the originals, we don’t have the first copies of the originals. We don’t even have copies of the copies of the originals, or copies of the copies of the copies of the originals.... And these copies all differ from one another, in many thousands of places” (Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*, 10).

3. How do we determine the original? >> **Textual Criticism.**
4. Comparing N.T. manuscripts with other ancient writings.

Greek N.T. Manuscripts and Other Ancient Writings

(circa and rounded dates)	Original Source Date	Earliest Available Manuscript(s)	Time Elapse (from Original)	Number of Manuscripts
Homer’s <i>Iliad</i>	900 BC	c. 415 BC	485 yrs.	+1,900
Livy’s History of Rome	25 BC	4 th Century AD	325+ yrs.	c. 475
Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews	93 AD	>800 AD	700+ yrs.	20
NT Greek Manuscripts	50-100 AD	130 AD	35-80 yrs.	>5,800
(However, over 5,000 of these NT Greek manuscripts date to the 10 th century AD or later.)				

5. **Erasmus:** a 16th century example. (See CHART: “Greek N.T. Manuscript Timeline”)
 - a. Erasmus (1516) published the first New Testament in Greek.
 - b. He (and the King James Version in 1611) only had **7 manuscripts** for their work, none of them older than 900 AD.
 - c. Erasmus had only **2 manuscripts for the Gospels**, and neither was older than 1100 AD.
6. **Today:**
 - a. N.T. Greek manuscripts go back nearly 900 years earlier than Erasmus had!
 - b. We have about 5,800 Greek manuscripts (though 5,046 are 10th century or later).

“We now have nearly a thousand times more manuscripts than were used by Erasmus in his first edition ...” (Peter Williams, *Can We Trust the Gospels?*).

- c. We have about **124 Greek manuscripts within 300 years** of the NT writings. Typical classical authors have 0 manuscripts within 300 years of their writings.
- d. We have **65 papyri within 200 years** of the NT writings.
- e. We have **10 papyri within 100 years** of the NT writings.
- f. The oldest papyrus (P52) dates between 125-175 AD (from John 18).
7. **What have we learned** in 400+ years since Erasmus?
 - a. There are many variations in the copies (200,000+ among the 5,800 Greek manuscripts).
 - b. **But, 70%** of the variations are *spelling* differences.
 - c. **Less than 1%** of the variations are *meaningful* (may affect our understanding) and *viable* (with substantial and multiple manuscript testimony).
 - (1) e.g. 1 Thess. 2:9 “the gospel of Christ” instead of “the gospel of God.”
 - (2) e.g. 1 John 1:4 “**our** joy” vs. “**your** joy.”

Bart Ehrman’s “confession”: “**The vast majority of these hundreds of thousands of differences are completely and utterly unimportant and insignificant and don’t matter at all.** By far the most common differences simply show us that scribes in the ancient world could spell no better than most people can today (and the scribes didn’t have spell-check!) If we really want to know what the apostle Paul had to say about the importance of Jesus’ death and resurrection, does it matter to us how he spelled the word ‘resurrection’? Probably not.” *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings* (Oxford, 2016), p. 23. [emphasis added]

8. No major Christian doctrine is adversely affected by these 200,000+ variants!

Bart Ehrman: “The position I argue for in *Misquoting Jesus* does not actually stand at odds with Prof. Metzger’s position that the **essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants** in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament” (*Misquoting Jesus*, 252) [2007 paperback edition with Appendix; emphasis added].

9. The explosion in the *number* of manuscripts and the richness of *older* manuscripts allow us to be *even more confident in the reliability of the text of the NT.*

VIII. What About All the Purported Contradictions?

A. Skeptics emphasize purported Gospel “incompatibilities” or “contradictions.”

B. Case study: The *number* of women at the tomb and *who* did they see?

Matthew 28:1 [ESV]	Mark 16:1, [ESV]	Luke 24:10 [ESV]	John 20:1 [ESV]
<p>Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb ...</p> <p>But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.</p> <p>6 He is not here, for he has risen,</p>	<p>When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome ...</p> <p>5 And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe ...</p> <p>6 ... You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here.</p>	<p>10 Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles,...</p> <p>4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel....</p> <p>5 ... the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but has risen.</p>	<p>Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early ... [She then tells Peter & John and returns with them to the tomb.]</p> <p>11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. 12 And she saw two angels in white,...</p> <p>[She then sees Jesus.] 18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”—and that he had said these things to her.</p>

C. Responses:

1. Differences do not necessarily mean “contradictions.”
2. Most purported “incompatibilities” or “contradictions” have very plausible, if not relatively simple, resolutions.
3. This does not mean that we can definitively resolve every apparent difference.
4. The differences are *in the details*, which is a characteristic of good witnesses.
5. Even *IF* we concede *inconsistencies in details*, this would not, by itself, invalidate the primary claims of the Gospels about Jesus: He was crucified; He was raised from the dead; and He appeared in a bodily form to many people.