

Why trust the gospels? An introduction

Discuss while we wait to begin...

1. Why do you believe that the Bible is God's Word?
2. Why do non-believing friends *not* believe this?
3. What do you think will change their minds?

Introduction

Not true?... not good?



THE EVENTS



1. SEEN



2. WRITTEN



3. TRANSMITTED



4. CORROBORATED

1. The gospels contain reliable eyewitness testimony

real and public history (e.g. Acts 2:22)

events were seen (e.g. 2 Peter 1:16, 1 John 1:1-3)

the value of eyewitness testimony

clues that the Gospels really do include eyewitness testimony

- **geography** – e.g. details like “Gethsemane”
- **personal names** – the right names... used in the right way
- **local taxation**
- **local Hebrew and Aramaic** – e.g. “hosanna” (Mark 11:9)
- **weights and measures** – e.g. Mark 13:33
- **plants / botany** – e.g. the sycamore tree in Jericho

→ **Peter Williams, *Can we trust the Gospels?***

<https://academic.tyndalehouse.com/explore/videos/can-we-trust-the-gospels/>

2. The eyewitnesses’ testimony was accurately recorded

In an oral culture... the gospel was written down.

John 21:24 says, “This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.”

The gospels were written Speedily →

The gospels were written carefully (e.g. Luke 1:1-4)

**Biased? Of course!
And so are we all...**

WRITING THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus’ death	33AD
Paul’s letters	c.48-65AD
Gospels	c.65-90AD
From crucifixion to writing NT	= <u>gap of 15-57 years</u>

OTHER ANCIENT RELIGIOUS TEXTS

Muhammed dies	632AD
First biography	c.760AD
	= <u>gap of 125 years</u>
Buddha dies	400BC
First writings	c.40BC
	= <u>gap of 350 years</u>

3. The gospels have been reliably transmitted to us

Comparison with other ancient texts

CLASSICAL TEXTS:

Josephus, Jewish War (written c.70AD)

Surviving copies? 2 sets of excerpts and 9 complete mss.
From when? Small portion is 5th century Latin translation.
Remaining manuscripts from 10th century.

Tacitus, Annals of Imperial Rome (117AD)

Surviving copies? At least 16 books originally written.
Missing: all of books 7-10, parts of books 5, 6, 11 and 16
Surviving: 1 mss for Annals 1-6 and 1 mss for Annals 11-16
From when? 850AD (1-6) and 1050AD (for 11-16)

<u>Virgil</u>	<u>Livy</u>	<u>Horace</u>	<u>(Most) Plato</u>	<u>Euripedes</u>	
350	500	900	1300	1600	years after first writing

The New Testament documents

Early Greek manuscripts containing some or all of the NT (totaling c.5,000)

The Papyri (c.100) mainly 2nd-4th centuries. Including:

Uncial manuscripts (c.300). Parchment. From 4th-10th centuries.

Minuscule manuscripts (c.2800). From 9th century and later.

Lectionaries (2000). Fragments from 6th century. Complete mss from C.8th on.

Early translations or “versions”

Coptic, Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Arabic, Persian, Slavonic, Frankish
E.g. Coptic Sahidic dialect NT from 3rd century
and Bohairic dialect John’s gospel from 4th century

Quotations of NT in the early church Fathers

E.g. Ambrose of Caesarea: 520AD commentary on Revelation containing entire Gk text

4. The gospels are confirmed

Archaeology

e.g. the pool of Bethesda

Non-Christian writers

e.g. Josephus

e.g. Tacitus, "Christ who had been executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius."

Testimony from within the Bible

Especially the unity of the scriptures and the fulfilment of prophecy

Conclusion

**** Remember: We will never argue anyone to faith in Christ by weight of argument****