

History, Bible, and The Resurrection

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson you'll learn:

1. How you can know anything about history (and how it's different from science).
2. The *historicity* of the Bible. (compared with other ancient documents it's the most accurate document from antiquity. A word about contradictions.)
3. The *historicity* of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (5 theories)

HOW DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE PAST?

Do you believe that Confucius, the American Civil War, Julius Caesar were actual historical persons/events? How do you know? Why do you believe?

The only time you know anything about the past is from two ways: you witnessed it, or you learned about it from another witness. You can't *prove* something or someone in the past is historical the way you can prove that electrolysis of water produces the ratio of 2 hydrogen and 1 oxygen.

So if anyone asks you to prove that Jesus rose from the dead how would you respond?

Can I get a Witness?

As we said above, we only know about the past in one of two ways:

1. We witnessed that bit of history.
2. Someone else witnessed that bit of history and passed it down.

Therefore, for all history that you do not personally witness, you must learn from another source. But there are two kinds of sources: primary and secondary sources.

A **primary** source is a record by an eye-witness of an event. A **secondary** source is a record by one who is not an eye-witness of an event. Thus, we can read about JFK's assassination from primary sources, those who actually saw it happen. But we read about Julius Caesar's assassination from secondary sources, not those who actually saw it happen.

So, what's makes a Historical Record more Reliable than others?

Great question, I'm glad you asked! In general, there are three tests for historical reliability. We only have time to do a very brief overview, but much more can be said of each test.

1. The **internal** test – does the document claim to be historical eyewitness accounts?
2. The **external** test – does material from other documents confirm or support the reliability of the accounts?
3. The **bibliographical** test – how many copies (of manuscripts) do we have and how far removed in time are they from the events recorded?

Internal Test

At least one gospel writer explicitly says he is recording actual events from eyewitnesses for an accurate record. Luke 1 (and Acts 1) start out this way...

1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. – Luke 1:1-4 (NIV)

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach. ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. – Acts 1:1-2 (NIV)

External Test

Sometimes people say “Jesus of Nazareth” was a mythical figure that does not exist in records outside the Bible. That's just not true. There were other accounts of Jesus from Jewish and Roman historians, as well as Christian writings. One such famous historian was Josephus.

Bibliographical Test

There are thousands of Greek and Latin manuscripts of the gospels and New Testament. Some of these were written in the middle of the second millennium. Some of the earliest were written in the 2nd century.

THE BIBLE'S SUPERIOR HISTORICITY

Comparing the Bible's Bibliographic Evidence

Here, we can compare the Bible with other ancient documents. (From *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell.)

Author	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	No. of Copies
Caesar	100-44 BC	AD 900	1,000 yrs.	10
Plato (Tetralogies)	427-347 BC	AD 900	1,2000 yrs.	7
Herodotus History	480-425 BC	AD 900	1,300 yrs.	8
Aristotle	384-322 BC	AD 1100	1,400 yrs.	5
New Testament				
--Greek NT	AD 80-100	AD 120	40 yrs.	5,000
- Latin vulgate NT		AD 382-405		8,000

Why You Should Trust the Gospels as Reliable

In addition to above, there are several important points about why reasonable people can view the gospels as reliable.

1. Jesus' teachings differed greatly from his contemporaries in a way that was looked down upon. If people were trying to manipulate people to believe in Jesus, they would have not recorded Jesus as such a radically different teacher.
2. The short time span between the events and the records. With a short amount of time, there would have been many people that lived with Jesus by the time the gospels were written. If the disciples tried to add or change what really happened, you would expect people to have disputed their claims, but they did not.

THE HISTORICITY OF THE RESURRECTION

A Dilemma for Critics and Skeptics

The truthfulness of Jesus' resurrection is the most important historical event in Christianity, and (if true) the world. We've already seen that the Bible records Jesus' resurrection as accurate history. Plus, we've seen the Bible has superior historical reliability.

Five Possible Theories for the "Empty Tomb"

The Bible records that there was an empty tomb. So if you don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus, you need to come up with another explanation for the record of the resurrection. There are 5 common theories trying to explain the empty tomb.

Theory 1: The disciples stole the body and made up the resurrection. (Conspiracy)

Theory 2: The disciples went to the wrong tomb and were deceived. (Myth)

- Theory 3: The believers went to the right tomb but were hallucinating. (Hallucinating)
Theory 4: Jesus didn't really die. (Swoon)
Theory 5: Jesus resurrected from the dead.

Refuting the Skeptical Theories

There are overwhelming points to be made against these theories. Some directly address the skeptic's theories, and others offer more evidence to believe in the resurrection.

1. The gospels boldly record numerous eye-witness accounts which would have easily been refuted.
2. If the Jews and Romans still had Jesus' dead body while the Christians claimed He resurrected, they would have produced the body and squashed Christianity before it started.
3. The tomb had professional Roman guards who would be punished by death if they let anything happen to the body.
4. The tomb was sealed with a large heavy stone that once put in place would have required many men to remove it. So, it's unlikely that the disciples could move it, or even Jesus move it by himself from the inside!
5. There were only 7 weeks between the resurrection and when the disciples started preaching the resurrection. That's too short a time for legend to have developed since people would clearly remember Jesus' death.
6. All of Christ's followers were radically transformed in a way so different from Jewish or Roman or Greek ideas, and were willing to die for their beliefs that it could not have been a mass hallucination or mass conspiracy.
7. No veneration (worship) at Jesus' tomb.
8. Even the nonbelieving Jews believed in the empty tomb. They spent their time trying to explain it away rather than flat out deny it. (See Matthew 28:11-15) If Matthew's account was not true, the Jews would have denied it.
9. To have women be the first to report the empty tomb would have not been as persuasive as men. If the story was made up, the disciples would have made up the story of men discovering the tomb.
10. Finally, if you disbelieve the resurrection, you need to explain away the unprecedented expansion and power of the disciples of Jesus to convert people, grow, and change the world.

In conclusion, we have seen that the science of history is based upon the reliable records of witnesses. We've seen the Bible has evidence for strong, if not the strongest, reliability. We've seen how the reliable history of the gospels and the existence of a world-wide movement of the Christian church give strong evidence for the resurrection. This evidence is so strong, that other theories for the empty tomb are shown unreasonable. The best conclusion from the evidence is that Jesus Christ actually did what he claimed would happen: he would die and then rise again.

If Jesus was right about his resurrection, should we not believe his other teaching about God, life, and eternity? What's the most reasonable conclusion?