

## **EVIDENCE THAT CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE**

We can be sure that the New Testament has come down to us as it was originally written because we have many manuscripts going back to 150-200AD with fragments from before then, such as a fragment of John's Gospel dated around 130AD, whose value is to show that the New Testament was written in the first century. We even have non-biblical Greek papyri from which we can show that the New Testament was written in first century Greek. We also have copies of the writings of early Christians from 100AD onwards containing quotations from the New Testament. Practically all the New Testament can be recovered from their writings as quotations. We also have a very valuable check on the text as it was in 150-175AD in the form of translations made at that time, which have survived as later copies. Sir Frederick Kenyon, a leading authority on the reliability of ancient manuscripts, wrote: Any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.

We have more assurance from Archaeology [inscriptions on stones] and written history [copies of ancient writings]. The writings of Luke, his Gospel and the Book of Acts, are full of detail about persons and places. Archaeology has shown an accuracy only possible for an eyewitness or first century writer. Archaeologists consider Luke to be a historian of the first class.

From the Roman historians who wrote on the first century AD we have references to the crucifixion and the early spread of Christianity to Asia Minor and Rome. Although Josephus the Jew wrote a history of the Jews when he was living in Rome at the end of the first century, and which contains references to Jesus and His brother James as well as useful background material on many New Testament events, we won't count his evidence as his writings were transmitted by Christians.

The Jews collected comments on Old Testament laws and passed them down orally from the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD and committed them to writing in 200AD. Of great value because they were transmitted independently of the Christians by hostile witnesses are the remarks about Jesus with references to his unusual birth, his disciples, his miracles, his crucifixion, his claims to be divine, and his promise to return at the end of the age. Incidentally various Jewish writings serve to illuminate words and actions of Jesus in the Gospels by indicating current attitudes and beliefs which Jesus took into account in His answers and actions.

We have the many writings of early Christians from 100AD onwards in which they eagerly discuss all about Christianity as they sought to find out all they could. It is of remarkable significance that the authority of the Gospels is never questioned nor is the fact of the Resurrection disputed, so certain were those things to these writers.

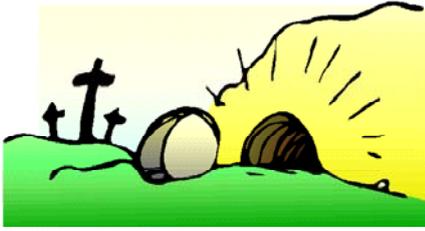
We even have some old manuscripts from 140AD written by a strange sect called the Gnostics which quote from the New Testament books and regard them as authoritative sources on Christianity.

### **We can also study the Gospels and New Testament in the way lawyers study documents to prove they are authentic.**

Jesus is unique in all history. No one else has had the perfectly balanced behaviour he had. No one else has taught all the good things and no nonsense, not only morally perfect teaching but also relevant to daily life. Jesus taught all the things that really matter-about what God is like, about relating to God, and about how to live. No one else has claimed to be divine, to be the Saviour and Judge of all, and that the proof of it was to be his rising again from the dead. The religious, history and wisdom books of the world [apart from the Bible] know of no one like this. Christianity is based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus-God's self revelation.

Accuracy in collecting the New Testament data is shown by complete agreement everywhere between the multitude of checkable details in the incidents described and what we have been able to find out from other sources. All the historical, geographical and cultural [customs and behaviour] details are correctly represented. Also, the accounts behave like those of really observed events by being full of detail, not easy to exactly harmonise with each other, and yet containing many hidden agreements that are not obvious on first reading them.

We have further confirmation in that the new Testament writers in several places say that either they were eyewitnesses or that they included only the statements of eyewitnesses in their accounts. Their accounts were written down mostly between 50 and 75AD and were the summaries of what they had preached continuously since 30AD. Some of the people who had seen Jesus in 30AD would still be alive in 60AD and many they told would live to 100AD. Living memory is reliable for 50years at least. The time is too short for much change to occur in the memory of the life and teaching of so famous a founder as Jesus. Also his sayings are recorded in a poetic style which would improve memory retention. We have six main authors each contributing his own account and two others contributing a small portion of the New Testament. A remark here on Jesus' miracles may be of interest. Although they are better attested than legendary miracles [done publicly and recorded by people who can be shown to be reliable] miracles are not used as proof of Jesus' deity-they are just as would be expected of God. The proof of Jesus' deity is the Resurrection.



We can check the honesty of the New Testament writers. There is no motive possible for inventing a story about a man who had been crucified rising from death and thus being shown to be divine, then going on to preach that along with demands to live a life of complete honesty in word and deed.

The Apostles started preaching in Jerusalem-the last place on Earth to begin unless the story was true-within a mile of where the Easter events took place. No one was able to disprove the Apostles' claim that Jesus' tomb was empty because he had been raised from the dead and had appeared to them. Their preaching met with great success because everyone in Jerusalem knew that the tomb had been found empty and no-one knew why. The Jews or the Romans did not move the body, they would have spoken out if they had. The disciples did not move the body. We know this because they stood up to the severest persecution possible-torture and execution-to take their story all the way from Jerusalem to Rome, so much did they believe it. We know that no one else moved the body [they would have told if they had] because not only were the empty grave clothes left behind forming a body shape with no body inside [also the guard], but He was seen again alive by His followers in ways that allowed of no doubt-He could be seen, touched, heard and could even eat to prove He actually had a body, yet He was also different, he could disappear and was not immediately recognised-in other words He had a new "spiritual" body into which His dead human body had been transformed at the moment of the Resurrection. [As for Jesus not being really dead on the cross, well, four Roman executioners, a spear thrust through His side, the observations of friends who buried Him, the tightly wound grave wrappings and the one and a half ton stone closing the tomb I think puts paid to any idea of His reviving in the tomb and emerging two days later full of life!]. What convinced Paul when Jesus appeared to him was that suddenly he understood why the tomb was empty-that Jesus really had risen from the dead and therefore His claim to be the divine Son of God and the Messiah was true.

During the early years of preaching the presence of hostile witnesses guaranteed that any significant departure from the facts of Jesus' life and ministry would be immediately detected. By the time we get to the writing of the new Testament documents not only were there people around who saw Jesus and heard the early preaching, but the writings themselves bear the marks of amazing self control and soberness-full of honest admissions of failures, and lacking spectacular descriptions of things like the Resurrection itself or the world beyond death, and containing true to life events like two women being the first [after the guard!] to discover the resurrection. Furthermore, the first century was a time of great activity in travel, communication by letter and writing of books, with many intelligent, enquiring people in Jerusalem, Rome and all over the Eastern Mediterranean. It was the worst time in history to pass off as true public events which did not really happen.



We have circumstantial evidence in the shape of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the change in the day of rest from Saturday [the Jewish Sabbath] to Sunday [The Lord's Day-Easter Morning] and the existence of the first century Church. It is impossible to invent these things and then get people to believe that their predecessors a generation or more before did or knew these things-they can only result from an event that causes them and whose story is then passed on. The Church says it all started from Jesus rising from the dead. We can also believe that all the Pauline letters are genuine [they are the earliest New Testament documents dated from 50AD to Paul's death in about 65AD] because forgeries would be detected during the lifetime of Paul and his associates, while later, say in 100AD, the Church would question the sudden appearance of a new letter. All the Pauline letters were accepted by the early Christian writers. Incidentally, Paul signed his letters, sent them by the hand of a reliable messenger, and had them read out in the church to which they were sent.

We have looked at evidence that the New Testament writers were truthful, had personally witnessed what they were writing about and that what they wrote has come down to us practically unchanged.

The New Testament says: **The Good News was promised long ago by God through his prophets, as written in the Holy Scriptures. It is about his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: as to his humanity, he was born a descendant of David; as to his divine holiness, he was shown with great power to be the Son of God by being raised from death. Through him God gave me the privilege of being an apostle for the sake of Christ, in order to lead people of all nations to believe and obey-Romans 1.2-5**