



WHY IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE? WHY IS THE NEW TESTAMENT RELIABLE?

Frank Turek

There's a central truth on which the credibility of the entire New Testament hangs – the resurrection of Christ.

Simply put: If Jesus rose from the dead, Christianity is true. There's no way around it. Conversely, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, then it's game over. The claims of Christianity are false. We'd all do better to sleep in on Sunday and do what we want the rest of the week. Because if Jesus never came out of the grave, Christianity is not true.

The Apostle Paul said as much in 1 Corinthians 15:14. He wrote...

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

The resurrection of Jesus doesn't just prove Christianity to be true, it proves that the entire Bible is true. Why? Because if Jesus rose from the dead, then He's God. And whatever God teaches is true. In His life and teaching, Jesus affirmed that the entire Old Testament comprised the Word of God, and He also promised the New Testament. So, as you can see, everything hinges on that singular moment in history.

The question, then, is what evidence is there to tell us that the resurrection actually happened, and that Jesus is God as He claimed to be? To that, some Christians might say, "But aren't we just supposed to have faith? Why do we need evidence?"

Yes, we are to have faith, but faith isn't a blind following of something for which there is no evidence.

We're never called to just have faith. Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15...

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

God gave us minds and the ability to reason. And we are supposed to have a reason for the hope we have. Why should you be a Christian and not an atheist? Why be a Christian and not a Muslim? Why be a Christian and not one of the countless other faiths?

Because Christianity is true, and we can offer compelling evidence to prove it.

The way we do that is by looking at the New Testament documents to see if they're historically reliable. We need to determine if they're generally telling us the truth, because if they're generally telling us the truth, then Christianity's true.



What evidence do we have that they told the truth? There are several different elements we examine, and I want to go over a few of these. I'll start with one element that is particularly compelling to me:

Embarrassing Stories

Here's what I mean by embarrassing stories. Historians know that if they're reading a supposed historical text and it has embarrassing details in it about the author or authors – or the characters in the story that they're trying to promote – it's highly likely those stories are true.

That's because people will generally not invent stories about themselves that make them look bad. They may invent things that make them look good, but people don't tend to invent things that cast them in a bad light.

And yet, the New Testament documents are filled with embarrassing stories the authors never would have invented. In fact, the Old Testament has these, too. But since we're looking at the New Testament, let me give you some examples from there.

The New Testament writers depict themselves as dim witted. When you read the four Gospels, you find the disciples are constantly clueless about what Jesus was teaching. They often didn't know what He meant. In fact, they really didn't understand His mission until after His resurrection and ascension.

Even Jesus' closest followers, such as Peter, are painted in a poor light at times. At one point Jesus calls Peter Satan. Do you think Mark – who wrote this section of Scripture – went to Peter and said, "I'm going to make this a real interesting story, Pete. I'm going to have the Lord call you Satan."

Later, Peter says to Jesus, "Lord, I'll never deny you." But what does he end up doing? He denies him three times. That's embarrassing.

And then in the early days of the church – after Jesus ascended and the Holy Spirit was given to believers, the apostle Paul has to correct Peter in Galatians 2. Paul says, "I told Peter to his face that he was wrong for trying to get the New Testament believers to obey the Old Testament law."

There's even potentially embarrassing details about Jesus in the text. Mark 3:21 says that Jesus' own family came to seize Jesus and take Him home because they thought He was out of his mind. His own family thought He was out of his mind. John 7:5 says that even Jesus' own brothers didn't believe in Him. That's embarrassing. Some secular scholars say that New Testament writers embellish Jesus to be God. If that's true, then why are these passages included?

They're not embellishing anything.



And of course, at the crucifixion, all the disciples, maybe with the exception of one, all ran away. And who are the brave ones? The women. The women are the brave ones.

Now, who wrote the New Testament down? Men. What man is going to invent that he was hiding for fear of the Jews while the women went down and discovered the empty tomb? These elements of the New Testament accounts betray a truthfulness not found in many other ancient texts.

This brings me to a second element that gives evidence to the reliability of the text.

Eyewitness accounts

The text of the New Testament attests to verifiable eyewitness details that only someone who was there would know. Even more compelling, these eyewitnesses don't reflect the type of people you'd expect to see, if the author's intent was to propagate a made-up story.

Case in point are the women who first witnessed the empty tomb. Forget the fact that it was embarrassing for men to say that the women went there first, braving the ridicule and possible danger of being associated with Christ. A first century author would never name women as witnesses to the validity of a testimony. Why? Because a woman's testimony in that culture was not considered on par with that of a man's.

So any author who wanted to convince an audience of the New Testament story would never cite women as some of its chief eye-witnesses. They'd have selected men. Yet all four Gospels testify that women were the first witnesses of the resurrection. The only plausible reason is that it's true, and the New Testament account is accurate.

This agreement among the four Gospels – in this story and many others – is a third element that tells us the New Testament is true.

Embedded confirmation

Embedded confirmation means that the New Testament writers are all independently witnessing the same historical events. They may see them and present them from different perspectives, which is completely consistent with eyewitness accounts, but their shared facts corroborate their testimony. The fact that they differ slightly actually lends even more credibility.

If you ask any detective who's questioned suspects, they'll tell you that when every single detail matches up exactly, that's when you suspect collusion. It's a sign that the witnesses have gotten together to get their stories straight and sell a lie. Small variations based on how the witness saw and interpreted the events are not only normal but expected. What's important is that the main facts are all in agreement. And that's exactly what we see in the New Testament.



Extra biblical writers

Evidence for the truth of the New Testament, and therefore the resurrection, does not only come internally from the Scriptures. A number of non-Christian sources within 100–150 years of Jesus' life corroborate the historicity of the New Testament. Writers like Josephus, Suetonius, Thales, Phlegon, to name just a few. When you add up what they say and you add up their references to Jesus and the apostles, you get a story congruent with the New Testament narrative.

Josephus, the Jewish historian who likely resided in Jerusalem in the early days of the church, tells us that James, the brother of Jesus and pastor of the church in Jerusalem, died as a martyr in the very city where both he and Josephus lived. This is the very brother who had once denied the Messiahship of Jesus. Why did he eventually believe and ultimately give his life for Christ? Because as we read in 1 Corinthians 15, Jesus appeared to him and others after his death and resurrection. This brings me to another piece of evidence.

Early sources

We can believe the New Testament because these documents were written soon after the events they describe. The earliest evidence we have for the resurrection of Jesus is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Scholars recognize this passage as a creed. It was memorized early and later put in writing. Even atheist scholars agree this creed was created very early on in the life of the church. Some even say that within months of the resurrection, this eyewitness information had developed into a creedal statement.

This reflects an early church developing in real time during and right after the events described in the New Testament. And it's worth noting that within those early years, creedal statements such as the one above merited persecution from Jewish and Roman authorities.

Which leads to the next piece of evidence... the willingness of Jesus' disciples to suffer and die for their testimony of his Messiahship.



Excruciating deaths

Not only did many of Jesus' followers die for what they said they saw, they died in horrific ways when they easily could have saved themselves by saying, "Look, it never happened."

All the writers of the New Testament, with the exception of Luke, are Jewish believers in Yahweh.

They already thought they were God's chosen people. So why would they invent a resurrected Jesus? In fact, they wouldn't. Did they get power? No, they didn't get power. They got the opposite. They got persecuted. Paul had all the power persecuting the church before he became a Christian. After he became a Christian, he was the one persecuted.

Why would these men willingly die for a testimony they knew to be a lie?

They wouldn't.

Sure, many people will die for a lie they think is the truth. But no one chooses to die for a lie they know to be false. The New Testament writers witnessed Jesus rise from the dead. They saw Him, they touched Him, they ate with Him. Then they witnessed their risen Lord ascend into heaven. They knew what they professed to be true, so they willingly suffered and died for it.

This is by no means an exhaustive study of the reliability of the New Testament and the historicity of the resurrection. But believers should not be swayed by the accusations of a blind culture that the gospel is fake propaganda or misguided history.

The reliability of Scripture and the truth of the resurrection are defended by reason and unprecedented historical evidence. Confident of this, believers can hold out the hope of Jesus to a world in desperate need of Him.

Take Your Study Further

*For more about the reliability of the Bible and other questions about truth, God, and the gospel, read Dr. Turek's book *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*.*

For verses about defending your faith and the hope you have in Christ: 1 Peter 3:15, Colossians 4:5–6, 2 Corinthians 10:5, Titus 1:9

Resource based on "I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist" by Dr. Frank Turek. Used with permission. Learn more about Frank at crossexamined.org