

# A Firm Foundation 7

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Preacher: Tom Schmidt

[ 0 : 00 ] Ladies and gentlemen, will make the notice certisons a fist right here and it will be now in fireworks and a good Feeling, is it supposed to take Sharp, its finalelapse?

All day. All day. We'll get started in just a minute.

A New York minute? An island minute. A Connecticut minute. Whatever that is. Yeah, Brent knows Connecticut minutes, yes.

We don't want to start early, but we'll probably start. Yeah, he'll come probably. Yeah, I think so. Okay. Welcome back, everyone. It's good to be here again. For those of you who don't know me, my name's Tom Schmidt. And I've been here a few times talking to you about the reliability of the New Testament.

[ 1 : 16 ] It's kind of a sub-series within our greater series on Scripture. And a couple weeks ago when I was with you, we talked about the preservation of the New Testament. And we looked at how the New Testament has been preserved and passed down to us through the generations.

And how this is done carefully and reliably. And then the next time I was with you, we talked about the canonicity of the New Testament. And we looked at how the New Testament books were put together. Who chose what books were in the Bible?

Why are some books in the New Testament, some books not in the New Testament? We talked about whether there was some kind of conspiracy theory or something like that. And we saw how God reliably and superintended this whole process to preserve and pass down the New Testament to us.

Today, we're going to talk about the accuracy of the New Testament. And we're going to see if what the New Testament says is true. So we know it might have been reliably preserved.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that it contains true things. So we're going to look at that in our time together this morning. We'll investigate whether what the New Testament says about Jesus is true and why its claims are factual.

[ 2 : 22 ] And this pertains especially to the New Testament's central claim that Jesus was crucified, buried, and then resurrected. So those are some things we'll go over today.

But first, I want to open in a word of prayer. Father in heaven, we thank you for how you have given your word to us, how you've preserved it and gathered it for us through your saints.

Father, we also thank you for how your word is trustworthy and how you sent your son Jesus to rescue us from our sins. It's in his mighty name that we pray. Amen.

All right. So to begin with, I want to ask a question. Can we trust that the New Testament is accurate and true? We sometimes hear accusations that the New Testament is based on myths and folktales, that it's inaccurate and deceptive.

I've heard these claims many times before, sometimes in popular culture, sometimes in the classroom. I'm sure some of you have heard these claims as well. And today, what we're going to look at is that the New Testament is not based on rumors or lies or myths.

[ 3 : 28 ] And indeed, there are several reasons why we can trust its factual claims. Now, these reasons, they build on one another. And so we're going to start with perhaps one of the most foundational reasons and then go from there.

So one reason that we can trust that the New Testament is true and accurate is first and foremost because it's based off of eyewitness testimony. It's not based off of rumor and report or hearsay. And these eyewitnesses were behind the documents of the New Testament. And they were in a position to know what Jesus said and did and to report it accurately. So, for example, John, the disciple of Jesus, says this about Jesus, whom he calls the word of life.

He says, John tells us here that he's preaching not something that he just heard a rumor about, but something that he witnessed, that he saw with his eyes, that he touched with his hands, that he heard directly with his own ears.

And Peter, another disciple of Jesus, he tells us the same thing. For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 4 : 58 ] But we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. Peter says that in his second epistle. He says much the same thing in his first epistle. In chapter 5, verse 1, he also adds that he was an eyewitness of the sufferings of Christ.

And other New Testament authors make similar claims. For instance, Luke, the gospel writer. He says, It seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Theophilus was the person to whom Luke wrote, and Luke tells him that he went to the eyewitnesses, he investigated everything carefully from the beginning, so that he, Theophilus, and you all may know the exact truth about what you have been taught.

So we've heard from the Apostle John and the Apostle Peter and Luke the evangelist, but we have more testimony as well. We have the testimony from the Apostle Paul. He gives perhaps the earliest account of the resurrection of Jesus.

He says this, For I delivered to you as a first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, that's Peter, then to the Twelve.

[ 6 : 30 ] Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. The resurrection of Jesus is the essence of our faith, and Paul gives his own eyewitness testimony here.

And indeed, the Twelve disciples, the Twelve Apostles of Jesus, they concur. They say in the book of Acts, chapter 2, verse 32, This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

The fact that the New Testament is based on eyewitness testimony is so well established that even ancient anti-Christian sources agree. Now, what do I mean by these ancient anti-Christian sources? These sources were ancient writers who attacked Christianity in the 2nd through 4th centuries.

They were people like Celsus, Porphyry, Heracles, and Julian the Apostate. They were highly educated, powerful, extremely hostile to Christianity.

But even when they were attacking the New Testament, they still attributed its writings to Jesus' disciples. These ancient skeptics did not believe that the New Testament documents were written under false names far after the time of Jesus and were hence based on rumors like some scholars try to maintain today.

[ 7 : 55 ] They acknowledged that it was the disciples who wrote them. So if such ancient hostile sources agree that the disciples were ultimately behind the New Testament documents, then I think we can safely conclude that the New Testament documents are not based off of rumor or hearsay.

But I want to ask you something more. Even if we can be sure that the New Testament is based on eyewitness testimony, how can we be sure that the eyewitnesses were telling the truth?

We all know that eyewitnesses can lie. So do we have good reason to think that these eyewitnesses are being truthful and not fabricating their claims?

Well, we have several reasons to trust the claims of these eyewitnesses. Firstly, they did not have worldly motives to lie about the resurrection of Jesus. They did not gain materially from their claims. They did not gain money or fame. They did not gain power or earthly benefit by preaching that Jesus was the Son of God and was resurrected. Not only does the New Testament testify to this, but even those ancient critics of Christianity I mentioned before, like Celsus and Julian the Apostate, even they agree with this.

[ 9 : 08 ] In fact, if you read their writings, they mock the apostles for being poor and uneducated, for being members of the lower class and friends with slaves and minority groups.

They knew that the apostles did not gain riches or political power for following Jesus. They knew they were impoverished and they mocked them for it. In fact, far from seeking material gain for their beliefs, the apostles and the authors of the New Testament, they knowingly risked persecution and humiliation and scorn and shame and death.

Indeed, many of the disciples of Jesus were executed for their faith in Jesus or even tortured. And when the authorities warned them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus and threaten them with punishment, they said this in the book of Acts, we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

Despite all these threats, they continued to proclaim that Jesus was resurrected. And just look at the outcome of their lives. Peter was executed. Paul executed.

John was exiled as a prisoner to the island of Patmos. James, his brother, was beheaded. Matthew executed. Thaddeus, Nathaniel, James, the brother of Jesus, they were all executed.

[ 10 : 23 ] And we have good historical data to support these outcomes. And more than this, we have evidence that many other early Christians suffered the same fate.

The fact that the apostles were terribly persecuted for their belief in the resurrection of Jesus is so beyond question that, again, as I've said before, even non-Christian sources agree with this.

They tell us that the apostles were persecuted and executed. Sometimes they brag about it. We see this in, for example, the Jewish Talmud, the Jewish historian Josephus. They both claim that Matthew, that Thaddeus, that Nathaniel and James were executed.

Josephus talks about James and the Jewish Talmud talks about the rest. Another Jewish document, the Toldot Yeshu, describes how Jesus was executed, that his 12 disciples then spread his teaching among the nations, and that, quote, they were slain.

And it even criticizes Peter for teaching, quote, the meek acceptance of suffering. And the Roman historian Tacitus, he tells of a persecution of Christians in Rome under Emperor Nero that sounds exactly like the circumstances under which Peter was executed.

[ 11 : 39 ] But despite such great persecution, the apostles and eyewitnesses, they continued to maintain that Jesus really was resurrected. These sufferings are not something that so many people would each be likely to endure for a claim they knew that was a lie.

Instead, it seems far more likely that the apostles were simply being honest and sincere. So, the first reason we can trust the eyewitnesses is because they don't seem to have worldly motives to lie.

They gained nothing from what they were saying. And secondly, they had everything to lose. They were persecuted for what they said, yet they preached and continued to preach it. And this trustworthy character of the apostles, it was so steadfast that they passed it on down to their own disciples.

Just like Jesus, the apostles went on to have disciples of their own. And when we examine the character of these men, these followers of the apostles, we see that they also conducted themselves in the same way as Jesus and the apostles did.

They also suffered and were martyred for faith in Jesus. Take, for example, Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna. Both were disciples of the apostles. Both have writings that remain for us to read.

[ 12 : 55 ] And both of them were executed for their faith in Jesus. In fact, let's look at Ignatius specifically. He was a disciple of Peter, perhaps also Paul.

And while he was awaiting his execution for being a Christian, he wrote several letters to churches encouraging them. And in one letter, he talks about how Peter witnessed the resurrected Jesus. Here's what he says. For Jesus suffered all these things for our sakes in order that we might be saved. And he truly suffered just as he truly raised himself, not as unbelievers say. For I know and believe that he was in the flesh even after the resurrection.

When he came to Peter and those with him, and he said, Take hold of me, handle me, and see that I am not a disembodied spirit. And immediately they touched him and believed, being closely united with his flesh and blood.

For this reason, they too despised death. Indeed, they proved to be greater than death. And after his resurrection, he ate and drank with them, like one who is composed of flesh, though spiritually he was united with the Father.

[ 14 : 03 ] Here Ignatius, the disciple of Peter, proclaims the resurrection of Jesus. He says that he knows Jesus appeared to Peter. And for this reason, Peter and the apostles despised death.

Why? Because they had seen the one who had conquered death, and they knew death had power over them no longer. And Ignatius, though a man condemned to die, he joyfully testifies to this, just as Peter testified to him.

So let me summarize. Can we trust that the New Testament is accurate and true? Well, yes, we can. It's based on eyewitness testimony of the apostles, not on rumor and report.

And these eyewitnesses are trustworthy, because they did not stand to gain anything materially from their claims. They did not have motives to lie about the resurrection. Rather, they risked persecution and death.

And in fact, their own disciples went on to do the very same thing. And these points are so beyond question, that even ancient non-Christian sources admit to many of them. Well, so far, I've been talking about how the New Testament writers were in a position to know the facts about Jesus, and how the New Testament documents were written with a backing of eyewitness testimony.

[15:17] And I've also shown how we can trust that these eyewitnesses were not lying about what they were saying. But let's not stop here. Let's see if we can test the reliability of the eyewitnesses in other ways.

Let's not just trust their character or motives. Let's see if we can test their truthfulness and accuracy a little more scientifically. After all, eyewitnesses might still have accidentally put in false information.

They might have gotten carried away in their great passion. They might have exaggerated things or convinced themselves of something that wasn't actually true. Even if the eyewitnesses were sincere, they might have still been inaccurate.

We all know honest people who make wrong statements. So let's do a more thorough investigation here. Let's forget about character and motives. Let's see if the New Testament can hold up to good, old-fashioned, brass tacks, nuts and bolts, historical scrutiny.

And this is what we're going to do. Throughout the New Testament, the authors make numerous historical claims. And we can check these claims against the historical record to see if they're true.

[16:26] So when the New Testament mentions a person or a place or an event, we can check that claim against the historical record to see if the New Testament is accurate. This is just like in a detective case when the testimony of an eyewitness is checked against the facts to see if their testimony can be corroborated by the evidence.

And when we subject the New Testament writers to historical scrutiny, we find that the New Testament authors were indeed accurate and they were not in the habit of making up information. Let me show you what I mean. We'll start with some easy, basic stuff, and then we'll get to more complicated stuff as we go. So first of all, the New Testament authors report the existence of several Roman emperors.

And we know from various historical sources that they correctly identify them in their proper historical context. And this comes from various lines of evidence like historical reports, the archaeological record, coins, things like that.

You can see a coin of Emperor Augustus on the screen, which Luke talks about. Emperor Tiberius is also mentioned by Luke. There he is. Emperor Claudius mentioned in the book of Acts. Herod the Great mentioned in the early part of the Gospel of Matthew.

[17:36] He's the guy who tried to kill baby Jesus. Herod Archelaus is also mentioned in Matthew. Herod Philip, Herod Antipas, Herod Agrippa, Herod Agrippa II.

There's a lot of Herods. It's hard to get them all straight, but the New Testament does. And we could go on for other rulers like Arathos IV. Paul mentions him.

Pontius Pilate. This is a famous Pontius Pilate stone. And I know it might be difficult for you to read it, but on here it says the name Teos Pilatus.

It's missing the P-O-N. It's missing from the stone. But anyway, all scholars agree this is an inscription mentioning Pontius Pilate from his time frame.

Yes. Very quickly, is that like the back of a seat in a theater? Oh, I don't know where the stone comes from. I'd have to check, and we may not actually know. I'd have to see if we know the provenance of it.

[18:41] When I was in Israel, when we were like in Caesarea by the seat or something like that, the tour guide pointed to a seat, you know, and they had their names on it.

They were VIP seats. At that time, I think in 1999, he claimed that this was the first archaeological evidence because the seat had a righteous name.

So all I know is it's called the Pilate stone. It is in Israel. So this is in Israel. I don't know if that's part of a back of a chair or not, but we also have lots of other evidence for Pontius Pilate.

It's not just this stone. He's mentioned in many historical ancient sources outside of the Bible. Right, he's saying the only part. Okay, yes, yes, yes. But if we're honest here, these names that I've been talking about, they're a little easy to get right.

It's like naming the correct presidents. It's not too hard to get those right. So let's do something a little more challenging. It's good that the New Testament get these folks right, but let's see what the New Testament authors do with lesser-known figures whom someone would likely only know about if they were well-informed.

[ 19 : 50 ] Well, the New Testament authors speak about many people like Bernice, Drusilla, Judas the Galilean, Festus, people even like James the brother of Jesus, John the Baptist, Caiaphas the high priest, Herodias, and her daughter Salome, and the list goes on.

And when we check the historical record, we see that all of these folks are mentioned outside of the Bible by non-Christian sources, and that the New Testament correctly places every one of them in their proper historical context.

The New Testament is even correct about a minor person named Erastus, Paul's fellow partner from Corinth. And if you go to Corinth today, you can still see his name emblazoned on one of the paving stones.

Erastus seems to have been one of the ministers of public works. And I know it might be hard to see, but the beginning of the E is there, R-A-S-T-U-S. The U looks like a V.

Erastus. How do we know that's the Erastus that Paul would refer to? Erastus mentions him as a Corinthian minister of, I think, of public works, or maybe of some kind of official.

[ 20 : 54 ] And we know that when this name was put down, that that's what the public officials who were responsible for laying these things and arranging it would put their names on. So the place matches, the name matches, the profession matches, and the time matches.

A person in the ancient world wouldn't likely know about these things unless they were actually there and witnessed many of these people. And we can even go to the names in the New Testament of humble peasants and workers.

Even they can be verified. Now, they can't be verified on an individual basis, but it turns out that, but they can be verified statistically. And let me tell you what I mean.

It turns out that every generation and every location has a frequency rate in their choice of names. So when people have children, they choose certain names, and every generation has a frequency rate.

So for instance, in the United States, 100 years ago, Betty, Sally, those were popular names. Not so popular these days. We have different names that children tend to have. And you can line up these statistics, figure out what names are popular, look at the frequency rate.

[ 22 : 03 ] And some scholars have done this with ancient names from first century Israel. And they have found that the frequency rate of those names matches up with the New Testament's reports of a lot of Marys and a lot of Simons.

If you read the New Testament, you're like, everybody's named Mary. Everybody's named Simon. Well, that's exactly what was going on in first century Palestine. And so even those names can be roughly corroborated.

Now we can also test the accuracy of the eyewitnesses in other ways too, aside from references to people. We can examine geographic references in the New Testament. This map shows dozens of locations mentioned in the New Testament.

And guess what? The New Testament correctly locates all of them. It's even correct about little towns near and around Jerusalem, like Arimathea and Bethlehem.

And it's also correct about villages in Galilee, even tiny fishing villages around the Sea of Galilee, like Capernaum. Remember back then, folks didn't have maps or atlases or the internet or encyclopedias to look up little places like this.

[ 23 : 09 ] The only way to know about an insignificant fishing village was if you were actually there or you knew someone who was. And the New Testament gets them right. And this is in great contrast to other documents we've mentioned in past courses, some of those false gospels.

They will mention villages and towns that seem to have no bearing with historical reality. But let's go even smaller. The Gospel of John in chapter four mentions Jacob's well.

Here it is. The Gospel of John speaks of the pool of Siloam, where Jesus tells a man to go and wash. There it is. The Gospel of John mentions huge stone water jars.

Now, this is kind of strange because you think of water jars as smaller and not made out of stone, made out of clay. But these are big and made out of stone. But apparently that's not what they used to do in first century Judea, because here we go.

We still have some of them. John did know what he was talking about. And we could continue doing this for hours about New Testament events, customs, contemporary beliefs, various historical phenomenon, and all sorts of other things that the New Testament reports is occurring in the first century.

[ 24 : 18 ] And you'll see that when the New Testament talks about events, we're able to historically verify them. It seems then that the authors were not in the habit of making up information.

It also implies that the original New Testament documents must have been well preserved, because if later scribes were in the habit of messing about with them, then these historical claims would have tended to have been altered and therefore would have tended to not be so precise.

But they are precise. Now, it must be said that there are a handful of instances where historical claims in the New Testament seem to be contradicted by what we know from other sources.

And I would say that the most prominent, the most egregious example of this is with Theudis the Galilean, whom Luke mentions in the book of Acts, chapter 5. And Luke seems to clearly date this guy to before 39 AD.

The problem with this is that the ancient Jewish historian Josephus, he also mentions Theudis, but he dates him several decades later. But rather than concluding that Luke and the New Testament are wrong, I would caution us to withhold judgment, given how accurate the New Testament is elsewhere.

[ 25 : 36 ] Perhaps there was a second Theudis, or perhaps Josephus himself was wrong. And in fact, we know Josephus is often wrong. Josephus actually talks about, he wrote multiple books, and he talks about the same period of time, three different times, so you can compare his own reports to one another.

And he contradicts himself several times. So in fact, since the advent of modern scholarship, there's always been some historical claims in the New Testament that skeptical scholars dismissed as wrong, or made up, or otherwise fictitious.

They would seize on these and argue that the New Testament authors were historically incorrect, and that they were fabricating information, and therefore untrustworthy. But time and again, later discoveries have proved the New Testament right, and the skeptical scholars wrong.

Let me show you what I mean. Back in the day, certain scholars believed that Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night in the Gospel of John, they believed that he was fabricated by the Gospel of John.

Some of them claimed that John must have made up the name Nicodemus to function as an allegory, because Nicodemus literally means ruler of the people. And these skeptical scholars thought that John wanted to make a kind of greater point about how even rulers of the people were coming to Jesus, so he made up this guy named Nicodemus.

[ 26 : 54 ] Now John gives six data points about Nicodemus. He tells us that Nicodemus was a member of the ruling class, that he was a Pharisee, that he was a teacher of the law, that he was very wealthy, that he was associated with Jerusalem, and that he lived in the early first century.

And certain scholars thought that this was nonsense, and that there was no Nicodemus. But then, other scholars started realizing that according to ancient Jewish literature, there was, in fact, a rich, ruling family in Jerusalem in the first century that did have Pharisees and teachers of the law as members, and do you know what name was popular for men in that family?

Nicodemus. It may also be that the Jewish Babylonian Talmud mentions Nicodemus' execution as a disciple of Jesus. The Talmud seems, this is a little tentative, but the Talmud seems to use a nickname for Nicodemus, a nickname that we know is used for people with the name Nicodemus. So we can't be totally sure of that one. But in either case, no scholar can really truthfully claim that Nicodemus never existed because he seems like an entirely plausible historical person.

Let me give you some more examples. In the Book of Acts, Luke tells us that there was an empire-wide famine during the reign of Emperor Claudius. For a long time, scholars dismissed this as a pious exaggeration.

[ 28 : 19 ] There was one or two local famines, but no famine gripped the whole Roman Empire during the reign of Claudius, they said. Yet archaeological excavations discovered ancient records on papyrus in Egypt documenting the annual flooding of the Nile when the Nile would irrigate

farmland.

Now, it's important to know that Egypt was the breadbasket of the Roman Empire. That's where they got most of their food from when the Nile would do its annual flood and irrigate all the farmland. And it would provide incredibly fertile ground for crops.

Well, it turns out that during the reign of Claudius, these papyrus records document that in one year the Nile badly overflowed, which would have invariably caused the destruction of the crops of Egypt and invariably would have caused a severe famine throughout the empire.

In fact, one scholar, Ken Sperber Gap, he says that the official documents found amongst the papyri in Egypt, quote, so supports Luke's count of the universal famine that the accuracy of the statement can no longer be challenged.

We can keep going. The Pool of Bethesda, mentioned in John chapter 5, John says that it had five sides, each equipped with an overhanging porch. Now, this is kind of weird.

[ 29 : 41 ] Normally, when you think of a pool, you think of four sides or you think of a circular pool. And this one is extra special because each side had like an overhanging porch. For a long while, scholars accused John of making up this piece of information because we had no archaeological record of its existence.

Scholars said that the five porches were fictitiously crafted by John to represent five stratas of society or the five books of Moses or some other thing like that. But then, in 1948, archaeologists found this, a pool that scholars now admit is the Pool of Bethesda and indeed had five sides.

The picture is showing one half of the pool and the archaeological reconstruction, you can see that it actually is a four-sided pool, but then it has a porch going between it, making five porches.

So, four on the outside, one through the middle, just like John reported. Or, we could talk about Galio. Galio was the man to whom Paul had a trial before in the book of Acts.

Scholars routinely claim that Luke's chronology in the book of Acts was, quote, hopeless and false regarding Paul's trial before Galio in Acts chapter 18. Other scholars insisted that Luke, the author, most likely placed this trial somewhere between 51 and 54 AD.

[ 31 : 04 ] But these scholars were dismissed. But then, in 1913, this inscription was found which mentions Galio and precisely dates him to 51 or 52 AD exactly as Luke claimed.

Here's another one. Sergius Paulus, Acts chapter 13, verse 7. Another guy whom Paul preached before. Scholars for many years said there was no evidence that Sergius Paulus was a proconsul in Cyprus like Luke claims in the book of Acts.

But then, this inscription was discovered. And then this one. And these clearly show that a Sergius Paulus was proconsul in Cyprus sometime in the first century.

Exactly like Luke claims. Skeptical scholars also accused Luke of making up the census mentioned in Luke chapter 2 when Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem to be registered for Jesus' birth.

Our historical sources tell us that the census actually happened years later. Skeptical scholars said Luke was wrong. But other scholars thought maybe there was more than one census.

[ 32 : 11 ] But they were ignored. But then we found this inscription which was shown to clearly speak about not one census but many censuses.

And Luke was vindicated. The same happened with Quirinius. Skeptical scholars also said that Luke was wrong about the governorship of Quirinius in Luke chapter 2. The ancient historian Josephus placed his governorship years later than Luke did.

Some scholars tried to solve this by hypothesizing that perhaps Quirinius was governor more than once. But this seemed like special pleading. But then this inscription was deciphered and then this one and then this one and it showed that there was a governor in the very, very early part of the first century A.D.

or the end of the first century B.C. there was a governor of Syria who did have two terms that were not consecutive and that the most likely candidate for this governor was in fact Quirinius who therefore seems to have been governor more than once.

Luke was right again. And by the way that was not an uncommon thing in the ancient world. People were often being shuffled in and out. We can say the same thing about Luke's reference to Lysanius the Tetrarch in Luke chapter 3.

[ 33 : 31 ] Scholars said for many years that Luke contradicted the historical record by placing Lysanius some 50 or 60 years after he really existed. Some faithful scholars suggested that maybe there was more than one Lysanius the Tetrarch.

But again, this seemed like special pleading. But then in 1912 we found this inscription and it proved that there actually were two Lysanius the Tetrarchs.

And Luke was right again. And once more that's not all that unusual in the ancient world. You'll have someone who's a ruler or a governor or a powerful figure and they often name their son the same name and that son often goes on or grandson goes on to do the same job.

So it's not unusual to find situations like this. You can for instance see this with the Roman emperors where every single Roman emperor adopts the name Augustus or Caesar. So they all have the same names all dozens of them again and again.

same thing happened in other parts of the world too. All right. These instances teach us that it is never wise to bet against the historical reliability of the authors of the New Testament.

[ 34 : 44 ] It is true that Luke and Josephus contradict one another about the dates of that guy Theutis I mentioned to you. But we may yet find evidence that Luke was right about Theutis and that Josephus was the one who was wrong or we may find that both were right and there were two figures of the same name.

After all it's happened before hasn't it? But I have to say about Theutis that if it turns out that Luke is the one who's incorrect would this one minor error concerning a minor marginal figure really undermine the overall credibility of the New Testament given how historically reliable it is with its other claims especially its important claims.

Indeed the historical reliability of the New Testament is so strong that by some measurements it gets better every year. Just a few years ago a ring was found inscribed with the name Pontius Pilate dating to the first century in Jerusalem and this once again supports the New Testament narrative and it once again bolsters the reliability of the New Testament.

Like I say though Pontius Pilate is a well established historical figure even if we were missing the ring and the inscription I showed you he's mentioned in many historical sources other than those. And this is similar to what we saw with the preservation of the New Testament where every year every few years we make more discoveries that enhance our confidence in the preservation of the New Testament the same thing happens with the accuracy of the New Testament also.

Okay so let me summarize we can be sure that the New Testament is true and accurate because it is based off of eyewitness testimony and those eyewitnesses were reliable because they don't seem to have gained anything from their claims and therefore had no motive to lie in fact they gained suffering and persecution because of their claim about the resurrection of Jesus yet they persisted in maintaining that Jesus actually was resurrected and furthermore their disciples suffered the same things and even non-Christians admit to much of this as we saw with writers like Celsus and Porphyry and Julian the Apostate and lastly we've just seen how we can historically verify dozens if not hundreds of the claims that the New Testament writers make showing that the authors of the New Testament were not in the habit of making up information but were quite accurate in their reports and this even includes instances where scholars charged the New Testament with being wrong and sometimes they would maintain these claims for decades or generations but time and again the New Testament has been proven correct through various archaeological and historical discoveries but let's do better than this all I've been doing so far is showing that the New Testament authors made accurate claims about mundane normal everyday events and activities but mundane evidence gives only so much reason to believe super mundane things the New Testament is right regarding normal natural claims but what about supernatural claims we want extraordinary evidence for extraordinary claims can we

[ 38 : 08 ] I wonder can we corroborate the miracles attributed to Jesus yes I think we can this is because the miracles of Jesus were so impressive and so indisputable so beyond doubt that non-Christians and even anti-Christians admitted that Jesus and his disciples worked miracles let me show you what I mean and what we're going to do here is I'm going to walk you through some claims from some non-Christian writers about Jesus and we're going to go in sort of reverse chronological order starting with the latest and then getting to the earliest so we'll start with a document called the Toldoth Yeshu scholars agree this was probably compiled around 600 A.D.

it's a Jewish account of Jesus however we can track the information in the Toldoth Yeshu and that information matches up with early 2nd century claims about Jesus made by other Jewish sources so in other words this document seems to have been compiled around 600 A.D.

but it's compiled from earlier traditions and those traditions go way way earlier if that makes sense well the Toldoth Yeshu it's very interesting it's a highly negative account of Jesus trying to portray

him as a terrible terrible person but it explicitly admits that Jesus had the power to raise the dead and that his disciple Peter was able to heal in the name of Jesus or this source the Jewish Talmud this is earlier 200 to 400 A.D.

again it has traditions that are probably even earlier the Jewish Talmud speaks about Jesus and it mentions that he had the power to heal people porphyry now we're moving from Jewish into pagan territory porphyry wrote around the year 300 A.D.

we can date him pretty precisely and he was a virulent anti-Christian writer he also was perhaps the most famous philosopher in the Roman Empire at that time and he wrote an entire work against Christians he called for Christians to be persecuted but in his writings he also admitted that Jesus worked wonders just like the Bible says around the same time Heracles was writing as well he was not a philosopher he was a Roman governor he was a very powerful man he called for Christians to be persecuted and as a Roman governor he actually had them arrested and executed and he like Porphyry also wrote a book against the Christians and in this just like with Porphyry he too acknowledges that Jesus seems to have worked miracles and let's keep going the Tosephtha this is an early Jewish manual of traditions it talks of a certain James whom it calls a disciple of Jesus who claimed that he could heal in the name of Jesus and it relates a story about how a rabbi desperately tried to get to

[ 41 : 20 ] James in order to be healed because he was convinced that James truly had this power or the oracle of Hecate Hecate was a goddess a Greco-Roman goddess and these oracles would give out statements people would come to them and make an offering and the oracle would give out advice and the oracle Hecate confessed that Jesus was immortal it's one of those oracles that have been preserved for us Celsus writing around the year 175 here's another anti-Christian writer he wrote an entire book against the Christians and in it he acknowledges that Jesus worked wonders and that early Christians had authority over demons if we go to the year 137 to 140 Phlegon Phlegon is a Greco-Roman writer he's a chronographer he's also the fancy term is also a paradoxographer he liked cataloging unusual mysterious or supernatural happenings and he's writing in 137 or 140 but he talks about a strange an unusual darkness as well as an earthquake that occurred in 33

AD just like the gospels say happened at the crucifixion of Jesus Phlegon also says elsewhere he mentions Jesus and he says that Jesus correctly predicted the future again just like the gospels say moving earlier around the year 95 Josephus he's a Jewish historian I've mentioned his name several times he's got a paragraph about Jesus and in it he says that Jesus worked miracles and we could perhaps go even a little earlier with a guy named Thalys he wrote between 50 and 100 AD we're a little unsure of his dates and he also reports an unusual darkness and we don't know the context of this one so this one's a little tentative but he seems to have placed this around the time or around the year of Jesus' crucifixion as well but we still have to talk about one of the earliest critics of Christianity and one of the greatest someone who murdered

Christians and then who became a Christian himself and I'm speaking of someone you all know of Saul of Tarsus he says in his own words that he was trying to destroy the followers of Jesus but then Jesus appeared to him and demonstrated his miraculous power and after this Saul of Tarsus changed his name to Paul and he went on to write many of the letters of the New Testament and there Paul talks about how he was a persecutor of Christians and how he was a violent man and how he was a witness of the resurrected Jesus and after many years of ministry and suffering for the name of Jesus Paul was executed for his faith in Jesus and we can say similar things about others who did not believe in Jesus but then changed their mind after Jesus appeared to them people like James and Jude whom the Bible testifies did not believe in Jesus when he was ministering but who were persuaded after

Jesus was resurrected and he appeared to them and these two men also went on to write letters in the New Testament this is extraordinary remember that ancient authors were more than capable of denying miracles we see this for instance with Cicero with the Epicureans with the Atomists the followers of Democritus with the Jewish Sadducees all of whom denied many or even all supernatural things but Jesus his miracles seem to have been so beyond question that non-Christians and even hostile anti-Christians admitted that they occurred and some of them even seem to have become Christians themselves so can we trust that the New Testament is true and accurate yes we can the New Testament is based off of eyewitness testimony and we can trust these eyewitnesses because they don't seem to have a worldly motive to lie they had nothing to

gain in fact they risked persecution for their claims and furthermore their own disciples suffered the same and on top of that the claims of the eyewitnesses can be historically verified and we can even verify their miraculous claims and even non-Christian sources admit to many of these facts but if this is not enough for you then you yourself contest the authenticity of Jesus miraculous powers all you have to do is look around the world right now and this is because the prophecies of Jesus Christ contained in the New Testament are being remarkably and miraculously fulfilled among us for example Jesus predicted in Matthew 24 14 he says this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and if we examine our world today we see that there is no other message on earth that has reached so many people there is no message that has gone to so many nations and so many countries there is no message except the message of Jesus that has been translated into so many languages and has been adopted by so many cultures and has changed so many lives Jesus is prophecy is being to this and keep in mind that when Jesus said this he was not famous or powerful or popular or influential when he predicted these things he was a member of the underclass a carpenter from a backwater in

[ 47 : 19 ] Galilee and he predicted that his message would go into all the world and so far it has spread farther than any other and against all odds his prophecy is being fulfilled Jesus predicted many other things correctly he said that many false prophets and false Christs would come in his name and if you look through history I don't think there's a single person who has existed who's had more people come in their name and say they represent them or they are them Jesus said that his followers would be brought before kings and rulers and all these things have happened so many times it is beyond counting and Jesus predicted all of this when he was still an obscure carpenter from Galilee and he was right so my friends I've been giving many reasons why the New Testament is worthy of our trust and if you're interested I'd be happy to talk about these matters afterwards or share my sources of information with you as well but if you're here today and you're still wondering about the person of

Jesus let me give you one final test to conduct concerning the authenticity of Jesus and the New Testament and this is a test recommended by Jesus himself he says in the gospel of John anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own my friends if you choose to do the will of God Jesus has promised that you will find that his teaching comes from God and that you will know that he is worthy of your trust let me end in prayer and then we'll take some questions father in heaven we thank you that you sent your son Jesus to minister on this earth to preach and teach to work miracles and signs and wonders Lord but above all to suffer for us in order to forgive our sins we thank you Lord that he died was buried and three days later rose again and that he promises that he will raise us up on that day when he comes in glory with his holy angels father

I pray that you would increase our trust in your word that you would help us to grow in it Lord to grow in in the fruits that Lord help us to forsake evil and to cling to what is good to repent of our sins to minister to others and to lay our lives down just like Jesus did for us we pray this in his mighty name amen all right folks we've got I went faster than I thought so we've got we've got time for questions if you want we can also I can also answer questions about any for the persecution of Christians during Rome what was the flash point about why the Romans persecuted Christians was it charge substitution because they wouldn't bow down to the the

Emperor Augustus and his statues was it they were scapegoating them for the fall of Rome what was the reason why Christians were universally despised great question questions why were the Christians persecuted in Rome the answer is kind of all of the above it varies at different times in different places so the Rome we think of Rome as this dictatorship where everybody follows the same set of laws and that's not really the case Roman governors had a lot of latitude and there were local customs that were obeyed and even if there were certain laws Roman governors could break them so it really depends but in general there were a number of reasons so one was that there were a lot of vicious rumors circulating about Christians they Christians were accused of cannibalism of incest of things like that they seem like bizarre claims but when you think when people hear rumors about the Eucharist and communion and how people eat the body and blood of Jesus it makes a little more sense why those rumors would go out as far as incest goes Christians would counter-culturally call other Christians their brother or sister sometimes you know if your wife or husband was a Christian they would also be your sister or brother and so that seems to be where those claims of incest came from these of course are completely unfounded and

absurd but the rumor mill swirls people start viewing these folks as terrible and in fact we have some testimonies there's some ancient Christian philosophers who say I think it's Justin the philosopher Justin the martyr where he says he heard all these horrible things about Christians and how terrible they were but then he saw them being led to death and refusing to deny their faith in Jesus and he realized these do not who would be doing these horrible things and he became a Christian to sacrifice to the Roman gods this was expected of all people in Rome now sometimes it wasn't a big deal sometimes you just don't go to the festival where they're sacrificing and you're just viewed as kind of weird but other times you could get in really severe trouble for this and usually for most people it wasn't a problem because they would just even if they worshipped another set of gods they were polytheists are generally okay with just throwing other gods into the mix and so they have no problem worshipping a deified

[ 53 : 01 ] Caesar or worshipping Zeus or Jupiter or what have you but Christians would say no we won't do that and that would get them into a lot of trouble sometimes the only other group that seems to have refused to do that the only other large group were the Jews but Jews often had like an agreement with the Romans that they didn't have to do that and at the same time Christians would be refusing to do it often you have Jewish communities loudly proclaiming that these Christians were not Jewish and were doing terrible things and so it just was this cyclic effect there were other things like when earthquakes or famine would hit Rome people would say it's the Christians the Christian to the lion the Christians to the lion and they would round them up similar things would happen that remember most people in the Roman Empire unless you were a male citizen which in the early part of the Roman Empire was you were a great minority unless you were a male citizen you didn't really have many rights and if you were a woman or you were the wife or the daughter or the son of someone who is not yet of age or you were a slave then your father had authority over life and death and so could pretty if you became a

Christian and the head of your household didn't like that you were in real big trouble and that was many people if not most people could be caught up in that and so the empire wide persecutions where you have this empire wide scale event those don't happen until later in Christian history those first start happening around the year 250 and there's several empire wide persecutions where the emperor says everybody's got a sacrifice if not you can be tortured or executed and you actually would have to go get a certificate and we actually have some of these certificates today still remain where people have a certificate or receipt that they sacrifice but before 250 there were more local persecutions by governors or mobs or things like that so it was very yes what about the Old Testament what about it so it depends what you mean by big part of the problem with the Old Testament is that later you get in history the less historical sources we have and so the Old Testament goes back so far so for instance Herodotus is usually thought of as the earliest historian to write and he wrote in like 450 BC or something like that and that's when the Old Testament ends so so the Old Testament goes so far back that we only have limited number of historical sources to use some of them are good like in certain parts of Babylon or Egypt we've got good sources but in most parts of the ancient world we don't have hardly any and so there's also if you carefully read the Old Testament there's huge swaths of it like in Genesis like Abraham Isaac Jacob these are just semi nomads going around in the desert I mean we wouldn't expect to find anything about someone like that from 4,000 3,000 years ago so in some ways we do have some fantastic archaeological discoveries that corroborate certain parts of the Old Testament we also have gaps where we just don't have other sources the sources don't really exist and that's to be expected

I mean any part of the world you would expect that in 3000 BC or 1500 BC but then we do have places where the big one is probably the exodus in Egypt where the Bible talks about Hebrews being enslaved by the Egyptians and then these terrible plagues coming on and then hundreds of thousands or even like a million Hebrew slaves coming out of Egypt and the problem is that we don't we do have evidence that there were Semitic or West Asian slaves in Egypt who worked as bricklayers and so roughly there's a corroboration there we do have other bits and pieces of suggestive evidence there's a papyrus from Egypt that talks about these terrible plagues being visited upon them that sound roughly like what we find but it's hard to date the papyrus it's hard to know it's being talked about and then to have a million people going through the desert is you would think sources would mention that more than they do although again this is so long ago so there's a couple possibilities one is that the

Hebrew in the Hebrew Bible the numbers that are used sometimes ancients didn't use numbers like we do like they did use them for math but sometimes they had deeper meanings like the number 40 in the Bible sometimes it's like maybe that's not a mathematical term it's a general term so some people think that's what can also be translated as clan or family and so it could be that what's going on here is that it's meant to say 600 families or 600 clans which is significantly less than a million people so but these are things we're still waiting to discover you've seen in the

[ 59 : 03 ] New Testament I mean if we gave this talk 100 years ago Lysanius the Tetrarch the pool of Bethesda all of these things that would be explicitly contradicted seemingly by the historical record but later excavations have discovered that actually we've either misinterpreted the historical record or sometimes most of the time we've interpreted it correctly it's just there was another event or there was something else that happened that we didn't know about so I would say that for the Old Testament it's very good by very ancient historical standards but it's not as good as the New Testament which is you would expect a higher level of corroboration given that it's earlier in time yeah so we're just going to have to trust God guys that he's faithful yeah you know if it was good enough for Jesus it's good enough for me yeah you mentioned really at the beginning this talk about the resurrection as an event that banks extraordinary evidence is there any plan down the pipe for a class about that oh we could do that yeah yeah it's class about the resurrection yes

I love looking at the five or six accounts of the resurrection that we have in the Bible I didn't have time to bring that up but people will often claim that when you read the accounts of Jesus resurrection so you get Matthew Mark Luke and John give an account Paul gives an account and Luke gives an account again in the book of Acts so there's kind of six of these and people will claim that these are irreconcilable with one another and they are inherently contradictory and I think actually it's quite the opposite I think they actually work together very well and are what you would expect if you watch true crime shows and detective stories and people have different versions of events it sounds exactly like that where people are saying stuff and the way they're portraying events is individual from their perspective but they also complement one another very well we can talk more about that if five people for me are saying the same thing exactly word for word for me they're lying they're colluding

I know there's a great if we do a class I'll bring this up there's a wonderful article do you remember that famous picture it's called the tank man picture in Tiananmen square in the 80s where that man is standing in front of the tanks well the New York Times did a 30 or four pictures by four different photographers of that man and they all show slightly different perspectives and the New York Times went and interviewed each of those photographers like 30 years later and was like tell us what happened and then they each wrote a paragraph or two about what happened and comparing these four together it was amazing like one of them says the police came and took them away another says people from the crowd came and took the man away another says it was the secret police that came and took him away and you start thinking like well if it was the secret police they would have looked like people from the crowd and one guy says he was holding bags another says he was only holding a bag you know plural verse singular and you look at the pictures and some pictures it looks like he is holding one bag but other pictures it is like no he has a clump of bags right there and so all of these they work together and it's exactly

I think it lines up with those photographers in Tiananmen Square I think the testimony ends up like that where they compliment and actually inform one another instead of contradict one another there was a tank there was a guy and there was a tank yeah exactly yeah exactly exactly yeah other questions Amos so you talk a lot about how there's corroboration between the Bible and early secular and Christian writers and in terms of what they said helps establish the credibility of the New Testament from independent review perspective but I'm wondering is there content from those other sources where we might learn interesting things that are credible about Jesus or the early Christians that would be interesting not on par with the New Testament which might there are more stories about Jesus or the apostles that stated without putting it on par with the New Testament but which in principle one could do maybe a sermon on it or I don't know yeah so the question is do we have other information about the New Testament or New Testament people outside of the New Testament that we could that would be edifying for us or useful for us to some degree yes yes there is and I would say that those come in two forms so one way is that sometimes we get evidence from these external sources which doesn't give us new information about something or a person or something that actually happened but helps us understand an event in the New Testament better

so for example this is an easy example if you read the ancient historian Josephus he covers the history of the

[ 64 : 34 ] Jewish people in the first century AD he also was from the first century AD and you'll notice that something he talks about again and again and again is that the Jewish people were horribly oppressed by taxes they're constantly arguing about them how should we pay this should we not pay this it's a huge huge hot button issue and you take that and you read where you've got these Pharisees these sneaky Pharisees coming up to Jesus trying to trap him with this question about should I pay taxes to Caesar or not and you realize that they are asking him like the most loaded possible question in public to try and catch him and there's numerous examples of that where we will find that something that we understand I mean we know they were trying to catch him with that tax question but it really brings up the level of tension when you read that so there's various things like that that help us but in terms of like do we have more information about Jesus or the disciples that we don't have in the

New Testament that so I had that quote it's many slides ago so I probably won't be able to get there but that quote by Ignatius of Antioch where he that was I lost the whole thing where he talks about Jesus appearing to Peter that is probably some of the closest we'll get to a story about Jesus that may not be in the New Testament but that may actually be accurate although you could say that he's here talking about what John or Luke talked about because John or Luke especially Luke talks about something pretty similar to this but Ignatius may not be getting it from Luke at all he may just be telling it like he heard from Peter there's another example so if you read really carefully through the Bible in the resurrection sequence there's a mention where where no it's in 1 Corinthians Paul mentions that Jesus appeared to James but we don't have any account of that at all and there is a document that just talks about how it happened I don't know if we should trust that though it might be like a much later legend that's trying to fill in the accounts we do have we do have I'm just scanning my brain for more Jesus stuff before I move to the disciples okay here's another one there's another ancient Christian writer his name is Justin the philosopher Justin Martyr whom I mentioned once he mentions that when Jesus was baptized that there was a light that appeared also so sometimes you get these little things like I don't know the spirit comes down like a dove and then this light is on the water I don't know I mean maybe maybe that happened most of the extra stuff we know is about the disciples and that's where we get more stuff for instance according to very early Christian tradition Simon the magician

Simon Magus that was not the end of Simon Magus in the book of Acts he went on to oppose the apostles especially Peter he even went to Rome to track Peter down that's said again and again we know that John the disciple the apostle went to Ephesus and Irenaeus gives us a story about John Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John if that makes sense and so he's telling us this kind of second hand story that he heard about John about how he was going into you know in the Roman Empire they would have these communal bath houses where you would go in and bathe and that John was in there and this heretic named Serentis showed up and he quickly ran out and said we got to get away from this guy so stuff like that you know they do they are interesting these stories about the apostles you know you have to be careful because so many of these stories are much later and we just don't know if they're accurate or not so what is the problem in simple words with the Gnostic

Gospels you should have come to the class two weeks ago you didn't make the cut yes great question so the problem with them is that first of all the Gnostics most people aren't aware of this the Gnostics accepted the canon of the mainstream church they just added to it so they're not really rejecting stuff they're just adding to this the problem with it is that they don't seem to have any grounding whatsoever in first century Jewish history they seem to be written like Jesus from a much later Greek philosophical background so all the stuff that we just did with the New Testament where we're looking at names, dates, places, events, happenings can't do that with the Gnostic Gospels another thing is that contrary to popular perception the vast majority of Gnostic Gospels are not even accounts of Jesus life they don't even pretend to be they're dialogues of a risen savior where he has this extended dialogue or it's just a sermon or it's a letter so most of them don't even claim to be accounts of Jesus life they are just theological musings other reasons why is that there's no evidence that the people who the titles of the

[ 70 : 16 ] Gospels are ascribed that they actually wrote them so like Gospel of Mary Gospel of Peter there's no evidence that they wrote these scholars are united in believing these are from the

second or third centuries and in fact that ancient critic Porphyry whom I've mentioned a bunch of times he talks about the Gnostics and he says oh yeah they're just making up false titles for these things but then when he's dealing with the four Gospels and the writings of the New Testament he doesn't say that he seems to accept that they're accurate so they don't seem rooted in Judaism at all to any degree they can't be historically verified they seem to be written at a very late date they follow they're all united behind this Gnostic myth about how you need to have this knowledge in order to come to salvation and it contradicts Judaism I mean most of them have this idea that the creator God is evil and when you read Genesis

God makes everything good they've got to do a lot of hermeneutical running around to get around that or they'll just reject the passage and it just seems the idea that Jesus or the apostles these Jews from first century Palestine would have believed that the Old Testament God was bad it just doesn't make sense it seems much more like someone who's following Platonic philosophy who believes the material world is evil that's what seems like what's going on here and I think that is what's going on is that they're trying to take the teachings of Jesus and mash them together with Greek philosophy and this is kind of what what's coming out yes that's a great question let me make a comment first I just want to emphasize how privileged and blessed we are if you go back even 100 years ago people didn't know the stuff we know if you go back 500 years ago the only test you could do was that last test that Jesus said if you choose to do the will of God you will know that I come from the Father because if you're living in the middle of some far off place and you can't read or write there's really nothing you can do when you're presented with the gospel message other than seek God's guidance directly and so we're in this position where we have all this stuff that most Christians throughout most of history didn't have some of the earlier ones might have had this kind of stuff but they were facing horrible persecution and death and everything so it brings up a good question of like what do we do and I think we follow Jesus we see what he wants us to do what is our we each have our own callings and we discern from the Lord what that is and we carry our cross as best we can humbly knowing that I think God is going to hold us to the standard of the things he's given to us and he's given us a lot I also think that we should always be careful I've mentioned this a couple times in my other classes but that this information that I presented

I mean it's great it's wonderful this is my career like I love this stuff but this this doesn't really get at Jesus directly in order to get at Jesus directly you got to know him and that's what matters and so some of this information can be extremely helpful for people and can bolster their faith but other people work differently for others you know it doesn't it's not exciting for them and ultimately God following Christ is not about how much you know or even how certain you are of these little facts it's you know Jesus on that day he's going to ask do you know me and that's what we want to keep in mind seek him and this is a important these are important things but they're only stepping stones to the ultimate goal yeah yes absolutely absolutely yeah

I agree with that we've gone over I'm happy to answer more questions but if you got to go you got to go but otherwise thanks for coming I think we have one more class right John what's the topic on it we're going to be looking at given all these things about the scriptures how how do they come to make a difference in our lives so we're going to look particularly at how the word of Christ the gospels can come to dwell in us richly and transforming us particularly at meditation it's kind of the capstone in application of these things so yeah all right stay tuned how to have the word of Christ come to the world we wish all right thank you so much everyone