

The Accuracy of the New Testament

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[0:00] Hello, everyone. It's good to see you all again this week. I want to welcome you back to part two of our three-part series on the reliability of the New Testament.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Tom Schmidt. I'm a Ph.D. student at Yale University. I focus on the history of Christianity and also the history of the New Testament. Last week when I was with you all, I talked about the preservation of the New Testament.

That was part one, and we saw how carefully and reliably the text of the New Testament has been preserved over the centuries. And today in part two, I'm going to talk about the accuracy of the New Testament.

And we'll cover how the content of the New Testament is accurate, how it's true, and how it's trustworthy. And then next week, we'll talk about the canonicity of the New Testament, and I'll speak about how the New Testament was assembled and put together.

And we're going in this order because these topics lead into one another fairly naturally. So last week, we saw how the New Testament has been well-preserved, but we all know that it's possible for someone to write a document that's full of exaggerations and misstatements and even lies, and then have that document preserved over the centuries.

[1:16] So if the New Testament is truly reliable, then it needs to be more than just carefully preserved. It also needs to be accurate and true, and that's what we'll cover today.

We'll investigate why we can trust that the New Testament is trustworthy, why we can trust that what it says about Jesus is true, why its claims are factual, and this pertains especially to the New Testament's central claim that Jesus was crucified and buried and then resurrected three days later.

Why don't we open with prayer, though, before we begin. Father in Heaven, I want to thank You for this opportunity to gather together here safely together and to learn about Your Word.

And we ask, in the name of Jesus, that You would send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts this morning, and that You would help us to grow in trust in Your Word, and above all, trust in You, that we would depend on You.

Lord, I pray if there's any of us here who are searching for You, that You would be revealed in this time. I pray, Lord, that You would calm any troubled hearts, and that You would forgive any unforgiven sins.

[2:27] Lord, I pray You'd open our hearts to hear what You have to say today. And we pray all of this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen. All right, so let's get started. Why can we trust that the New Testament is accurate and true?

You know, sometimes we hear accusations that the New Testament is based on myths or folk tales, that it's inaccurate or deceptive. I've heard these claims many times, both in popular culture and in the classroom.

I'm sure some of you may have heard these things as well. But I'm here to tell you today that all this is wrong. The New Testament is not based on rumors or lies or myths, and indeed there are several reasons why we can trust its factual claims.

Now, these reasons build on one another, so we're going to begin with the most fundamental reason. We can trust that the New Testament is not made up of myths or rumors. We can trust that it's true and accurate, first and foremost, because it is based on eyewitness testimony.

It's not based off of rumor or hearsay. And these eyewitnesses who are behind the documents of the New Testament were in a position to know what Jesus said and to report it accurately.

[3 : 40] Let me give you some examples of this. John, the disciple of Jesus, he writes in the New Testament in his first letter. He talks about Jesus, and he calls him the word of life. And he says this, He says, He says, That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, and our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the word of life, the life appeared.

We have seen it and testified to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard.

John tells us here that he's preaching not something that he just heard about distantly, a rumor or anything like that, but something that he witnessed. He saw Jesus with his eyes.

He touched him with his hands. He directly heard him with his ears. And Peter, another disciple of Jesus, he says the same thing in the New Testament in his second letter.

He says, We did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

[4 : 49] Other New Testament authors make similar claims. Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke, he says in the beginning that he interviewed eyewitnesses about Jesus. He says, Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 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 that you have been taught.

Theophilus, whom Luke mentions, he was the person to whom Luke wrote. And Luke tells him, I went to the eyewitnesses. I investigated everything carefully so that I could tell the exact truth to you.

So we've heard from the Apostle John, the Apostle Peter, Luke the evangelist, but we've got more witnesses. We have the Apostle Paul. He also testifies as an eyewitness, and he gives what is perhaps the earliest account of the resurrection of Jesus.

In his own words to the Corinthians, he says, I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance to 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, and then to the twelve, the twelve apostles.

[6 : 09] Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, and to all the apostles, last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

The resurrection of Jesus is the essence of our faith, and Paul gives his own eyewitness testimony of it here. And indeed, the twelve apostles agree. They say in the book of Acts, 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 anti-Christian sources agree. Now what do I mean by these anti-Christian sources?

These sources were ancient writers who attacked Christianity in the second through fourth centuries. They were people like Celsus and Porphyry, Heracles and Julian the Apostate, they were highly educated, powerful, and 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 hence were based on rumors or hearsay, like some scholars try to maintain today.

[7 : 30] They acknowledged that the disciples wrote these documents. So if such hostile sources agree that the disciples were ultimately behind the New Testament, then we also can be sure that the New Testament is indeed based on eyewitness testimony, and that its account of the life of Jesus and his resurrection is not based off of mere rumor or hearsay.

But I want to ask you something. 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 that they're not fabricating their claims?

Well, we have several reasons to trust the claims of these eyewitnesses. I'll start with the first one. Firstly, they did not have a motive to lie about the resurrection of Jesus.

They did not gain materially from their claims. They did not gain money. They did not gain fame. They did not gain power or earthly benefit by preaching that Jesus was the Son of God and that he was resurrected.

Not only does the New Testament testify to this, but even those ancient critics of Christianity that I mentioned earlier, like Celsus and Julian, even they agree with this.

[8 : 45] In fact, when you read their writings, they mocked the apostles for being poor, for being members of the underclass, for being uneducated, for being friends with slaves and the lower classes and minority groups.

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

And indeed, many of them were executed for their faith in Jesus. And all of them were persecuted and even tortured. But when the authorities warned them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus and threaten them with punishment, the book of Acts says that they replied, we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

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

John was exiled as a prisoner to the island of Patmos. James, the brother of John, was beheaded. Matthew was executed. Thaddeus was executed. Nathanael was executed. James, the brother of Jesus, was executed.

[10 : 02] We all have good historical data that points to these facts. And more than this, we have evidence that many other early Christians suffered the same fate. And the fact that the apostles were terribly persecuted for their belief in the resurrection of Jesus is so indisputable it's so beyond question that again, even those anti-Christian sources agree with this.

They tell us this. They tell us that the apostles were persecuted and that they were executed. We see this, for example, in the Jewish Talmud and the Jewish historian Josephus which claimed that Matthew and Thaddeus and Nathanael and James were executed.

The Roman historian Tacitus tells us of a persecution of Christians in Rome under Emperor Nero that sounds exactly like the circumstances under which Peter and perhaps also Paul were executed.

But despite such great persecution, the apostles and eyewitnesses continued to maintain that Jesus really was resurrected. These sufferings are not something that people would endure for a claim that they knew was a lie.

Instead, it seems far more likely that the apostles were simply telling the truth. So for the first, the first reason that we can trust the eyewitnesses is because they didn't have worldly motives to lie.

[11:18] They had nothing to gain from it. And the second reason is because they had everything to lose. And indeed, they were persecuted for what they believed. But they continued to preach.

And this trustworthy character of the apostles was so steadfast that they passed it 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 their faith in Jesus. So let me give you some examples here. We have Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna. These both were disciples of the apostles. We both have their writings that remain for us to read and both of them were executed for their faith in Jesus.

If we look at Ignatius specifically, we see that he was a disciple of Peter and in the year 107 AD, he was awaiting his execution for being a Christian and during this time he wrote a letter.

[12:24] And in this letter, he talks about Peter witnessing the resurrection of Jesus and what he says sums up exactly what I've been saying. This is what he writes. 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.

And when he came to Peter and those with him, he said to him, Take hold of me and 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.

And 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, although spiritually he was united with the Father.

Here, Ignatius 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 did they do this?

[13:32] Because they had seen the one who had conquered death and they knew death had power over them no longer. And Ignatius joyfully testifies to this while he is condemned to die the same fate.

What a powerful testimony. Consider this. The New Testament was not written by a bunch of rich, powerful, highly educated people who gained wealth and influence and fame and power from their preaching.

Instead, the New Testament was written by a group of carpenters, of fishermen, of tent makers and prisoners. And they were persecuted and tortured and unjustly accused. These eyewitnesses of Jesus did not seek money or power like we would expect someone who is making something up.

Instead, they gained suffering. But so devoted and committed were they to Jesus' resurrection that they preached it despite the risk and even their own disciples did the same. They knew that Jesus had defeated death and they were unafraid of it.

And these apostles were the one who brought our New Testament and its message of love and salvation into our dark world. And they did it at great cost. So let me summarize. Can we trust that the New Testament is accurate?

[14:42] Yes, we can. It is based on eyewitness testimony of the apostles, not on rumor or report. And these eyewitnesses are trustworthy because they did not gain anything materially from their claims.

They had no motive 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 as well. And these points are so beyond question that even ancient non-Christian sources admit to many of these things.

But you know, so far I've been talking about how the New Testament writers were in a position to know the facts about Jesus because they wrote with the backing of eyewitness testimony. I've shown why I think we can trust them, why their character was trustworthy, why what they were saying is true.

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 the character and motives of the eyewitnesses. Let's see if we can test their truthfulness and their accuracy a little more scientifically.

As you all know, eyewitnesses might still have accidentally put in false information. They might have gotten carried away in their great passion and then exaggerated things. They might have even convinced themselves that something was true when it actually wasn't.

[15:57] Even if they were sincere, they may still have been inaccurate. We all know honest people who make wrong statements. So let's do a more thorough investigation here. Let's see if the New Testament holds up to good old-fashioned brass tacks, nuts and bolts, historical scrutiny.

Let's forget about character and motives. And this is how we're going to do this. Throughout the New Testament, the authors make numerous historical claims. And we can check these claims against the historical record to see if what they say is true.

We can double-check and cross-check the claims of the New Testament with what we know from history and see how they line up. So when the New Testament mentions a person or a place or an event, we can check that claim against the historical record and see if the New Testament is accurate.

And when we do this, we find that the New Testament authors were indeed accurate and that they were not in the habit of making up information. Let me show you what I mean.

The New Testament authors report the existence of several Roman emperors, for example. And we know from various historical sources that they correctly identify them in their proper historical context.

[17:12] And this comes from various lines of evidence that we have like historical reports, the archaeological record, and from coins. You can see an example on the screen. So I just want to walk you through this a little bit.

So here we've got Emperor Augustus. Luke talks about him. We know from history Luke totally identifies him properly. Same thing with Emperor Tiberius. Luke mentions him. Boom. He gets him right.

Same thing with Emperor Claudius. In Acts 18, Luke gets him right. Now I'm giving some coins as examples of these folks. We have lots of other evidence, of course, about these guys. But we can keep on going here.

Herod the Great. Matthew talks about him in Chapter 2. He gets it right. Herod Archelaus. Matthew talks about him as well. Also gets him right. And we can just keep going.

King Herod had lots of sons. He called them all Herod. Herod Philip, we know him. Herod Antipas, we know him. Herod Agrippa I, Acts gets him right. Herod Agrippa II, Acts gets him right.

[18:07] Here's another king, Arathos IV. He's mentioned in the book of Acts. He's mentioned in 2 Corinthians. New Testament gets him right. Here we've got Sergius Paulus. This is the guy who converted under the Apostle Paul's preaching.

This is the reason why Paul is called Paul. Because of this guy. He changed his name because of this guy. And we have an inscription that talks about him. He's relatively unknown, less unknown than the other guys I've mentioned.

The New Testament gets him right in his proper historical context. Pontius Pilate, you know he's mentioned many times in the New Testament. He's the one who supervised the trial of Jesus and his execution.

And we know him from many historical references. We also know him from this very famous inscription that mentions his name. But let's do some more challenging analysis.

It's good that the New Testament get these folks right. But let's see what the New Testament authors do with other lesser known figures whom someone would likely only know about if they were very well informed.

[19:07] The New Testament speaks about lots and lots of people. I've got about 17 names on here. Some of these you probably recognize. Maybe some of them you don't. They're very obscure. People like Bernice, Drusilla in the Book of Acts, Judas the Galilean, Festus, Felix, Salome, Annas, Ananias.

We can just keep going down this list. Gamaliel, Herodias, John the Baptist, even some of the apostles. James, the brother of Jesus, Matthew, Nicodemus, Nathaniel, Thaddeus. These are relatively minor figures.

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

The New Testament is even correct about a very minor person named Erastus whom I've got mentioned below. He lived in Corinth. And if you go to Corinth today, you can still see the Erastus inscription in the pavement right there.

He was a minister of public works there. And you can see some of the bricks that he laid right in the first century when Paul was in Corinth. A person in the ancient world wouldn't know about many of these figures unless they were eyewitnesses or had access to reliable testimony.

[20:20] But we can test the accuracy of the New Testament authors in other ways as well. We've been looking at their references to people. We can look at their geographic references. So for example, this map shows dozens of locations mentioned in the New Testament.

And the New Testament correctly places every single one of these. It's even correct about little tiny villages around Jerusalem. I know the font here is really small, but villages like Emmaus, Arimathea, Bethphaga, Bethany, Bethlehem.

The New Testament is right about that. The New Testament is even right about tiny fishing villages around the Sea of Galilee. You'll recognize some of these names. Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida.

These places are extremely obscure. Remember back then, folks didn't have maps or atlases to document places like this. The only way to know about an insignificant little fishing village in the backwaters of Galilee was if you were there or you knew someone who was.

And the New Testament gets them right. But you know, but we can go even smaller. The Gospel of John talks about Jacob's well in John chapter 4. It's still there today.

[21 : 29] The Gospel of John talks about the pool of Siloam. It's still there today in Jerusalem. You can go and see it. The Gospel of John mentions stone water jars. Now, this is kind of strange.

Water jars usually are made of clay, right? It's a little weird that he would mention strange stone water jars, but apparently this wasn't out of the ordinary in first century Judea because here you go.

They still have them around. These stone water jars that are very large, just like John says, hold many gallons. Now, we could continue doing this for hours about New Testament events and customs, contemporary beliefs, various historical phenomenon, but you guys get the point.

When the New Testament makes historical claims, we're able to verify them successfully. And this means 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 the manuscripts, then these historical claims would have tended to have been altered and therefore would have tended to not be so precise.

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

[22 : 48] I would say that the most serious example of this is with Theodos, the Galilean, whom Luke mentions in Acts chapter 5. He dates Theodos to before 39 AD.

The problem with this is that the ancient Jewish historian Josephus talks about this guy and he dates him several decades later. Straight up contradiction, at least apparently.

But rather, I think, 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. Perhaps there was a second Theodos.

Perhaps Josephus was the one who was wrong and Luke was the one who was right. In fact, since the advent of modern scholarship, there have always been historical claims in the New Testament that skeptical scholars dismissed as wrong or made up or otherwise fictitious.

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

[24 : 01] Let me give you some examples. Back in the day, certain scholars believed that Nicodemus, who came to Jesus at night in the Gospel of John and helped bury him, skeptical scholars believed that he was quote, fabricated by John and made up to serve some purpose.

Now, John gives four data points about Nicodemus. He tells us he was a member of the ruling class. He was a Pharisee. He was a teacher of the law and he was very wealthy. And certain scholars heard these skeptical claims and they started doing some investigation and they started realizing that according to ancient Jewish literature, there was in fact a rich ruling family in Jerusalem that did have Pharisees and teachers of the law in it.

And do you know what name was popular for men in that family? Nicodemus. It also appears that the Jewish Babylonian Talmud mentions Nicodemus' execution as a disciple of Jesus.

It seems like it uses one of his nicknames that we know about from these ancient Jewish sources. Now, no scholar can truthfully claim that Nicodemus never existed. And it seems that John was right after all.

But let me give you more examples. There's a pool of Bethesda that's mentioned in John chapter 5. John says it had five porticos or overhanging porches, which is weird.

[25 : 19] Pools usually have four sides, you know, five-sided pool. Kind of strange. For a long while, scholars accused John of making this up. We had no record of the pool of Bethesda.

They said the five porches were fictitiously crafted by John to represent the five stratas of Jewish society or the five books of Moses or some nonsense like that. But then in 1948, we found this.

And now every scholar admits that the pool of Bethesda really does exist and it had five sides with five porches. John was right. And we can keep going. Scholars claim that Luke's chronology in the book of Acts was, quote, hopeless, that he made it up, especially regarding Paul's trial before a guy named Galio in the book of Acts, chapter 18.

Other, more faithful scholars said, no, no, no. We think Luke's right. We think Luke probably based this between 51 and 54 AD. But they were dismissed. And then in 1913, we found this, which mentions Galio and precisely dates him to 51 or 52 AD, exactly as Luke claimed.

I can keep going. Skeptical scholars also accused Luke of making up the census in Luke chapter 2. This is when Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem to be registered for Jesus' birth.

[26 : 36] We hear about this every Christmas. Our historical sources tell us that this census actually happened years later. Skeptical scholars said Luke was wrong. But then we found this inscription, which was shown to speak about not one census, but several censuses.

And Luke was vindicated. Skeptical scholars also questioned Luke about the governor Quirinius, who oversaw the census. The ancient historian, Josephus, placed his governorship years later than Luke.

Some scholars tried to solve this by hypothesizing maybe Quirinius was governor more than once. But this seemed like special pleading to everyone. But then we found this inscription, and then this one, and then this one.

And they clearly say that Quirinius was governor more than once. And Luke was right. We can say the same thing about Luke's reference to Lysanius in Luke chapter 3.

This is Lysanius the Tetrarch. Scholars said that for many years Luke contradicted the historical record. Lysanius the Tetrarch. It's an unusual name. And there was only one of them. And he lived 50 or 60 years after Luke says he did.

[27 : 48] Some faithful scholars suggested that maybe there was more than one Lysanius the Tetrarch. But they were dismissed. And then we found this in 1912.

And it clearly says, I've got it highlighted in red, Lysanius the Tetrarch. And now we know there was more than one Lysanius the Tetrarch. Luke was right again.

So, what a lucky guy. It keeps coming up true. It keeps coming up Luke every time. These instances teach us that it's never wise to bet against the historical reliability of the authors of the New Testament.

We may find evidence yet that Luke was right about that pesky Theutis and Josephus was wrong. Or that both of them were right and there were two different figures of the same name.

After all, it's happened before, hasn't it? But if not, would this one minor error in chronology really undermine the overall credibility of the New Testament given how historically reliable it is with its other claims?

[28:53] Especially the important ones. Indeed, the historical reliability of the New Testament is so strong that it gets better every year. Just last year, we found a ring inscribed with the name Pontius Pilate and dating to first century Jerusalem.

And once again, this supports the New Testament narrative by bolstering its reliability. And so, with the passing years, we keep finding stuff and it keeps coming up New Testament every time.

So let me summarize. We can be sure that the New Testament is accurate and true because it is based off of eyewitness testimony. And those eyewitnesses were reliable because they did not gain anything from their claims.

Therefore, they didn't have a motive to lie. In fact, they gained suffering and persecution because of the claim of the resurrection of Jesus. And yet, they persisted in maintaining that Jesus actually was resurrected.

And furthermore, their disciples suffered the same fate as them and even non-Christians admit to much of this. And lastly, as we've just seen, we can historically verify dozens, if not hundreds, of their claims showing that the authors of the New Testament were not in the habit of making up information but were quite accurate in their reports.

[30:08] 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 for believing super mundane things. The New Testament is right regarding normal, natural, everyday claims. But what about supernatural claims?

We want extraordinary evidence for extraordinary claims. Can we, I wonder, can we corroborate the miracles attributed to Jesus in the New Testament?

Yes, we can. This is because the miracles of Jesus were so indisputable. They were 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 we're just going to go down through the centuries. We're going to start around 200 or 400 A.D. with the Jewish Talmud. This is a collection of Jewish traditions and when you go through the pages and find a reference to Jesus, there's a story where they admit that a guy named James, a disciple of Jesus, could perform miraculous healing in Jesus' name.

[31:20] And then we go to a little earlier, Porphyry, anti-Christian writer around the year 300. I've mentioned him to you before. He called for Christians to be persecuted. He wrote an entire book against them.

But in his writings, he also admitted that Jesus worked wonders, just like the Bible says. Same thing with Heracles. He was a powerful man in the Roman Empire.

He was a governor. He called for Christians to be persecuted. As a governor, he actually persecuted Christians and had them put to death. He, like Porphyry, also wrote a book against the Christians. And in this, just like Porphyry, he too admitted that Jesus worked miracles.

Let's keep going. The Tosefza, an earlier manual of Jewish tradition, and it says a very similar thing as the Jewish Talmud. It admits that Jesus' disciples could heal in his name, but it cautions Jews not to be persuaded by them.

The Oracle of Hecate, a pagan oracle in the 200s, says that Jesus was immortal around the year 175. Celsus, an anti-Christian writer, he called for Christians to be persecuted, and he still acknowledged that Jesus worked wonders and that early Christians had authority over demons.

[32 : 33] Phlegon, around the year 125, he reports an unexpected darkness around the time of Jesus' death, as well as an earthquake, just like the Gospels say. Phlegon also adds that Jesus could correctly predict the future.

And Josephus, we've seen him earlier in this talk, around the year 90 or 95, he's a Jewish historian writing in the first century, and he says that Jesus worked miracles.

Paradoxa, he calls them. A first century Jewish historian admits this. Thalass, sometimes between 50 and 100, we don't really know his dates, the Greek writer Thalass reports that the sun grew dark, and he seemed to have placed this event at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, just like the Gospels claim.

But we're not done yet. We have to talk about one of the greatest critics of Christianity and one of the earliest. In 35 AD, a persecutor of Christians named Saul of Tarsus was trying to destroy the Christian faith, and he tells us in his own words that the risen Jesus appeared to him and demonstrated his miraculous powers.

And as you know, after this, Saul of Tarsus changed his name to Paul. And he went on to write many of the letters of the New Testament where he speaks of how he was a persecutor of Christians, how he didn't believe, and then he witnessed the resurrected Jesus.

[33 : 56] And after many years of ministry, he was executed for his faith, and we could say similar things about other ancient skeptics like James and Jude, none of whom believed in Jesus, but were convinced when he appeared to them.

And they also went on to write letters of the New Testament. This is extraordinary. Remember that ancient authors were more than capable of denying miracles. We see this, for instance, with Cicero, we see this with the Epicureans, but Jesus' miracles were so indisputable and beyond question that non-Christian sources and even anti-Christian sources admitted that they occurred.

And some of these folks became Christians themselves. So can we trust that the New Testament is accurate and true? Yes, we can. It's based off of eyewitness testimony. The eyewitnesses did not gain anything.

In fact, they risked persecution. Their disciples suffered the same. And their historical claims can be verified. And we can even verify their miraculous claims.

And on top of this, non-Christians admit to most of these facts, these ancient non-Christians. But if all this isn't enough for you, then you can test the authenticity of Jesus' miraculous powers right now.

[35 : 11] All you have to do is look around the world and see what's going on. This is because the prophecies of Jesus contained in the New Testament are being remarkably and miraculously fulfilled among us.

If we go to Matthew 24, Jesus says that his gospel will be preached to the whole world as a testimony to all nations. And if we look at our world today, we see that there is no other message on earth that has reached so many people, so many nations, so many countries.

There's no message except that message of Jesus that has been translated into so many languages, been adopted by so many cultures, and changed so many lives.

Jesus' prophecy is being fulfilled. And all of you are testimonies to this. And we all come from all over the world. Keep in mind that Jesus was not famous.

He was not powerful or popular or influential when he predicted these things. He was a member of the underclass. He was a carpenter from a backwater of Galilee. And he predicted that his message would go to the nations, would go out to the world, and he was right.

[36 : 18] It spread farther than any other against all odds. It's doing it right now. And Jesus predicted many other things correctly. He said that many false prophets would come in his name.

Many false Christs would come in his name. He said that his followers would be brought before kings and rulers and all these things have happened so many times it's beyond counting. And Jesus predicted all of this when he was still an obscure carpenter from Galilee.

And he was right every time. My friends, I've been giving you reasons why we can trust that the New Testament is true. Why it's trustworthy. Why we can believe it.

And if you're interested, I'd be very glad to talk with you about these matters and share my sources of information with you. But if you're here today and you're still wondering about this person of Jesus, I want to give you just one final simple test to conduct concerning the authenticity of Jesus and the New Testament.

And this is a test that Jesus himself recommends. He says this in the Gospel of John. He says, 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.

[37 : 28] So my friends, if you want to follow Jesus, if you want to do God's will, Jesus promises you'll know, he'll let you know that he's true and that he's worthy of your trust.

Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we thank you for your New Testament. We thank you for the people who wrote it, your disciples, who labored and suffered so much and did so joyfully to bring your message.

Lord, we pray that we'd follow their example, that we wouldn't seek to gain riches or power by your message. We also pray that we would be increased in our faith, that you would magnify our faith and our trust in you.

I pray for anyone here today who is struggling with doubts. I pray that you would speak to them now, comfort them, reveal yourself to them. Lord, I pray for the church service we're about to fellowship and listen to.

I pray that you'd send your spirit there mightily. And we pray all this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. I think we have some time for questions if anybody has questions.

[38 : 32] Ben. Those who agree that miracles were performed but deny Christ, how do they reconcile it? Great. So the question is, yeah, all these people talk about the miracles of Jesus but they still deny Christ.

How does that make sense? Well, they do the same things that the Jewish leaders in the Gospels do. They say that he did this by demons, with magic. That in the ancient world, magic was something that you had supernatural power but you got it through the help of demons.

And so they said the same things. That yeah, yeah, yeah, he did this but he used demons. And Christians would reply to this. They would say like, but someone who repents from their sins, who preaches righteousness, they don't work with demons.

Jesus is preaching to love God, to do all these things. And the response by the ancient critics was usually, I mentioned some of them, is that they would say, yeah, but Jesus and the apostles were poor.

They were laborers. They invited women into their society. They liked slaves. That's ridiculous. We shouldn't do that.

[39 : 42] Again and again, you see Celsus, Julian say all these things. So it's ironic to us because what they criticized the early Christians for is what we boast about. that they loved the poor.

They loved slaves. They loved the underclasses. But this was used by critics as evidence that they didn't know what they were talking about. They weren't rich. They weren't powerful.

They weren't educated. Can you go back to the picture of the full of that? Yeah, that's awesome. Okay, yeah, sure. I don't believe you until I see it.

I have to say that, here we go, that this picture doesn't, it doesn't encompass everything that's there. It's part of an archaeological, an archaeological dig that happened.

I have not been able to find a picture that clearly shows all five places. What I do know is that apparently all scholars, even skeptical scholars, accept this now.

[40 : 39] Often the archaeological record takes a lot of fine, a fine-drained analysis to tell, like for instance, they can probably find the foundations of these porches and find how they've crumbled. So you won't be able to find them standing there today.

Is this like from a helicopter or something? I can't tell. It's looking down. So over the centuries, people paved over this again and again and again. And so this stuff on the sides, I'm not, I would imagine, is later material.

That's what happens in archaeological digs. So when I get earlier, you have to go deeper. And in this case, you have to go so deep that you're kind of looking down now at something that originally was on ground level. I have, there's a very distinguished professor.

He's still at Yale and he's a professor of the Gospel of John. And I heard him not once but twice say publicly in class that he used to think that the Gospel of John was all myth and allegory.

And he said, but then they started digging up these pools. And he's like, and it really has made me think. And he never completes that thought. But he said that without urging.

[41 : 45] I mean, he's just brought it up. He's like, yeah, and they found this stuff. So as far as I'm aware, no one really disputes the Pool of Bethesda. There's other things I was going to say that people do dispute.

So I didn't mention those things. Is that a professor of the New Testament? Of the New Testament? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Any other questions?

I just wonder, it seems like the New Testament is so accurate. Has it been embraced as a standard to compare other things to yet? Or is it kind of its nature as a belief book that they don't know there? It seems like it would be a great standard if it's proven to keep this wrong with other really books that we look to as standards.

Has it become that more and more? Yeah. That's a good question. The question's about do people use the New Testament as a source book for evaluating other historical people? I agree.

And there are, you'll find a big divide in the field that New Testament scholars that the field is very divided. They tend to be very skeptical and so usually they fall in one of two camps.

[42 : 47] Either they're very skeptical or they believe it. If you go to archaeologists, it's a little more like what you're saying that they will say, oh, we found this. This must be, you know, what was mentioned in the New Testament or even like, we're going to dig here because we think something might be here.

They do that with the Old Testament too. Again, but not all archaeologists. Some of them are very skeptical. In terms of Josephus, it's very ironic. Luke wrote before Josephus.

We know that he was very accurate. Josephus wrote later. We know that Josephus made mistakes in part because sometimes he'll give the same account of the same event and contradict himself. And, you know, you'd think if they were in tension, scholars would go with Luke.

He's earlier. We know he's very good, but many of them don't. And I think it's because they subconsciously, they're like, oh, it's the Bible. So, it's unfortunate, but that's what happens.

Anything else? Are you familiar with the associates for the biblical research? Yeah, I've heard of them. Yeah, yeah. They're doing a dig in Shiloh. I mean, it's been going on for a few years now.

[43 : 55] And it's just really exciting. Yeah. For personal interest and anybody wants to look that up, what they're finding there. Yeah, yeah. There's digs going on all the time. And they find stuff. I mean, that's how they found the ring of Pontius Pilate.

It's in some destruction layer when Jerusalem was destroyed in year 70. It's probably not literally his ring. It's probably the ring of one of his slaves or servants that would stamp, you know, documents with it.

But it might have been him, but it's a testimony to his existence. And it's ironic that when that was found, you know, people made kind of a big deal about it, but we knew about Pontius Pilate for so long.

I mean, we have all these literary records from non-Christians that talk about him, both Jewish and pagan, that are from the first century and the early second century as well.

And we have that inscription of Pontius Pilate. But this just kind of adds to it. Anything else? I think it might be about time to wrap up. So next week, we're going to talk about the canonicity of the New Testament.

[44 : 52] We're going to talk about how the New Testament was put together. So be sure you come for that. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks.