

# CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

WORD IN THE WORLD SERIES

Pradeep Dias

<http://www.letsthinkthrough.com>



An aerial photograph of a city with a grid of buildings. A large green rectangular area is overlaid on the left side, and a grey rectangular area is overlaid on the right side. The text 'RECAP WEEK 4' is centered in the grey area.

# RECAP WEEK 4



# RECAPPING WEEK 4 – IS THE OLD TESTAMENT AUTHENTIC?

- Though we don't have the original manuscripts, we have over 2500 Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.
- The oldest manuscripts available date to even before the birth of Jesus
- The scribal tradition went to enormous lengths to ensure the quality and accuracy of copying.
- This has been proven by the Dead Sea Scroll discovery. Comparing Great Isaiah scroll (125 BC) to the previous earliest Aleppo Codex (920 AD). Over millennia of copying has had minimal differences (spelling without changes to the meaning of any text).
- The variety of archaeological and historical findings have only gone on to further strengthen the premise that the old testament is authentic.

# CONFIDENCE BOOSTER

## God

God in His Nature is Truth and cannot lie

God through His Holy Spirit inspired the human authors

The witness of the Holy Spirit

## The Bible

> 25000 Manuscript & Fragments. Very early dating.

Accuracy of transmission with no impactful scribe errors

The amazing internal consistency and harmony

Written by 40 authors over 1600 years

Biblical Prophecy

## Others knowledge

Findings in science, archaeology and history

## Change

Inspire movements

Transform societies

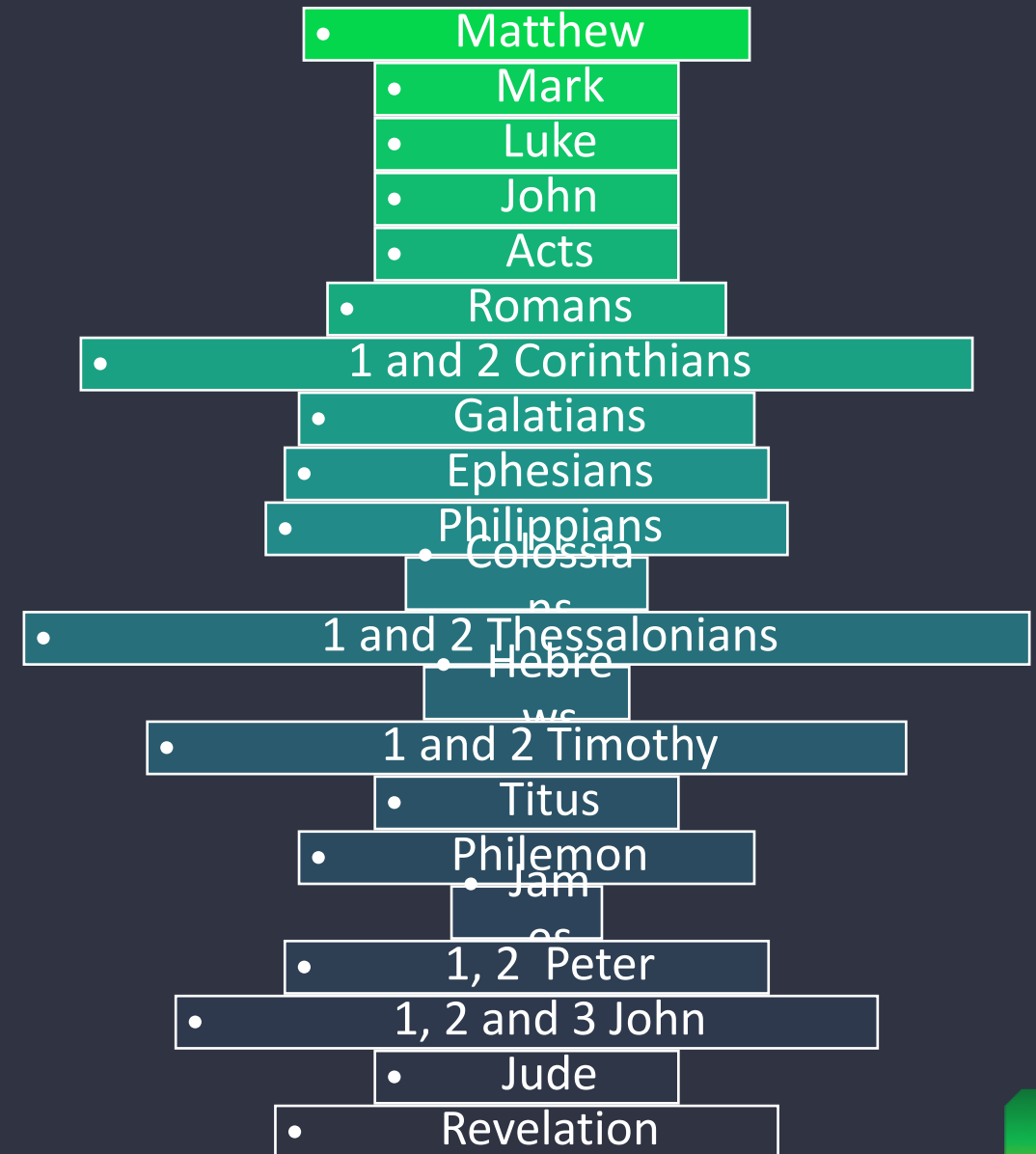
Changes lives

# WEEK 4

How did we get the  
New Testament &  
can I trust it?

# WHO WROTE THE NEW TESTAMENT?

- All the books of the New Testament was written either by the apostles or those who walked with the apostles and had the stamp of approval.
- These apostles were eyewitnesses of the life, death and resurrection of Christ.
- Paul is the exception. Defends his apostleship in Galatians 1-2, 1 Cor 15:8
- There is no point having non eye witnesses giving testimony.
- The highest confidence is with regards to eyewitness testimony.



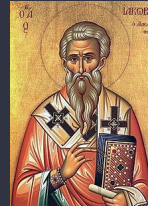
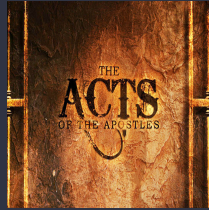
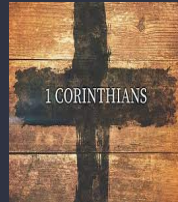
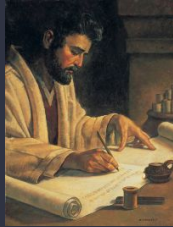
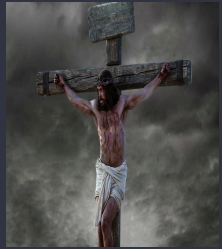
# GOSPEL WRITERS INTENDED TO SPEAK THE TRUTH

MANY PEOPLE HAVE SET OUT TO WRITE ACCOUNTS ABOUT THE EVENTS THAT HAVE BEEN FULFILLED AMONG US. 2 THEY USED THE EYEWITNESS REPORTS CIRCULATING AMONG US FROM THE EARLY DISCIPLES. 3 HAVING CAREFULLY INVESTIGATED EVERYTHING FROM THE BEGINNING, I ALSO HAVE DECIDED TO WRITE AN ACCURATE ACCOUNT FOR YOU, MOST HONOURABLE THEOPHILUS, 4 SO YOU CAN BE CERTAIN OF THE TRUTH OF EVERYTHING YOU WERE TAUGHT.

LUKE 1:1-4



# IS THERE EVIDENCE FOR THE EARLY DATING?



Crucifixion  
**AD 33**

Book of  
Mark  
Pre 53 AD

Book of  
Luke  
53 AD

First  
Corinthians  
55 AD

Book of  
Acts  
Pre 60AD

Nero  
Persecution  
60 AD

James  
Brother of  
Jesus  
62 AD

Peter  
Martyred  
64 AD  
  
Paul  
Martyred  
64 AD

Great  
Jewish  
Rebellion  
66 AD

Destruction  
of Jerusalem  
**70 AD**

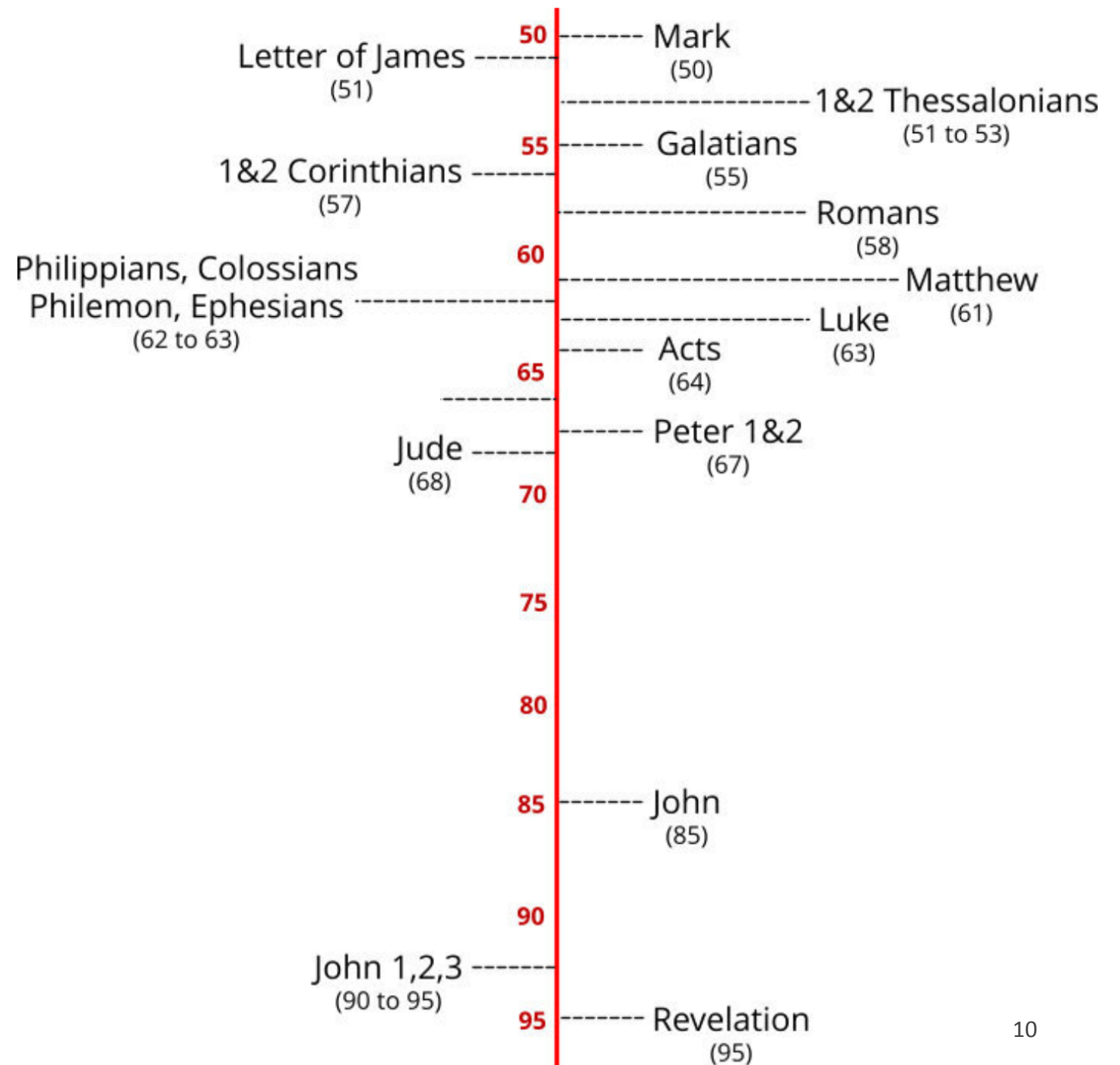
Acts refers to Mark.  
Luke 1:1, he refers  
to early sources

Acts 1:1, Luke tells the  
gospel was written before  
Acts. 1 Cor 11:25 refers to  
Luke 22:20

Martyrdom not recorded  
though key leaders. Nero's  
persecution of Christians in  
Rome missing

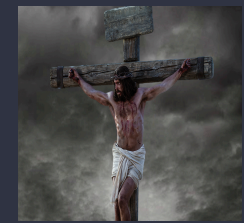
Not recorded in NT, only  
the prediction in Matt 24:3

# WHEN WERE THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORED?



# IS ORAL TRADITION RELIABLE?

- We learnt the Bible is Inerrant.
- The fact that the gospels were written by eye witnesses, this raises our confidence levels
- The early dating of the new testament books means, the content can be validated.
- By whom? By other eyewitnesses
- Given the church community was small, any issues with the content would have soon become common knowledge.
- Oral tradition didn't distort the accuracy and truthfulness of the content.
- Critics say because of oral tradition is not dependable, that it is like the "telephone game".



AD 33

Crucifixion

ORAL

Mark

Luke

Acts

Matthew

John

AD 95

Death of John

*“When you’re **carefully memorizing** something and **taking care** not to pass it along until you’re sure you’ve **got it right**, your doing something very different from playing the game of telephone. In telephone half the fun is that the person may not have got it right or even heard it right the first time, and they cannot ask the person to repeat it. Then you immediately pass it along, also in whispered tones that make it more likely the next person will goof something up even more. So yes, by the time it has circulated through a room thirty people, the results can be hilarious...If you really wanted to develop that analogy in light of the **checks and balances** of the first-century community, you’d have to say that every third person, out loud in a very clear voice, would have to ask the first person, ‘**Do I still have it right?**’ And **change it if he didn’t**. The community would **constantly be monitoring what was said and intervening to make corrections along the way**. That would preserve the integrity of the message. And the result would be very different from the childish game –*

Pradeep Das Dr. Craig Blomberg – Professor of NT, Denver Theological Seminary

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# DA VINCI CODE – HISTORICAL TWIST # 1

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Emperor Constantine decided  
what books should be in the  
New Testament.

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# WHO WAS EMPEROR CONSTANTINE? 280-337



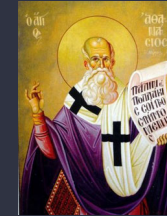
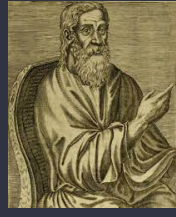
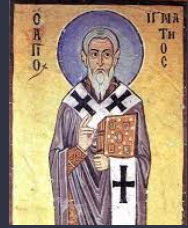
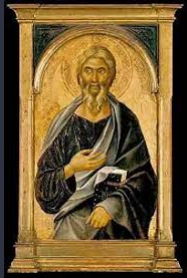
- He identified as a Christian though he continued pagan practices. He was also ruthless.
- He introduced religious reforms. Anyone can worship any god they chose.
- This stopped the longstanding persecution of Christians in the empire.
- During his reign the Arian controversy was starting to cause division in the church.
- Emperors had a responsibility to ensure the correct forms of religion, and this could be one of the motivations for Constantine to call for meeting.
- This meeting was called the Council of Nicea.

# WHAT HAPPENED IN NICEA?



- Took place in AD 325
- Attended by church leaders and bishops, moderated by Constantine
- 2 main points discussed
  - The deity of Christ; was Jesus Christ divine?
  - The Trinity
- Arius – who was leading the movement called Arianism argued
  - The son was a created being.
- Bishops of Alexander and Athanasius argued that Christ was uncreated, co-eternal, second person of the Trinity. He had the very nature (substance) of the Father.
- It was decided by voting (overwhelming majority) that Arius' position was unbiblical.
- There was no discussion about the Canon or the Books of the New Testament.

# SO HOW DID THE CANON FORM?



110 AD

125 AD

155 AD

189 AD

160-230AD

250 AD

367 AD

Apostle  
John  
AD 95

Ignatius (martyred, mentions  
7 Pauline letters as Scripture)

Papias (affirms Mark, Matthew,  
John, some Pauline letters)

Polycarp (martyred, 7 Pauline  
letters as Scripture )  
**Muratorium Cannon**  
**(22 of 27 books)**

Clement of Alexandria  
(24 of the 27 books)

Tertullian (24 of the  
27 books Affirmed).

Origen – seems to refer  
To the 27 books of NT

Athanasius. Festal  
Letter. All 27 books

Council of  
Hippo  
AD 397

- The church did not willy nilly add anything and everything
- They took time, they analysed, they tested before including the books into the Canon



***“THE SHAPE OF OUR NEW TESTAMENT CANON WAS NOT DETERMINED BY A VOTE OR BY A COUNCIL, BUT BY A BROAD AND ANCIENT CONSENSUS. . . . THIS HISTORICAL REALITY IS A GOOD REMINDER THAT THE CANON IS NOT JUST A MAN-MADE CONSTRUCT. IT WAS NOT THE RESULT OF A POWER PLAY BROKERED BY RICH CULTURAL ELITES IN SOME SMOKE-FILLED ROOM. IT WAS THE RESULT OF MANY YEARS OF GOD’S PEOPLE READING, USING AND RESPONDING TO THESE BOOKS.”***

**DR MICHAEL KRUGER**



# DA VINCI CODE – HISTORICAL TWIST # 2

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The church suppressed other  
gospels

# WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER BOOKS?

- As we learnt, the NT books were written either by the apostles or those who had direct access to the apostles
- There were many other books in the early church outside of the 27 NT books
- Some of those books were orthodox (in line with the teachings of the Bible)
  - E.g. 1 Clement, Shepherd of Hermes, Epistle of Barnabas
- Others were heretical. These heretical gospels are referred to as gnostic gospels.
  - Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Judas, etc.

# WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER BOOKS?

- These books were rejected by the church because
  - Fantastic and Legendary
  - Doesn't align with the apostolic or old testament theology instead affirm Gnosticism
    - Body is evil and spirit is good, Jesus only appeared human, Sin is not the ultimate problem, it is the lack of knowledge, by access to special knowledge you are saved, not through faith in Christ.
  - They were late productions with no apostolic authority
  - They added famous name to gain recognition

# WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER BOOKS?

Jesus called a child “unrighteous, irreverent idiot” (3:1–3). Another child bumped into Jesus, which made Him angry, so Jesus struck him dead (4:1–2). Those who provoked childhood Jesus fell dead (14:3), making clay pigeons **Infancy Gospel of Thomas**

Some said, “Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit.” They are in error. They do not know what they are saying. Whenever has a female been impregnated by a female?

## **Gospel of Phillip**

(note – some believed the Holy Spirit is female, a mother father trinity)

# WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER BOOKS?

**Gospel of Peter** – describes Jesus as a spirit with the illusion of human body.

“Simon Peter said to them, ‘Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.’ Jesus said, ‘I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven’” (Saying 114)

Gospel of Thomas



# HOW ACCURATE WAS THE NEW TESTAMENT?

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# THE GOSPELS GETS THE NAMES RIGHT

- Did the gospel writers get the names in the gospels right?
- They wrote from different parts of the empire; Mark in Rome, Matthew in Syria, John in Ephesus, Luke across the empire
- Richard Bauckham in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* analyses this.
- Correlates 1st century Jewish Palestinian names with those of the Gospels and Acts: results within 1%
- Comparison with other nearby Jewish settlements e.g. Egypt



# THE GOSPELS GETS THE NAMES RIGHT

- Famous names in Palestine were Simon, Lazarus, Joseph, Judas, Jesus, Matthew
  - 40% of the names used in the NT is top 9 male Jewish names from the time.
- Egypt famous Jewish names - Elazar, Sabateaus, Joseph, Josephus, Papas, Ptolemeus
  - These names from Egypt don't appear in the gospel
- This gives evidence that those who wrote the gospel, away from Palestine had access to accurate sources.

# THE GOSPELS GETS THE NAMES RIGHT

- The right features of names
- The popularity of Simon
  - Simon Peter, Simon the zealot, Simon the leper, Simon the Tanner
- Matthew 10:2-4, disambiguation of names
  - Simon (most popular name) is called Peter
  - Judas Iscariot, Matthew the Tax collector, James son of Alpheus, etc.
  - Thomas, Bartholomeus, Thaddeus - none of which has qualifiers because their names are not popular.

# THE GOSPELS GETS THE NAMES RIGHT

- So if the gospel writers had no idea about the land they were describing, such detail and accuracy will be lost.
  - Only most common names have qualifiers in this list
- Evidence in Dialogue
  - Points to a realistic picture of 1st century Palestine. John qualified as John the Baptist in dialogue described in the Gospels

# GETTING THE TOWNS RIGHT

- Geography: Do they know the places described?
- The four gospels mention 12-14 towns each, for a total of 23 places including tiny villages
  - Most common Jerusalem, then Nazareth, Capernaum.
  - We also hear non common places like Bethany, Bethsaida, Jericho, Caesarea Philippi,
  - Roman maps would not have included tiny villages

# GETTING THE TOWNS RIGHT

- The Gospel of Philip (gnostic) only mentions Jerusalem and Nazareth
- The Gospel of Peter (gnostic) mentions only Jerusalem
- Other 2nd/3rd century gospels mention no specific places
  
- What if the four New Testament gospels told things as they really happened? They mention the place names naturally, not in a way that's intrusive. This is about a real time and place.

# PEOPLE, PLACES AND PRACTICES

- Erastus in Rom 16:23 – inscription in Corinth
- Meat market mentioned in 1 Cor 10:25
- Acts 17:6 – Politarchs. Luke accurately picks the right word to describe the magistrates
- Acts 28:7 – Publius described as the first man in Malta. Inscriptions prove it is a proper title
- Acts 19:23 – The theatre in Ephesus and the goddess Artemius
- Acts 14:11 – Paul and Barnabas called Zeus and Hermes. The traditional gods of this area was these two gods.

# PEOPLE, PLACES AND PRACTICES

- Discovery of ancient Derbe in 1956
- Acts 21:28 – Riot caused by Paul taking a gentile into the temple. Inscription denying access to foreigners (discovered in 1871 and 1935)
- Luke 3:1 - “Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene”. Greek inscription in Abila affirming the person
- Luke 2:2 - when Quirinius was governor of Syria.
- Acts 5 - Sapphira (tomb located in Jerusalem in 1923). Cannot be fully certain if the same.
- Acts 24:27 – replacement of Festus by Felix. 59 AD Nero comes to power and issue new coin
- John 5:2 – Pool of Bethesda, Pool of Siloam

# THE EMBARRASSMENT FACTOR

- The Bible didn't shy away from the truth.
- Christ (the hero, the central person in all 4 gospels)
  - The rejected and betrayed Messiah (family, community, disciples)
  - Abused and killed as a criminal
- Peter
  - The head of the Jerusalem church
  - Betrayed Jesus 3 times
  - The many foot in the mouth occasions
- The disciples
  - Jesus chiding them for their foolishness
- Rejected by the inner circle
  - Judas Iscariot betraying Christ
- Many walking away from Christ (this is a hard saying)

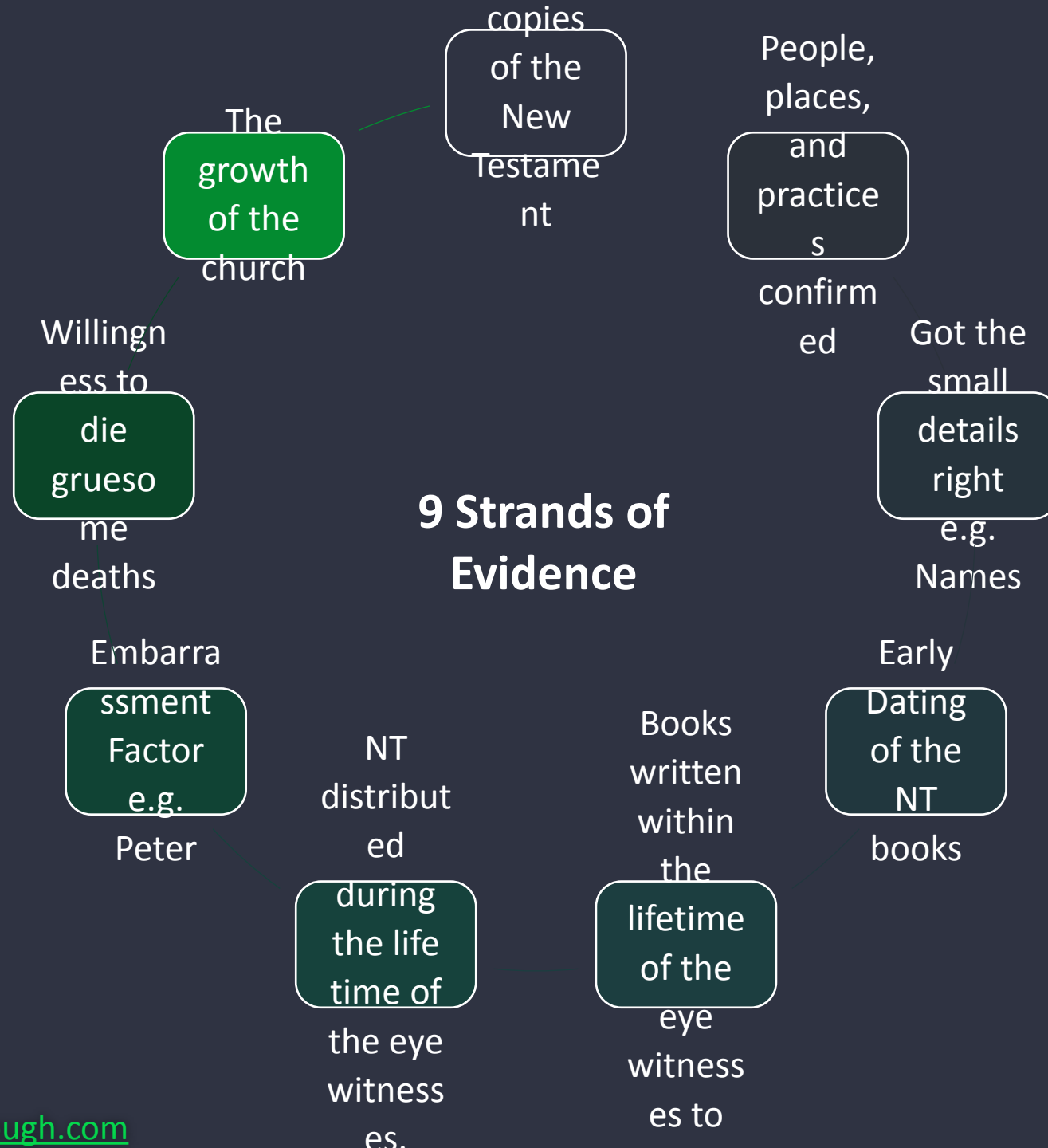


# AS IT HAPPENED

- Post Resurrection Appearances
  - The gospel writers show women as the witnesses to His resurrection
  - Jesus appeared to the women first!
  - This is unbelievable as the witness of a woman was not accepted in court
  - But the gospel writers says it as it is!
  - First to the women and then to Peter.
- Thomas
  - His very disciples doubting the resurrected Christ.
  - Thomas famously rejected the resurrection
  - He wanted empirical evidence, else he would not believe

# THE FATE OF THE APOSTLES

- Severe persecution and martyrdom was experienced by the disciples
- They were rejected by society, looked down upon
- There was no wealth, fame, honour or worldly glory
- Why would they sacrifice everything and face gruesome deaths
- These guys genuinely believed that Jesus died and was raised from the dead.
- They did not choose to believe in a lie and then die for a lie
- Martyrdom does not mean the beliefs are true. Rather it affirms that the disciples believed in the authenticity with certainty of what they believed.
- The apostles died for holding their beliefs and those beliefs they knew to be true.
- Except for Judas (pre-death) walking away from the Christian camp. They all died. They knew.



## 9 Strands of Evidence

An aerial photograph of a city with a grid of buildings. A large green rectangular area is overlaid on the left side, and a grey rectangular area is overlaid on the right side. The text 'Q&A' is centered in the grey area.

# Q&A



# HOW DID THE SCRIBES DO THE COPYING?

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# HOW DID THE SCRIBES DO THE COPYING?

- The Jewish Scribal tradition was not there initially in the new testament church.
- Since most of the people in the church were poor, they could not afford professional scribes.
- So they chose cheaper means which resulted in some errors.
- But with time, the process became as thorough as the Soferim, Tannaim, Amoraim and Masoretes



AD 300 – 400s onwards Monasteries to Scriptoriums

# HOW DID THE MONKS DO THE COPYING?

Many scribes  
in 1 room

Reader reads  
the book out  
loud - dictation

Once done  
copyists and  
editors cross  
checked

Text with  
errors was  
either  
corrected or  
re-done

There was a  
desire to  
ensure  
accuracy of  
transmission