

EQUIP

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Tactics

Is the New Testament Trustworthy?

“Jesus of Nazareth is not a figure in history.”¹

“There is no reason to believe” he existed. -Christopher Hitchens

“There is no more and no less reason to believe the four canonical gospels. All have the status of legends, as factually dubious as the stories of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table.”² - Richard Dawkins

Many people today believe that the New Testament is no more historically accurate or trustworthy than the Book of Mormon, or Grimms’ Fairy Tales. Many people even think that Jesus of Nazareth did not exist in history. If Jesus did not exist, then Christianity is not true. If the New Testament is wholly unreliable historically, then we have a lot of uncertainty about many of our beliefs.

1. Jesus Certainly Existed.

The Ancient Roman historian Tacitus wrote:

“Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXXqVZFyEpg> (accessed February 27, 2019)

² Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: First Mariner Books, 2008), 122.

penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.”³

This is not an embellished account. It was written approximately 116 AD by a prominent historian who was not friendly to Christianity. It is even disparaging of Christianity, indicating that it is not fabricated by Christians to make Christianity look good. It is legitimate historical affirmation that Jesus existed and was crucified under Pontius Pilate.

The Roman historian Suetonius wrote

“Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.”⁴

This was written by 122 AD and provides further attestation to the existence of Jesus.

Josephus also affirmed that Jesus existed.

There is more than sufficient historical evidence to demonstrate that Jesus existed and was crucified.

2. There is an abundance of manuscript evidence for the New Testament.

There are over 5,800 Greek manuscripts found for the New Testament, the oldest from 100-175 AD.

³ Tacitus, *The Annals*, translated Alfred Church and William Brodribb (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 327.

⁴ Suetonius, *Claudius*, 25.

There are thousands of Latin manuscripts supporting the New Testament. There are around 1 million Scripture quotations in the early Christian writings. We could reconstruct most of the New Testament from the writings of the early Christians alone, even if we lost all the Greek manuscript evidence. Thus, we know with greater than 99% certainty what the original documents said. The New Testament documents were not invented centuries later by corrupt men to control the masses. They represent very early Christian beliefs.

Contrast the New Testament manuscript evidence with that of other important historical works, which historians depend on: Herodotus, only 74 mss, from 500 years later. Thucydides, only 20 mss, approx. 500 years later. Tacitus, 3 mss, 900 years later.

3. The Basic Christian Story of Jesus is not a Later Invention

1 Corinthians 15 was written around AD 53-54. Most scholars believe the book is genuine, and reflects early Christian beliefs about Jesus.

Early Christian Creed predating the book itself is found in chapter 15.

Historically, we know that a handful of years after Jesus was crucified, many people believed he had risen again.

The belief that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and risen again was not a later invention. They are the earliest Christian beliefs. Those who were alive and would have witnessed the events, or knew people who witnessed, them believed Jesus had risen.

What Response Would We Give to Someone who Thinks the New Testament is wholly Untrustworthy? Or thinks Jesus didn't exist?

Recommended Resources:

The Case for Christ, by Lee Strobel

The Historical Reliability of the Gospels, Craig Blomberg