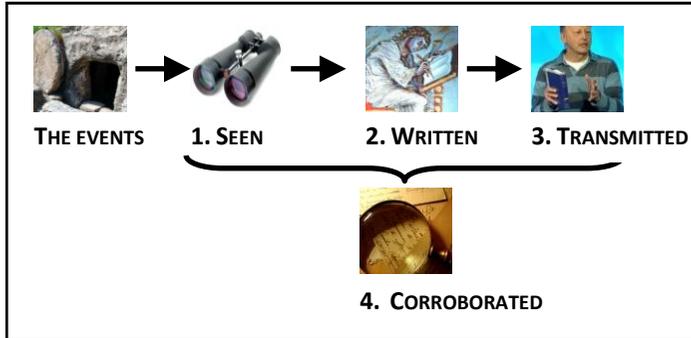


3. WHY TRUST THE GOSPELS? TRANSMITTED & CORROBORATED

“Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.” (Psalm 119:18)



3. THE GOSPELS HAVE BEEN RELIABLY TRANSMITTED TO US

(a) Comparison with other ancient texts

Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i> (written c.70AD)				
Surviving copies?		2 sets of excerpts and 9 complete mss.		
From when?		Small portion is 5th century Latin translation. Remaining manuscripts from 10th century.		
Tacitus, <i>Annals of Imperial Rome</i> (117AD)				
Surviving copies?		At least 16 books originally written. Missing: all of books 7-10, parts of books 5, 6, 11 and 16. Surviving: 1 mss for Annals 1-6 and 1 mss for Annals 11-16		
From when?		850AD (1-6) and 1050AD (for 11-16)		
Virgil	Livy	Horace	(Most) Plato	Euripedes
350	500	900	1300	1600 years after writing

(b) The New Testament documents

Early Greek manuscripts containing some or all of the NT (totaling c.5,000)

The Papyri (c.100) mainly 2nd-4th centuries.

Including: *Rylands fragment* (P52)

From Egypt, c.100AD = John 18:31-33, 37-38.

Uncial manuscripts (c.300). 4th-10th centuries.

Including: *Codex Sinaiticus*. Written in 4th century. Complete NT

Minuscule manuscripts (c.2800). 9th century on.

Lectionaries (2000). Fragments from 6th century.

Complete mss from 8th century on.

Early translations or “versions”

E.g. Coptic Sahidic dialect NT from 3rd century

Bohairic dialect John’s gospel from 4th century

Quotations of NT in the early church Fathers

E.g. Ambrose of Caesarea: 520AD commentary on Revelation containing entire Gk text



(c) So what? It is possible to recover the original text

97-99% of the New Testament is in no doubt

(d) What about the differences between the manuscripts?

- John 8:1-11, the woman caught in adultery
- Mark 16:9-20, the longer ending of Mark’s gospel

4. THE GOSPELS ARE CORROBORATED WITHIN THE BIBLE AND EXTERNALLY

(a) Corroboration from outside the Bible

- **Archaeology**

The pool at Bethesda



The Pilate inscription



- **Non-Christian Jewish writers**
Josephus
- **Non-Christian Roman writers**
Julian Africanus, Thallus, Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, Tactius

(b) Corroboration from within the Bible

5. CONCLUSION

(a) The gospels: a story well worth telling

(b) A caution

Different schools of apologetics

- (i) Fideism (Karl Barth): “personal experience, testimony”
- (ii) Evidentialism (?McDowell, ?Strobel): “reasons will persuade”
- (iii) Presuppositionalism (Van Til, Schaeffer, Frame):

(c) An encouragement: only God can persuade someone to trust His Word

“For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed with the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.” (Calvin, Institutes, 1.7.4)

“Unless this certainty, higher and stronger than any human judgement, be present, it will be vain to fortify the authority of Scripture by arguments, to establish it by common agreement of the church, or to confirm it with other helps. For unless this foundation is laid, its authority will always remain in doubt. Conversely, once we have embraced it devoutly as its dignity deserves, and have recognised it to be above the common sort of things, those arguments – not strong enough before to engraft and fix the certainty of Scripture in our minds – become very useful aids.” (Calvin, Institutes, 1.8.1)

1 Corinthians 2:14, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

USEFUL RESOURCES

Introductory

Is the New Testament history? Paul Barnett

The Christ files: how historians know what they know about Jesus, John Dickson (book and DVD)

The Da Vinci Code: from Dan Brown’s fiction to Mary Magdalene’s faith, Garry Williams

The truth about Jesus: the challenge of evidence, Paul Barnett

Bethinking.org – various resources

Advanced

Jesus and the gospels: an introduction and survey, Craig Blomberg

Jesus and the eyewitnesses: the gospels as eyewitness testimony, Richard Bauckham

A new Eusebius: documents illustrating the history of the Church to AD337, J. Stevenson and W.H.C. Frend

An introduction to New Testament textual criticism, J. Harold Greenlee

A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament, B.M. Metzger

The Old Testament documents: are they reliable and relevant? Walter C. Kaiser Jr