

## Lesson 7: Historical Reliability of the N.T.- Internal & External Tests

### I. The Internal Evidence Test—Can we trust what the authors wrote?

#### A. The Benefit of the Doubt

Aristotle's Dictum: "The benefit of the doubt is to be given to the document and not to the critic."

#### B. Contradiction?

Law of Non-Contradiction

- If one statement absolutely contradicts another statement, without qualification, at least one of those statements cannot be true. But in order for one statement to absolutely contradict another, there must be no sense in which the statements can both be true. If there is a possible logical explanation, it is not a real contradiction.
- Example: When was Jesus Crucified?
- John 19:14 & Mark 15:25
- The list of alleged discrepancies gets shorter and shorter.

#### C. The Authors Based Their Accounts on Eyewitness Testimony.

- 2 Peter 1:16
- 1 John 1:1
- Luke 1:1-4
- This confirms their recall ability.

#### D. Contemporary Critics Were a Constant Corrective

The authors no doubt tried to be very careful with how they handled the facts. During the time they wrote, they had a lot of critics who would have loved to discredit their testimony. If the authors had made a mistake, the critics would have pointed it out.

E. The Authors Died for their Doctrine.

- People will sometimes die for what they believe to be true, but never for something they know to be false.
- If the Resurrection had not taken place, the disciples would have known it.
  - The authors willingly gave their lives for their belief in Christ's Resurrection.
  - This confirms their honesty.

**II. The External Evidence Test- Is There Outside Corroboration?**

A. Supporting Evidence from Other Early Christian Writers.

1. Papias, acquaintance of John the apostle: “The Elder the Apostle John used to say this also: ‘Mark, having been the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that he Peter mentioned, whether sayings or doings of Christ, not, however, in order.’”
2. Irenaeus, student of Polycarp (student of John):

“So firm is the ground upon which these Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and starting from these documents, each one of them endeavors to establish his own particular doctrine.”

B. Supporting Evidence from Early Non-Christian Historical Sources.

- We get the following picture if we combine the testimonies of Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, Thallus, and the Talmud—all contemporary non-Christian sources:
  1. . Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate at Passover time. (Tacitus, Thallus, Josephus, Talmud)
  2. He was believed by his disciples to have risen from the dead three days later. (Josephus)
  3. Jewish leaders charged Christ with sorcery and believed He was born of adultery. (Talmud)

4. The Judean sect of Christianity spread even to Rome. (Tacitus, Suetonius)
5. Nero and other Roman rulers bitterly persecuted and martyred early Christians. (Tacitus, Suetonius)
6. Early Christians denied polytheism, lived dedicated lives according to Christ's teaching, and worshipped Christ. (Pliny, Lucian)

### C. Archaeology as External Evidence

#### 1. Sir William Ramsay

- He went to study in the Bible lands as a liberal; fifteen years later he became a firm believer in a reliable New Testament.
- Ramsay said that Luke was unsurpassed as an historian.
- For example, when Luke made reference to 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 islands, he made no mistakes.

#### 2. The Pavement

- The place where Jesus was tried before Pilate.
- Once considered a myth because there was no record of it in Jewish or secular maps or history.
- It was finally found.
- When Titus destroyed Jerusalem, he built barracks there. When these were abandoned and had crumbled, other buildings were built on top. Archaeologists had dug down to the barracks, but no further until recently. When they did go underneath, they found the pavement.

#### 3. The Pool Of Bethesda

- Mentioned in John 5, as the place Jesus healed a crippled man.
- No record in Jewish or secular maps or histories; therefore considered a myth.

- In 1888, it was found while archaeologists were digging around the Church of St. Anne.

#### 4. Nelson Glueck

- Jewish, and universally esteemed as one of the greatest archaeologists.
- Said that no archaeology discovery has ever contradicted the Bible.