

HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE

SESSION 3: WHY TRUST THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPELS?

Why should Christians be able to defend the truths found in the Gospels?

What is “apologetics”?

Is the Content that Became Part of the Gospels Reliable?

According to skeptics, it is not possible for the content in the Gospels to have remained accurate throughout the three decades preceding the time when the Gospels were written. However:

- 1. People in oral cultures are capable of recalling and repeating oral histories accurately.
- 2. Christian communities worked together to keep the oral histories true to their sources.
- 3. Eyewitnesses circulating in the communities would have prevented widespread fabrications and distortions.

Were the Gospels Originally Anonymous?

According to skeptics, the New Testament Gospels originally circulated anonymously; in the second century, the names were connected to them to make them seem more authoritative. The evidences for this claim are that the oldest manuscripts lack titles and that, when titles begin to be added, the titles vary. However:

- 1. The oldest manuscripts have not survived sufficiently intact to know whether or not titles were included.
- 2. The oldest manuscripts that have survived sufficiently intact to know whether or not titles were included *do* include titles.

- 3. By the mid-second century, the New Testament Gospels had already spread across the Roman Empire; if titles had been added at that time, the ascribed authorship would have varied radically.
- 4. The variation in the Gospel titles is limited almost completely to "According to [author's name]" and "Gospel According to [author's name]."

Is the Resurrection an Un-Historical Event?

According to skeptics, an improbable event cannot be a historical event. However:

- 1. Historicity is not established by statistical probability but by reliable testimony.
- 2. The reliability of historical testimony is assessed by a variety of factors; these factors include:
 - (a) Multiple sources
 - (b) Independent sources
 - (c) Witnesses with little or nothing to gain
 - (d) Contextually credible sources
 - (e) Testimony recorded while eyewitnesses are alive
 - (f) Internally consistent sources

Location	Date	Content
1 Corinthians 15:3-7	Emerged as oral history in A.D. 30s, written in A.D. 55	Raised on the third day, many witnesses saw him alive
Mark 16:1-8 (adapted in Matthew 28:1-4 and Luke 24:1-4)	Written in A.D. 60s, based on oral history from Simon Peter	Raised on the third day, Mary Magdalene as first witness
John 20:1-18	Written in mid-to-late first century A.D., originated with John	Raised on the third day, Mary Magdalene as first witness
Papyrus Cairo 10759	Mid-second century, probably based on earlier tradition	Raised on the third day, Mary Magdalene as first witness