

New Testament Historical Reliability

The historical reliability of the NT is foundational to the Christian faith (1 Cor 15:13-19), for its authors depict Jesus as a man interacting with real people in real places nearly 2000 years ago. Examining what they wrote, we find the authors support their reliability claims with accurate historical details, and are well supported by other sources.

Evidence to die for!
Why did Jesus' friends die horrid deaths (crucifixion, burned at the stake, killed by lions) rather than deny Him? They believed His claims, and believed they were worth more than earthly life. (What did He do to convince them?)

Worship an executed criminal?
Why would respectable people (Roman tax collector, Doctor, Pharisee) establish a religion worshipping an executed Jewish criminal? This must be explained! (What happened after Jesus' death to motivate this?)

Internal Evidence (The authors claim reliability)

- Luke 1:3-4
- 2 Peter 1:16-19
- John 19:35
- John 21:24-25

External Evidence (Other sources support it)

- Josephus (Jewish historian for the Romans) wrote
 - ❖ Jesus was called the Christ
 - ❖ James was brother of Jesus, and was a believer
 - ❖ Jesus lived and was considered wise
 - ❖ Jesus did remarkable things and was a teacher
 - ❖ Jesus was accused by Pilate and condemned to be crucified
- Jewish literature
 - ❖ Calls Jesus false messiah, says He practiced magic, and that He was justly condemned to death
 - ❖ Negative info confirms key details of Christ's public career
- Pliny the Younger (Gov. of province of Bithynia ~110 AD) wrote
 - ❖ He crucified Christians
 - ❖ Christians honored Jesus as God
 - ❖ Christians had high moral standards
 - ❖ Christians refused to curse Christ under pain of death
- Archaeological discoveries support NT
 - ❖ Luke was a very accurate historian; e.g. 104 AD census form supports Luke 2:1
 - ❖ Dead sea scrolls show Gospels' language and customs are authentic to Jews of that time

Bibliographic Evidence (We have what they wrote)

- Immense manuscript evidence for NT
 - ❖ Most manuscripts within one or two generations of original
 - ❖ 25,000 whole and partial manuscripts
 - ❖ Earliest partial text is ~120 AD, ~40 yrs older than original
 - ❖ Best and most important dated around 350 AD
 - ❖ Could reconstruct NT from quotations of the early church fathers' writings (sermons, letters, commentaries, etc.)
- Authorship dates (within lifetime of eyewitnesses; could be earlier)
 - ❖ Mark – 70s AD
 - ❖ Matthew, Luke – 80s
 - ❖ John – 90s
- Manuscript evidence far better than any other ancient document
 - ❖ Iliad (next best attested text)
 - Written ~800BC
 - 643 Greek manuscripts, earliest 500 yrs after original
 - ❖ Most have 6-12 manuscripts 500-1000 yrs newer than original
- If NT considered unreliable, all other ancient documents must also be considered unreliable (Aristotle, Plato, Caesar, Sophocles)