

I. The gospels are historically accurate portraits of Jesus

A. The genre of the gospels

1. Both Luke and John explicitly claim to be writing history, not fiction. Luke states that his gospel is drawn from older written sources, eyewitness testimony, and personal investigation (Lk. 1:1-4) and John claims to be writing an narrative based on his own eyewitness accounts (John 21:24).
2. Many modern scholars –even skeptics- recognize that the gospels are ancient biographies, not mythology (See Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament*, p.64-65)

B. Confirmation of non-Christian writers

1. Non-Christian historians Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, and Suetonius (along with a few others) all mention Jesus.
2. These accounts confirm the major events in Jesus' life and several minor details about Jesus and the early church mentioned in the New Testament.

C. Manuscript reliability

1. We have far more manuscripts of the New Testament than any other ancient writing (NT: 24,000 manuscripts. Iliad: 600 manuscripts).
2. The gap between the writing of the NT and the first physical manuscripts is far smaller than for the Iliad (NT: 30-100 years. Iliad: 400 years).
3. The gap between the writing of the NT and the first complete physical manuscripts is far smaller than for the Iliad (NT: 260-300 years. Iliad: 1600 years)
4. The differences in the manuscripts are mostly minor and the abundance of manuscripts allows us to reconstruct the originals with high confidence.

D. Archeological evidence

1. No modern archeologist or historian denies that the setting of the New Testament gospels was the real, historic world of the 1st century Roman empire
2. Archeologists have unearthed numerous artifacts, inscriptions, burial boxes, and buildings which confirm major and minor details of the NT. For example, a small sample of the evidence includes: the burial box of the high priest Caiaphas (Matthew 26:57-67), the burial box of Jesus' brother James (Mark 6:3), the synagogue at Capernaum (Mark 1:21-28), Jacob's well (John 4), the pool at Bethesda (John 5:1-14), the pool at Siloam (John 9:1-14), the theater at Ephesus (Acts 19:29), and Herod's palace at Caesarea (Acts 23:33-35).

E. The eyewitness evidence

1. The gospels agree on all the major events of Jesus life, but show diversity in emphasis and content in minor details, consistent with eyewitness testimony
2. The gospels record events and sayings that would have been embarrassing to the early church and confusing to early Christians.
3. Several internal features indicate eyewitness testimony.
 - a. Proper names in the NT match the frequency of names used in Judea prior to (but not subsequent to) 70 A.D.
 - b. The canonical gospels mention far more geographical details with far greater frequency than later apocryphal gospels
 - c. Undesigned coincidences serve to support the independence and historical reliability of the gospels (John 1:44,6:5/Luke 9:10, Luke 23:3-4/John 18:33-38, Mark 14:57-58/John 2:19)

II. Jesus' claims would have been blasphemous for any mere human to make

- A. He claimed to be able to forgive sin (Mk. 2:1-12, Mt. 9:2-8, Lk. 5:18-26, John 8:1-11)
- B. He claimed that He was the only way to know God (Matt. 11:27, Lk. 10:22, Jn. 14:6)
- C. He claimed that he could heal the sick and raise the dead (Matt. 11:5, Lk. 7:22, Jn. 5:28-30),
- D. He claimed to have preexisted from all eternity (Lk. 10:18, Jn. 8:57-58)
- E. He claimed that we must love him more than our mother or father or children (Lk. 14:26)
- F. He claimed that we must love him more than our own life (Mt. 10:37, Lk. 14:27)
- G. He claimed that our eternal destiny depended on our response to him (Lk. 12:8, Jn. 5:24)
- H. He claimed that he would rise from the dead (Mt. 16:21, Mk. 10:34, Jn. 2:19)
- I. He claimed that he would return at the end of time to judge all of humanity (Mt. 19:28, Matt. 25:31-46, Jn. 5:28-30)

III. Therefore, Jesus is either an evil, megalomaniacal liar or God

Suggested discussion questions:

1. Were there any other reliable writings about Jesus that weren't included in the gospels?
2. How could the disciples of Jesus remember all of his teaching accurately?
3. Are the New Testament gospels the earliest source of information we have about Jesus?
4. Couldn't Jesus have just been sincerely mistaken?

Notes:

Recommend resources:

The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel – a great introduction to the historicity of the gospels

The New Testament Documents: are they reliable? By F.F. Bruce – a classic

On Youtube: "New Evidences the Gospels were Based on Eyewitness Accounts" by Dr. Peter Williams – 54 minute lecture. Absolutely fantastic.