

Defending the New Testament

1) Did they write down what happened?

The gospels claim to be eye-witness documents
E.g. Luke 1:1-4; 1 John 1:1-4; “We” in Acts 16:1-16

They are honest about the disciples’ mistakes
E.g. Mark 10:35-41; 14:66-72

They name names
E.g. Mark 5:22; 15:21

2) Was it copied accurately?

Chinese Whispers New Testament Style

3) Did it get lost in translation?



4) What's the corroborating evidence like?

Herod killing the boys	Matthew 2:16	Macrobius, <i>Saturnalia</i> 2:4:11
Archelaus ruler of Judea	Matthew 2:22	Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i> 2:94
Quirinius governor of Syria	Luke 2:2	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> , 17:355
Aretas king of the Nabateans	2 Cor. 11:32	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> , 18:109

Pliny, *Letters from Bithynia*, c. AD 112

It is my custom, lord emperor, to refer to you all questions whereof I am in doubt. Who can better guide me when I am at a stand, or enlighten me if I am in ignorance? In investigations of Christians I have never taken part, hence I do not know what is the crime usually punished or investigated, or what allowances are made. So I have had no little uncertainty whether there is any distinction of age, or whether the very weakest offenders are treated exactly like the stronger, whether pardon is given to those who repent, or whether a man who has once been a Christian gains nothing by having ceased to be such; whether punishment attaches to the mere name apart from secret crimes, or to the secret crimes connected with the name. Meantime this is the course I have taken with those who were accused before me as Christians. I asked them whether they were Christians, and if they confessed, I asked them a second and third time with threats of punishment. If they kept to it, I ordered them for execution; for I held no question that whatever it was that they admitted, in any case obstinacy and unbending Perversity deserve to be punished. There were others of the like insanity; but as these were Roman citizens, I noted them down to be sent to Rome. Before long, as is often the case, the mere fact that the charge was taken notice of made it commoner and several distinct cases arose. An unsigned paper was presented, which gave the names of many. As for those who said that they neither were nor ever had

been Christians, I thought it right to let them go, since they recited a prayer to the gods at my dictation, made supplication with incense and wine to your statue, which I had ordered to be brought into court for the purpose together with images of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ – things which (so it is said) those who are really Christians cannot be made to do. Others who were named by the informer said that they were Christians and then denied it, explaining that they had been, but had ceased to be such, some three years ago, some a good many years, and a few even twenty. All these too worshipped your statue and the images of the gods, and cursed Christ. They maintained, however that the amount of their fault or error had been this, that it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and recite by turns a form of words to Christ as a god; and that they bound themselves with an oath, not for any crime, but not to commit theft or robbery or adultery, not to break their word, and not to deny a deposit when demanded.

Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44, concerning the fire of Rome, AD 64

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.

5) Were the right books included?

Apostles writings seen as “Scripture”

- 1 Timothy 5:18 [Matthew 10:10]
- Polycarp to the Philippians (c. AD 120): “As it is said in the Scriptures, ‘be angry but do not sin’, and ‘do not let the sun set on your anger’” [Ephesians 4:26]
- Epistle of Barnabas (AD 70 – 130): “It is written, ‘many are called, but few are chosen’” [Matthew 22:14]

Apostolicity is the criterion

- Muratorian Fragment (c. AD 190) rejected Shepherd of Hermas because not apostolic
- Tertullian (AD 160 – 225), “We lay it down as our first position, that the evangelical Testament has apostles for its authors.”

Four gospels only

- Tatian’s *Diatesseron*
- Irenaeus, *Four winds!*

Dodgy dating excludes others

- Gospel of Thomas, c. AD 140
- Gospel of Judas, c. AD 160
- Gospel of Barnabas, late C16th!

6) Can we understand it?

Knowing truly vs. exhaustively

Speech-act Theory

The help of the Spirit!