



Facts of Our Faith

Many of us wonder about the accuracy of the stories of Jesus at some time in our lives. We hear people talking of history and hinting that the Bible is religious and therefore unreliable and that Jesus of Nazareth is a mythical figure, not in real history at all.

Rest assured, such assertions are absolute rubbish. Unfortunately most have been generated by so called theologians within mainstream churches. Real historians have watched in amazement as these self styled experts use suspect logic to de-mythologize the Bible, re-write what Jesus, in their mind, is more likely to have said through Textural Criticism, and attempt to remove historical certainty in favour of a nebulous possibility of a fable being behind what actually happened.

Textural Criticism

CS Lewis, author of many books on Christianity and Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English at the University of Cambridge, although probably best known for his Narnia Chronicles, such as *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, wrote about textural criticism. He pointed out that such people had always been 100% wrong whenever they tried to explain how or why he had written something.

He also pointed out that textural critics had thought that the big battle and the end of Mordor in the book of his friend Tolkien was an illusion to the atomic bomb. Lewis remembered his friend discussing *Lord of the Rings* and that battle in mid thirties, some ten years before the world had any idea of such devastation.

If textural critics couldn't accurately work out the whys and wherefores of what had been written in their languages, in their culture, in their time how can anyone have any confidence in their

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methods when they turn to examine writings in a different language, in a different culture and in a different time?

Historical Fact

Facts are established, even in a court of law, by witnesses; people who were there when an event happened, who could tell what happened, who did what and what was said, and even what happened afterwards. No one alive now was there when Jesus walked the streets of Galilee but there were many eyewitnesses that wrote down what they experienced.

Another thing that should not be forgotten is that there really is very little written material left from 2000 years ago. Unfortunately papyrus scrolls give a nice perfume in the desert air when burnt, and many valuable writings have been destroyed in some Bedouin night time camp fire. In fact there are only seven books directly from the time of Christ known to be in existence, a couple are memoirs of Roman servicemen from the army, another two are on horticulture, and another one is the amorous adventures of a seaman in a local port. This lack of originals is not unusual. For example we do not have the originals of most of Shakespeare's plays, and they are only a quarter of the age of the period we are considering. However there are copies, and copies of copies. So, no, we do not have the original gospels. But then nor do we have Plato or Socrates or Shakespeare's original works.

There are other things that can support what the witnesses said or wrote. The places where these events are supposed to have happened must be real, and those places must be capable of having those events. You can't have a full blown riot in the middle of a desert, such things happen in cities where there are crowds of people.

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Names of those involved must also be real, and the time the event was supposed to have happened must be reasonable.

Pliny the Younger was the Roman Governor of Bithynia under Trajan, the Roman Emperor. Pliny had a problem with Christians under his governorship and he wrote to Trajan for advice. He described some of the beliefs of these Christians, meeting on a certain day of the week, singing hymns to Christ as if to a God, and binding themselves to only deal honestly and openly with everyone.

Tacitus, some years earlier records in his *Historiae* the destruction of Jerusalem and in his *Annales* details Nero's persecution of Christians in the 50's. Tacitus evidently believed the Christians to be evil but he mentions Christ and his suffering under Pontius Pilate.

Josephus Flavius was a Jew made Roman citizen by his master. He records the history of his birth nation in his book the *Antiquities of the Jews*. Of the time of Christ He writes, *"About this time it appeared Jesus, a wise man, if indeed he should be called a man, for he was the doer of surprising works, and a teacher of such as except the truth with pleasure. He won many Jews and many Greeks. He was the so-called Messiah. Pilot, on the accusation of our leading men, condemned him to be crucified, but those who had first loved him did not give up. On the third day he appeared to them, living again, for God's prophets had foretold this, and countless other astonishing things about him. And the tribe of Christians, called after him, is still in existence."*

(Josephus *Antiquities* XVIII Chapter 3, paragraph 3)

Those three writings would be enough on their own to confirm the existence of any historical figure. The fact that there was a Christian church in existence at that time is another proof that there was indeed a Jesus Christ.

But over and above that historical evidence we have far better proof; the written evidence of eyewitnesses Matthew, Peter, and John. Is it generally accepted though not proven, that Peter related his experiences to a young man called Mark after whom that book in the Bible is named. A doctor and a historian later visited as many eyewitnesses he could find and put their accounts of Jesus together in one book His name was Luke.

In short, the life of Jesus Christ is confirmed in history without any reference to the Bible. However the Bible itself is of such historical accuracy that the four Gospels more than confirm a genuine historical Jesus, and they add a depth of knowledge and understanding His life that is beyond that of any other ancient historical figure.

To state, as some theologians have, that the historical Jesus is unknown and unknowable is a blatant lie; exposing those people to scorn, even among amateur historians.

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

The key element that makes Christianity different is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. All the eye witness accounts state that Jesus of Nazareth was killed, buried and that He rose from the dead.

One thing you don't do with a myth or created story is set it accurately in time and place. That is why fairy stories always start, "Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, in a far away land" Nor do such stories include real people who were still alive and very powerful, instead the characters are imaginary.

But the gospels give time and place and genuine people. And it should be born in mind that the art of story telling in the sense we know today wasn't to come into existence for over a thousand years.

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Is the resurrection impossible?

Well, what are the alternatives?

Jesus didn't die, he recovered in the cool tomb and escaped.

Consider what happened to Jesus.

He was beaten up

He received 39 lashes as 40 often killed

He was scalped

He had nails through his hands and his feet

He neither ate nor drank since the Last Supper

He had a spear thrust in his side blood and water flowed, not spurting, out.

His body was inspected by an experienced centurion to ensure it was dead

Without food or drink for at least two days, and without any medical treatment from the lashes, the scalping, the beatings, Jesus was supposed to have shifted a two ton stone with crippled hands and feet, and in spite of loss of blood and a punctured lung overpower the 15-18 trained armed guards and escaped into the capital city at feast time without any one noticing,

He was dead but maybe the disciples stole the body.

The records do not show the disciples as scheming villains out to create a new religion. The records show a defeated group of dispirited people. They didn't believe Mary or the disciples who had been on the road to Emmaus. Even after Jesus appeared to the other disciples Thomas still wouldn't believe it.

But there's two other things to be aware of:

1. It would take more than a few disciples to beat trained armed soldiers
2. But even if they did how could they carry the body through the most holy city at the time of it's most holy ceremony when no work was allowed to be done and no one see them?

And what of the soldiers?

The penalty for failing to guard is death. Yet here they were walking around Jerusalem claiming the body of Jesus was stolen. How can that have been?

If it were true that the body of Jesus had been stolen then the guards would have been executed. There is no way they could have been free spreading such a story, as the Bible says they were, unless the authorities believed that something supernatural had occurred, something so miraculous that no guard could be held responsible. The impossible had occurred; the prophesied resurrection had taken place. And the Scribes and Pharisees never tried to disprove the resurrection, they just tried to stop the spread of this new religion, Christianity.

And would those disciples be happy to face death for their story of the resurrection if they knew it was a lie?

Wrong Tomb?

One other possibility is that the disciples went to the wrong tomb, found it empty and then spread the story that Jesus had risen from the dead. If that were true then all the Pharisees had to do was take the disciples to the right tomb. They didn't. And that can only mean that the disciples were at the right tomb; and it was empty, and the Pharisees knew it.

As Brother Branham often pointed out the main difference between Christianity and other religions is that we have an empty tomb.

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In Islam there is a horse held outside the tomb of Mohammed awaiting his return. They have changed horses many times, and Mohammed still lies in his tomb. Buddha and Confucius are both still in their tombs. But the Christian tomb of Christ is empty.

Pure Logic

Jesus claimed to be God. He also said that if killed within three days He would rise from the dead.

Now there are only two possibilities, one that He was telling a lie, the other He was telling the truth.

If He was telling a lie then there are only two possibilities, one He knew He was lying; the other He didn't know He was lying.

If He didn't know He was lying He was on the same level as a man who says he is Julius Caesar, Napoleon or a poached egg.

The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus by asking if the people should pay tax to the Romans. If He said yes then He would lose His popularity. If He said no then He could be arrested for subversion.

Jesus told them to show Him a coin then asked whose head was on it. They said Caesar's. Jesus said, "Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." That sort of thinking is not a mad man, and nor did was any sign of madness noted by anyone, friend or foe.

Did Jesus know He was lying?

People only lie when they need to get out of trouble or when they expect to gain something through their lies. All Jesus got was a beating, crucifixion and death. No, he was not lying.

There only remains then one possibility. He was telling the truth.

All the evidence, all the logic, all history confirms, Jesus Christ rose from the dead. His resurrection is historical fact.