

EYE WITNESSES TO JESUS CHRIST

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In any investigation to determine whether something is true or false, an essential starting point is eye-witness evidence.

Eye-witness evidence is powerful, compelling and convincing. It is crucial in historical matters as in the case of Jesus Christ.

It is important to note that the four Gospels and their authorship is not in serious question; it does not matter who wrote them. The basic and important facts are the same. They have different authors but there is no evidence of collusion, and the question has to be asked, "Why four Gospels? What motivated the writers to pen them? How could it be that four writers writing at different times have the same details about Christ?"

There is an argument that the Church has written the Gospels to make them compatible, but the Gospels existed long before there was an established Church. The dates that the Gospels were written are from 40 AD to 115 AD. Ignatius died in 115 and yet quotes from the Gospel of Matthew which therefore gives us some idea of the date.

The areas of where the first Christians were gathered were all in the Roman Empire whether it was Jerusalem, Rome, Corinth or Galatia. In 325 AD, Constantine became a Christian or, more accurately, allowed Christianity, and it was after this that the Church was set up with its creeds and statements of belief.

Of course, there were gatherings of Christians before this. Ever since Pentecost, there were meetings in various parts of the Roman Empire and these groups of believers were subjected to torture and death by the Romans and there was no established Church or governing body. These gatherings have indeed been called churches but they had no set or established doctrines of faith. In fact, Christians were more concerned with survival from the evil and persecuting Romans and many believed that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent and, for these two reasons, writing the life of Christ was not paramount in their thinking

The other argument is that the Gospels are the only evidence of the life of Christ and, as they were written by Christians, they are biased. That argument is untenable since if Christians had been biased they would probably not, for example, have written about the failures of Peter, Thomas and Paul.

In addition, there are secular records and other contemporary documentary records that confirm New Testament events and the important details about Christ.

Irenaeus, writing about 180AD, tells us that Matthew published his Gospel in Hebrew at the time that Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome, around 61-62 AD, and setting up an assembly of believers there, which was called a church. But it was not a church in the sense that we understand the term today, but a group of believers without any affiliation to any overall body or authority. But Paul refers to many assemblies of believers as churches. The word church means 'called out ones' as Christians were called out of a life without Christ to a life with Him. This is why brethren call their gatherings assemblies because they are not affiliated with the established Church or any other body.

Irenaeus also tells us of Mark writing down Peter's sermons from the Day of Pentecost onwards, and of Luke writing the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles as he travelled with Paul, being an eye-witness to Paul's life and work.

Each Gospel has its own literary style which endorses non-collusion. Mark does not write about the birth of Christ or His early years but is only concerned with His three years of ministry.

In those days, biographers were concerned with historical accuracy since a biography was meaningless otherwise. This was the teaching of the Romans, Greeks and Jews.

Some say that Mark's Gospel was the first to be written and written about 40 years after the crucifixion and by that time, memory may have been faulty and historical facts may have become overlaid with mystic elements. In other words, the Gospels were written so long after the events that legend and distortion had taken place.

Even if they were written 40 years after the crucifixion, there would still have been eye-witnesses of the life of Jesus who would have served as correctives if false teaching was circulating.

There is evidence that the Gospels were written earlier than some state. In his second book, the Acts of the Apostles, Luke refers to his first book, his Gospel and he also incorporates part of the Gospel of Mark which therefore must have been written earlier. As Luke wrote the Acts on his travels with Paul and finished this book when Paul was in prison in Rome this means that the Acts cannot be dated any later than 62AD. And, therefore, Mark's Gospel was earlier than that. If Jesus was crucified in 30AD or 35 AD, we are talking about a gap from His death to the Gospel of less than 30 years. And if Paul was executed around 62AD, the epistles he wrote, which quote from the Gospels, must have been earlier indicating the Gospels were written earlier than some state.

Paul was a scholar and originally narrow minded and fastidious. He was not going to be conned. He knew Peter and other eye-witnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

They were eye-witnesses to the miracles and teaching of Christ as well.

Paul's epistles probably started around 40AD and they confirm the Gospels, Christian teaching, belief and practice.

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul lists eye-witnesses to the resurrection of Christ as well as His miracles and death. He tells of one group of 500 people who saw Christ after the resurrection and all at the same time. And most of them were still alive when Paul wrote this and there was no contradiction of what he said.

People believe in Alexander the Great and his deeds without demur. Yet he died in 325 years before the birth of Christ. People also believe the account that Alexander was homosexual.

Yet 325 years plus on, they will not believe the eye-witness accounts of Christ.

Julius Caesar said of Britain, "I came, I saw, I conquered" This was 44 years before the birth of Christ and people do not question Caesar's quote.

Yet they question things about Christ.

Let us consider the assumption that the Gospels were written a long time after the death of Christ, if that is so. The first accounts of the life and deeds of Alexander the Great written by Arrian and Plutarch were written 400 years after Alexander's death.

40 years after the death of Christ... unreliable. 400 years after the death of Alexander... reliable!!

But there is further evidence. If Jesus died in 30AD, Paul's conversion would be around 32AD. His

first meeting with Peter would have been around 35AD after Paul had spent three years in Arabia (Galatians 1, 17) and Peter and others were eye-witnesses to the death and resurrection of Christ only about five years earlier.

It has to be said here that non-Christian, and therefore the secular records of the Jews and the Romans, prove the existence of Jesus, where He was born, His deeds and preaching, details about His cousin John the Baptist, the arrest and illegal trial of Jesus (trials at night were illegal), His death and burial, how the tomb was sealed and guarded. This documentation was written at the time not months or years later and not written by Christians.

Flavius Josephus was born around 37AD, five to seven years after the crucifixion. He was a Jew but was employed by the Romans, as was Matthew the tax collector, and, consequently, may have been hated by his fellow Jews.

He wrote The Antiquities of the Jews largely from a secular point of view. What he writes tallies with the Old Testament; his work is a history of the Hebrews and the Jews. Therefore his secular writings agree with the Bible and he wrote this history book while employed by the Romans and one can conjecture that he would have to exercise care in what he wrote so as not to offend the Romans.

Josephus wrote about John the Baptist, and, as he was a careful historian, he would have collected irrefutable evidence and from eye-witnesses and what he writes agrees with the Gospels. And yet he was not a Christian!

This is what he wrote about Jesus Christ:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call Him (just a) man, for He was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth. He drew to Himself many Jews and Gentiles. He was the Christ. And Pilate condemned Him to the Cross and He (the Christ) appeared to His followers alive on the third day.

Note again that Josephus was not a Christian. He was a reliable historian, meticulous in his research. He would have known many who knew Christ. He openly writes of the wonderful works of Christ, of his teaching, death and resurrection. He also states who Jesus was.

But the records show that he was never converted to Christianity!

In his writings, however, he confirms the fundamental teaching of the Gospels and the Epistles.

Just as people will believe all about Alexander the Great, but balk at the evidence of Jesus Christ, and some do say that Josephus's work was tampered with. When there is evidence about Christ, someone always has to both dismiss and ridicule it.

Books about history were closely guarded and highly valued and the manuscript of Josephus's work pre-dates the established church and shows no interference.

One can see to what lengths people will go to attack Christianity.

Other Roman records give details of the trial of Jesus which details are not in the New Testament. They also record that 40 days after the ascension, 3000 Jews were converted on the Day of Pentecost which confirms Acts 2. The Jews now admitted that Jesus Christ was the Son of God explaining that He must be or else He could not have performed the miracles or been raised from the dead. Remember that a month or so earlier they had been shouting, "Crucify Him!".

Off we go again with another claim. This time it is that Jesus did not die but was drugged to give the appearance of death and that He died much later, probably of old age having married Mary Magdalene and had children with her.

The Romans and Jews were ultra-particular about historical and factual details. If Jesus had survived the Cross and lived for another 40 years it would be recorded somewhere. If the death and resurrection of Christ was fraudulent, it would have been exposed two centuries ago.

As to his 'marriage' to Mary Magdalene this is against Scripture and where does this supposition come from? Why have people invented this? It must be to diminish Christ and Christians!

But back to serious things and more evidence. History reveals that the Romans rounded up Christians to kill them. They were burned to death, crucified or thrown to the lions and yet the history states that Christians were gentle and peaceable people. As with Herod and the slaughter of the innocents, Rome wanted to eliminate people by killing all eye-witnesses to the resurrection of Christ.

Christians did not plan an uprising or the overthrow of the Romans but helped all kinds of people in an undemonstrative way. Yet the other reason for the Romans wanting to exterminate them was because they were becoming more popular than the Romans.

Eye-witnesses and supporting evidence is powerful, compelling and convincing. It is crucial in historical matters such as i concerning the life of Christ.

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