

So far this month in this Apologetics series we have looked at the evidence for the reliability of the Biblical texts. When we judge the historical documents (Biblical New Testament) by the standard set for all ancient documents, we find that they were early and thoughtfully copied. In this article we will discuss the testimony the documents give. Again, we use tests from the secular world. In the legal world The McCoskey-Shoenberg standard is used to determine if witnesses are lying. There are four tests: What is the character of the witness? What are the external pressures to lie? Is the testimony consistent within itself? Is there external evidence to show the witness is lying?

First the character of the witnesses: The evidence lies squarely with the witnesses of Jesus life. In the texts themselves they say such things as “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” (2 Peter 1:16, ESV). There is no evidence that they were pathological liars, that they had criminal records, that they were untrustworthy. Here also we come down on the principal that the burden falls on whoever wishes to show that a witness is *not* telling the truth.

External pressures are the things that would prompt a normally truthful witness to lie. When we look at the culture of the day, we find that everything in the pagan and Jewish context would have pushed the witnesses in the opposite direction. By insisting that Jesus was a Divine Messiah they would have alienated both the Jews and the Romans. They would have lost their social status, their possessions, and ultimately their lives. Which is exactly what we see. It has been said that the disciples fabricated what they wrote because of Jesus powerful influence over them. We can put this to rest by simply showing Jesus himself spoke harshly about liars. He in fact, taught that lying was of the Devil (John 8:44).

Are the Gospels internally consistent? When we look at the historical documents, we find exactly what we expect to find in eyewitness testimony. We find four different accounts of Jesus life. They are not identical, an indicator of unreliability. Each writer tells the accounts from their own perspective. None of the Gospels claim a complete account of Jesus life. So called contradictions can often be harmonized with each other and often come from a misunderstanding of the nature of logical contradiction. Also, the witnesses often put themselves in a bad light. One only must look at the accounts of Peter to see this at work. These facts give these historical documents the ring of truth.

Is there external evidence to show the witnesses were lying? There are no accounts from the time that disagree with the Gospels. Of all people the Jews had the most reason for disagreement with what was written. Jesus life was lived in the open, in public. We find no accounts that disagree with what was said by people who had motive and opportunity to do so. The community leaders were in the ideal position to speak and write against the documents. Yet no accounts exist. Modern archaeology has also confirmed again and again the reliability of the New Testament geography, chronology, and general history. One example is all an article of this length will permit. Prior to 1961, many people claimed that Pontius Pilate was a creation of the Gospel writers. In that year, archeologists discovered a “Pilate Inscription”. This inscription speaks of a temple dedicated to Caesar, built by Pilate.

We find, once again, that testing the historical documents using secular tests comes out with a positive result. The Gospels convey an accurate account of Jesus life.

There are those who say, “If God would only reveal himself with a miracle, I’d believe in him.” To which I say, He has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. We have documented evidence of miracles including his resurrection from the dead. In fact, the case for the resurrection is so strong that those who refuse to face the evidence would find a way to discount even a modern miracle. As Jesus himself said, “If they do not

hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.” (Luke 16:31, ESV). But more on the resurrection of Jesus next time.