

**Majority of this information is from "I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist"*

If you were God, how would you communicate? (written communication)

That's a silly question, but it makes you think through the goodness of God in communicating through the **written form**. Everybody has the same communication from God. The same written Word. Nobody can rightly claim, "God said this," and "God said that," except for what's in the written communication that we have. You see cults of Christianity, like Mormonism, come out of happenings like that.

Written language is a precise medium of communication that can easily be duplicated and passed on to succeeding generations, yet it also can be easily ignored by those who will to reject what it says.

Would you appear to each one of us and make yourself plainly known?

He did with Adam and Eve, but then there was the fall. God and man were separated, but we know that it was God's plan to come and bridge that separation, making a way where there shouldn't be a way. So, if you have given your creation free will, the ability to freely choose or not to choose, how would you communicate to your creation?

C.S. Lewis, in his "Screwtape Letters" tells that if God appeared to each one of us, it might interfere with our free will. If you think about Philippians 2:10-11, at the sight of Jesus, every knee WILL bow...but for many it will be too late. It reminds me of Luke 16 with Lazarus and the rich man. Verses 27-31 shows us everything we are talking about.

Written language is a precise medium of communication that can easily be duplicated and passed on to succeeding generations, yet it also can be easily ignored by those who freely decide that they don't want to be bothered with God.

I have once heard someone say that if you want to outlive your life, write. We can still hear from the heart and mind of William Shakespeare and Charles Spurgeon and Maya Angelou and C.S. Lewis. They can still inspire us and teach us and train us and guide us and make us laugh and make us cry and entertain us, and they can still speak...though they are all gone.

So, inspired writings, a book would work as a valid but not overpowering means of communication from God that would last throughout generations.

But whose book? Has God communicated through the book of the Jews, the book of the Christians, or the book of the Muslims? How are we supposed to tell whose book, if any, is really a message from God?

MIRACLES

In the past, when a king sent a message, there had to be a form of authentication, proving that that communication really was from him. The King's seal...It had to be unusual and unique, easily recognizable, and it had to be something only the king possessed.

God's form of authenticating His message is miracles. A miracle is an act of God, to confirm the Word of God, through a messenger of God.

The scope of this class does not allow us time to discuss miracles in detail, but having the arguments for the existence of God, the most basic argument you need to know for miracles is: Since God exists, miracles are possible.

Why don't we see miracles as normative today?

If you think through the history of the Bible, there are three eras where miracles were more normative occurrences...were more concentrated during these time periods.

1. Moses (*Exodus 4:1-9*)
2. Prophets (*1 Kings 17:17-24, 18:36-39; 2 Kings 1:10*)
3. Jesus and Apostles (*John 3:2; Luke 7:22; 2 Cor. 12:12*)

What do these time periods have in common? God's Word was being revealed and confirmed.

Why don't we see miracles as normative today? Because if the Bible is true and complete, God is not confirming any new revelation. There is no new word from God that needs to be confirmed by God.

So, now that we have established that God has spoken through written communication, we will build a case for the validity of Christianity by observing its writing, specifically the validity of the New Testament. Simply stated, if what it contains is accurate and contains the truth, Christianity is true.

What sets Christianity apart from the other theistic religions? (JESUS)

Why is it imperative to show the validity of the New Testament when defending Christianity? (The New Testament is the basis of Christianity and gives the teachings of Jesus and about Jesus.)

In our case for the validity of Christianity, we will start with testimony about Jesus.

Do we have early testimony about Jesus?

Flavius Josephus, who was a Jewish historian, in *Antiquities of the Jews* (which was finished in A.D. 93), wrote these words: *“At this time [the time of Pilate] there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he has appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”*

In Josephus we have more than one first-century reference to Jesus and events and details about his life.

How many non-Christian sources are there that mention Jesus?

Including Josephus, there are ten known non-Christian writers who mention Jesus within 150 years of his life. By contrast, over the same 150 years, there are nine non-Christian sources who mention Tiberius Caesar, the Roman emperor at the time of Jesus. So, discounting all the Christian sources, Jesus is actually mentioned by one more source than the Roman emperor. If you include the Christian sources, authors mentioning Jesus outnumber those mentioning Tiberius 43 to 10! Some of these non-Christian sources such as Celsus, Tacitus, and the Jewish Talmud could be considered anti-Christian sources.

If you would like to read more of these sources, visit

<https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/is-there-any-evidence-for-jesus-outside-the-bible/>

Piecing together all 10 non-Christian references, we see:

1. Jesus lived during the time of Tiberius Caesar.
2. He lived a virtuous life.
3. He was a wonder-worker.
4. He had a brother named James.
5. He was acclaimed to be the Messiah.
6. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
7. He was crucified on the eve of the Passover.
8. Darkness and an earthquake occurred when he died.
9. His disciples believed he rose from the dead.
10. His disciples were willing to die for their belief.
11. Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome.
12. His disciples denied the Roman gods and worshipped Jesus as God.

In light of these non-Christian references, the theory that Jesus never existed is clearly unreasonable. How could non-Christian writers collectively reveal a storyline congruent with the New Testament if Jesus never existed?

What does this say about the New Testament? On the face of it, non-Christian sources actually affirm the validity of the New Testament...at least the basic storyline. And, while the non-Christian sources don't believe in the resurrection, they claim that the disciples did.

Since, as we have seen, the existence of God and the possibility of miracles is firmly established through natural revelation, and the general story of Christ and the early church is affirmed through non-Christian sources, did the miracles of Christ actually occur as the disciples claim? Do the New Testament documents record actual history? Could it be that they are not biased religious writings full of myths and fables as many in our modern world assume, but instead describe events that actually occurred around 2,000 years ago? If so, we will be well on our way to discovering if Christianity is true.

To see if the New Testament is a record of actual history, we need to answer two questions concerning the documents that comprise the New Testament:

1. Do we have accurate copies of the original documents that were written down in the first century?
2. Do those documents speak truth?

Here is what we are going to see...we have:

- More Manuscripts
- Earlier Manuscripts
- More Abundantly Supported Manuscripts

How many of the original manuscripts do we have? (Zero) Is this a problem? (No)

All significant literature from the ancient world is reconstructed into its original form by comparing the manuscripts that survive.

The New Testament documents have more manuscripts, earlier manuscripts, and more abundantly supported manuscripts than the best ten pieces of classical literature combined.

More Manuscripts

- 5,800 Greek
- 20,000 in other languages
- The next closest work in the ancient world is the Iliad by Homer, with 1,800 manuscripts.
- Most other ancient works survive on fewer than a dozen manuscripts, yet few historians question the historicity of the events those works describe.

Earlier Manuscripts

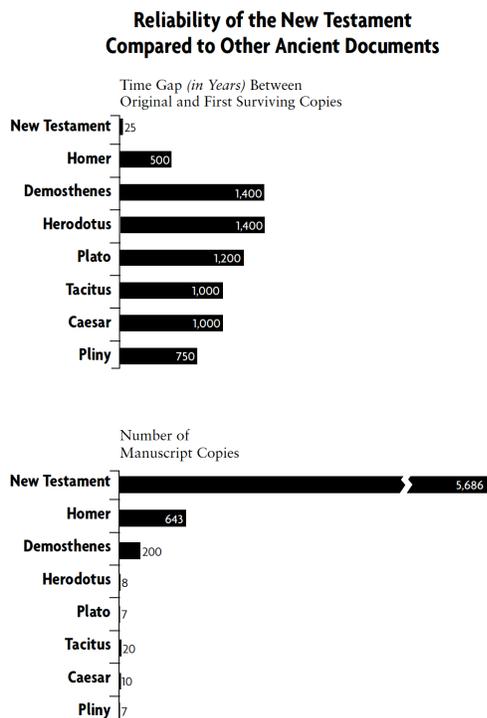
- John Rylands Fragment (A.D. 117-138)
- Codex Vaticanus (A.D. 325)
- Codex Sinaiticus (A.D. 340)

The earliest undisputed manuscript is a segment of John 18:31-33, 37-38 known as the John Rylands fragment (because it is housed in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England). Scholars date it between A.D. 117-138, but some say it is even earlier.

Even earlier than the John Rylands fragment are nine disputed fragments that date from A.D. 50-70, found with the Dead Sea Scrolls. Even if the John Rylands fragment is the earliest, it is still vastly shorter than anything else from the ancient world. The Iliad has the next shortest gap at about 500 years; most other ancient works are 1,000 years or more from the original. The New Testament gap is about 25 years and maybe less.

How old are the oldest surviving manuscripts of New Testament books? Manuscripts that are largely complete New Testament books survive from about A.D. 200.

How about the oldest manuscripts of most of the New Testament? Most of the New Testament, including all of the Gospels, survives from 250, and a manuscript of the vast majority of the New Testament called Codex Vaticanus survives from about 325. Codex Sinaiticus is a complete manuscript that survives from that century (340). And those manuscripts have spelling and punctuation characteristics that suggest that they are in a family of manuscripts that can be traced back to A.D. 100-150.



More Abundantly Supported Manuscripts

- Early Church Fathers
- Quoted all but 11 verses of the New Testament

Beginning in February of A.D. 303, the Roman emperor Diocletian ordered three edicts of persecution upon Christians because he believed the existence of Christianity was breaking the covenant between Rome and her gods. The edicts called for the destruction of churches, manuscripts, books, and the killing of Christians.

Hundreds if not thousands of manuscripts were destroyed across the Roman Empire during this persecution, which lasted until A.D. 311. But if Diocletian had succeeded in wiping out every biblical manuscript off the face of the earth, he could not have destroyed our ability to reconstruct the New Testament. Why? (Because of the early church fathers.)

The early church fathers - men of the second and third centuries such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, and others - quoted the New Testament some 36,289 times. Indeed, counting all the Fathers, there are some one million citations of the New Testament. In other words, you could go down to your local library, check out the works of the early church fathers, and read basically the entire New Testament from just their quotations of it. They quote all but 11 verses from the New Testament.

We not only have thousands of manuscripts but thousands of quotations from those manuscripts. This makes reconstruction of the original text virtually certain.

We have seen that the New Testament documents are early, so they meet historical test #1, but what about historical test #2? Do the New Testament documents speak truth?

We will start with eyewitness testimony.

- Let's begin by looking at the claims of the NT writers.
- Acts 2:32 - This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.
- Acts 3:15 - and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.
- Acts 4:18-20 - **18** So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. **19** But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, **20** for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."
- Acts 5:30-32 - **30** The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. **31** God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. **32** And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

- Acts 10:39-40 - **39** And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, **40** but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear,
- 1 Cor. 15:3-8 - **3** For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, **4** that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, **5** and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. **6** Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. **7** Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. **8** Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.
- 1 Peter 5:1 - So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:
- 2 Peter 1:16 - 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.
- John 19:33-35 - **33** But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. **34** But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. **35** He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.
- John 20:24-30 - **24** Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin,^[a] was not with them when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” **26** Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” **27** Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” **28** Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” **29** Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” **30** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;
- 1 John 1:1-2 - That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2** the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—
- Luke 1:1-2 - Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, **2** just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,

- Hebrews 2:3-4 - **3** how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, **4** while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Peter, Paul, and John all claim to be eyewitnesses, and Luke and the writer of Hebrews claim to be informed by eyewitnesses. In addition, the New Testament writers name others who saw the resurrection (the 12 apostles, James, and himself) and claims that there were more than 500 others. Matthew and Luke confirm the appearances to the apostles. All four Gospels mention the women as eyewitnesses, with Mark identifying them as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. Luke adds Joanna. That's four more. Acts 1 also reveals that Joseph called Barsabbas was an eyewitness.

It is clear that the apostles claimed to be eyewitnesses.

But, how do we know that the New Testament writers didn't exaggerate or embellish what they say they saw?

1. The New Testament writers included embarrassing details about themselves.

- They are dim-witted
- They are uncaring
- They are rebuked
- They are cowards
- They are doubters

2. The New Testament writers included embarrassing details and difficult sayings of Jesus.

- Jesus:
 - Is considered "out of his mind" by his family (Mark 3:21, 31)
 - Is not believed by his own brothers (John 7:5)
 - Is thought to be a deceiver (John 7:12)
 - Is deserted by many of his followers (John 6:66)
 - Turns off "Jews who had believed in him" (John 8:30-31) to the point that they want to stone him (vs. 59)
 - Is called a drunkard (Mat 11:19)
 - Is called demon-possessed (Mark 3:22; John 7:20, 8:48)
 - Is called a madman (John 10:20)
 - Has his feet wiped with the hair of a prostitute (Luke 7:36-39)
 - Is crucified by the Jews and Romans, despite the fact that "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse" (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13)
- John 6:53, 66 - **53** So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. **66** After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

3. The New Testament writers left in demanding sayings of Jesus.

For instance, often Jesus makes the demands of the law more strict, like in the sermon on the mount. (Matthew 5:28, 32, 39-42, 44-45) “Be perfect...as your heavenly Father is perfect. (5:48)

If the disciples, who were Jews, were making this up, they wouldn't have made it harder to obey the law, they would have made it easier.

4. The New Testament writers carefully distinguished Jesus' words from their own.

It would have been easy for the NT writers to solve first century theological disputes by putting words into Jesus' mouth. If they were making up this story, they would have made Jesus say things that would have cleared up disputes and to make people see things their way. (1 Cor. 7:10-12)

5. The New Testament writers included events related to the resurrection that they would not have invented.

- The burial of Jesus
- The first witnesses
- The conversion of priests
- The explanation of the Jews

6. The New Testament writers include more than thirty historically confirmed people in their writings.

The NT documents cannot have been invented because they contain too many historically confirmed characters. The NT writers would have blown their credibility with their contemporary audiences by implicating real people in a fictional story, especially people of great notoriety and power.

There is no way the NT writers could have gotten away with writing outright lies about Pilate, Caiaphas, Festus, Felix, and the entire Herodian bloodline.

7. The New Testament writers include divergent details.

Slightly divergent details with the same storyline is strong evidence in a court of law. If people use the exact same words it is collusion. Divergent details adds credibility to eyewitnesses and truthfulness of their accounts. It's clear they didn't get together to smooth out their testimony, but were reporting what actually happened.

8. The New Testament writers challenge their readers to check out verifiable facts, even facts about miracles.

2 Cor. 12:12 – *“The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.”* Why would Paul write this to the Corinthians unless he really had done miracles for them? He would have destroyed his credibility completely by asking them to remember miracles that he never did for them.

9. The New Testament writers describe miracles like other historical events: with simple, unembellished accounts.

Embellished and extravagant details are strong signs that a historical account has legendary elements. For example, there’s a legendary account of Christ’s resurrection that was written more than 100 years after the actual event. It is from the apocryphal forgery known as the Gospel of Peter, and it goes like this:

Early in the morning, as the Sabbath dawned, there came a large crowd from Jerusalem and the surrounding areas to see the sealed tomb. But during the night before the Lord’s day dawned, as the soldiers were keeping guard two by two in every watch, there came a great sound in the sky, and they saw the heavens opened and two men descend shining with a great light, and they drew near to the tomb. The stone which had been set on the door rolled away by itself and moved to one side, and the tomb was opened and both of the young men went in. Now when these soldiers saw that, they woke up the centurion and the elders (for they also were there keeping watch). While they were yet telling them the things which they had seen, they saw three men come out of the tomb, two of them sustaining the other one, and a cross following after them. The heads of the two they saw had heads that reached up to heaven, but the head of him that was led by them went beyond heaven. And they heard a voice out of the heavens saying, “Have you preached unto them that sleep?” The answer that was heard from the cross was, “Yes!”¹

10. The New Testament writers abandoned their long-held sacred beliefs and practices, adopted new ones, and did not deny their testimony under persecution or threat of death.

- The animal sacrificial system
- The binding supremacy of the Law of Moses
- Strict Monotheism
- The Sabbath
- Belief in a conquering Messiah

They instituted new practices:

- Sunday
- Baptism
- Communion

¹ The Gospel of Peter. See Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 80-81.

Pre-Resurrection Belief	Post-Resurrection Belief
Animal sacrifice	Unnecessary because of Christ's sacrifice
Binding Law of Moses	Nonbinding because it was fulfilled by Christ's life
Strict monotheism	Trinity (three persons in one divine essence)
The Sabbath	Replaced by Sunday worship
Conquering Messiah	Sacrificial Messiah (he'll conquer when he returns)
Circumcision	Replaced by baptism and Communion

DISCOVERING THE CANON

How do we know we have the correct writings/books in our New Testament?

How do we know that the books we have were actually written by apostles or confirmed by apostles?

Well, you could trust the early councils who looked at the evidence, but what did they look at?

Apostolic proximity, circulation and acceptance by the early church

We will look at apostolic proximity. Who were the apostles, who was close to them, and how do we know what they actually wrote?

The early church fathers help us answer that question. Why? (Because they were a lot closer to the events than we are.)

While there was some initial controversy over some of the minor books (Philemon, 3 John, and James), the early church fathers immediately recognized the Gospels and major Epistles as divinely inspired.

There is an unbroken chain of testimony from the apostles to the early church fathers regarding the authorship and authenticity of the New Testament books.

- The Apostle John had a disciple named Polycarp (A.D. 69-155), who had a disciple named Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202).
 - Polycarp and Irenaeus collectively quote 23 of the 27 NT books as if they are authentic - and in some cases specifically say they are authentic.
 - Irenaeus explicitly affirms the authorship of all four Gospels.
 - Furthermore, through the historian Eusebius, we know that Papias (60-120) affirmed the authorship of Matthew and Mark.
 - And virtually no one doubts the authorship of the major works of Paul.

- While the major works of the NT were immediately seen as authentic by the early church fathers, most of the NT was accepted before A.D. 200, and all of it was officially and finally recognized as authentic by the Council of Hippo in 393.
 - Why did the recognition take so long?
 - Perhaps because Christianity was generally illegal in the Roman empire until 313.
 - The important thing is, once all the evidence was on the table, all 27 NT books, and only those 27 books, were recognized as authentic.

What about errors?

Modern textual critics (like Bart Ehrman) will say that there are thousands of variations (or mistakes...200,000) within the NT manuscripts. This is misleading. For example, one punctuation mistake copied hundreds of times is referred by them as hundreds of errors. In reality, this is one variation, not hundreds or thousands.

Simply, no textual variant affects any essential Christian doctrine.

This is why it is important to look at footnotes in your Bible. It will always let you know if something is not found in early manuscripts, etc. Some Christians wrongly claim that translations like the ESV and others are sinning because it will take out certain passages that they have always known to be in the KJV, when in reality, they are being more accurate with their translations and relying on earlier copies of the manuscripts.

CONCLUSION

With all that being said, you can be virtually certain that when you open up your Bible, you are reading the Words of God about His work in real space and time. Jesus really lived. Jesus really died. Jesus really rose from the dead. You and I really can be saved. His Words really are true.