

**ARE THE GOSPELS RELIABLE HISTORY - INTRODUCTION (Video 4:48)****DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How would you respond to this objection: “The Bible is just a book written by men, and men make mistakes”?
2. Why do atheists attack the validity of Scripture? What are they hoping to accomplish?
3. What attacks on the Bible have you heard? What objections to the Bible have you had a difficult time responding to?
4. Which of the following questions about evidence interests you the most? Why?
  - Can we trust the witnesses?
  - Has the testimony changed?
  - Is there corroborating evidence?
5. Are the three questions above adequate to investigate the reliability of the Gospels? Would you add any other criteria for investigation?
6. Does it bother you that we don’t have any of the original manuscripts of the New Testament? Why or why not?
7. How would you respond to this objection: “The Bible is full of contradictions. Why trust in a book that’s so inconsistent and unreliable?”
8. Read Matthew 27:1–10 and Acts 1:15–19.
  - According to these passages, how did Judas die? Some say these passages contradict each other. How do these passages harmonize and give us a complete picture of what happened to Judas?
9. Have you had difficulties with harmonizing Biblical passages before? If yes, which passages were a challenge? How did you work through the challenge?
10. What led you to trust the witness of the Gospel writers? Why do you trust that the Bible is true?

**ACTION POINTS:**

1. This week read “A Solution to the Genealogy Problem in the Gospels” by Robby Lashua:  
<https://www.str.org/w/a-solution-to-the-genealogy-problem-in-the-gospels>
2. This week read “Textual Variants: It’s the Nature, Not the Number, That Matters” by Tim Barnett:  
<https://www.str.org/w/textual-variants-it-s-the-nature-not-the-number-that-matters>

**ARE THE GOSPELS RELIABLE HISTORY - CAN THE WITNESSES BE TRUSTED? (Video 7:28)****DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. The Gospel accounts sound like written history. Read these passages and make a list of the historical markers in these Scriptures. Look for names, places, titles, and time markers.
  - Matthew 2:1–9
  - Mark 5:1–20
  - Luke 2:1–5
  - John 4:46–54
2. The writers of the New Testament claim to be eyewitnesses that proclaim the things they saw and heard.
  - One of the evidences for the Gospels being written by eyewitnesses is undesigned coincidences. This means the Gospels reinforce each other in such a way that rules out the possibility of them being fabricated. They fit together, even in obscure details. Let's look at some.
    - Read Matthew 14:1–2. How did Matthew know what Herod said to his servants?  
Read Luke 8:3 to find the answer.
    - Read Luke 9:35–36. Why did John, James, and Peter keep silent about this event?  
Read Mark 9:9 for the answer.
  - The way the Gospels reinforce one another with arbitrary details is evidence that they are eyewitness testimony. The only other option would be that the Gospels were cleverly crafted by geniuses who humbly didn't want to point out the intricate details they embedded in the text. Ask yourself, were the disciples humble, deceptive geniuses or eyewitnesses? I think we should go with the latter.
3. Embarrassing details are a criterion of finding truthfulness in historical documents. Normally, when people make up stories, they will embellish or lie to make themselves or their cause look better. It would be strange for someone to make up a lie or story that causes them to lose credibility, but that is precisely what we find in the Gospels. These embarrassing details are evidence that the New Testament writers were telling the truth.
  - Read through the following Scriptures that have embarrassing details in them. Discuss why it would be embarrassing to write these details if the disciples were merely making up the story.
    - John 7:1–5 & Mark 3:20–21
    - Matthew 11:1–6
    - Matthew 28:16–17
    - Mark 13:32
    - Matthew 16:21–23
    - Mark 9:33–34
    - Luke 24:6–11
4. Which of these three evidences do you find the strongest? Why?
  - The Gospel accounts sound like written history.
  - The Gospel accounts were written by eyewitnesses.
  - The Gospel accounts have embarrassing details in them.

**ACTION POINTS:**

1. This week read “The Crucifixion Stories Are Embarrassing, and That’s a Good Thing” by Robby Lashua:  
<https://www.str.org/w/the-crucifixion-stories-are-embarrassing-and-that-s-a-good-thing>
2. This week read “The Gospels Get It Right When It Counts—and When It Doesn’t” by Tim Barnett:  
<https://www.str.org/w/the-gospels-get-it-right-when-it-counts-and-when-it-doesn-t>

**ARE THE GOSPELS RELIABLE HISTORY - HAS THE TESTIMONY BEEN CHANGED?** (Video 8:06)**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why is the telephone game a poor analogy for Bible transmission (copying the texts of Scripture throughout history)?
2. In your own words, describe how scholars reconstruct what the original ancient documents of the New Testament said.
3. What would motivate people to make the earliest copies of the New Testament?
4. Did Christians or non-Christians make the copies of the earliest New Testament documents?
5. Would the copying process of New Testament documents be haphazard and sloppy, or focused and precise?
6. Why is it important to have many copies of an ancient text for comparison?
7. Why is it important for the copies of an ancient text to be dated close to the time of the original?
8. Does it make you uneasy that there are so many textual variants in the New Testament documents? Why or why not?
9. If you were a college student who heard about textual variants for the first time from your atheist professor, how could that shake your faith?
10. What is a good reason for why we don't need to be concerned about the number of textual variants found in the Gospels?
11. Who do you need to talk with about textual variants to prepare them for the "atheist professor"?
12. Look at the following passages:
  - Mark 16:9–20
  - John 7:53–8:11
  - Does your Bible have brackets or a footnote for these passages?
  - Read these passages and ask, What core doctrines of Christianity are lost if these two passages are not in the original manuscripts of the Bible? Which following category do these textual variants fall into?
  - Variations that do not matter

**ACTION POINTS:**

1. See "Explain Textual Criticism to Your Friends" by Amy Hall, and read the Daniel Wallace interview referenced within it: <https://www.str.org/w/explain-textual-criticism-to-your-friends>
2. Listen to "The Telephone Game and Manuscript Transmission" by Greg Koukl: <https://www.str.org/w/the-telephone-game-and-manuscript-transmission>

**ARE THE GOSPELS RELIABLE HISTORY - IS THERE CORROBORATING EVIDENCE? (Video 9:03)****DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why is it important that we have multiple non-Christian sources that mention details of Jesus' life and death?
2. What can we deduce about the details of Jesus' life mentioned from non-Christian sources, considering that these were hostile witnesses to the Christian cause?
3. Which of the listed facts about Jesus, from non-Christian sources, is the most interesting to you? Why?
4. What if we didn't have any non-Christian sources? Would that undermine the reliability of the Gospels? Why or why not?
5. Archeology that corroborates the Bible:
  - Read these Scriptures about Caiaphas.
  - Matthew 26:3–5
  - Matthew 26:57–61
  - Acts 4:5–7
  - After reading, watch this short clip on the Caiaphas Ossuary:  
<https://youtu.be/wukdd9o5MZw?si=jkvJlW2wNc2OTHfQ&t=2288>
  - Read these Scriptures about Pilate.
  - Luke 3:1
  - John 18:28–19:15
  - After reading, watch this short clip on the Pilate coins, the Pilate Stone, and the Pilate Ring:  
[https://youtu.be/wukdd9o5MZw?si=aJ9xj\\_inJYVdBl4I&t=2382](https://youtu.be/wukdd9o5MZw?si=aJ9xj_inJYVdBl4I&t=2382)
  - Read these Scriptures about James.
  - Matthew 13:53–56
  - John 7:1–5
  - Acts 1:12–14 (note especially verse 14)
  - 1 Corinthians 15:7
  - After reading, watch this short clip on the James Ossuary:  
[https://youtu.be/wukdd9o5MZw?si=871dcOGHolGhb\\_up&t=2585](https://youtu.be/wukdd9o5MZw?si=871dcOGHolGhb_up&t=2585)
6. What biblical archeological findings have been most impactful to you?
7. What does biblical archeology help us to establish about the reliability of the Bible?
8. What can't archeology verify about the Bible?
9. How well do religious holy books, other than the Bible, match up with archeology as corroborating evidence (Book of Mormon, the Quran, etc.)?

**ACTION POINTS:**

1. Listen to Robby Lashua interview Archeologist Titus Kennedy on "Excavating the Evidence for Jesus":  
<https://www.str.org/w/interview-titus-kennedy-excavating-the-evidence-for-jesus>

**ARE THE GOSPELS RELIABLE HISTORY - ANSWERING OBJECTIONS (Video 8:09)****DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Has anyone ever told you, “The Bible is not reliable because it was written by men”? If so, how did you respond?
2. The inerrancy of Scripture is important, but why is it a wiser strategy to argue for the historical reliability of the Gospels with non-believers, instead of arguing over the inerrancy of Scripture?
3. Let’s practice. If someone says, “The Bible is flawed because it is a book written by men,” what are a few questions you could ask to expose why this statement is flawed?
  - Remember, asking questions is the best approach to having a productive conversation.
4. When you are asked why you believe the Gospels are reliable, what specific evidence from this course will you use? Why?
5. Has anyone ever told you, “The Bible is a matter of your own interpretation”? If so, how did you respond?
6. Considering the material from this course, how will you respond to the objection in question 5 in the future?
7. What are some good questions you can ask when someone says the Bible is a matter of your own interpretation?
8. What evidence from this class have you found the most compelling for the reliability of the Gospels?
9. What questions do you still have about biblical reliability?
10. What will you continue to study when it comes to biblical reliability?  
What’s your gameplan for further growth in this area?
11. Read the following passages:
  - Matthew 24:35
  - Matthew 5:17–18
  - Psalm 119:160
  - Psalm 119:89–96
  - How do these verses encourage you about the Word of God?
12. Has your confidence in the reliability of the Gospels grown because of this class?

**ACTION POINTS:**

1. Watch “What Kind of Book Is the Bible?” by Tim Barnett:  
<https://www.str.org/w/what-kind-of-book-is-the-bible->
2. Listen to “How to Make the Case That the Bible Is the Word of God” by Greg Koukl:  
<https://www.str.org/w/how-to-make-the-case-that-the-bible-is-the-word-of-god>