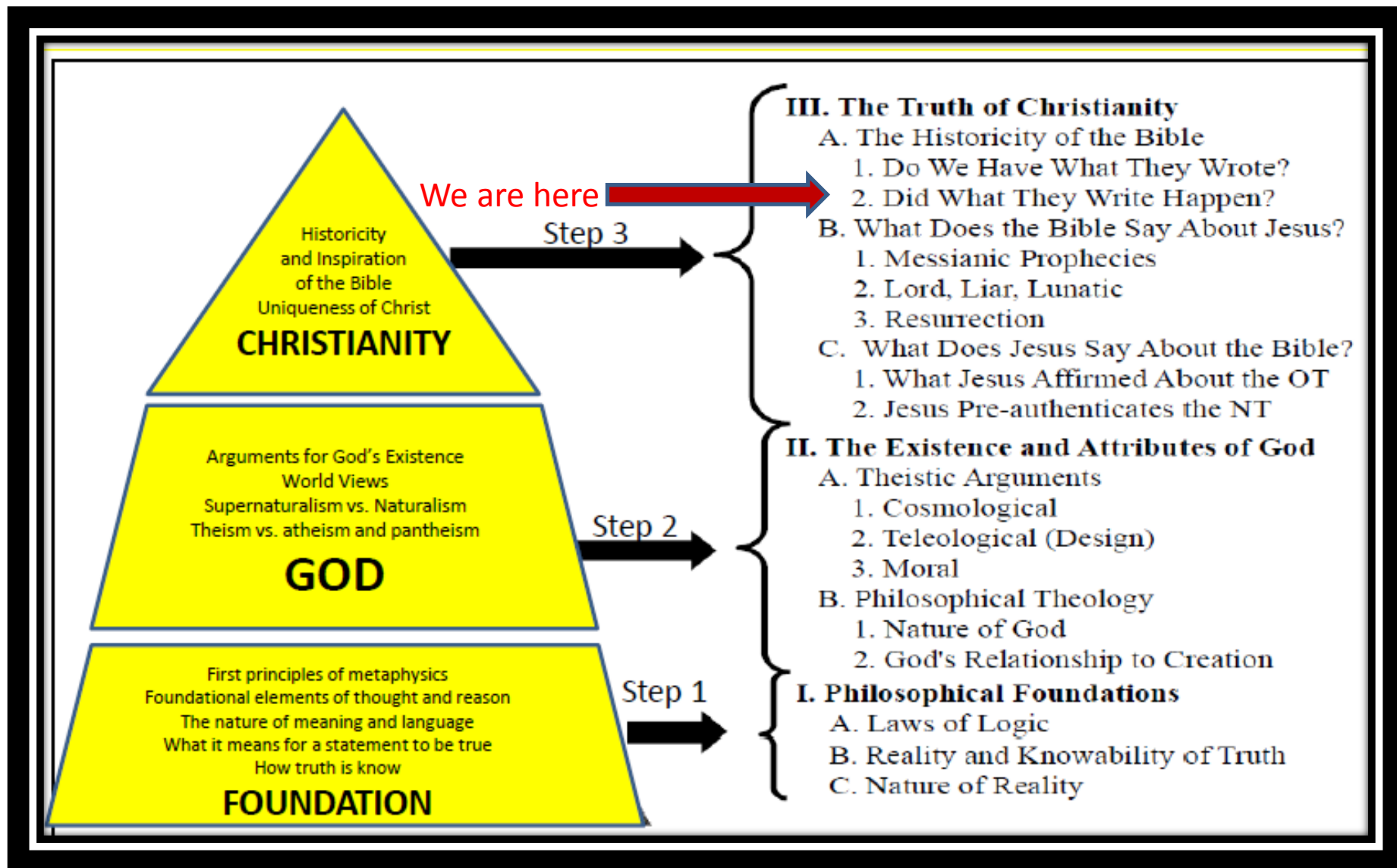


APOLOGETICS 61

Did What They Write Happen? Answering Reasons against Believing the Testimony of NT Writers (DDR #610)



Did What They Write Happen?

The fact that we have an incredible amount of early biblical manuscripts (that is available for anyone to examine), this in and of itself does not mean that what they wrote was true. One could have an accurate copy of Alice in Wonderland, but that would not mean that Alice in Wonderland really happened (though there was an Alice Liddell the daughter of the Liddell co-author of Liddell and Scott's massive lexicon).

We establish that what they wrote from two directions:

1. Answering the reasons *against* believing the testimony of the New Testament writers.

2. Giving the reasons for believing the testimony of the New Testament writers.

Answering the reasons against believing the testimony of the New Testament writers.

1. Their claims are too fantastic (for example that Jesus rose from the dead or that He walked on water or that He fed the 5,000).

Answer: This is a philosophical objection not a historical objection. I am not opposed to philosophical objections---we can talk about them. But I do have a problem with people bringing up philosophical objections to historical issues. Once that I have shown that there is a transcendent God as per step two in our pyramid, then one cannot logically discount miracles. Liberals who criticize the historicity of the Bible due to their naturalistic a priori philosophical assumptions need to be made aware that their objections are philosophical and not historical. Philosophical assumptions can not be adjudicated by the discipline of history.

Did What They Write Happen?

Answering the reasons against believing the testimony of the New Testament writers (cont.):

2. People from the ancient world were not interested in accurate history.

Answer: This is simply not true. I would challenge this by asking what evidence is there from ancient history that people did not know the difference between history and myth? C.S. Lewis pointed that it is nothing less than chronological snobbery to believe that no one cared about accuracy until the Enlightenment. I would add that the Greeks very well knew the difference between history and myth: they knew the difference between stories of Zeus and Poseidon versus Suetonius. What is more is that the New Testament is not a product of the Hellenistic world---it is a product of the Hebrew world. Who does not think that the Hebrews cared about accurate history? Understanding the history of the Jews was their whole identity!! Their identity as a people was rooted in history. This is the context of the New Testament---not paganism or Hellenism. Peter was far less superstitious than (cf. 2 Peter 1:16 *For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty*) some people are today (cf. people into horoscopes, New Age Spiritism, Hillary Clinton talking to Eleanor Roosevelt in the White House).

Answering the reasons against believing the testimony of the New Testament writers (cont.):

3. The writers were reading back into the life and teachings of Jesus their own concerns.

Answer: It is understood that Matthew, for instance, wrote the book of Matthew about ten years after the ascension. The charge is that Matthew wrote back his own ideas into the life of Jesus in the Gospel. This charge is common in college textbooks of religion. However, this charge simply cannot stand up to the evidence. The fact of the matter is that the presence of irrelevant material (Sabbath controversies), the lack of relevant material (why not put into the mouth of Jesus teaching about tongues since that was the issue in the church when Matthew wrote the gospel), and the presence of counterproductive material (Jesus in his humanity not knowing when He is coming back; embarrassing features of the disciples not knowing certain things) indicate that the writers were not merely reading back into the life of Jesus. The evidence points to the fact that the writers simply wrote what happened in the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus never touched on tongues or meat sacrificed to idols, or circumcision---all of which were hot issues when the gospel writers were writing the gospels, cf. Acts 15.

Answering the reasons against believing the testimony of the New Testament writers (cont.):

- 4. There are no extra-biblical (i.e. outside of the Bible) references to New Testament people or events.**

Answer: There most certainly are extra-biblical references to New Testament people and events. There are whole books written on this evidence (Habermas, *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*).

The following slides recap the arguments and provides extra-biblical testimony for the New Testament.

Is What They Wrote True?

Answering the reasons against believing the testimony of the New Testament writers

1. Their claims are too fantastic (for example, that Jesus rose from the dead)

answer: Whether or not these types of events (such as a resurrection) can occur is not an historical question but a philosophical one.

Is What They Wrote True?

Answering the reasons against believing the testimony of the New Testament writers

2. People from the ancient world were not interested in accurate history.

answer: The writings from other historians show that ancient people understood the differences between history and myth. This is especially true with the Hebrew mindset (within which the New Testament was birthed) which understood the sacredness of history.

Is What They Wrote True?

Answering the reasons against believing the testimony of the New Testament writers

3. The writers were reading back into the life and teachings of Jesus their own concerns and desires.

answer: The presence of irrelevant material, the lack of relevant material, and the presence of counterproductive material indicate that the writers were not merely reading back into the life of Jesus.

Is What They Wrote True?

The presence of irrelevant material

If the disciples or the early church invented the story of Jesus Christ, why would the story include elements that were unimportant to them?

- Jesus Sabbath controversies with the Pharisees
- Jesus' attitude of favor to Israel
- Jesus' uses of the phrases "Kingdom of God" and "Son of Man"

Is What They Wrote True?

The lack of relevant material

If the disciples or the early church invented the story of Jesus Christ, why would the story not include elements that were important to them?

- There is nothing on circumcision
- There is nothing the gifts like tongues
- There is nothing on food laws (eating meat sacrificed to idols)

Is What They Wrote True?

The presence of counterproductive material

If the disciples or the early church invented the story of Jesus Christ, why would the story include elements that were counterproductive to the spreading of the message?

- The women's testimony of seeing the resurrected Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15)
- Embarrassing features of Jesus' disciples
- Embarrassing features of Jesus Himself

Is What They Wrote True?

Answering the reasons against believing the testimony of the New Testament writers

4. There are no extra-biblical (i.e., outside the Bible) references to New Testament people or events.

answer: There most certainly are extra-biblical references to New Testament people and events.

Is What They Wrote True?

Extra Biblical References to New Testament People and Events Roman Historian Tacitus (c. AD 55-120)

But neither human resources, nor imperial munificence, nor appeasement of the gods, eliminated sinister suspicions that the fire had been instigated. To suppress this rumour, Nero fabricated scapegoats – and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called). Their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilatus. But in spite of this temporary setback the deadly superstition had broken out afresh, not only in Judaea (where the mischief had started) but even in Rome. All degraded and shameful practices collect and flourish in the capital.

Is What They Wrote True?

Extra Biblical References to New Testament People and Events Roman Historian Suetonius (c. AD 117)

tion of their faults. In granting the Trojans, as founders of the Roman race, perpetual exemption from tribute, he supported his act by reading aloud an ancient letter written in Greek to King Seleucus, from the Senate and People of Rome, with a promise of loyal friendship on condition that Seleucus should 'keep their Trojan kinsfolk free from all imposts'. Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus,¹ he expelled them from the city. When the German envoys first visited the Theatre, they took their seats among the common people, but, noticing the Parthian and Armenian

Is What They Wrote True?

Crestus = Christ

them = the Jews

expelled them from the city of Acts 18: 1-2 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.

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Is What They Wrote True?

Extra Biblical References to New Testament People and Events Jewish Historian Josephus (c. AD 37?-101?)

Antiquities of the Jews

Book XX, Chapter IX, Section 1

On the martyrdom of James:

"Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law he delivered them to be stoned."

Is What They Wrote True?

Jewish Historian Josephus (c. AD 37?-101?)

Antiquities of the Jews

Book XVIII, Chapter V, Section 2

On John the Baptist:

"Now, some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist; for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism; for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it, not in order to the putting away, [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body: supposing still that the soul was thoroughly purified beforehand by righteousness."

Is What They Wrote True?

Jewish Historian Josephus (c. AD 37?-101?)

Antiquities of the Jews

Book XVIII, Chapter III, Section 3

On Jesus

(with the alleged Christian interpolations)

"Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."

Is What They Wrote True?

Jewish Historian Josephus (c. AD 37?-101?)

Antiquities of the Jews

Book XVIII, Chapter III, Section 3

On Jesus

(without the alleged Christian interpolations)

"At this time 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 had 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."

Is What They Wrote True?

Extra Biblical References to New Testament People and Events

- Thallus
- Pliny the Younger
- Emperor Trajan
- Emperor Hadrian
- The Talmud
- Lucian
- Mara Bar-Serapion
- the lost work "Acts of Pontius Pilate" quoted by Justin Martyr in AD 150

