

HISTORICAL CRITICISM

“cleverly invented stories”

Key question

How do evangelical Christians answer the questions raised by modern historical critical scholarship with respect to the integrity of the New Testament?

Key Texts

Luke 11:52

“Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.”

I Corinthians 1:20-21

“Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”

Key Definition

Historical Criticism

Historical criticism of the Bible is an attempt to uncover the origin and meaning of the text as a product of the natural forces within time and space. It uses forensic scientific tools to try to uncover what happened in the past and why.

Introduction

1. **II Peter 1:16** “We did not follow **cleverly invented stories** when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”
2. “If disobedience to Scripture in Roman Catholicism has taken the form of the church hierarchy and councils imposing their decisions upon and thus superseding Scripture, disobedience in Protestant circles has taken the form of higher critics imposing arbitrary speculations upon the Bible and thereby undermining its authority. Neither the verdict of church councils nor the verdict of historical criticism and critical science escapes the danger of substituting eisegesis for exegesis.” Carl F.H. Henry
3. “Seeing is not believing ... What we learn from experience depends on the kind of philosophy we bring to experience ... The result of our historical inquiries thus depends

on the philosophical views (the a priori assumptions) which we have been holding before we even begin to look at the evidence.” C.S. Lewis in *Miracles*

4. There are two mistakes we can make in viewing the Bible.

Naïve supernatural view	Narrow natural view
The Bible is not to be examined critically.	The Bible is to be approached with great suspicion.
A good heart always = truth. A critical mind = a hard heart	A critical mind = is the only way to truth.
Personal faith defines historical facts.	Personal faith is not dependent upon historical facts.

5. Three types of naturalism

- a. **Historical naturalism** – The causation of the events reported in Scripture must be explained on natural grounds.
- b. **Authorial naturalism** – The writing of the Scriptures and the inclusion and interpretation of certain materials must be explained on natural grounds.
- c. **Interpretive naturalism** – The interpretation of the Scriptures is done by the use of natural human methods of interpretation of literature, with no special illumination work attributed to the Holy Spirit.

6. The Historical Critical profile.

- a. The historian rightly seeks a rational, natural, and common explanation of events.
- b. The historian is rightly skeptical of tradition, dogma, and claims of the supernatural.
- c. The historian cannot claim to prove what happened but only to offer the most probable explanation of what happened. This is where presuppositions play a big role.
- d. **The historian can mistakenly act as though there is no truth beyond what can be explained naturally.**
- e. **The historian can mistakenly try to explain everything naturally, even if he has to use imaginary data or distort the data.**
- f. **The historian can mistakenly (and dogmatically) conclude that the Christian message can be explained without any reference to the supernatural Spirit of God.**
- g. **The historian can mistakenly (and dogmatically) conclude that the New Testament evolved through the creative activity of the early church.**
- h. **The historian can mistakenly (and dogmatically) conclude that there were many viable versions of Christianity in the first centuries of the church.**

7. Eta Linnemann (a former eminent historical critique) notes, “It is not merely that the Bible isn’t read from the *perspective* of faith, it isn’t even read from the perspective of the *possibility* of faith.” To make matters even more difficult for those of faith, many institutions of higher learning aggressively socialize students with unqualified or justified pressure from expressions like, “obviously,” “of course,” “everyone now knows,” “all scholars agree that.”

A. **ASSUMPTIONS that are made.**

1. **What are the issues of scholarly debate with respect to the New Testament?**

- a. How are we to understand the similarities and differences between the different gospel accounts?
- b. How are we to understand the formation of the canon (authoritative list of books) of the New Testament?

- c. How close is the content of our present text to the original texts of the New Testament?
- d. Are the gospels historically reliable in their accounts of Jesus' words and deeds?

2. **Two views of how the NT came to be in its present form.**

- a. It represents the orthodox position of the Apostles of Jesus and the NT documents were identified fairly soon after they were written as inspired by God's Spirit through Apostles or their close associates.
 - 1) The gospel records are put in a Hebrew setting where oral tradition was carefully protected and where historical facts were highly valued.
 - 2) Tradition tells us that the Apostles were responsible for the content of the gospels although we do not have any indication from the gospels themselves about authorship.
- b. Various competing views of Christianity were present in the first centuries of the church. Eventually one of these views won out over the others with the result that it selected and or edited sacred texts to fit its pattern of doctrine.

Response. This view tends to overstate the effect of the diversity among the early Christians as though there was never really an orthodox position from the beginning.

- 1) It is believed that Paul's theology (Christianity as we know it today) was shaped by cultural sources from his day – Hebrew religion, Mystery cults, Greek philosophy. The parallels between Christianity and Mystery cults is striking (death and resurrection of god/man, initiation rituals like baptism, concern about after life, atonement for sin, resurrection of believers, etc.

Response: The parallels between Mystery Cults and Christianity are not as powerful as some might suggest. We do not know a great deal about the Mystery Cults. We do not know which tradition influences which. Monotheism was not a part of the Mystery cults, Mystery cults were not grounded in historical events, Paul is quite strong in insisting that his Gospel was not borrowed from outside culture (Gal.1-2).

- 2) It is suggested that there was little interest in preserving facts about Jesus as oral tradition. Christians carried and created the Jesus myths down to the time of the written gospels. The real interest, it is suggested, was the edification of people's faith in Him not historical accuracy.

Response: But this seems to be undermined by the very claims within the NT that the faith is foolishness without the resurrection as a historical fact. It is hard to understand how the credibility of the leaders of the early church could have been maintained if they were placing such a high degree of stock in the history while they were knowingly creating a fanciful story.

- 3) It is believed that the gospels represent a kind of Greco-Roman genre of biography that was not so concerned about historic accuracy as character description and propaganda to show superiority to rivals.

Response: The gospels seem to be a unique kind of literature. They do not easily fit any previous pattern or genre.

- 4) It is believed that the Apostles could not have written the gospels for the following reasons.
 - a. They were uneducated.
 - b. They spoke Aramaic whereas the gospels were written in Greek.
 - c. The gospels do not identify the Apostles as the authors.

- d. Parts of the gospel story records events where only Jesus and someone other than an Apostle (Pilate for example – Jn.18-19) are present.

3. **Areas where classical and radical critics agree.**

- a. There is a need to obtain the meaning of the Bible through grammatical, historical exegesis.
- b. Dogmatic, theology must not be allowed to determine the interpretation of biblical texts.
- c. The Gospel tradition was preserved largely in oral form for a generation by the church.
- d. The Gospel did not arise in a neutral vacuum, but in the life of an active, witnessing church.
- e. The forms in which the preaching and teaching were cast became patterned.
- f. There is interpretive value in determining the literary form of the passages under investigation.
- g. A literary document is to be interpreted in terms of the author’s purpose.
- h. All interpreters come to the text with bias that must be acknowledged.

4. **Areas where classical and radical critics disagree.**

Conservative approaches	Liberal approaches
Assume that the text is a trustworthy record of historical events and that it is inspired as recognized by the early church.	Assume that the text cannot be trusted as an accurate record of events because the events claim to be supernatural. The authors distorted the documents with their bias.
The burden of proof is on the radical critic to show that the text cannot be trusted.	The burden of proof is on the classical interpreter to show that the text can be trusted.
Issues of harmonization between Biblical texts and with extra Biblical material can be explained or are not critical to the message.	Problems (inconsistencies) between the Biblical texts and extra Biblical material prove that the texts cannot be trusted.
Christian Faith is grounded in historical fact controlled by eyewitnesses.	Christian faith creates and molds the Jesus stories in the gospels.
Similarities in the gospel accounts vindicate the voracity of the witnesses.	Any difference within the texts of the gospels is magnified as important.

5. **Assumptions made by radical critics** (speculative advocacy criticism).

- a. It is assumed that **the traditional Christian interpretation of its faith and sacred texts is not possible because it demands the supernatural intervention of God.**
 Note: This assumption is often expressed in terms of a neutral, objective, search for the truth. It is assumed that the authors of the NT had a bias that discredited their objectivity. It is at the same time assumed that the historical critique does not have a bias and can be objective.
- b. It is assumed that there must be an explanation of the “sacred texts” (the Bible) that is contingent (tied into) natural historical forces.
- c. It is assumed that wherever there is a secular parallel to something recorded in the Gospels, it must have been borrowed from that secular source.
- d. It is assumed that the use of secular ideas together with the socio-psychological, economic, and spiritual dynamics of the writers produces the NT gospels in their present form.
- e. In other words, the NT writers had a religious faith (the origins of which can be traced to secular sources and human anxieties) that they had a vested interest in propagating through the intentional or unintentional creation of supportive texts.
 The Gospel texts were granted inspired status over time by others who shared the human author’s faith.

- f. It is assumed that any difference in detail between gospel writers is evidence that their accounts cannot be trusted as historically accurate. Some critics cite the three testimonies of the conversion of Paul as a clear example of ‘fictional’ accounts because of inconsistencies that **cannot** be reconciled.

Acts 9:1-19	Acts 22:6-16	Acts 26:12-18
<p>“¹ Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, ² and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; ⁴ and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ⁵ And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He {said,} "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, ⁶ but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do." ⁷ And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one. ⁸ And Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. ¹⁰ Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Behold, {here am} I, Lord." ¹¹ And the Lord {said} to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight." ¹³ But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." ¹⁷ And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized; ¹⁹ and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus.”</p>	<p>“⁶ And it came about that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, ⁷ and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' ⁸ And I answered, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.' ⁹ "And those who were with me beheld the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ "And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go on into Damascus; and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.' ¹¹ "But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. ¹² "And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, {and} well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, ¹³ came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him. ¹⁴ "And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth. ¹⁵ 'For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ 'And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'”</p>	<p>“¹² While thus engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, ¹³ at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. ¹⁴ "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' ¹⁵ "And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ 'But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; ¹⁷ delivering you from the {Jewish} people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, ¹⁸ to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'”</p>

- g. It is assumed that religious texts fundamentally function to camouflage other, less noble human passions and convictions.

6. Rational for these assumptions

- a. Since the Renaissance, and more particularly since the Enlightenment, worldviews have been developed which involve skepticism about basic Christian tenets.
 - 1. Two basic concepts emerged from the enlightenment.
 - a) Presuppositions
 - 1) **Materialistic Naturalism** — The nature of ultimate reality is temporal — matter, energy, chance, plus nothing!

- 2) **Secular Humanism** — the autonomous and evolving nature of man as the starting point of all inquiry.
- 3) **Objectivity** – Modern man can be objective in evaluating the present and the past.
- 4) **Uniformitarianism** – All phenomena throughout history is subject to the same laws of nature.

b) Method

Rationalistic Empiricism — modern, rational, critical science

2. Evangelicals see value in the **method**, but not the **presuppositions**.

3. The relationship between presupposition and **“burden of proof”**

- a) If you adopt traditional presuppositions, then the burden of proof is on the critic to prove that the Bible is not trustworthy or in error. This is very difficult to do (in any conclusive way) to one who holds the traditional presupposition.
- b) If you adopt the presuppositions of the enlightenment, then the burden of proof falls to the traditionalist to demonstrate that the Bible is uniquely inspired and error free. This also is very difficult to do to the satisfaction of the one who holds the critic’s basic assumptions. Historical criticism has become the strike force of modernity and has set its sights on all authority but its own.

4. Evangelicals differ in their attitude toward the use of Historical – critical tools in the study of the New Testament.

- a) Some feel that the tool is so tainted by its hostile assumptions that it cannot but be destructive to the integrity of the text and its message. (Montgomery, Geisler, Maier)
- b) Others feel that it can be useful in a limited way. (Blomberg, Bock, Carson, Stein)

b. It is accurately observed that the purpose of the Gospel accounts is not to give accurate history but rather to edify the church, therefore we should not expect them to be accurate historically.

- 1. The very nature of the Gospel message is grounded in historical facts not mystical experience.
- 2. The Jewish tradition that provides the context of the Gospel’s message is also grounded in history not in myth.

7. **General conclusions drawn by historical critics.**

a. There is a great difference between the Jesus of history (of whom we know very little because we can’t trust the gospel records) and the Christ of the early church (who is the creation of Paul’s faith later to be amended by Constantine and the church Councils).

Jesus of history (a mystery)	Christ of the church (“Paul’s” - the early church’s faith)	The Gospels (written to support the theology of Paul through a fanciful depiction of the Jesus of history)
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b. The Gospels are primarily a record of the beliefs of the early church about Jesus, rather than any sort of account of Jesus as he actually was. They were written as ancient hero biographies to provide a foundation for Paul’s theology. Oden sites an example.

“Jesus was an eschatological prophet who proclaimed God’s coming kingdom called his hearers to decide now for or against that kingdom. After he was condemned to death and died, the belief emerged gradually that he had arisen. Only after some extended period of

*time did the remembering community develop the idea that Jesus would return as the Messiah, Son of Man. Eventually this community came to project its eschatological expectation back upon the historical Jesus, inserting in his mouth the eschatological hopes that it had subsequently developed but now deftly had to rearrange so as to make it seem as if Jesus himself had understood himself as Messiah. Only much later did the Hellenistic idea of the God-man, the virgin birth, and incarnation emerge in the minds of the remembering church, who again misremembered Jesus according to its revised eschatological expectation.” Thomas Oden, *The Word of Life*. p.220*

- c. The criteria used to discern the true sayings and deeds of Jesus are based on the following assumptions.
 1. If authentic the words ascribed to Jesus must be distinct from Judaism and or the early church’s unique teachings.
 - a) Anything in Jesus teaching that can be paralleled in either the teaching of Judaism or the theology of the early church is of doubtful authenticity according to this rule.
 - b) Response: Are we to assume that Jesus spoke in a cultural vacuum with no spiritual context? And are we to also assume that there was no continuity between Jesus and the early church? And how can we be so sure of what may have been a part of early Jewish tradition (of which we know very little)?
 2. If authentic, the words ascribed to Jesus must be recorded in more than one unrelated source.
 - a) If a saying of Jesus is found in Mark and also in Q (the hypothetical unknown source used by Matthew and Luke but not by Mark) it is to be regarded as more authentic than if it occurs in but one source.
 - b) Response: It has become apparent that the formation and relationship between the gospels is very complex. We can not assume that there were but four sources (Mark, Q, M,&L).
 3. If authentic, the words ascribed to Jesus must be consistent with the historical and cultural setting of his day.
- d. It is assumed that the early church viewed the gift of prophecy as “the word of Jesus” just as much as the oral tradition of what Jesus said in the flesh. This led to justification for insertions into the gospel accounts.
 1. Response: There is little evidence that the early church regarded the gift of prophecy in this way. The foundation of the church came from the teaching of the twelve not the ongoing prophetic voice of the church.
 2. Response: Paul demonstrates in I Cor.7 sensitivity to the distinction between his teaching and that of Jesus.
- e. It is assumed that Christianity as we know it, was established as a religion by Constantine who needed it for political reasons. This view was popularized in Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*.
 1. It is claimed that neither the Gospels nor Paul regarded Jesus as God.
 2. Jesus was deified at the Council of Nicaea at 325AD through the influence of Emperor Constantine (who was theologically illiterate) in the same way that Mary was pronounced “Mother of God” and without sin in 431AD at the Council of Ephesus.
- f. Note: While *The Da Vinci Code* is fiction, it is sometimes read as though it was based on historical facts. The following observations need to be noted with regard to *The Da Vinci Code*. (See theology file #209 for other comments on *The Da Vinci Code*.)

1. The Dead Sea Scrolls were not early “Christian” documents - but were rather copies of Old Testament books by a Jewish fringe group.
 2. Not all of the Jewish men in the first century were married, but rather many chose to remain celibate.
 3. Gnostic gospels were late documents, which didn’t have an enormous impact on Christian thought.
 4. The role of women in the early church was distinct from the cultural norms.
 5. Constantine didn’t choose the four canonical gospels from a vast number of competing “gospels”.
 6. There is not a strand of historical evidence suggesting Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene.
 7. Nor did the church suppress “gospels” that told of a secret marriage.
 8. Jesus was considered divine from the earliest stages of Christianity - far earlier than the fourth century.
 9. There are not thousands or even hundreds or even dozens of documents, which suggest the New Testament isn't historically reliable. Those documents simply don’t exist.
 10. The New Testament documents, which do exist, have withstood intense scholarly scrutiny.
8. **Evangelical observations of the historical critical method.** (taken from Carl F.H. Henry’s *God, Revelation, and Authority* vol. IV p.403)
- a. Historical criticism is not inappropriate to, but bears relevantly on, Christian concerns.
 - b. Historical criticism is never philosophically or theologically neutral.
 - c. Historical criticism is unable to deal with questions concerning the supernatural and miraculous.
 - d. Historical criticism is as relevant to miracles, insofar as they are historical, as to nonmiraculous historical events.
 - e. Historical criticism cannot demonstrably prove or disprove the factuality of either a biblical or a nonbiblical historical event.
 - f. To assume the unreliability of biblical historical testimony – or of any other ancient source – in order to believe only what is independently or externally confirmed, unjustifiably discounts the primary sources.
 - g. Discrimination of biblical events as either historically probable or improbable is not unrelated to the metaphysical assumptions with which a historian approaches the data.
 - h. A historian’s subjective reversal of judgment concerning the probability or improbability of an events occurrence does not alter the objective factuality or nonfactuality of the event.
 - i. Although the historian properly stresses historical method, he is not as a person exempt from claims concerning supernatural revelation and miraculous redemptive history, for the historical method is not man’s only source of truth.
 - j. Biblical events acquire their meaning from the divinely inspired Scriptures; since there could be no meaning of events without the events, the inspired record carries its own intrinsic testimony to the factuality of those events.
9. **Evangelical critique of the historical critical method.**

- a. Historical critical methodology is an **infant science** that needs time to be refined and developed. Much of modern historical and theological scholarship is based more upon the creativity of the scholar than anything else.
- b. Historical criticism is easily **influenced by fads** in the present culture. They are victims of “the newer the truer.” It is interesting if not embarrassing that the official Soviet Communist view of Jesus corresponded almost hand in glove with the critic’s view.
- c. Historical criticism has a **poor track record** in that its dogmatic conclusions are often overturned with more evidence. The study of Jesus has long suffered from an over dependence upon archaic methods of literary criticism, once attempted but long rejected by the mainstream of literary criticism. Examples of issues that no longer can be supported – pre Christian Gnostic redeemer myths, virgin birth narratives in other religions, Hellenistic influences on New Testament narratives.
- d. Historical criticism is based on **presuppositions that are too restrictive** and narrow. The supernatural is excluded as a possible explanation.
- e. Historical critics while recognizing the possible (assumed) bias of ancient authors **refuses to admit its own possible bias**. Kant’s Christ becomes a strained exposition of the categorical imperative; Hegel’s Christ looks like a shadow-image of the Hegelian dialectic; Schleiermacher’s Christ is a reflection of the awkward mating of pietism and romanticism; Strauss’s Christ is nearly weeded of all supernatural referents; Harnack’s portrait of Christ looks exactly like that of a late nineteenth-century German liberal idealist; and Tillich’s Christ is a dehistoricized existential idea of being that participates in estrangement without being estranged.
- f. Historical critics **make too much of too little**. They subject the Biblical texts to a standard of measure that no other texts could meet. Using the critical method in the usual manner, for example, we read in a biography of Abraham Lincoln that he died on Good Friday. Since this detail would support a view of Lincoln as a martyr to his cause, we reject it as too convenient to be true.
- g. While there are differences in the way each gospel writer records some details in Jesus’ life we must not make more of this than is warranted. Clearly the inner **coherence in the Gospels as a whole is impressive** and leaves little doubt about what Jesus said and did. What about all the inconsistencies that critics claim are a part of the Biblical story? You have to show three things to make this issue relevant. First, that they’re irresolvable. Second, that they lie at the heart of the narrative rather than in the details, which in fact they do. And thirdly, you’d have to show that all of the documents have an equal claim to historical credibility, since inconsistencies in a later, less reliable source don’t undermine the earlier, more credible source.
- h. If the Gospel writers were indeed manufacturing propaganda for the faith by putting into the mouth of Jesus words that seemed to support the early church’s theological agenda, **they did a poor job**.
 1. The sayings of Jesus are not nearly as clear in supporting subsequent theology as they could have been or as we would have liked.
 2. The Apostles themselves are often cast in an unfavorable light. This is not what one would expect from a bias redactor.
- i. Critics like to **have their cake and eat it to**.
 1. They suggest that the gospels were written as propaganda to deify Jesus but feel free to sight the gospels as authoritative when they seem to support the critic’s desired conclusions.

2. **Example:** They are quick to point out that in the gospel texts, Jesus seldom if ever claims to be divine. Why do they choose to respect these texts as authentic when they would reject them if they suggested in stronger words his deity?

10. A brief challenge to the historical critical version of the origin of Christianity.

- a. **Christianity – a new religion.** It is hard to see a gradual development or evolution of Christianity. The facts suggest that its origin was dramatic, fast, and certain.
- b. **Explosive growth.** It grew rapidly and spread broadly. It is unlikely that the doctrine of the resurrected Jesus would become so soundly established so quickly if it were not true.
- c. **An unlikely place of origin.** It grew out of a rather obscure corner of the Roman empire.
- d. **An unlikely leader.** Jesus did not write, did not travel very far, nor did he minister very long.

In his famous speech on St. Helena, Napoleon exclaimed: “I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ, and the founders of empires and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christianity and any other religion the distance of infinity . . . Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires. But upon what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon *force*. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him” (Monser, pp. 503,508).

- e. **Christian intolerance was an unpopular concept.**

It was common ideology and practice in the Roman world to tolerate, and even accommodate, the philosophical notions and fleshly inclinations of the varying elements of society. The historian Edward Gibbon observed that in the world of the Caesars “most different and even hostile nations embraced, or at least respected, each other’s superstitions” (p. 383).

- f. **It was dangerous to be a Christian.**

In A.D. 112, Pliny, governor of Bithynia, sent a letter to the emperor Trajan, inquiring as to how to deal with Christians. Therein he details his customary method: “I ask them if they are Christians. If they admit it I repeat the question a second and a third time, threatening capital punishment; if they persist I sentence them to death” (10.16.3 as cited in Bettenson, p. 7).

11. Traditional assumptions

- a. The Gospels appear in the order in which they were probably written, though this is insignificant.
- b. The gospels are basically parallel accounts representing the work of the authors under the influence of the Holy Spirit, their own personal witness and any literary or oral fragments that may have been at their disposal. Lk.1:1-4; Acts 20:35; Jn.16:13; 14:26.
- c. The differing details in the gospel accounts are seen not as contradictions. They are to be explained as distinctives in style, viewpoint, or commentary on the part of the individual writers.
- d. The record is legitimate and authentic as it claims to be. Lk.1:1-4
 1. Ancient writers were not on the whole either fools or frauds.
 2. The cultural details in the Gospels are consistent with what we know of life in Palestine at the time of Jesus.
 3. The Gospels have also been firmly rooted in a Jewish context by the work of two Scandinavian scholars, Harald Riesenfeld and Birger Gerhardsson. The rabbis took

great pains to ensure that their sayings were accurately remembered and passed on by word of mouth to their followers.

4. The fact that much of the Gospel account (though written in Greek) includes Aramaic expressions suggests that its origin goes back to Jesus' day.
5. In the synoptic tradition it is the inauthenticity, and not the authenticity of the sayings of Jesus that must be demonstrated.
6. The fact that the Gospels are so different from what we know of the life and concerns of the early non-Jewish churches suggests that they are not the self-serving documents that the critics suggest. For example there is virtually no teaching on the nature of the church itself. Nor is the issue of the Gentile Jewish conflict addressed.
- e. Ancient traditions surrounding the origin of these records agree with the internal evidence of the gospels themselves and are probably valid.
- f. The New Testament Church recognized that these records were authoritative and inspired soon after their circulation. Paul's letters were written quite early and they indicate that the theology of Jesus' death and resurrection was already well developed.
- g. In the physical sciences there are often pieces of data that do not fit a well-established hypothesis so in a reading of the Scripture there will sometimes be data that does not seem to fit. This is expected in that we do not always see clearly nor do we have all the evidence that at some future time might be available to us.

B. Discernment of truth involves FAITH as well as material data and logic.

1. Healthy people are in touch with and acknowledge the presence and power of faith assumptions.
 - a. Some people (often religious people) down play the important role of critical reason.
 - b. Others seem to ignore the fact that we all have faith assumptions that are not based on physical evidence only.
2. While critical reason is a very important "door keeper"(telling us what is possible and impossible given our assumptions) it does not possess the power to commit.
 - a. There is so much to life that cannot be accounted for through empirical observation and reason.
 - b. The energy of commitment comes from the passion, pain, and prejudices of the subjective side of life.
 - c. We are spiritual beings made in the image of God. We are more than animals or machines.
3. How do people come to commit to an idea as true?

Commitments to ideas involve a complex of both objective and subjective factors.

Objective factors	Subjective factors
Critical reasoning from empirical observation	Faith assumptions
Public information	Personal intuitive instincts
This area is based on and guards the Subjective factors.	This area has the energy to make commitments to something as true.

C. The New Testament, in claiming to be UNIQUELY INSPIRED, should be given special treatment. It cannot be understood through historical critical methods alone.

1. **The New Testament claims to special inspiration:**
 - a. The Old Testament claims about itself — 3,808 references to "the Lord said," etc.

- b. The New Testament claims about the Old Testament —

II Tim.3:16-17 “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

II Pet.1:20-21 “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is {a matter} of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

I Pet.1:10-11 “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that {would come} to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.”

- c. Christ’s claims about the Old Testament — Matt.5:17-19; 19:4-5 (Gen.2:24)

John 10:34-35 “Jesus answered them. ‘Has it not been **written in your Law**, ‘I said, you are Gods.’? If he called them gods, to whom the **word of God** came (and the **Scriptures** cannot be broken), do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

- d. The New Testament claims about the New Testament —

I Tim.5:18 “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,’ and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” (quoting **Luke 10:7**)

II Pet.3:16 “as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.” (Paul’s writings are equated with Scripture.)

I Thess.2:13 “And for this reason we also constantly think God that when you received from us the word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God,”

I Cor.14:37 “If any one thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.”

2. Did Paul invent the Gospel? Gal.1:10-2:10

Five reasons it is not likely that Paul invented the Gospel.

Reason #1 Paul’s natural inclination was to please men. Following Christ is a path that would not be pleasing to men.

“¹⁰ For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

Reason #2 Paul testimony that he received the Gospel as a special revelation from God.

¹¹ For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but {I received it} through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Reason #3 Paul’s past record was one of resisting the Gospel and persecute the church.

¹³ For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; ¹⁴ and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

Reason #4 Paul’s limited contact with the apostles immediately after his conversion.

15 But when He who had set me apart, {even} from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. 18 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

Reason #5 Paul's limited contact with the church immediately after his conversion.

20 (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was {still} unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; 23 but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." 24 And they were glorifying God because of me."

Reason #6 Paul was subject to the other Apostles.

1 Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. 2 And it was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but {I did so} in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.

Reason #7 The resistance to Paul's Gospel came from "false brethren."

3 But not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4 But {it was} because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. 5 But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.

Reason #8 Paul received from the other apostles "the right hand of fellowship" and "a commission" to preach his Gospel.

6 But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) -- well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. 7 But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter {had been} to the circumcised 8 (for He who effectually worked for Peter in {his} apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), 9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we {might go} to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. 10 {They} only {asked} us to remember the poor-- the very thing I also was eager to do."

3. The two-source hypothesis.

a. The Spirit of God is in some way guiding the inscripturation of the New Testament — II Chron.15:1; Matt.22:43.

I Corinthians 2:12-13 "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words."

II Peter 1:21 “for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” “moved” = (passive participle) “to be moved upon”

b. The human authors are used by the Spirit without violating their human culture, personality, and language.

Hebrews 1:1 “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”

1. The personality, style, and cultural context of the human authors is not superseded.
2. The vast cultural diversity among the human authors adds to the universal appeal of the Scriptures.
3. The writings of Scripture were seldom, if ever, the result of mechanical dictation.
4. The cultural and perceptual limitations of the human authors were controlled by God’s Spirit.

NOTE: The analogy of the dual nature of Christ is an illustration of the two modes of inspiration.

The Holy Spirit	The Human authors
The Word of God -	- In human language
Supernatural	Natural
Historical Criticism must be modified out of respect for the divine side.	Historical Criticism can be helpful with respect to the human side.

5. Evangelicals differ in their view of Biblical Inerrancy as outlined in the following chart. See notes on inerrancy #211

D. It is reasonable to believe that the New Testament Writers told the truth. (This list is taken from *I don’t have enough Faith to be an Atheist* by Geisler and Turek, pp275-293)

1. The NT writers included embarrassing details about themselves.
 - They often failed to “get it” with respect to Jesus’ teaching. Mk.9:32, Lk.18:34, Jn.12:16
 - They seem disengaged. Mk.14:32-41 (They fell asleep at critical times.)
 - They are rebuked by Jesus. Mk.8:33
 - They were cowardly. Matt.26:33-35
 - They were doubters. Jn.2:18-22, 3:14-18, Matt.12:39-41, 17:9,22-23
2. The NT writers included embarrassing details and difficult sayings of Jesus.
 - Jesus is considered “out of his mind.” Mk.3:21,31
 - Jesus is not believed by his own brothers. Jn.7:5
 - Jesus is thought to be a deceiver. Jn.7:12
 - Jesus is deserted by many of his followers. Jn.6:66
 - Jesus “turns off” Jews who had believed him. Jn.8:30-31,59
 - Jesus is called a drunkard. Matt.11:19
 - Jesus is called “demon possessed.” Mk.3:22, Jn.7:20, 8:48
 - Jesus is called a “madman.” Jn.10:20
 - Jesus has his feet washed by a prostitute. Lk.7:36-39
 - Jesus is hung on a tree (under a curse). Deut.21:23, Gal.3:13

- Jesus declares, “The Father is greater than I.” Jn.14;28
3. The NT writers left in demanding sayings of Jesus. Matt.5-7
 4. The NT writers distinguished Jesus’ words from their own. I Cor.7:10-12
 5. The NT writers include events related to the resurrection that they would not have invented.
 - Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea, (member of the Sanhedrin).
 - Women were the first witnesses to the resurrection.
 - Priests were converted.
 - The Jewish explanation of the empty tomb.
 6. The NT writers include more than thirty historically confirmed people in their writings. If these references were not accurate they would have been exposed by early critics of Christianity.
 7. The NT writers include divergent details. The Gospels contain different but not contradictory details suggesting that they did not copy each other or try to smooth out differences. Critics claim that the Gospel’s similarities indicate that they copied from each other and that their differences indicate that they cannot be trusted. How can the critic have it both ways?
 8. The NT writers challenge their readers to check out verifiable facts, even facts about miracles.
 - Luke’s overt assertion of accuracy to Theophilus in Lk.1:1-4.
 - Peter’s claim that they did not follow cleverly devised tales but were eyewitnesses to Christ’s majesty (II Pet.1:16).
 - Paul’s bold declaration to Festus and King Agrippa about the resurrected Christ in Acts 26.
 - Paul’s restatement of an early creed that identified more than 500 eyewitnesses of the risen Christ in I Cor.15.
 9. The NT writers describe miracles like other historical events: with simple, unembellished accounts. The apocryphal forgery known as the Gospel of Peter contains a description of the resurrection that is full of outlandish descriptions that are quite different from the canonical Gospel’s accounts.
 10. The NT writers abandoned their long-held sacred beliefs and practices, adopted new ones, and did not deny their testimony under persecution or threat of death.

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
Circumcision	Replaced by baptism and Communion

E. The RESURRECTION of Jesus is a watershed in the presuppositions used in Biblical studies.

1. If Christ was raised from the dead then it is likely that the following things are possible.

- a. The record of Jesus life and death was preserved by the power of the Holy Spirit through inspired apostles and prophets and that their work has been providentially preserved.
- b. The nature of that record can assumed to be in some way unique.

2. The resurrection of Christ has great theological significance.

Acts 2:24 - “And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.” The resurrection was a sign of Christ’s unique nature.

Acts 2:29-33 - “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.” The resurrection was necessary to fulfill the Old Testament promises of an eternal kingdom and king.

Eph.2:6 - “and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.” The resurrection secured our position “in Christ.”

Eph.1:18-23 - “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” The resurrection made God's power available to His church.

Rom.4:25 - “He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.” The resurrection assured us of the effectiveness of the atonement.

I Cor.15:17 - “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.” The resurrection gives us a hope in our struggle with sin.

I Cor.15:20-24 - “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.” The resurrection gives us assurance of eternal life.

3. The evidence for the resurrection is impressive.

a. THE PRE-RESURRECTION SCENE:

1. Jesus was dead.
2. His tomb was identified.
3. The preparations for burial were detailed and witnessed.
4. The tomb was guarded (Matt.27:62-66).
5. The tomb was sealed (Matt.27:66).
6. The disciples were dispersed in disbelief (Matt.26:56).

b. THE POST-RESURRECTION SCENE:

1. The empty tomb.
 2. The grave clothes.
 3. The position of the stone.
 4. The Roman guard.
 5. The post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to specific individuals and groups.
 - a. Mary Magdalene (Jn.20:14, Mk.16:9)
 - b. The women returning from the tomb (Matt.28:9-10)
 - c. Peter, later in the day (Lk.24:34, I Cor.15:5)
 - d. Emmaus disciples (Lk.24:13-33)
 - e. The apostles without Thomas (Lk.24:36-43, Jn.20:19-24)
 - f. The apostles with Thomas (Jn.20:26-29)
 - g. The seven by the Lake of Tiberias (Jn.21:1-23)
 - h. Over 500 on a Galilean mountain (I Cor.15:6)
 - i. James (I Cor.15:7)
 - j. The eleven (Matt.28:16-20, Mk.16:14-20, Lk.24:33-52, Acts 1:3-12)
 - k. Paul (Acts 9:3-6, I Cor.15:8)
 - l. Stephen (Acts 7:55)
 - m. Paul in the temple (Acts 22:17-21, 23:11)
 - n. John (Rev.1:10-19)
 6. The enemies of Christ did not refute the resurrection. It is significant that the resurrection was proclaimed in Jerusalem, near where He had been buried. If it could have easily been refuted, it most certainly would have been.
 7. The transformed lives of the disciples.
 8. The fact that the disciples died for their faith.
 9. The institution of the Christian church.
 10. Sunday worship.
 11. Christian ordinances.
 12. The transformed lives of 1900 years of history.
 13. The fact that the tomb was not venerated as was the custom with saints that died and did not rise from the grave.
 14. It was customary to return to the tomb and collect the bones of famous people. There is no indication that this was attempted in the case of Jesus.
- 4. False theories of the resurrection of Jesus can be answered.**
- a. There are three assumptions made by those who deny the authenticity of the resurrection:
 1. The dead are not raised.
 2. The New Testament witness is not completely reliable.

“The best way to discredit a witness in court is for the cross examiner to tie him up in knots and make his evidence appear to be such a tissue of inconsistencies that the jury becomes convinced he is untrustworthy. One does not need to be a scientific New Testament scholar to do that with the resurrection narratives”
(R.H. Fuller, The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives).

3. Something happened to launch the church that was “believed to be” the resurrection of Jesus.
- b. **OBJECTIVE HYPOTHESIS** - What the witnesses saw was real but their interpretation of its significance was misguided.
 1. **The Swoon Theory** - Some MUSLIMS believe that Jesus didn’t really die on the cross but just looked to be dead. Later He was revived in the damp tomb. Schonfield’s The Passover Plot appeals to this theory. But:
 - a. The soldiers, Joseph, and Nicodemus witnessed His death.
 - b. Jesus' disciples did not perceive Him as having merely revived from a swoon.
 - c. How could He have escaped the grave clothes?
 - d. How could He have moved the stone?
 - e. How could He have walked to Emmaus (7 miles)?
 - f. If He swooned, why did He not tell His disciples?
 - g. How and when did He die?
 2. **The Theft Theory** - Some JEWS believe that Jesus’ body was stolen. But:
 - a. This view was mentioned in Matt.28:11-15.
 - b. Why would the Jewish or Roman authorities have wanted to remove the body? To produce the body would have ended Christianity, a desire of both Jew and Roman alike.
 - c. Why would the disciples have wanted to remove the body? They were depressed and disillusioned with Jesus at this time.
 - d. How could the disciples have done it even if they wanted to?
 1. The guard’s testimony was not doubted (Matt.28:11).
 2. The tomb was secured against theft (especially insurmountable to the disciples).
 3. If the soldiers were sleeping, how could they say the disciples stole the body?
 4. For soldiers to fall asleep while on watch would have meant death for them.
 5. If they were asleep, the moving of the stone would have aroused them.
 6. The condition of the grave clothes makes theft unlikely.
 7. The disciples were men of honor. It is unlikely that they would fabricate a lie.
 8. The disciples would hardly sacrifice their own lives for what they knew was a hoax.
 3. **The Wrong Tomb Theory** - The women and others went to the wrong tomb. But:
 - a. The women had noted where the body was left just 72 hours before (Mk.15:47; Lk.23).
 - b. Could Peter and John have made the same mistake (Jn.20:2-8)?
 - c. Was the “angel” a fabricated story?
 - d. Why didn't the Sanhedrin go to the right tomb and expose the body so as to kill the Christian movement?
 - e. Certainly Joseph of Arimathea would have known where the tomb was and the mistake would have been corrected.
- c. **SUBJECTIVE HYPOTHESIS** - What the witnesses saw was not real in a space/time sense but rather a “faith encounter” or vision.

1. **The Hallucination Theory** - No one actually saw a resurrected Jesus; they just thought they saw Him. They hallucinated. This view is put forth by Bultmann, Lake, and others. But:
 - a. Christ’s appearances were very important as a part of the authority of the apostolic community. This would have been very controversial if the sightings were not a part of space/time reality.
 - b. It is hard to believe that the Christian movement could have been sustained by a few hallucinations.
 - c. The many and varied people involved could hardly have experienced such similar visions.
 - d. The extended and varied descriptions in the gospel record do not appear to be visions.
 - e. Many of the witnesses recognized Christ only after a period of reflection suggesting there was no sense of “wish fulfillment” (John 20:2-8).
 - f. Hallucinations usually are patterned in a life but there is no evidence of such patterns in the disciples’ lives.
2. **The Hypnosis Theory** - Jesus used prehypnotic suggestion to get the disciples to believe His resurrection at a point in time after His death. But:
 - a. There is no indication that Jesus was prone to trick or manipulate anyone in this way.
 - b. It demands more faith to believe this theory than to believe the resurrection.
3. **The Pagan Mythology Theory** - The early church adopted themes from pagan mythology in propagating the story of Jesus’ resurrection. But:
 - a. The pagan myths made no attempt to be historical as do the gospels.
 - b. The pagan myths were tied closely to the cycles of nature while the gospel story is not.
 - c. The pagan myths were not reported in the matter-of-fact style of the gospels.
 - d. The resurrection accounts appear immediately in the early church, without the lengthy interim required for evolution of detailed mythology.
 - e. In I Cor.15:6, Paul indicates that 500 people who saw the resurrected Jesus were still alive and could have been asked about their experience. This claim is audacious if the whole story was the result of mythological development.
4. **The resurrection of faith Theory** – What was raised on Easter was faith not the body of Jesus. But:
 - a. The disciples had lost their faith at the cross. There is no indication that they were trying to find some reason to hang on to it.
 - b. The resurrection of Jesus is described as **both** an historical (space time) event and an experience of hope and power.
 - c. Faith, according to I Cor.15 was based not on an existential encounter but on a historical event.
5. **The differing accounts of the resurrection are often cited as evidence of the fallibility of the Gospels. Note the following example.**

Mark 16:2-5	Luke 24:1-4	Matthew 28:1-4
...very early in the morning	On the first day of the week,	...towards dawn on the

<p>on the first day of the week they went to the tomb just as the sun was rising. They had been saying to one another ‘Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?’ But when they looked they could see that the stone – which was very big – had already been rolled back. On entering the tomb they saw a young man in a white robe seated at the right-hand side.</p>	<p>at the first sign of dawn, they went to the tomb with the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, but on entering discovered that the body of the Lord Jesus was not there. As they stood there not knowing what to think, two men in brilliant clothes suddenly appeared at their side...</p>	<p>first day of the week Mary of Magdala and the other Mary went to visit the sepulchre. And all at once there was a violent earthquake, for the angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His face was like lightning, his robe white as snow...</p>
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- To the critic, these differences in details are impossible to be reconciled and show the freedom of the different authors to create their own story.
- Traditional interpretations have been impressed with the high degree of similarity and have reconciled the differences by allowing each author to be selective in what they record.

6. **The gospel accounts of the resurrection can be harmonized** (George E. Ladd, I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus)

- The earthquake and removal of stone occurs before dawn.
- A group of four women come early to the tomb, wondering who will move the stone. As they approach, they are amazed to see that the stone has been rolled away.
- Mary rushes off to tell Peter and John that the body of Jesus has been stolen (Jn.20:2).
- The other women stay in the garden. They enter the tomb and are met by two angels, who tell them to carry word of the resurrection to the disciples. The problem of “a young man” of Mark 16:5, “two men” of Lk.24:4, “angels” of Lk.24:23, is one of the “ordinary” synoptic divergences of detail through selective recording.
- The women rush away from the garden, filled with mingled emotions of fear and joy, speaking to no one about the vision of the angels at the empty tomb (Mk. 16:8).
- Later in the day, Jesus met them (Matt. 28:9 does not say that this meeting occurred in the garden). They had run away from the tomb. Jesus tells them to bear the word to the disciples; they depart to find the disciples, who are not together but scattered (Matt. 26:56).
- Peter and John, having been informed by Mary, come to the tomb after the women have left. They see the clothes; vague comprehension dawns on John. They rush off to gather the disciples.
- Mary returns to the tomb after Peter and John have left; they had run to the tomb (Jn.20:4), leaving Mary behind. She still thinks the body had been stolen. She is weeping outside the tomb, knowing nothing of the experience of the women she had left in the garden. She sees the two angels, then Jesus (John 20:11-17). (Mk.16:9 is not authentic.)
- After the first shock of amazement had worn off, the women find some of the disciples; the disciples cannot believe the fanciful story (Lk.24:11).
- The disciples have gathered together.
- Mary arrives and tells her experience (Jn.20:18).
- That afternoon, the walk to Emmaus.

- m. Sometime that afternoon, an appearance to Peter (Lk.24:34). Paul does not mention the appearance to the women (I Cor.15:5-6) but neither does he preclude it.
- n. That evening, the disciples are all together in the closed room. They had been scattered, but the testimony of the women, of Peter and John, then of Mary serves to bring them all together. Thomas was absent.
- o. A second appearance to the eleven, including Thomas.
- p. Galilee (Matt.28:16). The appearance by Tiberias (Jn.21) and to the 500 (I Cor.15:6).
- q. Return to Jerusalem; the final appearance and ascension.

NOTE: The diversity in the Gospel accounts shows their independence of each other and suggests that the points on which they do give identical reports are likely to be all the more historically reliable. Faith did not create the appearances. The appearances created faith.

F. **The authorship of the Pentateuch.**

1. The traditional explanation is that the Five Books of Moses were written by Moses himself. There are several variants of this explanation:
 - a. Traditional Judaism and fundamentalist Christianity believe that the text was dictated by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, letter for letter (or pretty much letter for letter).
 - b. Other religious groups still ascribe authorship to Moses, but use words like “divinely inspired” rather than “dictated letter for letter.”
 - c. Still others say Moses was the sole author, but there’s nothing “divine” about it except in the sense that all great works of literature and poetry are “inspired.”
 - d. Mosaic authorship would mean the five books were written around 1280 to 1250 BC, the most commonly accepted range of dates for the exodus from Egypt, give or take 30 years.
 - e. It has long been recognized that there were a few problems with the traditional view of Moses as author. The text reports the death of Moses--how could Moses have written of his own death? It also describes Moses as “the most humble man who ever lived”--how could Moses write that about himself? But these are minor issues. Some say Moses’ successor Joshua wrote the few lines that describe the death of Moses; others say that Moses himself was commanded to write that text before it happened. None of this represents a serious challenge to Mosaic authorship.
2. As time went on, however, scholars became increasingly skeptical of the idea of Moses as single author. Among their objections:
 - a. Several stories are repeated, with different characters or different emphasis (called “doublets”). For instance, there are two creation stories (Gen 1 and Gen 2). There are three stories of a patriarch traveling among pagans and pretending his wife is his sister. There are two stories of Moses striking a rock to produce water. There are two versions of the Ten Commandments (one in Exodus, one that Moses recaps in Deuteronomy) with slightly different wording. There are, in fact, a lot of these doublets.
 - b. There are internal inconsistencies. The number of days of the Flood story don’t add up right. At one point, Noah takes two of each animal; at another point, he takes two of some, seven of others. Joseph is sold into slavery to Ishmaelites in one verse, to Midianites a few verses later. The Mountain of Revelation is sometimes called Sinai and sometimes Horeb. Moses’ father-in-law is sometimes called Yitro and sometimes Ruel, and so on.
 - c. Scholars in late 18th century Germany noted that in most of the duplicated stories, one set described God using the Hebrew word Elohim (usually translated “God”) while the other set tended to use God’s four-lettered Name Y-H-W-H (usually translated “Lord,” sometimes miscalled “Jehovah.”) This gave rise to the theory that

there were two different authors, one called E and one called J (German for Y), whose works were somehow combined to form a single text.

- d. Later analysis of the grammar, vocabulary, and writing style provided evidence for two other authors--called P for the Priestly author (mostly Leviticus, and lots of the genealogy) and D for the Deuteronomist, since the book of Deuteronomy seemed different (grammatically and politically) from the earlier books. The multiple-author view has come to be called the “Documentary theory.”
 - e. We interject at this point to say that traditionalists have answers to all the points raised by Documentary scholars. The E-word for God is used when God’s justice is predominant; the J-name is used when God’s mercy is predominate. The doublet stories are complementary, offering different interpretations and insights. For example, each of the creation stories has a different emphasis, one on the physical universe and one on the pre-eminence of mankind. Textual differences (such as in the different versions of the Ten Commandments) make a point by comparison. For example, “Remember the Sabbath” and “honor the Sabbath” means to do both.
3. Documentary theorists see a much more complicated story, with four different texts by four different authors (although some think “schools” of authors might be responsible for each text rather than a single author). These were later combined by an editor, called the Redactor. The Redactor sometimes put the different authors’ stories one after the other (as with the creation stories) and sometimes interwove them (as with the two stories of Noah’s Flood and of Joseph’s mistreatment by his brothers). The Redactor also added comments like “Now it came to pass, after these things . . .” as a transition between sections.
 - a. Scholars differ on when the various authors wrote and when the Redaction occurred. No one today knows who the initial authors were--the predominant view is that many of the stories were handed down orally for generations before being written down. It’s not clear which texts are older (although the Song at the Sea in Exodus 15:1-8 is usually acknowledged as among the oldest verses), or which author wrote which verses. Nor is there agreement on the gender of the authors. Some scholars believe the J-writer was a woman. (The above section is taken from Straight Dope Staff Dex and Eutychus)
 - b. The four hypothetical sources.
 - The J Source – is the oldest source (950-900) YAHWAH is a human like figure who works through people not miraculous acts.
 - The E Source – was written (850-800) and pictures God as a miracle worker.
 - The D Source – the book of laws found by Hilkiah in 621 B.C. and makes up most of Deuteronomy.
 - The P Source – the Priestly source is dated about 500 B.C. and contains details of Priestly requirements for purification. The emphasis is on the priest not the prophet.
 - c. Below is an example from Genesis 21 of how the redactor’s supposedly drew from the various sources. *J,E,P*

“¹ Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised.² So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.³ Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.⁴ Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.⁵ Now Abraham was one

hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.⁶ Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me."⁷ *And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."*⁸ The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.⁹ Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking.¹⁰ Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac."

G. **The authenticity of the Gospels (traditional arguments).**

1. **Internal evidence**

- a. The style of each Gospel is what we might expect from our knowledge of the traditional authors.
- b. The lack of mention of the fall of Jerusalem (70 C.E.) suggests that the Synoptic Gospels were written before that date.
- c. The fact that there is no attempt to suppress apparent discrepancies in the various accounts argues for their authenticity.
- d. The details within the Gospels are consistent with Jerusalem prior to the fall of the Temple (70 C.E.).

2. **External evidence**

- a. They are widely cited by many authors from early on.
- b. They are quoted as authoritative and as one-of-a-kind.
- c. They were collected very early into a distinct volume.
- d. They were given titles of respect (Scripture, divine writings).
- e. They were publically read and expounded.
- f. Copies, commentaries, and harmonies were written on them.
- g. They were accepted even by heretical groups.
- h. Early opponents of Christianity regarded the Gospels as containing the accounts upon which the religion was founded.
- i. The apocryphal books of the New Testament were never so treated.

3. **The text of the Gospels is pure (uncorrupted).**

- a. Citations from the church fathers are consistent.
- b. Any corruptions would have been detected as the Gospels were widely copied and used in the churches.
- c. The abundance of copies over a wide area without major discrepancies is a witness to their purity.

4. **The Gospels are reliable.**

- a. It is unlikely that the disciples of Jesus were deceived.
 1. Many saw the resurrected Christ.
 2. They saw him together.
 3. They saw him on several occasions.
 4. They touched him, conversed with him, and ate with him.
- b. It is unlikely that the disciples of Jesus were deceivers.

Suggested Reading

Popular level

1. Lee Strobel, **The Case for Christ**, Harper & Collins. This is a journalist's personal investigation of the evidence for Jesus. It is popular, powerful, and very readable.
2. F.F. Bruce, **The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?** Eerdmans (This is a classic and popular treatment of the subject from an evangelical perspective.)
3. N.T. Wright, **The Original Jesus**, Eerdmans (Wright is an conservative scholars who is at the top of the field in NT studies. All of his material is recommended. This volume is for beginners.)
4. N.T. Wright, **The Challenge of Jesus**, IVP (This is a short concise, simple, yet intellectually respectable and informed defense of an orthodox Christian view of Jesus.)
5. Donald Guthrie, **New Testament Introduction**, IVP (This text book is a good conservative, and scholarly introduction to the N.T. It addresses many of the critical questions raised by modern critics.)
6. Edward Carnell, **An Introduction to Christian Apologetics**, Eerdmans (Although first published in 1948 this remains one of the best reasoned defenses of the Christian faith that I know.)
7. Josh McDowell, **The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict**, Nelson (This is a good resource that addresses most of the questions raised by those who challenge the authority of the Bible and the integrity of the Christian message. It would be good **first read** for most university students.)

Academic level

8. Bart D. Ehrman, **The New Testament - A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings**, Oxford (This text book is a well written and powerful but quite biased presentation of the liberal, historical, critical approach to the New Testament. If you are not now wrestling with the questions of credibility of the N T. you will be after reading this book. This text is a fine example of what is being taught in the modern university (on the subject of the New Testament).
9. Craig Blomberg, **The Historical Reliability of the Gospels**, IVP (A good thorough treatment that deals with higher critical problems from an evangelical perspective that sees value in Historical Critical tools)
10. G.E. Ladd, **The New Testament and Criticism**, Eerdmans (This is a good text by a fair minded conservative scholar who answers the claims of modern liberal critics.)
11. Frank Gaebelin, **The Expositor's Bible Commentary Volume 1**, Zondervan (This volume addresses issues of introduction to both Old and New Testaments. Its material is helpful in addressing some of the scholarly issues raised by modern critics.)
12. Arthur Patzia, **The Making of the New Testament – Origin, Collection, Text, & Canon**, IVP (This text is a good conservative and scholarly treatment of its subject.)
13. N.T. Wright, **The New Testament and the People of God**, Fortress. (For more advanced students.)
14. N.T. Wright, **Jesus and the Victory of God**, Fortress. (For more advanced students.)

15. Robert Thomas and David Farnell ed. **The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship**, Kregel (This text gives a strong critique of Historical Criticism but unfortunately also of any evangelicals who use its tools.)
16. Wayne A. Meeks, General Editor, **Library of Early Christianity**, Westminster. (Vol.1 by David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, is a good treatment for serious students.)
17. Thomas Oden, **The Word of Life**, Harper Collins. (Oden was a brilliant historical critic and became disillusioned with the system. Chapter 7 of this systematic theology of Christ has a fine critique of the historical critical method.)
18. Ben Witherington III, **The Jesus Quest**, IVP. (Witherington is a respected scholar and a solid evangelical who deals with historical critical methodology to demonstrate the integrity of the Gospel message.)
19. Eta Linnemann, **Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?** Kregel (Linnemann is a former historical critic who critically reviews the methods and assumptions of Historical Criticism.)
20. Eta Linnemann, **Biblical Criticism on Trial** Kregel (Linnemann's books are a treasure of helpful criticism from one who has been on the inside.)
21. Roland Kenneth Harrison, **Introduction to the Old Testament**, Eerdmans. (This is one of many solid evangelical treatments of the Old Testament and the questions raised by Historical Critical views.)

The Point

The fatal flaw of historical criticism is its naturalistic presupposition.

Response

Head

I am to understand that:

Presuppositions determine conclusions.

Heart

I am to believe that:

The Word of God is dynamic and we should expect it to touch our hearts not just our minds.

Hands

I am to behave by:

Giving careful attention to the sound scholarship of historical critics while recognizing the limitations of their methodology.

Pastoral advice

How should evangelical believers view historical critical methods?

1. Be aware of how presuppositions color the results.
2. There is need for historical criticism in helping us understand the human side of Scripture but the method is seldom used without destructive results because of the narrow presuppositions that often accompany it.
3. Anyone going into a college setting where they will be taking classes in Biblical literature should be familiar with this material.

Questions that you should be able to answer.

- 1. Specific facts you should know.**
 - a. What are five weaknesses of the historical critical method?
 - b. How is an evangelical Christian to defend the Biblical record against higher critical attack?
- 2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.**
 - a. Where is historical criticism helpful?
 - b. Where do evangelicals need most to listen to historical critics?
- 3. Questions you should wrestle with.**
 - a. Do the presuppositions of higher critical scholarship doom its usefulness to Christians?
 - b. How is faith subject to scholarship and how is scholarship subject to faith?