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The Historical Reliability of the Gospels

August 20, 2022



Knight & Rose Show - Wintery Knight and Desert Rose

Wintery Knight and Desert Rose discuss several lines of evidence supporting the authenticity and trustworthiness of the four Gospels, for example: consistency with contemporary non-Christian sources, name disambiguation, undesigned coincidences, confirmation of historical details, etc. We also discuss whether miracles are possible. Finally, we recommend resources on Gospel reliability for all skill levels.

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Show notes: <https://winteryknight.com/2022/08/20/knight-and-rose-show-episode-19-the-historical-reliability-of-the-gospels>

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Transcript

Welcome to the Knight & Rose Show, where we discuss practical ways of living out an authentic Christian worldview. Today's topic is "The Reliability of the Gospels." I'm Wintery Knight. And I'm Desert Rose.

Welcome, Rose. So in today's episode, we're going to be discussing some of the evidence for the reliability of the Gospels. The Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John

are ancient biographies of Jesus of Nazareth that are found in the New Testament.

So we want to focus on the Gospels because they record the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. If the Gospels are reliable, and what they record actually happens, then Christianity is true, and that has serious implications for how we live our lives. So let's get into it.

Rose, do you think the Gospels are historically reliable? And if so, why? There is a lot of evidence that indicates the Gospels are indeed reliable, and that what they record are actual historical events. So the writers are extremely knowledgeable of the time and places they wrote about. They are very attentive to detail.

They agree with other non-Christian historical sources and archaeology. And the writers didn't shy away from recording difficult or embarrassing interactions in order to further their agenda. But before we get too far into the evidence, I do want to mention that the strength of this argument is in the cumulative case.

We're going to mention a lot of reasons and a lot of examples for why we can trust the Gospels. But it's when we put the facts together that we really see the strength of the overall case. Yeah, that sounds excellent.

Let's get into it. So in a previous episode that came out a couple of weeks ago, we were talking about common challenges that are raised by Muslims against Christianity. And one of their challenges was that they said that the Gospels that we have today are different than the Gospels that were originally recorded.

And we talked about how we had discovered over 5,000 Greek manuscripts, some of them dating back as early as the second century. When we compare those early manuscripts with what we have today, we found that they're nearly identical. And most of the changes were minor errors, such as variations of spelling.

Even the most significant discrepancies didn't affect the core truth claims of the Christian worldview or the story of Jesus. But the fact that the writings were accurately copied doesn't necessarily mean they were reliable to begin with. So let's get started with some reasons why we should believe that the Gospels are reliable.

What's a good reason for us to think that they are? Well, there are several reasons, as I mentioned. But one is that the Gospels are consistent with what was written by reliable non-Christians who lived very close to the time of Jesus. I'll give you a few examples.

One is Cornelius Tacitus. Okay. Cornelius Tacitus.

Yes. So he was born around 56 AD. He was a Roman historian.

He is known for his incredible accuracy in recording history. Okay. He was not a

Christian, as I mentioned.

In fact, he called Christianity a disease. So sometimes people have issues with the Gospels having been written by Christians, although certainly it's not the case that they're unreliable just because they believe and are excited about what they're writing about. Think of like post-World War II Jewish historians writing about what happened to them under the German regime.

They're not unreliable. They want to be accurate because they want everyone to understand what happened. Yeah, that's a great analogy.

Yeah. But here we have writings from Tacitus who was not a Christian, did not like Christianity. He reported several facts that line up with what the gospel saved.

So for example, he reported that Christ was the source of the name Christian. So Christ the Messiah, the anointed one, is the source of the name Christian. The name Christian, like the name of the community.

Yes, exactly. And he also reported that it was the crowds that named them Christians. That name did not come from Christians themselves.

And that lines up with what we find in Acts 11 and 26 and 1 Peter 4, that it was actually originally a condescending name that was not come up with by people who were following Christ, but with their enemies, basically. Tacitus also reported that Christ was put to death during the reign of Tiberius. Who's Tiberius? So Tiberius was the Roman emperor from A.D. 14 to 37.

So it's really significant because that helps us date. And it really confirms a lot of the dating as far as when Christ lived and was killed. Yeah.

Tacitus also records that Christ was sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea, from A.D. 26 to 36. So now we're even narrowing the window of when Christ was crucified. Yeah, it's nice.

They're getting all the surrounding details confirmed by this external source, this Roman historian who doesn't even like Christians. Exactly. Yeah.

He also reported that Christians were persecuted for their faith. He reported that Christianity began in Judea. Wow.

Okay. Yeah. He talks a lot about the large fire in Rome during the time of the leader Nero who blamed the fire on the Christians.

And this we know from several sources have occurred in A.D. 64. And so he talks a lot about that. And he records that Nero blamed the fire on the Christians and talks a lot about them as if there were many, many Christians in Rome by the year 64.

This is significant because that means that Christianity spread really far, really quickly. Jesus was only crucified around A.D. 30. And there were large numbers of Christians in Rome, living in Rome by 64.

That's a pretty short amount of time to go a far distance because the distance from Jerusalem to Rome is greater than the distance from New York City to Havana, Cuba. It's a long distance. And this is before the days of airplanes.

So how did they get so many people to become Christians at such a great distance in such a short time? Right. Yeah, exactly. And the more widespread Christianity became, the harder it certainly would have been to change the message.

So a lot of people like to say, "Oh, well, some of this was created over time and these were just myths." But what we see is, for a lot of reasons, is a single message that spreads very quickly and very far, very early. Right. And in previous episodes, like the resurrection episode and the common Muslim objections episode, we've talked about the early emergence of the resurrection story and the divinity of Jesus.

Right, exactly. And 1 Corinthians 15, for example. So yeah, those are really significant as well.

So any other non-Christian writers writing around that time who confirm facts that are reported in the Gospels? Yeah, well, there's plenty of the younger. He was born around 61 or 62. He died sometime after 111.

He was a Roman governor in northwestern Turkey. And he wrote to the Roman emperor Trajan to ask how he should deal with Christians. So Pliny and Trajan both agreed on a test for Christians.

Yeah, I just read about this. The test for seeing if someone is a Christian, as you just asked them to worship the Roman gods in addition to their gods. And their early Christians weren't willing to do that.

Right. Yeah, I just went through this because I'm reading Person of Interest by J. Warner Wallace and he talked about this. It was really interesting to find out what life was like for the early Christians.

Yeah, exactly. And speaking of life for the early Christians, Pliny the Younger also wrote that Christians assembled before dawn on a regular basis and they sang to Christ as to a God. Wow.

Yeah, so he's acknowledging that they don't just, you know, they won't worship multiple gods. You can't get them to worship Roman gods. They won't just add another God to the God they worship.

But then he also says they were singing songs to Christ as if to a God. And so that's really significant for how they viewed Christ very early on. Yeah, some people try to argue that the divinity of Christ emerges over time.

But like we saw in the common Muslim objections episodes, the divinity of Christ goes right back to the earliest sources. Right. So, and here it is being reported by a non-Christian Roman governor.

Right, exactly. Yeah. And Pliny also recorded that Christ was executed under Pontius Pilate.

He indicated that there were large numbers of Christians and he talked about the temples of Roman gods becoming desolate and people who sold meat that was sacrificed to idols were struggling to find buyers. Wow. Yeah, you'd have to have significant numbers for that to be the case and for so many temples and businesses to be affected like that.

Yeah, I just went through the book of Acts in the Bible study I'm in and they talked about how Paul is like always getting into trouble in Acts. He should read Acts. It's really interesting to see how he is conducting business as a Christian.

And he would go into synagogues and open areas and discuss things with people. But at one point he went into a Jewish temple and he got into trouble. Yeah, he got into trouble while he was busy doing all of these debates and discussions because the silversmiths who used to make images of the Roman gods for people were not able to get enough people to buy their images.

And they're saying this is because so many people are becoming Christians. Right. And Acts chapter 19 is where you can read about this.

And there are riots over this because the businesses that cater to these Roman ways of worshiping, sacrifices and idols are getting annoyed that not enough people are buying their stuff. Yeah, yeah, exactly. Have you got another non-Christian historian who confirms core facts in the gospels? Yeah, so Flavius Josephus was a Jewish historian who lived in the first century.

He was born around 37, died around 100. And he wrote about James, the brother of Jesus. This is really significant because for one thing he confirms Matthew chapter 13 verse 55 and Mark 6.3 that Jesus in fact had a brother named James.

Yeah. He also affirmed the persecution of Christians, including the stoning of James. Wow, okay.

So we're getting details about what happened to the people who are written about in the gospels, like what happens after. Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

And we talked about James in our resurrection episode, if you recall, because he originally was a skeptic, thought his brother was out of his mind, that Jesus could not be the Messiah. And then there were these resurrection appearances. And next thing we know, James is not only a believer, but he's leading the church in Jerusalem.

Yeah, so let's just pause there for a second because basically, whenever we're looking at history, we come up with a set of historical facts that have to be explained. And here we are reading a Jewish historian who's considered extremely reliable and he's saying, okay, well Jesus had a brother named James and after Jesus died, somehow James gets himself stoned to death and he is a big leader in the church. And the gospels are saying before that, that he was very skeptical of his brother, which is kind of an embarrassing detail, right? Right.

And that's probably reliable. So what's the explanation for that is what you want to everybody has to answer this, you know, right? What's your explanation for how you get this skeptical James to change his mind. So much of the Christian worldview is inferring causes for effects, even in like science.

And here we are in history saying, okay, James and Paul, Paul's like an enemy of the church. He's like persecuting everyone. And James is like, Oh, my brother is quite crazy.

I don't like him at all. He's very annoying. And then something happens, even Jesus dying, something has to happen after Jesus's death that causes these people, Paul and James to change their minds.

And these are things that are known about Paul and James, you know, they're written about outside the gospels, like what happens to them. Exactly. Yeah.

And what happened to them was not the opportunity to live their best life now. That's for sure. Because both of them ended up being martyred, living very, very difficult lives, knowing that it was because of their new Christian faith that they were being persecuted and then, and that they would likely die for their teachings.

And that's what happened. Something had to have happened that made them less concerned about the threats of suffering and death. Right.

Exactly. What could it be? What could it be? Who knows? Such a mystery. And so this also indicates that the early church was not a good environment for spreading myths because of people who had quite good lives, very good lives in the case of Paul for sure, and then became Christians and started suffering for it.

And then people like James who had a similar situation, but was the brother of Jesus, James would have known a little bit about Jesus' upbringing, his birth, his life, his death. And so given that he was leading the church and that even some of Jesus' other family members were involved in the early church, this just isn't a good environment for myths

to creep up, especially when there's such a cost to be paid or accepted. To get outed as a Christian to the Roman authorities is going to result in torture and execution.

So because they're alarmed at how fast this is spreading, and they're alarmed at how large numbers of people aren't worshipping the Roman gods, and they're seeing this as a threat to their authority. Okay, so let's cut it off there and see what we have found from reading non-Christian sources. So at a minimum, we can say that non-Christian historians confirm basic facts that are documented in the New Testament.

We know that from these external sources that Christ was worshiped as God early on, that Christ followers saw worshipping of other gods as competitive to worshipping Jesus, that they experienced persecution for not worshipping other gods, that Christianity spread far and fast. We're talking in decades, it was reaching far distances and large numbers of people were becoming Christians. They confirmed the names and existence of Jesus' family and other Christian leaders who are written about in the Gospels.

So we're kind of at the point, like I was saying, where we can kind of say, let's accept that the details that are confirmed by these external sources are historical, because now we have multiple sources saying the same things. What's the explanation for all of these developments? Christians have an explanation, but just wonder what non-Christians would say, how would they explain this? How did Christianity grow so fast in the teeth of persecution like this? Okay, so that's evidence from outside the Bible, outside the Gospels, often by people who are very antagonistic to Christianity. So how about another reason to think that the Gospels are reliable? Well, there's also the fact that the church began in Jerusalem and grew outward from there.

And as Tacitus and others recorded, Christianity began in Judea, where Pontius Pilate was governor and where Jesus was crucified, and it spread out from there to other places. This is in agreement with the Gospels. And since that's where Jesus was killed, where Christianity began is where Jesus was killed, then producing a body or interviewing the witnesses, many of whom were named in the historical records, would have stopped the movement in its tracks.

But that's not what happened. What actually happened is that Christianity grew rapidly, beginning right where the events took place, right where it could have been easily disproved, and it spread from there. Okay, that's excellent.

I have one that I want to talk about because it's related to my field of computer science. So this one is called the Indicator of Disambiguation in the New Testament text. So there's disambiguating going on, and I'm going to tell you what it means.

So when I was studying computer science in grad school, I didn't know where I was going to work after. So I took a wide variety of courses in different topics. So I took courses in machine learning, information retrieval, and natural language processing.

And one of the topics that came up in natural language processing is that computers need to be able to understand the meaning of human written language, which we call natural language. And so there are words in the English language like the word run, which can have multiple meanings like run a race or a run in her pantyhose or a run in the stock market. And the computer kind of needs to understand which meaning of the word run you're talking about.

What we do is we look at the words around that word to try to decide what the context of that word is, and then we can determine the meaning. And the same thing is done with names in the New Testament. So people have done studies about which names were the most common in first century Judea.

And the problem with common names is you never know which person of a group of people with the same name is being talked about unless you qualify them with a disambiguator. So do you have any examples of disambiguation in the New Testament? Yeah. So as you mentioned, we can find out which first names were the most common in first century Judea by looking at the writings of that era.

And in fact, scholar Richard Baucom has done that and has written extensively on that topic. And what he's found is actually really fascinating. I think his book is called Jesus and the Eyewitnesses, and he won a prize for that.

It was original research. No one had ever done this before. Yeah.

Yeah. And there's a lot more into that book than we're going to be able to talk about here, but I'll give a couple of examples. The names Simon and Mary, for example, were very common in first century Judea, but the names Thomas and Bartholomew and Philip were not common among Jews in Palestine.

So we should expect to see disambiguators on these common names, but not on the uncommon names. And that is exactly what we find in the New Testament. Okay.

I can do this. So Simon and Mary. Okay.

Simon the zealot. Yes. So he's getting a disambiguator because there's a billion Simons.

Exactly. Yeah. So the zealot would be a disambiguator.

Yeah. There's also Simon Peter. There's Simon the Cyrenian.

There's Simon the leopard. Simon the leper. Sorry.

I meant the leper. He's not a leopard. His name is a leopard.

Yes. So it's also, yeah, it's also interesting to me that the frequencies of names were different for Jewish communities in different regions of the Roman empire. So someone

who was inventing these stories would have to be familiar with the frequencies of names specifically in first century Judea in order to know which ones to disambiguate.

And, you know, it couldn't, it could not have been writing the gospels only familiar with common Jewish names in Libya or in Egypt or in other parts of the Roman empire. They would have had to have known common Jewish names in this particular little area. Right.

And this is before the time of libraries, before the time of the internet. So this is really hard to travel everywhere and know what every, you know, everything is. Let's move on to another reliability indicator that we talked about this before.

And you mentioned that today already the embarrassing details in the gospels indicate that they were not made up. Right. So back in our very first episode, we talked about the criteria that historians use to determine if some part of a historical document is reliable and they call this criterion of embarrassment.

So if there's a piece of the historical document that's reported, that's embarrassing to the author or to the author's community, then it's more likely to be historically accurate. And one of the examples we gave was the discovery of the empty tomb by Jesus's women followers, because in that time, women's testimony was not very highly valued in, in like trials. They just didn't think that it was as good as a man's testimony.

So if the gospels were being made up for evangelistic purposes, you know, like come join our movement, they would choose people who are seen as reliable about testimony. And so they would have chosen male witnesses. The reason they didn't choose male witnesses because the fact was that the women discovered the empty tomb.

Right. Exactly. Yeah.

And that actually did cause some people to doubt in the first century, but it's, it's a strong bit of evidence for the reliability now. And there are lots of examples of that sort of thing in the gospels. I mean, the disciples repeatedly come across as a group of faithless and fearful, unreliable fools.

We see in, in Matthew 14, 28 to 30, for example, that Peter was trying to walk on water and he saw the wind and became afraid and cried out to Jesus to save him. And so that just really does not make Peter look too good. And he's supposed to be a leader of these disciples.

Yeah. That certainly didn't put forward the agenda of the disciples. I think it, you know, it would have needed to be authentic to make any sense to include it.

In Luke 18, 31 to 34, when Jesus was talking about his imminent death, the disciples didn't even understand what he was talking about, even though he was speaking in plain language. He wasn't talking in... I laugh, but I'm as much of a dork as they are, I'm sure.

He wasn't talking in parables at that point.

You know, he was pretty clear. It seemed as I read it and, and yet they seemed confused. And that happens a lot throughout the gospels that the, the disciples seemed confused and, and lost and dimwitted.

So the gospels also record large numbers of people walking away from Jesus after they heard his message. This is embarrassing for, you know, for people who are trying to... Yeah, the people who are closest to him, right? Yeah, exactly. Yeah, including people who knew him best.

So John records that many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. That's what John says in chapter six, verse 66, after he, Jesus was teaching the crowds. That's when Jesus goes over to his disciples and says, do you want to go to, you know, and Peter's like, where are we going to go? You're the one with the words of life.

And Mark tells us in chapter three, verses 20 and 21, that Jesus' own family thought he was out of his mind. I think that's hilarious. And Mark six also tells us that Jesus was rejected in his own hometown of Nazareth.

People just did not believe there. They're like, yeah, this is... We know this guy. We know this guy.

He's not that special. Right. And Jesus was even betrayed and handed over to the authorities by one of his handpicked 12 disciples.

John records that in chapter 18, verses one through five. Those are some embarrassing details for sure. Here's another thing that is troubling to many people, but it's an indicator of reliability because they left it in.

It's the difficult teachings that are confusing or hard to accept in the Bible. So tell us some of those. Yeah.

Well, for example, I mean, I hear this a lot of time for Muslims. Jesus didn't even know the time or day of his return. So how could he be... How could he be God? Yeah, exactly.

That's in Mark 13. Jesus says that the father is greater than he is in John 14. Again, I hear that from Muslims as, well, if the father was greater than Jesus can't be deity.

And so, I mean, these are easily explained by... Yeah, there's ways to explain these, but on the face of it, it's troublemaking stuff. Right, exactly. There was no reason to include it unless Jesus said it.

Right. There were a lot of early questions that led to disputes among Christians that Jesus did not answer, which if the disciples had felt freedom to insert teachings into Jesus' mouth in their recordings of history, then why not have him make some definitive

statement on whether believing Gentiles had to be circumcised or whether they had to follow any of the other Jewish laws or what roles women could hold. I mean, things like this that ended up causing all sorts of dissension, division, discussion.

And if they felt free to play around with Jesus' words, they could have easily just included something that they made up. But that's not what happened. A lot of questions were left unanswered and we were left to, as Christians, to use our minds and figure them out utilizing what we were given.

Well, let's go on to another evidence for reliability. This one is really interesting and maybe people haven't heard of it, but it's called Undesigned Coincidences. And what's an undesigned coincidence? So basically, this is when you read something in one source that kind of is confusing or doesn't make sense.

It's surprising. And then you read a parallel account that's different from a different person. And there's kind of an ordinary fact that's reported that unlocks the mystery in the first source.

Right. Yeah, it's kind of as if they unintentionally fill in gaps of information for one another. So let me start with one example and then you can tell me one that you know.

So this one is from the Gospel of Matthew and Matthew reports that Jesus' accuser spit in his face and struck him and some slapped him saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ, who is it that struck you?" So that seems weird. It's like if somebody comes up and hits me and then they go, "Who hit you?" I'd go, "You did." So why doesn't Jesus know who struck him? And Matthew doesn't tell why he doesn't know. But if you read Luke, Luke has a parallel account of what happened here and he also adds that Jesus was blindfolded at the time.

Right. And that's in Luke 22. If you take Matthew 26 alone, confusing.

If you take Matthew 26 and Luke 22, everything makes sense. Clear as spider webs, as Shakespeare would say. So I'll give you one more.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus asks Philip, who is a very kind of obscure disciple who is not often mentioned, where to get food for this large crowd that's following them. So this is in John 6. So the question is, why does Jesus ask Philip compared to, you know, one of the disciples who's more well known. And so the first piece of the puzzle is in John, where we find out that Philip is from Bethsaida.

But that doesn't really unlock the puzzle for us. We have to go over to Luke and Luke reports that they were near Bethsaida in Luke chapter nine. And that's why.

That's why Jesus asked Philip specifically. Yeah. Where to get food.

He was from there. Yeah, exactly. It's like if I'm born in Chicago and we all travel to Chicago and everybody says where do I get the best Italian beef sandwich? The guy from Chicago is going to know.

Right. Exactly. Yeah.

And in Matthew's account, Andrew and Peter both chime in with their thoughts too. After Jesus asked Philip where to get food. And Luke also revealed that Andrew and Peter were from Bethsaida as well.

So that kind of unlocks even more of the mystery. Everybody who was a part of that conversation was from that area. So yeah, I really like Jesus's first calling of his disciples as an example of undesigned coincidences.

Where is that? In Matthew chapter four verses 18 to 22, we read of Jesus seeing some fishermen and saying, follow me. And then they left everything and followed him. Just like that.

That sounds crazy. I'm a very practical person and I'm not abandoning my safe career and nice house for nothing. Yeah, exactly.

I mean, that's what I thought when I first read this. That clearly something, I mean, something has got to be missing. Are you kidding me? Who does this? Is this for real? But then when I read Luke chapter five verses one through 11, he reveals in his account that before Jesus said, follow me and they left everything.

Jesus had told these disciples to lower their nets after they had been fishing all night and caught nothing. And then they had cleaned the nets and Jesus says, put the nets back out again. And they're like, are you insane? What do you, what do you, we haven't caught any fish all night long.

And now you think during the daytime, we're going to catch fish and he's like, lower them, trust me. And they lower the nets and they catch so many fish that the nets are all breaking, that the boats start to sink. And so then the story made a lot more sense to me.

Obviously, if you can't catch a single fish all night long and then some guy tells you in the morning, try again now and you catch more fish than you've ever seen in your life. Yeah. And you're, and it's, you know, you're expecting the Messiah and that sort of thing.

Yeah, that, that would have, that would catch my attention. Yeah. These are really interesting.

There's a large number of these in the gospels, but we have to cut it off because we still have more reasons. So let's go to the next reason. This one is the types and variety of

historical details that are reported, accurately reported in the gospel.

So basically the writers of the gospels talk about just ordinary details of the place where they are writing these things. And these details are about a variety of things and they describe the historical settings where the events took place. So if these things are confirmed to be correct, then we can know that they were at least in a position to be recording what was happening accurately.

So why don't you give us an example of that? Again, there are just way too many than what we could go into. But for example, the gospel writers mentioned 26 different towns, including very small villages like Bethany and Bethphagy that they likely could not have learned about through reading other sources. Some of the towns they talk about are not mentioned in any other known source from that time.

And so in a lot of ways, the gospels serve as kind of the go-to geography book and historical book for that area at that time. They certainly, as you said earlier, could not have found this information on the internet. Right.

They'd have to be there in order to look at what grass is growing there and what festivals are going on, who the governor is, what the laws are. Yeah, which direction to go to get from one place to another, what the different options were for different directions, what kind of trees grew there, what seasons had the most rain, things like this. I mean, they knew all these details, how deep the water was in certain parts of the Sea of Galilee.

I mean, I was reading Peter Williams' book, *Can We Trust the Gospel?* And he talks about using the phrase going up to this place and going down to this place. And when he looked at it, he was like, "Oh, that's right. They're up here and now they're going down to this place, which is downhill.

And they're down here and now they're going up to this place, which is uphill." So just these kinds of things that you don't think about unless you're there and you're like, "Oh, we're walking uphill today, so I'm putting that down in my gospel." Right. So you can find a lot of details of agriculture, architecture, geography, architecture, like the porticos in John, is that what they're called? Those gates, geography, culture, language, law, politics, economics, religion, social stratification, weather, like tons of details. And many of these things can be confirmed by archeology or even just going today and visiting and looking.

Right. Which is a lot easier to do today, as we've mentioned several times. So yeah.

And then you contrast these gospels with apocryphal gospels. What is an apocryphal gospel? So it's a gospel that was written much later and not by the authors in the titles. So there's doubtful.

The authority is very, very doubtful. The authorship is very doubtful. Okay.

So the Gospel of Thomas, for example, mentions Judea one time. The Gospel of Judas doesn't mention any location. The Gospel of Philip mentions Jerusalem, Nazareth, and the Jordan River, which at the time that it was written, I mean, everybody knew of these places.

Jerusalem was the big capital. The Jordan River was the big river. Nazareth had been made famous by Jesus.

And that's all he mentions. And these guys don't go, whoever wrote these, they don't go into any detail. They're just really unimpressive when it comes to details like we see in the genuine gospels.

It's almost like they're sitting somewhere far off in like Egypt and going, okay, time for me to write my gospel. I've kind of heard of Judea. I'll just put that and that's it.

You know, and I'll name like Jesus and Mary. Right. Right.

That's the other thing. Yeah. We, with everything, I gave the example of city names, but it's that way with, with people's names.

It's that way with all of the level of detail. Okay. Uh, let's go on to another one.

We've talked about this before, but I just want to mention it in this podcast. So we talked about the changing over time already. So, uh, in the Muslim common Muslim objections episode, we talked about how they often say, well, the words have been changed, you know, over time.

And in that episode, we talked about a skeptical scholar named Bart Ehrman, who is a famous professor of new Testament. And he was asked in a debate to list the most important changes that affected core Christian doctrines. And he came up with a really miserable shortlist and we, you know, kind of diffused that in that episode.

Yeah, exactly. That's episode 17, by the way, uh, common Muslim objections to Christianity in case anyone wants to look back at that. Yeah.

So we won't talk about that now. Let's, let's move on to a different one, which is contradictions in the Bible. So I just want to quickly make two points about this.

So whenever someone raises a contradiction in the Bible and says, you see, I can't believe in Christianity because one gospel says there's one angel at the empty tomb and the other one says there's two angels at the empty tomb. And clearly the whole thing was made up and it's false. Well, you have to say calm in these situations and understand that the Christian worldview isn't like a piece of glass where you just crack it and the whole thing falls into a million pieces.

It's more like a, you know, a brick wall. And if you poke out one brick, the wall still

functions to hold up the house. So in our case, we have lots of evidence for the existence of God from science, lots of evidence for a minimal facts case for the resurrection, lots of evidence for the early belief in the divinity of Jesus and talking about whether there's one angel or two angels doesn't affect any of that.

Right. And none of the gospel writers said there was only one angel there while another one said there were two. And just because they only mentioned the one that they talked to or the one they saw, the one they were paying attention to doesn't mean there couldn't have been another one there.

So easily reconcilable, but yeah. Um, and that you bring up the minimal facts. That's we talked about that in episode one, still one of my favorite episodes that we've done.

If people haven't heard it, I recommend they go back and hear that very first episode. Yeah, it's a great episode. And I think the key thing is, is that we try to make the case for the resurrection based on the most well-supported facts that are accepted by the most historians, liberal, moderate and conservative, atheist, Jewish and Christian.

So you just can't throw out the entire Bible over little disagreements like this. And the second thing is, is a lot of the contradictions that people raise, often these people are like not historians, you know, not new Testament scholars. They're just atheists living in their mom's basement with, you know, progressive Christians, uh, people who, who self identify as progressive Christians who actually aren't Christians because they don't believe any of the core tenets of Christianity love to bring up these, uh, supposed contradictions to me.

They just think that this completely dissolves Christianity. It's pretty funny. Aren't there books that you can read about these supposed biblical contradictions? Yeah, definitely.

I mean, uh, one of my favorites is called the historical reliability of the new Testament by Craig Blomberg, excellent professor of new Testament. But, um, let me just give an example of some of a supposed contradiction and that's from the Sermon on the Mount. I think this is really funny.

This is something that people have brought up to me on multiple occasions that Matthews gospel in chapter five contradicts Luke's gospel in chapter six, um, with regard to the Sermon on the Mount. So Matthew five one says, quote, seeing the crowds, he, Jesus went up on the mountain and when he sat down, his disciples came to him and then Luke six 17, uh, describes what many scholars believe to be the same event like this quote, and he, Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people. End quote.

Okay. So was this teaching given in the mountains as Matthew says, or on a level place as Luke says, there are at least two possible solutions. One is that Jesus taught these

important teachings more than once as he traveled around to different towns, interacted with different people and gave similar message in different locations.

That's very, very possible. Yeah. But secondly, it's possible and likely that Jesus was up in the mountains, but since he had some common sense, he decided to teach from a level place in the mountains while he taught so that he and his listeners wouldn't be like falling off the cliffs and rolling down the hills during his lesson.

I mean, that's so ridiculous. Why, what are people thinking that there are no level places in the mountains? Um, and that Jesus is going to stand on the edge of a cliff and watch people roll down and laugh at them. So yeah, it's, it's very reconcilable.

Yes. Okay. Yes.

That's funny. Let's move on to the last one. I think this is the last one.

Uh, this is an objection you hear a lot. I want to spend some time on this. So people, ordinary people will look at the Bible, read a couple of chapters and go, I can't believe this.

There are miracles documented in this. So I think what they're saying is they're saying I have not seen any miracles performed in front of me and therefore I am not going to read books that have miracles in them and believe them. So this is really important because I think a lot of people in church don't understand the importance of learning documents.

I hear a lot of Christians say, well, I want to be an apologist, but I only want to learn historical apologetics, or I want to argue against progressive Christianity, or I want to argue for the pro-life view. You know, everybody needs to defend the Bible as basically a reliable document that documents history. And if somebody rejects it for the presence of miracles, you have to be able to make a case for the existence of God.

And the best way to do that is by, I think, appealing to the progress of science. So I'm just going to give me a couple minutes here. I'm going to just list out briefly some of the areas of science that support the existence of a creator and designer.

So let's start with the origin of the physical universe. So, you know, in the 1900s, everybody thought that the universe was eternal. We made a series of discoveries since then.

And now the common, the most widely accepted view of the origin of the universe is that it came into being out of nothing time, space, matter, and energy. And so what is good enough to create the entire natural world? You're looking at a supernatural creator that brings the entire physical universe into being. Yeah.

Whatever caused the existence of time, space, and matter and energy to begin must have been outside of time, space, and matter. Correct. I mean, this is all of the acts comes into being.

So acts cannot be the cause of all of the acts coming into being. Otherwise, there would have been some something material before the origin of matter. That's just not possible.

Right. So the other one is people have heard about this one, the fine tuning of the universe. Open your physics textbook at the beginning.

There's a list of constants and quantities like the gravitational constant and so on. If you alter those constants and quantities a little, little bit, the universe ceases to be able to support life. And what I mean by that is no stars, no hydrogen, no elements heavier than hydrogen, different terrible things happen.

So there's no way you can support complex embodied life. The origin of the first life, you know, how do you get proteins and DNA, which have sequences of components? It's like computer code. It literally is computer code.

Okay. Good luck writing a computer code. That's that complex without any intelligent agent.

It doesn't work. The sudden origin of major body plans in the fossil record. So naturalism requires gradual development of major body plans.

The fossil record shows that they all come in. Wow. You know, WAP at once, even more fine tuning.

When you think about what it takes for a planet to support life, you have to be in, in the galactic habitable zone. You have to be in the circumstellar habitable zone. You have to be on a planet that has tides and liquid water at the surface.

There's a lot of fine tuning that goes with that as well. An atmosphere, you know, you have, there's a whole bunch of constraints and these, these things I'm talking about, I can pull up a book written by one or more non-Christians for every one of these. So you go, what are you talking about? Well, say for the fine tuning, you can look at Martin Reese's just six numbers, or for the habitability, you can look at Peter Ward and Donald Brown Lee's rare earth.

So when I'm talking about these things, I'm not talking about Christian authors. Okay. These are, these are things that we've discovered from the progress of science over the last hundred years, each of which is lethal to naturalism to put them all together.

They're horrible for naturalism. And the problem is, is that the more discoveries we make, the worse it gets for naturalism. And I'm not done.

I'll read one more. Everybody's heard of irreducible complexity. So these are just machines in the cell that can't be built up in a stepwise process.

You can't go from one part and it does something to two parts and does something more and three parts. It does all the 40 parts have to come together at once or it does nothing. So I'll stop there.

But I do, I do want to urge people who think that they can dismiss the need for science apologetics. You need this. People don't read the Bible because of miracles.

You need to have present in their worldview, somebody who can do the work performing miracles. And I think the best and strongest way to do that is to appeal to these, uh, scientific evidences. Absolutely.

I mean, a hundred years ago, naturalists would have said that these problems didn't exist or that, um, science would solve all these problems without the need for creator or designer in the future. But what we've learned from the progress of science is that naturalism is increasingly unreasonable and theism lines up perfectly with the evidence that has been discovered over the last century. Right.

So like the, the universe is always eternal. Oh, except now we know it isn't. Well any kind of universe would be likely to support life except now we know that's not the case.

Well, cells are really simple. They're just a lump of Jell-O. No, no.

We discovered DNA. That's false. Well, I'm pretty sure the fossil record shows a gradual emergence of complexity.

No, it doesn't. You know, it's, it's, it's just, it's really bad news for naturalist. Exactly.

Okay. We were running out of time. So please tell me some books that we can recommend to our listeners so that they can get really, really good at defending the reliability of the gospels.

Okay. Well you and I both love Peter J. Williams book. Can we trust the gospels? It's an introductory book.

Yup, exactly. Intro level. Not difficult at all.

And quite short as well. I think it's like 150 pages. A cold case Christianity by J. Warner Wallace is also an introductory book.

Not hard to read at all. What about that one you mentioned by Blomberg? Yeah. So that's called the historical reliability of the New Testament.

It's not difficult in any way, but it is long. And so I guess because of the length, um, I

might put it in a medium category of difficulty, even though it's not difficult to understand. Right.

And for people who have kind of been there, done that with gospel reliability, you have to make sure you check out Jesus and the eyewitnesses by Richard Baucom. Yeah. Because that's where we got that name study from and a lot of other interesting arguments besides.

So new stuff. Absolutely. Yeah.

I'm glad you mentioned that one. Okay. And I think we got to call it there.

That's all we have for this episode. If you enjoy the show, please like, comment, share, and subscribe. You can find the references for this episode on winternight.com. W-I-N-T-E-R-Y-K-N-I-G-H-T.com. We appreciate you taking the time to listen and we'll see you again in the next one.

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