

101: Historicity of the Bible

- **66 books of the Bible** (Protestant canon)
- **39 books of the Old Testament** (ignoring deuterocanonical books)
 - Generally less reliable (especially books depicting events of an earlier period, e.g., Genesis)
- **27 books of the New Testament**
 - Generally more reliable (esp. Gospels/Acts; 1 Cor.; Gal.)
 - But also consists of **many theological texts** (dealing less with historical events):
 - Epistle of James
 - Revelation of John
 - Also many **pseudonymous books** (possibly forgeries):
 - Pastoral epistles (1st and 2nd Timothy; Titus)

102: Temporal Gap of Old Testament (Beginning)

- **Torah/Pentateuch** (first 5 books of the Bible)
 - Origin of the universe -> c. 1600 – 1270 BCE (death of Moses)
 - Composed (in stages) c. 1000 – 500 BCE (OAB 6; 8)
 - **Temporal gap of 270 – 1100 years!**
- **Titus Livy** on Regal Rome (753 – 509 BCE)
 - Lived 59 BCE – 17 CE
 - Sources: Fabius Pictor (254 – 190 BCE); Annales Maximi (390 BCE onward)
 - **Temporal gap of 119 years** (for earliest public record), **three centuries** for earliest Roman literary source!

103: Temporal Gap of New Testament (Paul/Gospels)

- **Authentic Pauline epistles** (50's-60's CE)
- **Gospel of Mark** (60's – mid-70's CE)
 - I view Mark as *at least* post-Paul.
 - (Irenaeus, *Adv. Her.* 3.1)
 - Sorry for those favoring earlier dates!
- **Other Gospels** (c. 80's – early-2nd century CE)
- Gap between Jesus (c. 30 CE): **20 – 100 years**
- Much shorter chronological gap!

104: Is 20-100 years too short of time for legendary development to occur?

- James Crossley dates the Gospel of Mark to c. 40 CE (only a decade after Jesus' death).
 - Still thinks the empty tomb at the end of Mark is a literary invention
- Stories about Alexander the Great meeting legendary Amazon warriors emerged even among eyewitnesses.
 - Onesicritus
- The medieval *Life of Saint Genevieve* was written only 18 years after her death.
 - Still includes stories about monsters (34), exorcisms (44-47) calmed storms (50), and healings (32; 36)
- **Takeaway: Legendary stories can emerge rapidly!**
 - Sherwin-White's "two generation" rule never gained widespread scholarly support.
 - Out of 7 scholarly reviews in the 1960's, 3 were critical, 2 ambiguous, and only 2 supportive.
 - No major scholarly revival of Sherwin-White's thesis has occurred since.

105: Testimony about Early Christians (a century after Jesus, extra-biblical)

- Josephus (corrupted passage)
 - Small group of Jews and Greeks who regarded Jesus as the Messiah (still existed in his day)
 - Notes that James, the brother of Jesus called “Christ,” was killed for a dispute over Jewish Law
- Pliny the Younger
 - Christians were conducting secret meetings
 - Killed for refusing to sacrifice to Pagan idols (common punishment for non-Christian Jews)
- Tacitus
 - A superstitious religious group persecuted for allegedly causing the great fire of Rome (64 CE), which was a political charge
- Suetonius
 - Briefly notes Nero’s punishment of the Christians (as a good thing)
 - Makes no connection between Christians and the “Chrestus” mentioned in his *Life of Claudius* (25.4)
- **None of these authors say that Christians were persecuted for belief in the resurrection of Jesus!**

106: Testimony about Jesus

(a century after his death, extra-biblical)

- Josephus
 - Notes that Jesus was the brother of James and regarded as the Messiah (less disputed passage)
- Pliny the Younger
 - Mentions a “Christ” that Christians worship like a god, but furnishes no historical information about Jesus (even his name)
- Tacitus
 - Notes that “Christus” suffered the extreme penalty under Pontius Pilate when Tiberius Caesar was emperor (doesn’t give Jesus’ name)
- Suetonius
 - Notes a “Chrestus” causing disturbances among Jews in his *Claudius* (25.4), but makes no connection with Christians in his *Nero* (16.2)
 - Chrestus was a common name; too vague to know this is Jesus
- Mara bar Serapion
 - Discusses a “wise king” killed by the Jews, compared to Pythagoras and Socrates (historical figures)
 - Recently dated by the Mara bar Serapion Project to the 1st century CE and identified with Jesus
 - Earliest Pagan reference to Jesus

107: Events Uncorroborated Outside the New Testament

- Herod's Slaughter of the Infants in Bethlehem
 - Not mentioned by Josephus
 - Mentions many of Herod's other crimes
 - Had Nicolaus of Damascus as a source
 - Literary explanations of the story:
 - Resembles Pharaoh's slaughter of the Jews in Exodus, in which Moses escapes
- Ripping of the Curtain in the Jewish Temple
 - Not mentioned by Philo of Alexandria or Josephus
 - Both write on matters pertaining to the Temple
 - Literary explanations of the story:
 - Jesus' death means that the God no longer needs the Temple for mediation with his people.
- 3-Hour Darkness at Jesus' Death
 - Not mentioned by any contemporary account discussing astronomical occurrences.
 - Julius Africanus looked for contemporary sources and found none that were reliable.
 - The story is likely drawn from OT passages (cf. Joel 2:1-2; Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:14-15).

108: Possible Literary Origins of Jesus' Miracles

- Walking on Water
 - Shows that Jesus was greater than Moses, who had merely parted the seas
- Multiplying Bread
 - Derived from Elisha multiplying bread in 2 Kings 4:42-44
- Raising the dead son of the widow of Nain
 - Elisha raises a woman's dead son back to life in Shunem (near Nain) in 2 Kings 4:8-17; 4:32-35.
 - Elijah heals a widow's son in Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:7-24.
- Ascension to Heaven
 - Inspired by Elijah's ascension to heaven in 2 Kings 2:11-12

109: What if Jesus performed real miracles like those in the OT?

- This possibility does not eliminate the hypothesis of literary invention!
- **Several ancient figures have similar myth-making patterns to Jesus, like Alexander the Great.**
- Alexander's mother is impregnated by a thunder-bolt striking her womb.
 - Resembles Zeus fathering Hercules
- Alexander journeys to the end of the world
 - Resembles Odysseus' journeys
- Alexander meets mythical Amazon warriors
 - Resembles Achilles' exploits
- **Jesus' miracles imitating OT passages in the NT was a common form of literary invention in antiquity.**

110: Aspects of the NT that align with history outside the Bible

- Real people are mentioned in the texts:
 - Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas
 - BUT, probably fictional characters too:
 - Barabbas (“son of the father”) was likely invented in imitation of the Yom Kippur sacrifice (release one lamb into the wilderness; sacrifice the other)
- Real cities are mentioned:
 - Nazareth, Capernaum, Jerusalem
 - BUT, issues with geographical accuracy:
 - Problematic route from Tyre “through” Sidon to the Sea of Galilee (Mark 7:31)
- Real customs:
 - Passover, Sabbath, traces of Aramaic oral traditions
 - BUT, uncorroborated customs and anachronisms:
 - No custom to release any criminal the crowd wanted at Passover (Barabbas)
 - The Roman denarius was not used for taxation (Matthew 22:19)

111: Consensus Facts about Jesus

- Jesus was a historical Jew who lived in the early 1st century CE.
- Jesus was probably a native of Galilee.
- Jesus probably had a brother named James (referenced in Gal. 1:19), a father named Joseph, and a mother named Mary.
- Jesus was likely baptized by John the Baptist.
- Jesus, like John, was probably an apocalyptic prophet who taught about a coming Kingdom of God (majority opinion, but not consensus).
- Jesus' ministry got him into trouble with either the Roman or Jewish authorities (or both) at Jerusalem.
- Jesus was executed by crucifixion, probably when Pontius Pilate was the Roman prefect of Judea (26-36 CE).
- Within a couple years after Jesus' death, some people *believed* that Jesus had been raised from the dead.
 - As is evidence by the creed in 1 Cor. 15:3-7, which most scholars date to 2-5 years after the death of Jesus

112: Details Disputed about Jesus' Life

- Jesus was descended from King David (probably an invented genealogy).
- Jesus was born in Bethlehem (probably born in Nazareth; infancy stories invented).
- King Herod attempted to kill Jesus as an infant by slaughtering all of the male children in Bethlehem after he was born (likely invented out of imitation of Pharaoh and Moses).
- Jesus performed genuine miracles (probably a faith healer; genuine miracles are a philosophical/theological question).
- Jesus claimed to be the equivalent of God the Father (many scholars argue that these are later sayings attributed to Jesus).
- Jesus was crucified simultaneous to a three-hour darkness that covered the earth and the ripping of the curtain in the Jewish Temple (uncorroborated outside the NT; likely literary inventions).
- After his execution, women found Jesus' burial place empty as the first sign of his resurrection (disputed by many NT scholars; no consensus).
- Jesus, after his death, physically appeared to his disciples, face to face, in an earthly setting (many scholars argue that Paul only describes visions, and not corporeal experiences).
- Jesus genuinely rose from the dead (bracketed in NT Studies as a philosophical/theological question).
- Jesus ascended to Heaven in broad daylight (the story itself was also probably inspired by the ascension of Elijah in 2 Kings 2:1-18).

113: Reliability of the Gospels, part 1

- None of the Gospels claim to be written by a named eyewitness of Jesus, or identify a named eyewitness as a source.
- The earliest patristic quotations of the Gospels (e.g., Justin) do not refer to them by named titles.
- The unusual titles in the Gospels show signs of being later additions (argued by David Trobisch).
- When compared to Greco-Roman biographical literature, the Gospels include no statements in the first-person singular about their authors' identity or sources.
 - Nepos, Plutarch, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Lucian all say more about their own identity and sources.

114: Reliability of the Gospels, part 2

- **The Gospels do not resemble the literary conventions of ancient historiography or historical biography.**
- They almost never cite oral or written historical sources.
- The sources they do cite are primarily the OT scriptures.
 - Actually a point against their historical reliability, since stories were being invented about Jesus in imitation of the OT (slide 108)
- The Gospels do not discuss contradictions between their sources about Jesus.
 - Instead, contradictory stories are seen *between* the Gospel narratives.
 - Historians and biographers would note contradictions *within* the narrative.
- The Gospels contain vastly more direct speech and dialogue than ancient historical works (Richard Pervo).
 - Ancient historians did not like to report lots of direct speech, because they did not always know the actual words spoken.
- Even ancient historical literature is not used by modern historians to try to verify ancient miracle claims.
 - If the Gospels do not even measure up the standards of ancient historical works, it makes even less sense to use them for this purpose.

115: The Reliability of the Gospels, part 3

- **The Gospels resemble the literary conventions of ancient novelistic literature.**
- The Gospels are told through an anonymous and omniscient third-person narrator.
 - Similar to the narratology of novelistic and legendary biographies, like the *Alexander Romance* and *Life of Aesop*
- The ratio of direct speech and dialogue in the Gospels is characteristic of novelistic literature (Richard Pervo)
 - Adds far more drama and didacticism to the narrative, but is not characteristic of historical literature
- The Gospels are written in a low language register and include the frequent use of parataxis (short sentences).
 - Very similar to the vocab and sentence structure in the *Alexander Romance* (Marius Reiser)
 - Not similar to the complex vocab and lengthy sentences of ancient historical literature

116: The Resurrection, part 1

- **The importance of Jesus' resurrection to Christian theology (1 Cor. 15:12-14):**

“But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. **And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.**”

117: The Resurrection, part 2

- Making the case against the resurrection:

H1: The resurrection hypothesis:

- Following his death, Jesus rose on the third day, in an earthly setting, in a transformed immortal body, and appeared to his disciples, face to face.

H2: The naturalistic or non-paranormal hypothesis:

- One of the following happened to Jesus' body:
 - Obscure burial (site never known to his followers)
 - Body was moved or stolen (accounts for empty burial place)
- The belief in the resurrection came from:
 - Theological rationalization over how Jesus could be crucified and still be the Messiah (temporary death, followed by return)
 - Visionary experiences and (possibly) hallucinations
 - Theological rationalization may have caused the visions/hallucinations
 - There would have already been a prior expectation of resurrection.
 - Legendary development eventually led to exaggerating the details in Paul/Gospels (e.g., Thomas touching Jesus' wounds).

118: The Resurrection, part 3

- The **prior probability** of the naturalistic or non-paranormal hypothesis is much greater than resurrection.

H1: Billions upon billions of people die, and yet science has never documented one resurrecting.

- If there have been one hundred billion humans in history, the prior odds of resurrection are:
- 1/100,000,000,000 *at least*
- The unprecedented nature of the resurrected body (e.g., immortality) would likely further lower the prior.

H2: Naturalistic or non-paranormal explanations all rely on more common phenomena:

- Bodies are documented to be buried obscurely, stolen, or moved.
- Post-mortem reports of dead people appearing are recorded to come from visions, hallucinations, or plain old rumors/lies.
- Legendary development is recorded to happen in ancient literature.
 - Alexander the Great and Saint Genevieve

119: The Resurrection, part 4

- The **consequent probability** of the evidence is at least equally expected on H2 as H1, if not more expected.
- **The story grows in the telling**, favoring the hypothesis of legendary development:
 - Paul (c. 50's CE), the earliest source, has no empty tomb and just vague "appearances" of Jesus (likely interpreted as visionary experiences).
 - Mark (c. 70's CE), half a century after Jesus' death, then has an empty tomb.
 - Matthew (c. 80's CE), after Mark, then has Jesus appear to his disciples in Galilee.
 - Luke (c. 90's CE), even later, instead has Jesus appear to his disciple in Jerusalem (a different story than Matthew's), and likewise this Jesus can teleport and is not at first recognizable to his followers.
 - Finally, John (c. 90-100's CE) has Thomas be able to touch Jesus' wounds.
 - If you go even later into the Gospel of Peter (2nd century CE), Jesus emerges as a giant from the tomb with giant angels accompanying him
- Note that Paul (the earliest source) makes no mention of the empty tomb or corporeal appearances.

120: The Resurrection, part 5

- The naturalistic or non-paranormal hypothesis (**H2**) has a greater overall probability than the resurrection hypothesis (**H1**).
- H2 is intrinsically more likely than H1.
- The evidence can be read as (at least) *equally favoring* H2 as H1.
 - If so, the posterior probability is greater for H2, *by virtue of the prior alone*.
- The evidence can also be read as *more likely* on H2 than on H1.
 - The fact that the story grew over time strongly suggests legendary development.
 - If both the prior and consequent probability are greater for H2, then its posterior is greater than that of H1, *hands down*.