

# *The Credibility and Candor Of the New Testament Writers*

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Since the writers of the New Testament books were not disposed toward deception, they recorded the events as they actually happened. If someone were to ask us why we believe the Bible, how would we respond? How do we know that the Bible is the Word of God? This chapter is designed to deal with such an inquiry. Just a brief reflection upon the credibility, candor, forthrightness, and honesty of the writers testify as to the authenticity of the New Testament writings. If one were seeking to pull off a scam, we cannot help but wonder why they would report events that one would leave out if one were seeking to perpetrate a fraud. Why do we believe the Bible? Just a casual reading of the New Testament books reveals the genuineness of the twenty-seven books that originated from the pens of those who were directly involved with the ministry of Jesus or with those who were indirectly caught up with those who had had a personal encounter with the One who entered history. These writings have a ring of truth that no other writings in the entire world have.

The openness of the writers jumps out with genuineness. If the authors of the New Testament wanted to carry out a hoax upon unsuspecting individuals, they would not have inserted comments that would have lead one to question the veracity of their claims about Jesus. Throughout the New Testament, these writers focused on the One who died for the sins of humanity and was raised on the third day. Peter, one of Jesus' closest companions and one of the Twelve, toward the end of his life, wrote his Second Epistle to reinforce the authenticity of the Christian faith by calling attention to the fact that the Twelve were eyewitnesses to the events reported in the New Testament. We need to pay attention to Peter as he recounts these events:

So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. <sup>13</sup> I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, <sup>14</sup> because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. <sup>15</sup> And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. <sup>16</sup> 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 Peter 1:12-16)

Peter gave first-hand testimony concerning the ministry of Jesus. Can we rely upon the testimony of one who was directly associated with Jesus? Is his testimony, as well as of the

other Apostles, credible? As we seek to evaluate the credibility and candor of the New Testament writers, we discover that these men put down many comments that no writer who wanted to pull-the-wool over someone's eyes would have ever forged. If one were seeking to carry out a swindle, or scam, one would have avoided the many negative comments about themselves as His disciples and would have carved and molded the particulars concerning the ministry of Jesus and themselves to bring about the most desired results—conviction.

Yet, in spite of their defects, we still observe an air of truth in the testimony of those who were with Jesus during His earthly ministry. We also detect an air of truth in the various compositions of the writers of the New Testament books. Why did they write the way they did if they wished to pull off a fraud? This chapter is a brief survey of some things written by these writers that give validity to their testimony. In explaining the honesty and candor of the writers of the New Testament, there will be repetition in some of the various subheadings. This repetition will only reinforce the thrust of this chapter—the integrity and candor of the writers.

## **RESURRECTION**

### **Limited to His Friends**

The various accounts of the Resurrection of Jesus strengthen the candor of the New Testament writers. Just a laid-back reading of the various narratives dealing with the Resurrection of Jesus is one such incident that leads toward the unbelievable, especially if His disciples wanted to avoid rejection of one of the most important events in the history of the world. If one wanted to convince the world of Jesus' Resurrection, one wonders why the resurrection appearances were limited to His disciples, and not to the world at large. Why did He not appear to Pilate after His Resurrection? Why did He not appear before the leaders of Israel after His Resurrection? Why did He not appear before the Scribes and Pharisees after His Resurrection? Why did He not appear before Caiaphas the high priest? Why did He not appear to the guards that mocked Him? It seems that the Resurrection of Jesus would have had more clout if He had shown Himself alive to these individuals. Surely, the Resurrection of Jesus would have had more believability if He had reported to foes as well as to His friends, but such was not the situation.

God did not reveal to His community of believers His reason for not appearing before the religious leaders of Israel. Would His appearance have convinced them of their reprehensible deed of putting to death the Son of God? Had they not witnessed the many miracles of Christ, but still did not believe? Did they not have Moses and the prophets? In the Gospel accounts, we witness the very opposite of what we would expect. The Gospel writers agree that after His Resurrection He appeared to only His disciples. One such well-known example of the fairness of the evangelists in reporting their accounts concerning the Resurrection is found in the Book of Acts:

We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree,<sup>40</sup> but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to

be seen. <sup>41</sup>He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. (Acts 10:39-41)

Peter, in his discourse to Cornelius, calls attention to the limited number of witnesses concerning the Resurrection of God's Son. This statement is quite remarkable for its integrity. If they had written after His Resurrection that He appeared to His enemies as well as to His friends, this would have added more weight to the claims of His Resurrection, at least in the eyes of some. Unquestionably, if they had fabricated the Resurrection story, they would have rendered their narratives concerning this event as unobjectionable as possible. If the narratives were false, they would have omitted references to Christ's Resurrection as having occurred to His disciples alone. This restriction of Resurrection appearances did not keep them from reporting the historical facts surrounding His appearances after His Resurrection. Instead of negative reaction toward His Resurrection, this candor of the Gospel writers adds weight to their credibility and to the nature of the evidence. This effect is something that the evangelists would not have foreseen, so it seems to me, at the time of writing.

## **CRUCIFIXION**

### **Disadvantageous to Christ as the Son of God**

As we reflect upon the events leading up to the Crucifixion of Jesus, we are immediately confronted with the impartiality of the facts reported by the writers of the New Testament. None of His disciples sought to omit any of the events surrounding the Crucifixion that was, in actuality, disadvantageous to their beliefs concerning Jesus as the One sent from God. This frankness, or candor, about the Death of Jesus is another argument for the credibility and honesty of the authors of the New Testament writings. No one sought to embellish, or overdo, the life of Christ in order to make the story of Jesus more credible to unbelievers. If the events did not happen as reported by His disciples, we wonder why they were so outspoken about statements that would deter belief in the Son of God by those not willing to examine the evidence.

If the writers wanted to bolster their belief about Jesus as the Anointed One of God, they could have fabricated other stories concerning Jesus disappearance. If the story of Jesus had been a contrivance, surely they would not have thought of recommending to the Jews a person who their Jewish rulers condemned and rejected. On the other hand, we also wonder why the writers of the New Testament would have set forth one as the redeemer of humanity, especially when the Gentiles, too, disowned and crucified Him. Both the Jewish nation as well as the Gentiles rejected him. Could the disciples have come up with a more plausible explanation for His absence? For example, the disciples could have drawn from the Old Testament two stories that might have had more clout—the translation of Enoch and the assumption of Elijah (2 Kings 2:11-12). Would not the miraculous whirlwind that took Elijah have carried more weight than a Crucifixion? Would this story have made more sense than a Crucifixion?

Surely, the writers of the New Testament would not have overlooked such an important point if they had wished to carry out a fraud upon the people. The telling of the Crucifixion

could be nothing short of telling the actuality of the facts as they occurred. The Crucifixion was a problem to both Jew and Gentile. Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians called attention to the negative effect that the Crucifixion had upon both: “We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:23). Would not the story of Enoch or Elijah have been more glorious than a Crucifixion? Is it possible that the story of these two men were overlooked? If His disciples had wanted to recommend to Jews and Gentiles, this scenario of either Enoch or Elijah would have made the story of Jesus more palatable. Yet, this was not done. They reported the facts as they actually occurred. Had the story of Christ’s Crucifixion been invented, these particulars would not have been a part of this story. If this story had been fictitious, the Crucifixion would never have been a part of this story.

## THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS

### Character and Conduct

The disciples of Jesus did not seek to hide their lack of comprehension and unbelief concerning the Resurrection of Jesus. If the Crucifixion and Resurrection were a made-up story, they would not have left themselves open to such criticism. Their self-disclosures reveal their candor. We detect a “ring of truth” in their writings. We cannot read the accounts of the Crucifixion in the four Gospels without reflection upon the conduct of His twelve disciples. Prior to the Crucifixion, they entertained strong emotions about Jesus as the Promised One as foretold by the prophets.

They heard Him speak with authority, not as the teachers of the Law. They witnessed many wonderful works performed by Him. They witnessed the raising of Lazarus from the dead. With the Crucifixion, His disciples, like John the Baptist, had doubts, in spite of the miraculous in the ministry of Jesus and their ability to also perform miracles. The words of Jesus to the disciples of John the Baptist sets the tone for the events witnessed by His disciples. For instance, Matthew gives his commentary on the words of John and then gives Jesus’ response:

After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.<sup>a</sup> <sup>2</sup> When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples <sup>3</sup> to ask him, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” <sup>4</sup> Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy<sup>b</sup> are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” (Matthew 11:1-6)

These miraculous events proved beyond doubt that Jesus was the One He claimed to be—the Son of God. Shortly before Jesus decided to return to Jerusalem, He and His disciples were in the region of Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13a). Jesus took this opportunity to ask His

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a Greek *in their towns*

b The Greek word was used for various diseases affecting the skin—not necessarily leprosy.

disciples about His true identity. Before asking His disciples this vital question about His person, He inquired as to the beliefs of the people—“Who do people say the Son of Man is” (16:13b). After their response to the first question, He then asked them what they thought. Without hesitation, Peter answered with exactness: “**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God**” (16:16). In spite of this answer, we later witness fear and doubt by His disciples after His arrest and trial and Crucifixion. After the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to the Eleven as well as to hundreds of His believers (I Corinthians 15:6).

The disciples entertained the same prejudices of the Jews concerning the establishment of an earthly kingdom. After the Resurrection, Luke writes: “So when they met together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’” (Acts 1:6). The Eleven, like the Jews, were still looking for an earthly reign of the Messiah. Jesus responded by saying,

It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (1:7-8)

Just a casual glance at the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John reveal that they did not whitewash their doubts; but rather, they exhibited their skepticism concerning His Resurrection. If they were reporting fiction, they would not have laid themselves open to such unbelief, especially since they were trying to convince people of the truth of Jesus as the Promised Messiah. It is significant that prior to this last appearance, we also catch a glimpse of the disappointment over the death of Jesus in the Book of Luke. Luke reveals a conversation that took place between Jesus and two of His disciples that had just been told by the women about the Resurrection of Jesus. We should concentrate on the words of Luke as he unfolds this story of unbelief to belief:

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles<sup>a</sup> from Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. <sup>15</sup>As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; <sup>16</sup>but they were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. <sup>18</sup>One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” <sup>19</sup>“What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. <sup>20</sup>The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; <sup>21</sup>but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. <sup>22</sup>In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning <sup>23</sup>but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. <sup>24</sup>Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” <sup>25</sup>He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup>Did not the Christ<sup>b</sup> have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” <sup>27</sup>And beginning

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a Greek *sixty stadia* (about 11 kilometers)

b Or *Messiah*; also in verse 46

with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:13-27)

As stated above, if the story of the Crucifixion had been invented, none of these particulars would have been a part of the story of Jesus. Not only do the Twelve reveal their lack of knowledge concerning the true nature of the Messianic kingdom, but, at the same time, they reveal their own character and conduct, which, at first sight, appears to be disadvantageous to their cause—converting people to Jesus as the Messiah promised by the prophets. Just a perusal of the writings that compose the New Testament reveals that His disciples did not seek to soften or conceal their behavior or lack of faith.

Neither did they weaken the harshness or severity of the reprimands of Jesus concerning their lack of comprehension or conduct. Surely, if they had wished to carry out a deception about the Christ, they would have kept secret their shortcomings. Had the story about Jesus been invented, one doubts if the various particulars would have ever been a part of their narratives. For example, they did not hide their material ambition for places of honor in a temporal kingdom. Matthew reports this incident with the story of the mother of two of His disciples—the sons of Zebedee, James and John (Matthew 20:20-23; 10:2).

Upon the other ten learning of this maneuver, “they were indignant with the two brothers” (20:24, see also Mark 10:35-45). We cannot read these two accounts without a consciousness that the Twelve were infected with ambitious views of honor in a temporal kingdom, a view that was not correct. We witness demanding ambition on the part of James’ and John’s mother. Were the two brothers behind this plot? If not, we wonder why the Ten were so “indignant with the two brothers” (Matthew 20:24). Again, we see the honesty of Matthew as he reports the disciples’ lack of faith during a storm.

What is amazing is that the disciples had witnessed a man cured of leprosy (8:1-4), the healing of a centurion’s daughter (8:5-13), and the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law and the healing of many others (8:14-17). We stand in awe at the unbelief of the Apostles after witnessing so many therapeutic miracles. Matthew did not hide the fears and doubts about their safety when they were in a storm (8:23-27). Their behavior received a stern reprimand from Jesus: “You of little faith, why are you so afraid” (8:26)? With the calming of the storm, this action caused the disciples to respond with amazement: “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!” (8:27).

On another occasion, we see a stern rebuke from Jesus concerning their misunderstanding about His remarks concerning the “yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (16:6). Following these remarks, the disciples discussed this among themselves (16:7). Matthew then records Jesus’ remarks against him and the other Eleven for their failure to comprehend the true import of His warning:

You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? <sup>9</sup> Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? <sup>10</sup> Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? <sup>11</sup> How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (16:8-11)

Matthew does not hide their failure to understand the truth about this One who has power over nature. He says, “Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (16:12). Mark, in his Gospel, reports even stronger words against their failure to understand:

Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? <sup>18</sup> Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? <sup>19</sup> When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up? “Twelve,” they replied. <sup>20</sup> And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up? They answered, “Seven.” <sup>21</sup> He said to them, “Do you still not understand?” (Mark 8:17-21)

Another significant confession, or admission, reported by Mark, surrounds the lack of ability, on the part of His disciples, to cast out an evil spirit. Jesus, along with Peter, James, and John had just come down from the Mount of Transfiguration, encountered His disciples arguing with the teachers of the Law. During the event, Jesus cast out the deaf and dumb spirit. Later, His disciples questioned Jesus as to why they failed to exorcise this spirit (9:28). Surely, if one were seeking to pull off a hoax, His disciples would not have disclosed their own failures. We observe complete honesty on the part of frail men, men who were struggling to gain clear insight. The disciples did not understand that Jesus had to die for the sins of humanity. In fact, Peter tried to prevent the Crucifixion, which action received a strong rebuke from Jesus: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:23).

Another disclosure surrounds Jesus walking on water with an invitation from Jesus to Peter to walk on water (14:22-36). In spite of the negative overtones concerning Peter, nevertheless, Matthew writes about this incident as a historical fact. Not only did he jot down this incident, but he also gives Jesus' strong rebuke for Peter's lack of trust: “Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith,’ he said, ‘why did you doubt?’” (14:31). None of the writers of the New Testament sought to set the Twelve disciples in the most favorable light to the people. We observe impartiality of the reporting of the history on the part of the writers of the New Testament. If the demeanor of the Apostles had been improved in order to gain a more favorable hearing, we might question as to falsification of the historical data.

## **JOHN THE BAPTIST**

### **Doubts about Jesus as the Messiah**

If the writers of the New Testament were bent on fraud concerning the Messiahship of Jesus as the Savior of the world, we wonder why both Matthew and Luke included John the Baptist's negative thoughts about the true identity of Jesus as the Coming One. After John's arrest, Matthew gives some insight as to his mental state: “When John (the Baptist) heard in

prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples <sup>3</sup>to ask him, ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’” (Matthew 11:2-3, see also Luke 7:18). If Matthew and Luke wanted to create a sham, surely these two writers would have kept their comments on John the Baptist’s confession about the Christ to themselves. In light of this inquiry, we cannot help but reflect upon John’s positive attitude concerning the identity of Jesus. For instance, earlier, John told two of his disciples that Jesus was “the Lamb of God” (John 1:35). Also, just a day earlier, John, one of the Apostles, writes about John the Baptist’s comments about Jesus: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (1:29).

Without doubt, the recording of John’s reservations concerning the character of Jesus could not help but have a negative effect on unbelievers, or enemies of Christ. This kind of damaging comments about John’s doubts could only add fuel to the fire in one’s rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. Yet, truth and honesty could not afford to hide John’s inward mental condition. Neither Matthew nor Luke withheld this harmful information. Again, we witness a “ring of truth” in the narratives concerning John’s positive and negative statements.

## **JUDAS ISCARIOT**

### **Betrays Jesus**

Judas, one of the original Twelve disciples, is an anomaly among His disciples. Judas received the same commission and healing powers that the other eleven received, even the power to raise the dead. Matthew records the mission of the Twelve:

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup>Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. <sup>7</sup>As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ <sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,<sup>b</sup> drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” (Matthew 10:5-8)

In spite of the ability to accomplish these miracles, Judas still betrayed the Master for thirty pieces of silver. During his travels with Jesus, Judas had witnessed the feeding of four thousand men, which count did not include the women and children, with just seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. This feeding of such a large number with such a small amount of food was not the only miracle. For instance, following this episode of feeding several thousand, the disciples picked up “seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over” (15:37).

Once more, prior to this event, Judas has just witnessed numerous healings by Jesus (15:30-31). He was with Jesus throughout His ministry, even to eating the final Passover meal with the Master. In spite of approximately three and one-half years with Jesus, He ultimately betrayed the One who performed so many miracles that even another of His disciples exclaimed: “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written” (John 21:25). Judas, too, knew this truth. In addition to all these miracles, Judas also witnessed

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<sup>b</sup> The Greek word was used for various diseases affecting the skin—not necessarily leprosy.

the raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44). Again, Mark records an incidence in which Jesus calms a storm. This was such a remarkable feat that His disciples, which included Judas, exclaimed: “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” (Mark 4:41).

What is so amazing about Judas is that he witnessed all these events and still betrayed Jesus to the religious leaders. Yet, in spite of his being one of the Twelve, Mark did not fail to record this failure. Mark writes with candor as he unfolds this terrible disloyalty by one of His own:

Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. <sup>44</sup>Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” <sup>45</sup>Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. <sup>46</sup> The men seized Jesus and arrested him. <sup>47</sup> Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. <sup>48</sup> “Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? <sup>49</sup> Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” <sup>50</sup> Then everyone deserted him and fled. (Mark 14:43-50)

Not only did Mark in his Gospel take note of the failure of one of the Twelve, but he also revealed that the rest of His disciples deserted and fled. If the writers of the New Testament wanted to carry out a deception, we cannot help but wonder why they would have documented such a negative comment about themselves, especially the treachery of one of their own (Judas). We can only believe the testimony of the Apostles and those associated with the Apostles are historical occurrences. They detailed the facts as they took place without regard to the negative overtones that the enemies of Christ might latch onto. From what we know about human character, it is impossible, so it seems, that these men in their circumstances could have persevered as they did in the assertion of a falsehood. Their enemies were ready to pounce on them for any inconsistencies of misinformation. They had no choice other than to report the facts as they actually occurred. We do not discern any coloring of the facts in order to sway individuals to their side. We detect absolute candor on the part of the writers of the New Testament books.

## **ANECDOTES FOUND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

### **Desertion of Some Disciples**

How do we account for the anecdotes, or stories, found in the New Testament that convey negative overtones about Jesus if the writers were bent on dealing with suppression and disguise? For example, John records the following statement about the desertion of many of His disciples: “From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him”

(John 6:66). Is it logical that John would have recorded such an event if he were seeking to suppress or camouflage the true facts surrounding Jesus' mission to the world?

### **Not Many Miracles Because of Unbelief**

Yet again, if one were trying to suppress one's beliefs concerning the true identity of Jesus, we wonder why Matthew would have recorded the following statement: "And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith" (Matthew 13:58). This comment follows an episode that occurred during one of Jesus' visits to His own hometown. On this occasion the people expressed amazement at His wisdom and miraculous powers. In spite of that, even His wisdom and miraculous healings did not create belief. Matthew goes right to the heart of their rejection: "And they took offense at him" (13:57). If one were disposed toward deception, or dishonesty, we question if Matthew would have disclosed this kind of information.

### **Governor Festus: Speaks Disparagingly of Jesus and Paul**

Dr. Luke, author and companion of Paul, records Paul's encounter with Festus (Acts 25:1-12), which record reveals a startling statement by the governor himself. In this meeting, Paul gives his defense against the chief priest and the Jewish leaders (25:2, 8-11). As we peruse, or read thoroughly, this narrative, we detect a testimony that is open and above board in reporting the facts. Surely, if Luke had been a dishonest narrator, he would have withheld Festus' negative statements concerning the belief in Jesus and the Resurrection of the One whom Paul claimed to be alive.

A fraudulent narrator would not have represented his cause with such a downbeat statement from a government representative in terms that were disparaging, or disapproving, with apathy and indifference about Jesus and His Resurrection. On the other hand, this encounter would have afforded Luke with an opportunity to put belief in Jesus in the most favorable light from a governor in order to bring about conviction in Jesus and His resurrection, but he did not. Thus, Luke in his narration states with honesty the remarks of one who could care less about this one called Jesus. Listen to Luke as he reveals Festus' desire to have King Agrippa to listen to Paul, along with his critical remarks:

A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. <sup>14</sup> Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. <sup>15</sup> When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned. <sup>16</sup> I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend himself against their charges. <sup>17</sup> When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. <sup>18</sup> When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. <sup>19</sup> Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive." (Acts 25:13-19)

## **SAYINGS OF JESUS**

### **Faith to Remove Mountains**

Toward the end of Christ's ministry upon the earth, Matthew records an incident concerning the withering of a fig tree before His disciples' eyes. They were amazed that the tree withered so quickly following the words of Jesus: "May you never bear fruit again!" (Matthew 21:19). The disciples asked: "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" (21:20). The following comments appear very improbable if He had not actually spoken the words:

I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done.

<sup>22</sup> If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. (21:21-22)

The term "faith," no doubt, is rightly interpreted as that "internal notice" by which the Apostles were admonished concerning their power to perform any particular miracle. Paul, a later convert to Christianity, spoke of the power to perform "signs, wonders and miracles" as a mark of an Apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12). The words of Jesus carry with them a difficulty, a difficulty that no writer would have brought upon himself if this saying were not authentic.

### **Dead Bury Their Dead**

We are once more confronted with a saying that is harsh and repulsive: "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60). Even though this response by Jesus to one who expressed a desire to follow Him is, on the surface, unsympathetic and revolting, if this statement did not occur, why would Luke put this saying into the mouth of Jesus. This statement, at first glance, appears to be unsympathetic and heartless toward natural feelings for the death of a father. In this scenario, Jesus told a man to "Follow me" (9:59a). The man replied by saying, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father" (9:59b). If Jesus had not actually made this discourse, we wonder why Luke would have recorded a statement that rings with ruthlessness and insensitivity. Again, we view candor and honesty in reporting the sayings of Jesus in spite of the negative overtones that the enemies of Christianity might latch onto.

### **Controversial Statement in John 6**

In John, Chapter 6, we read of Jesus feeding five thousand with "five small barley loaves and two small fish" (John 6:8), Jesus walking on water (6:16-24), and Jesus' assertion about His being the bread of life (6:35). This third episode is what created a great deal of attention among many of His disciples. The saying that created havoc on this occasion was spoken in a synagogue while in Capernaum:

I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup> Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. <sup>56</sup> Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup> Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever. (6:53-58)

John reports the reaction to this testimonial by Jesus: “On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’” (6:60). Jesus then entered into a dialogue with them over His declaration (6:61-64). This further discussion resulted in Jesus’ declaration: “Yet there are some of you who do not believe” (6:64). John then reports the reaction of the crowd: “From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (6:66). Just a casual reading of this section of Scripture reveals an obscurity surrounding this public statement of Jesus. It is almost impossible to believe that one of His disciples would have reported such an incident if it had not actually happened. This discourse was difficult to understand at the time and created disbelief on the part of some. Again, we see the honesty and candor of the New Testament writers. One who was an eyewitness to the event reports this episode.

## THE LORD’S SUPPER

Before we look at the various accounts of the Lord’s Supper, which accounts bear internal testimony as to the truthfulness of the various narratives, the Lord’s Supper gives testimony as to the historical accuracy of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. The Lord’s Supper is one of the most powerful testimonies as to the authenticity of the first eyewitnesses to the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus. When we desire to verify the genuineness of testimony, especially testimony that occurred almost two thousand years ago, there are four criteria that must be met in order to give credence, beyond doubt, to the factuality of the event, or events.

First, the actions reported must be *sensible* facts; that is to say, the facts must be such that the eyes of spectators, along with his or her other senses—hearing, tasting, smelling, feeling—must be cognizant of. Second, the alleged facts must be available to the scrutiny of the public; in other words, the facts must be exhibited under circumstances of extraordinary publicity that one cannot deny. Third, there must be certain monumental and commemorative institutions continuing from the time of the reported events to the present as a perpetual attestation to the historicity and factuality of the reported facts. And last, but not least, the monumental proofs, or commemorative institutions, existed simultaneously with the events that the commemorative institutions are intended to perpetuate, that is, the institutions (for example, the Egyptian Passover, the Lord’s Supper, baptism, and so on) continue in existence up to the present hour. The Lord’s Supper fits all of the above criteria and testifies to the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus.

The various accounts of this institution bear strong internal testimony as to the genuineness of the events represented in this institution. In other words, if it had been a fraud, the accounts, so it seems, would have been more complete. Just a casual reading of the accounts in the Gospels reveals that the authors did not give all the data surrounding the celebration of the Passover rite—a rite instituted (1446 BC) 1500 years earlier to commemorate the exodus from Egyptian bondage, which rite gives validity to the story as reported by Moses. In the Gospel of Matthew, we do not read even the command to repeat the ordinance. This silence leans toward honesty in reporting the occasion.

If the numerous accounts of the Lord's Supper involved a fraud, we cannot help but wonder why His disciples reported a very difficult saying: "Take and eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26). If this Eucharist had been a made-up story, surely they would have avoided such a controversial statement. We can only surmise that no writer would have cast his readers with such a difficulty. Just a brief examination of the various New Testament writers reveals that the authors did not throw in remarks to anticipate objections. If one were seeking to perpetrate a fraud, one would be conscious of the need to reconcile the reader's mind to what may be extraordinary in the narrative. It does not appear that this perception came into the mind of the New Testament writers as to how this action would appear to both believers and enemies. Again, we perceive the candor and honesty of the writers reporting the historical facts as they occurred.

## **EXTREME NATURALNESS OF VARIOUS STORIES**

### **Father's Love**

Just a casual reading of the healing of a boy with an evil spirit is expressed with an air of reality, which reality could hardly be counterfeited. We cannot read this story without standing in awe of the way the events are related. A certain man—he is not named—came to Jesus requesting the healing of his son (Mark 9:17). He requested Jesus to take pity on the boy (9:22). Jesus responded by saying, "Everything is possible for him who believes" (9:23). The father's reply has an "air of reality," which answer negates a made-up story. Listen to the father: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief" (9:24). His comeback has a "ring of truth" flashing like neon lights.

### **Acceptance and Rejection**

Matthew does not hide the seemingly contradictory behavior of the people in Jerusalem. In the final week of Jesus' earthly life, He and His disciples approached Jerusalem with a triumphal entry (Matthew 21:1). Jesus, upon arrival, instructed His disciples to go to a certain village to bring back a donkey with her colt (21:2-3). Upon their return, they placed their cloaks on them and Jesus rode on them (21:7). Matthew notes Christ's acceptance by the crowd:

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna<sup>b</sup> to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!<sup>c</sup> Hosanna in the highest!”<sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”<sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” (21:8-11)

Shortly after this episode of praise, Matthew reports the arrest of Jesus and His trial. During the trial, Pilate asked the crowd if they wanted Barabbas or Jesus crucified (27:20). We stand flabbergasted at the fickleness, or indecisiveness, of the crowd in such a short period of time. Pay attention to Matthew as he unfolds their flip-flop behavior:

But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.<sup>21</sup> “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. “Barabbas,” they answered.<sup>22</sup> “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!” (27:20-22)

We do not detect fraud, or hoax, in this story. In fact, we sense the lack of pretension and genuineness of this revealing story. If Matthew wanted to perpetrate a deception about the true identity of Jesus, we wonder why he would have listed such positive and negative behavior back-to-back. Again, we view an air of reality, a reality that could hardly be counterfeited.

### **Teachers of the Law and Pharisees**

John did not hide the rejection of Jesus as the Son of God by many of the religious leaders. This admission is another example of the candor and honesty of the New Testament writers. Many of the religious leaders rejected Christ while many of the common people accepted Him. John sets forth the attitude of some religious leaders as they sought to put to rest once-for-all the belief that Jesus is the One that the prophets foretold would come. Pay attention to John as he lays bare the prejudice of the leaders:

Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, “Why didn’t you bring him in?”<sup>46</sup> “No one ever spoke the way this man does,” the guards declared.<sup>47</sup> “You mean he has deceived you also?” the Pharisees retorted.<sup>48</sup> “Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?”<sup>49</sup> No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them.”<sup>50</sup> Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked,<sup>51</sup> “Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?”<sup>52</sup> They replied, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet<sup>a</sup> does not come out of Galilee.” (John 7:45-52)

Yet again, we watch the openness of this story, no pretentiousness. If John wanted to pull off a hoax, or swindle, we wonder why he did not embellish his story to include the religious leaders as followers of Jesus. None of His followers ever sought to cover up the rejection of

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b A Hebrew expression meaning “Save!” which became an exclamation of praise; also in verse 15

c Psalm 118:26

a Two early manuscripts *the Prophet*

Jesus by the religious leaders. They reported the facts as they actually occurred. These men were eyewitnesses of the events that they testified to.

## CONCLUSION

The above Scripture citations provide satisfactory proof of the truth and the reality of Christianity. We are conscious that the events recorded in the New Testament were not forged or invented, but faithful narratives of the facts as they occurred. Those who were eyewitnesses of the wonderful words left their testimony as to the truthfulness of the events as observed by their senses. Since Christians today do not see miracles performed for the confirmation of Christianity, therefore, believers must seek other avenues in which to verify the truthfulness of the first witnesses to the facts reported. Luke asserts that he himself had “carefully investigated everything from the beginning” (Luke 1:3). John also writes:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. <sup>2</sup> The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. <sup>3</sup> We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. (1 John 1:1-3)

In the various accounts, the narrators inserted characters and geographical boundaries that testify as to the accounts as real history. Also, the books passed on to future generations bear the name of the authors of the books. For examples of historical persons mentioned, take note of the various accounts:

In those days **Caesar Augustus** issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup> (This was the first census that took place while **Quirinius** was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup> And everyone went to his own town to register. (Luke 2:1-3)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of **King Herod**, **Magi**<sup>a</sup> from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east<sup>b</sup> and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ<sup>c</sup> was to be born. <sup>5</sup> “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied. (Matthew 2:1-5)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when **Pontius Pilate** was governor of Judea, **Herod** tetrarch of Galilee, his brother **Philip** tetrarch of Iturea and Tracoonitis, and **Lysanias** tetrarch of Abilene—<sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to

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a Traditionally *Wise Men*

b Or *star when it rose*

c Or *Messiah*

John son of Zechariah in the desert. <sup>3</sup> He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Luke 3:1-3)

At that time **Herod the tetrarch** heard the reports about Jesus, <sup>2</sup> and he said to his attendants, “This is **John the Baptist**; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.” <sup>3</sup> Now **Herod had arrested John** and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, <sup>4</sup> for John had been saying to him: “It is not lawful for you to have her.” <sup>5</sup> Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet. (Matthew 14:1-5)

These Scriptures are marks of time since they give the appearance of a true history of facts, not fiction. The facts surrounding Christianity do not carry in them any temptation to forgery or invention. The events reported in the four Gospels are very natural and probable. The heart of the Gospels reports Jesus’ discourses and His miracles and His Resurrection. We are also introduced to the reactions—both negative and positive—of the people. The castigation of the religious leaders for their character and principles was well known to the people in the first century. We observe a full disclosure of their external behavior in the Gospels. The various stories as introduced above can be nothing else but a bare representation of actual events as they transpired during Jesus’ ministry.

The representation of the apprehensiveness of the disciples concerning the Savior is extremely natural as found in the Gospels. The impartiality of the history of the New Testament is another argument of its truth. The writers did not omit those things that were really disadvantageous to themselves. In other words, the disciples reported their own characters and conduct. Had the stories been invented, these particulars would never have been a part of their written record. Had the story about Christianity been a fiction, a Crucifixion would certainly have never been a part of the story.

If they had made their stories more favorable, we might question as to falsification of the facts. As we read the various Epistles by His disciples, we view many particulars not very honorable to the first Christian converts. Still, they did not withhold such information. We stand in awe and wonder at the remarkable simplicity and plainness of the New Testament writers. The writers did not seek out occasions to enhance Jesus’ honor. The openness of the New Testament writers, as stated above, jumps out with authenticity. Their honesty and candor give credence to their testimony. The New Testament writings display a “ring of truth.” In conclusion, I call attention to the book *Does God Exist: The Great Debate* (3-24-1988) in which J. P. Moreland (b. 1948), American philosopher, theologian, and Christian apologist, defends the authenticity of the Christian faith.

J. P. Moreland, in his first defense for the Christian faith with Kei Neilson (b.1926), professor emeritus of philosophy at the University of Calgary and a leading advocate of atheist philosophy, tells the story of a young Jewish convert to Christianity. This individual came to saving faith because of his reading the Gospel of Luke from the Greek New Testament. What is significant about this story is that this young man was convinced of the truthfulness of Christianity because Luke’s Gospel had a ring of truth. His expertise was in the field of myths. Yet, when he actually read from the “common” Greek, he came to the conclusion that the story of Jesus is real, not mythology. The following citation is taken from this debate:

One more point about the historicity of the New Testament, and then I'll sit down. In my doctoral program, I was walking into the library one day, and I ran across a student who was reading the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament. I went over to him and I said, "What in the world are you doing?" And he said, "I have a master's degree from Harvard in business, and I have a master's from UCLA in classics, and an undergraduate degree in classics from Harvard. I'm finishing my Ph.D. degree from UCLA in classics, and I was reading the Greek New Testament here recently." He was Jewish, and he went on to say, "I became a committed follower of Jesus of Nazareth. And I just wanted to come over here to USC because I knew there were Christian graduates students studying philosophy." I asked, "How did you become a Christian?" He said, "Dr. Moreland, I have studied myth most of my education. I know the earmarks of myth; that's all I study. My undergraduate training was in mythology; my graduate training has been in mythology. And I was practicing Koine Greek reading the Gospel of Luke, and I got halfway through it, and as a Jew, I said, 'My God, this man really did these things. What am I going to do? This is history. It reads like history. It doesn't read like myth. I know what myth tastes like because all I do is read it, and that is not myth.'"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J. P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen, *Does God Exist: The Great Debate* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 60. Even though I cited this episode in another chapter, this repetition is justified because of the subject.