

II. Eyewitness Evidence

"But all I had ever really given the evidence was a cursory look. I had read just enough philosophy and history to find support for my skepticism — a fact here, a scientific theory there, a pithy quote, a clever argument . . . Setting aside my self-interest and prejudices as best I could, I read books, interviewed experts, asked questions, analyzed history, explored archaeology, studied ancient literature, and for the first time in my life picked apart the Bible verse by verse." Lee Strobel, The Case for Christ Study Guide pp. 21-22.

1. Having watched the video teaching segment, what stood out for you and got you thinking?

2. When in your faith journey did you grow in your hunger for the Bible, the Word of God? Was there ever a season in your life when you thought the Bible was boring? Why do people young and old, critique the Bible before ever really giving it a serious read?

3. Read the introduction to the gospel of Luke:
*"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were **handed down to us** by those who from the first were **eyewitnesses** and servants of the word. With this in mind since I myself have **carefully investigated** everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus so that you may know **the certainty** of the things you have been taught."*
 [Luke 1: 1 – 4]

3. What in Dr. Luke's introduction gives you a sense that he is a serious historian? Who do you imagine Theophilus is? Luke claims the purpose of his meticulous investigation is that the reader might know "the certainty of the things you have been taught." Recalling the morning sermon, what about the term "certainty" should be a comfort to Christians and a challenge to skeptics?

4. Here's how the internet describes the telephone game:

"Parlor game demonstrating the limitations of indirect verbal communication. Alice whispers a message to Bob, who whispers it to Carol, who whispers it to Dave, etc., until Zachary receives the message. When Alice and Zachary repeat their messages the two messages have absolutely nothing in common."

Skeptics set up a straw man and then knock it down.

They argue that the telephone game is precisely why the Jewish NT oral tradition can't be trusted.

Bethel Professor Mark Strauss makes a strong case for the authenticity and accuracy of the gospel accounts [1]. Gospel writer Mark [2] put pen to paper and recorded Peter's eyewitness accounts of Jesus' words and deeds. Peter with firsthand knowledge of Jesus, could have corrected any inaccuracies. We know about this tight bond between Peter and Mark from Papias [c. A.D. 140] who was a first century disciple of the apostle John. The Jewish oral tradition and memorization handed down disciple to disciple would be the polar opposite to the whispered gossip of the telephone parlor game [3]. Mark alone records that the man who carried the cross for Jesus down the via dolorosa named Simon the Cyrene (North Africa Libya), had sons named Alexander and Rufus, most probably familiar and at that time living disciples of the church at Rome to whom Mark wrote Peter's gospel [Mark 15:21].

6. To what extent do you think the information contained in the original Bible manuscripts has been reliably copied and accurately translated into our current Bible? How much do you trust that the Bible you read today is an accurate reflection of the original intent? [4]

7. If the four gospels are accurate in giving us a solid trustworthy reporting of the teaching, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, what impact should that have on your life? What impact should that have when you face stormy seasons of your life or even death? [5]

In preparation for next week's study consider reading from the Case for Christ:
Chapter Four: The Corroborating Evidence
Chapter Six: The Rebuttal Evidence

II. Eyewitness Evidence

[1] *"We have actually very early attestation of the authorship of the Gospels. The early church father Papias, for example, as recorded by the church historian Eusebius, identifies Mark's gospel as essentially the eyewitness account of Peter. Papias was a disciple of the apostle John, so we are only one generation removed from Jesus himself. Now that is a pretty close testimony and strongly suggesting that the Gospels are based on eyewitness accounts."*

[2] John Mark's family hosted the last supper in their Jerusalem home and Mark journeyed with Paul on his first missionary journey. It's a curious piece of information. John Mark was most probably the young man rushing naked from the scene at Jesus' arrest, Mark 14:51 [NIV Study Bible].

[3] *"Books — or actually, scrolls of papyrus — were relatively rare. Therefore education, learning, worship, teaching in religious communities — all this was done by word of mouth. Rabbis became famous for having the entire Old Testament committed to memory. So it would have been well within the capability of Jesus' disciples to have committed much more to memory than appears in all four Gospels put together — and to have passed it along accurately."* New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg [CFC Study Guide, p. 30].

[4] *"There is no comparison: the manuscript evidence for the New Testament is overwhelming when juxtaposed against other revered writings of antiquity — works that modern scholars have absolutely no reluctance treating as authentic. The grand total of Greek manuscripts is at 5,664. In addition to the Greek documents there are thousands of other ancient New Testament manuscripts in other languages. There are 8,000 to 10,000 Latin Vulgate manuscripts, plus a total of 8,000 in Ethiopic, Slavic, and Armenian. In all, there are about 24,000 manuscripts in existence."*

[5] I have a place to stand. "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." [See Mark 4:35-41].