

Chapters 1&2: Eyewitness Evidence

Chapter 1

1. Are the Gospels Based on Eyewitness Testimony?

Yes. According to Blomberg:

- Matthew was a disciple of Jesus — an actual eyewitness.
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- John was also a disciple and very close to Jesus.
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- Mark wrote his Gospel based on Peter's firsthand account.
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- Luke gathered info from multiple eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1–4).
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- Luke 1:2–3 (NKJV)
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- "Just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us..."

2. Were the Gospels Written Early Enough to Be Reliable?

Yes. Blomberg explains that:

Mark may have been written around AD 60–70.

Matthew and Luke were likely written between AD 60–80.

John was written later, around AD 90–95, but still by someone who personally knew Jesus.

This means the Gospels were written within a generation of Jesus' death (AD 30–33).

There wasn't enough time for legend or myth to develop.

2 Peter 1:16 (NKJV)

"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables... but were eyewitnesses of His majesty."

3. Can We Trust the Gospel Writers?

Strobel asks if the writers could have made it up or exaggerated.

Blomberg replies:

The writers had no reason to lie—they faced persecution and even death.

People don't willingly die for something they know is false.

Their stories were consistent, even if they had minor differences, which is normal for multiple eyewitnesses.

Acts 4:20 (NKJV)

"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

4. Do Minor Differences Make the Gospels Unreliable?

Strobel brings up apparent contradictions between the Gospels.

Blomberg says that minor variations are actually a sign of genuine eyewitness testimony.

If the Gospels were exactly identical, it might suggest the authors copied each other.

Instead, they each highlight different details, which makes the overall account more trustworthy.

Proverbs 18:17 (NKJV)

"The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him."

5. Was Memory Trustworthy Back Then?

People in ancient cultures were trained to remember well.

Rabbis and disciples used memorization to pass down teachings accurately.

The Holy Spirit also helped the disciples remember Jesus' words.

John 14:26 (NKJV)

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit... will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

Chapter 2

1. What Are the Gospels?

- The Gospels are **biographies** of Jesus written in the first century.
- While they are not biographies in the modern sense, they include:
 - Key events of Jesus' life
 - His teachings
 - His death and resurrection

John 20:30–31 (NKJV)

"But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

2. How Do the Gospels Compare to Other Ancient Biographies?

- The Gospels are **better preserved** and **more detailed** than most ancient writings.
- We have **thousands of early manuscripts** (copies of the text), far more than for other ancient books like those by Plato or Caesar.

Luke 1:1–3 (NKJV)

"...to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us... just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses..."

3. How Close in Time Were the Gospels Written to the Actual Events?

- The Gospels were written **within 30–60 years** of Jesus' death (which happened around AD 30–33).
- This is extremely **early for ancient history**, meaning **eyewitnesses were still alive** to confirm or deny what was written.

1 Corinthians 15:6 (NKJV)

"...He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present..."

4. Was Oral Tradition Reliable?

- In Jewish culture, people **memorized teachings and stories carefully**.

- Rabbis and disciples were **trained to remember** long passages word-for-word.
- The disciples would have memorized Jesus' teachings and passed them down accurately.

John 14:26 (NKJV)

"...The Holy Spirit... will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

5. Did the Gospel Writers Tell the Truth?

Blomberg gives several reasons to believe they were honest:

- They included **difficult or embarrassing details**, like:
 - The disciples arguing or falling asleep
 - Peter denying Jesus three times
- They didn't **exaggerate or glorify themselves**.
- The writers **never became rich or powerful** from spreading the message. Instead, they were often **persecuted**.

Mark 14:72 (NKJV)

"Then Peter called to mind the word that Jesus had said to him... When he thought about it, he wept."

6. Were the Gospel Writers Influenced to Lie or Change the Story?

- No, because they had **no motive**:
 - They didn't gain political or social power.
 - They suffered for what they taught.
- People don't suffer and die for something they know is false.

Acts 5:29 (NKJV)

"But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'"

Chapter 3: The Documentary Evidence

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- ❖ Lee Strobel introduces several good questions to ask
 - How can I be sure that the current copies of the Bible bear any resemblance to what was written originally?
 - How can I be sure the authors are telling the whole story?
 - How can I be sure other biographies haven't been censored?
- ❖ Lee Strobel met with an expert on Biblical documentary evidence named Metzger
- ❖ He had several important points that answered his questions:
 - The New Testament has many copies that agree with each other even today, which allows us to cross check them; this is an evidence to their authenticity
 - We also have copies that are within a few generations from the originals, which prove the authenticity of when they are written
 - Also, there are many translations of the Gospels early on- greek, coptic, and so forth
 - This allows us to reproduce the contents of the NT, say, if we had lost all the greek manuscripts
 - Also, if we had lost all the greek manuscripts, we could reproduce NT due to the wealth of sermons and commentaries written on the NT by early church fathers
- ❖ Next he compares to other ancient manuscripts:
 - Josephus, a Jewish historian who wrote *The Jewish Wars*, and Tacitus, a Roman historian who wrote the *Annals of Imperial Rome* have several centuries between when their original copies were written and when they were copied and translated, yet they are routinely accepted by academic scholars; barely few copies exist at that
 - However, more than 5 thousand copies of the greek NT manuscripts exist today
 - For comparison, the *Iliad*, one of the most significant greek narratives in history only has about 650 extant copies, and have large gaps since when Homer originally authored this text
- ❖ He then describes the earliest NT manuscripts:
 - Many existed on papyrus
 - Included large portions of Hebrews and revelation, for example
 - Earliest fragment is from John 8, with five verses, two on one side and three on the other
 - Dates back to 100-150 AD
 - This negates the opinions of certain theologians who claimed that St. John's gospel was not composed until 160
 - Dating back as early to the third century were 300 copies in capitalized Greek written on parchment made from animal skins

- Enter *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*
 - Little less than 3,000 were dated to 850 AD with a cursive style
 - Around 2400 lectionaries exist that have NT readings as they were to be read at appropriate times of the year
 - There are thousands of other manuscripts in existence from other translations
 - Essentially the NT stands pretty well against other ancient writings in terms of manuscript authenticity and reliability
- ❖ Next, he asked about inconsistencies in the manuscripts and their copies:
 - Metzger admitted that there were copying errors among the thousands of copies of the manuscripts
 - Yet he also pointed to the idea that eyeglasses weren't popularized until 1373
 - Scribes with astigmatism could copy letters differently, for example
 - Other factors such as inattentiveness also played a role
 - Scribes could write the right words but in the wrong order, for example
 - However, in Greek, this is not a big deal. Why, you might ask?
 - In English there's a huge difference between saying man bites dog and dog bites man
 - In Greek, the subject serves the same function regardless of its position in the sentence, which leaves the meaning undistorted
 - Strobel pointed to the troubling estimate of copying variants: around 200,000
 - Metzger downplayed this figure, as one word misspelled in 2,000 copies counts as 2,000 variants
 - He emphasized no church doctrine is in jeopardy because of these mistakes
 - Talks about how Jehovah's witnesses deny the existence of the Trinity since it was not mentioned in the earliest manuscripts, specifically citing 1 John
 - However, the Trinity is mentioned in many other places in the NT, so this really isn't a factual claim
 - The NT has survived much better than any book of antiquity, in a form that is 99.5% pure (compared to original copies)
- ❖ Next, he asks Metzger about canon:
 - He was wondering if early church fathers and councils had criteria for canonizing and removing books
 - Metzger cites three criteria
 - Written by apostles or an eyewitness of them
 - Has to agree with Christian tradition and faith

- Document must be used and accepted by the church as a whole
 - ◆ large unanimity on the greater part of the NT canon in the first 2 centuries
 - Other gospels that may carry names of significance, such as St. Peter or St. Mary are not necessarily credible
 - Written centuries after Christ and the first gospels
 - Associated with names not out of authorship, but to gain credibility which turns out to be false
- ❖ Next, Strobel asks Metzger about the Gospel of Thomas, which many scholars cite to be of equal status as the 4 Gospels of the Bible:
 - It seems to have been written in Syria in Greek circa 140
 - Metzger found a fifth century copy in coptic with Our Lord Jesus' sayings
 - He also points out that this gospel contains many inconsistencies that do not harmonize with the other gospels
 - Render to God the things that are God's, render to Me the things that are Mine
 - Look under a stone, and you will find me....
 - St. Mary needs to become male to become a living spirit
 - In this case, it was not the councils or synods which silenced it, but rather, the gospel which silenced itself
- ❖ Finally Strobel concludes the chapter:
 - The NT is unrivaled and marvelously correct compared to books of antiquity
 - There is majority agreement on the NT canon
 - Gospel of barnabas and other heretical writings are not cited or used by any council or church father, and thus did not deserve to be included in the NT

Escape Room Idea

Escape Room Stations:

1. Gospel Excerpts

- The students will be presented with several folders containing excerpts from the 4 Gospels, and each folder will be labeled with one of the names of the evangelists
- There will be more than 4 folders, as some will contain excerpts from discredited gospels such as gospel of Peter, Thomas, and so on (yet they will be labeled with one of the 4 real and true Gospels)
- The students will need to identify which 4 folders contain the real excerpts
 - Each folder will have bolded words that spell out a sentence
 - Once the students locate the 4 folders and order them correctly, it will spell out the right sentence and lead them to their next clue
- Key point: the Gospel writers were eyewitnesses of Christ, and their writings fell under certain criteria to be accepted as part of the NT
 - Ex. Why don't we accept St. Thomas' gospel, although he witnessed the Lord
 - Major inconsistencies with other Gospels

Unlocks: eyewitness testimony, consistency and truth of account, and agreeance with Christian faith and tradition

2. Who Wrote It? Matching Puzzle

Match each Gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) to its likely author and eyewitness source. Use color-coded cards with clues:

- *"This man was a tax collector and disciple of Jesus."* → Matthew
- *"This Gospel is based on Peter's preaching."* → Mark
- *"He carefully investigated everything from eyewitnesses."* → Luke
- *"This disciple was part of Jesus' inner circle."* → John

Unlocks: eyewitnesses, eyewitness testimony

3. Timeline Lock Puzzle

Use a 4-digit lock with the approximate Gospel dates (e.g., Mark = 70, Matthew = 80, Luke = 80, John = 90). Players arrange Gospel names in correct chronological order to find the combination: **708090**.

Unlocks: within a century; of the Lord's life and ministry

4. Manuscript Evidence

- The NT has over 5000 extant manuscripts, more than any other book of antiquity
- The students will acquire an envelope with a mixed up assortment of verses from the feeding of the 5000
- They will reorganize the verses to tell the story, and use the number 5000 to unlock a lock
- Key point: The NT has the most extant manuscripts of any book of antiquity, which can help us cross check the Gospels and other books to check for authenticity and reliability

Unlocks: 5,000 extant manuscripts, any book of ancient history

5. The Outside Evidence Vault

Challenge:

- ❖ A “vault” with **quotes from Josephus, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger** mixed with fakes.
- ❖ Students must match **real historical quotes** to events in Jesus' life (birth under Caesar, crucifixion under Pilate, early Christians).
- ❖ Students will match these events to Gospel references (out of a selection)
- ❖ Correct matches reveal a number to open the final “evidence vault.”
- ❖ **Key point:** Reinforces that Jesus' existence and impact are supported by sources outside the Bible.

Unlocks: sources outside the Bible, in the Gospel actually occurred

6. Manuscript Match

A table with fake “manuscripts” in different languages (Greek, Latin, English). Students match verse fragments that say the same thing, proving the Bible was transmitted accurately (e.g., John 3:16 in different formats).

Then the order of the languages, the first letter of each language makes a word to find where the code is (So is the word is door then the code will be on the door)

Unlocks: message of the Gospel, transmitted accurately, different languages and cultures

Final Product:

The scavenger hunt, or escape room, should culminate in a final case file that the students will fill out with information gathered from the previous stations. The file will be located in the students' notebooks and will have guided blanks to fill out based on the information that is unlocked at each part of the scavenger hunt.

Alternate idea: use objects in addition to just words and phrases

- ❖ The early church canonized the 4 Gospels based on:_____.
- ❖ The authors were either_____ and/or had_____.
- ❖ The Gospels were written_____ of the events_____.
- ❖ The Gospels have over_____ today, which is more than_____.
- ❖ _____confirm that the events recorded_____.
- ❖ The_____ has been_____ in_____.