**Confessing the Faith**

Class 5 – Is the Bible Reliable? (External Evidence)

**I.** **Tests for the Authenticity of the New Testament**

What is the manner of establishing the reliability of ANY ancient document or literature? How can we verify that the form we have today is reliable?

* 1. **Bibliographical test** - reliability of the physical document
  2. **Internal evidence test** – what does the text claim about itself
  3. **External evidence test** – what do outside sources say that contradict or support

**II. Intro Video Clips:**

* No historical exra-biblical evidence for Jesus? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KifLDNsfOYM> *(starting at 3:10)*
* External Evidence Intro Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIdCRanZZyw> (long video)

**III. External Evidence Test for Existence of Jesus**:

*Do other historical documents confirm or deny the Bible’s claims?*

1. ***Josephus*** (an important 1st c. Jewish historian) is vital because he was disliked by Jews, a traitor to Romans, yet mentions James and Jesus. He is an enemy with incentive to lie, but corroborates the historicity of some Biblical figures. Josephus didn’t say more about Jesus than he did because he was interested in political matters; Jesus was less important of a threat. The other history of Josephus is very reliable and has been corroborated, so his mentioning Jesus is very important.
2. ***Tacitus*** (AD 115) recorded Nero’s persecution of Christians. Tacitus was an unsympathetic witness to Christianity, but acknowledges that a religious group rose who followed a man who was crucified. Crucifixion being so shameful and violent, why would the religion have so quickly spread for a crucified man? A better explanation has to be given.
3. ***Pliny the Younger*** (AD 111) gave correspondence to Emperor Trajan making reference to executing Christians and their worship practice. His work shows that Christianity spread quickly into every class, worshiped Jesus as God, and had ethical standards.

1. ***Thallus*** (AD 52) recorded the darkness during the crucifixion, which was quoted by Julius Africanus in AD 221.
2. ***Phlegon***, a Greek author, reported a great eclipse and earthquakes in 33AD. The significance of the timing of the crucifixion during Pilate’s reign is that historically, Pilate’s position was very weak in 33AD. He was reluctant to offend the Jews and wanted to avoid trouble with the emperor. Thus, the Biblical history of the Pilate’s crucifixion of Jesus was even more understandable.
3. ***Talmud and Mishnah*** (200-500 AD) mention Jesus as a false messiah who practiced magic and attributes miracles to sorcery. He is described as a teacher with disciples, but also a heretic.

**IV. Other Archaeology and the Reliability of the New Testament**

There are multiple New Testament archaeological finds that confirm and verify Biblical locations and information. ***Archaeology has not produced anything that contradicts the Bible.*** Things that had been considered “fact” that exposed flaws in the Gospels have themselves been disproved by archaeological discoveries. In contrast, for example there’s a glaring absence of archaeological findings for Mormon locations (Book of Mormon cities, persons, artifacts, scriptures, inscriptions—have ever been found).

1. ***Luke’s Accuracy as a Historian:***

Luke was very accurate and detailed. He referenced 32 countries, 54 cities, and 9 islands with no mistakes. For example, Luke mentioned the tiny detail that Lysanias as tetrarch of Abilene in Luke 3:1, which was verified by a later archeological discovery. Main point: If Luke was so accurate in his historical reporting, on why would one assume he was inaccurate and sloppy in his reporting of material of eternal significance?

1. ***The Reliability of John***

Recent archaeological discoveries have verified John’s precision: Jn.9:7 (Pool of Siloam), Jn 4:12 (Jacob’s well), Jn. 19:13 (Jaffa Gate).

1. ***Examples of Archaeological support of New Testament:***
   * 1. **Crucifixion victim:** Evidence of crucifixions during the Roman reign.
     2. **The Nazareth decree**: Edict of the Roman Emperor, which orders that anyone caught disturbing tombs or moving bodies from them should be put to death. It was reportedly discovered in Nazareth in 1878, and the emperor in question was Claudius, who ruled between AD 41 and 54.
     3. **The Pool of Siloam**: In 2004, engineers stumbled upon the steps of a first century ritual pool near the mouth of Hezekiah’s tunnel. Archaeologists said it was without doubt the missing pool of Siloam.
     4. **Nazareth** was so insignificant in biblical times that it isn’t mentioned in any surviving literature until after the time of Jesus. But, archaeological digs in the vicinity of Nazareth have discovered tombs dating from the first century AD confirming the village was a strongly Jewish settlement.
     5. **The Pontius Pilate stone** In 1961, an inscription was found which confirms not only the rule of Pilate in Judea but also his preference for the title ‘Prefect.’

**V. Is the Jesus of history the same as the Jesus of the Bible?**

a) Where do we get our current facts about Jesus? [Bible and external evidence]

b) How would we know if there were different/contradictory facts about Jesus? Why does that evidence not exist?

c) Is there a difference between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of a person’s personal faith? How does Postmodernism impact our society’s answer to this question?

**VI. Is the Bible reliable?** *Review with someone near you some of the evidences that demonstrate the reliability of the Bible that we’ve discussed so far.*

***Most helpful thing I learned today:***

**Homework**: Read William Lane Craig’s article on the Five arguments for the existence of God: <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/the-new-atheism-and-five-arguments-for-god/>

**For Further study**: Watch William Lane Craig’s video on the Historical Reliability of the New Testament found here: <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/videos/short-videos/are-the-new-testament-documents-historically-credible/>