

OCTOBER 21, 2025

C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE - BASIC APOLOGETICS COURSE

Small Group Participant Guide

Set I: Reasons for Faith	Set II: Objections to Faith	Set III: Responding to Atheism	Set IV: New Age & Cults
☒ 1. Cosmological Argument	☐ 6. Gospels: Can They Be Trusted?	☐ 11. Reason & Imagination	☐ 16. Responding to New Age
☒ 2. Argument from Desire	☐ 7. Problem of Evil	☐ 12. Faith & Reason	☐ 17. Neopaganism
☒ 3. Who Is the Real Jesus?	☐ 8. Is Christ the Only Way?	☐ 13. Postmodernism	☐ 18. What Is a Cult?
☒ 4. Prophecy about Christ	☐ 9. Atheism: Wish-Fulfillment?	☐ 14. Relativism	☐ 19. Dealing with Cults
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"This is a journey of faith and reason — learning to know why we believe, defend truth, and share Christ with grace."

Introduction to Set 2: Objections to Faith

Many objections to faith, new and old, circulate in our culture. What are some of the most crucial issues to face? Was Jesus married? Are the Gnostic Gospels to be taken seriously? Was Jesus' Deity invented? Why is there so much evil? Is Christ the only way? Is belief in God a fantasy? How can we speak about our faith in this culture? These lectures address these important questions.

1. Authority of Scripture: Can the Gospels Be Trusted?
2. The Problem of Evil: How Can You Believe in God When There is So Much Evil, Pain, and Suffering in the World?
3. Is Christ the Only Way? There Are So Many Religions; How Can You Say Which One is Right?
4. Understanding Atheism: Is Belief in God "Just a Crutch"?
5. Apologetics and the Ascension: The Where, Who, and What of Apologetics

As you begin reading or listening to this lecture, it could sound like it is covering the same ground as Lecture 3 in Set 1. Each has a unique purpose, emphasis, and takeaways.

Let's take a look at the two.

Purpose

Set 1 - Lecture 3: Show why modern sensational claims (Da Vinci Code, Gnostic texts, "Jesus married") do not undermine the historical, eyewitness portrait of Jesus.

Set 2 - Lecture 1: Provide a method for evaluating the Bible's reliability (bibliographic/internal/external tests + creedal early material) and show how evidence and the Spirit work together.

Emphasis

Set 1 - Lecture 3 (applied case study):

- Late Gnostic sources vs. early canonical Gospels — relative dating matters.
- Cultural memory, eyewitness value, and testimony make the Gospels historically weighty.
- Many "new" claims recycle old errors or hoaxes (Priory of Zion, modern forgeries).

Set 2 - Lecture 1 (method & foundation):

- Tools for historical reliability (bibliographic, internal/external tests).
- Early creeds and speedy transmission reduce plausibility of later invention.
- Evidence builds high probability; the Holy Spirit confirms to personal certainty.

Takeaways

Set 1 - Lecture 3:

- Why Gnostic and late texts are not reliable historical sources.
- How eyewitness testimony and cultural memory practices support Gospel reliability.
- How to answer common sensational claims calmly and factually.
- That early church affirmation of Jesus' divinity predates Nicaea.

Set 2 - Lecture 1:

- How to use historiographical tests to evaluate Scripture.
- Why early creeds (e.g., 1 Cor 15) matter historically.
- How to move from evidence (probability) to conviction (Spirit-confirmed faith).
- Practical ways to combine reason and prayer when engaging skeptics.

Historical tests and early eyewitness testimony show the Gospels are rooted in real events; learning how historians evaluate evidence empowers faithful, humble witness.

SET 2 - Session 1 – Authority of Scripture

Introduction (from CSLI)

Can the Gospels be Trusted?

The Scriptures in general, and the Gospels in particular, have been under a massive assault in recent years not only from atheists but from those in the liberal theological sector. Some say that much of the Gospels was invented by the early church. In the last generation the representative of this criticism was Rudolf Bultmann. In this generation critics include the Jesus Seminar (i.e., Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, etc.), Bishop Spong, and Elaine Pagels. From a more secular point of view, Bart Ehrman and Dan Brown's *DaVinci Code* have attracted a large readership. What can be said to these attacks that so permeate our culture, surfacing in editorials, TV talk shows, and blogs? Can we give a credible argument that the Gospels are historical? Yes. There is strong evidence for the reliability of the Gospels, and it is important to know it if our faith is to withstand the attacks of unbelieving scholars.

Lecture Synopsis

The lecture argues that Christianity's core is historical fact, not merely myth or private experience, and that the question of Scripture's authority must be grounded both in evidence and in the Spirit's confirming witness. While the testimony of the Holy Spirit is essential—providing personal certainty—relying on that alone is vulnerable: other traditions make similar subjective claims. A stronger, non-circular case begins with evidence. The speaker sketches a three-part, cumulative argument: (A) the Bible is at least a generally reliable historical document (supported by bibliographic, internal, and external tests); (B) converging historical signs (prophecy, miracles, early creedal formulations) point to Jesus as a unique, God-sent messenger; and (C) Jesus taught a high view of Scripture, implying the Bible's full trustworthiness. When combined, evidence moves belief into high probability and the Spirit confirms to certainty.

The lecture then defends the Gospels against radical critical claims (e.g., Bultmann, the Jesus Seminar) that they are largely invented. Key counter-arguments include: the rhetorical and moral uniqueness of Jesus' teaching (Amen-prefaces, antithetic parallelism, distinctive parables) which are hard to fabricate; the cultural importance of precise memory in first-century Judaism and the Middle East (formal and informal oral controls that preserve core tradition); early dating of creedal material (1 Cor 15) and Gospel texts that leave little time for myth to develop; the presence of living eyewitnesses and the apostles' readiness to die—conditions hostile to successful long-term invention; and scholarly voices (e.g., Ken Bailey, J. A. T. Robinson, N. T. Wright) that bolster authenticity.

In sum, the lecture frames Christianity as a faith rooted in history: if the events (Incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection) occurred, Christianity is infinitely consequential; if not, it is merely cultural artifact. Therefore, the burden of proof rightly lies with critics who deny Gospel authenticity; believers should combine historical evidence with the Spirit's testimony in discipleship and witness.

Ten Life Applications

1. **Ground your faith in history, not just feelings.**

The gospel is first a historical claim (death, burial, resurrection). Emotion helps, but historical facts give durable confidence.

When doubt comes, read 1 Cor. 15 aloud and list three historical touchpoints (empty tomb, early creed, eyewitnesses) as a reminder you believe something that actually happened.

2. **Pair evidence with prayer — don't split head and heart.**

Reason prepares the mind; the Spirit confirms the heart. Both are needed for mature faith.

Study a skeptical objection for 20 minutes, then spend 10 minutes in prayer asking the Spirit to help you understand and trust.

3. **Memorize short creeds as discipleship anchors.**

Early creeds condense the gospel into memorable, defensible statements. They strengthen recall and clarity.

Memorize the 1 Corinthians 15 summary and practice explaining it in one minute.

4. **Value eyewitness testimony — treat Scripture like testimony, not mythology.**

The Gospels were formed around eyewitness memory, which carries historical weight.

When reading a Gospel passage, your process can be to ask: who is speaking, who saw this, and how would I explain this to someone who thinks it's a myth?

5. **Respond to critics calmly with a few clear facts.**

Panic or sarcasm harms witness; simple, factual answers build credibility.

Prepare three concise historical points (e.g., early creed, women as first witnesses, hostile attestation) to use in an apologetic conversation.

6. **Use historical study to deepen worship.**

Knowing what God has done in history fuels genuine praise, not abstract sentiment.

Start by briefly recounting an evidential fact about Christ's life/resurrection, then move into a time of thanksgiving.

7. **Turn objections into opportunities for growth.**

Doubts and challenges can push you into fuller study and spiritual maturity.

Keep a "question list": when someone raises an objection, research it for the week and create a journal with what you learned.

8. **Teach others how to tell the story clearly.**

Being able to summarize the historical gospel helps people share it under pressure.

Prepare a 60–90 second gospel presentation that highlights historical facts. (A Gospel Elevator Speech)

9. Discern between novelty and real scholarship.

Many “new” claims recycle old errors; knowing the timeline and sources exposes flimsy theories.

When you see a sensational claim, ask: who wrote it, when was it written, and does it rely on eyewitness evidence? If not, treat it cautiously.

10. Let historical assurance energize mission and perseverance.

If the events the Christian message rests on truly happened, your service and witness have eternal significance.

Keep a “ministry-log” of small acts of service and any fruit; revisit it when discouraged to remember your labor is not in vain.

Study Questions (from CSLI)

1. What are some of these unlikely bestsellers?

2. What is the evidence that Jesus was married and had a child?

3. Was Jesus' divinity invented at Nicea (325 AD)?

4. Does the discovery of the Gospel of Judas cause us to question what we have believed?

5. Do the Gnostic Gospels change our picture of Jesus?

6. Is the New Testament text hopelessly corrupted?

7. Was the Canon determined by the winners?

Building Faith Conversations

1. What three historical facts does 1 Corinthians 15 highlight about Jesus that the lecture called essential to the gospel?

2. How does the lecture distinguish between subjective spiritual experience and historical evidence as bases for belief?

3. Why is eyewitness testimony important for understanding the Gospels, and how did first-century Jewish memory practices support reliable transmission?

4. What are the bibliographic, internal, and external tests for historical reliability, and how do they apply to the New Testament?

5. How does the early dating of creedal statements (e.g., 1 Cor. 15) strengthen the claim that the resurrection belief arose quickly after Jesus' death?

6. What are two common naturalistic objections to the resurrection (e.g., swoon, hallucination), and what key problem did the lecture raise with each?

7. How should Christians combine historical evidence and the witness of the Holy Spirit when explaining why they trust Scripture?

8. Give one example from the lecture of how knowing the historical basis for the Gospels can deepen your personal worship or discipleship.

9. When confronted with a sensational cultural claim about Jesus (book, documentary, article), what three-step approach did the lecture recommend for responding wisely?
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10. How does grounding faith in history change the way we share the gospel with skeptics compared with relying only on personal testimony?
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Links to Lectures and Notes: <https://srmatthews.com/tsg>



Set 2 - Lecture 1

(0:20 - 20:53) Let's start out with a word of prayer. Lord, we ask you for your presence here this morning. I pray for your spirit, the same spirit who inspired the word, that might speak through the word and through the words that I say.

I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts might be acceptable to you, our Lord, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen. This issue of the authority of scripture is an important foundational issue for our lives and for the church.

It also is something that there are many different approaches to it. One approach that is most often held, perhaps, and I certainly agree with the central principle that's involved in it, that is that the central means of believing in the authority of scripture is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. That the Holy Spirit, as you read the word, will testify to your heart that the Bible is the word of God.

And I certainly agree with that at the foundation, and I certainly have experienced it many times in my own life as I've read the word of God, and it does powerfully speak to me. However, if that's the sole basis on which we believe in the authority of scripture, it's very vulnerable to criticism from other points of view. For instance, the Mormon would point to the Book of Mormon, for instance, and say that as you read the Book of Mormon, you may get, or the Book of Mormon gets a burning in his or her bosom that says that the Book of Mormon is the word of God.

Or you may have a Muslim that says as they read the Koran, they get the feeling that the Koran is the word of God, and so on and so on through various claims to authority that are out there. Now, if the sole basis for our belief in the authority of scripture is a more subjective experience that we would call, and I think rightly call, the testimony of the Holy Spirit, then what do we have to say to these other religions? It reduces in some way to the idea that my experience is better than yours. My experience is, I would say, the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and yours is not.

Or our experience is a testimony of the Holy Spirit, and yours is not. There's not a solid basis to discern between the two positions. I would suggest this, that the testimony of the Holy Spirit be the ultimate confirming basis on which we believe in the authority of scripture, but it would be in line with the evidences, that we can sift out the different authority claims between different books that claim to revelation, and we can look at the evidences for the authority of scripture, and build a case for the evidences, and then at the end of it, we have the testimony of the Spirit.

It's more like, it's not a leap into the dark when we believe in the Bible, it's a leap into the direction set by the light. The evidences provide the light that shed light down a path. Now, it doesn't take you all the way to absolute certainty.

It does take you down the road, takes you down the road to the realm of probability, or high degree of probability, then the Holy Spirit comes in and takes you the rest of the distance from probability or high probability to certainty. And I would just give you a sketch of a case for the authority of scripture that would really take a whole course to develop, or a whole book, and I've thought many times of writing such a book. I don't know if I will get around to it, but the case goes like this.

Premise A, the Bible's at least a generally reliable historical document. Again, premise A, the Bible's at least a generally reliable historical document, and you can discuss that using certain historical criteria that you can apply to other books. The tests are the bibliographical test, the internal and the external.

Bibliographical would be the textual reliability of the text that you have in front of you. The internal would be certain claims that are made within the book about the kinds of literature it intends to be and try to test whether those claims seem to be confirmed by external evidence, and then the external would be particularly claims of, say, non-believing authors, people that are not believers in Christ, and then also the claims of archaeology would be within the realm of the external. But in any case, the first premise is the Bible's at least a generally reliable historical document.

Many people dispute that claim, and we're going to address one aspect of that this morning, and we'll come back to that in just a minute. So the Bible's at least a generally reliable historical document. The second premise is that Jesus is a messenger sent from God, and I think you can, without assuming as your starting point that the Bible's the inspired Word of God, produce evidences, as long as the Bible's a generally reliable document, that point in that direction.

Evidences from prophecy. There are a tremendous number of prophecies, say 60 major prophecies. There's a book on prophecy about Christ the Messiah that has eight major prophecies.

Josh McDowell says 332 prophecies about Christ in the Old Testament. Whatever the number, there's a massive number of prophecies that point forward to Jesus. So that's a classic argument that's been used throughout the history of the church.

Another is an argument from miracles, or particularly, we'll say for the resurrection. Later in the series, we're going to be addressing that issue, and I believe later in the series, we're also going to address the argument from prophecy. So we'll deal with a couple aspects of this case.

We can't develop all aspects of it, but we'll at least show you the lines along which you could develop some of these issues. Okay, first premise, the Bible's at least a generally reliable historical document. Second premise, Jesus is a messenger sent from God because of all of these converging signs, ones I've mentioned and others, that really point to him as being special and unique, and someone to listen to as an agent sent from God.

And then the third main premise is that Jesus teaches that the Bible is a whole lot more than generally reliable. It's an absolutely trustworthy historical document, and there are massive numbers of passages that show that. Like in the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there are 164 passages that relate to Jesus' view on the authority of, say, the Old Testament.

If you look at the Gospel of John, include that, there are about 200 passages, so that it leaves you with a strong belief that Jesus held to a very high view of the authority of Scripture, higher than many believers in the contemporary world that call themselves Christians. So that's an issue to address. So the way the argument goes, the Bible is at least a generally reliable historical document on all the evidences that point in that direction.

Jesus is a messenger sent from God. Jesus teaches that the Bible is a whole lot more than generally reliable. It's absolutely trustworthy, totally true, in the way he puts it forward.

Therefore, the Bible is absolutely trustworthy. And the strength of the conclusion is determined by the degree of evidences all along the way. Now again, that doesn't take you all the way, because you can't arrive at absolute certainty by those arguments, but it's at least a non-circular case for the authority of Scripture.

And then the Holy Spirit comes and confirms that, that the Bible is the Word of God in your heart. Tells you that the direction that the evidences point to, the direction set by the light, is actually the truth. But it's not a circular argument.

It's not solely based upon experience. In any case, what I'm going to do in this particular session is to look at the importance of Christianity being based in history, and then look at one aspect of this case. And it's more the internal reliability of the Scriptures.

First of all, let me accent that Christianity is based upon history. Paul Johnson says this, Christianity, like Judaism from which it sprang, is a historical religion, or it is nothing. It does not deal in myths, metaphors, and symbols, or in states of being and cycles.

It deals in facts. Christians believe that certain specific events occurred, that in time other specific historical events will occur. That's the uniqueness of faith in Christ.

It's based upon events that either happened or didn't happen. They happen in history. No other religion is so based that that your belief or trust in certain historical events is the basis for your salvation.

And it's very important whether you believe that these things happen, like the Incarnation, like the crucifixion of Jesus, like the Resurrection. These things are absolutely foundational for our faith, and for our salvation. C.S. Lewis put it this way, if these events that I've just mentioned are true, then Christianity is of infinite importance.

If they're not true, it's of no importance except as a cultural artifact. The one thing it cannot be is of moderate importance. That's why the radical claims of Christianity have often been made, because it's either true, because it happened, or it's not true.

That's at the very center of faith in Christ. Well, there are many in the theological sector, and I attended a seminary that held to this kind of view, that says that much of the Bible is unreliable, and particularly the Gospels. Much of the Gospels were, so to speak, invented by the early church.

The way Rudolf Bultmann used to put it is that the early church had a certain place in life. In German, Sitz in Leben. A certain place in life, and there are certain questions that arose in the early church that they didn't have answers to.

And so, people in the early church invented sayings of Jesus, put them in Jesus' mouth, and then put them out as true. And so, the question is, according to this scenario, how much of the Gospels are reliable, can be reliably said to be from Jesus? In more recent years, we've had the Jesus Seminar and the Jesus Seminar Bible that will have various color codes. There are 260-some scholars that got together and voted on different passages of the Gospels, and they had different color codes where one is totally reliable, we're certain that this is from Jesus, while probably reliable, probably unreliable, and totally unreliable, in the opinion, subjective opinion, I would say, of these particular scholars.

And as it comes out, a massive amount of the Gospels was thought to be either probably unreliable or totally unreliable. The amount that is considered to be very reliable would be way less than 50% of the Gospels would be considered to be reliable. In fact, I think it was around 25%, but I don't take that as an absolutely correct fact.

But it's you know, it's amazing how much of the Gospels were considered to be unreliable. So the issue is this, were the Gospels invented by the early church or not? And I'm going to give you a few arguments that are non-circular arguments that can be used to address this. Now, there are many complex arguments on this issue.

I've read many books as I had to survive during my time at this more liberal seminary, and I don't have time to go through all of the different arguments, but I've picked arguments that are my favorite arguments that are actually, I think, interesting and exciting, at least to me. I hope they'll be exciting to you on this issue. And here's again the issue.

What's the case against Jesus being invented by the early church? Did the early church invent the person of Jesus more or less? Or did the Jesus of the Gospels really shape the Gospels themselves? Is the character of Jesus real or was it created by the writers? Here's the problem with it being created by the writers. First of all, inventing the character of Jesus would be something of a miracle. I came across various quotes by actually opponents of Christianity or people that wouldn't be considered evangelical Christians at all throughout church history that actually argue this case.

Theodore Parker says, it takes a Newton to forge a Newton. What man could have fabricated a Jesus? No one but a Jesus. Very interesting.

A number of these other quotes go along a similar direction. John Stuart Mill, I believe was an atheist, said it's of no use to say that Christ as exhibited in the Gospels is not historical, and we know not how much of what is admirable has been super-added by the tradition of his followers. Who among his disciples or among their proselytes was capable of inventing the sayings of Jesus or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee and certainly not St. Paul whose character idiosyncrasies were of a totally different sort.

Still less the early Christian writers in whom nothing is more evident than that all the good in them was derived as they always professed it was derived from a higher source. So the question is this character of Jesus has fascinated people of all religions or of no religion throughout the ages. Now which individual that's unknown or uneducated or which community was able to invent this character that has riveted people throughout the ages? I mean if there's anything that we get as we read the Gospels is that we've come in contact with a personality, but if this personality was constructed hither and yon by many diverse people educated and uneducated, it's rather strange that we get this impression.

Who among his disciples were capable of inventing the sayings of Jesus? Certainly not uneducated fishermen. Well where are these geniuses? Really in the very early church you have people, certainly Jesus I believe, but then the Apostle Paul was at a very high level as is mentioned by Mill, but Paul's character and idiosyncrasies,

his style and his way of approach are totally different than what we see within the scope of the Gospels. Really you don't see, even though the early church fathers were faithful, you don't see people of considerable ability to get to Tertullian and Irenaeus and such people in the second century, and you really don't have another genius on the level of Jesus or the Apostle Paul to get to Augustine in the middle of the 300s.

So you have various people that put forward these views. Jean-Jacques Rousseau says this, it's inconceivable that several men should have united to forge the gospel than that a single person should have furnished the subject of it. The gospel has marks of truth so great, so striking, so perfectly inimitable that the inventor of it would be more astonishing than the hero.

Or another one by Matthew Arnold says this, Jesus himself as he appears in the Gospels and for the very reason that he's so manifestly above the heads of his reporters there is in the jargon of the modern philosophy and absolute. We cannot explain him, cannot get behind him and above him, cannot command him. Again, this idea that Jesus is over the heads of his reporters, if you look at the early church, you look at the early church fathers, there's an immediate massive drop in level between the Gospels and the Epistles and the writings in the early church.

So again, how did the character of Jesus in this teaching come out of anything in the early church? Some unknown person or unknown committee that was able to create something of such a massive significance. There's a presumption or weight of evidence that intuitively goes against it. Another consideration is the importance of eyewitnesses.

It was very important as a book by Richard Bauchman on the eyewitnesses recently come out, a scholar from the United Kingdom, and he argues that in the early church it was very important that there be eyewitnesses. That any story, if it was going to be received, had to be certified or authenticated as coming from people that had seen these events or certainly from people that passed on faithfully the message of eyewitnesses. It was really asked carefully and scrupulously, are these things true or are they just hearsay? It was very important in the early church and he has a massive book that documents the importance of this.

In any case, if these people that held to radical criticism are correct, that much of it's invented, the disciples must have been translated to heaven after the resurrection. But we know they were not. They remained present.

And many people that saw the very events that Jesus, where Jesus did miracles, were still alive. And basically you could go and talk to them. Say in 1st Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul says that Jesus appeared at one time to 500, said most of whom remain until now, but some fall asleep, some have fallen asleep, some have died.

So you could go and talk to them. Or you think of this, how many people were present when Jesus fed 5,000 and when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead or so on and so on. And how many people had not only been there, but how many people heard stories from those who had been there.

And do you think perhaps it can grow in terms of exaggeration, but the stories were passed on, the stories were very much known. So if you try to invent a story within the first generation, you had many people, the Apostles particularly, and then others that could say, well, no, these things didn't happen or these things didn't happen that way. So only if you push it into the second generation or push it, say, late first century or into the second century, do you have that kind of free invention without any checks and balances.

(20:54 - 22:06) But you have the Apostles and eyewitnesses present that can provide a refutation of any freely invented stories. We also note that all the Apostles were put to death as martyrs except the Apostle John,

according to tradition. It said that Peter was crucified upside down because he didn't think himself worthy to be crucified as his Lord was.

It said that the Apostle Paul was beheaded, that James, the brother of our Lord, was stoned close to Jerusalem. So we have various stories in the tradition. We don't know exactly how reliable these are, but many, if not almost all, except for the Apostle John, were put to death in that way.

Yet people under persecution often, if they're putting forward a lie, would give some hint that it was a lie. If people were tortured, you'd think they would tell the truth. If there's some conspiracy to make up teachings about Jesus or make up the story about his resurrection, do you think people would have cracked under pressure? Chuck Colson has a great illustration in his book, *Love and God*.

(22:06 - 24:01) There's a chapter there called *Watergate and the Resurrection*. And in that chapter, he argues that at the time of Watergate, there was a two-week period where there was an obstruction of justice where they knew about the idea of a crime being committed but didn't go to the authorities to talk about it. So very soon, John Dean got immunity from prosecution to speak to Congress, and then everybody, according to Colson, was climbing over everybody else to try to get immunity as well.

And this is just under the threat of a small prison term. I think Chuck Colson got less than a year, something like nine months, in prison for this obstruction of justice. But he saw how quickly a conspiracy, in this case the conspiracy in Watergate to obstruct justice, fell apart under the threat of even a small amount of persecution, how much more under physical torture and death.

Yet we see no hint anywhere of any of the disciples cracking or of any alternate stories coming forth. And you would think that the persecutors, if they had heard such a story, would have trumpeted it hither and yon everywhere, if that was the case. So that's another consideration.

Also, the time for the creation of the material is too short. Mark was written in the 60s, if not the 50s. Paul received his tradition in the mid-30s.

Where's the time for the creation of sagas, legends, and myths? The development of German folklore required centuries. The Gospel exploded into life in the midst of well-attested history, fully grown at birth. There's also no absolute reason to push the Gospels or other New Testament writers either very late in the first century or certainly into the second century.

(24:02 - 28:18) It's interesting that in the previous generation, they thought that the Gospel of John was a second century document. At least some of these liberal critics put that forward. But surprisingly, the earliest document that we have confirmed is now the John Rylands fragment, a little fragment of the Gospel of John about this big, that was dated about 120 AD and was found in the sands of Egypt, which pushes the Gospel of John most likely to the end of the first century.

And that's probably the latest of the Gospels. But it could even have been written much earlier. There's a surprising book by J. A. T. Robinson called *Redating the New Testament* that caused a furor when it was written.

J. A. T. Robinson is not a conservative evangelical. In fact, he wrote back in the 1960s a book called *Honest to God*. And in this book, he shocked people kind of like a Bishop Spong does today, where people were shocked that an Anglican bishop should say so many things that were unbelieving, that he totally reinterpreted the Gospel in a more philosophical way and not according to the classical tradition.

So it was a bombshell when his book *Honest to God* came out. But later, this book *Redating the New Testament* had a surprising conservative bent, at least, because he argued by looking at the criteria and

evidences for the dating of New Testament books, that he argued that there's no reason for dating any book of the New Testament later than 70 AD. And he goes through the various criteria and looks at the various arguments for a later dating and finds them wanting.

Now, I wouldn't go to my death on this kind of argument or issue, but it is important to consider that. Is there any necessary reason that pushes them later? I think not. One of the things he mentions, among others, is that there's no mention or hint within the scope of the New Testament of the most massive event that affected the first century Judaism.

And that event was the destruction of the Temple and the destruction of Jerusalem. And that was dated 70 AD. That was a massive event on the Jewish psyche.

For instance, if you think 9-11 has had a massive impact on the United States psyche, where we had 3,000 killed and many people saw it very visually, very tragic event, how much more would there be an impact on the Jewish psyche with the destruction of Jerusalem and the killing, some people have estimated, of about a million people in the process, and the destruction of the Temple, their center of worship, center of sacrifice, where not only was the Temple destroyed, but even the stones were obliterated. It must have had a massive effect on any Jew living there in the first century, yet there's no hint of it. You would think that that massive event, people write most or think most about that which they feel most deeply.

You would think it would pop to the surface at some point or another. You would think, say, in the Gospels, where Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple, that one of the Gospel writers would have said and would be very legitimate, and they do this with other things, make a little side comment. And these things have been fulfilled.

These things happened, yet we don't see any hint of it even in the books that are considered to be later in the New Testament. So it's not a necessary reason, but it's at least reason to give you pause about any kind of late dating of the New Testament books. There's a mild critic, C.H. Dodd, that wrote to Robinson in a letter and said this, You are certainly justified in questioning the whole structure of the accepted critical chronology of New Testament writings, which avoids putting anything earlier than 70 AD, so that none of them are available for anything like first generation testimony.

(28:19 - 29:55) I should quite agree with you that much of this late dating is quite arbitrary, even wanton, the offspring not of any argument that can be presented, but rather of the position of the critic's prejudice, that if he appears to assent to the traditional position of the early church, he will be thought no better than a stick in the mud. So this idea of the time frame, it just doesn't seem to be there to allow what these critics are talking about. And another major consideration, I think this alone would be enough to shift the weight of evidence in the more conservative direction, is a failure to take into account the Jewish perspective on memory.

You have some things that would be regarded as informal uncontrolled. These would be like atrocity stories that sometimes people would exaggerate with respect to them. But Jews and people in the Middle East were very scrupulous in terms of the formal controlled tradition that they put out.

In other words, the teachings of the rabbis or of the religious leaders were passed on very carefully. There's a book, a couple Scandinavian scholars, Reisenfeldt and Gerhardsen, and one of their books is called Memory and Manuscript. And the argument, and it's not to be found easily on amazon.com, it's mostly found in libraries and pretty expensive book because it's pretty thorough and dense and very powerful.

(29:56 - 32:21) But what Gerhardsen argues is that there's a certain analogy between the transmission of the gospel stories and the tradition found in Judaism, and especially passing on the teaching of rabbis. For

instance, the idea in early Judaism was the student was to be like a cistern, not losing a drop of the master's teaching. In other words, the master's teaching was not to be passed on very loosely.

Well, I think he said something like this. The idea was passed on by memory verbatim, was to be memorized. And the importance of memory is one thing that a lot of the modern scholarship, most modern scholarship today, has neglected.

Within Judaism, it was very important not only then, as what Memory and Manuscript documents very thoroughly, but it's also important now. For instance, you see it in a novelized form. Haim Potok has written a book, *The Chosen*, where you have the young boy there, he's brilliant in terms of his Jewish studies, and he'll sit around in a room with rabbis.

We'll say 12 to 15 rabbis sitting around, and the Jewish student will be asked, well, what's the tradition teaching on this subject? And the best rabbinic student will start, perhaps in chronological order, well, rabbi so-and-so says this, and have a substantial quote, and then rabbi so-and-so says this, and rabbi so-and-so says this, and several different quotes. And of course, if you get one word wrong, everybody there goes, you know, there's an immediate correction, that you're to remember it exactly and precisely. And of course, the best Jewish student is the one who gets it exactly correct.

Well, there's a guy, Ken Bailey, who lived over in the Middle East for about 60 years, he ended up getting his PhD in the parables of Luke, and teaching in American University in Beirut. And he used to go out and teach in Middle Eastern villages, extensively on the parables and other things. But he wrote a fascinating essay, where he talks about this passing on of tradition.

(32:22 - 32:58) What he discovered in his essay, and then later I've seen it in a videotape, a couple videotapes that he produces, is that it was very important in the Middle East of this day, in the present day, and also the Middle East in previous ages, to pass on things scrupulously. The idea of memory is very important. For instance, he's found that in some of these countries, you have even illiterate peasants that know thousands of lines of poetry and proverbs verbatim.

(32:59 - 33:37) In fact, there's a game, he said, that is often played in the Middle East, where you sit around in a room, we'll say 15 people, where he's seen it. Here's the way the game goes. You have two lines of poetry or a proverb, and the last letter of the last line has to be the first letter of the first line of the next person.

And then the last letter, first letter of the first line. He's seen it go around a circle of 15 several times in a village where people, again, are illiterate. They can't read or write.

(33:38 - 37:31) Go around several times before anybody goes out. Of course, if you miss one word, everybody in the village knows all these quotes, and you're immediately out. They'll all enforce the time.

And so the last one standing is the winner. He's seen it even where we have 200 people sitting in a circle, where it will go around one or two times before anybody goes out. It's amazing the amount of retention of ideas that people had, the value that's placed upon memory and precision.

A few other illustrations in the contemporary world that American youth workers have gone over and played the telephone game in the Middle East. The telephone game is where you get a circle, say, of teenagers, and you whisper into their ear a particular saying. And then they whisper into the other person's ear, and then it goes around the circle.

And the idea is supposed to be funny, because by the end, it comes out garbled in some strange way that's utterly unlike what was said in the first place. But in the Middle East, they found out that it came out exactly the

same, because they'd been taught from the time they were very young to listen carefully and repeat exactly. So that was very valued.

A couple other contemporary illustrations. We could go into many. Muhammad Atta, one of the 9-11 conspirators, was said to have memorized the whole Qur'an in Arabic.

That's not at all unusual that this idea of memory is valued in the Middle East. Or Bruce Waltke, a Christian scholar that teaches now at Reform Seminary and also Regent College, has said this. When he was over in Israel, he said he met a man who had claimed to memorize the whole Old Testament in Hebrew.

And he tested him a number of different times and found his claim to be consistent with that claim. And yet the surprising thing was that the man was an atheist, yet memorized the whole Old Testament in Hebrew. He often has found, Bailey has found, that going around, taxi cab drivers will have massive amounts of things memorized.

Even people that are uneducated will have incredible amounts of things stocked up in their memory. So great value placed upon it, especially with regard to the formal tradition that provides the foundation for their teaching. There are many other illustrations that could be given here.

But this idea of the free invention of stories goes totally against the mentality of Judaism and of the Middle East. In this day, and especially as documented in Memory and back in Jesus' time. Goes totally counter to the mentality and the cultural practices of that time.

And these things are true also, not only with regard to the formal controlled tradition like the rabbinic teaching, but it's also true with regard to the informal controlled tradition. And that is the teaching that would be stories that go around the founding of the community. Where it's not just formal teaching, but there were stories that were very important, such as the gospel narratives.

Now in this case, what Bailey found, is that the core of the story is preserved. And usually preserved very precisely and exactly. Sometimes there's mentioning of different details around the fringes, but the core is very clear.

Like for instance, just one instance that he uses. One time he found a book that was about the founding of a Christian community in the Middle East. It was written 150 years ago.

(37:32 - 38:46) And so he took the book and he read it and he went back to that community and asked them to tell the stories of the founding of that community, of the founding of the church or churches in that area. And he found that the tradition was preserved and the stories were preserved verbatim. Occasionally again, there would be different details or occasionally someone would tell the story imprecisely, in which case they'd be corrected.

But they were passed on especially by the elders. The elders had passed it on to other elders who passed it on to other elders and they were very careful and scrupulous with the way they passed it on. So that it was very important that even the stories around the founding of the community be passed on very carefully.

Again, sometimes some people would put in one detail around the fringe and other people would leave it out, but always the core of the story was preserved verbatim. We go on and on with these kinds of things. But I would say again that a lot of the critics in modern criticism have not given sufficient place to the Jewish perspective or the Middle Eastern perspective on memory.

(38:47 - 39:56) That goes totally against a free invention of stories. That might happen way later in another culture in another time, but not in that culture and in that time. It's a strong weight of presumption against that kind of approach.

In fact, at the end of Bailey's lecture, after again 60 years of living in the Middle East and doing his PhD and teaching, he was able to stand in front of the camera and say, the Gospels are authentic. And in this case, he's not saying infallible and inerrant. I don't know what he believes or doesn't believe on that issue, so I'm not going to put it into his mouth.

But I say just on the basis of this argument alone, the Gospels can be judged to be authentic, substantially true. That's the weight of presumption, just from this kind of argument alone. I think it's a very powerful argument to consider, and there's much more to be said here.

There's a lot of other research. N.T. Wright addresses this in some way in *Jesus and the Victory of God*, and other scholars do as well. But Bailey's probably the one who's developed it the most thoroughly.

(39:59 - 45:33) Another thing that we need to look at is the utter uniqueness of Jesus' teaching. Usually, some of these critical scholars regard a saying as being authentic, where it's not at all parallel to something that happened in the tradition, and it's not likely, if it goes especially counter to the received tradition, that it's invented. So if the teaching of Jesus is utterly unique, that's regarded as being authentic.

And it's amazing, even if we take the criteria, and I don't know that it's, I would argue that it's really valid in itself, but we'll just take their criteria and say, how much of the Gospels can be regarded to be utterly unique? I think a large segment. Let me just give you a few illustrations of this. One is Jesus' use of language, such as his use of the word *Abba* and *Father*, especially in prayer.

The word for God, *Yahweh*, was written not with all of the vowels, but in terms of consonants. Y-H-W-H, of course, would be *Yahweh*. These are the four great letters, sometimes called the tetragrammaton, is the phrase for these four great letters.

And the reason that the name of God was written in consonants is that it was never to be pronounced. It was so holy. And after a while, they wouldn't even regard these letters as being something that should be written.

Even the four consonants would not be written, but they'd use some circumlocution, such as the word of God, word of *Adonai*, to even get around the idea of having to write down these four holy letters. That's how holy God was, and God was not to be approached in any kind of familiar fashion. Yet Jesus repeatedly addresses God, not only speaks about God, but addresses God in prayer as *Father*, and even uses the word *Abba*, which is a more familiar form of address, similar to the idea of *Daddy*, although perhaps a little bit more respectful, a little bit higher level than *Daddy*.

But in any case, Jesus does that repeatedly. Now this is shocking within this particular context. I believe that Jewish people heard it as striking, and especially the religious leaders were extremely shocked by Jesus' familiarity in the way he addressed God.

In fact, I think you could even argue that Jesus was crucified in part for his use of *Abba*. That's amazing. And yet he uses it repeatedly.

There's no parallel in Judaism or Palestinian Judaism around Jesus' time of anybody addressing God as *Father* or *Abba* in prayer. In fact, the first time we come across it, the address of God as my *Father* in prayer, is a Jew in 974 AD in Italy, way after these events. So Jesus does it repeatedly.

It seems to be that which is utterly unique to Jesus in that time and in that context. Another very striking thing is his use of the word Amen. Now Amen is a Hebrew word, which means it is true, it is reliable, it is solid, it's authentic.

Like for instance, in Jewish, in the early Judaism, Amen was used, say, in the Old Testament. We have a passage in Nehemiah chapter 8, where the scribes come out and they bring the scrolls of the Scripture in front of the people and hold it up. And all the people say, look at it in Nehemiah 8, Amen, Amen.

It's true, it's true. Or look at the various books of the Psalms. Most people skip over it and are unaware that there are five books of the Psalms, but at the end of each one of the books it says, Amen, Amen.

It was a requirement for every Jew, if there was a doxology, a praise, or a thanksgiving, that all a Jewish congregation would say, Amen. And of course we get that practice today as well, where in some churches, especially more free churches, that people will say Amen in the middle of a sermon. There'll be lots of responsiveness that's there.

And the idea is, I regard that what has just been said as being true, what the pastor just said. And so many people will be responsive and give their Amen, their statement that it's true, to what the pastor claims. And so that's very usual for that to happen, where the Amen is given.

But this word Amen is used very frequently by Jesus, actually in the Greek text of the New Testament, where he says, say in John 3, three different times, Amen, Amen I say to you. Now the translation in the King James is, verily I say to you, or in John, this John 3, verily, verily I say to you. Or the more modern translation is, truly I say to you, or truly, truly I say to you.

(45:33 - 46:14) Now in that passage, the actual word that's used in the Greek text, it's a little bit confusing, you got to listen to it. The actual word that's used in the Greek text is the Hebrew word, Amen. Amen I say to you, or Amen, Amen I say to you.

Now that's striking, because often when there's a word from another language that's used in the Greek text, translators allow it to come through untranslated. Like for instance, Jesus' words on the cross are in the Greek text in the Aramaic, Eloah, Eloah, Lama Sabachthanah. Or another time with the healing of the young girl, Tabitha Kum.

(46:16 - 47:21) It's not, and so it's surprising that most translations, in fact I think I know of one, only one, that uses Amen and actually lets it come through. But it's very significant, because it's a remarkable thing for a speaker to use the Amen up front. For instance, if a pastor, your pastor, were to get up in front of the congregation and say, Amen, Amen I say to you.

What would that imply? That would imply I'm not waiting around for you as noble Bereans to search out the text and then add your Amen to what I say. I'm claiming absolute authority for what I say up front. And that's really audacious, is it not, unless it's absolutely true.

It says in the Gospels that Jesus spoke with authority and not as the scribes. Now I imagine that Jesus spoke authoritatively, with a weight and gravity in the way that he spoke. I would guess that, but I know that one of the marks of his authority was his use of Amen.

(47:23 - 48:19) Amen, Amen I say to you. And he says that say in that passage in John 3 about being born again, three different times. Anytime you see that truly I say to you, or in the King James, verily I say to you, or truly, truly, verily, verily, you're to note it.

Jesus is marking this out for special attention. He's underlining it, so to speak. He's emphasizing the importance of the truth that's being claimed here.

So this word Amen is a very important thing, and it wasn't at all a common thing within Judaism of Jesus' day for anybody to do this, to preface their words with Amen. In fact, it's without parallel, and there's only one exception to prove the rule. We have one instance where in 700 BC, we have a letter of someone who started their sentence with Amen.

(48:20 - 48:31) It's obviously theoretically possible to think about doing that. It would emphasize the truthfulness of your statement. The only thing is that nobody did it, at least in terms of our record.

(48:32 - 51:42) And Jesus does it repeatedly, many different times, within the scope of all four Gospels. So it's a real mark of Jesus' authority, and it's a mark of utter uniqueness within the context of his time. And I think that the reason that Jesus was able to say the Amen, or Amen, Amen, at the beginning of his sayings, is that he was the Amen.

In fact, if you look at Revelation 3.14, the letter to the Laodiceans there in the book of Revelation, you'll see that Jesus is the Amen, the faithful and true witness. That's one of the titles of Jesus. Jesus was able to speak the Amen because he was the Amen.

He was the one that was true and reliable and solid and authentic. So that's why he was able to speak the truth, because he is the truth. So it's a very remarkable thing to look at.

There are other places where Jesus uses very unique forms of speech that are the mark of a personality. And this is not a sign of utter uniqueness, but a sign of at least a unique form of speech that has the mark of personality. Joachim Mirmias, in his book *New Testament Theology*, says that Jesus, about a hundred times or over a hundred times, uses a form of speech called antithetical parallelism.

Now, that's a fancy word. Basically, Jews, in terms of poetry, to try to make it simple, would use a form of poetry called parallelism. In our English poetry, we use rhythm and rhyme to make our emphasis, in many cases, in poetry.

Of course, there are many different forms of poetry. But when I was, when my kids were younger, I used to read to them from a rhyme bible. And I would go, da-da, da-da, da-da, da-da, and then have a word.

And then the second line, da-da, da-da, da-da, da-da, and have another rhyming word. And even when our boys were five and seven, they were almost always able to guess the rhyming word at the end of the second line. That's the way we often do poetry, in terms of the structure of the many variations of it, using rhythm and rhyme to do it.

Well, that wasn't the Jewish way. The Jewish way was thought parallels, or various pictures, stating things in different ways. There's something called a synonymous parallelism, where all of the different sayings of something are in the same, it's the same idea, but stated in different words.

For instance, there's a great Hebrew benediction in Numbers chapter 6. It goes like this, and we say it in the prayer. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

(51:42 - 53:42) May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace. Now, in that great Hebrew benediction, every line restates the message of the other line. So if you want to understand the meaning of any word in that prayer, you can use it by interpreting it in terms of the images or wording of the other lines.

Like, for instance, the word bless there. It's a very archaic word. It's used very loosely in our own present language.

But what does the word bless mean? So, may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you. His face meaning his favor, his pleasure.

May the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace. So it's a presence of his grace. It's a presence of his favor, where there's that personal connection that's present.

In the same way, the idea of peace, what does that mean? That's at the very end. It means to be blessed. It means to have the Lord's presence.

It's not so much a lack of trouble or a lack of suffering as a positive presence of the Lord. And you know it because each line of this prayer, it means the same thing as all the other lines. It's just stated in different words or different pictures, different thought parallels.

In a similar way, the antithetic parallelism has a positive statement and then a negative statement right after it. And this is what Jesus does many different times. I'm just going to give you a couple illustrations.

You can go to Jeremias or do your own study to come up with other parallels. But we'll just say in Matthew 6, 22 and 23, we get an example of this antithetic parallelism, where Jesus says, if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. If therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.

(53:42 - 54:37) That's the positive. Now he could just leave it there. It doesn't need to have anything else be said. I suppose it stands on its own. But if you wanted to add clarity to it, you could add the negative. It also, if you add the negative, it gives symmetry to it.

Like here's what he goes on to say. To start out, if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. And then the negative.

But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. Now that adds clarity to the saying. It adds symmetry and rhetorical power.

It also adds memorability to Jesus' teaching. There's a great symmetry, the mark of a great teacher. Jesus does this repeatedly.

Just one other short instance, Matthew 7, 17, where it says, every good tree produces good fruit. Now that's very short. You could just leave it there.

(54:38 - 56:47) But he goes on to say, but the bad tree produces bad fruit. Again, it just adds clarity to the idea. It adds symmetry, rhetorical power, and it's easily memorized. And again, this idea of the antithetic parallelism is used over 100 times at all different levels of the text. So it's the mark not of a freely invented Jesus by a community, but it's a mark of a personality and a master teacher that goes right throughout many different places in the New Testament text. It's interesting how beautifully Jesus' teaching fit together in terms of symmetry.

There's a great study of this in other arenas in Ken Bailey's book, *Poet and Peasant*, and *Through Peasant Eyes*. Fascinating to look at the thought, the careful thought structure of Jesus' teachings. I don't have time to go into that, but it's fascinating.

Finally, the utterly unique use of parables in Jesus' teaching. There's no parallel to the use of parables, common everyday stories, like the Parable of the Sower or the Prodigal Son or, say, the Good Samaritan, in

Jesus' time as used to teach theological truth. Occasionally, you have in the Old Testament this kind of teaching.

Like, for instance, Nathan comes up to David when David has committed murder and adultery, and he comes up and he tells the story of the poor man who has one sheep and the rich man many sheep. The rich man has guests and he doesn't kill one of his many sheep, he takes the poor man's sheep and kills it for dinner. And David's outraged, where is this man? And Nathan, you are the man.

A very powerful, you know, rebuke. And I'd say many of Jesus' parables, in fact most of them, are actually weapons in controversy. They're not nice stories.

(56:47 - 57:29) They're actually used as mirrors to help expose someone's spiritual state. They shine back on people who they really are. But in any case, Jesus uses parables, depending on how you count them, what you consider to be a parable and whatnot, about 41 parables of Jesus.

But there's no parallel to the use of these common everyday stories in Jesus' time in Palestinian Judaism. There's metaphor and simile, but not full-blown parables. It's just no parallel to the use of parables, yet Jesus uses it repeatedly.

(57:29 - 57:51) Now, if utter uniqueness is a sign that it comes from Jesus, there's a whole bunch of parables in all of the different gospels that are under that criteria of utter uniqueness. Well, there's much more we could say here and much more we could develop. I've tried to skim the surface of some of these arguments and some of these ideas, but here's what I would say to sum it up.

(57:52 - 1:00:12) In light of these and other arguments, the burden of proof is on those who maintain the inauthenticity of the gospels, rather than on those who maintain the authenticity of the gospels. Let me say that again. In light of these and other arguments, the burden of proof is on those who maintain the inauthenticity of the gospels, rather than on those who maintain the authenticity of the Gospels.

I've just given you some of my favorite arguments, ones that I think are most interesting and helpful and connect most with people, but there are many other arguments, massive numbers of arguments, that also go in this direction as well. I've only given you the tip of the iceberg, what I consider some of the most interesting ones. If you want to see an anthology of some of those, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell provides some of the quotes from these books, but I would go back to the original source books themselves.

Maybe your favorite quotes have a similar author, and you can come to see the book in its original context. Many of the books that McDowell used, I used in the original form and read the whole book, and it was great to have a summary of the different quotes in one place. But there's a massive amount of literature that's out there on this kind of subject, and I recommend that you go look at it.

So you don't have to be intimidated by the higher critics or the Jesus Seminar or the latest sayings here. There are solid answers to it, and there are many people who have written books on this. Perhaps the most recent, N.T. Wright, in his book, say, *Jesus and the Victory of God*.

It's a massive book that takes on, piece by piece by piece, refuting these critics and really upholding the historicity of each event and different sayings of Jesus. Done a magnificent job. He stood on the shoulders of many who have gone before him.

Provides a very powerful persuasive case for the authenticity of these various sayings, as over against the critics. So there's something to be said, even without assuming the doctrine of inspiration. I do believe in the doctrine of inspiration, but these arguments stand even independent of that assumption.