

Evidence of Eyewitness Testimony

The Reliability of the Gospels. Part 5. 16th February 2025.

Two views

- Bible believers say that the accounts in the gospels are reliable accounts from eyewitness sources.
- Bible sceptics say that the accounts are legends which developed over time through numerous retellings and embellishments.

Geography

- Like the book of Acts, the gospels are filled with place names.
 - Regions, Villages/Towns/Cities, Bodies of Water, Local places/landmarks
- These are not just the "big" cities or famous regions, but include numerous small and insignificant places.
- These would not be easy to look up, so they are evidence of local (eyewitness) testimony in the gospels
- Cm. "sea" of galilee in Matthew (e.g 4:18), Mark (e.g. 1:16) and John (6:1), but "lake" of Gennesaret in Luke (5:1)
 - Matthew, Peter (source behind Mark), and John were residents of Galilee. They fished there and experienced it's unusually violent storms. To them, it was natural to refer to this as a "sea". That's what their cultural context would make them call it.
 - But Luke was not a native of Galilee. He was used to much larger bodies of water. So it makes sense that he would call it a lake.
- Note that in John, another name is added, "the sea of Tiberius"
 - This name only came into use towards the end of the 1st century.
 - The fact that Matthew, Mark and Luke do not use this name supports the tradition that they wrote their gospels much earlier, while John wrote his later.

- Elevation in John's gospel
 - John 2:12. Jesus went "down" from Cana to Capernaum. This fits with the topology. Cana is at 750ft. Capernaum is at -750ft (below sea level).
 - John 5:1. Jesus went "up" to Jerusalem (2500 ft).

Named characters

- Most people in the gospels are not named. So when someone is named, it stands out as strange.
- Why are these people given names, but not others?
- Mark 15:21. "And they compelled a passerby, *Simon of Cyrene*, who was coming in from the country, *the father of Alexander and Rufus*, to carry his cross."
 - Why are Simon's children named?
 - The best answer is that these people were known to the people in Rome who Mark was writing for. In other words, the account is being written within living memory of the events. People with important connections to the eyewitnesses were still around.
 - Cm. Rom. 16:13. "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well."