

Are the New Testament Documents Historically Reliable? | with Dr. Ben Shaw

(October 27, 2023)

FRANK:

What evidence do we have that the New Testament documents are historically reliable, that they're actually telling us the truth about what happened? We're not asking the question, "are they inerrant", today. That's another question. But do they tell us really what happened in the first century, particularly what happened to Jesus? Because if Jesus really did rise from the dead, then Christianity is true. And to have us work through that question is Dr. Ben Shaw.

Ben has his PhD in theology from Liberty University, and for the past several years, he's been working with the great Dr. Gary Habermas. And we happen to be right now at the Steadfast National Conference on Christian Apologetics for Southern Evangelical Seminary. And Ben, you were going to be here anyway. But Gary got sick, and you filled in for him. Which goes to show you how well you know his stuff.

BEN:

Yeah, it goes to show too how important it is to train up the next generation. That's a very important part. And yeah, he called me less than 24 hours before the event was going to start. He's like, "Hey, Ben. If I don't go, tomorrow, are you going to go?" That's a weird question to ask. So, I was like, yeah, I'll go. But why are you asking that. He goes, "because I'm feeling sick, and I need you to fill in for me."

And so, he told me we were going to be talking about the timeline argument. And then I show up, and that's not the topic we were supposed to discuss. So, we had to pull some audibles. But it was good. It was a good session. We were able to share a lot. So yeah, it was good. I enjoyed it.

FRANK:

First of all, just so our viewers and listeners understand, in 2024, you're going to come out with a book that has 13 arguments for the reliability of Scripture? Or is it the New Testament?

BEN:

Thirteen arguments for the reliability of the New Testament. And it's designed to be a short book about 150-170 pages. Each chapter is a standalone chapter. So, you can just pick it up and read those chapters. But my background kind of led to this book. I remember, for example, I didn't understand that Paul, I knew he was a persecutor of the Church. But I didn't realize he wrote books of the New Testament until I was in college. So, I still know that feeling and how important it was to realize, wow. I'm really paying attention to his words now, because this guy used to persecute the Church and he's writing for the Church. Now, what happened to him?



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And so, going through school, those were some of the questions I had. Obviously, the resurrection was one of the big questions that I had. And there's a story about how I met Habermas through hockey. But as we studied the resurrection, I started just seeing all these areas of reliability for the New Testament. And they're often just so spread apart here and there, or sometimes just the academics talk about them. And I'm like, man. These just need to be synthesized, put together, made readable, so someone can pick up, and just read and go oh.

This is an argument for the reliability in New Testament. This is good. Okay. They're dated early. That's good. They're all before the end of the first century. Wow. Okay. And that's what skeptics grant too? It's not quite a minimal facts approach to the reliability of the New Testament, but it kind of is. So, we have multiple lines of evidence there. And you'll see throughout, there's skeptics. There's believers, all sorts making comments in support of these.

FRANK:

Now, we probably won't get to all 13 today. When the book comes out, we'll have you on again to go through some of them. But before we get into some of the 13, you have been working probably as hard on Gary Habermas' magnum opus as he has. You're on Volume 3 of how many?

BEN:

Four. There's going to be four total.

FRANK:

Just give us an overview of what each volume contains.

BEN:

It's funny because we've been working, and we would go to Habermas' house, and we'd be working on it together, and trying to do some of the edits. And then his wife would chime in in the background and be like, you two have got to get it worked out. Try to stay focused. But Volume 1 is coming out January 15. It's available on pre-order now, 1072 pages. Huge. And it's just on the evidences, historical method, the evidences. And it's full of all the multiple lines of evidence for each of his minimal facts and additional facts. And that's going to be just Volume 1.

FRANK:

Okay, but for our listeners, what are the minimal facts they Gary says most scholars agree with?

BEN:

Yes. And he'll have two sets of this. The minimal facts are going to be Jesus's death, the appearances, it's proclaimed early. It's the conversion of James, Jesus' skeptical brother, and the conversion of Paul.

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FRANK:

So, you've got five of them.

BEN:

Five of them. I may be missing one because my memory's not so tight because we're on Volume 3 now. We actually turned in Volume 1 at the start of SES a year and a half ago. And we've done another whole 1000 pages on Volume Two since then. And then there's a set of additional facts after those five.

FRANK:

Is the empty tomb one of them?

BEN:

That's in the additional facts. And there's about 20 arguments or so for the empty tomb that he discusses, a lot of them. And then we also have the centrality of the resurrection, it started in Jerusalem, the Church began and grew, the transformation of the disciples. That was the sixth minimal fact, by the way, the transformation of the disciples such that they were willing to suffer and die.

FRANK:

So, you've got Jesus' death, number one. You've got the appearances of him resurrecting, number two. Number three is the transformation of the Apostles. They were followers of Yahweh and suddenly now they're believing a man claimed to be God and rose from the dead. You've got the conversion of James and the conversion of Paul.

BEN:

Yes, those are the six.

FRANK:

All right, I'm missing one. Which one?

BEN:

You had six. Jesus's death, appearances, proclaimed early.

FRANK:

Proclaimed early. That's the one we missed. Alright, so those six, more than 90% of scholars whether they're atheists or Christians agree with?

BEN:

Yes, sir. It's a given. And they're well attested. So well attested.

FRANK:

All right. And then Volume 2 of the magnum opus, what's in that?

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BEN:

If you had any doubts on the first part, the second part deals with all the alternative theories, including David Hume's arguments, miracles, questions of that nature. Then he goes into all sorts of alternative theories. And that's going to be about 1000 pages on that. And what's interesting, too, is he doesn't just give his responses to some of these alternative theories. But he also gives the history of them. So, in the 18th century, you had German liberals giving (that's what they called themselves too). They gave these alternative theories. But if you didn't give the same alternative theory as someone else, well, they're going to critique your alternative theory.

So, you have these two guys. One guy may give swoon, one guy may give the hallucination theory, and they attack each other, and they show the holes in their theories. So, Habermas gives that history and I think the chapter titles are 'Liberals vs. Liberals' and then 'Conservatives vs. Liberals.' So, pretty cool history and development, which leads to where we are now. Which is why a lot of scholars don't take a naturalistic theory these days, we're starting to see them pull back on that and just say, I don't really know what to say happened.

FRANK:

So, the evidence is such that they agree with these six facts. But how to interpret why these six facts are facts, they punt.

BEN:

Right. Because the naturalistic theories fail to account for all of those facts. There's problems with each of them. So, when we have this bedrock, and you put forward an alternative theory, they're challenged by that historical bedrock. And it's fascinating because it's just six facts, and they're easy ones for us to grasp. I grasped them as a hockey player. So, you know, we can all grab them. And then if you start having those questions, you go okay, well, it doesn't explain Paul's conversion. Paul wouldn't have converted. He wouldn't have hallucinated like these guys did. He's not in that position. Neither would James. James was a skeptic according to Mark and John.

FRANK:

Right. And then the empty tomb would seem to also create a problem for the hallucination theory and the fact that it started in Jerusalem, right? I mean...

BEN:

It's not proclaimed in Greece, right? It's proclaimed in Jerusalem where they could check and verify these things, as opposed to some distant land. So, that's huge. But we kind of take that for granted and overlook its significance.

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FRANK:

Yeah, it is interesting that these New Testament scholars who are not Christians are now avoiding saying what they think happened. They used to say what, hallucinations? Was that the top one?

BEN:

Yeah. Hallucinations was probably one of the leading ones. And now it's kind of, I don't know. And maybe if we put two or three bad theories together, maybe we can get one working theory. [Laughter]

FRANK:

What about the third volume?

BEN:

The third volume is going to be...so, Habermas has referenced how he tracks a lot of scholars. This is going to be a lot of scholars who he's tracked over the years. And I've worked on this portion of this document for the past decade. He's worked on it since 1975. So, I jumped in about a decade ago and added to it. And it is a collection of where scholars are on all these different subjects. So, it's not really too much of his thoughts, but it's really highlighting where we put these people in these thoughts.

FRANK:

All right. We're going to be right back with Dr. Ben Shaw. We're going to talk about the 13 evidences or reasons to believe the New Testament documents are historically reliable here on I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. We're back in two minutes.

Welcome back to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. This Monday night on our YouTube channel, also our website CrossExamined.org, we'll be streaming lesson 11 of 'Digging up the Bible.' We're looking at the top archaeological discoveries in the Bible. We're about to get into the Kings era. We did Joshua and Judges last time. It'll be streamed Live on our YouTube channel. It won't be on YouTube too long, so you may want to watch it while it is Live.

And then next week, we're going to be at the University of Cincinnati on November 2, all of the details are on our website. A couple of days later, November 4, we'll be in Nashville, Tennessee for the Unshaken conference. That's me, Alisa Childers, and Natasha Crain. Go to UnshakenConference.com. If you want more on that, we're going to go to four different churches next year for Unshaken. Again, if you'd like to bring Unshaken to your church, just go to the UnshakenConference.com.

I'm talking to Dr. Ben Shaw today, who has his PhD in theology from Liberty University, and he's been working with Dr. Gary Habermas, who is the world champion, heavyweight champion of the resurrection. And we were talking just before the break about the four volumes of Gary's

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magnum opus. We talked about volumes one, two, and three. What's in volume four that hasn't been written yet? Or is it being written now?

BEN:

It's been written but not written. Alright, kind of an odd way to say that, but Volume 1 is evidence. Volume 2 is alternative theories. Volume 3 is where scholars are at on various different subjects. Volume 4 is pastoral and practical implications, because the resurrection is not just some event that happened, but it has practical implications for the present. So, Volume 4 is going to be really interesting to see that because, you know, we want to live that out.

FRANK:

That's right. And Gary has personal experiences. His wife died when she was 43, I think. And I remember him talking about how the resurrection was a comfort to him knowing that one day, they would both be resurrected. So, Gary's not just a scholar. He's a guy that is a real human being. Anyone who knows him loves him. He's just a wonderful guy. Now, let's go to your work, Ben. You're about to release a book in the coming year. What's the title of the book?

BEN:

'Trustworthy: 13 Arguments for the Reliability of the New Testament.'

FRANK:

All right, 'Trustworthy.' Let's go through a few of them. We're not going to get to all of them today. But if you had to talk to somebody about this issue, where would you start?

BEN:

Well, there's at least 13 arguments. And a lot of times in reliability books, we'll see textual criticism. So, we do cover that because it's important. But I wanted to make sure to go beyond that. And one of the objections I think that Christians get is they just get the stereotype that the New Testament is not reliable. And so, historical criteria have come a long way and showing that there's multiple points of convergence in the New Testament that are reliable. And so, historical criteria, the best thing about them is they're intuitive. We do them every day. We just don't call them historical criteria in some academic way.

You know, if there's a car accident, we just look. Did you see what happened? Did you see what happened? I saw what happened? Oh, you're a witness. Okay. You did too? Oh, now we have multiple independent witnesses. But we don't think like that. But that's what historians do. So, when you're doing historical work, you want to find multiple sources. So, that's one historical criterion that we can use. But there's others. We want early testimony too. We don't want something from centuries after the fact, like we have with Alexander the Great's biographies, for example.

All of Jesus's, not all of them, canonical Gospels, that is. They're all within the first century, all within the lifetime of eyewitnesses. And so that's significant. That's not an insignificant factor.

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So, we have early. We also talked about dating in the book, too. Not just of the Gospels, but also of Paul's writings. We want eyewitnesses. That's another one. How about embarrassing testimony? If I'm the one driving, and my wife is in the car next to me, and she's telling the officer, it's my husband who did it. He did it. You know, that doesn't look good for me. She's offering up something that's going to, you know, she's embarrassed about what her husband had just done, but it's a confession.

So, that's another criteria. And we see that in the New Testament, that Jesus's crucifixion was immensely taboo at that time. The Gospels actually present the most detailed crucifixion accounts in all of ancient history. So, why did they do that? Why would they present something that shouldn't even being the thoughts of Roman citizens was what Cicero says. So, I really like historical criteria because they're so common and we do them every day. So, we can easily grasp them, and then we can apply them to the New Testament ourselves.

FRANK:

Let's talk about early first. Why do we think the New Testament documents are written early? And when you say early, what do you mean by early? How early is early? Because some people might even say, well, if it's written down 20 years later, that's not early. What would you say to that?

BEN:

Yes, so the first comment would be, in Bart Ehrman's book, 'Did Jesus Exist?', he uses a century as a timespan. So, he counts sources within a century of Jesus's death. So, 100 years in the ancient world, you know, they don't have computers. This is just making me think, Habermas' big volume on 1000 pages. You know, he types with two fingers. So, you know, today we use all 10 of our fingers. We're 80% more efficient. But in the ancient world, the ability to have paper, to write things, it takes time. It takes money. It takes skills because not everyone can read. So, 20 years and especially like we just mentioned with Alexander the Great, our earliest biographies for him are centuries later.

FRANK:

And people don't really question what he did, even though he accomplished amazing feats for a man who was in his early 30's. He conquered most of the known world at the time. Nobody doubts that those amazing feats were done by him even though the biographies were centuries after he existed.

BEN:

Close to three centuries for the first one. The first one is not the best of them. Plutarch and Arrian are typically considered to have the better ones. So, that's interesting. But what's really cool with the New Testament, you have the Gospels all within the lifetime of eyewitnesses. So, you know, we have people writing biographies of World War II decades after. And they can recall vividly because those are vivid things that had happened. They're major events. I can't tell you the color of the car I parked next to because it's a trivial thing, right?

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We can only recall so much. And the things that are important are what stand out to us. So, we have the Gospels, but we've got Paul's writings even earlier. And we talk about these dates, but we also talk about creeds in the book. There's dozens of creeds in the New Testament. It's just hard for us to pick up on them at times for a variety of reasons.

FRANK:

Explain a creed for our audience.

BEN:

Yes, 1 Corinthians 15 is probably one of the most evident creeds because Paul specifically says, I passed on to you that which I received. And so, that's technical, rabbinical language for passing on tradition. So, he's giving them a formal instruction.

FRANK:

Now, when you say tradition, people in America think tradition is almost like, well, it could be true, but it might not be true. It's just a tradition. But you don't mean that, right?

BEN:

No, it's a very formalized training.

FRANK:

So, it's more like a catechism?

BEN:

Yes, much like catechesis. Actually, in the New Testament, Romans 10:9, I use the word confession. That's another example of these types of oral traditions. Oral traditions can just be a catch all.

FRANK:

So, it's a way of passing off historical and theological truth to someone who maybe even can't read. You can put it in a rhythmic way that they could understand.

BEN:

Yes, and they can recall it better. And you know, Habermas uses the childhood rhymes that we would learn like, row, row, row your boat or something like that.

FRANK:

Jack and Jill went up the hill.

BEN:

Yes, exactly. In oral culture, you have to have those sorts of things, because people need to take it. And if you're trying to make disciples, you have to make sure that they know what's of

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first importance. And that's exactly what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, that Jesus died, He was buried, He was raised again, and then He appeared to many people. So, Paul's reminding them that He gave them this tradition. And then we go, well, where did Paul get this tradition? And in Galatians 1, it says, just three years after Paul was converted, and a lot of scholars date Paul's conversion to 32-33 AD. And if Jesus died in 30 AD, okay, we're really close to these events themselves.

Paul says three years later, I went and met with Peter and James. And he didn't just go to meet them, it says histories. So, he inquired with them. He sought them out to meet with them to get specific information. Galatians 1 and 2 is about the Gospel. And I just mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says, it's about the Gospel. It's of first importance, and this is what I gave to you. And by which if you believe it, you're saved. So, this is critical information that again, virtually all scholars grant that this creedal information. And even Bart Ehrman says that Paul probably received all of his traditions in the early 30's or at that meeting with Peter and James.

FRANK:

Why do they suggest it's the early 30's that this creed from 1 Corinthians 15:3-7, that it comes that early? Why do they say it's right after the alleged resurrection and not a decade or two later?

BEN:

Well, because Paul's meeting with the eyewitnesses. So, it's interesting. There's three individuals named in 1 Corinthians 15 as having seen the risen Jesus. And we just mentioned that Paul, three years after his conversion...so again, Jesus died in 30 AD. Thirty-two or 33 AD, Paul gets converted. Paul says in Galatians 1, three years after my conversion, I went and met with Peter and James. So, we have Peter, Paul and James. The creed and 1 Corinthians 15, Peter, Paul, and James are the individuals mentioned as having seen the risen Jesus. There's also three groups mentioned in that creed as well.

FRANK:

By the way, Titus Kennedy, who's an archaeologist, seems to think that the better date (I know it's disputed) for his crucifixion is 33 AD, because it has something to do (and I can't recreate the argument in my head right now) with Janus, who was like second in command to Tiberius, perhaps, who was executed. And Pilate had kind of an allegiance with Janus. And he was wondering if Tiberius was going to execute him next. And this happened, I want to say like 31 AD or 32 AD.

So, I think Titus Kennedy's point, and others have said this, that it's much more likely this happened in 33, when Pilate would have been absolutely terrified that he was going to experience the same fate as Janus by Tiberius. Because Janus tried to basically usurp the throne while Tiberius was on vacation or something. And so, if I'm remembering the argument correctly, have you heard this?

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BEN:

I do know a number of scholars do take 33 AD. Paul Barnett is a big one.

FRANK:

Yep. From Down Under, right?

BEN:

Yes, that's right. The majority is 30. But there's big names who take 33 AD. And actually, Barnett takes a 33 AD, and Paul's conversion is in 34. So again, it's still three years later. So, everything just moves back. It doesn't actually change the timeline too much, because it's still just a couple years after the event. And again, if Paul's receiving the tradition, too, I should note...

So, say we take Kennedy's date of 33 and Barnett's date, even if that happens and Paul converts in 33, Paul still says, three years after my conversion, I'm meeting. So, whichever date you take, it's three years after Paul's conversion, which happens just after that. But if Peter and James are giving Paul that creed then, they must have had it before then. And that's why guys like Hurtado and Dunn say this creed was developed within weeks or months of the crucifixion.

FRANK:

Wasn't Hurtado a part of the Jesus Seminar originally?

BEN:

I don't think he was.

FRANK:

I thought I read that. Maybe it's wrong, because he was a good scholar. I thought I read that just recently.

BEN:

I'm going to have to double check that now.

FRANK:

Yeah, he died not long ago. But his the 'Destroyer of the Gods' book is a very good book. Larry Hurtado, he's got a website. I think he was a believer. There may have been some decent guys on the Jesus Seminar. But maybe I was mistaken. I read it. Maybe they were mistaken. Anyway, we're talking to Dr. Ben Shaw here. We're going through some of the evidence that the New Testament documents are historically reliable.

He has a book coming out next year about 13 of these evidences. We're just talking about one of them right now. Is it early? And we'll pick up our conversation right after the break. Also, we're talking about Galatians here. We're starting a course in Galatians this week that you want to be a part of. If you go to CrossExamined.org, click on online courses. You'll see the Galatians

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Welcome back to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network. If you're low on the FM dial looking for National Public Radio, go no further. We're actually going to tell you the truth here. You're never going to hear the evidence that the New Testament documents are reliable on NPR, that's for sure.

But we're here to tell you the truth. And our guest today is Dr. Ben Shaw, theology degree from Liberty University, who has for quite a while been working with the great Dr. Gary Habermas. And we're talking about some of the arguments for the reliability of the New Testament documents. Ben, a lot of people will say, well, even if the documents were written, you know, 20-30 years later, that seems too long. But what are they not getting when they say that, that there are sources that are earlier? Can you unpack that for us?

BEN:

Yes. So, we talked about creeds. One of the other components that are important are, if we look at Papias, who we have reports from him from the first century, right around the end of the first century. He says that Mark was Peter's interpreter, and he was the one who wrote down Peter's Gospel. So, although the writing...

FRANK:

Peter's Gospel, which is called Mark.

BEN:

Peter's, yea that's right. Not the Gospel of Peter. It's a different thing entirely. Yes. So, Mark was Peter's interpreter. And this is why it's agreed upon actually by a number of scholars that say, yeah, Mark was the one who had Peter as a source for his Gospel. And so, although mark is generally considered to have written around 65 or so AD, maybe a little earlier, his source is Peter. He's right there at the events. He's an eyewitness, so he was there. And Peter is not just giving the Gospel one time for Mark to hear. Peter had been giving the Gospel message over, and over, and over for those several years after the crucifixion until he was ultimately martyred.

And so, Mark, that was his source. I mean, what better source can you look for than Peter, who was, you know, one of the top three disciples? So, that's one of the great testimonies we have there. And then, Paul, similarly, like we've mentioned with the creeds, he interviews Peter. Because he's like, man, I want to know about Jesus from, you know. I've been persecuting. Where was I wrong? What was I getting wrong? You know, I've already been baptized. And I spent some time with an Ananias, but I want to talk to Peter because he was there. And so, even Paul's doing the same thing. So, it's important to have those. We have the writings, but we have the sources that bring them back even earlier to the events themselves.

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FRANK:

What are the criteria that these scholars use to date the Gospels? Like you just said, Mark 65 AD. People I've talked to, or people I've read, people like Colin Hemer, who wrote 'Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History,' he makes a really strong case that Acts is written by 62, which means Luke is prior to Acts. And most people believe Mark is prior to Luke. So, how do you get 65 AD for Mark, when Luke is that early?

BEN:

Right. That's a great question. So here, I'm going to let my Habermas influence show. I take a minimal fact kind of approach, and I take the general dating. So, when I do the 65 date, that's just kind of a general view that scholars will get.

FRANK:

Where did they get that number from?

BEN:

Well, the reason I say that is to say, Jonathan Bernier, he just wrote a book called 'Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament.'

FRANK:

Oh, that sounds like Bishop John Robinson from like 50 years ago.

BEN:

You could think of it as a sequel to his book. He dates everything to pre 70. Just about everything, I should say. And the fall of the temple is one of those big reasons. Because some scholars say they would for sure mention that. But historically, that's also an argument from silence. So, how do we weigh those two positions together? Because guys like Keener date Acts to post 70 as well. And Keener, he's a brilliant scholar. So, you know, how do we weigh those arguments, especially with the destruction of the temple?

But Bernier takes Robinson's view. And at the end of his book, he makes a really interesting comment. He says, Robinson and I are the only two guys to write a full-length treatment on the dating of the Gospels and the arguments for them, like how do we actually get to these dates? And we both date them earlier. And if you think we're wrong, write a full-length book and show us why we're wrong.

FRANK:

Which book is this now?

BEN:

I believe it's called 'Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament.' Robinson's book has a very similar name too. So, you'll be right in line with both.

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FRANK:

As I understand it, Bishop John Robinson, don't be put off by the word bishop. I think he was liberal, wasn't he?

BEN:

I believe so too.

FRANK:

Like, he wasn't evangelical. But he's saying, look, the evidence says these documents are early. And Dan Wallace, who as you know, teaches at Dallas Theological Seminary. I asked him many years ago, what do you think about John? When was John written? Because when you read John 5, it talks about the Pool of Bethesda as if it's still there. If he was writing after 70 AD, it wouldn't still be there. And Dan said he studied that for a long time. And back in the 90's, he came to the conclusion that John was written prior to 70 AD too.

BEN:

I think Bernier takes that position as well.

FRANK:

Okay. So, it's not just an argument from silence. It's an argument from them positively stating...

BEN:

There's that element. And then too, the argument of silence, it's nuanced because would we expect the writers to mention these things? Because I take a similar view with Clement, because he's typically dated to 95. But he speaks of the temple as though there's still sacrifices going on. So, that's kind of interesting.

FRANK:

Maybe he's writing earlier?

BEN:

So, 65 is the alternative date given for Clement? Okay, so that pushes him...

FRANK:

Clement of Rome?

BEN:

Yep. And he wrote his letter to the Corinthians. He wrote a letter to the Corinthians as well. So, Clement goes over some early church fathers in addition to the New Testament stuff. But he also dates John pre 70, as well, if I recall correctly. So, he's, it's really interesting. So yet, the only two full-length treatments put everything pre 70.

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FRANK:

Yeah, I once asked Gary that question, Gary Habermas. I asked him, you know, why did they date it at 65. And he goes, I don't know. They just do. They just pull stuff out of the air. Well, let's go with 65. [Laughter]

BEN:

He's so eclectic. He's just like, okay, where can we just agree on to move on so we can get the discussion going? 65? Okay, so how do we move from here?

FRANK:

Even if it is 65, if you've got data in it from earlier...it'd be like today if I wanted to write a history of the Vietnam War, which occurred in the 60's and 70's. Even though I'm writing it in 2023, if I have eyewitnesses that have informed me as to what happened, then I'm back to the events itself by their experience. And so, those people would be telling me the truth, even though I'm writing it 50 years after the event. So, to believe that just because it's written later that you can't trust it doesn't make any sense at all. And the way historians look at these things, Ben, 50 years is nothing.

BEN:

Not in the ancient world at all. And again, Ehrman puts a century, you know. Anything within a century is good for Jesus's, not only His existence, because he's got that book 'Did Jesus Exist?' But I think he gives 12 or a dozen sources for Jesus's crucifixion. And they're within a century. Some scholars may be more flexible. They may take 150 years. If you're dealing with Alexander, you have to be more flexible. You don't have a choice, right? Because his biographies are much later.

FRANK:

What is the mistake that people make in the general public when they think, oh, we can't trust these documents because they were written by Christians? You see, they're biased. Like, what is that mistake? What are they missing when they say that?

BEN:

Part of me thinks it's just an easy thing to say. But, you know, it's funny. I was talking to Habermas last night and just checking on him a little bit and talking to him about how the events going because he's sick. And we were actually talking about that question. And Ehrman says, you know, if you were doing a history on the American Revolution, what kind of sources would you want? Would you discount the American sources because they won the war? Would you discount George Washington from your source? You'd be a terrible historian not to use George Washington in the American Revolution, right?

So, that's a common everyday example. That's why I like history, because we can apply to non-Christian areas and be like, okay. I've got an article called 'What's Good for the Goose is Good for the Gander.' Okay, if we do it over here, and we apply it to Christianity, how does that look?

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It looks pretty good. Looks really good. So, that's the biggest one. But at the end of day, we all have biases. But there's a great saying. Neutrality is not objectivity, or objectivity is not neutrality. You can be objective and be biased, right? You can critique your own side while still being on your side. You can critique the opponents while also being right.

So, there's a lot to be said for our subjective biases. The problem is, and I believe his last name is Evans. He's Sir Evans. And he makes the point, as long as our biases aren't paramount. And there's a story in church history of what that means. There was an Huldrych Zwingli scholar who said, he just loved all Huldrych Zwingli and Zwingli had some controversy around him for committing adultery and whether he had a mistress or not.

FRANK:

Was this one of the guys that was burned at the stake? Am I thinking of that guy?

BEN:

Well, this is Zwingli's scholar. So, this is a story about him. But the Catholic Church was saying, they just want to be a bunch of just no laws and go around and be promiscuous. But oh, that's just a Catholic bias. Zwingli really was pure and wholesome. And you've got a Zwingli scholar now studying Zwingli like, oh, yeah, he was so pure and wholesome. But he finds a letter of confession of adultery. And what does he do? He just throws his bias out the window and proclaims Zwingli's guilt? No. He starts to burn his letter. And as he's doing it, he knows what he's doing is wrong. And he does ultimately stop doing that.

So, our biases can be paramount. If he were to let the letter burn, that would've been a paramount where the biases take over. But he didn't. He chose truth. And that's important, too. And we see that in Scripture because we see embarrassing testimony. Jesus's brothers not believing in Him is embarrassing testimony. His crucifixion, as Paul says, was embarrassing for Jews and Gentiles. There's the women at the empty tomb. So, there's all sorts of embarrassing testimony. But they include it because it happened.

FRANK:

Yeah, it also seems to me that if the bias was going any way at all, it would go in favor of them telling the truth because they had everything to lose by saying it was true. Right? Like these are Jews. They're not believing that a man could claim to be God and rise from the dead, unless a man really did claim to be God and rise from the dead. Because they're going to be beaten, tortured, and killed for saying this. So, their bias, maybe I said it the wrong way a minute ago. Their bias would be to say this stuff didn't happen. But in reality, they say it did, and it hurt them by saying it did.

BEN:

Yeah, and as Licona says, liars make poor martyrs. I think Paul Meyer says, liars make poor mythmakers. And then on top of that, a recent scholar Andrew Loke, who's got a book on the resurrection, he adds the right element. They were not only risking their bodily injury, but their

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souls as well because they're blaspheming. That's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. You know, we're lying about God if he didn't rise from the dead. But he did raise from the dead. So, some things follow from that. So, that's important.

FRANK:

We're talking to Dr. Ben Shaw, who has a new apologetics ministry called CoreApologetics.com. And he's been working with Gary Habermas. He has his own book coming out next year on the reliability of the Scriptures, particularly the New Testament. And we say Scriptures, we really mean just the New Testament documents. Are they really telling the truth? And we've just talked a little bit about early testimony, a little bit about embarrassing testimony.

And we're going to talk a lot more with Ben right after the break. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist on the American Family Radio Network, 180 stations or so around the country. This is also in podcast. It's called the I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist podcast. We're back in just two minutes.

Welcome back to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. By the way, a great place to get an education is Southern Evangelical Seminary. I went there many years ago. The great Jorge Gil is going there right now. Alisa Childers is going there. Melissa Dougherty's going there. There are people who you know out there who have gone to Southern Evangelical Seminary, SES.edu. And if you put a forward slash Frank on there, you might be able to get a scholarship. So, go to SES.edu to learn a lot more about apologetics, philosophy, and theology for the real world. And you're going to be steadfast in it because they're not budging. They're not going woke, I can tell you that right now.

In fact, we're at the Steadfast conference. And we're talking to Dr. Ben Shaw from Liberty University. He has a book coming out next year about 13 arguments for the reliability of the New Testament. Ben let's talk a little bit about embarrassing testimony. We talked just a little prior to the break. This, for me, is very intuitive and makes a lot of sense. What are some of the most embarrassing details in the New Testament that they never would have invented if they were making this up?

BEN:

Yes, the two that come to mind for me are crucifixion and the women at the tomb. The crucifixion is as Paul says, it's a stumbling block to the Jews because he who is hanged is cursed by God.

FRANK:

Yep, Deuteronomy 21:23.

BEN:

And to the Gentiles, a stumbling block, or foolishness, because it was a punishment reserved for slaves. It was meant to be shameful. It was meant to be a public display. And Cicero has a

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bunch of really brilliant comments on it, in the sense of it gives you his perspective on what it was like for Roman citizens. And he says it's something that shouldn't even be on our minds. And he does a couple cases where a Roman citizen was threatened with crucifixion by the prosecutor, because Cicero's a lawyer. And that was enough for them to throw the case out, because the word shouldn't even be...it's so beneath a Roman citizen. We don't even need to think about such disgusting things. It's beneath us.

FRANK:

So, it's beneath the Romans and beneath the Jews. But these writers who were all Jews, with the exception of Luke, say that the Messiah actually is crucified.

BEN:

And there was no expectation of a crucified Messiah or resurrecting before the final resurrection of the dead at the end of time. And so, it was embarrassing. I try to think often of what's a good analogy for it. And we don't really have much of an analogy today, until we start seeing the world through the ancient Roman eyes or the ancient Jewish eyes, because it was something so far beneath them. Fortunately, Paul gives us that nice snapshot of a statement to help us go, okay. Both groups saw this as very embarrassing. It's tough, but they keep proclaiming it. And so, we also see in archaeology, where they put a donkey head on a crucifixion victim. "Alexamenos worships his God" is what's painted.

FRANK:

That's in Rome. Yeah, I've seen that.

BEN:

And so, you know, that gives them an idea of what these Christians were doing. That's how ridiculous they thought it was. But their crucifixion wasn't the end of the story. The resurrection is what happened. And so, we have that event. But even there, we see women's testimony being the lead on the empty tomb. And so, they're the first ones to discover the empty tomb. And if you're making it up, you can easily just leave that part out, or put Peter in there first, or there's a number of things you could have done.

FRANK:

They do leave it out in the creed.

BEN:

They leave it out in the creed. You know what's interesting? In a number of creeds, the empty tomb is often left out too in creeds. Because creeds are supposed to be a concise statement. James Ware has an excellent article on all of this, as far as what's typically in a creed and what's not, and also why 1 Corinthians 15 is dated to the 30's by virtually everybody. And it doesn't matter who you are on the theological spectrum. But the women are left out there. And some scholars have said precisely because of the embarrassing nature of it. We can just not mention that part.

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But we don't see the Gospel writers 1) omitting it. Because that's a more unpacking narrative of what happened. We don't see them omitting it, and we don't see them changing it. Because they could have done either those two, and they don't do that. And it's not just that they have women there. Because in that culture, women weren't seen as on the same level regarding their testimony. But again, it wasn't just that they have women there. They had one woman there who was reportedly multi demon possessed.

FRANK:

What a credible witness. [Laughter]

BEN:

Yes, you know. So, we know in courts today, sometimes, their cellmates will be brought to the stand. But if their cellmate had said they were possessed multiple times, so you're going to bring that person to your stand? Okay, why would they do that? It's not like she was later then celebrated or something to that effect. She's just mentioned because this is a matter of fact. And it's a matter of fact because everyone seemed to know they were the ones that went to the tomb. They were the ones that came back. And what did the disciples do when they told them? They're like, these sound like tales you guys are telling us. I don't know if they're even really true.

FRANK:

These emotional women. Yeah, there's so many other embarrassing details that they wouldn't have made up. They wouldn't have Jesus with Rahab in his genealogy, or Tamar, you know, prostitutes. And he wouldn't be called demon-possessed, or a madman, or drunkard, or any of these things. He certainly wouldn't have His brothers not believe in Him. His own family wants to seize Him and take Him away in Mark 3.

BEN:

Yes, exactly. Even having one of His own disciples turn his back on Him. Judas is embarrassing for Him.

FRANK:

Or Peter saying, I'll never deny you Lord.

BEN:

And it's not just of Jesus. Peter is one of the leaders of the Church. So is James. James, in the Gospels, written after. He was already leader of the early Church. They're like, hey, don't forget James. He was a skeptic during Jesus' life. Don't forget about that part. They could have again, left that part out, easily left it out.

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FRANK:

And at the Great Commission, and it says about His disciples, some believed, but some doubted. He's standing right in front of them. How are they doubting? This doesn't make any sense if they're making it up. Let me ask you another. This is an unusual one I hadn't heard before and evidence for the resurrection. You say it has to do with the genre of the Gospels? What do you mean by that?

BEN:

Yes, it's actually the genre of the New Testament. Prior to the 80's, there was a lot of debate on what are the Gospels? What's the nature of the reading? Because our genre tells us what the reader is expecting from it. So, if we go watch 'Chronicles of Narnia,' we know we're in for kind of a fictional story. If we go watch the news, we know we're in for a fictional story. I'm just kidding. [Laughter]

FRANK:

Unless it's the Babylon Bee, your best source in fake news. You can trust them. [Laughter]

BEN:

We understand that genre dictates our understanding, how we're going to understand and read something. So, if we read a history, we're expecting to get factual information, understanding causes, and things like that. Well, there's a good book called, 'What are the Gospels?' by a scholar named Richard Burridge. And he set out to argue the Gospels are not biographies. They are not. Well, his research led him to the opposite conclusion. He's like, oh, they are for sure biographies. And within a decade or so, he convinced all of scholarship.

And then, since the 90's or so, scholars have agreed that the Gospels are biographies, which are a subcategory of history. So, when you read a biography, that tells us a couple of things. It's not a novel. It's not a romance fiction. They were directing and trying their best to tell the truth. In that genre, you are not expected to just make up facts, just for the fun of it, to make up some account.

FRANK:

You're the expert on this. I've been told that this idea of a historical novel is only like 200 years old.

BEN:

I just actually reviewed this the other day in Craig Keener's 'Christobiography' book. Which if you're really interested in looking at how the Gospels are biography, specifically, his book is an excellent read. And you're right. It's more of a recent thing. But there were only a very few number of those type of fictional histories, and they came later, 200 years after the Gospels. They were typically later. And they were very obvious. And they were there to subvert. They were countercultural measures to biography. So, they kind of were their own biography.

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FRANK:

There wasn't this kind of idea of a historical novel in the first century.

BEN:

For the Gospel writers, they were not allowed in that genre. Like, there's not a police, right? No one's over their shoulder going you can't do this. But if you're writing that genre, you're not expecting to invent freely. You're not going to do that kind of thing. If you are, you're just going to write a different genre. Right? And that's not what the Gospel writers... Luke tells us that in the preface, that he sought eyewitnesses out. We know Mark was Peter's interpreter. So, we know we have guys that were associated with the Apostles, or Matthew and John as Apostles.

So, you have these guys who are writing biographies. And then what Burridge does is, he breaks down the Gospels and says, look. They fit the historical genre of biographies of other ancient Greco-Roman writings. And he makes some really profound arguments in his book as well. For example, he makes a very good Christological argument for Jesus' deity. How many biographies are there of other Jewish rabbis? And the reason is, if you do a biography, Jesus was the embodiment of the law lived out. He was the one who we are now supposed to live our lives like.

If you were to do that with Rabbi Hillel, well, that would be idolatry, because I'm supposed to live after Hillel? No, I'm supposed to follow God. But these authors are telling us to follow Jesus. So, that's the argument there, which is a really profound one, which needs to be unpacked more by somebody at some point soon. But we also have Paul's writings, which are internal letters to the Church.

And so, he's not trying to propagandize anybody. He's writing to believers who are already on the same page. There's some issues going on in those churches, but they're dealing with them. So, Paul's writing an internal memo. You know, we see a lot today on memos leaked, or this is leaked, and this is what they're really saying to each other. We have that with the New Testament.

FRANK:

Especially Galatians when he has to dope slap Peter, you know, Galatians 2. Here's one Apostle correcting another Apostle. Well, that's more embarrassing testimony, by the way. But yeah, you're right; it's internal. And there's no propaganda here, he's telling the truth. And why would he write all of these damning facts about these churches that they're not following? Even the book of Revelation. Right? They're damning facts about these folks.

BEN:

It's a bit encouraging for us today because we're like okay, there's still hope for us because we saw they had problems too. So, now we've got hope.

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FRANK:

Well, Ben, there's so much more we could talk about but we're running out of time. Tell people your website again where they can learn more and support you.

BEN:

We are CoreApologetics.com. And you know, we joke. We are kind of Dr. Habermas' spiritual baby or ministry baby, and it takes two of us to even do half of what he did. But we're just getting started. Check out our website. Got a lot more coming up.

FRANK:

Sounds great. When the book comes out, we'll have you on. Alright, it's great being with Dr. Ben Shaw from Liberty University, CoreApologetics.com. We've got a lot coming up in the ensuing weeks. Don't forget University of Cincinnati next week, and also the Unshaken conference in Nashville on November 4. Hope to see you guys out there. Lord willing, we'll be back next week. God bless.

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