

Solid Ground Faith

The Evidence about Jesus

*The substance of things hoped for and
the evidence of things not seen – Hebrews 11:1*

by Richard Cravy



Solid Ground Faith

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as the SUBSTANCE of the things we hope for and the EVIDENCE of things we haven't yet seen. The emphasis is on the substantial and evidential foundation which causes faith to exist. This study examines the historically reliable nature of the New Testament writings upon which our faith in Jesus Christ stands. As Jesus Himself said, we need to be building on solid rock – Matthew 7:24-27 and 16:15-18!

These four classes were originally taught by Richard Cravy in the Adult Education program of the Sunset Church of Christ in January 2025. © Copyright 2025 by Richard Cravy.

Table of Contents

Lesson 1 – pg 2

Lesson 2 – pg 6

Lesson 3 – pg 11

Lesson 4 – pg 18

Additional Reading – pg 27

How Historians Determine the Historicity of People and Events

Four Reasons the New Testament Gospels Are Reliable

Testing the Gospels from John to Hippolytus

Five “Fake News” Stories People Believe About Early Christianity

Paul the Apostle: But Now I See

Paul the Apostle: The Making of an Apostle

SOLID GROUND FAITH

Evidence about Jesus – Part I

1. WHAT IS FAITH?

- a. What do you think of when we say, “solid ground?” – Matthew 7:24-27
- b. What is faith?
- c. So, what would “solid ground faith” consist of?

2. WHAT ABOUT YOUR “FAITH” AS A CHRISTIAN?

- a. WHAT do you believe – about God – about the Bible – about Jesus?
- b. WHY do you believe it? Is it based on evidence? What kind of evidence?
- c. How SOLID is your faith? Many Christians have died for their faith!

3. BEGIN LOOKING TOGETHER AT:

- a. The solid ground our faith, or confidence, should and can stand upon
- b. What we can believe with complete confidence

4. OUR CURRENT “HOSTILE” CULTURE ABOUT JESUS:

- a. Popularity of a new kind of militant atheists who have gained the attention of mass media: Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, etc.
- b. Religious scholars who are agnostic or reject classical Christian faith.
- c. Steady output of magazine articles, television “news,” documentaries, books and more with a very biased view but which claim scholarly support.
- d. Banning of teaching about Jesus or the Bible as history in schools. But agnostic and atheistic viewpoints are allowed. University and public-school instructors who criticize the Christian faith or deny the historical truth of the New Testament records.

5. FAITH AND EVIDENCE:

- a. What are the most common kinds of “evidence” that create confidence in the reality or truth of something?
- b. What are some “unreliable” sources of faith?
- c. Consider how historians look at their sources – see chart at end of handout.

6. WAS JESUS A REAL PERSON? IF YES, WHAT ELSE CAN WE KNOW ABOUT HIM?

- a. What will be our primary source(s) of evidence?

- b. **Non-religious Scholarly Resources** – consider these sources provided by Dr. John Dickson, professor of Ancient History. Each is considered a standard reference for those who study, teach or do research in the field of ancient history. Each includes long articles on the historical Jesus!
 - i. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*
 - ii. *Cambridge Ancient History*
 - iii. *Cambridge History of Judaism*
 - iv. *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopedia of the Ancient World*
- c. **Non-biblical early historical references:**
 - i. Roman historian Tacitus (d. 120)
 - ii. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (d. 100)
 - iii. Christian writers such as: Clement of Rome (d. 99); Ignatius of Antioch (d. 108); Polycarp of Smyrna (d. 155). The *Didache* (AD 100-120).
- d. **Letters of the Apostle Paul:**
 - i. Even skeptical historians believe at least 7 of Paul's letters are genuine (Galatians, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Philemon, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians). They were written about AD 48 – 62, possibly earlier than even the first of the Gospels.
 - ii. While these letters are not about the life of Jesus, they are filled with references to Him and His teachings, death, nature, etc.
 - iii. Paul himself testified in his letters to his conversion to faith in Jesus
- e. **The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John:**
 - i. Compared to other ancient documents of historical events, we have 4 different sources, our earliest copies are much closer to the originals, we have more numerous copies, and they are widely quoted and referenced by writers over the next 400 years.
 - ii. No evidence exists from first or second century rejecting their accounts.
 - iii. Their references to people, places, events are accurate.
 - iv. Most supposed differences have reasonable resolutions.

CONCLUSION:

1. There is much more evidence available than what is listed above. Much of it can be accessed through the resources we have listed on the next two pages.
2. Next class we will go to the New Testament to see what it says about who Jesus is. This will include His own words and deeds, as well as the words of His disciples about Him.
3. Remember that our goal is to strengthen our faith so that we know that what we believe stands on solid ground. I pray that this information will also provide a way to teach others about the evidence that supports our faith.

Resources & References

1. *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ*, (Image Books, 2016) by Dr. Brant Pitre, Distinguished Research Professor of Scripture at the Augustine Institute Graduate School of Theology. He is a highly respected Catholic scholar on the New Testament and ancient Judaism.
2. *Is Jesus History?* (The Good Book Company, 2019) by Dr. John Dickson (www.johndickson.org). Dickson has a PhD in Ancient History from Macquarie University, teaches at the University of Sydney, and is the author of 18 books and 3 video documentaries on Christianity.
3. Lee Strobel (<https://leestrobel.com>), former atheist and legal editor at *The Chicago Tribune* and author of more than 40 books and curricula:
 - a. *The Case for Christ* (Zondervan, 2016)
 - b. *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Zondervan, 2016)
 - c. *The Case for Faith* (Zondervan, 2021)
 - d. *Finding the Real Jesus* (Zondervan, 2016)
 - e. *In Defense of Jesus* (Zondervan, 2008)
4. J. Warner Wallace (coldcasechristianity.com), former agnostic who used his training as a homicide and cold-case police detective in Los Angeles to become a believer. He is now an adjunct professor of apologetics at Talbot School of Theology (Biola University) and a best-selling author:
 - a. *Person of Interest* (David C. Cook, 2013)
 - b. *Forensic Faith* (David C. Cook, 2017)
 - c. *Alive* (David C. Cook, 2014)
 - d. *Cold-Case Christianity* (David C. Cook, 2013)
5. Josh McDowell (josh.org) and Dr. Sean McDowell (seanmcdowell.org). Josh has been an apologist for the Christian faith since 1961, emphasizing the historical evidence supporting faith. He has written over 150 books and spoken live to audiences totaling more than 40 million about the truth of Christianity. Sean has Masters degrees in both Theology and Philosophy and a PhD from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is an Associate Professor in Christian Apologetics at Biola University, and the author of more than 20 books.
 - a. *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Thomas Nelson, 2017)
 - b. *Evidence for the Historical Jesus* (Harvest House, 2011)
 - c. *Apologetics for a New Generation* (Harvest House, 2009)
6. *Excavating the Evidence for Jesus: The Archeology and History of Christ and the Gospels*, (Harvest House, 2022) by Dr. Titus M. Kennedy is an Adjunct Professor of Biblical Archeology and a field archeologist primarily in the Near East and Mediterranean world.

7. *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ*, (Kregel, 2007) by Robert M. Bowman, Jr. PhD. In Biblical Studies, and J. Ed Komoszewski, ThM in New Testament Studies.
8. *The Deity of Christ*, (Moody Publishers, 2017) by John MacArthur, MDiv. From Biola, and Chancellor of The Master's university and The Master's Seminary. He has been the pulpit minister at Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA. he has written over 150 books, including the MacArthur Study Bible and 33 volume MacArthur New Testament Commentary Set.
9. *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Misdemeanor Popular Culture*, (Kregel, 2006) by J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer (PhD), and Daniel B. Wallace (ThM, PhD).
10. *Man, Myth, Messiah: Answering History's Greatest Question*, (Thomas Nelson, 2016) by Rice Broocks (PhD).

AUTHOR	BOOK	DATE WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPIES	TIME GAP	NO. OF COPIES
Homer	<i>Iliad</i>	800 B.C.	c. 400 B.C.	c. 400 yrs.	643
Herodotus	<i>History</i>	480–425 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,350 yrs.	8
Thucydides	<i>History</i>	460–400 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,300 yrs.	8
Plato		400 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,300 yrs.	7
Demosthenes		300 B.C.	c. A.D. 1100	c. 1,400 yrs.	200
Caesar	<i>Gallic Wars</i>	100–44 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,000 yrs.	10
Livy	<i>History of Rome</i>	59 B.C.–A.D. 17	4th cent. (partial) mostly 10th cent.	c. 400 yrs. c. 1,000 yrs.	1 partial 19 copies
Tacitus	<i>Annals</i>	A.D. 100	c. A.D. 1100	c. 1,000 yrs.	20
Pliny Secundus	<i>Natural History</i>	A.D. 61–113	c. A.D. 850	c. 750 yrs.	7
New Testament		A.D. 50–100	c. 114 (fragment) c. 200 (books) c. 250 (most of N.T.) c. 325 (complete N.T.)	+ 50 yrs. 100 yrs. 150 yrs. 225 yrs.	5366

From *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, by Josh and Sean McDowell

– Richard Cravy, © 2022