

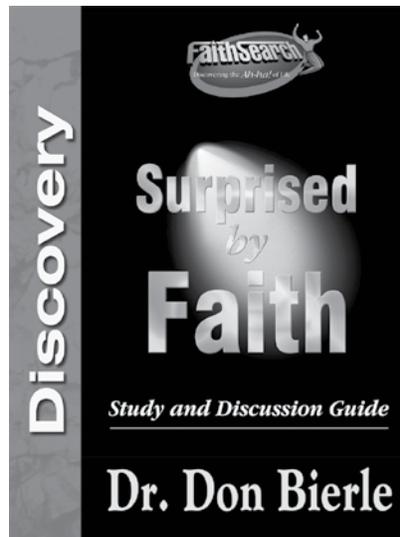
Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide

LEADER'S MANUAL

CHAPTER 3

Is the Bible True?

Discovering Answers to Three Questions
that Demonstrate Manuscript Integrity



- **Answer Key for the *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide***
- **Teaching Helps for the Teacher/Facilitator of the *FaithSearch Discovery Presentation***



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PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL WITH EVIDENCE TO ALL PEOPLES EVERYWHERE

CHAPTER 3

Is the Bible True?

Discovering Answers to Three Questions that Demonstrate Manuscript Integrity

Getting Focused

Materials:

- *Surprised by Faith Study and Discussion Guide*, chapter 3
- *Surprised by Faith* text, chapter 2, pages 33-44*
- PowerPoint® slides: through Discovery #3 (slides 22-58)
Chapter review: slides 59-60
Why do we need to know this? (slides 61-62)

Key Points:

1. There are tests for determining the integrity of the manuscript copies of an ancient writing.

Determining the integrity of manuscript copies of an ancient writing is necessary because there are no originals or autographs. The original text has to be reconstructed from copies that have been found. Three tests are used by scholars to determine the degree of integrity of this restored text: 1) How many manuscript (handwritten) copies have been found? 2) How early (close in time to the autograph) are these manuscript copies? 3) How accurately were they copied and transmitted through the centuries?

2. The New Testament text has far more integrity than the text of any other ancient writing.

The New Testament passes the integrity test with flying colors! 1) There are many more handwritten copies of the New Testament than of any other ancient writing; 2) The earliest of these handwritten copies dates back to the eyewitness generation of Jesus; and 3) The New Testament we use today is not changed substantially from eyewitness accounts in the first century.

Glossary of Terms Used:

Integrity: genuine, true to what is claimed; (e.g., the text of the New Testament Gospels we have in print today has integrity because it is based on excellent manuscript copies so there is little difference from eyewitness accounts of Jesus.)

Manuscript: a handwritten copy of a writing that was produced prior to the invention of the Guttenberg printing press in the fifteenth century

Autograph: the original writing of the author (the first one produced); no autographs have been found of any ancient literature

Answers to the numbered, objective questions are available at the end of each chapter.

* Page numbers are from the third edition of *Surprised by Faith*. In the second edition, see pp. 27-37.

Author's Comment

The subject matter of discoveries three and four is the most unfamiliar to most people. Many people accept the Bible because of tradition or on authority. That is, "I grew up in the church and have always believed it" and "My parents, pastor, etc. have always taught me that it is true and I believe them." Most have not investigated the external and internal evidence for the integrity of the manuscripts, the basis for the canon, and the accuracy of transmission of the text over the centuries. As a result, many Christians have uncertainties in their faith and timidity in their witness. They have no answer for challenges like *The DaVinci Code* book and movie, the publication and claims of the Judas gospel, and news of finding the alleged tomb of Jesus and His family in Jerusalem. Therefore, as the teacher/facilitator, emphasize the importance of establishing a solid foundation of integrity and historicity for the records

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Here's where we're headed

The purpose of this section is to guide the participant to make their own *Ah-ha!* Discovery number three.

Author's Comment (cont.)

which are the key to discovering who Jesus really is. These two chapters are cornerstones for *FaithSearch* Discovery.

Subjective questions on page 21
of the Study Guide

Subjective question on page 23
of the Study Guide

Making the DISCOVERY

Ah-ha!

The DISCOVERY

#3

The Gospel records in our Bible today are essentially unchanged from eyewitness accounts of Jesus!

Introduction

Read 2 Peter 1:16 in a Bible, or in the margin of this page. What does the apostle Peter claim was his source of information about Jesus' life and ministry?

Himself. He said he was an eyewitness.

Read Luke 1:1-4 in a Bible, or in the margin of this page. What does Luke claim is the source of information about Jesus that he and others had in writing their Gospels?

They all had eyewitness sources. He states that his information came from those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus.

Read the following, and highlight some of the ways that scholars can determine how old a manuscript is.

You would highlight: 1) the style of writing; 2) the absence or degree of punctuation used; 3) the nature of the writing material, whether plant (papyrus) or animal (parchment) source and whether scroll or codex; 4) the technology or evolution of the writing material; 5) carbon-14 dating; and 6) associated artifacts like ceramic and coins found nearby.

How does the large number of New Testament manuscripts give us greater confidence for the integrity of its text?

Since there are no autographs of any ancient writings, the original must be reconstructed from the known manuscript copies that are extant. Scholars agree that the accuracy of this reconstruction is in direct proportion to the number of manuscript copies that are available. Many manuscripts (like in the case of the New Testament) mean that more comparison between manuscripts can be made that detect any changes made by scribes in the copying process resulting in a more accurate restoration of the original. To illustrate with an extreme contrast, if there was only a single manuscript copy found for some ancient writing, it would be impossible to know what may have changed over the years of copying. It would be impossible to confirm its integrity. At the other extreme is the New Testament with thousands of manuscript copies, found in every century from the first all the way to the printing press in the fifteenth century. Thus, there is more confidence in the integrity of the New Testament text. This confidence is the basis for statements like that of scholar Frederic Kenyon who said that "the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed" (see p. 27 in SBF for the full quote and citation).

An Optional Question for Additional Discussion

How does knowing that the New Testament has the best integrity of all ancient literature impact your interest to learn more about what it says?

This calls for a personal response and sharing. Often when we don't trust a source, we are reluctant to commit ourselves to it. This is true whether committing ourselves to another person or, in this case, the writings about Jesus. Furthermore, our motivation to learn may be increased by knowing that what it says is about a real person who can make an actual positive difference in our current lives. Furthermore, if these records are true, it is quite motivating to learn more about Jesus' teaching when we realize that we will stand accountable before Him someday, and live with Him forever!

The interval between the date of authorship and the earliest known manuscript of other ancient works varies from 300 to 1,500 years. How does the New Testament compare with this?

The time interval between original authorship and the earliest known manuscripts for the New Testament is negligible compared to all other ancient literature. In fact, it is the only ancient literature for which manuscripts are known from the eyewitness generation (the author's generation). See page 34 in *Surprised by Faith* for a chart giving actual numbers. This virtually assures integrity since there is not sufficient time for significant changes to occur in the text, for example, due to oral tradition. Legendary accumulation is also eliminated since legends start a century or more later than the eyewitness generation. Any claim which calls for the rejection of the integrity of the New Testament will result in the rejection of the integrity of all other ancient literature as well, whose evidence is vastly inferior to that of the New Testament.

In response to this discovery, skeptics often ask: "How was it decided which books should be in the New Testament? Was this decided hundreds of years after they were written?"

The answer to these two questions above are explained in the shaded discussion of Harris' book directly under this question in the *Study Guide*. This is extremely important in formulating a response to false accusations about the origin of the New Testament writings made in *The DaVinci Code* book, The Jesus Seminar members' writings, etc. The position taken by Harris has been confirmed by an examination of the quotes of New Testament writings found in the early apostolic church fathers (e.g., Polycarp and Clement of Rome—see page 32 in SBF for more information and citations). It has also been confirmed by the discovery of written papyrus fragments of the Gospels from the first century, proving they did not go through a long period of oral tradition but were written within the eyewitness period.

Did the information presented in this chapter surprise you? Explain your answers briefly.

Of course, the answers here will be personal. Most people today, both believers and nonbelievers, express that they were not familiar with this evidence and were not even aware that this approach could be used to study the Bible. Some people who are familiar with this area of study, may say that our data is contrary to what they had heard before. It is the manuscript evidence that tends to

Subjective question on page 24
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 27
of the *Study Guide*

Subjective question on page 28
of the *Study Guide*

Author's Comment

The determination of the canon of the New Testament is not the primary concern of chapters 3 and 4. We are mostly concerned with establishing

Subjective questions on page 28 of the *Study Guide*

historical eyewitness confidence in the records we have in the New Testament. The question of canon is included here because it is often used by skeptics as a way to cast suspicion on the New Testament records. The allegation is often expressed that they were written and compiled by men (not inspired by God) with a devious or religious agenda. Of course, as the shaded discussion demonstrates, the truth is that authority of the New Testament books was determined by divine inspiration, and inspiration determined primarily by apostolicity. It is important to point out that the determination of the canon of the New Testament was completed by eyewitnesses or their students within 100 hundred years of Jesus Himself. This is one of the little known facts about the New Testament in our twentieth-first century culture.

Author's Comment

It would be very eye-opening for each person using this *Study Guide* to have a second copy of SBF that they could use for this outreach activity (and future sharing as well). They don't have to give the book away, only ask another person to read the pages indicated. Of course, the person you give the book to will likely look at other sections of the book as well (which is okay if they do). It is important to give a time frame for the follow up discussion—usually within a week since it only involves a few pages. This will assure that the person will actually read it rather than just put it on a shelf and ignore it. An alternative is to combine this field test with the one on page 37 in the *Study Guide* (same chapter in SBF—about archaeological discoveries which confirm the New Testament). The follow-up discussion should not be an interrogation or accusatory, but rather exploratory. Let the person talk about their impressions, surprises and remaining questions. This approach will not be frightening or confrontational for ei-

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upset the skeptical commitment some people have. Generally, the reason most of us are so surprised is that it contradicts the popular notion that the Bible is mythological in origin and nature. It reverses what many of us have heard repeatedly in higher education, the press and even in some churches and seminaries.

How well known do you think the evidence for the integrity of the New Testament is in society today?

This evidence is not well known at all, even in the Christian community. For several generations, Christians in America have enjoyed a consensus that their message and the source of that message are true. As a result, there has been little training or attention given to apologetics, i.e., the reasons why the Christian claims are true. Until now, it has not been necessary. Now Christians in all parts of the world find themselves needing to defend their views. But they do not know how, and many find their attempts at explaining their faith frustrating and ineffective. To communicate effectively with people in the technological culture of the twenty-first century will require an upgrading of Christian understanding so they are able to explain to honest skeptics *why* Christianity is unique and true.

Another explanation why the evidence is not well known may be the dependence Christians have had upon testimony (personal experience) alone to validate the truthfulness of their faith. Of course, a changed life is powerful evidence, but it is often viewed by those who are skeptical as quite subjective. Furthermore, the skeptic hears similar-sounding testimonies coming from cults and other religions—even from people in the sales meetings of some companies. To avoid confusion, the Christian today needs to combine objective, historical evidence with the power of personal testimony.

Write out a brief answer to someone who insists that the Gospel records in the New Testament have been changed so much over the centuries that they are not a reliable source of information about Jesus.

The purpose for chapter 3 in **FaithSearch** Discovery is to enable a Christian witness to give an informed response to this common contention. The answer should be built around the three questions used by scholars to determine integrity of reconstructed ancient texts (like the New Testament): How *many*, how *early* and how *accurate* are the manuscripts from which the current text is reconstructed? You do not have to include all the points or details in the brief answer. The basic timeline from the first century to the fifteenth century printing press has proven to be immensely helpful to clarify these matters to people. My experience has been that very few people you talk to will know as much as you do about these matters presented in this Discovery course. As a result, your credibility as a Christian will be enhanced and your witness made more effective. The sooner you get the question of the reliability of the New Testament “out of the way,” the quicker you can begin to use those records to present Jesus to them. That's why we do all of this study—more effectively to win the lost to Jesus Christ!

Confirming the Discovery

Read the references below in a Bible, or as provided in the margin of this page. Write below how the main teaching of each relates to or confirms the Discovery in this chapter.

- John 8:31-32 Jesus said that His Word (recorded in the Bible) is truth. His disciples are to obey it and it will change their lives.
- John 6:63 He also said that His Word is God's Word and has the power to give eternal life.
- 2 Peter 1:20-21 Peter said that the human instruments who recorded the Bible were guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Looking Ahead

Related Reading

- Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), Chapters 3-4.
- F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), Chapters 1-3.
- Douglas Groothuis, *Jesus in an Age of Controversy* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003), Chapter 3.
- Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1998), Chapters 1-4.

Bible confirmation on page 28
of the Study Guide

Author's Comment (cont.)

ther party, and could lead to continued conversation and a witnessing opportunity concerning Jesus Christ—either right then or in the future. Each person should have prepared their personal testimony of salvation prior to this field test since it may lead to an opportunity to share their own spiritual journey of faith. They should also have prepared the answer to the next question in case the person is skeptical about the reliability of the New Testament records.

Author's comment

Note that the paragraph following the verses in the *Study Guide* is a summary of the main points of these verses.

Author's Comment

You should note the reason for the evidence in chapter 3 compared to chapter 4. We have demonstrated in this chapter that what we read in our New Testament Bible today is very close to eyewitness accounts of Jesus in the first century. In other words, the records have greater integrity than any other ancient writing. The evidence in chapter 4 is to establish whether what they wrote is historical (as opposed to fiction or legend). We want to be assured that the people, places and events recorded there are factual and real. Only then can we confidently use the New Testament as a reliable source of information about what Jesus claimed and what He did to back up His claims.

