



# In Defense of the Gospels

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Answering the Challenges

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# You are now in Court



# You, the Jury, Must Decide



# Did Jesus Actually Say and Do the Things Written in the Gospels?



# The Gospels



## What are the Gospels?

- “Gospel” means “Good News”
- Matthew, Mark, Luke, John are the 4 Gospels
- Gospels are *ancient biographies* that tell the life and teachings of Jesus

## Why are the Gospels Controversial?

They claim to present

- the truth about who God is
- God's plan for humanity
- God's view of morality
- eternal consequences for unbelief

They present stories involving  
miracles

They provide a narrow, exclusive  
way to please God

# Can the Gospels be trusted to tell the truth?

- Truth about God and His plan
  - Truth about mankind
  - Truth about Jesus
  - Truth about salvation
- Truth about the afterlife



# Testing “Truth Claims”

No way to test “spiritual” truth claims  
 (“your sins are forgiven”)

Jesus used testable evidence for His  
 truth claims

Historical investigation can test the  
 Gospels

If Gospel accounts are reliable where  
 testable, it is reasonable to believe  
 untestable claims



Do the  
Gospels  
Provide  
Reliable  
Accounts  
of Jesus'  
Life and  
Teachings?

# Are the Gospels Reliable?

- Depends on the answer to six questions
- Answer the “Big Six” and you’ve made a Case for the Gospels

# Making a Case for the Gospels



The Case  
for the  
Gospels:  
Answering  
the “Big  
Six”

1. Dates? (when were Gospels written)
2. Writers? (eyewitnesses or hearsay)
3. Biased? (can converts be fair and honest)
4. Missing? (Lost Gospels)
5. Changed? (Same today as original)
6. Accurate? (confirmed by history/archaeology)

# 1. Dates?

## Time Between Events and Writings

- A. When were Gospels written?
- B. Are the events described in the Gospels the type that are easily remembered, even years later?
- C. How do the Gospels compare with other ancient biographies (regarding the time of the events and the time the written record of the events)?

# Scholars' Conclusions on Dates Gospels were Written

	Earliest	Latest
• Matthew	50	80
• Mark	40	75
• Luke	55	85
• John	60	95

(Jesus' resurrection was approx. A.D. 30)

# Memories





Q 1: Were the Gospels Written Close Enough to Events to be Accurately Remembered?

Consensus on Range of Dates Gospels were Written:

Mark	AD 40-75	10-45 years
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Matthew	AD 50-80	20-50 years
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Luke	AD 55-85	25-55 years
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John	AD 60-95	30-65 years
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(Jesus' resurrection was approx. A.D. 30)





# Do you Remember Where You Were When You heard about:

World Trade Ctr	9-11-01	24 years ago
JFK assassinated	11-22-63	62 years ago

# Long Term Memories





# Comparing Gospels to Other Ancient Biographies

- Gospels—written 10-35 years (conservative view—35-65 for skeptical view) after the life of Jesus
- Alexander the Great—two best sources written over 400 years after Alexander lived

# Answer to Question 1

Were The Gospels Written Close Enough to the Events to be Accurately Remembered?

Yes—10 to 65 (at the longest) years, eyewitnesses were still alive

The events and teachings in the Gospels are the type that are easily remembered

The Gospels were written much closer to the events than other ancient biographies



## Conclusion

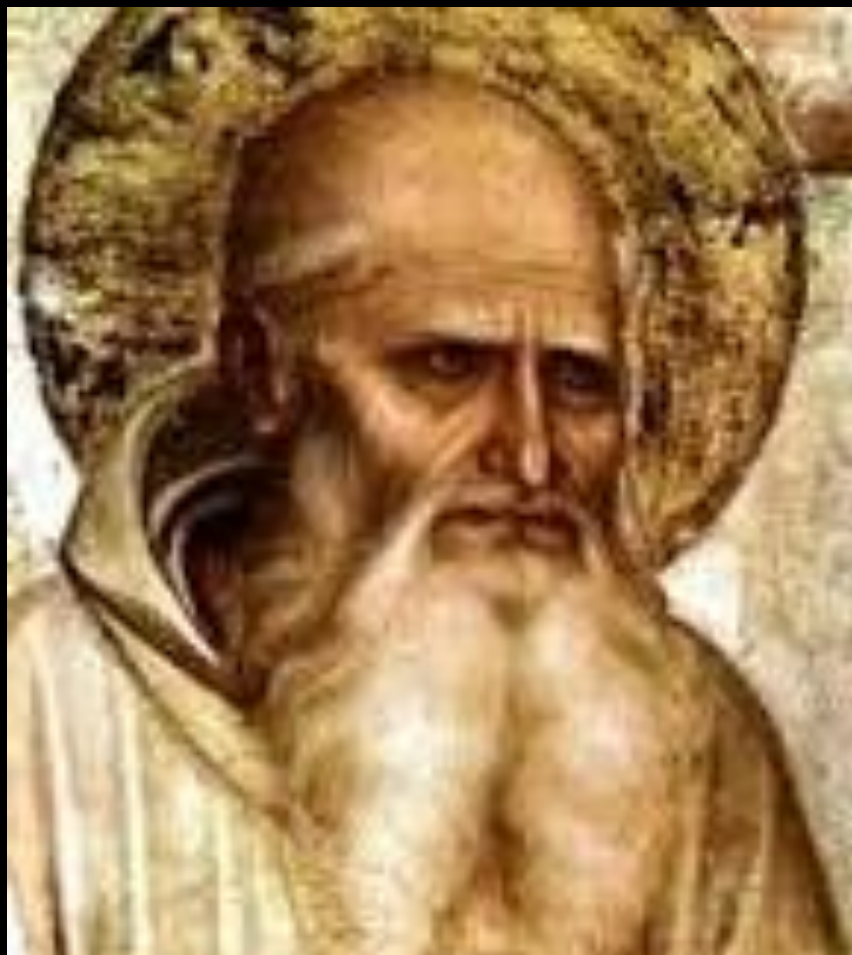
- The Gospels were written when eyewitnesses were still alive (including hostile witnesses)
- The events and teachings in the Gospels are the type that are easily remembered
- The Gospels were written much closer to the events than other ancient biographies that are never questioned

## 2. Who Wrote the Gospels? Are They Anonymous?

### New Testament Claims

- Luke 1:3-4
- John 21:24, 1 John 1:1, 3
- 2 Peter 1:16

# Papias, Bishop of Hieropolis, A.D. 120



“Matthew recorded his sayings in the Hebrew language.”

“Mark was the companion and interpreter of Peter, writing down all that was mentioned of the sayings and doings of Christ.”

# Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, A.D. 180



“Luke, the follower of Paul, set down in a book the Gospel preached by his teacher.”

“John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on his breast, himself produced his Gospel while he was living in Ephesus in Asia.”

# Answer to Question 2: Who Wrote the Gospels?

- Based on writings of Papias (ca 120) and Irenaeus (ca 180) here is who wrote the Gospels:
- Matthew was written by...Matthew
- Mark was written by...Mark
- Luke was written by...Luke
- John was written by...John

There are NO surviving traditions of ANYONE ELSE

Writing the Gospels

# Question 3: Weren't the Gospel Writers Biased?

- Common objection: The Gospels should be doubted because the writers were converts (and, therefore, biased)
- How does one know if a writer is being honest or biased?

# Criterion of Embarrassment



# If You Were Making Up Stories, Would You Include These Accounts:

- The disciples fell asleep after Jesus said, “Watch and pray.”
- The disciples often misunderstood Jesus
- The disciples (except John) were not at Jesus’ crucifixion (but women were)
- The disciples were told by Jesus on several occasions that they had “little faith”
- Jesus doesn’t know the day or hour of return



# Answer to Question 3: Weren't the Gospel Writers Biased?

The criterion of embarrassment is strong evidence that the Gospel writers told us the unvarnished truth (i.e., “reliable”)

Question  
4: Were  
Any  
Gospels  
Left Out?

*“More than 80 gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John among them.” The Da Vinci Code, p. 231*

- Why only Matthew, Mark, Luke & John?
- What about Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Judas, Gospel of Mary Magdalene, etc.?

# What Really Are the “lost gospels?”



# Gospel of Thomas

- Not written by Apostle Thomas (forgery)
- Written 175-180 (150 years after Jesus)
- Fragments discovered in garbage dump 1896
- 114 sayings attributed to Jesus (no narrative)
- Found with other material from Gnostic cult
- Church Historian Eusebius called *Gospel of Thomas* “fiction of heretics.”

Gospel of  
Thomas,  
Saying  
114

Simon Peter said to him, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life." Jesus said, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."

Example of a “Lost Gospel”

The Acts of Paul

Paul Evangelizes and Baptizes a Lion



# Ephesians Put Paul in Arena-- They Bring in a Lion to Kill Him



# Answer to Question: Were any Gospels Left out of the New Testament?

- Biblical scholar Raymond Brown: From the “lost gospels” “we learn not a single verifiable new fact about the historical Jesus’ ministry...”
- No Gospels were left out of the New Testament



# Question 5: Have the Gospels Been Changed Over the Years?



The "Telephone Game"

# Are the Gospels the Same Today as When Originally Written?

- The originals (“autographs”) of the Gospels are missing (same is true of all ancient writings)
- We rely on later copies to determine what the originals said--How reliable are our copies?
- Two factors to determine reliability of copies:
  - How old are the copies (closer to original is better)
  - How many copies exist (more is better)



Let's  
Compare  
number  
and age of  
copies of  
the N.T. to  
other  
ancient  
writings

If we stack all the existing copies of classical authors

The tallest pile would be four feet high



If we stacked all the manuscripts of the N.T., the stack would be a mile high— twice as high as the Burj Khalifa in Dubai



# We have more than 25,000 copies of New Testament writings

- 25,000 copies (including fragments) of NT
- 33 copies of Roman historian Tacitus' *Annals*
- 251 copies of Caesar's *Gallic Wars*
- 210 copies of Plato's *Tetralogies*

# How Old (close to time of writing) are N.T. copies?

	<u>Oldest Copy</u>	<u>Date Written</u>
• Caesar	A.D. 850	50 B.C.
• Tacitus	A.D. 850	A.D. 100
• Suetonius	A.D. 950	A.D. 110
• Josephus	A.D. 900	A.D. 90
• New Testament	A.D. 125	A.D. 90

How Does the  
N.T. Text  
Compare with  
text of  
Shakespeare?






Answer to  
Question 5:  
Is the  
Wording of  
our Gospels  
the same as  
originals?

- Yes!
- There are many, many more copies of the Gospels, much closer in time to original writing
- Text of the Gospels is far more reliable than text of Shakespeare's plays (which are only 400 years old)

# Question 6: Do History & Archaeology Support Accuracy of Gospels?

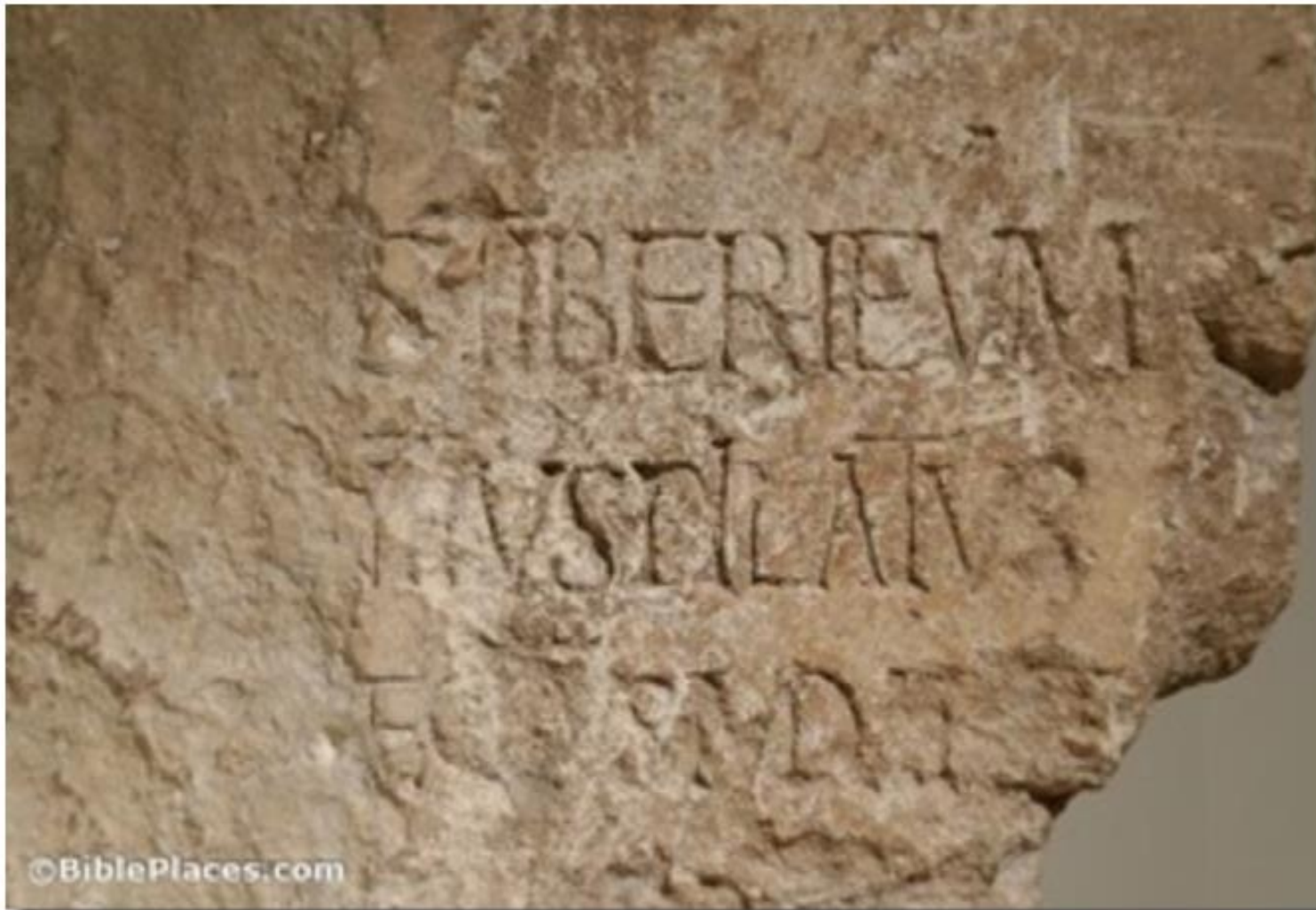




Confirmation  
of Accuracy  
of Gospel  
Accounts

- Gospel accounts challenged by skeptics
  - Existence of Pilate
  - Use of nails in crucifixion
  - Existence of Nazareth

# Existence of Pilate



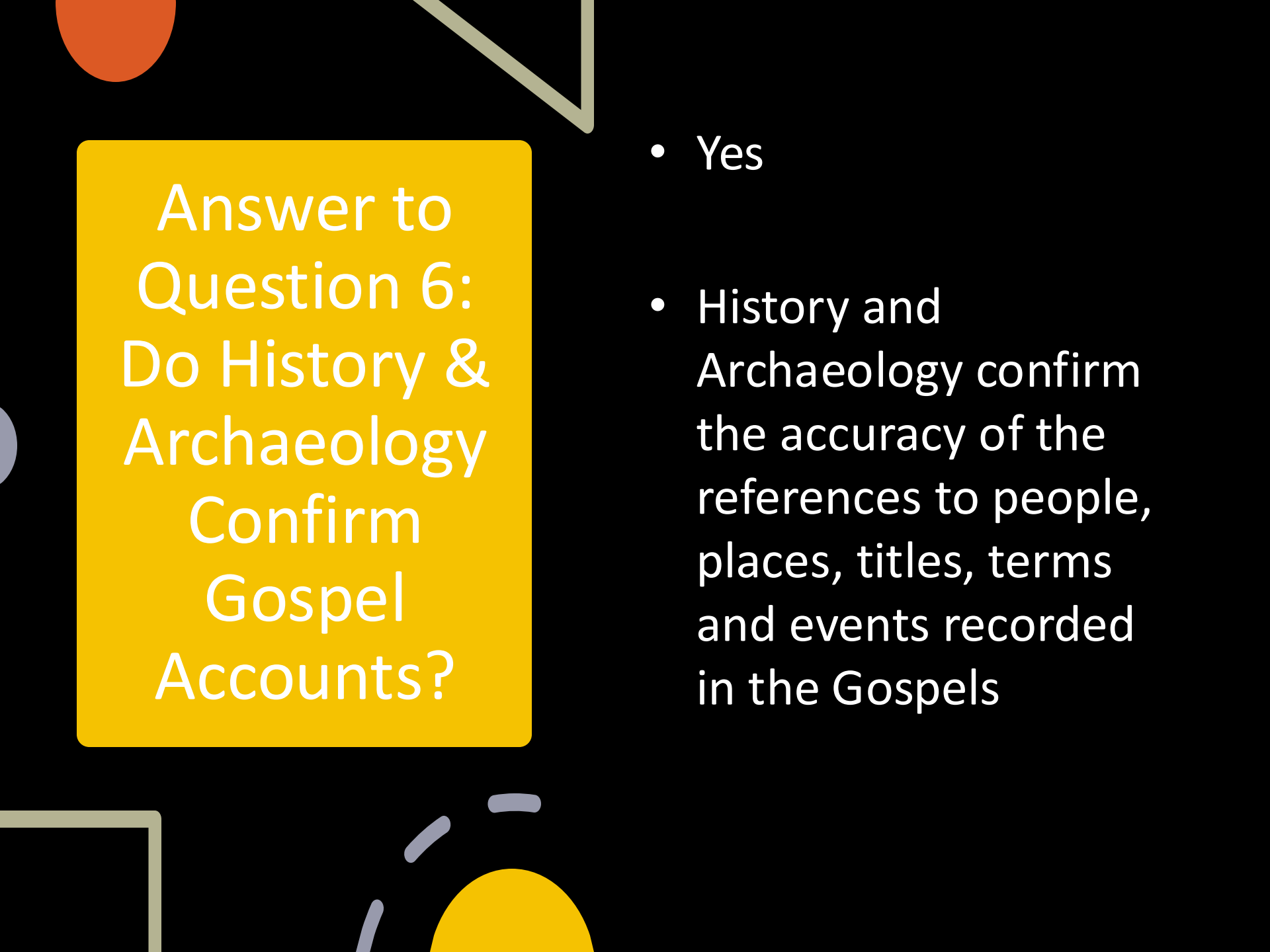
# Use of Nails in Crucifixion





Archaeologists'  
Conclusions

- Conclusion of archaeologists
  - Clifford Wilson
  - Sir William Ramsay
- Conclusion of researchers
  - Colin Hemer



Answer to  
Question 6:  
Do History &  
Archaeology  
Confirm  
Gospel  
Accounts?

- Yes
- History and Archaeology confirm the accuracy of the references to people, places, titles, terms and events recorded in the Gospels

# Summation

The Gospels can be trusted to tell the truth because:

- Written close enough to the events
- Written by eyewitnesses and primary sources
- Contain earmarks of honesty and accuracy
- None have been “lost”
- Have the same wording as when originally written
- Accuracy confirmed by history & archaeology



Therefore,  
the Gospels  
are a  
Reliable  
Record of  
Jesus' Life  
and  
Teachings:

- Jesus said He was going to die for our sins so that we could be forgiven
- Jesus rose from the dead as proof that His promises were true
- Jesus said, “Because I live, you shall also live.” (John 14:19)
- Jesus said, “Rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20)

# The Defense Rests

