



## What Do You Expect?<sup>(Part 2)</sup>

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We have all heard of the telephone game. Remember back to your elementary education where all of your fellow classmates sat in a row or in a circle. Your teacher, or some other initiator, started the message chain and each person in the row would whisper it to their neighbor. Each citizen would share the message with the person next to them until it finally reached the last person who would share the message. This was the most anticipated part of the exercise. What would the last person say? What may have started out as, "Sally, Bill, and Russ enjoy eating jellybeans," would eventually become, through the transmission, "Antelopes treasure a tooLYchin."

In our last Slice, I told the story of the Martians disbelieving the Earthmen no matter the evidence. This is a predicament among Earthlings as well. We often have predisposed criteria completely discounting any new evidence. But if God does exist and if He is good, what trademarks would we find if He actually visited our planet in the person of Jesus?

We should expect information. This information should be, not only accurate, but reliable. When talking about the Christian God, the information we refer to is the Bible, written by over 40 authors over the span of nearly 1,500 years. Though the consistency among so many authors is amazing in itself, many skeptics have taken issue against it. One such argument is the telephone argument in the opening illustration. They argue that it is impossible to accurately transmit information across so many years and generations.

But the telephone illustration fails in two important ways. Firstly, the telephone game fails in the nature of the subject. Because the New Testament writers encountered the truth of the resurrected Jesus as such good news, and even contrary to their own beliefs of what the Messiah would look like, they had good reason to keep the story intact. It was a 'pearl of great price.'

Now, suppose before the telephone game that the teacher said, "Class, before we begin today's exercise, I want you to know something. If you get the message correct, there will be no school for you all of next week!" Of course, the students would begin

wiggling with excitement in their seats. The serious kids would glare at the jokers in the class to make sure they understood the gravity of transmitting the message accurately. The chances of the important message remaining intact would escalate over the chances of a silly inconsequential message.

Secondly, the telephone game fails in the medium of transmission. The telephone game is oral, whereas the Bible is written. Of course, oral tradition has played a role in the Bible's transmission. However, the early writings of the New Testament were recorded only 50 years after the actual events. Moreover, copies of these written New Testament fragments can be found dating as early as 114 A.D. In fact, whole New Testament books are dated to 100 years since the original autograph. Today, we have over 5,000 ancient copies of the New Testament. These writings, especially writings dated more closely to the original, are substantially more reliable than merely oral tradition. Now, suppose a classroom played the telephone game by not only speaking the message but also passing along the written message with it. The chances for accuracy are highly probable.

Scholars tell us that the evidence for the accuracy of the New Testament is over 99% accurate to the

originals. F. F. Bruce, a textual scholar for nearly 60 years, said, "If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt." This is a remarkable preservation.

This is what to expect from a good God who visited the planet: a means by which to accurately get the information that was written down.

But there is one thing we must keep in mind. For textual critics, it is not enough to say that what we have in our hands is accurate to the original. They also want to know if the original is accurate to the events that happened. We've addressed the first expectation of information: its accuracy to the original. Tomorrow we will address the original's reliability.

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