

What follows is the “negative rebuttal” of the speech given by the “first affirmative” in its support of the resolution, “Resolved: The Book of Acts is Historically Reliable.” If you need to refresh yourself on what the affirmative team argued, you can find it on the March 24 post, here: <http://ehrmanblog.org/is-acts-historically-reliable-affirmative-argument/> In the first negative speech (yesterday’s post) the negative team argued its case, without direct reference to the affirmative side. This, now, is the negative response to what the affirmative said (the next post in the thread will be the affirmative rebuttal to the negative side) (recall: this was a debate I staged with myself in front of my New Testament class earlier this semester. I didn’t read this speech: I winged it. But this is the essence of what I argued, on the negative side against the affirmative)

If you choose to go point by point through the affirmative team’s case that the book of Acts is historically reliable, you will find that they have advanced their views on very thin grounds. The affirmative team begins by arguing that the author of Acts expresses his intention of giving a historically reliable account based on eyewitnesses. To that we have two responses: first, the fact that an author tries to be reliable has no bearing on whether he is reliable. To be sure, if an author tells you that his intention is to be unreliable, then, well, you can probably count on him being so. But just because someone wants to be reliable does not mean his account is necessarily is so. His account has to be checked to see.

Second, the author does not actually say that he consulted with eyewitnesses to give us his account. It is true that in Luke 1:1-4 the author indicates that the stories he is about to relate were originally given out by “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.” But this verse is often misread as indicating that he personally consulted with eyewitnesses. That’s not what it says. The author never claims to have talked with an eyewitness - let alone a group of eyewitnesses. All he is saying is that the accounts about Jesus and his followers were originally told by eyewitnesses. That is certainly true - but it doesn’t mean that he himself knows any of these eyewitnesses. He gives no indication that he did.

But was he himself an eyewitness? That is what the affirmative side wants to argue, that...

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