

# *Is the New Testament Historically Accurate?*

by

**ROBERT H. MOUNCE**

*Th.M., Ph.D.*

(This article is Chapter 9 from the book *Can I Trust the Bible?* edited by Howard F. Vos [Chicago: Moody Press, 1963]. Dr. Mounce was Professor of Religious Studies at Western Kentucky University.)

How important is it that the New Testament be accurate in all its many details? Wouldn't that be asking too much of a book that doesn't pretend to be a textbook in such areas as geography or science? How could we expect perfect accuracy on the part of those hundreds of scribes who copied and recopied the books of the New Testament, from the time they were written down until the invention of printing in the fifteenth century? And in fact isn't the Bible full of little minor contradictions? For example, where *was* Jesus when He preached the Sermon on the Mount? Matthew says that He "went up on the mountain" (Matt. 5:1), and Luke says that He had just come down and "stood on a level place" (Luke 6:17). Does it really make any difference? In either case we still have His marvelous teaching and that is what is really important!

And so the argument goes. Sounds convincing doesn't it? However, those who reason in this way have overlooked one basic point. Christianity, unlike other religions, is not simply a code of ethics or a new scheme of morality. It is what the theologians call a historical religion. It cannot be considered apart from the historical traditions associated with its origin, but is inseparably entwined with history itself. Its message is not "good conduct," but "good news"—that's what the word *gospel* means. This good news is about something that happened in a certain place at a certain time.

So you see it *is* important whether we can trust the New Testament when it tells us about something that happened. The Gospel writer is either right or wrong. If he is wrong in an area where we can check him (history), how can we rely upon his accuracy in an area where no checks are possible (doctrine)? The whole thing stands or falls together. F. F. Bruce, the Scottish New Testament scholar whose works are so widely read in both the conservative and liberal camps, has rightly said that the "historical 'once-for-all-ness' of Christianity . . . makes the reliability of the writings which purport to record this revelation a question of first-rate importance" (*Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?* p. 12).

About the middle of the last century there arose an influential school of thought which has become known as the Tübingen school (after the University of Tübingen in southwest Germany). For reasons which are now largely discredited, this group of men decided that many of the books of the New Testament were not written by the traditional authors but by men of the second century who arbitrarily altered the historical origins of Christianity in such a way as to correspond with the developing thought of the post-apostolic church. F. C. Baur, the spokesman for this Hegelian reinterpretation of Christianity, held that of all Paul's epistles, only Galatians, I and II Corinthians, and Romans 1-14 could be accepted as genuine.

Among the books judged to be second-century fabrications, and therefore not reliable, were the four Gospels and Acts. In other words, the history of early Christianity was placed under suspicion. Now, the further the recording of an event is separated from the event itself, the stronger the case for the intrusion of error. For example, if the exploits of the pony express, which for one short year about a century ago galloped the mail from St. Joe to Sacramento, were written down today for the first time, we would have plenty of reason to doubt the accuracy of the account. Memories grow dim and

imaginings run wild. Yes this one hundred year lapse is about the same span of time as was supposed to have existed between the events in Acts and their recording by "Luke." The natural result of this critical frame of mind was to place the entire New Testament under suspicion and those holding such a viewpoint often grasped with glee any apparent historical inaccuracy which would feed their bias.

## HISTORICAL PROBABILITY OF A RELIABLE RECORD

It is not our purpose to handle the question philosophically, but let's take time to consider briefly the historical *probability* that in the New Testament we have a reliable record. When we look at the textual evidence for secular works of antiquity we are surprised to find only a moderate number of copies, almost all of which are quite late. Caesar's famous *Gallic War*, written about a half century before Christ, can boast of only nine or ten good copies and the oldest of these comes from the ninth century A.D. Our earliest manuscript of the *History of Thucydides* is over thirteen hundred years later than the original.

On the other hand, when we look at the evidence for the New Testament we learn that there are in existence more than 4,000 Greek manuscripts (or portions thereof), some of which are very early. One of these goes back almost to the event itself. In addition, there are second-century translations, such as the Old Syriac and the Old Latin, and writings of the early Church Fathers who quote at length portions of the New Testament.

The two most famous manuscripts are the Codex Vaticanus in Rome and the Codex Sinaiticus in the British Museum. These beautifully preserved manuscripts (the writing is as clear and understandable as a first grade primer) date from about the middle of the fourth century. The important Chester Beatty papyri go back another hundred years. The Egerton papyrus, evidently a manual designed to teach converts the gospel stories, is dated 150, and the famous Rylands fragment is part of the Gospel of John which was circulating in Egypt within forty years of the time the beloved disciple signed his name to the original.

From the standpoint of literary evidence the only logical conclusion is that the case for the reliability of the New Testament is infinitely stronger than that for any other record of antiquity.

But what about the all-important question of the gap between an event and its initial recording? Here archaeology has something of significance to say. Dr. Millar Burrows of Yale has pointed out that the study of historical grammar based on archaeological evidence shows that the Greek of the New Testament is first century Greek, leading to the conclusion that the New Testament books were written during the first century. He holds further that the hypothesis of a deliberate and remarkably successful use of archaic language (by a later writer)—the only other alternative in view of the nature of the Greek of the New Testament—is "wholly improbable."<sup>1</sup> The excessive skepticism of many liberal theologians stems not from a careful evaluation of the available data, but from an enormous predisposition against the supernatural.

We must also add a word about just what constitutes a historical error or discrepancy in the Biblical text. A. A. Hodge, a famous theologian who taught at Princeton, defined a discrepancy as a statement in the original text designed to set forth as true that which is absolutely contradictory to other statements in the original text or to definitely ascertained elements of human knowledge.<sup>2</sup> In other

1 Millar Burrows, *What Mean These Stones?* (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1941), pp. 53, 54.

2 A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1908), pp. 75, 76.

words, *proving* the existence of a contradiction is not as easy as one might imagine. First of all, the "erroneous statement" must be shown to be in the original text; then that the secular record was incontestably correct; and finally that the two are *essentially incapable* of being harmonized. To chat about "contradictions" is one thing; to prove them is something else.

One of the intriguing things about the Bible is that nowhere does it make an attempt to gloss over what might appear on the surface to be a contradiction. For example, Luke says that Jesus met and healed blind Bartimaeus as He drew near to Jericho (Luke 18:35), while Mark says that it was as He was leaving Jericho (Mark 10:46). Matthew agrees with Mark as to the location ("as they went out from Jericho"—Matt. 20:29 ASV), but he mentions two blind men instead of one (Matt. 20:30). If three of us were writing parallel accounts of something which we wanted our friends to accept as absolutely true, we might be a bit more careful about the details. However, when such "contradictions" are studied, they inevitably have a way of resolving themselves, or at least pointing out a possible avenue of explanation.<sup>3</sup> In the past half century or so archaeology has again and again turned up an inscription or some other artifact which has solved one "contradiction" after another. Just because all the answers are not now available does not mean that the problems are incapable of being solved. Patience! God is in no hurry, and something has to be left to faith.

One reason for these problems is that the Bible is the most complex literary unity known to man. It was written by about forty authors, and these from every strata of society. It contains every conceivable literary form and was more than fifteen hundred years in the making. Apparent discrepancies are what we would expect. Any telltale signs of clever editing would simply weaken the case for authenticity.

But enough of this philosophical ground work. Let's look at the text itself in the light of archaeology and historical research.

### *Luke the Historian*

Besides being a physician (Col. 4:14) and Paul's traveling companion, Luke was the historian of primitive Christianity. The two New Testament books which came from his pen (the third Gospel and Acts) are in reality two parts of one great work. (One papyrus roll could not accommodate both halves.) They tell of the origin of Christianity and its major missionary expansion in the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

In the Prologue (Luke 1:1-4) Luke sets down the occasion for his work, calls attention to the reliability of his sources, indicates his own qualifications, and states his purpose. Then, continuing as a good historian, he starts his narrative by sketching the historical context: "There was in the days of Herod, king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abijah. . . ." As Luke unfolds his story we are introduced to a whole array of historical personages, both Roman and Jewish, secular and religious. Note the meticulous concern for detail in his preface to the account of John the Baptist:

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias (Luke 3:1, 2 ASV).

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<sup>3</sup> For example, it has been suggested that in Jesus' day there possibly were an old and a new Jericho a short distance apart. Matthew and Mark could have viewed the miracle as occurring when Jesus left the one, and Luke, as the Lord was about to enter the other.

Now any writer who goes to such length to root his narrative in the historical setting is simply inviting the critic to examine the accuracy of his record. How different from this is the story of the birth of Lao-tzu, the founder of Taoism. This one is said to have been born a fully matured "wise old philosopher" with white hair, having been carried in his mother's womb for over seventy years! Or compare the historicity of Christianity with the gradual and complex emergence of Hinduism, which has developed at least six different types of religion, each embodied in successive sets of documents. The Christian faith did not rise from a spiritist's seance or the misty regions of pre-historic legend. It took place *in time* and invites us to check up on it if we so desire.

A good indication of an ancient historian's reliability is the liberty he allows himself in the matter of reporting speeches. Here is an opportunity for him to display all his dramatic and literary skill. One such example is the eloquent oration which Josephus places upon the lips of Abraham as he stands with dagger poised over his beloved Isaac. If the aged patriarch could hear what he is supposed to have said, he would be completely dumfounded. But what do we find when we turn to the early speeches of Peter as they are recorded in Acts? (These, of course, are just summaries of what was said and not verbatim reports.) Far from being "exhibit A" of Luke's literary ability, they are written in a style of Greek which is quite often awkward and at times almost untranslatable. Since Luke normally wrote as good Greek as can be found in the New Testament, what can be said about this lapse into mediocrity? Experts in Aramaic, the language spoken throughout the eastern Mediterranean in the days of Jesus, have demonstrated that these speeches, when translated back into Aramaic, have a way of smoothing out and becoming perfectly understandable. This means that their awkwardness in Greek is the result of a rather literal translation from the original Aramaic. Quite possibly a written document was involved. This reluctance of Luke to tamper with his sources is a significant indication of his careful concern to report as nearly as possible exactly what took place.

Our confidence in Luke as a historian is strengthened even more when we compare his writings with the results of modern archaeology. In what is perhaps the severest test of the accuracy of an ancient historian—correctly designating the host of public officials which enter his narrative—Luke comes through with flying colors. What makes this so difficult is that Rome allowed her various provinces to carry on (as far as could be safely allowed) their traditional forms of government. To handle with precision the bewildering array of official titles in each locality was no task for a person unconcerned with precision. The writer of Acts never falters in this crucial test, a remarkable feat for even a first-century historian to say nothing of a second century fabricator.

Luke correctly refers to the governor of Cyprus as a *proconsul* (Acts 13:7, Greek). Since Cyprus became a Senatorial province in 22 B.C. it would be governed no longer by an Imperial *legatus* but by a *proconsul* as Luke indicates. Achaia was also a Senatorial province and Luke's reference to Gallio as a *proconsul* (Acts 18:12 ASV) is confirmed by the famous Delphi inscription which reads in part: "As Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend, and the *proconsul* of Achaia wrote. . . ." The civic authorities at Thessalonica are called *politarchs* (Acts 17:6, 8, Greek). Since this title was unknown in classical literature, it was immediately assumed by the critics that Luke had committed another *faux pas*. However, archaeology has now uncovered some nineteen inscriptions from this period in which the rulers of Macedonian cities (and Thessalonica is the city in question in five of these) are called *politarchs*. (Cf. F. F. Bruce's excellent article in *Revelation and the Bible*, pp. 319-331.)

Again, Luke refers to the local officials at Philippi as *praetors*. Since Philippi was a Roman colony, the official title of these men would be *duumvir*, but here again Luke has made no mistake. The more imposing title of *praetor*, we have learned, was a courtesy granted to rulers of Roman colonies, and hence to the civic magistrates at Philippi.

In Acts 28:7 Luke refers to the governor of Malta by the curious title, "the first man of the island." But

now inscriptions have been found both in Greek and Latin indicating that this was in fact the proper designation for rulers of that island. Luke speaks of *tetrarchs*, *lictors*, *Asiarchs*, and in one place (Acts 28:16) of a *stratopedarch* (identified as the commander of the Imperial couriers), all with unflinching accuracy.

When the narrative in Acts is subjected to this searching test for historical accuracy and comes through with a perfect score, it is certainly not too much to say that Luke is a historian in whom we can confidently trust.

#### LUKE'S ACCURACY CONVINCES CRITIC

Any discussion of the historicity of Acts will inevitably mention the pioneer work of Sir William Ramsay. Destined to become an eminent authority on the geography and history of Asia Minor, when he first began his work on the field he was fully convinced of the critical position on the authorship of Acts. It was with some reluctance that he turned to Acts—"a highly imaginative and carefully colored account of primitive Christianity"—for possible data on the geography of Asia Minor. The evidence that he began to find, however, led him before long to a complete reversal of his former views. If you wish to read his own account of the thrilling path along which his investigation took him, you will find it in his book *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*. It is the story of how terribly wrong theories spun in the ivory tower can be, and of what crucial importance are the results of first-hand investigation.

The great rightabout-face began with his discovery of an inscription indicating that Luke had been absolutely correct in locating the boundary of Phrygia and Lycaonia between the cities of Iconium and Lystra. A small thing, you say. Yes, but turning points are not normally spectacular. It had been the common critical assumption that the city of Iconium lay in the province of Lycaonia. For Luke to have said that Paul and Barnabas fled from Iconium to the cities of Lycaonia (Acts 14:6) would be like saying that a man drove his car from Chicago to Illinois. But the inscription proved that Luke was right and his critics were wrong. At that period of history Iconium *did* belong to Phrygia and Luke was perfectly correct in what he implied. This seemingly unimportant discovery on the part of Ramsay was but the first which in time led him to hold Luke to be one of the greatest of the Greek historians.

The confirmation of the Biblical record is always more striking when it occurs at a point where the critical scholars are unanimously agreed that the Bible is in error. One such place is Luke 2:1-3. Here, we are told, is some of the worst bungling to be found in the New Testament. The existence of any Imperial enrollment is doubted; we are reminded that secular records agree that Saturninus (not Quirinius as Luke states) was governor of Syria at this time; and that the whole idea of a census which would force people to return to their ancestral home was probably invented in order to accommodate Micah's prophecy that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.

What has archaeology to say to these claims? In the first place, that such enrollments did take place is clearly illustrated by an edict of the governor of Egypt dated A.D. 104 and dug up from the sands of Egypt. It reads in part: "The enrollment by household being at hand, it is necessary to notify all who for any cause soever are outside their own administrative district that they return at once to their homes in order to carry out the customary procedure of enrollment. . . ." (cf. A. Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East*, p. 271). These enrollments were for the purpose of determining the amount of tribute to be paid into the Roman treasury, and it was for this reason that Joseph and Mary were returning to Bethlehem.

By a careful study of the available documents, Ramsay established that the enrollments took place

every fourteen years. However, this presented a problem. The enrollment in question must necessarily have been the one that Josephus says took place between 9 and 6 B.C. Now, Luke says that the governor of Syria at this time was Quirinius (Luke 2:2 ASV), but secular records show that Quirinius did not become governor until A.D. 6 and that Saturninus was governor during the time in question.<sup>4</sup>

Did Luke make a mistake and confuse the two governors? Hardly. Once again archaeology has vindicated the accuracy of historical detail with which Luke tells his story. An inscription found at Tiber, and later substantiated by another from Antioch, shows that Quirinius *twice* governed as an Imperial legate. The first time was between 10 and 7 B.C. when he was commander of the Roman forces in the Homondensian War, and as such had military jurisdiction over Syria. Thus while Saturninus was the civil governor, and therefore bore the official title of procurator, Quirinius was the military governor. It also explains why, when Quirinius became governor of Syria in A.D. 6, it is said that he was "legatus of Syrian *again*."

One more example of Luke's accuracy. In Luke 3:1 we have a reference to "Lysanias" who was "tetrarch of Abilene" in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, that is, about A.D. 27. Critics considered this as another slip of the pen on Luke's part because the only ruler by that name whom the historians knew to have ruled in those parts was a Lysanias who was put to death by Mark Anthony some sixty years before (in 36 B.C.). However, we now have an inscription from Abila (near Damascus) which speaks of "Lysanias the tetrarch." Because of the particular joint title (the "Lords Imperial"—given only to Tiberius and his mother Livia) used in this inscription, it must necessarily be dated between A.D. 14 and 29, the very time indicated by Luke.

The evidence could be multiplied almost without end, but enough has been cited to show that whether the question is approached from the standpoint of historical probability and internal consistency, or from the external verification which archaeology provides, to think of Luke as anything but an accurate and trustworthy historian of primitive Christianity is to fly in the face of all probability.

### ***Further Archaeological Evidence***

Thus far we have talked about those places where Luke is said to have been in error. We have demonstrated how archaeology has confirmed the historicity of Luke's account. Note that it is always the *historical record* which can be said to be confirmed by archaeology and not the essential truthfulness of the Christian faith itself. This assurance is inseparably involved with the response of faith and does not move in the realm of external verification. But even on the level of historical evidence, the major function of archaeology is not so much to confirm as it is to illustrate. We now turn to a number of examples where the discoveries of archaeology have thrown new light on the historical background of Christianity.

Paul's last visit to Jerusalem ended up in a riot which landed him in jail. It was instigated by some Asian Jews who claimed that Paul had defiled the holy place by bringing Greeks into the temple. Gentiles were allowed to enter the outer court, but were forbidden on penalty of death to set foot in the court of the Jews. Josephus, the Jewish historian at the court of Rome, indicates that the Imperial authorities were so sensitive about not interfering in the religious practices of Judaism that they sanctioned the execution of even a Roman citizen for such an offense (*Jewish War* vi.2.4.). Between the two courts there was a lone stone barrier, about five feet in height, with notices written in Greek and Latin attached at intervals to remind the forgetful Gentile that to pass beyond that point was

4 Most readers realize that the birth of Christ, since it preceded the death of Herod, must be dated somewhere before 4 B.C. The awkwardness is due to an unfortunate mistake in the sixth century when the dating from the founding of Rome was replaced by the B.C. and A.D. system.

tantamount to suicide. In 1871, while excavating the temple site Clermont-Ganneau, the famous French orientalist, discovered a pillar with an inscription engraved in capital letters:

*No man of another nation is to enter within the fence and enclosure round the temple,  
and whoever is caught will have himself to blame that his death ensues.*

Another such inscription was found in 1935.

This temple barrier was undoubtedly the source of Paul's metaphor in Ephesians 2:14 where he speaks of the "middle wall of partition" which in former times had separated Jew and Gentile but now in Christ has been broken down (a daring statement in that the actual barrier was still intact at the time Paul was writing).

At the close of his letter to the church at Rome, Paul sends the greeting of several of his Christian brethren with him at Corinth. Among them he mentioned Erastus, the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23 ASV). During the excavations at Corinth in 1929 a first century pavement was unearthed with the inscription, "Erastus, procurator for public building, laid this pavement at his own expense." It is quite possible that the Erastus of the inscription and Paul's friend were one and the same person.

Acts 14 relates that Paul, after reaching Lystra on his first missionary journey, healed a man who had been crippled from birth (verses 8-10). The reaction of the crowd was to assume that the gods had come down to them in human form. They promptly designated Barnabas as Zeus, and Paul, since he was the chief speaker, as Hermes. (The King James Version uses the Roman names Jupiter and Mercury.) The people prepared to offer sacrifice to them. That these two gods were traditionally connected with this particular region is indicated by the Roman poet Ovid, who tells of a time when Zeus and Hermes came there incognito and found hospitality with a certain aged and kindly couple.

Archaeology tells the same story about the religion of that part of Asia Minor. In 1910 near Lystra an inscription was found that records the dedication to Zeus of a statue of Hermes. A few years later a stone altar was discovered which was dedicated to the "Hearer of Prayer" (Zeus?) and Hermes. These authentic reconstructions of local customs and atmosphere are significant testimonies to the ability of Luke as a careful and sensitive historian.

The site of the ancient city of Ephesus on the west coast of Asia Minor has yielded remarkable results for New Testament archaeology. On the last day in December, 1869, J. T. Wood, digging through some twenty feet of silt, came upon the pure white marble pavement of the famous temple of Artemis (Diana). This magnificent octagonal structure (referred to in Acts 19:27), with its sculptured columns and blocks of colored marble which were joined by gold rather than mortar, was truly one of the "seven wonders of the world."<sup>5</sup>

A few years later a group of Austrian archaeologists cleared and gave careful study to the enormous open-air theater where the riot caused by Demetrius, described in Acts 19:23-41 took place. This theater was the regular meeting place of the *ecclesia*, or civic assembly, as implied by Paul in Acts 19:32, 39, 41 (ASV) and verified by an inscription found in the theater. Adjacent to this huge structure which seated some 25,000 people were some buildings used for educational purposes. One of them may have been the hall of Tyrannus in which Paul taught the Ephesian converts for a period of two years (Acts 19:9).

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5 The thrilling account of Wood's eleven years of excavations at Ephesus can be read in his *Discoveries at Ephesus*, 1877.

Many examples of "Books of Magic," like those which the Ephesian Christians burned in public (Acts 19:19), have survived. The most famous is the Great Magical Papyrus, now in Paris, which contains such gibberish incantations as "Mimipsothiooph, Persothi, A, E, I, O, U, come out of him!" Another inscription engraved on a block of marble reads, "If the bird is flying from right to left, then whether it rises or settles out of sight, it is unlucky." It is almost impossible to realize the wealth of archaeological material unearthed at Ephesus unless one reads for himself the firsthand accounts.

Considerable light has been thrown on the history of New Testament days by the record of ancient coins. For instance, coins of Damascus have been found with the names of the Roman emperors who ruled both before and after the period of A.D. 37-54. However, none have yet been found bearing the insignia of Caligula or Claudius who were in power during this time. In II Corinthians 11:32 Paul refers to the governor under King Aretas who guarded Damascus, thus forcing him to escape over the wall. Aramaic inscriptions show that Aretas IV ruled the Nabataean Arabs from 9 B.C. until A.D. 40 and that somewhere during this time was in power at Damascus. The lack of any coin indicating Imperial rule at this juncture and the discovery of a Damascus coin with a date equivalent to A.D. 37 and bearing the image of Aretas, is an interesting confirmation of Paul's narrative.

If space permitted we could continue to set forth the amazing contribution of archaeology to an understanding of the New Testament. We have by no means exhausted the evidence. Of equal interest would be the account of the discovery of the Nazareth Stone which sheds light on the circumstances of the resurrection; the Delphi inscription which names Gallio as proconsul of Achaia in 52, and thereby provides a fixed date in Pauline chronology (cf. Acts 18:12); the two ossuaries (receptacles for bones) found in a burial chamber in use before A.D. 50 and bearing references to Jesus scratched in charcoal, and many more.

One final word should be said about the two great manuscript discoveries of the 1940's—the Coptic Gospel of Thomas and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Gospel of Thomas, lost for sixteen centuries and discovered in 1945 in an Egyptian tomb, has been called "one of the greatest sensations of modern archaeology." It is but one of the forty-nine works which made up the thirteen bound volumes discovered at Nag Hamadi. This collection of 114 "sayings of Jesus" as recorded by "Didymus Judas Thomas" is a fourth or fifth century adaptation of a work whose primitive text was produced in Greek and whose underlying sources ultimately go back to an early Jewish-Christian tradition which was parallel to but independent of the sources for our canonical Gospels. From the standpoint of textual importance, it witnesses to the fact that behind the Gospel tradition there stands a Person whose words have come down to us with no appreciable alteration. Along with the other works it provides a primary source for the complex and heretical religious movement known as Gnosticism.

The Dead Sea materials have by now become legendary. Almost every schoolboy knows the story of the Bedouin who in 1947 chanced upon the cave near Wadi Qumran which, along with others, has yielded such priceless treasures. The shepherd had been searching on a steep rock hillside for a goat that had strayed, when he came upon an opening in the rocks. Throwing a stone through the opening he heard something break. A bit apprehensive he left and returned later with a friend and the two of them, made brave by each other's presence, wiggled through the hole. Once inside the cave they saw in the dim light a number of earthen jars, some broken and others intact. Disappointed to find nothing in the jars but some old leather rolls, they set off to Bethlehem in the hope of finding someone who would be interested enough to buy them. Little did they realize that their find was of greater importance for the world than if the jars had been filled with gold.

What they had stumbled into was the literary remains of an Essene community which had had its headquarters in that area from about 150 B.C. until shortly before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. From this cave, and the others which were subsequently located in the same area, a library of more



than 400 volumes has been identified. This includes manuscripts of all or part of every Old Testament book with the exception of Esther.

While the total impact of this great discovery on the study of the New Testament has not as yet been fully realized, already it has shed a great deal of new light upon the origins of Christianity and the context in which it arose. Contrary to some early and ill-advised statements to the effect that in the Qumran "Teacher of Righteousness" we have an extraordinary prototype of the Galilean Master of Christianity, the Dead Sea Scrolls have showed us more clearly the distinctive nature of Christianity over against that phase of contemporary Judaism represented in the Scrolls.

Our conclusion can be simply stated. Whether the problem of the accuracy of the New Testament is approached from the more philosophical standpoint of historical probability and inner consistency, or whether the abundant evidence of archaeology is examined with care, the Christian can rest secure in the confidence that in the New Testament he has an accurate account of God's mighty intervention into history in the person of His Son Christ Jesus to redeem for Himself a people of His own.

Is it really true that the New and Old Testament is the book from the ancient world that has the largest amount of extant manuscripts? Into how many ancient languages has the Bible been translated? And finally, if we did not have all the manuscript evidence some believe we could still get the gist of the New Testament from early church correspondence. If this is true how does this improve or maintain the general case for an historically accurate New Testament? history new-testament manuscript historical-criticism. Share. Which Account Is More Historically Accurate? 0. 1069. There are documents not in the New Testament but they tend not to tell us anything we want to know about, for example, the very beginnings of Christianity as a movement. What you've got in the New Testament comprise at least for some of the earliest material we have. If you want to know about the life of Jesus, for example, the four canonical gospels with perhaps the Gospel of Thomas, which we'll be reading later, give you basically the only information about Jesus of Nazareth available to historians, the same thing for Paul. There are second century sources that talk about Paul, or that claim to be letters by Paul, but most of us scholars don't believe they have any historical, reliable information. The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical author, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt. This is an undeniable fact that Caiaphas existed as a true historical figure. The significance of such extra-Biblical evidence is of such magnitude that honest skeptics are now forced to agree that the Bible is historically accurate and reliable. One such person was Sir William Ramsey, considered one of the world's greatest archaeologists. He believed that the New Testament, particularly the books of Luke and Acts, were second-century forgeries. It is fitting that its kickoff was on Easter, or Resurrection Sunday because the resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate historical event in a long list of miracles, the most historically testable one, and the one that sets Jesus apart from all other prophets, religious leaders and historical figures, bar none. LESS. Category. Spirituality & Faith. Sensitivity. Normal - Content that is suitable for ages 16 and over. Playing Next.