

The Incredible Accuracy Of Luke

Although it might be tempting to read the accounts in the Bible as “stories” with about as much historicity as a myth or fable, Luke’s reliability as an historian is unquestionable. Biblical archaeologist Merrill Unger says that archaeology has authenticated the gospel accounts, especially Luke. In Unger’s words, “The Acts of the Apostles is now generally agreed in scholarly circles to be the work of Luke, to belong to the first century and to involve the labors of a careful historian who was substantially accurate in his use of sources.”

His mention of matters such as the census (Luke 2:1-3), Lysanias as a tetrarch (Luke 3:1), Lystra and Derbe being cities of Lycaonia (Acts 14:6) all show his intimate knowledge of first century life.

Furthermore, his usage of terms such as “deputy” (Acts 13:7, 12; 18:12), “part” (Acts 16:12), “rulers” (Acts 17:6) and “chief man” (Acts 28:7) have confounded scholars but he has always be proven to be right.

Concerning Luke’s ability as a historian, Sir William Ramsay concluded after 30 years of study that “Luke is an historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy ... this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.”

Thanks to the many archaeological finds, most of the ancient cities mentioned in Acts have been identified. The journeys of Paul can now be accurately traced as a result of these finds. In all, Luke names 32 countries, 54 cities and 9 islands without an error.

Colin Hemer, a prominent Roman historian, has cataloged numerous archaeological and historical confirmations of Luke’s accuracy:

- Specialized details, which would not have been widely known except to a contemporary researcher such as Luke who traveled widely.
- Details archaeologists know are accurate but cannot verify as to the precise time period.
- Correlation of dates of known kings and governors with the chronology of the narrative.
- Facts appropriate to the date of Paul or his immediate contemporary in the church but not to a date earlier or later.
- Undesigned coincidences between Acts and the epistles to Paul.
- Internal correlations within Acts.
- Off-hand geographical references that reveal familiarity with common knowledge.

- Differences in formulation within Acts that indicate the different categories of sources he used.
- Peculiarities in the selection of detail that are explainable in the context of what is now known of first century life.
- Accounts shaped in such a way as to suggest that the author was recounting an experience, rather than shaping a text long after it had been written.
- Cultural or idiomatic items now known to be peculiar to the first century world.

All of this has lead A. N. Sherwin-White to conclude, "For Acts the confirmation of history is overwhelming ... Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted." If anyone tries to tell you that believing in the Bible is just like believing in Alice in Wonderland, you can tell them that the Bible was written from a historical point of view, and that point of view is correct!

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