

The Uniqueness of the Bible #5

Archaeological confirmation

The Incredible Accuracy of Luke

Intro: No NT book has more details about the first century world than Luke's Acts of the Apostles. If there was ever a place in the NT where it would be likely be in error, it would surely be this book that touches on many countries, cities, and rulers with their own particular features geographically, topographically, politically and spiritually.

Many years ago, critics of the Bible zeroed in on the book of Acts as having numerous mistakes, all of which it was suggested made the book of Acts a second-century production. Among them was a man by the name of Sir William Ramsay. For many years he was influenced by the modernistic German school; but in the course of his life's work he was forced to consider the book of Acts in his archaeological pursuits and completely reversed his views. Over and over Luke the physician, a disciple of Jesus and companion of Paul and author of the book of Acts has been proven to be totally accurate in his history of the early church.

The Census of Luke 2:1-2

Now it came about in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. (Luke 2:1-2)

Many critics of the gospel of Luke denied there was a census, that Quirinius was not governor of Syria at that particular time and that people were not required to return to their ancestral home.

Now archaeology has supplied confirmatory evidence that Luke was accurate on all three points.

It has now been confirmed that starting with Augustus the Romans had a regular enrollment of taxpayers and also held censuses every fourteen years.

There is evidence that Quirinius was governor of Syria not only in 6 AD (mentioned by Josephus) but also at an earlier time around 7 BC. An inscription has been found that suggests this possibility and it is clear that Luke was aware of a second census in Quirinius' reign (Ac. 5:37).

A papyrus found in Egypt contains text that indicates that people were required to return to their ancestral home to register for the census, just as Luke reported.

Proper location of Iconium

they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region (Acts 14:6)

Luke's critics contended that he was inaccurate in the statement that Iconium was not in Lycaonia, since Luke implies it was not by the

expression “the surrounding region”. Even Cicero was quoted as saying that Iconium was also in Lycaonia. Was Luke right or wrong? Ramsay in 1910 found a monument in his archaeological work that found that Iconium was a Phrygian city!

The rule of Lysanius in AD 27

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, (Luke 3:1)

Luke’s critics pointed out that the only Lysanias mentioned in ancient history was killed in 36 BC. How could he be ruling when John the Baptist began his ministry?

However an inscription has been found at Abila near Damascus which speaks of “Freedman of Lysanias the Tetrarch” and is dated between AD 14-29, the proper time frame for Luke’s statement.

A synagogue in Corinth

And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. (Acts 18:4-7)

Archaeologist have found in Corinth a fragmentary inscription believed to have read, “Synagogue of the Hebrews”. Luke was right!

The political and spiritual environment in Ephesus

In Luke’s account of Paul in Ephesus he reported:

That the people were devoted to the goddess Artemis (Diana)

For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; (Acts 19:24)

That large assembly occurred in a theater

And the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia. (Acts 19:29)

That the town clerk referred to an “ecclesia” of the city which was a lawful gathering to handle city business

“But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly. (Acts 19:39)

All these details are accurate. Archaeologists have found in Ephesus a theater capable of seating 25,000 people!

The titles of rulers

And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Now therefore, come out and go in peace.” (Acts 16:36)

Now we know that magistrates of a Roman colony were referred to as praetors.

But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, (Acts 18:12)

The Delphi inscription states in part, “as Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend, and the Proconsul of Asia”

Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days. (Acts 28:7)

Inscriptions have been found there referring to the ruler as “first man”, the very term Luke uses in Greek!

And when they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also; (Acts 17:6)

Luke uses in this text the Greek term “politarch”. Luke was believed to be in error until 5 such inscriptions have been found in Thessalonica!

Luke is accurate in the names of those rulers!

Sergius Paulus, Ruler of Paphos

And when they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. (Acts 13:6-7)

Erastus, the city treasurer of Corinth

And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. (Acts 19:22)

Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother. (Romans 16:23)

A pavement inscribed with Erastus’ name was found near Corinth.

Numerous countries, cities, and island

In describing the spread of the gospel Luke had occasion to describe the travels of Paul and others that would take them over a great part of the Roman empire. Geisler points out that “In all, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities and nine islands”; yet never makes a single error.

What do all the details show?

These minute details offered with incredible accuracy show the evidence of person who was there, writing of his first-hand experience.

William Ramsay was forced by Luke impeccable accuracy to reverse his views:

“Luke’s history is unsurpassed in respect to its trustworthiness”.

“Luke is a historian of first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy...this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians”

Conclusion: Our lessons today have focused on the science of archaeology and how it can help confirm the reliability of the Scriptures. Though the Bible may be accepted on the basis of its own internal evidences, it is also beneficial to see that it can be verified to be true in its discussion about the ancient world. If it is trustworthy in such discussions, then surely we have reason to trust its testimony about what we cannot verify.