

# How Did We Get Our Bible? The Origin and Authority of Scripture

## #8: Objections to the Bible: Does the Bible Make Historical Mistakes?

Introduction: The Story of William Ramsey

"I set out to look for truth on the borderland where Greece and Asia meet, and found it here [in the book of Acts]. You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian's, and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment."

### I. The Bible and Historical Reliability

- A. Why does the historical reliability of the Bible even matter?
- B. Burden of Proof?
  - Some scholars presume the Bible is unreliable unless it can be proven otherwise
  - Example: John's unusual five-sided "Pool of Bethesda" (John 5:2)
  - Example: "the beautiful Gate" in Acts 3:2
- C. Can we trust the Biblical Authors if they have a *theological* agenda?
  - Are theology and history mutually exclusive?
  - Do modern scholars do history with an agenda?
- D. How Does One Determine Historical Reliability?
  - The Bible's historical reliability can only be judged by what we know historically from *other sources*. But this raises a question of which source should be trusted!
  - Example: Josephus and the Census of Quirinius (Luke 2:2)

### II. The Gospels as a Test Case

- A. The Gospel Authors were in a position to record reliable history
  - We have reasons to think authors were eyewitnesses (or knew eyewitnesses)
  - We have reasons to think the authors were trustworthy
  - We have reasons to think the authors *intended* to record reliable history (the Gospels fit the pattern of ancient historiography/biography).
- B. The Gospel Authors recorded embarrassing/unpopular material
  - The genealogy of Jesus
  - The crucifixion of their messiah
  - The denial of Peter
  - Lack of understanding among the disciples
  - Women as first eyewitnesses of the resurrection

## C. The Gospel Authors show impressive familiarity with First Century Israel/Palestine

- Geography of Israel
  - Towns, regions, bodies of water, special locations (Golgotha, Gethsemane, Solomon's Colonnade)
  - Travel between locations is accurately described (e.g., going "up" to Jerusalem, or "going down" to Jericho)
  - "Other" Gospels reflect very little geographical awareness
- Names in Israel
  - From other sources, we know the most popular male names in Palestine were Simon, Joseph, Lazarus, Judah, John, and Joshua (Jesus)
  - How could the Gospel authors have gotten this right if they wrote from outside Palestine? Names in Egypt and other locals are decidedly different!
- Customs/practices in Israel
  - Authors deeply immersed in Jewish thoughts and aware of distinctively Jewish customs and practices (e.g., Mark 7:1-4)
  - Gentile authors writing later or outside Palestine would never know these details
- Unnecessary Detail
  - Mark tells us that Simon of Cyrene's sons were Alexander and Rufus (15:21)
  - John refers to Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (3:1; 19:38)
  - These details could easily be checked!

Big point: Knowing these details doesn't prove that what the Gospel authors wrote is true. But it is what we would expect from eyewitness/firsthand accounts.

## D. The Gospel Authors are vindicated by archaeological discoveries

- Pontius Pilate
  - At one point scholars doubted he even existed, until an archaeological discovery in 1961.
  - Now there are full length books about him as a historical figure!
- Pool of Siloam
  - Scholars used to think that Pool of Siloam mentioned in John 9 was fictional
  - In 2004, excavations on the Temple Mount uncovered the ancient pool
- Burial box (ossuary) of James the Lord's brother
  - Dated to the first century, inscription reads: "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus"
  - Authenticity is debated, but many defend its validity
- "Lost" city of Bethsaida
  - Many of Jesus' disciples came from Bethsaida, on sea of Galilee, but city was never found
  - Recent archaeological excavations (with help RTS's Dr. John Currid!) helped discover the city