

Agnostic Archaeologist Discovers Evidence for the Virgin Birth

Of the four Gospels, Luke gives the most detailed account of the nativity and mentions Mary 12 times, more than any other biblical writer. In addition to the birth of Christ, he also gives special, detailed attention to the birth of John the Baptist, and many see his gynecological interests to be a result of his training as a physician.

Agnostic Oxford professor and archaeologist Sir William Ramsay thought he would scientifically prove Luke to be a bogus, unreliable writer by retracing Luke's account of Paul's travels in Acts. However, after years of retracing Luke's account of Paul's travels and doing archaeological excavations along the way, Ramsay completely reversed his view of the Bible and first-century history.

He Sets Out to Disprove Luke

Ramsay, considered one of the greatest archaeologists of all time, was a product of the skeptical, German higher criticism of the 19th century. According to these critics, the New Testament was written in the second century by individuals far removed from the events described and, therefore, filled with inaccuracies, myths and legends.

Ramsay set out to prove these theories, which he taught and had become accepted as facts in much of academia. However, after many years of archaeological research, he became convinced that Acts was written in the first century by Luke, the traditional author, and he acquired a very high regard for Luke as a historian. He wrote: "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy,

he is possessed of the true historic sense; in short, this author should be placed along with the greatest of historians" (Hyatt, "Christmas is for Real," 10-11).

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In 1896, Ramsay began publishing his discoveries in a book titled "St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen." The book caused a furor of dismay among the skeptics of the world, for its affirmation of the biblical record was totally unexpected. The evidence was, in fact, so overwhelming that many atheists gave up their atheism and embraced Christianity.

Over the next 20 years, Ramsay published other volumes showing how he discovered Luke to be accurate in the tiniest details of his account. In his book, "The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament," he wrote, "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" (Hyatt, 11).

To cite just one example, Luke's use of the term "politarch" to describe officials in Thessalonica was widely considered to be a bogus term since it was unknown in all other ancient literature. But in his archaeological excavations, Ramsay uncovered the term no less than five times in ancient carvings in the city, demonstrating beyond doubt the authenticity and reliability of Luke's authorship.

The evidence piled up and became overwhelming. Ramsay eventually gave up his agnosticism and came to faith in Christ. He concluded that if Luke was this careful to get right the most minute facts about words, dates, roads, waterways and different cultures, then he could also be trusted to have gotten his facts right about the supernatural things he described, such as the virgin birth.

Indeed, at the beginning of his Gospel, and just before

describing the angel's visit to Mary, Luke says he has utilized eyewitness accounts of the events described. The detail Luke presents about the virgin birth does indicate that he has derived his information from a primary source, either Mary herself or someone to whom Mary had relayed the intimate details of the event.

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The famous Oxford historian A.N. Sherwin-White carefully examined Luke's references to 32 countries, 54 cities and nine islands, finding not a single mistake. The noted New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce pointed out that where Luke has been suspected of inaccuracy by modern critics, archaeology has again and again proven Luke to be right and the critics wrong.

The evidence begs the question that if Luke was this careful to get his facts right about names, places, events and dates, can we not be confident that he was just as careful to get his facts right concerning the more important things about which he wrote, such as the virgin birth of Jesus Christ?

Charles Wesley, the Anglican cleric and Methodist revivalist, believed so and wrote his magnificent hymn, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," after hearing London church bells ringing as he walked to church one Christmas day. He wrote,

Hark! The herald angels sing/"Glory to the newborn King.

"Peace on earth and mercy mild/God and sinners reconciled!

Joyful, all ye nations, rise/Join the triumph of the skies

With th'angelic host proclaim/"Christ is born in Bethlehem."

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This article is derived from the book "Christmas is for Real" by Dr. Eddie L. Hyatt and available from Amazon and his website at .