

Is the New Testament Accurate?

(by Bob Pulliam)

The accuracy of our present day New Testament is actually more easily proven than it's completeness. Again, those who say English translational work isn't accurate either speak out of ignorance, or dishonesty. The accuracy of the New Testament can be tried and tested by *any* who are willing to do so. People tend to ignorantly say things like: "The Roman Catholic Church changed the Bible for it's own purposes, so it can't be trusted," or, "The men who translated the Bible made mistakes, that's why all the versions are different and can't be trusted." We shall see that these are merely excuses.

Of all the books from antiquity, the New Testament is actually one of the best preserved. Nearly 3,000 copies of varying amounts of the New Testament in Greek survive to this day. In addition, there are other Greek manuscripts (about 2,000), that are arranged in a daily reading format. In addition to that there are 8,000 manuscripts in Latin and over 2,000 ancient manuscripts of different versions other than the Greek and Latin.

All of these manuscripts can be compared and cross-referenced. The New Testament is just like any case where truth is sought... The more evidence you have, the more likely you are to arrive at the truth. The evidence offered by all of these ancient manuscripts is overwhelming. As they are compared, an astonishing continuity pervades the whole. From this we are convinced that God's word is not only accurate, but also that His will can be determined by that message!

There are a small number of the New Testament documents which contain minor discrepancies. These are called "textual variants." These amount to copyist errors, *not* the errors of the inspired writers. It is important to remember two things when considering this topic. 1) We do not have any of the originals that the inspired writers produced, and 2) copies in ancient times had to be done by hand. There were no photo copy machines available. Copyists often made minor errors, such as leaving out a "the," or a dot here or there. None of these errors affect the accuracy of important doctrinal matters. If they did, we could have no confidence in any part of the Bible!

What do Secular Historians Rely on?...

Secular historians might ridicule the Bible as silly and unreliable, but have you ever thought about what some of our historical knowledge is based upon? If you wrote a book in the year 100, and that book was lost, but later copies were found, their accuracy might depend on how much later they were produced. A copy from the year 900 may have gone through several copyings until the one in 900 was produced. If you don't have any of the intermediate copies, you might wonder how accurate a copy from 800 years after the original might be (*i.e.* 100 to 900).

Here are some of the ancient documents that some of our ancient history is based upon:

Caesar's Gallic War (written around 50 BC). Oldest copy is 900 years after the original.

Roman History by Livy (59 BC - AD 17). Oldest copy is 450 years after the original.

Histories by Tacitus (AD 100) Oldest copy is 800 years after the original.

The History of Thucydides (460 - 400 BC). Oldest copy is 1,300 years after the original.

History of Herodotus (488 - 428 BC). Oldest copy is 1,300 years after the original.

The Bible, on the other hand, leaves much more room for trust. The oldest verifiable fragment of the Bible is the John Rylands fragment which dates to AD 125. That's just thirty to forty years after the original was written. Three other manuscripts found in Egypt date to between AD 100 - 400.

There are several early translations of the Bible which help to verify textual integrity. The Peshitto Syriac is an Aramean translation from the second century (within 100 years of the original NT documents). The Old Latin translation dates to this same time period, and the well known Latin Vulgate was completed in AD 385.

Conclusion...

It is obvious from this information that there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the Bible. That we have what was written in the first century should be unquestioned. The only reason it is questioned in our day is its message. People who do not want to accept its message find it necessary to attack its accuracy!