

The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?

by F. F. Bruce

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This is the sixth edition of a very popular and useful work first published in 1943. The author examines various evidences which contribute toward our understanding of the reliability of the New Testament documents upon which Christianity stands. We are fortunate to have had such a man and his considerable gifts write on this vital subject.

F. F. (Frederick Fyvie) Bruce is perhaps best known for his ability to combine deep scholarship and practical down-to-earth communication (pp. x-xi):

Though this book remains at a level the beginner can understand, Bruce pulls no punches. When he needs to cite recondite evidence, he cites it, with due explanation. We are never left in doubt that the argument is underpinned by serious and accurate knowledge of the ancient sources. . . . Fred Bruce was, in short, a tower of strength in the worlds of scholarship and faith, and in particular to those who, like him, were and are determined not to separate the two.

There is an immense amount of valuable information packed within this relatively small book—all of it clearly presented, well-documented, and convincing in its survey of ancient documents. Yet, for all that, the text is easily read by non-academics. Indeed, such is the intended audience of the work.

After having established that the reliability of the New Testament documents *do* matter, the author turns to a consideration of manuscript evidence and other early writings which show us that the New Testament we have today is a reliable representation of its original form.

In an especially interesting section, Bruce discusses the many historical subtleties mastered by Luke, both in his gospel and especially in Acts (pp. 82-83):

The accuracy of Luke's use of the various titles of the Roman Empire has been compared to the easy and confident way in which an Oxford man in ordinary conversation will refer to the Heads of Oxford colleges by their proper titles -- the *Provost* of Oriel, the *Master* of Balliol, the *Rector* of Exeter the *President* of Magdalen, and so on. A non-Oxonian like the present writer never feels quite at home with the multiplicity of these Oxford titles. But Luke had a further difficulty in that the titles sometimes did not remain the same for any great length of time; a province might pass from senatorial government to administration by a direct representative of the emperor, and would then be governed no longer by a proconsul but by an imperial legate. . .

The author also includes a chapter discussing archaeological evidence related to various passages in the New Testament. This is both helpful in establishing the reliability of the

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Scriptures as a historical record, but also a useful and interesting source of background for use by preachers and teachers.

A minor criticism: the author could have spent less time in such a short work discussing source criticism of the Gospels. Postulating the existence of the conjectured “Q” document does little to shed light on the reliability of the factual gospel records we hold in our hands. Although seeming to accept the Markan hypothesis, to his credit, he admits (p. 31): “While the Markan hypothesis is still the regnant hypothesis, it has been assailed by writers of great scholarship and ability.”

This book deserves the very modest space it would occupy on the bookshelf of every thinking believer. It is an excellent introductory resource to share with friends who are skeptical of the reliability of the New Testament. Bruce easily demonstrates the inconsistency with which the secular world accepts the authenticity of other ancient writings which have a much poorer and later attestation.

Review by [Tony Garland](#) of www.SpiritAndTruth.org.