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Frederick Fyvie Bruce (1910-1990) was a Biblical scholar, and one of the founders of the modern evangelical understanding of the Bible. His work NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS: ARE THEY RELIABLE? is considered one of the greatest classics in the discipline of Christian apologetics.

The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? Details

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Nikhil Gupta says

The New Testament documents; Are they reliable?

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The late F. F. Bruce was Emeritus Professor, University of Manchester. He was a Biblical scholar who supported the historical reliability of the New Testament. His first book, *New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (1943), was voted by the American evangelical periodical *Christianity Today* in 2006 as one of the top 50 books "which had shaped evangelicals"

Bruce does a great job of doing just as he argues, "if a work can be proven to be historically and culturally accurate with respect to most of its content, that document then becomes-on the whole-more compelling."

The author makes his cases about why he thinks the New Testament documents are reliable.

This book is divided into following ten chapters:

First Chapter, Does it matter?

Is it essential that the New Testament documents should be reliable? Christianity it's not only about morals, ethics or metaphysics but about good news as well.

Second Chapter, the New Testament documents; In regard to their dating, the author declares that the New Testament was almost complete about 100 AD with the majority of documents being in existence 20-40 years before this. Author meant that the things that Jesus said and did were still around when the books were documented and some might have been alive even when the fourth gospel was written. Like Papyrus fragments, Papyrus Codex dated no later than 150 AD. The author gives many more examples in this chapter the author points out the overwhelming evidence of the New Testament and if we compare it to other historical writings of which no historian would ever doubt their authenticity. Third Chapter, The Canon of the New Testament; How was decided which books would make the cannon? The author also points out that there was a dispute about which books were recognized and how some people did not recognize certain books. At the end, the books that were recognized were those who were common among the Christian communities and also those books who were recognized by the Church which were pretty much the same that were going around.

Fourth Chapter, The Gospels; Author has divided into two sections; the synoptic gospels and the gospel of John. The author wisely deals with the controversies, hypothesis, and many other things. Ones like, the claim that Luke and Matthew copied from Mark.

Fifth Chapter, The gospel of Miracles; Here, author argues in support of miracle narratives. He puts forward some of the arguments from people who have tried to reduce the miracles in a non supernatural way. For, instance, empty tomb, not all the disciples could have had the same hallucination, Jesus appearance, Paul's testimony.

Sixth Chapter, the Importance of Paul's evidence; As a response to many who argue that Paul doesn't talk about Jesus, his life and ministry. So the author talks about his background, life and conversion, Christ like life, Luke's work, familiarity, with other Christians etc.

Seventh Chapter, Writings of Luke; Here, author deals with the authority and historicity of Luke's writings and his personhood.

Eighth Chapter, More Archaeological Evidence. Ninth Chapter, The Evidence of Early Jewish Writers; Here, author gives good details about some of the Jewish writer who documented about Jesus. (Talmud, Josephus etc.).

Tenth Chapter, The Evidence of Early Gentile Writers; Now Bruce talks about gentile writers, Julius Africanus who refers to the writings of Thallus who wrote about the darkness that covered the land when Jesus was crucified. Some others also included in support.

In summary, Bruce puts it “He asks why the reliability and historicity of the New Testament documents are important. His answer is that the Christian faith is grounded in history and facts. Without a history or without the underlying facts, Christianity is not really Christianity.”

Bruce provides internal and external data that point to the historical reliability of the NT. Perhaps most notable is the fact that Bruce does not try to convince his readers that Christianity is true; that is not his objective. It is only his endeavor to demonstrate that the NT documents, which themselves declare Christianity's truth claims, are as historically reliable as any documents of antiquity. Indeed, this book is an extraordinary channel for any person, Christian or skeptic, who would like to comprehend the point of historical accuracy that can be found in the New Testament documents. Any historian would then need to take more critically the author's questionable claims such as the miracles, and Christ as God and savior of humanity. Bruce's work is an undeniable read for anybody interested in this topic.

I would like to strongly recommend this read for couple of reasons; first it will be a great help to understand the historical roots of Christian faith that lies in the New Testament. Second, non-Christians who believe that the Bible is mere religious myth, this book will change their concept completely. Third, this can be taken as a great tool on the New Testament for the apologetical study, since it has enormous information that aids in verifying the reliability and credibility of the New Testament.

Source: <http://nikhilrajgupta.blogspot.in/201...>

Douglas Wilson says

Excellent.

Louis Lapidès says

F. F. Bruce's classic book defending the reliability of the NT is still applicable decades after I read it the first time. His chapter on the Book of Acts is worth the whole book. Acts is loaded with historical figures, timelines and events. It is prime for skeptics to disparage the reliability of the NT by finding historical inaccuracies in Acts. But F. F. Bruce demonstrates through scholarly documentation how the Book of Acts holds up to scrutiny. Highly recommend reading this book, perhaps several times.

Mary says

A highly informative, practically beneficial read. This book is both scholarly and accessible.

Steve Hemmeke says

Helpful summary of the New Testament's reliability. It is historically consistent with outside documents (Josephus tells the same story we find in Acts 12:20-23, for instance). Even where other writings are hostile or indifferent to Christianity, they do not refute the NT's claims. Bruce examines why some books weren't included in Scripture and others were disputed. He considers the Gospel differences helpfully, and Paul and Luke's Acts, also. He shows there are far more NT texts closer to the original writing than we have for most other major works (Caesar, Socrates, etc.), the historicity of which we do not question.

All this in 120 pages! Highly recommended, especially for seminary students and any Christian who is struggling with doubts about the faith once delivered to the saints.

Benjamin Merritt says

A bit dated but still very relevant. Great entry level introduction to New Testament and Christian origins. Lots of helpful info backed up with solid scholarship.

Joe Hyink says

Helpful in many respects, especially when he sticks to the facts. I really loved the chapter on miracles. His adherence to the speculations about Markan Priority and Q are disappointing due to the paucity of actual evidence cited and are incongruous with most of the rest of this well-researched book.

Specifically, he should have followed his own advice in the final footnote of chapter 2: "The latest exhaustive enquiry into the dates of the New Testament books -- *Redating the New Testament* by J. A. T. Robinson (1976) -- argues that everything in the New Testament was written before AD 70, the latest book being Revelation, which he dates preferably under Galba (June 68-January 69). The pivot of his case is the Gospel of John, to the final form of which he gives a date no later than AD 65. I should not go all the way with some of his early dating, for I believe that one or two of the New Testament documents do imply that the fall of Jerusalem (AD 70) had already taken place. But Dr. Robinson's case is so well researched and closely reasoned that no one from now on should deal with this question of dating without paying the most serious attention to his arguments."

Not once does Bruce follow this advice.

Paul Batz says

F.F. Bruce was a man of deep personal faith (himself a Brethren) while simultaneously being a foremost scholar in his own field. Often, it is assumed that these two traits are mutually exclusive, but in this book, Bruce proves that you can be both.

The main question Bruce attempts to answer in this book is captured within the book's own title: are the New Testament Documents reliable? Being himself a Christian, one might expect Bruce to answer "yes." That said, this "yes" does not come without a rigorous treatment of the relevant material that might lead one to such a conclusion.

Bruce starts with a bit of prolegomena, arguing that the question he's attempting to answer is actually a question that can be asked. It can be asked because the Gospel is good news within history. The New Testaments are a witness to the Christ-event that breaks into our world's sequence of events. As Bruce claims, "And this good news is intimately bound up with the historical order, for it tells how for the world's redemption God entered into history, the eternal came into time, the kingdom of heaven invaded the realm of earth, in the great events of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ" (2). Checking for the historical accuracy of the New Testaments is a task worth undertaking given this reality of the historical nature of Christianity.

Bruce starts by defining what the New Testament documents are and then proceeds to date these documents. Dates are an important factor in regards to their trustworthiness, much like any other ancient documents one might scrutinize. Bruce then states the massive collection of manuscripts available to us in the Greek. Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Alexandrinus, and Codex Bezae are also mentioned. With such a wealth of textual support for the New Testament, it seems almost superfluous to mention the independent testimony of the early church fathers and their heavy citation, adding further support (just to be clear, Bruce does mention this point).

Throughout his book, Bruce anticipates questions that might obstruct our ability to answer his original question about the reliability of the New Testament. This explains the purpose of his third chapter, which addresses the canon of scripture. "Sure, the New Testament is reliable," one might say, "but why is the New Testament the way it is anyways?" This is a fair question, to which Bruce gives an honest answer. He notes the existence of material on the edges of the proto-canon such as the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas.

In chapter four, Bruce addresses what some have called "the synoptic problem" and then proceeds to discuss the noticeable differences between the synoptics and John's gospel.

In his fifth chapter on miracles, Bruce is helpful when he says that "our first concern about the Gospel miracles should be not to 'defend' them but to understand them" (62). That being said, Bruce does not back down from the historicity of these miracles. In fact, Bruce focuses our attention towards Jesus' own resurrection, calling it the "chief Gospel miracle of all" (63).

In his sixth chapter, Paul's testimony is discussed with an emphasis on his importance in speaking of the New Testament's reliability. His letters are, by far, the earliest of our New Testament documents and it is assuring to know that "the gospel story as we can trace it in the writings of Paul agrees with the outline which we find elsewhere in the New Testament, and in the four Gospels in particular" (79).

In his seventh chapter, Bruce concludes that Luke's testimony is deemed reliable by scholars coming from a liberal point of view.

In the final three chapters, Bruce discusses archaeological evidence and then finishes with a discussion of outside Jewish and Gentile sources that speak of the Jesus movement. Essentially, Bruce is answering the question of what the outside world can tell us about the reliability of the New Testament. Josephus is easily the most important external Jewish source in this regard.

Personally, I find it fascinating that Josephus was aware of persons such as John the Baptist, and even takes

the time to recount the martyrdom of James, the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church. Less important are the external Gentiles sources that reference Jesus or his movement. That being said, the information we gather from these brief mentions of Jesus seem crucial for Bruce, leading him to make the following bold statement: "the historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar" (123).

In conclusion, Bruce's book is well worth your time. You can sense both Bruce's personal faith and his excitement over exploring and discussing the relevant scholarship. I am sure that after reading his book, Bruce would have hoped his readers would have gained a renewed and energetic willingness to go out and read the New Testament again for themselves. To be sure, Bruce accomplishes this. Read this book.

Justin Nichols says

This is a very dense read!! I originally sought after this book to coincide with my month long study on the validity of the bible. The overarching concepts discussed here definitely aided in strengthening my understanding of how we can trust the bible as a historical piece, and also how to trust its content. For that I am eternally grateful. Unfortunately I got rather lost in the historical depth this book reads, and found myself skimming past some of the historical data. If you enjoy history, you will absolutely love this book and probably take away even more than me. I hope to use this as a resource in the future, and perhaps revisit when I am able to better appreciate the historical detail. Praise God for the contextual evidence presented here to support the life and works of Jesus Christ our savior and biblical times.

Erik Graff says

I picked this one up on Broadway while at U.T.S. in New York studying the Christian Scriptures. F.F. Bruce was unknown to me. The book was cheap.

I quickly discovered that he was a believing Christian--a contemporary believing Christian. I was used to liberal Christians of one sort or another. My professors were mostly of that kind. But, when it got down to it, none of them seemed to believe in miracles. All of them interpreted away the miracle stories of the bible. Bruce, however, is prone to take the biblical texts at face value, as basically factual source material for religious belief.

Now, in high school I had known many evangelicals. The Campus Crusade For Christ was big at Maine Twp. H. S. South. The local coffee house for adolescents was run by something called Coffee House Ministries. Many of my friends got caught up in the Willow Creek Church during its early years when it still met in a rented movie theatre. On the broader, national scene, the Jesus Freaks made Christianity respectable for many identified with the counterculture and the antiwar movement.

Unfortunately, the local fundamentalists were not very good in presenting evidence or answering questions intelligently. Many of them had read a translation of the bible and knew the material well, but few had much background in the history of the period and none any familiarity with the textual histories of the various canonical texts. I enjoyed discussions with them, felt challenged by their passion, but never felt challenged by their arguments.

Then came Grinnell College and an eventual degree in religious studies followed by matriculation into the seminary my favorite teacher, the Rev. Dr. Dennis Haas, had attended. I was becoming a bit of a biblical scholar myself, expert in the higher and the lower criticism, in the art of putting out a grade A exegesis. But, with the exception of two resident advisors who were evangelicals in an existentialist sort of way (*credo ut absurdum*), all of my Christian teachers and colleagues were liberals, treating the biblical mss. as they would treat, say, Sumerian ones. Their faith(s) referred to the biblical texts, but weren't much based on them.

Bruce came, therefore, as a revelation. Here was an intelligent master of the biblical material who was disposed to take it seriously as historical record. Here was someone who appeared to give the best possible arguments from the fundamentalist standpoint.

Of course, this means that Bruce is no idiot. He knows that the so-called "Greek New Testament" sold in seminary bookstores, the so-called "received text", is in fact an updated edition of Erasmus' very imperfect work. He knows that the hundreds of English bibles are as new as their copyrights, more or less modern editorial creations, not the inerrant word of god. He knows that all we can do is to try to hypothetically reconstruct original texts and that certainty in such efforts is impossible. Still, he takes this task with the utmost seriousness and has very strong, evidentially based, opinions.

If you are a liberal Christian yourself or otherwise wish to be exposed to an educated evangelical's arguments, check out Bruce's work. If you are an evangelical, hold yourself to his standards.

Matt Mason says

Measured and convincing.

Joey Day says

This is an older but still useful popular level primer on the manuscript and archeological evidence for the Bible. It's a bit outdated, having its last major revision in 1959, and I found some of the slightly old-style writing hard to "grok" in places, but I definitely see why this is a classic and I'm glad I read it. It was a quick read and I commend it to anyone interested in broadening their understanding of this topic, but if you only want to read one book on this subject and want something newer and (imho) better, you should pick up Lightfoot's "How We Got the Bible" instead.

M. J. says

This is one of those books that I had to purchase in college, but probably did not actually make it to my reading list at the time. A few years ago a pastor was cleaning out his library, and it appeared that he, too, had acquired this in his seminary studies--and that he had then obtained a used copy, dated to when we were preschoolers. Yet I knew it was a classic, so I grabbed it, and read it, and put it in my library.

Picking it up again, I am surprised at how much of the material I failed to recall. I was not surprised at how valuable a resource it is on the evidence for the historicity of the New Testament documents, including all the extant Roman and Jewish references to the reported events, the accuracy of the details, the evidentiary

strength of the documents themselves, and more. Much of this I know, and more that has been discovered in the now three-quarters century since the original publication (I was reading the author's 1960 revision, which was not a listed edition at Goodreads).

I can think of half a dozen people, without stopping to consider the question, who ought to read this book; none of them will. Instead, I will keep it available and read it again, to be better able to answer their uninformed objections to the Biblical record which stand as an excuse to avoid considering the claims of Christ.

Eric Olsen says

Great read and wonderful affirmation of what is true; the New Testament is the most documented text in ancient literature.

Peter Vik says

This book is a classic treatment of the evidence for the historical reliability of the New Testament. The many editions of the book bear witness to its helpfulness to many readers since its first publication in 1943. The material is clear, concise and compelling. Bruce does not say more than can be said. He fully recognizes that many issues come down to a matter of faith, but he provides a sound historical basis for discussing these matters. Those with an a priori assumption that supernatural things do not happen will obviously discard any ancient text which contains them, but this assumption would affect the supposed credibility of virtually any ancient historical text. Bruce navigates these and other issues with precision and eloquence.
