

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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The Bible's Historical Accuracy

(Jerry Fite)

When you read the Bible, you will notice that it speaks of real places on a map. Scripture also names the people who lived in those places during recorded time. When Luke records that Augustus Caesar gave a decree for a census at the time when Jesus was born, one might not doubt the fact that Augustus Caesar existed, while not being sure that Jesus ever existed. Many rely on recorded history as the determining factor, not the Bible. While it has been proven that Jesus was a historical figure, doubts about other Biblical figures exist, because of the lack of historical evidence.

For years, Pontius Pilate, a prominent person in the life of Christ, was doubted to be a historical figure. Luke records that Pilate was governor during the rule of Tiberius Caesar (*Luke 3:1*). While historical records exist to establish Tiberius as a Roman Emperor, there were no historical records to prove Pilate existed, much less lived in the first century Roman world. But in the summer of 1961, Italian archaeologists uncovered a stone plaque in the steps leading to Caesarea's Amphitheatre. This piece of limestone had inscribed upon it:

“Pontius Pilatus, Prefect of Judea, has dedicated to the people of Caesarea a temple in the honor of Tiberius.” The word “Prefect” is Latin (Praefectus) literally meaning: “put in front,” which harmonizes with Luke's designation of Pilate being “governor” or “procurator” of Judea. Up to now, this is the only historical artifact we know that points to Pilate of the New Testament. But the archaeologist's shovel reveals that the “Pilate Stone” is not only a chief corner stone in history, but historical proof of Luke's accuracy in the Gospel according to Luke.

Luke writes that “*Quirinius was governor of Syria*” (*Luke 2:2*). He also adds that while Quirinius was governor, the “*first enrollment*” took place while Augustus ruled Rome which affected Joseph and Mary at the time of Jesus' birth. A tombstone inscription from Beirut was obtained by merchants from Venice sometime before 1674. It is a funeral stone of Aemelus Secundus who was an army officer, serving under Quirinius in the time of Augustus. On the stone, his work connecting Quirinius with a census is inscribed: “*On command of Quirinius I have carried out the census of Apamea, a city-state of*

one hundred and seventeen thousand citizens...”. What we can know by this archeological discovery is that Quirinius, executing a leadership-roll in the time of Augustus, conducted a census in Syria, north of Palestine. Luke's account in Scripture does not contradict what archaeology has uncovered, the “Lapis Venetus” (Stone of Venice) connects Quirinius, Augustus and census-taking occurring in the area just north of the birth place of Jesus.

Luke also records a man by the name of “*Gallio*,” the “*proconsul of Achaia*,” coming to the aid of Paul when the apostle was brought before civil authorities in Corinth (*Acts 18:12-18*). In 1915, a doctoral student uncovered nine stone fragments in Delphi, containing the words of Claudius, the Emperor of Rome (A.D. 52.) The inscription on stone addresses “*Gallio*” as “*my friend and proconsul.*”

History substantiates Augustus, Tiberias and Claudius as historical rulers, but the sifting shovel reveals evidence from stone that Pilate, Quirinius, Gallio, lesser authorities, are also actual historical figures. We can trust our Bible to be historically accurate!