

2017

Credibility of the New Testament by Bill Lockwood

To say that something is “credible” is to say that it is believable or “reliable.” Trustworthy is another description. If something is “reliable” it is “dependable.” All of these terms accurately depict the New Testament.

Craig Evans, in *Jesus and His World: The Archaeological Evidence*, gives a good summary of the credibility of the New Testament Gospels as opposed to second-century “gospels” and Gnostic works of that era. “There is also a very important argument in favor of the general reliability of the New Testament Gospels, and that concerns what is called verisimilitude: that is, what the Gospels describe matches the way things really were in the early first-century Jewish Palestine.

“The New Testament Gospels and Acts exhibit a great deal of verisimilitude. They speak of *real people* (such as Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, Annas, Caiaphas, Herod Agrippa I and II, Felix and Festus) and *real events* (priests, tax collectors, Roman governors, Roman centurions) and *beliefs* (of Pharisees and Sadducees; interpretation of Scripture). Jesus’ engagement with his contemporaries, both supporters and opponents, reflects an understanding of Scripture and theology that we now know, thanks to the Dead Sea Scrolls and related literature, to have been current in pre-70 Jewish Palestine.”

This verisimilitude stands out in stark relief from other so-called “gospels.” “The verisimilitude of the New Testament Gospels stands in contrast to the lack of verisimilitude in the second-century Gospels and Gospel-like writings, such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Peter* and various Gnostic Gospels. It is such that historians and archeologists of all stripes regularly make use of them, as perusal of their books reveals. These scholars see them as valuable sources, without which historical and archaeological work concerned with first-century Jewish Palestine would be much more difficult. No archaeologist or historian would say this with regard to *Thomas* or *Peter*. It is to the New Testament Gospels that archaeologists and historians make reference.”