

Luke 1:1-4

Comparing Ancient Manuscripts

Is Luke a historically reliable document? How do we know whether or not the New Testament we have today has been corrupted over the centuries? Below is a comparison between the manuscripts of several ancient documents and the manuscript evidence for the New Testament (from McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, pp. 42-43):

<u>Author</u>	<u>Written</u>	<u>Earliest Copy</u>	<u># of Copies</u>
Plato (<i>Tetralogies</i>)	427-347BC	900AD	7
Tacitus (<i>Annuls</i>)	100 AD	1100AD	20
Pliny the Younger (<i>History</i>)	61-113AD	850AD	1
Thucydides (<i>History</i>)	460-400BC	900AD	8
Seutonius (<i>Lives of the Caesars</i>)	75-160AD	950AD	8
Herodotus (<i>History</i>)	480-425BC	900AD	8
Sophocles	496-406BC	1000AD	193
Euripides	480-406BC	1100AD	9
Aristophanes	450-385BC	900AD	10
Aristotle	384-322BC	1100AD	49 (of any one work)
<i>New Testament</i>	<i>40-100AD</i>	<i>125AD</i>	<i>24000+</i>

In terms of manuscript evidence, the New Testament is unmatched among ancient documents, both in sheer number of documents and in the short interval between writing and our earliest extant copies. In the words of F.F. Bruce, "There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament." If the New Testament documents do not give us a reliable picture of what the authors wrote, then no ancient document can be trusted!

Luke as historian

"Amid the multiplicity of changing official designations in the Roman empire at that time, Luke moves with sure familiarity, not so simple a matter as it would be today with ready access to convenient works of reference. Luke knew that at the time with which he deals Cyprus, Achaia and Asia were senatorial provinces governed by proconsuls (Acts 13:7; 18:12; 19:38); that Philippi, as a Roman colony, was administered by collegiate praetors, who were attended by lictors (16:20ff); that Thessalonica, like other cities of Macedonia, called its chief magistrates politarchs (17:6,8). He was acquainted with the Areopagus at Athens (17:19ff); he knew that the leading men of the cities of Asia were called Asiarchs (19:31), that Ephesus enjoyed the honorary title of "temple warden" of Artemis (19:35) and that the town clerk occupied an important and responsible place in its municipal administration. He knew that the chief official in Malta was called the "first man" (28:7)."

- *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, p. 43