



THE BEREA PAGE

"Examining . . . to see if these things are so" ~ Acts 17.11

Take Up Your Cross

"And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, [Jesus] said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"

- Mark 8.34-35

"Because of the passage of time and the frequent spiritualization of this passage, it is necessary to emphasize that the words must be taken literally if we are to read them as Mark intended. When Mark's first readers read these words, they could have understood them only as a warning that discipleship might mean execution, for in their time the cross was a well-known instrument of Roman execution used on runaway slaves, rebels, and other criminals of lower classes. To be more precise, in Mark's time the cross was not just an indication of possible death for disciples, it was a warning of *execution* by the state authorities." - Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Baker Books, 1983, 1989), 137-138

"Death to self is not so much a prerequisite of discipleship to Jesus as a continuing characteristic of it." - D. A. Carson, *Matthew Chapters 13 through 28*, paperback edition (Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 379

Snobbery of the Modern

David Anguish

Like other commentators who make similar observations about Luke's preface, Mark Strauss takes note of the fact that "the term *diēgēsis* [διήγησις; 1.1] is used frequently in Greek literature of a historical narrative, especially one that set out a comprehensive and orderly account of events."¹

Though true that ancient historical writings were different in many ways from their modern counterparts, "it overstates the case to deny that good history existed" then.² As Darrell Bock observed, "The ancients, just like us moderns, knew the difference between history and fiction."³

It's important to remember that truth when we hear it said that the reason ancient people believed the "mighty works, wonders, and signs" (Acts 2.22) recounted in the New Testament was "because they did not know the Laws of Nature,"⁴ now commonly accepted. Thus, the argument goes, they gullibly accepted as real things that we more enlightened moderns know cannot occur.

It's one thing to acknowledge that the cultural setting then made the miraculous easier to believe. It's something else entirely to assume ancient people were as uninformed, susceptible, or superstitious as those who make this claim apparently think.⁵ It was the ancient Egyptians, after all, who built the architectural marvels that are the pyramids, the Greeks who discovered basic principles of mathematics still used today, and the Greeks and Romans who devised the democratic and republican forms of government—all well before the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius (Luke 2.1; 3.1).

The same ability to discern seen in those developments is evident in the New Testament miracle accounts. They had magicians who claimed to be somebody great, but that meant they also had people who knew what was—and was not—sleight of hand (see Acts 8.9-13). To say Joseph didn't know the

On Worship

"Increasingly, you find people talking about the worship *experience* rather than the worship *service*." - John Gilmore, "No Experience Necessary," *Leadership* (n.d.), in "Obiter Dicta," *Christian Studies* 18 (2000/2001): 77

The Hard Work of Study

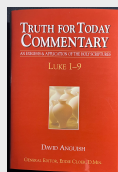
"Of course, it is one thing to read the Bible, it is quite another thing to understand it, and it is still another thing to use it responsibly! To be honest, the Bible is very hard to understand in places. Not because it is a book of mystery, magic, or mayhem; rather, because it contains a history distant from our own, it was originally written to ancient audiences in particular contexts, and it was written for us but not to us. If we are to grasp the Bible, what it meant to its original audience and what it means for us today, then we must traverse some historical chasms and learn to interpret ancient cultures as much as our own cultures. Understanding the Bible is rewarding, but it entails work—hard work." - Michael F. Bird, *Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About the Bible* (Zondervan Reflective, 2021), xviii

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terms and details of modern genetics does not mean he didn't know that virgins typically don't conceive. That's why, when he learned Mary was pregnant before they had been together, he resolved to divorce her (Matt 1.18-19). Ancient people also knew if men were blind and that, if they were, they didn't typically regain their sight (John 9.1, 18-21). And the disciples who encountered Jesus after his death were initially incredulous because they knew dead men usually don't walk, talk, and eat after their demise (Luke 24.4, 11-12, 22-24).

In his essay, "Religion and Science," C. S. Lewis related a conversation with a friend who discounted miracles because, he said, "'Science has knocked the bottom out of all that. We know that Nature is governed by fixed laws.'" Lewis pointed out some things the ancients knew about Nature's laws and then made a case for supernatural intervention into those laws. The man tried to rescue his argument by saying that, even if what Lewis said was so, the ancients had a very small view of the universe. Unaware that "'we are tiny little creatures crawling about on an unimportant planet,'" they "'invented'" a "'Power'" to explain what they saw, believing "'in a flat earth with the stars only a mile or two away.'"

Not so, said Lewis, taking from his shelf Ptolemy's *Amalgest*, which his friend identified as "'the standard astronomical handbook used all the through the Middle Ages.'" He asked the man to read a passage that says, "'the earth, in relation to the distance of the fixed stars, has no appreciable size and must be treated as a mathematical point!'"

After "a moment of silence," his friend said, "'Did they really know that *then*? But—but none of the histories of science—none of the modern encyclopedias—ever mention the fact.'"

"'Exactly,' said [Lewis]. 'I'll leave you to think out the reason. It almost looks as if someone was anxious to hush it up, doesn't it? I wonder why.'"

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Notes

¹ Mark L. Strauss, "Luke," *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Zondervan, 2002), 1: 323. For similar prefaces, see the prologue of Ecclesiasticus and Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.1-5.

² Ibid., 322, in his sidebar, "Historians of Luke's Time."

³ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, The NIV Application Commentary* (Zondervan, 1996), 44.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, "Miracles," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Eerdmans, 1970), 26.

⁵ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences* (Moody Press, 1953), 145.

⁶ Lewis, "Religion and Science," in *God in the Dock*, 72-75.

All Scripture quotations not otherwise designated are from the ESV.

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