Why should we trust the Bible?

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How detailed is the gospel writers' knowledge of local agriculture, architecture, culture, economics, geography, language, law, personal names, politics, religion, social hierarchy, topography, travelling times, and weather?

1. Personal names

Most Popular Jewish Names among Palestinian Jews (330 BC-AD 200)
Male

Rank	Name	Total	NT	Josephus	Ossuaries	DSS
1	Simon/Simeon	243	8	29	59	72
2	Joseph/Joses	218	6	21	45	78
3	Lazarus/Eleazar	166	1	20	29	52
4	Judas/Judah	164	5	14	44	35
5	John/Johanan	122	5	13	25	40
6	Jesus/Joshua	99	2	14	22	38
7	Ananias	82	2	10	18	13
8	Jonathan	71		14	14	21
9	Matthew/Matt(at)hias	62	2	12	17	15
10	Manaen/Menahem	42	1	2	4	23
11	James/Jacob	40	5	4	5	10

Names occurring only 3×	34
Names occurring only 2×	80
Names occurring only 1×	234
Total number of names	447
Total number of occurrences	2625

Female

Rank	Name	Total	NT	Josephus	Ossuaries	DSS
1	Mary/Mariam	70	6	7	42	9
2	Salome	58	1	3	41	8
3	Shelamzion	24		1	19	3
4	Martha	20	1		17	
5=	Joanna	12	1		7	3
5=	Sapphira/Shiphra	12	1		9	1
7	Berenice	8	1	3	1	
8=	Imma	7			6	
8=	Mara	7			5	

Names occurring only 1×	43
Total number of names	74
Total number of occurrences	328

Totals: male and female

Total number of names	521
Total number of occurrences	2953

Source: Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 85-88.

2. Place names in the Gospels

Gospel	Number of occurrences of place names	Number of words in Gospel (English)	Number of place names per 1000 words
Matthew	110	23,782	4.625
Mark	73	15,013	4.862
Luke	124	25,874	4.789
John	92	19,819	4.642
Thomas	*1*	*5,223*	*0.191*
Mary	*0*	*1,214*	*0*
Judas	*1*	*3,068*	*0.326*
Philip	*3*	*9,153*	*0.328*
Peter	*4*	*1,757*	*0.559*

Tacitus, *Annals* **15.44; writing about Rome AD 64:** But neither help by humans, nor generous gifts from the emperor, nor all the ways of placating Heaven, could stifle the scandal or dispel the belief that the fire had taken place by order [of Nero]. Therefore, to scotch the rumour, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital [Rome] itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find vogue. First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Hence, in spite of a guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrifices not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man.

Pliny the Younger, Letters 10.96, writing to the Emperor in AD 112 about Bithynia (Turkey): I interrogated them as to whether they were Christians. If they confessed I interrogated them a second and third time, threatening punishment. If they persisted I ordered them to be led off [to execution]. … As for those who denied that they were or ever had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words given by me, and prayed with incense and wine offerings to your statue, which I had ordered to be brought for this very purpose along with images of the gods, and also cursed Christ (which it is said that no true Christian can ever be compelled to do), I thought they should be discharged. Others named in the document said they were Christians but later denied it saying they had been, but that they had ceased three years ago, or many years ago, or even as much as twenty. … they said that this had been the full extent of their guilt or error: they had been accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and to sing antiphonally a song to Christ *as to a god*, and to bind themselves by an oath not to some crime, but rather not to commit theft, robbery, or adultery, not to break their trust, and not to refuse to return a pledge when asked to do so. … *many people* of every age, every rank, and of both sexes are being and will be called to trial. Nor is it only cities that are affected, but the disease of this superstition is also reaching villages and farmsteads. It seems possible to check and correct this. It is pretty well agreed that the temples, *which had almost become deserted*, have now begun to be frequented again, and all the sacred rites which had been neglected for a long time are recommencing and that the flesh for sacrificial rites is being sold, *for which up to now it was hard to find a purchaser*.

'Are the Gospels Reliable History?'
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1. According to non-Christian records, Christianity spread far and fast, and the early Christians suffered a lot. Together these conditions make it hard for the people to have simply made up the stories of Jesus even as Christianity was expanding.

2. When we look at the Christian records we see lots of signs that they were produced very close to the time and place they were talking about.

3. The most natural reading of the evidence is that the Gospels deserve our trust.