

A RELIABLE RECORD

- A. Introduction: The return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this world draws closer with each passing day. The Bible makes it clear that increasingly difficult times will precede His return. Matt 24:4-31; II Tim 3:1; etc.
1. The best thing you can do to prepare for what's coming on the earth is to become a Bible reader. The Bible tells us what is happening and why and gives us confidence and wisdom to navigate through it.
 - a. Because Bible reading is a challenge for many Christians we are taking time to talk about a very effective way to read. Become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament. (The Old Testament is easier to understand once you are competent in the New Testament.)
 - b. By regular, systematic reading I mean read ten to twenty minutes every day (or as close to that as possible). Start at the beginning of the New Testament and read each book from start to finish.
 - c. Don't stop to look up words. Don't worry about what you don't understand. Just read. Your goal is to become familiar with the New Testament. Understanding comes with familiarity and familiarity comes with regular, repeated reading.
 2. Bible reading is difficult for many because it's hard to see it as anything other than a book of Sunday School stories that don't seem relevant in a modern world. To address this issue, in the last lesson, we began to look at how the New Testament came into being. We have more to say in this lesson.
 - a. The men who wrote the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, Jude) were all eyewitnesses (or close associates of eyewitnesses) of the resurrection of Jesus. They did not set out to write a religious book. They set out to proclaim the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:30-32; 10:39-41
 1. They set out to tell people that, as a result of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, salvation from sin is available to all who believe on Him.
 2. Jesus commissioned them to spread this good news because they were eyewitnesses of His resurrection. Luke 24:44-48; Acts 1:4-8
 - b. Most of these men would die a martyr's death. They were so persuaded of what they witnessed (Jesus' death and resurrection) that they would not deny it even in the face of their own death. They gave their lives to get this message to as many people as possible. That's why, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they wrote the New Testament.
 3. Before we get into the heart of tonight's lesson we need to make some comments about the resurrection. Christianity is not based on dreams or visions or on its founder's ideology and beliefs. The central fact, the basis of the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus.
 - a. The resurrection is proof that Jesus is who He claimed to be—the Son of God (John 9:35-37; 10:36). Rom 1:4—Who was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord (NASB).
 - b. The resurrection is proof that we can trust what Jesus said. Before He was crucified, Jesus told His followers that He would rise from the dead (Matt 16:21; Matt 20:17-19). If He did not rise then we can't trust anything else that Jesus said.
 - c. The resurrection is proof that our sins are paid for and justice has been satisfied in regard to our sins.
 1. Rom 4:25—Jesus our Lord...was delivered up (to the Cross) because of our transgressions and was raised (from the dead) because of our justification (Wuest).
 2. I Cor 15:17—And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still under condemnation for your sins (NLT).
 - d. The resurrection is proof that the bodies of all who put faith in Jesus will be raised from the dead as well (I Cor 15:20-23). In that culture (1st century Israel) firstfruits referred to the first portion of various crops that were offered to the Lord as a promise that the rest will come in.

4. We also need to make a few comments about the apostles as we begin. When Jesus began His public ministry He chose twelve men to be His apostles. Luke 6:13-16
 - a. Jesus' plan was that they would "be with him" and that He would send them out to preach with power (Mark 3:14-19). Jesus poured into them during His earth ministry because they would ultimately proclaim the resurrection and oversee the church (believers in Jesus) as it developed.
 - b. Judas (the traitor) committed suicide after he betrayed Jesus and was replaced by Matthias after Jesus returned to Heaven. Note the criteria for a replacement:
 1. Acts 1:21-22—It must be someone who has been with us all the time that we were with the Lord Jesus—from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us into heaven. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection (NLT).
 2. These twelve men are known as the apostles of the Lamb (Rev 21:14). They are unique because they are the ones who accompanied Jesus through his three and a half year ministry, heard all His teachings, saw all His works, and saw His death and resurrection. Matthew, Mark, and Peter will become some of the writers of the New Testament.
 - c. Paul, who was also called to be an apostle (Rom 1:1; Eph 1:1; etc.), is not in this group. Jesus appeared to Paul several years after the resurrection, and made subsequent appearances in which He personally taught Paul the gospel that he preached (Acts 26:16; Gal 1:11-12). He wrote 14 of the 27 documents in the New Testament.
 - d. Mark and Luke weren't part of the twelve, but Mark was a companion of Peter who called him his son in the faith (I Peter 5:13) and Luke traveled with Paul on missionary journeys (Acts 20:5-21).
 5. For the rest of the lesson we're going to address the reliability of the writings in the New Testament because, not only do they seem like Sunday School stories to sincere Christians, there is an increasing attack on their reliability that is undermining the faith of uninformed Christians.
- B. The apostles spread their message orally at first because they lived in an oral culture that emphasized memorization. Less than half the people in the Roman Empire at the time of Christ could read or write.
1. The earliest written documents were epistles (James AD 46-49; Galatians AD 48-49; I and II Thessalonians AD 51-52). These letters were written to people who came to faith in Christ during the period covered in Acts. They explain what Christians believe and give instruction on how to live.
 - a. Although we call the epistles letters, they were actually discourses or sermons meant to be read aloud or delivered orally, usually to a number of people at once. Once a letter reached a group of believers (church) it was copied and shared with other groups (churches). Acts 15:30; Col 4:16
 - b. The gospels were written a little later (Mark AD 55-65; Matthew AD 58-68; Luke AD 60-68; John AD 80-90), during the life times of eyewitnesses, in part to record eyewitness testimony detailing Jesus' life, death, and resurrection before the eyewitnesses passed away.
 2. This brings us to a question: How careful were the apostolic eyewitnesses in what they reported through the spoken word and through written documents?
 - a. Keep in mind that they all were and are real people who had been given a Divine commission by Jesus Christ to proclaim what they witnessed. Luke 24:44-48; Matt 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; etc.
 1. They saw Jesus crucified, buried, and resurrected and then heard Him explain that through His sacrifice remission of sins was now available who believe on Him. This is what the nation has been waiting for, the Messiah who will open the kingdom of God by cleansing men from sin.
 2. Accuracy in what these men proclaimed would have been uppermost in their minds. James 3:1
 - b. Keep in mind that their preaching was not done in a vacuum. The apostles began to preach in the very city where Jesus had been crucified and where His tomb was accessible to all.
 1. The apostles were not the only eyewitnesses. Thousands in Jerusalem and the various regions around Israel saw and or heard of Jesus at some point in His ministry. When Jesus was

crucified (Passover) Jerusalem was packed with pilgrims who had come to celebrate the feast. There were as many as 50,000 people in the city. The empty tomb was only minutes away from the Temple where Passover lambs were slain. (Jerusalem covered about 425 acres, approximately 4,300 ft. by 4,300 ft.) There were lots of potential witnesses in a small area.

- A. If anyone telling the story got it wrong when they spoke there were plenty of people who could correct them because multitudes saw various events in Jesus' life.
- B. I Cor 15:5-7—Paul gave a list of many who saw Jesus post-resurrection who were still alive at that point (AD 55-57) and could verify what Paul said and wrote.

2. When we considered the response of people in Jerusalem, it indicates that something significant happened in Jerusalem that was known and believed by many people.

- A. Within a couple of months after the resurrection over 7,000 people in and around Jerusalem acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah. Acts 2:41 refers to 3,000 becoming believers. Acts 4:4 mentions 4,000. People were added daily to the company of believers (Acts 2:47).
- B. Remember that to profess Jesus as Messiah meant excommunication from Temple worship and loss of their way of life. But they knew something that made it worth it. John 9:22

3. All of the gospels were based on eyewitness testimony and eyewitnesses were around until the late 1st century. If a document was corrupted (incorrect, made up, altered, added to) there were plenty of people who could refute it. We can trust the accuracy of what was written.

C. How can we be sure that we have the right books in the New Testament? It is becoming increasingly common today to hear people say that the books were chosen centuries after Jesus for political purposes and that certain ancient books have been purposefully kept out of the New Testament.

1. These ideas come out of a completely misunderstanding of how certain books became part of the New Testament. The books in the New Testament were not chosen. They were recognized.
 - a. The historical record makes it clear that first century Christians, from the beginning, accepted the writings of Christ commissioned eyewitnesses (i.e., the apostles) as authoritative and received their testimony as the words of Christ Himself.
 - b. Authoritative means coming from an authority. An authoritative writing could be directly connected to an apostle or to an eyewitness from the time of the apostles. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John accepted as authoritative from the beginning.
2. The first Christians gathered weekly and someone who could read would read from scrolls with the writings of the apostles or the prophets.
 - a. A new type of manuscript began to be used in the 1st century, the codex, the ancestor of modern books. Sheets of papyrus were stacked, folded, and bound. Churches kept libraries of their codexes (or codices). They were highly prized and carefully stored.
 - b. From the beginning, there was a common core of undisputed texts that could be traced to the apostolic eyewitnesses. By the middle of the 2nd century (AD 100s) most churches had the four gospels, Acts, Paul's epistles, and I John. (gospels, Acts, Paul's epistles, I John). The other epistles took longer to become well known.
 - c. While the New Testament was in the process of being written the word of the apostles carried authority. Acts 1:21-26; 15:6-16:5; I Cor 4-5; 9:1-12; Gal 1:1-12; II Thess 3:10; etc.
 1. The apostles recognized that their writings were Scripture. Peter called Paul's letters Scripture and put the commandments given by the apostles on a par with the Old Testament prophets. II Pet 3:15-16; II Pet 3:1-2
 2. Paul referred to a statement from Luke and Matthew's gospel as Scripture: II Tim 5:18—The laborer is worthy of his reward. I Tim 5:18; Luke 10:7; Matt 10:10
 3. I Thess 2:13—These believers acknowledged that Paul brought them the Word of God. He

urged them to hold on to the teachings (II Thess 2:15). Traditions (in the Greek) means anything delivered through teaching, referring to the doctrine Paul taught.

4. Writings from the apostles carried the same weight as Jesus Himself. I Cor 14:37; I Cor 11:23-25; I Cor 7:10-11; I Cor 9:14; Rom 14:14; etc.
 - d. After the last eyewitnesses died (John was of the last ones), no more writings were accepted as authoritative because there were no eyewitnesses to tell what they witnessed.
 3. The idea that there are other books (so called lost gospel) that should have been included in the New Testament is becoming more and more popular (thanks to the internet). Sadly, this idea is undermining people's confidence in the Bible.
 - a. Lost gospels is a term that refers to ancient writings such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Phillip, the Gospel of Peter, etc.). The idea that they should be part of the New Testament but were excluded for nefarious reasons gained some popularity with *The DaVinci Code*, a novel (and later a movie) by Dan Brown.
 1. Some of these documents are accounts of Jesus' life written long after He was here and include material not found in the four gospels—i.e. Jesus performed miracles when He was a child. Others advance ideas contrary to the eyewitness testimony of the apostles. Most of the lost gospels have a Gnostic bent to them.
 2. Gnosticism was a heresy that emerged in the 2nd century, but the core ideas were developing in the latter half of the 1st century. They claimed to have a secret knowledge that will save men. Their doctrine is contrary to orthodox Christianity. The name is from the Greek word *ginoskein*, to have knowledge.
 - b. The lost gospels were not added to the New Testament because they couldn't be clearly connected to eyewitnesses of Jesus or eyewitnesses of the resurrection.
 4. What about the Book of Enoch? A copy of it was found among the Dead Sea scrolls (ancient writings found in caves along the Dead Sea beginning in 1947 that date back to before the coming of Christ).
 - a. Enoch was the 7th generation from Adam. He lived for 365 years and then was translated or taken directly to Heaven without experiencing physical death (Gen 5:21-24; Heb 11:5-6). Jude referred to a prophecy given by Enoch regarding the coming of the Lord (Jude 14-15).
 1. Enoch evidently wrote a book that was known to the Jews and, according to tradition, eventually entrusted to the tribe of Levi for safekeeping.
 2. Church fathers and rabbis between AD 32-AD 700 quoted from it. After that, it was mostly forgotten. It was never considered to be Scripture.
 - b. The Bible is not the only ancient book that contains ancient history. It is the only one inspired by God. Thirteen ancient history books are mentioned and recommended in the Old Testament.
 1. For example: The Book of Jashur (Josh 10:13; II Sam 1:18) the Book of the Wars of the Lord (Num 21:14-15), the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah (II Kings 14:18; II Chron 20:34); etc. The Book of Jashur is the only one still in existence.
 2. Jannes and Jambrees, the Egyptian magicians who withstood Moses (Ex 7:11), weren't named in Old Testament but Paul knew their names from other ancient works. II Tim 3:8
 5. Ancient history books other than the Bible do provide helpful information. But they are not on the same level as Scripture because they were not inspired by God.
- D. Conclusion: We have more to say next week, but consider this thought as we close. We live in a time when deception is increasing and we are all vulnerable. Our only protection against deception is accurate knowledge from the Word of God. Hopefully the information we are sharing is helping you see that you can trust the New Testament. Become a regular, systematic reader of this God breathed, eyewitness testimony. It will change your life.