

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

- A. Introduction: We've begun new series on the importance of reading the Bible. My goal is to inspire and challenge you to become a regular reader of the Bible (especially the New Testament). I intend to give you practical instructions that will help you overcome the obstacles that get in the way of reading the Bible.
1. Jesus is coming back to earth soon, and the Bible reveals that perilous times will precede His return. In the context of the challenges ahead Paul told Timothy, his son in the faith, to continue in or remain faithful to the Scriptures (the written Word of God). II Tim 3:1-5; II Tim 3:14-15
 - a. You can't continue in something that you don't know. Few Christians are familiar with the Bible. They may know some verses, but they don't read it the way it was meant to be read—cover to cover
 - b. People struggle with reading the Bible because they don't understand its purpose and they don't know how to approach it. People tend to look to the Bible for one-verse answers that will give immediate relief and solutions for their most pressing problems.
 1. But the Bible wasn't written for that purpose. It was written to reveal Almighty God and His plan to have a family of sons and daughters. The Bible is not a collection of individual verses. It is a collection of 66 books and letters each of which is meant to be read from start to finish.
 2. These writings tell the story of God's desire for a family and the redemption (or deliverance from sin) that is found in Jesus Christ. Every book and letter advances or adds to this story.
 - A. The Bible is divided into two parts: The Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is made up of writings written and preserved by the Jews (Israelites) the people group through whom Jesus came into this world. The New Testament writings were written by some of Jesus' first followers once He came to earth.
 - B. The New Testament records the completion of what the Old Testament anticipated and predicted—the coming of Jesus to pay for sin and redeem God's family.
 2. II Tim 3:16—The Bible is a book from God. He inspired the writings. The word inspired in this verse is made up of two Greek words (God and breathed). Inspired literally means God-breathed.
 - a. This God-breathed, God inspired, book is a supernatural book. It is the Word of Almighty God and it works in and produces change and transformation in those who hear, read, and believe it. Matt 4:4; I Thess 2:13; I Pet 2:2; etc.
 1. If you become a regular systematic reader of the New Testament you will be a different person a year from now—more peace, more joy, more hope, more life-changing knowledge of God.
 2. The Old Testament is easier to understand when you learn to read it in the greater light of the New Testament. Start reading the New and save the Old until you are competent in the New.
 - b. Set aside fifteen to twenty minutes a day to read. Begin with the first book, the Gospel of Matthew and read as far as you can in your allotted time. Don't skip around. Don't stop to look up words in the dictionary or consult a commentary. Just read. Leave a marker where you stop and pick up there the next day. Once you've read all the way through the New Testament, do it again and again.
 1. Don't worry about what you don't understand. You are reading to get familiar with the New Testament. Understanding comes with familiarity. Familiarity comes with repeated reading.
 2. This doesn't mean that you can't ever skip around or stop to look up the definition of a word, consult a commentary, or read the study notes at the bottom of the page. Just do that at another time besides your regular reading time.
 3. Sincere Christians also struggle with reading the Bible because it seems like a book of Sunday School stories or fables that teach some moral principles rather than a supernatural book. In this lesson we're going to begin to address why we can trust what the Bible claims to be—a book from God.
- B. Christianity is unique. It stands apart from every other religion or faith system in that it is based on a

historical reality witnessed by numerous people who were willing to testify about what they saw and heard—even though it cost them their lives.

1. Christianity is not based on its founder's dreams and visions or his ideology and belief system. It is founded on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible is 50% history. It is rooted in real events that can be examined by the same criteria used to examine any event from the past.
 - a. How do we know that any event in the past actually occurred? We look for surviving accounts written by people who saw or participated in the event (eyewitnesses). We look for accounts written by people who spoke to eyewitnesses. We look for any remaining physical evidence.
 - b. When the resurrection of Jesus is examined with the same criteria used to assess other historical events we find that there is more evidence for His resurrection than for many events recorded in history textbooks used in our schools and universities.
 1. There are many accounts of skeptics and unbelievers through the centuries who set out to disprove Jesus' resurrection but came away as believers when they realized the evidence overwhelmingly confirms that He did rise from the dead.
 2. Two good examples are Josh McDowell who wrote *MORE THAN A CARPENTER* and *THE RESURRECTION FACTOR*, and Lee Strobel who wrote *THE CASE FOR CHRIST*.
2. We could do many lessons on this topic, but consider just a few examples from surviving historical documents and records. It's the kind of evidence that is used in courts of law to prove cases and that is used to prove events that happened in the past.
 - a. The empty tomb. No one disputes that Jesus' tomb was empty. The argument is over what happened to His body. Everyone in Jerusalem knew that Jesus' tomb was empty. That's why the Jewish authorities paid the Roman guards to say that Jesus' disciples stole His body. Matt 28:11-15
 - b. No one was able to produce a body and no one came forward with testimony saying that they saw the disciples move and dispose of the body. This silence is deafening since it would have been in interest of the authorities to produce a body and stop this new movement before it began.
 1. Women were the first to see the empty tomb and the risen Lord—and the first to spread the news. Women were not highly regarded in that culture. If you were going to make up a story, you would not select a woman to be the source of your story. Matt 28:1-8; John 20:11-16
 2. When Peter and John went to the empty tomb they saw something that made them immediate believers—undisturbed grave clothes. The body had been wrapped like a cocoon according to Jewish customs, with strips of linen and more than 100 pounds of spices and ointments. His body couldn't have been removed without destroying the cocoon. John 20:4-8; John 19:39-40
 - c. Jesus made numerous post-resurrection appearances to a variety of people, including 500 at once. He also appeared to hostile witnesses like Saul (who became Paul) and James (Jesus' half brother), both of whom were convinced of the resurrection by what they saw. I Cor 15:4-8; Acts 9:1-5
 1. Some try to say that the apostles made up the story of Jesus' resurrection. That makes no sense because their profession of faith in Jesus did not make them wealth or famous.
 2. They were rejected by much of society and the prevailing religious establishment and ultimately executed. No one is willing to suffer and die for something they know is not true.
3. The men who wrote the New Testament were eyewitnesses (or close associates of eyewitnesses) of the resurrection—Matthew, Peter, John, (apostles), Mark (a close associate of Peter), Luke (a close associate of Paul), James and Jude (Jesus' half-brothers, converted after the resurrection), Paul (met Jesus on the Damascus road).
 - a. These men did not set out to write a religious book. They set out to proclaim a vital message: salvation from sin has come to us through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. And we saw Him alive after He was crucified. He has conquered death!
 1. Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8—Notice that on resurrection day when Jesus showed Himself alive to

His apostles He told them that they were witnesses of His death and resurrection and charged them to go and tell the world what they saw. He repeated this to charge to them before He returned to Heaven forty days later.

- A. A witness is someone who can testify to the truth of what he has seen, heard, and knows to be truth. The Greek word translated witness is *martus*.
 - B. We get the English word martyr from this Greek word. A martyr is someone who bears witness or testifies to the truth of what he believes by his death.
2. The Book of Acts reports that after Jesus returned to Heaven these men went out and proclaimed what they had seen—Jesus raised from the dead. We saw it! That was their message. Acts 2:32; Acts 3:15; Acts 4:33; Acts 5:30-32; Acts 10:39-41
 - A. When the apostles later selected a replacement for Judas the traitor that man also had to also a witness of the resurrection. Acts 1:21-22
 - B. When the resurrected Lord Jesus appeared to Paul a few years later, Jesus told him that he was to be a witness of what he had seen (the risen Lord) and what he would see and hear when Jesus appeared to him again in the future. Acts 26:16
 - b. The original twelve apostles not only saw Jesus alive after He was dead, they walked and talked with Him and lived in close contact with Him throughout His earth ministry (three and a half years).
 1. I Pet 5:1; II Pet 1:16—Peter identified himself and the other apostles as eyewitnesses of Jesus—the Word of God who took on flesh and walked this earth.
 2. I John 1:1-3—John wrote: The one who existed from the beginning is the one we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands...we have seen him. And we now testify and announce to you that he is the one who is eternal life...we are telling you about what we ourselves have actually seen and heard (NLT).
4. The New Testament was written by eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. They were so persuaded of what they saw that they were unwilling to deny it even in the face of horrible deaths.
 - a. John 1:1; John 1:4; John 1:4—John the apostle called Jesus is the Word of God or God's clearest revelation of Himself to man. We read the Bible to get to know Jesus.
 - b. Jesus makes Himself known to us through the pages of Scripture, all of which (Old and New Testament) was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and much of it (New Testament) by actual eyewitnesses of Jesus.
 - c. We cannot know God through our feelings, intellect or physical sense. We can only know Him through His written Word, the Bible.
 1. This doesn't mean that Almighty God never affects us through our feelings, intellect, or physical senses, because He does. But all of these faculties can and do give us inaccurate information from time to time. And, they can't perceive the invisible realm where God dwells.
 2. The Bible is our only 100% accurate source of information about God. It supersedes everything—including supernatural experiences (dreams, visions, prophecies, etc.).
 - d. John 5:39—Jesus said that the Scriptures testify or give witness to Him. The Scriptures point to and reveal Him (are about Him) because He is the one through whom God obtained His family.
 1. When Jesus was here on earth the Old Testament was the only portion of the Bible that had been written. The Old Testament points to Jesus through its many prophecies about His coming.
 2. On resurrection day Jesus went through the Old Testament and showed how, through His death and resurrection, He fulfilled what was prophesied about Him. Luke 24:25-27; Luke 24:44-48
 - A. Noted that Jesus explained the Old Testament passages in terms of what He had done. What He did through His death, burial, and resurrection is now spelled out in the pages of the New Testament (lessons for another time).
 - B. Here's the point: Jesus interpreted the Old Testament in light of the revelation given in

the New Testament. That's why we begin our regular reading with the New Testament, so that we too can understand the Old Testament in terms of what is revealed about Jesus in the New Testament.

5. Let's go back to where we started this lesson, where Paul exhorted Timothy (and us) to continue in the Scriptures through the perilous times that are coming on the earth. Notice an important point.
 - a. Paul reminded Timothy that He could trust what he had been told in the Scriptures because he had received them from people he could trust—his mother and his grandmother. II Tim 3:14-15
 - b. Eunice (Timothy's mother) and Lois (his grandmother) were both Jewish. (His father was Greek, Acts 16:1). The women brought Timothy up with the Old Testament Scriptures that anticipated the coming of Jesus the Redeemer.
 1. Luke 1:68-70—Israel's concept of the Scriptures (Old Testament) that they received, preserved, and read was that these were records of Almighty God's promise, through His holy prophets since the world, began to raise up a Savior.
 2. Timothy was living in the city of Lystra in the Roman province of Galatia (modern-day Turkey) when Paul visited the city on his first missionary journey in AD 47-48. Paul gave witness of the resurrected Lord Jesus and showed Timothy from the Scriptures (the Old Testament) how Jesus fulfilled everything predicted about Him. He is the Redeemer and I saw Him!
 - c. II Tim 2:2—Earlier in his epistle Paul told Timothy that you can also trust what I've taught you because it has been confirmed, not only by the Scriptures, but by reliable witnesses, including me.
- C. Conclusion: We have a lot more to say about the reliability of the Scriptures, the Bible in upcoming lessons, but consider these points as we close.
1. The apostle Peter, in a letter written shortly before he was executed for his faith in Jesus wrote to believers to remind them of what they believed and urge them not to forget it.
 - a. II Peter 1:16—In that context he wrote that we have not followed myths and fables. What we told you is real. We saw Jesus. We walked and talked with Him. We saw Him die and then we saw Him alive again. We are eyewitnesses.
 - b. To get out of a grueling death, all that Peter had to do was deny Jesus. But he couldn't do it. He knew what he saw. And his passion in life from that point on was to tell everyone he could reach that Jesus is alive. He has conquered death!
 2. We have available to us eyewitness accounts of the most important event in human history—the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ which opened the way for men and women to become sons and daughters of God through faith in Him.
 - a. Why would we not do whatever we have to do to find out what this record says, to see our Savior more clearly, and to understand more fully what He has provided through His death, burial, and resurrection? As we get to know Jesus through His book grace, peace and all His provisions come to us.
 - b. II Pet 1:2-3—May God bless you with his special favor (grace) and wonderful peace as you come to know Jesus, our God and Lord, better and better. As we know Jesus better, his divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life (NLT).
 3. Let's become Bible readers so that we are equipped to deal with the dark days ahead. We can trust what has been written. Lots more next week!