

## GOD INCARNATE

- A. Introduction: We have available to us a book from God, a book inspired by the Spirit of God. That book is the Bible (II Tim 3:16). Yet few people benefit from this remarkable book because they don't read Bible or they don't read it as it was intended to be read. In our present series, we're working on overcoming the challenges that prevent sincere people from effective Bible reading.
1. The Bible is a collection of 66 books that are divided into two sections (the Old and New Testaments). We tend to read random verses, but each of these books is meant to be read from start to finish
    - a. I am encouraging you to become a regular systematic reader of the New Testament. Regular reading means that you set aside time to read—15 to 20 minutes at least several days a week. Systematic reading means that you read each book all the way through from start to finish.
      1. When you read, don't stop to look up words or consult a Bible commentary or read the study notes. You can do that at some other time besides during your regular systematic reading.
      2. Don't worry about what you don't understand. You are reading to become familiar with the text because understanding comes with familiarity. Familiarity comes with repeated reading.
    - b. Effective Bible reading begins with the New Testament because it is a record of the completion of what the Old Testament anticipates and points to—the coming of Jesus Christ to this world.
    - c. Becoming familiar with the Bible takes time and effort—but it's worth it. If you become a Bible reader you will be a different person a year from now. Because the Bible is supernatural book, it produces growth and change in those who read it. I Thess 2:13; Matt 4:4; I Pet 2:2; etc.
  2. For the last several weeks we've been addressing the charge some make that the Bible is filled with myths, contradictions, and errors, and have more to say tonight.
    - a. Everything in the Bible was written by someone to someone about something. Real people wrote (under the inspiration of God) to other real people to communicate information. When we understand these factors it helps us see that we can trust the truthfulness and accuracy of the Bible.
    - b. The New Testament writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, and Jude) did not set out to write a religious book. All these men were eyewitnesses of Jesus or close associates of eyewitnesses, and they wrote to facilitate the spread of what they saw and heard of and from Jesus.
    - c. When Jesus rose from the dead He commissioned these men as witnesses to go tell the world that remission (wiping out of sin) is now available to all who believe on Him. Luke 24:44-48
      1. These apostles spread their message orally at first because they lived in an oral culture, a culture in which information and events were memorized and then shared orally.
      2. As the gospel message began to spread new believers wanted more than one oral testimony or teaching when an apostle visited their city. Written documents greatly expanded the apostles' reach and insured that their eyewitness testimony would be preserved.
        - A. Copies of original documents were made and circulated, and communities of believers (churches) collected and preserved their copies. These writings were accepted as authoritative because they could be traced to original apostles directly linked to Jesus.
        - B. Accurate transmission and copying of these documents was important because the message was vital (salvation from sin is now available because of Jesus' death and resurrection). And, there were plenty of other eyewitnesses of Jesus besides the original apostles who would recognize and expose inaccurate or misleading accounts.
  3. Critics who challenge the New Testament's reliability maintain that the first Christians didn't believe that Jesus is God or that He rose from the dead. They maintain that both ideas were myths added to the Bible years after the original documents were written. But they are wrong. That's tonight's topic
- B. There are twenty seven documents in the New Testament, twenty one of which are epistles or letters written

to people who became believers in Jesus through the ministries of the apostles (Jesus' first followers) as they went forth and proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus.

1. Fourteen of the epistles were written by the apostle Paul. Some of his epistles were the first inspired documents to be written and preceded the writing of the gospels. They include: the epistles to the Galatians (AD 48-49), I and II Thessalonians (AD 51-52), and I and II Corinthians (AD 55-57).
  - a. Paul was not one of Jesus' original followers. In fact, he was a Pharisee who became an ardent persecutor of Christians. He was present at and consenting to the death of Stephen, the first martyr (Acts 7:58; Acts 8:1). He terrorized the church in Jerusalem, invading homes, arresting men and women, and sending some to their deaths (Acts 8:3; Acts 9:13; Acts 22:4; Acts 26:10-11).
  - b. Jesus was crucified in AD 30. Two years later (AD 32) while Paul was traveling to Damascus, Syria with letters authorizing him to arrest Christians and bring them to Jerusalem, the resurrected Lord Jesus appeared to Paul and he was converted to Christ. Acts 9:1-8
    1. Those traveling with Paul took him to Damascus where met a believer in Jesus named Ananias, along with other Christians. Paul began to boldly proclaim Jesus. Acts 9:17-22
    2. Three years later (AD 35) Paul went up to Jerusalem and met Peter (an original apostle) and James (the Lord's brother). Gal 1:15-20
    3. Somewhere in this five year period Paul became aware of creeds (statement of beliefs) and hymns that were already in use among the first Christians. Paul later included several of these early creeds and hymns in his epistles—I Cor 15:1-4; Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20; I Tim 3:16; Rom 11:33-36.
      - A. These early oral traditions tell us what Jesus' followers believed about Him right after He returned to Heaven—before any inspired writings were penned.
      - B. Note that they date to within two or three years of the resurrection, which was not enough time for myths to develop. And, there were plenty of eyewitnesses still alive among the believers who could refute any added or incorrect information (myths) about Jesus.
2. These early creeds and hymns make it clear that the first Christians believed that Jesus rose from the dead and that He God. Consider two examples.
  - a. I Cor 15:1-4—Paul reminded his readers (believers in the Greek city of Corinth) what he taught them when he was with them in person (he had established that church)—that Jesus died for our sins as the Scriptures had predicted and that He was raised from the dead (v3-4).
    1. The way Paul worded his statement makes it clear that he was passing on an oral tradition that he himself received—one that was already in use before anything was written down (v3).
    2. Paul then listed a number of people who actually saw the risen Lord (including 500 at once), stating that most of them were still alive and could tell what they saw (v5-9).
  - b. Phil 2:6-11—This creed/hymn makes it clear that the earliest Christians believed that Jesus is God. Jesus was in the form of God, but took on the form of a slave and was made in the likeness of men.
    1. The Greek word translated form (*morphe*) literally means shape. When used figuratively it means nature (v6-7): who being in very nature God (NIV); though he was God (NLT); [possessing the fullness of the attributes which make God God] (Amp).
    2. The word likeness (v7) in this passage describes more than mere similarity or resemblance. Jesus truly became man. Jesus differed from the rest of humanity only in the sense that He was sinless, not only in behavior, but in nature—like Adam and Eve before they sinned. (*Strong's Concordance*).
3. Although this deserves its own lesson, before we continue with our discussion of why we can trust what the Bible says, we need to make some things clear about who Jesus is.
  - a. The Bible reveals that God is One God (one Being) who simultaneously manifests as three distinct Persons—the Father, the Son (or the Word) and the Holy Spirit.

1. These three Persons are distinct, but not separate. They co-inhere or share one Divine nature. They are persons, in the sense of being self aware and aware of and interactive with each other.
  2. God is not one God who manifests three ways—sometimes as the Father, sometimes as the Son, and sometimes as the Holy Spirit. You can't have one without the other. Where the Father is, so is the Son and the Holy Spirit.
  3. This is beyond our comprehension because we are talking about the Infinite God (eternal and without limits) and we are finite (limited) beings. All efforts to explain the Godhead fall short. We can only accept and rejoice in the wonder of Almighty God.
- b. Two thousand years ago, in the womb of the virgin Mary, the Word took on a full human nature (John 1:14). Jesus is God become fully man without ceasing to be fully God—one person with two natures. Jesus took on human nature primarily so that He could die for our sins (Heb 2:14-15).
1. Because the Holy Spirit formed the human nature of Jesus in the womb of Mary, Jesus did not partake of fallen human nature. Luke 1:35; Heb 10:5
  2. I Tim 3:16—Another of the hymns that Paul recorded in one of his epistles calls this a mystery—the mystery of the incarnation (a full explanation of this verse requires another lesson for another night.) To incarnate means to take on a human nature.
  3. While on earth, although Jesus was and is fully God, He didn't live as God. He lived as a man.
    - A. Jesus—in His humanity—experienced hunger, fatigue, and was tempted in all points that we are. Mark 4:38; Mark 11:12; Heb 4:15; etc.
    - B. Jesus lived as a man in dependence on God the Father and God the Holy Ghost. Acts 10:38; John 14:9-10
- c. Let's go back to Phil 2:6-11. Not only does this creed/hymn state that Jesus is God become man, it states that He died on the Cross and was exalted or raised up by God (v8-11).
1. Ten days after Jesus returned to Heaven (and 50 days after His resurrection), Peter, in his first public sermon, defined what the exaltation of Jesus meant to His eyewitnesses.
  2. Acts 2:32-33—Peter stated that God raised Jesus from the dead and we are witnesses. He further said that God the Father exalted Jesus—gave Him a position at the right hand of His throne. Exalt means to raise high, to raise in rank and power (Webster).
  3. The point for us in this week's lesson is that, from the beginning, the first Christians believed that Jesus was and is God—and that He died on the Cross and was raised from the dead. Those ideas were not myths that were added to the Bible many years later
4. Last week we talked about the biographies (or gospels) of Jesus. They were all written by eyewitnesses or close associates of eyewitnesses of Jesus—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
- a. Matthew and John were with Jesus throughout His three year ministry prior to the crucifixion. Mark got his information from Peter who was also with Jesus from the beginning. And Luke got his information from primarily from Paul, to whom Jesus appeared numerous times and taught him the message that he preached (Acts 18:9; Acts 23:11; Acts 26:16; Gal 1:11-12; etc.).
    1. The Bible doesn't say exactly when Jesus' first disciples realized that He was God incarnate. (Remember God gradually revealed His plan of redemption). It was likely a process as they watched and listened to Jesus. It was fully confirmed when He rose from the dead. Rom 1:4
    2. When these men wrote their books (Mark in AD 55-65, Matthew in AD 58-68, Luke in AD 60-68, and John in AD 80-90), they weren't coming up with new ideas. They were putting on paper what they and the others believed and proclaimed all along. They knew Jesus is God.
  - b. Matt 1:23—Matthew applied to Jesus a prophecy given to the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14) that a virgin would bring forth a child and His name would be Immanuel which means God with us.
    1. They reported Jesus' use of the phrase I Am in reference to Himself. I Am was the name that God gave to Moses when He commissioned him to lead Israel out of Egyptian slavery. Ex 3:14

- A. The best known example is in John 8:58-59 when Jesus told the Pharisees that before Abraham existed He was I Am—and they tried to stone Him for blasphemy.
  - B. Matthew and Mark reported that when Jesus walked on water and told his disciples, “Fear not, it is I”, the wording in the Greek is: It is I Am. Matt 14:27; Mark 6:50
  - C. The gospels report that Jesus forgave sin and accepted worship. All Old Testament Jews knew that only God is to be worshipped and only God can forgive sin. Matt 8:6; Matt 9:6; Matt 9:18; Matt 14:33; Matt 15:25; etc.
2. Jesus’ original followers knew that He is the God-man (fully God, fully man). The gospels refer to Jesus as the Son of God, a name that was used two ways. It refers to the fact that Jesus is God Incarnate (Matt 14:33; Matt 16:16; John 1:49. It also refers to the fact that God is the Father of Jesus’ humanity (Luke 1:32-35; Acts 13:33).
- c. John wrote his gospel to prove that Jesus is God (John 20:30-31). Although the other writers clearly presented the deity of Jesus, by the time John wrote, a belief system known as Gnosticism was developing. It denied the deity and incarnation of Jesus. Note how John opened his book.
- 1. John 1:1-14—John calls Jesus the Word who is God and who pre-existed with God, but is distinct from God. He identifies Jesus as the Creator and the Source of light and life.
  - 2. In this passage John contrasts two Greek words for the verb *was* and, in doing so, reveals that there was never a time when the Word (Jesus) did not exist. *Was (en)* denotes continuous action in the past. *Was (egeneto)* denotes a time when something came into existence.
    - A. John uses *en* for the Word (Jesus) and *egeneto* for everything else—John the Baptist (v6) and created things (v3, v10).
    - B. John used *egeneto* one time in reference to Word, when He was made (*egeneto*) flesh. At a specific point in time the Word took on flesh and became the God-man (v14).
      - 1. He is the only begotten Son. Begotten (*monogenes*) means unique, one of a special kind. This word refers to uniqueness, not to procreating and fathering (*gennaio*).
      - 2. Jesus is unique because He is the only Man who pre-existed with the Father, the only Man whose birth did not mark His beginning. He is the only God-man.
    - C. v15—John was six months older than Jesus, yet John testified that Jesus was before him. How is this possible? Because Jesus pre-existed with the Father.
- C. Conclusion: As always we have a lot more to say next week, but consider these thoughts as we close. The Bible is ultimately about Jesus (John 5:39). The writers wrote to reveal Jesus and the salvation He provides.
- 1. Acts 3:1-4:22—Not long after Jesus returned to Heaven, Peter and John got into trouble with the local religious authorities when they healed a lame man by the power of God in the name of Jesus
    - a. Note what the religious leaders said about the apostles: When the Council saw the boldness of Peter and John, and could see that they were obviously uneducated non-professionals, they were amazed and realized what being with Jesus had done for them (Acts 4:13, TLB).
    - b. These men were transformed as a result of their interaction with Jesus. You may recall that the night before He was crucified, Jesus promised His followers that He would continue to reveal Himself to His followers (be with them) through His written Word—the Bible. John 14:21
  - 2. Jesus, the Living Word, reveals Himself through the written Word. As we get to know Him through regular reading of His Word He will change and transform us. The Bible is a supernatural book that works in those who read and believe it. I Thess 2:13; Matt 4:4; I Pet 2:2; etc.
    - a. You can trust the Bible. We have the book and the words that we are supposed to have. However, we need to read it for ourselves—one, so we can be strengthened and changed for good.
    - b. And two, so that we can know Jesus as He truly is. With so many voices speaking today in the name of the Lord, you need to know Him for yourself as He is revealed in the book you can trust.