

WE FOUND THE ONE!

- A. Introduction: We're talking about the importance of becoming a regular, systematic Bible reader, primarily the New Testament. This approach is different than reading random verses and devotionals. Regular reading means reading as often as possible (daily or at least several days a week) for short periods of time (15 to 20 minutes). Systematic means reading each book from start to finish.
1. The purpose of reading regularly and systematically is to become familiar with the New Testament, because understanding comes with familiarity and familiarity comes with regular, repeated reading
 - a. The Bible is a collection of 66 books, and each book is meant to be read from beginning to end. These books tell the story of God's desire for a family, and how He obtained it through Jesus.
 - b. The Old Testament anticipates Jesus. The New is the record of Jesus' coming to earth to obtain God's family through His death, burial, and resurrection. The Bible is progressive revelation. The Old Testament is easier to understand when viewed through the greater light of the New Testament.
 - c. At first, the Bible can be hard to understand. But as you keep reading regularly and systematically, over a period of time, it will begin to make sense as you see the context of individual verses. Getting good Bible teaching is also very important, since a good teacher helps explain context.
 2. For the past few weeks we've been focusing on the fact that the New Testament gives us an accurate picture of Jesus—who He is, as well as the message He proclaimed.
 - a. This is particularly important because of the times we're in. Jesus is coming back to this world in the not too distant future. (In later lessons, we'll discuss why we can say this with certainty).
 - b. Before Jesus left this world, He warned that prior to His second coming, false christs and false prophets with false signs and wonders will deceive many. Our protection against this deception is to get to know Jesus as He is revealed in the pages of the New Testament. Matt 24:4-5; 11; 24
 3. Perhaps you've heard someone make one of the following statements about Jesus—He was a great moral teacher; if He were on earth today He would tell us to love each other; He performed miracles as a child. Each of these statements is contrary to what the New Testament tells us about Jesus.
 - a. Although Jesus was a teacher, He was much more than that. Jesus claimed to be God—so much so, His own family thought He was crazy (Mark 3:21; John 7:5). Many of His own people believed He had a devil in Him (John 10:19-20). There is no middle ground here. Jesus can't be a great moral teacher and also be insane and possessed by a devil because He claims He's God. Which is it?
 - b. If Jesus were here today, His message would not be "just love each other" because that wasn't His message two thousand years ago. His message was: Repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15). The gospel is: Jesus died for sin and rose from the dead so that sin can be remitted (I Cor 15:3-4).
 - c. The idea that Jesus did miracles as a child (i.e. made sparrows from clay) contradicts the New Testament record, which says Jesus performed His first miracle as an adult (John 2:11). The idea of a miracle working childhood comes from a later manuscript (*Infancy Gospel of Thomas*). This document was never accepted by the first Christians as a God inspired writing because it could not be connected to the apostle Thomas or any other eyewitness of the resurrected Lord Jesus.
 4. In this lesson we're going to continue to look at what the New Testament says about Jesus and why we can be certain that the information it provides is accurate and trustworthy.
- B. We've made the point that when you understand who wrote the New Testament and why, it affects how you view the information recorded in its pages. It gives you unshakeable confidence in what it says.
1. The eight men who wrote the 27 documents that make up the New Testament didn't set out to write a religious book. They wrote to tell the world what they witnessed concerning Jesus Christ.
 - a. Matthew, Peter, and John were part of Jesus' original twelve apostles. They walked and talked with Jesus for three and a half years, saw Him die, and then saw Him alive again. Matt 10:2-4

- b. James and Jude were Jesus' half brothers. Although they knew Him their entire lives, they didn't become believers until they saw Him come back from the dead. I Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19
 - c. Paul was not one of the original twelve. He became a believer when the Lord Jesus appeared to him a few years after the resurrection. Jesus commissioned Paul to be an apostle, then appeared to him a number of subsequent times and taught him the message he preached. Acts 9:1-6; Acts 26:16
 - d. Mark and Luke were not eyewitnesses, although Mark may have seen Jesus at some point prior to, and then after, His crucifixion and resurrection. However, Mark had a close association with Peter (an eyewitness) and later traveled with Paul (an eyewitness). Luke travelled with Paul and did extensive research for his books (interviewed eyewitnesses). I Pet 5:13; Acts 12:25; Luke 1: 1-3
2. The New Testament documents are not arranged in the order in which they were written. We don't know who arranged them as they are, but the arrangement makes sense.
- a. The four gospels are placed first and are named for the authors (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John). They provide historical information about Jesus from His birth to His resurrection and return to Heaven. From the gospels we learn that Jesus professed to be God and that His first followers believed Him.
 - 1. The gospels are biographies. Biographies in the ancient world were different than today. Authors devoted most of the text to important events in the person's life, not their childhood.
 - 2. The gospels give little information about Jesus' early years, but put great emphasis on His three year ministry, His death, and His resurrection—especially the week leading up to the crucifixion. When the gospels are harmonized (put together with all the events in order and nothing repeated or left out) they cover only about 50 days of Jesus' life.
 - b. All the gospels cover the same basic information. Even though there is repeat material, each gospel was written for a different audience and emphasizes a different aspect of Jesus' person and work.
 - 1. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written around the same time (Mark, AD 55-65; Matthew, AD 58-68; Luke, AD 60-68), share much of the same material, and have a similar perspective. They are known as the synoptic gospels. Synoptic means to view at the same time.
 - 2. John's gospel was written later (AD 80-90). John wrote to supplement the earlier gospels. Ninety-two percent of his material is found only in his book.
 - A. By the time John wrote, false teachers had begun to deny Jesus' deity and incarnation (the fact that He is God become man).
 - B. John wrote his gospel to clearly demonstrate that Jesus is God. Although the other gospels present the deity of Jesus, John's gospel is the most direct.
 - 3. None of the men who wrote the New Testament knew that two thousand years later, people like you and I would be studying what they wrote. They were not writing to us. They were writing to the people of their day—many of whom they knew personally—to communicate critical information.
 - a. To properly understand the Bible we must think in terms of what the writings meant to the men who wrote them, as well as to the people who read what they wrote.
 - b. Jesus' original twelve apostles were all Jewish. All the New Testament writers (except for Luke) were Jewish. As good Jews they all knew that there is only One God—Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who appeared to Moses at Mount Sinai.
 - c. For the rest of this lesson and the next we're going to consider how John and the others came to the conclusion that Jesus is God, the God of their fathers.
- C. John 1:1-18—The first eighteen verses of John's gospel are known as a prologue or introduction to His account. This prologue makes clear his intention in the book—to declare the deity of Jesus. We'll examine both the prologue and the gospel more fully in the next lesson. For now, consider these points.
- 1. John 1:1-3—John opened his gospel with a clear, direct statement that Jesus is God become man without ceasing to be God. Note that John referred to Jesus as the Word.

- a. Jesus was born into the Jewish people group and was raised as a Jew. His first followers were Jewish and, as Jews, they had some familiarity with the term Word being applied to God.
 1. At some point in their history the Jewish people ceased pronouncing God's name out of reverence for the Lord as well as fear of violating the third commandment (Ex 20:7). They began to substitute other expressions such as the Holy One, the Name, or the Word.
 2. The Targum was (is) an Aramaic paraphrase of the Old Testament Scriptures. Notice how the Targum renders Ex 19:17, which says that Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God. The Targum reads: to meet the Word of God.
- b. Notice also that John opened his gospel with the same phrase that opens the Old Testament: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1).
 1. John informed his readers that the Word was with God in the beginning, the Word was God, and the Word created all things (John 1:1-3). According to John (an eyewitness of Jesus) the Word is a pre-existent eternal Being and the Creator of the universe. The Word is Jesus.
 2. John further stated that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Two thousand years ago, the Creator of the universe entered time and space and took on a human nature in the womb of a virgin named Mary. He became fully man without ceasing to be fully God. God became man so that He could die on the Cross for sin. Heb 2:14-15
 - A. At the Cross Jesus took the punishment due to us for sin on Himself and satisfied justice on our behalf. He paid the price we owed for our sin. When any man or woman puts faith in Christ, the effects of His sacrifice are applied to them. John 3:16; I John 4:9-10
 - B. Sin is remitted (wiped out) and we are declared not guilty. God then indwells us by His life and Spirit, and we become part of the family, sons and daughter of God. John 1:12-13
2. Based on the writings of the Old Testament prophets, first century Jews were looking for a promised Messiah who was coming to earth to restore it to pre-sin conditions, establish God's kingdom, and then dwell (live) with His people. Gen 3:15; Isa 7:14; Dan 2:44; Dan 7:27; Isa 51:3; etc.
 - a. Based on two prophecies in the Book of Daniel, there was great anticipation in first century Israel that the time of the Messiah's coming was near. (We'll look at those prophecies in a later lesson.)
 - b. Then, between AD 25-27 a man known as John the Baptist began to preach in the wilderness of Judea, east of Jerusalem. His message was: Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand. He also began to baptize people in preparation for the coming of the Lord. A quick side note:
 1. This was not Christian baptism. Baptism or ceremonial purification was a common practice among the Jews. The idea behind John's baptism was: Prepare for the Lord's coming. This baptism (cleansing) was an expression of faith in the fact that the Lord's coming was near.
 2. John's ministry caused great excitement in Israel. There had been no prophetic voice in Israel since the prophet Malachi 400 years earlier. Before John was conceived, the angel Gabriel appeared to his father and told him his wife would bear a son who would come in the spirit and power of Elijah the prophet to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. Luke 1:13-17
 - c. John 1:19-24—Multitudes of people from all over turned out to hear John preach and be baptized. This drew the attention of the religious leaders (Pharisees, Sadducees) who sent priests to ask John: Who are you? He answered: I am not the Christ (the Messiah), that prophet, or Elijah.
 1. Moses had written that the Lord will raise up a prophet like him (Deut 18:15-19). The prophet Malachai wrote that the Lord will send the prophet Elijah before He comes. Mal 4:5
 2. John claimed to be the Lord's forerunner and answered by quoting the prophet Isaiah: I am the voice of the one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord. Isa 40:3
 - d. John 1:29—The next day John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching and cried out: Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This would have resonated with his audience.
 1. The prophet Daniel was the first to use the term Messiah (which means Anointed One). Daniel

wrote that Messiah will: Bring an end to sin, atone for guilt, (and) bring in everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24, NLT).

2. Every Jew in Jesus' day was familiar with sacrificing lambs—from the yearly Passover lamb which commemorated their deliverance from Egyptian slavery to the sacrifice of lambs for various sin offering throughout the year. John declared: God has provided this Lamb.
3. John 1:32-34—John Baptist then revealed how he knew who Jesus was. He stated that God, who sent him to prepare men and women for the coming of the Lord, also told him that the one on whom he saw the Spirit coming and remaining is the Son of God. Note these points.
 - a. Remember that in their culture they understood the phrase “son of” to mean sameness of nature and equality of being (Eph 2:2-3; Eph 5:6-8). That's why the Jews took up stones to stone Jesus when He referred to God as His Father (John 10:33; John 5:18; etc.).
 - b. Matt 3:16-17 describes Jesus' baptism by John. Note that the Son of God was baptized, the Spirit of God descended on Him, and God the Father spoke from Heaven.
 1. The Bible reveals that God is one God (One Being) who simultaneously manifests as three distinct Persons—the Father, the Word (the Son), and the Holy Spirit. These three Persons are distinct but not separate. They co-inhere or share one Divine nature, One God, three Persons.
 2. We'll say more in later lessons. For now, note that none of the eyewitnesses felt compelled to try to explain what they saw and heard. They simply accepted it. (All efforts to explain what is known as the Trinity fall short. We can only accept and rejoice in the wonder of God.)
 - c. In that culture priests, kings, and prophets were anointed with oil when they were set apart for service. Anointing with oil was a symbol of endowment with the Holy Spirit. Jesus was anointed because He was about to begin His public ministry, which would culminate at the Cross. Acts 10:38
4. John 1:35-37—The day after that, as John Baptist was standing with two of his disciples, Jesus walked by and John again declared: Behold, there is the Lamb of God. The two disciples followed Jesus and spent the day with him.
 - a. John 1:40-42—One of the men was Andrew, brother of Simon (Peter). Andrew went to tell his brother: ***We have found the Messiah, the Christ,*** and brought Peter to Jesus.
 - b. John 1:43-51—Jesus then went to Galilee, encountered Phillip, and called him to be His disciple. Philip went to Nathanael and said ***we've found the One Moses and the prophets wrote about.***
 1. When Jesus saw Nathanael, He called him an honest man. Nathaniel replied: How is it that you know me? Jesus answered: I could see you under the fig tree before Philip came to you (v48, NLT). Nathanael responded: You are the Son of God, the King of Israel (v49).
 2. Jesus assured him that he would see greater things than this. Jesus said: You're going to see angels coming out of Heaven to the Son of Man. To the Jews, this was a claim of Deity. The prophet Daniel wrote that the Son of Man—a Divine figure—will come at the end of the world to judge mankind and rule forever (Dan 7:13-14). Jesus took that title for Himself.

- D. Conclusion: We haven't said all that we need to say, but consider these points as we close. This is a historical record of real people who encountered Jesus when He was on earth two thousand years ago.
1. Over the next three and a half years they will watch Jesus, listen to Him, and learn from Him. There will be ups and downs, times of certainty and wavering. But ultimately, they will see Jesus die and then rise from the dead, silencing all doubt that He is indeed God Incarnate. These eyewitnesses wrote the New Testament documents to convey what they saw and heard.
 2. Note John's statement about why he wrote his gospel: John 20:30-31—Jesus' disciples saw him do many other miraculous signs besides the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life (NLT). Much more next week!!