

INTRODUCTION TO TALK 1:

FORMAT FOR THE NIGHT: Presentation followed by Q&A. Questions to clarify presentation welcome during presentation.

WHY WE ARE DOING THIS SERIES:

To many the bible is a mysterious book. To Christians, the word of God; mostly loved, sometimes feared, often misunderstood, and to some, just a book containing some good lessons. To the world, either something incomprehensible, something curiously powerful or something to be attacked and derided.

Our goal in this series is to **shed some light on some of the claims the bible** makes about itself:

- How and why it was put together;
- How it was transmitted over the years;
- Highlight criticisms.

So we're not here to make **scholars**, but we want to take the veil off and expose some of the behind the scenes of this amazing book, so that you can be confident in what you believe.

There are non-Christians who are subjected to a barrage of websites, popular books and a media that are very quick to disparage the bible and never get a chance or take the time to find out the truth for themselves. Perhaps this course can help you be a source of truth on the subject.

There are also Christians who are often perplexed by what they read, sort of like the Ethiopian official in Acts: "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" Aside from theological issues which are openly discussed in churches, a Christian might ask themselves questions like "why aren't there more details about Jesus' youth?" or "why do so many gospel accounts seem to differ from each other"?

Sadly these kinds of questions are not commonly spoken of in church, leaving people 'haunted' by the bible, wondering if **what they have heard and believed is true**.

We want to get this all out in the open and clear away any cobwebs.

WHAT WE WILL BE DISCUSSING OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS:

- 1) Can we understand why the NT looks the way it does (Form)
- 2) Can we figure out when it was written, and by who, and what about other books (Authorship)
- 3) Can we trust the way it came down to us today (Manuscripts)
- 4) Can we understand the contents (historical/geographical accuracy)
- 5) Can we understand the contents II (errors and contradictions)

PART 1: WRITING WITH A PURPOSE AND A GOAL

Why and how are things written?

Imagine a book about the building of the Champlain bridge- Origin/details/chronology

Now imagine a book about a person, a biography, do you think it would be different?

The 'data dump' style of high school history was fun for no one.....

How we want History/Biography: We want it unbiased and scientific in its details and facts.

Or do we? More likely we want to find out what the person/period was **LIKE** as well as what they **DID**.

This requires a perspective or a judgment from the author.

Why ancient historians wrote- The contemporaries (and near contemporaries):

Titus Livy, History of Rome - *"The subjects to which I would ask each of my readers to devote his earnest attention are these-the life and morals of the community; the men and the qualities by which through domestic policy and foreign war dominion was won and extended. Then as the standard of morality gradually lowers, let him follow the decay of the national character, observing how at first it slowly sinks, then slips downward more and more rapidly, and finally begins to plunge into headlong ruin, until he reaches these days, in which we can bear neither our diseases nor their remedies."*

Josephus - *"Now of these several reasons for writing history, I must profess the two last were my own reasons also; for since I was myself interested in that war which we Jews had with the Romans, and knew myself its particular actions, and what conclusion it had, I was forced to give the history of it, because I saw that others perverted the truth of those actions in their writings."*

They used history **as a moral essay**. Common theme- a desire to set the record straight from earlier works, and to show that all declines are moral declines. So with Polybius, Tacitus, Plutarch, etc.

They are not merely recording facts, they are telling a story that is a cautionary tale.

So in the main someone will write history or biography to get some idea out there.

Why write the gospels and the letters?

Luke (author Luke/Acts) had the same idea. Luke's intro is similar to other historians and biographers [READ LUKE 1:1-4] ..**that You may know the certainty of the things you have been taught**. In other words, a source for the true account of Jesus, just as others did before him. So what Luke is claiming here is that he is writing down an accurate retelling of the **life and work** of Jesus as well as what was going on in the early church. He's claiming these things are carefully researched, meaning that finding out the **truth was paramount**. It should also be remembered that Luke was deeply and personally involved and had devoted his life AND SOUL to Christ- this is not a pet project, he was living it.

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF A WRITTEN ACCOUNT? AUTHORITY

-Jesus quoted the OT as authority. It was the source of knowledge about Him handed down to that time.

-The apostles quoted OT, but mostly they quoted Jesus as authoritative.

-Christians would quote both the **Old & New Testament** authority for them

Paul in the letter to Timothy (2 Tim 3:16):

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Spreading out of the Church: The disciples, being **alive and eyewitnesses** among the many other eyewitnesses were teaching and traveling and building up the early churches. Within a decade churches were spreading all over the Mediterranean, and numbers were rapidly growing. **Now you're beyond available eyewitnesses to tell the stories or for the Jerusalem council to be nearby as a source.**

PART 2: WHERE DID THEY GET THE MATERIAL TO PUT IN THE BIBLE?

What do you start with? Do you write out everything Jesus said or did, or address every question in every church everywhere?

John 21

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

How do they get and hang onto the material they needed?

AS the disciples of other teachers in Judaism of the time [Talmud: Jochanan's disciple Eleazar son of Hyrcanus- Well plastered cisterns that never lost a drop], they would preserve what they heard- how?

- Continuing to remember and memorize many of Jesus' words (as in ancient schools)
- Compiling notes on what He said and did
- Discussing it and teaching it daily, and applying daily
- The style of of Jesus' teaching aided memory (parables, true to life examples)

REMEMBER: They were not observers or passers-by to these events

ex. Simpsons Quotes today

The disciples didn't just go home and become shopkeepers and get on with their usual lives who, in their retirement decided to write a memoir 30-60 years later. **They were active in their faith, many of them traveling all over the world, involved in evangelism, missions to other churches, others keeping it together in Jerusalem (acting as a central council) and nearby.**

This was an everyday part of their lives.

They also had access to other eyewitnesses, common people (many named in the NT) as well as people on the inside the halls of power (Joseph of Aramathea, Nicodemus, etc). How did they know what went on at Herod's party when John the Baptist was executed? How about **Luke 8:3**, the disciple Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager?

Jesus himself promised them the help of the Holy Spirit to guide them in John 14:26

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

PART 3: WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT THE BIBLE TO LOOK LIKE?

How do you arrange the material you have, and how do convey your message?

Ancient historians systematically order, topically and logically, with relevant material for their subject.

Since the gospels are in a way a biography of Jesus, let's look and compare it to some of the other biographical work. **Plutarch's lives** [2nd century AD]. In his section on the life of Alexander the great, he talks about his motivation in writing the book: [quote]

It is the life of Alexander the king, and of Caesar, who overthrew Pompey, that I am writing in this book, and the multitude of the deeds to be treated is so great that I shall make no other preface than to entreat my readers, in case I do not tell of all the famous actions of these men, nor even speak exhaustively at all in each particular case, but in epitome for the most part, not to complain. For it is not Histories that I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles when thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities. Accordingly, just as painters get the likenesses in their portraits from the face and the expression of the eyes, wherein the character shows itself, but make very little account of the other parts of the body, so I must be permitted to devote myself rather to the signs of the soul in men, and by means of these to portray the life of each, leaving to others the description of their great contests.

Writers are free with some things that would surprise us, but they are only interested in getting their point across.

Example: Early life of Jesus- almost none- why?

Plutarch: Alexander- one or two precocious incidents, tutored by Aristotle
J. Caesar- Starts when he is already married
Arrian- Anabasis of Alexander. No mention of Alexander's early life.
Gospel and letter writers want to get to the ministry of Jesus.

Categories-

Completeness: Who was at the tomb? John 20:1-2/Mark 16:1/Matt 28:1/Luke 24:10
Take the Test! "Who was at the event?"

Quotations: Quotations often summaries, done commonly- beatitudes- Luke 6:20-26/Matt 5:3-12

Precision: "Not one stone left on the other" Matt 24:2; Mustard seed the smallest" Mark 4:30-32

Chronology: Speeches out of place, included together thematically rather than in time, or things are sped up like the Fig tree Matt 21:18-22. Cleansing of the temple.

Condensing: OT quotes where several are mixed together as if it is one passage
Centurion with the dying servant, did he go or didn't he? Is the servant dead, or isn't he?

Conclusion:

Does knowing all this help?

What about the idea that showing these mundane details makes the text seem inspired by men and not by the Holy Spirit. Far from it; what SHOULD the text have looked like?

Just as God uses our personality to further His kingdom and to work on us individually, He would of course use the character and experience of the writers of the bible- that's communication

[Acts 17:24-28]