



MidWeek Study: Church Essentials: The Bible

Pastor Mike Ruel: Week 3

INTRODUCTION

- Back to the Bible: Review...
 - The Bible is an _____ of the church
 - The Bible is God's _____ of himself
- The Bible tells _____ story in four parts:
 - Creation / Fall / Redemption / Restoration
- Roadmap
 - Week 1 - Define terms
 - Week 2 - OT Canon
 - Week 3 - The Gospels
 - Week 4 (final week!) NT Canon and Textual Criticism

- Gospels - Are they reliable?

- Tonight's big question: Are the gospel accounts _____?
- Not everyone would say that they are reliable...
 - NY Times Best Selling author, UNC professor, and NT textual expert Bart Ehrman has made a career out of saying that in fact the gospels are in fact NOT reliable at all.
 - His books include "Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remember, Changed and Invented their Stories of the Savior."
 - As well as "Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why"
 - One of his famous claims is this "there are more differences among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament."¹

¹ Ehrman, Bart D. *Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. 1. paperback ed., [Nachdr.]. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007. 10.

- Is this true? Are these differences/mistakes significant? Do they change what we know about Jesus?
- What about culture? Weren't most of the people _____?
- Weren't things changed or distorted?
- Again, Dr. Ehrman weighs in – “The invention of memories of Jesus is not simply a modern phenomenon. It has always been going on. From the very earliest of times.”²
- So where does this leave us? Well, we really only have two options, either they are or are not reliable.
 - What is so bad if the gospels are NOT reliable?
 - If the gospel accounts are NOT reliable, then the Jesus we have based our lives around as his church doesn't exist and our lives are a pathetic sham...a giant waste of time.
 - If Jesus didn't say the things he did, if he didn't die and raise again back to life – as the Bible itself puts it “We're the most pitiful people on the planet.” (1 Corinthians 15:19)
- BUT, if the gospels ARE reliable, then we're basing our lives on the real and true historical person of Jesus and we all need to come to reckoning about what to do with this Jesus.
- Three big questions:
 - How could an _____ culture produce reliable writings?
 - Wasn't stuff deliberately _____?
 - What about the _____ gospels?

- Question 1: How Could an Illiterate Culture Produce Reliable Writings?

- So...was the majority of the culture at that time illiterate? Basically, yes...but that doesn't mean that they could not accurately _____ or _____ historical events.
 - First, scribes existed - whose (literal...see what I did there) job it was to WRITE.
 - Second, depending on the job you had, you definitely needed to read and/or write.
 - Matthew was a tax collector - you'd better believe that he could read and write, Luke was a doctor...same thing
 - But wasn't it like a giant game of telephone? By the time the stories were written down the true facts have been lost...? No. Why?

² Ehrman, Bart D. *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior*, 2017, 25.

- Third, there was “Informal _____ Oral Tradition”³
 - Yes, it was predominantly an oral culture in 1c Greco-Roman culture...
 - Bailey reports additionally that stories had varying levels of controls put in place to assure accuracy from no flexibility in the case of poems or proverbs, to some flexibility for historical persons and events, to total flexibility for jokes or casual news.

- Question 2: Wasn't Stuff Deliberately Changed?

- So, were the accounts of Jesus we see now in the gospels changed in the time between when they occurred and when they were written down? Answer: _____.
- Was there a gap between the actual events and the time period when they were written down as the gospels? Yes, but when the gospels were being written the _____ were still alive.
- Examples
 - Judas
 - Matt 27:3-10 said he hung himself / Acts 1:15-19 said he fell and his guts came out
 - Ehrman “It is very difficult, maybe impossible, to reconcile these accounts.”⁴ WHY?
 - Jesus “Messianic Secret”
 - Why did he tell people to be quiet about what he did for them and who he was? (Mark 1:44; 3:11-12) The Jews he told them to keep quiet as it wasn't his time yet
 - Mark 5:18-20: But the Gentiles he told them to go tell all about it
- _____ was deliberately changed/distorted. Why?
 - Because authors were _____.
 - Matthew and John were direct eyewitnesses
 - Mark and Luke were written by direct testimonies from other eyewitnesses
 - Mark used Peter
 - Luke used Paul
 - The eyewitnesses were still alive and were the gatekeepers of the truth.
 - Eventually, as those eyewitnesses passed on, they knew they needed to write them down to leave solid accounts of Jesus for the early church.

³ Kenneth Bailey, “Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels,” The Gospel Coalition, accessed September 22, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/informal-controlled-oral-tradition-and-the-synoptic-gospels/>.

⁴ Ehrman, Jesus Before the Gospels, 28

- Approximate dates of Writing:
 - Matthew ~70AD (some say earlier, before the fall of Jerusalem)
 - Mark ~late 50s-mid 60s AD
 - Luke ~62AD (after Acts 28)
 - John ~90AD
- Because the _____ church accepted them very quickly as canon
 - Brant Pitre, another New Testament scholar writes “the earliest Christian writings outside of the New Testament are completely unambiguous and totally unanimous about who wrote the four gospels. Even more, some of these writings come from authors who either knew the apostles themselves, or who were only one generation away from the apostles.”⁵
 - If we connect this with the informal controlled tradition of oral eyewitness accounts now transferred to written accounts – it becomes highly _____ that there could be any significant material changes made to the gospels, without the eyewitnesses intervening and correcting anything false.
- Papias ~120AD
 - “This also the presbyter said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ.”
 - “Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could.”
- Iraneus ~180AD
 - “Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome . . . After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.” —
- Tertullian ~200AD
 - “Of the apostles, therefore, John and Matthew first instill faith into us; whilst of apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterwards.”
- Other references to the gospels as _____:
 - “Nor should you pray like the hypocrites, but as the Lord commanded in his gospel, you should pray as follows, ‘Our Father in heaven, . . .’” — Didache (AD 100)

⁵ Brant James Pitre and Robert Barron, *The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ*, First edition (New York: Image, 2016), 69.

- “As it is written (“γέγραπται”), ‘Many are called, but few are chosen’” (Matt 22:14) — The Epistle of Barnabas (AD 130)

- Question 3: What about the “Other” Gospels?

- Other writings? Yes. Other “gospels?” No.
 - Why? BC they didn’t _____ the real eyewitness accounts that had been well understood by then.
 - Furthermore, we now have _____ of copies of the NT manuscripts that all maintain a consistent testimony of who Jesus was, what he did, and why it mattered. Were there any differences between these thousands of copies? Yes, and we will direct our attention to that truth and its implications as we answer our third and final question in this excursus.
 - We will talk more about this next week
- Very little manuscript evidence - All Apocryphal gospels combined have ~17.