

ReGroups 5/21/23

Making of the Bible: Eyewitnesses

Bridging the Gap

In our last study, we traced the Old Testament all the way back to Moses, who first received revelation from God on Mt. Sinai. From there, the Torah was shepherded by several prophets and priests until finally ending up in the hands of Ezra. God used Ezra to bring together all the Books of the Law, Israel's history, and books of poetry and prophecy.

Ezra wrote the final books of the Old Testament, 1st and 2nd Chronicles. These books traced Israel and the Redemption Promise all the way back to Adam and foreshadowed the coming Messiah. **Spend a few minutes reflecting on this process, hearing and attending to any questions that you may have pertaining to the previous study.**

We also learned that our Old Testament was indeed considered to be the complete Scriptures during the days of Jesus. While to them this would be the *Only Testament*, we know there is still more to the story. For this reason, perhaps you question the gap between the Old and New Testaments. *Why did God's revelation seemingly pause for a 400+ year period?*

The final Old Testament prophet, Malachi, concludes his book with a sense of finality, but also a promise of more to come: **Malachi 3:1, 4:4-6**

Malachi urges the people to cling to the word that began with Moses, but also alludes to the fact that they needed *something more* to bring them into complete fellowship with God. **Moses** may have led the people into the land, but they needed a **Greater Deliverer** to lead them into a relationship with God. A new prophet, in the spirit of Elijah, would come one day and begin turning hearts towards the Lord.

Also, **Amos 8:11-12** gave the people of Israel a word from God during this time that foretold of this silent period. Similar to how Israel had spent 400 years in the **bondage of slavery** in Egypt, they would spend over 400 years in this **bondage of silence**. Just as God sent Moses to deliver them, He was preparing to send Jesus... **Talk about the similarities here and imagine what that period of silence must have been like.**

The Good News Begins

While Matthew comes first in the New Testament, most agree that Mark was *written first*. Mark was Peter's account of the life of Jesus and is basically the most simplified and concise version of His Story. Matthew would take the foundation of Mark's Gospel and flesh it out with more Old Testament references, citing prophecies fulfilled and showing how Jesus essentially fulfilled the Law of Moses in ways that nobody else could.

Matthew's story pretty much mirrors Mark's once he gets to chapter 3, but his first two chapters focus on Jesus' birth and are meant to confirm that He is of the Messianic lineage as previously foretold. **Matthew 1:1** shows the reader right out of the gate, that Jesus came from Abraham and David - He was *indeed* the long awaited Messiah.

Mark's Gospel *begins* just like Malachi's book *ends*. Read **Mark 1:1-3** and see how he directly ties this new beginning with the previous period's ending. Mark's opening line that this was "*The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*" is a clear homage to Genesis and a way of signaling the importance of the story he was writing. Likewise, **John 1:1-4** is also a callback to the first book of the Bible. **Read these two Gospel accounts and compare them to Genesis 1:1-3. What similarities do you find? Do you think these parallels were intentional and meant to show how the Gospels were the beginning of something new?**

This leaves us with one Gospel, which may turn out to be the most essential in terms of explaining how the New Testament came together. **Read Luke 1:1-4 and discuss how different and unique his introduction is. Also, consider how this may explain the very approach that was taken by Matthew, Mark, and John in giving their accounts.**

Luke was commissioned by a wealthy patron, Theophilus, to thoroughly investigate the events that had taken place in and around Judea around 30 AD. Many were curious about the Jesus movement as it was taking the world by storm in the years following His death. Luke went and talked to "**eyewitnesses**" and "**ministers of the word**" - **those who had encountered Jesus and were the keepers of the stories He told and miracles He performed.**

We know that the Disciples were amongst the witnesses, including Matthew, Peter, and John. We know that people like Mark, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus, and many others held fast to their own interactions with Jesus and the stories they'd heard about Him.

All of these personal accounts were precious additions to all four Gospels, and set the tone for the New Testament that followed. All that was told about Jesus and the Church He was building would be written by the categories that Luke introduces us to: *Eyewitnesses* (**Directly called by Jesus**) and *Ministers of His Word* (**Sat under Jesus or influenced by His original, earthly work.**)

If we break down the New Testament authors they all fit into these groups:

Eyewitnesses: Mathew, John, Peter, Paul

Ministers of His Word: Mark, Luke, James, Jude

You could slot James and Jude into *both* categories in that they were His brothers and no doubt saw many things with their own eyes, but they didn't come to faith until after His Resurrection and were convinced to join. Similarly, Paul may seem out of place in the "eyewitness" category, but even though he wasn't one of the original twelve he was personally called by Jesus on the Damascus road.

Of these eight, it seems that Luke was the only *layman* of the group. While he would eventually accompany Paul on his journeys, Luke was not himself a preacher. He was a physician turned journalist, who strongly supported the work of the Church and was a key witness to its *expansion*. Luke of course gave us the Book of Acts which details how the Church grew from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The context for all the letters to the Churches written by Paul, Peter, James and John all comes from Acts, in that we get to see these churches *established*. **Can you name some of the churches we read about in Acts and connect them to the letters that were written to them?**

One of Luke's major points in Acts is how the Early Church put eyewitnesses front and center in their evangelistic efforts. They wanted people to know that their stories were trustworthy. When electing someone to take Judas' spot on the core team, this was the main requirement: **Acts 1:21-23**.

We read this line again and again in Acts, how those on the front line of missions had been witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. In many ways this made their message irrefutable and undeniable. Read **Acts 4:13-20** and see how Peter and John were able to silence their doubters and discover the motivation behind their continued work.

This is why the New Testament quickly became trusted as God's new revelation, because it was literally the account of the very men who had been with Jesus.

Just As He Said

Another reason the New Testament was held up in confidence was how it all came together in such a short period of time. Matthew and Mark were written in the first decade of the Church, with Luke coming shortly thereafter. Perhaps the greatest proof of *how early* the Gospels were in fact written is how they feature **Jesus predicting the Temple's destruction**, which happened in August 70 AD. Unlike other places in Scripture, there is no editorial entry saying "*and this was fulfilled in 70 AD*", because the stories would have been written *beforehand*.

If anyone had any doubts about the Gospels as God's Word, **Matthew 24:1-2** offers an affirming word. Nobody believed Jesus when He said that the temple stones would be *thrown down*, because no one could imagine them actually being moved. However, when Rome were fed up with the Jews, they sent their legions into Jerusalem to completely disassemble the Temple *one stone at a time*. Thousands of soldiers pushed and pulled on these massive blocks, leading to the destruction of the city and the end of Jerusalem *and* Judaism.

A Second Pillar

It would take yeas for these books to be copied and collected into one document, but as they were being written and compiled, it was clear to everyone that **the New Testament** was being organized. While these Apostles and Witnesses were all living, their spoken word helped the Church to begin taking shape. As they began to die off, it was imperative that their writings be brought together. The Apostle Paul had an early insight on the larger, completed Bible that was coming together in his words in **Ephesians 2:18-22**. The Old Testament was put together by the prophets of old, while the New Testament was the work of Jesus' apostles.

The litmus test for the Old Testament prophets was **their service to the nation of Israel** from its inception under Moses to its final, free days under Nehemiah. (Persia restored Israel to independence in 530 BC, but the Greeks and Romans would conquer the land not long after). The litmus test for the New Testament apostles was **their relation to the earthly life of Jesus**, hence the *much shorter* window for all for it all to come together. (The *OT was written between 1400-450 BC, while the NT was written between 30-95 AD*)

Spend few minutes reflecting on how the New Testament came together and how we can be confident in its witness. Next time we'll discuss the so-called "Lost books of the Bible" and learn about books that simply didn't make the cut and shouldn't be equated or confused with Scripture.