

54. In what four books especially, do we find the story of the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth?
55. For what purpose were these four books, commonly called the Gospels, written?

Lesson Fifty-seven

THE CREDIBILITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS

Scripture Reading: Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-8, Gal. 1:11-20, 2 Pet. 1:12-21.

Scriptures to Memorize: "Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). "Am I not free? am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (I Cor. 9:1). "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16).

56. **Q.** What did Jesus Himself say to His Apostles with regard to their witnessing for Him?
- A.** He said: "Ye shall be my witnesses . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth."
57. **Q.** How are the Apostles witnessing for Jesus unto the uttermost part of the earth?
- A.** The Apostles are witnessing for Jesus among all nations in and through the New Testament writings.

(1) As it has been frequently pointed out, the Apostles were essentially witnesses; and not priests, philosophers, reformers, clergymen, or theologians. (2) Their testimony as set down in the books of the New Testament pertains to what they saw with their eyes; in other words, matters of their own personal experience. 1 John 1:1—"that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled," etc. (3)

To the extent that the apostolic testimony is proclaimed everywhere by faithful ministers and evangelists, just to that extent do the Apostles witness for Christ unto the nations. Matt. 28:19—"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations." Mark 16:15—"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation." 2 Tim. 2:2—"the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Matt. 24:14—"this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come."

58. Q. What claims do the New Testament writers make for themselves in their writings?

A. The New Testament writers claim for themselves: (1) actual personal knowledge of the matters related; (2) accuracy in assembling and relating the matters presented; (3) possession and inspiration by the Holy Spirit; and (4) divine authentication through the miracles which they performed.

(1) *Those who were Apostles claim actual personal knowledge of the matters related.* Luke 24:45-48, "Then opened he their mind, that they might understand the scriptures; and he said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Ye are witnesses of these things." Acts 2:32—"This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses." Acts 10:39-41, "And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem: whom also they slew, hanging him on a tree. Him God raised up the third day, and gave him to be made manifest, not to all the people, but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead." John 1:14—"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and

we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." 1 John 1:1-4, "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ: and these things we write, that our joy may be made full." 2 Pet. 1:16—"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty." Cf. also Rev. 1:1-3, 1:10-20, etc. (2) *Paul, in numerous scriptures, relates how Jesus appeared to him in His resurrection body, to call him to the apostleship.* See Acts 22:3-21, Acts 26:2-23, etc. 1 Cor. 9:1—"am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" 1 Cor. 15:8—"and last of all, as to the child untimely born, he appeared to me also." Gal. 1:11, 12—"For I make known to you, brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ." (3) *Luke, who was not an Apostle, nevertheless claims for himself accuracy in assembling and relating the matters presented in his books.* Luke 1:1-4, "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus; that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed."

Cf. Acts 1:1-8: here Luke continues his narrative from the point where he terminates it in his Gospel. (4) *The New Testament writers claim for themselves possession, guidance and inspiration by the Holy Spirit.* John 16:13—"when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all the truth." Acts 2:4—"they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts 15:28—"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us," etc. Acts 16:6—"having been forbidden of the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia," etc. 1 Cor. 2:12, 13—"But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God: that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words." 1 Peter 1:12—"these things, which now have been announced unto you through them that preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven." (5) *They also claim for themselves divine authentication through the miracles which they performed.* Mark 16:20—"And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed." Heb. 2:4—"God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will." Acts 19:11—"and God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul." 1 Cor. 2:4—"and my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

59. Q. What do we mean by the Credibility of the New Testament writers?

A. By the Credibility of the New Testament writers, we mean their reliability as witnesses of Jesus Christ.

That is, were they competent witnesses? Were they in a position to know with regard to what they wrote? Are we justified in accepting their claims as valid? Were they

honest and sincere witnesses? And, is their testimony trustworthy? etc., etc.

60. Q. What is the first valid ground on which we accept the New Testament writers as reliable witnesses?

A. The first valid ground on which we accept the New Testament writers as reliable witnesses, is their obvious competency.

(1) They had opportunities of personal observation and inquiry. The Apostles were men who had been intimately associated with Jesus throughout His ministry (cf. Acts 1:21). Mark was a close companion of Barnabas and Paul (2 Tim. 4:11), and later of Peter (1 Peter 5:13); and, according to Papias, was instructed in the writing of his Gospel by Peter himself. Luke was long and intimately associated with Paul (Acts 16:10, 2 Tim. 4:11, Philemon 24). And Paul himself declares that he received his knowledge by special revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12). These men, in other words, possessed actual knowledge with respect to the matters related in the documents which they wrote. (2) They were men of sobriety, respect for the truth, and moral discernment; and therefore could not have themselves been deceived. Matthew was originally a tax collector; Peter, James, and John, humble peasant fisherman; Luke, a physician, man of science, an educated man, as his writings show; and Paul was the most brilliant scholar of his time. It is illogical to assume that these men were overwrought religious enthusiasts, controlled by their emotions, and guided by visions and hallucinations. There is too much evidence to the contrary: viz. that they were sober-minded, reverent men, who recorded in their writings their own actual experiences, as trustworthy witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ.

61. Q. What is the second valid ground on which we accept the New Testament writers as reliable witnesses?

A. The second valid ground on which we accept the

New Testament writers as reliable witnesses, is their obvious honesty.

(1) "The moral elevation of their writings, and their manifest reverence for the truth and constant inculcation of it, show that they were not wilful deceivers, but good men" (Strong, *Systematic Theology*, p. 172). If they were not all that they claimed to have been, obviously then they must have been impostors, liars or fools. (2) Their honesty is further evident from the fact that their testimony imperiled all their worldly interests. (3) Their honesty is positively substantiated by the fact that they not only suffered hardships and persecutions, *but actually gave their lives in martyrdom for their testimony*. No greater evidence of sincerity is available in any human being!

62. Q. What is the third valid ground on which we accept the New Testament writers as reliable witnesses?

A. The third valid ground on which we accept the New Testament writers as reliable witnesses, is the complementary nature of their writings.

That is, though separate and independent witnesses, their writings mutually support one another; and their collective testimony, so far as doctrine is concerned, is a *unit*. Hence it is *never* spoken of in scripture as the *teachings*, but always as the *teaching*, of Christ. We read in the New Testament Scriptures of "strange teachings" or doctrines (Heb. 13:9); of "doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1); and of "doctrines of men" (Col. 2:22); but not once of the *doctrines* of Christ or of the Apostles' *doctrines*. The teaching of Jesus and His Apostles, as presented in collective form in the New Testament writings, is always given in the *singular* (the *doctrine*, the *teaching*), simply because it is a *unit* (Mark 4:2, John 7:16-17, Acts 2:42, Tit. 2:10, Heb. 6:1, 2 John 9, etc.). As a matter of fact, this *internal unity* is the outstanding characteristic of the Sacred Writings as a whole and is consequently the most convincing evidence of their *inspiration* that can be ad-

duced. "While one witness to the facts of Christianity might establish its truth, the combined evidence of four witnesses gives us a warrant for faith in the facts of the gospel such as we possess for no other facts in ancient history whatsoever" (Strong, *ibid.*, p. 173).

63. Q. What is the fourth valid ground on which we accept the New Testament writers as reliable witnesses?

A. The fourth valid ground on which we accept the New Testament writers as reliable witnesses, is the correspondence of their testimony in its details, with collateral facts and circumstances.

(1) For instance, the correspondence between the New Testament writings and contemporary profane history, in respect to the names of civil rulers, the periods in which they ruled, and the countries over which they ruled, etc., as, *e. g.*, Augustus Caesar (Luke 2:1), Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1), Quirinius, the Herods, Felix, Festus, Pontius Pilate, etc. (2) Secondly, the numberless correspondences between the New Testament writings and contemporary profane history, in respect to names of coins, methods of taxation, types of wearing apparel, different kinds of public assemblies and places where they were held, manners and customs of the people described, etc. (3) Thirdly, the correspondence between the New Testament writings and the known geography of the ancient world, in respect to cities named, also rivers, mountains, lakes, seas, travel routes, etc. (4) Finally, the absence of discrepancies between the New Testament writings themselves. The few discrepancies which do, at least apparently, exist, "are none of them irreconcilable with the truth of the recorded facts, but only present those facts in new lights or with additional detail" (Strong, *ibid.*, p. 173). How, *in view of all this evidence, can any intelligent and honest person doubt for one moment the reliability of the New Testament writers, or the trustworthiness of their writings?*

REVIEW EXAMINATION OVER LESSON
FIFTY-SEVEN

56. What did Jesus Himself say to His Apostles with regard to their witnessing for Him?
57. How are the Apostles witnessing for Jesus unto the uttermost part of the earth?
58. What claims do the New Testament writers make for themselves in their writings?
59. What do we mean by the Credibility of the New Testament writers?
60. What is the first valid ground on which we accept the New Testament writers as reliable witnesses?
61. What is the second valid ground on which we accept the New Testament writers as reliable witnesses?
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Lesson Fifty-eight

**MATTHEW'S TESTIMONY ABOUT JESUS
OF NAZARETH**

Scripture Reading: Matt. 9:9, 10:2-4; Luke 5:27-32.

Scripture to Memorize: "And after these things he went forth, and beheld a publican, named Levi, sitting at the place of toll, and said unto him, Follow me. And he forsook all, and rose up and followed him" (Luke 5:27-28).

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64. Q. In taking up the study of Christianity itself, what is the first matter to be considered?
- A. In taking up the study of Christianity, the first matter to be considered is the Person, Jesus of Nazareth, who appears historically as its Founder.
- (1) Christianity, as we have already learned, consists of:
(a) The Person, and (b) The System. The Person is