

The New Testament For Dummies Series

The Gospels

Sunday Evening, March 26, 2006

Dr. Henry Halley, illustrious author of the famed *Halley Bible Handbook*, wrote this opinion (page 379):

“The four Gospels are, by all odds, the most important part of the Bible....more important than all the rest of the Bible put together....more important than all the rest of the books in the whole world put together; for we could better afford to be without the knowledge of everything else than to be without the knowledge of Christ.”

I am only in “partial agreement” with Dr. Halley in his observation, for as Paul wrote, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable....” But the four Gospels that we study tonight are our God-given insight into the earthly life of Christ Jesus, our precious Lord and are therefore truly very, very important..

WHY ONLY FOUR GOSPELS?

Good question in light of Luke 1:1:

Luke 1:1-3

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, [2] Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; [3] It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,

It appears from Luke that many wrote the story of Jesus. Again, Dr. Halley: “It was a period of great literary activity, the age of Caesar, Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Tacitus, Plutarch and Pliny. Within a generation, the story of Jesus had spread over the whole known world and had enlisted countless thousands of devoted followers. Naturally there arose a great demand for written narratives of His life.”

In answer to the question, “Why only four Gospels”, I believe God had a direct hand in preserving those autographs (original documents) that most completely and accurately told of His life’s sojourn on this earth. While the four Gospels give us the story of Jesus that God wanted us to have, John reminds us that [John 21:25] “....there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose

that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.”

MATTHEW was a publican, a tax-collector from Capernaum, Galilee. **LUKE** was a physician from Macedonia, Greece. **MARK** was the son of a well-to-do noble woman of south Jerusalem, whose multi-level house adorned the summit of Mount Zion. Mark was a close friend of “the big fisherman” Peter. **JOHN** was a commercial fisherman from Bethsaida, Galilee.

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW was written basically to the people of Israel. The very first chapter, the Jewish genealogy of Jesus, is a clue to that fact. Matthew wrote to make the work of Jesus clear to Israel.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK was directed to the Romans. It had more appeal at its inception to the Gentiles than to the Jews. This Gospel could well be called “the Gospel of Peter” for Mark was a friend and protégé of the Great Fisherman. His gospel is seen through the eyes of Peter.

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE was written to the Greek - to the thinking man. As we will see when it study it in a moment, this Gospel had striking features that gave it a strength all its own while adding to the volume of material from the other three gospels.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN carries the heaviest theology. It is, in my opinion, the greatest prose ever delivered to mankind. It certainly contains the most beloved individual verse: **John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.** Think of the wonder of this man who was a relatively uneducated fisherman from Galilee that he could pen (under the Holy Spirit’s anointing), John 1:12-14 **“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: [13] Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. [14] And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”**

JESUS’ “SUPPORTING CAST”

ANDREW

Andrew was the brother of Peter. He lived in the north end of the Sea of Galilee in Capernaum and was a commercial fisherman by trade. Originally he was a disciple of John the Baptist (Mark 1:16-18). Andrew brought his brother Peter to Jesus (**John**

1:40). It seems that Andrew's main goal in life was to bring others to the Master. According to tradition, it was in Patra, Greece, that Andrew died as a martyr. When Governor Aepeas' wife was healed and converted to the Christian faith, and shortly after that the Govern's brother became a Christian, Aepeas was enraged. He arrested Andrew and condemned him to die on the cross. Andrew, feeling unworthy to be crucified on the same-shaped cross as his Master, begged that his be different. So he was crucified on an X-shaped cross, which is still called Saint Andrew's cross.

BARTHOLOMEW

Bartholomew (Nathaniel) lived in Cana of Galilee. Tradition says he became a missionary to Armenia. A number of scholars believe he was the only disciple who came from royal blood-or noble birth. His name means "Son of Talmai" (2 Sam. 3:3) Talmai was the king of Geshur (a tiny kingdom to the north of the Sea of Galilee which in the New Testament was better known as Bethsaida). Talmai's daughter, Maacah, was the wife of David and the mother of Absalom. Researchers believe that Bartholomew was a great searcher of Scripture. Tradition says he died a martyr in India, being flayed alive with knives.

JAMES

James, the Elder, Boanerges, son of Zebedee and Salome, brother of John, was a fisherman who lived in Bethsaida. He preached in Jerusalem and Judea and was beheaded by Herod, A.D. 44 (Acts 12:1,2). He was a member of that inner circle of disciples - Peter, James and John. Scripture does not tell us much about him. He is not to be confused with James, the brother of Jesus, about whom we learn later, or James the Lesser..

JAMES (THE LESSER)

James the Lesser (or younger) was the son of Alpheus (Cleophas) and Mary and lived in Galilee. He was the brother of the Apostle Jude. He was one of the little-known disciples. However, tradition tells us that he also died as a martyr, sawn to pieces.

JOHN

The brother of James, son of Zebedee and Salome, was known as "the beloved Apostle." He was a fisherman by trade and he, too, became a member of that famed inner circle of our Lord. He wrote the Gospel of John, I, II and III John and Revelation. He preached among the churches of Asia, primarily at Ephesus. He was arrested by the Romans,

under the authority of the Emperor Domitian, and banished to the Island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea (between Greece and Turkey). However, when the Emperor died, John was released and returned to Ephesus where he continued pastoring and writing well into his 90's. He died a natural death. He was known as a man of action, very ambitious, and possessed an explosive temper. However, he mellowed with time and was driven only by his love for Jesus.

JUDAS

Judas Iscariot, the traitor, was the son of Simon who lived in Kerioth in Judah. He betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver and afterwards committed suicide by hanging (Matt. 26: 14, 16). He was the treasurer for the disciples and very outspoken. While many have speculated why Judas betrayed Jesus - with such postulations that he was a violent Jewish Nationalist who wanted Jesus to overthrow Rome - no one knows for sure. His betrayal of our Lord in Gethsemane put Jesus on the cross.

JESUS' DETRACTORS*

* Taken from J. Vernon McGee's commentary on MATTHEW

1. PHARISEES – The Pharisees were the dominant party. They arose (during the inter-testament period) to defend the Jewish way of life against all foreign influences. They were strict legalists who believed in the Old Testament. They were nationalists in politics and wanted to restore the kingdom to the line of David. So they were a religio-political party.
2. SADDUCEES – The Sadducees were made up of the wealthy and socially-minded who wanted to get rid of tradition. They were liberal in their theology and thus opposed to the Pharisees. They were closely akin to the Greek Epicureans whose philosophy was “eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”
3. SCRIBES – The scribes were professional expounders of the law, stemming back to the days of Ezra. They were hair-splitters more concerned with the *letter* of the law than the *spirit* of it. It is important to know the Word of God but also we are to translate it into life and pass it on to others.
4. HERODIANS – These people sought to maintain the Herods on the throne.

THE FOUR GOSPELS COMPARED

The four gospels pretty much tell the same story but there are some differences to the approach and emphasis. For example: Only Matthew and Luke tell of the birth and childhood of Jesus. Matthew and Mark dwell on the Galilean ministry of our Lord. John omits much of the work of Christ in the northern country of Galilee and records visits to Jerusalem which the others omit. The last week of Jesus' life occupies 1/3 of Matthew, 1/4 of Luke and 1/2 of John. John devoted 7 chapters to the crucifixion. Matthew has 28 chapters, Mark has 16, Luke has 24 and John has 21. Luke has the most pages and is the longest while Mark is the shortest. (Luke, in fact, gave us more copy - Luke & Acts - than any other N.T. writer, including Paul, although Paul wrote more books.)

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF MATTHEW

(One can find this and similar outlines in most Bibles so I am printing only Matthew's outline in this syllabus to give the student an example. I recommend you look at the outlines before you read any of the books of the Bible to give you a concept of what lies just ahead of you.)

- Ch. 1 Genealogy and Record of Virgin Birth of Jesus
- Ch. 2 The visit of the wise men - the flight to Egypt - the return to Nazareth
- Ch. 3 John the Baptist - Jesus is baptized
- Ch. 4 Jesus is tested in the wilderness - begins His public Ministry in Capernaum - calls His Disciples
- Ch. 5 - 7 The Sermon on the Mount
 - 1) Relationship of subjects of Kingdom to self 5:1-16
 - 2) Relationship of subjects to Law 5:17-48
 - 3) Relationship of subjects to God 6:10-34
 - 4) Relationship of children of King to each other 7:1-29
- Ch. 8 Six miracles of Jesus demonstrate His power to enforce ethics of ch. 5-7
- Ch. 9 Six more Miracles - calls Matthew - contends with Pharisees
- Ch. 10 Jesus commissions the twelve to preach the Gospel to the Nation Israel
- Ch. 11 Quizzed by John's disciples - rejects unrepentant cities - issues new invitation to some individuals
- Ch. 12 Conflict and final break of Jesus with religious rulers
- Ch. 13 Mystery parables of the Kingdom of Heaven
- Ch. 14 John the Baptist beheaded - Jesus feeds 5,000 - the storm on Galilee - Jesus walks on the water
- Ch. 15 Jesus denounces Scribes and Pharisees - heals daughter of Syrophenician

woman and multitudes - feeds 4,000

Ch. 16 Conflict with Pharisees and Sadducees - confession from Disciples and Peter - Jesus confronts His men with news of His impending death and resurrection

Ch. 17 The Transfiguration - demon-possessed boy - money miraculously provided

Ch. 18 Little child - lost sheep - conduct in coming church - parable on forgiveness

Ch. 19 God's standard for marriage and divorce - children blessed - rich young ruler

Ch. 20 Parable of laborer's in the vineyard - Jesus makes 4th and 5th announcement of His approaching death - mother requests place of honor for James and John -

Jesus restores sight to two men

Ch. 21 Jesus cleanses the Temple

Ch. 22 Parable of Marriage Feast - Jesus answers Herodians, Sadducees and Pharisees

Ch. 23 Jesus weeps over Jerusalem

Ch. 24 and 25 THE MOUNT OLIVET DISCOURSE ON PROPHECY

Jesus answers questions about the sign of the end of the age and sign of His coming - Parable of the ten virgins - parable of the eight talents - judgment of sheep and goat nations

Ch. 26 Jesus betrayed by Judas - Last supper - Gethsemane agony - Peter's denial

Ch. 27 Trial, death and burial of Jesus

Ch. 28 Resurrection - the Great Commission

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

From the pen of Columnist Jim Bishop / The Day Christ Died / Harper Publishers

The Phoenicians were the first to devise crucifixion. They wanted a means of punishing criminals slowly so they devised the cross. It was as slow as it was painful (men often lived two or more days in the burning sun). A secondary consideration was nudity. This added to the shame of the evildoer and, at the same time, made him helpless before the thousands of insects of the air, while the carrion birds and the small animals held back until the crucified was dead.

The Romans adopted the cross and reduced it to an exact science with a set of rules to be followed. In the early phases of this (punishment) they had driven spikes through the feet of the victim and tied the hands to the crossbeam. But this, they learned, sapped the strength of criminals so slowly that it was necessary to post a guard at the foot of the cross for several days. Later they drove nails through wrists and feet and found that, unless the victim was a tower of strength, he would expire within a few hours.

This, they decided, was reasonable because after that time, the interest of the onlookers began to flag and they went home.

In the early days of the Empire, this punishment was reserved for slaves and revolutionaries. The part (of the cross) that remained permanently in the ground was called *stipes crucis*. The cross beam which Jesus carried (which weighed about 100 pounds) was called the *patibulum*.

The upright was six feet tall and would accommodate most criminals because the knees were arranged in a buckled position.

Once begun, the matter (of crucifixion) was done quickly and efficiently. The executioner wore an apron with pockets. He placed two five inch nails between his teeth and, hammer in hand, knelt beside the right arm. The soldier whose knees rested on the inside of the elbow, held the forearm flat to the board. With his right hand the executioner probed the wrist of Jesus to find the little hollow spot. When he found it he took one of the square-cut nails from his teeth, held it against the spot, raised the hammer over the nail head and brought it down with force. Then he jumped across the body to the other wrist. As soon as he was satisfied that the condemned man could not, in struggling, pull himself loose and perhaps fall forward off the cross, he brought both of his arms upward rapidly...the signal to lift the crossbeam.

Two soldiers grabbed each side of the crossbeam and lifted. When the soldiers reached the upright, the four of them began to lift the crossbeam higher until the feet of Jesus were off the ground. The four men pushed upward until the mortise hole was over the upright. Now the executioner knelt before the cross. Two soldiers hurried to help and each one took hold of a leg at the calf. The ritual was to nail the right foot over the left.

On the cross, Jesus' head at times was lowered with chin touching chest. When His body sagged, in fatigue, its weight hung on the nails in his wrists and his knees bent far forward. His arms were now in a V position, and Jesus became conscious of two unendurable circumstances: the first was that the pain in His wrists was beyond bearing and that muscle cramps knotted His forearms and upper arms and the pads of His shoulders; the second was that His pectoral muscles at the sides of His chest were momentarily paralyzed. He found that while He could draw air into His lungs, He was powerless to exhale. (End of Bishop's column)

It was not bleeding or the pain that killed a crucifixion victim, it was suffocation. Finally he would become so weary he could no longer pull himself up on his tortured arms and wrists to exhale and he would succumb. Jesus died after a few hours on the cross and a soldier pierced His side. His last words were, "It is finished!" Our salvation through faith in Him was assured. What a Savior!