

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE (4)

The last book of the Old Testament was written about 400 B.C. Jesus was born in about 4 B.C., and he died in 30 A.D. Jesus did not write any books during his short life. After his rising from the dead in 30 A.D., it was left to eyewitnesses to tell the world the story of his teaching, death, and RESURRECTION (coming to life again). These eyewitnesses traveled over much of the then known world to tell of the most important event in all of human history -- God had sent his own son to die (pay the price for our sins) and had brought him back to life again as proof. When Jesus died, he only had a few disciples (followers) who were still loyal to him. Even these few disciples were scattered when Jesus was arrested and taken to his trial. But three days after he was put to death, he began to appear to them over a period of 40 days. After witnessing his resurrection from death, they became very bold and began to spread the message to millions of people.

God backed up their teaching with signs, wonders, and miracles. Christianity grew very rapidly in the first century based on two kinds of evidence:

1) The 39 books of the Old Testament were readily available for them to examine the predictions about Jesus and to convince themselves that God had planned this event (Jesus' death and resurrection) since even before the creation of the world, and

2) Many eyewitnesses were still alive who actually saw him after he lived again. These eyewitnesses were willing to choose death rather than deny their testimony. Their testimony was powerful evidence to the truth.

About 25 years after Jesus died, the eyewitnesses were getting older and the persecution against them by their enemies was getting worse. Many of the eyewitnesses were murdered because they would not stop telling the facts about Jesus. So as the eyewitnesses became fewer and fewer, some began to write down their testimony.

So, today we still have the same two kinds of evidence to help us believe. 1) The 39 books of the Old Testament that predict his life, death, and resurrection, and 2) the written records of eyewitnesses who saw him alive after his death.

The Bible contains 66 books. 39 were written before his birth and 27 were written about 20-40 years after his death. Men who had seen Jesus Christ alive after his death on the cross wrote most of these 27 books. Together they are now called the NEW TESTAMENT, meaning the "new agreement". The first four books are called GOSPELS. The word "GOSPEL" is a Greek word that means "good news". The first four books are named after their writers: MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE, and JOHN. Each of these four books or "gospels" tells an independent account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. While these writers are telling the story, they also explain how many of the predictions (Prophecies) made in the 39 Old Testament books about Jesus were fulfilled. These four books tell the purpose of Jesus' coming, record his perfect life and teaching, and give evidence for his being the SON OF GOD! The last of the writers of the four gospels, John, summarizes this beautifully:

John 20:30-31

"Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

The four stories are not long and detailed. All four are contained in about 100 pages. So you could read one account of the life of Jesus by reading a mere 30 pages. The four stories compliment one another. Some of the events in Jesus' life are told in all four accounts, while some events are only found in one. There are many things we would like to know that none of them tell us. There is a reason for their brevity and conciseness. God, working through these men, chose just the right material to give evidence that faith can be based on. God's purpose in having these books written about Jesus was not to satisfy our curiosity. Notice the last statement in the final book of the four.

John 21:25

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written."

If you are just beginning to read the Bible, it would be best to choose a couple of these four books to begin with. I would suggest Matthew and John because they are the most different.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Christianity spread so fast in the first century A.D.?
2. Why was it necessary for eyewitnesses to start writing down their testimony?
3. Name the four books of the Bible that each tell about the life story of Jesus.
4. These four books about the life of Jesus are called _____ which means "good news"