Bible 101 - Back to Basics #4

Last week we talked about how we can trust the reliability of the Scriptures in terms of literature as they were handed down to us. In other words, we attempted to answer the question, "How sure are we that the texts we have are consistent with the original documents?" The purpose of this analysis is to confirm in our own minds the certainty that what we consider to be "God's Word" is really what He caused to be written down by the various authors over 1,500 years. We looked at the care that was taken with the copying of OT Scriptures and the confirmation of that care with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. We also considered the factors involved in the selection and transmission of the documents we now call the New Testament.

Today, I want to address the following question. "Is the New Testament *historically*accurate?"

I. The Gospel before the Gospels.

     A. How many *Gospels*are there?

          1. One. The ***Gospel***is the *good news*about Jesus. Luke 2:10-11

          2. Church father Irenaeus spoke of the ***Gospel***that is, which is under four forms.

          3. Consequently, we speak of the "***Gospel***according to Mathew, to Mark, to Luke and to John."

          4. There is one body of truth communicated from four different men from four different points of

               view.

          5. Oral tradition. The culture into which Jesus was born did use literary documents, but it was

              primarily an oral-tradition-based culture.

          6. To learn by heart and recite were the two normal operations for the transmission of text.

     B. The accuracy of the Oral Gospel

          1. Was this dependence on oral tradition a hindrance to those who lived in Jesus' day?

          2. Evidently not. Papias valued the "living and permanent voice of the apostles."

          3. The written text preserves the moving account of those living testimonies.

          4. The dissemination of material about Jesus was not entrusted to just anyone. Acts 1:21,22.

          5. Entrusted to "special persons". Acts 6:4

          6. Every one of the eyewitnesses to Jesus' life had at least some childhood training in the

              memorization and recitation of the ancient Scriptures. Acts 6:4

          7. How could they allow error to creep into the words of Jesus they wanted to preserve?

          8. Plus, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit will "bring to your remembrance all that I said to you".

          9. Jesus phrased His teaching in easy to remember segments. More about this later.

               a. Mathew 11:17. His ease of teaching in an oral culture.

               b. Mathew 7:24-27. Parallels and contrasts in phraseology.

II. Similarities and differences in the Gospel accounts

     A. Similarities

          1. Large blocks of material, particularly Mathew and Luke describe similar events.

          2. The Gospel of Mark as source material.

          3. Q document for other similarities. Debunked.

     B. Differences

          1. Each Gospel account is written from a different perspective and for a different purpose.

               a. Mathew - To the Jews, proving Jesus is the long awaited Messiah-King

               b. Mark - For the benefit of the Romans. A man of action. (The term immediately used much)

               c. Luke - As a doctor, Luke presents the humanity of Jesus

               d. John - Presents to us the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

          2. So, differences in the accounts are there ON PURPOSE to emphasize alternative aspects of

               Jesus and His ministry, depending on the point of view of the writer.

III. Historical Geography

Jesus traveled to actual geographical locations and interacted with known historical persons. The details of history and geography in the Gospel accounts yield clear evidence that the writers were not making up the story. Historical geography seeks to relate events in history to geographic locations. Knowing what happened in a certain location in the past reveals why Jesus would do something at that location when He was there. A few examples follow:

     A. Nain - Luke 7:11-17

          1. Nain sits on the north side of a hill in southern Galilee.

          2. On the south side is the place where Elisha the prophet resuscitated the dead son of Shunemite

               woman. II Kings 4:8-37.

          3. Jesus performed a similar miracle nearby, causing the people to say,"A great prophet has

               arisen among us!" And, "God has visited His people."

     B. Egypt - Mathew 2:13-15

          1. The flight to Egypt not an odd move.

          2. Alexandria contained a large and old Jewish population.

          3. Joseph and Mary may have had friends and/or relatives there.

     C. Nazareth, the obscure. Mathew 2:23 - significant for several reasons.

          1. Obscure village out in the sticks. Probably no more than 20-30 families there.

          2. Only 23 tombs dating from the first century have been found there.

          3. Does not appear in any of the lists of cities found in Josephus, Old Testament or in the Talmud.

          4. Nathaniel said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?

          5. Nazareth sits on the side of a high ridge overlooking the Jezreel Valley. Luke 4:29

          6. Plain of Megiddo there. More than 250 battles fought there. It is ironic and perhaps typical that

               the one called "Prince of Peace" should grow up looking out over the battleground of history.

     D. Jesus surroundings - lots of these

          1. Base of Mt. Hermon, 9,000 ft "rock". Mathew 16:13,18. *Petros - stone, Petra- bedrock.*

Gates of Hades = Gentile cities. Mission of apostles would eventually overthrow the Gentiles.

          2. Living water. John 7:38. Disciples reminded of Mt. Hermon from which melting snow feeds

               the Jordan River, not with a trickle, but with a gush.

          3. From Capernaum several cities on hilltops can be seen all around the Sea of Galilee. Math 5:14

          4. "He came unto His own". John 1:11. The towns Jesus did and did not visit.

               a. The towns He visited consisted mainly of devout Jews.

                    1. Capernaum,

                    2.  Chorazin,

                    3.  Bethsaida,

                    4.  Gennesaret,

                    5. Cana

                    6. Nazareth.

               b. No record of Jesus going to the larger cities populated mostly by Hellenized Jews.

                    Hippus, Gadara, Julias, Sephoris, Tiberius, Caesaria Philippi (near it, though)

          5. A strange miracle at the Sea of Galilee.

               a. The "mouth breeder" or "mother-fish". A fish only found in Lake Victoria (Uganda) along the

                    Nile and in the Sea of Galilee. The female keeps the eggs in her mouth until they hatch. She

                    then lets them out from time to time but scoops them up at any sign of danger. After the

                    young are gone and on their own, she will often keep a substitute in her mouth. Even today

                    some are caught with stones or coke bottle caps in their mouths.

               b. St Peter's fish. Mathew 17:24-27

          6. Galilee is a volcanic area. His parable of the four soils would be easily remembered. Math 13:3

          7. The view from the southern side of the Temple - chalk white tombstones were visible.

               Mathew 23:27,28