

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme.

Today's teaching is: THE ORIGIN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT – especially THE GOSPELS.

It is important to remember that there are several different theories about the dating of the events in the New Testament. The dates used in our studies, although tentative, are based on the best scholarship in the world.

POINT 1. THE ORIGIN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The books of the New Testament came into being by four important events:

First. The coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ into the world!

Second. The calling of the disciples to be Christ's witnesses.

Third. The oral transmission of the teachings of the apostles (Acts 2:42).

Fourth. The special circumstances that led to the writing of each book.

First. The coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, into the world.

All four writers of the Gospels wrote their Gospels about *the greatest historical event in the history of mankind*: namely the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, into the world of people. Since the time of the first people, Adam and Eve, and throughout the Old Testament, the prophets of God have predicted the coming of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. When he came, his works and words made such a great impression on the people of the world, that many people spread the news about Jesus Christ everywhere.

Luke wrote, "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us" (Lk 1:1). The early church fathers knew only four Gospels that were used in the churches, namely, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And John wrote, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (Jn 21:25). Each Gospel writer had a specific purpose, made a selection of the most important things Jesus Christ did and said and wrote his Gospel.

Second. The calling of the disciples to be Christ's witnesses.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus, including his works and his words, did not happen in an obscure corner (Act 26:26). There were very many witnesses. They have *seen with their own eyes* and *heard with their own ears* the things Jesus did and said. According to 1 John 1:1-3, they transmitted the things they saw and heard to very many people, all over the known world!

Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus appointed his disciples to be *his witnesses* to the ends of the earth (Act 1:8). The apostle Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:16, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty." And the apostle John wrote in John 19:35, "The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe." And Luke wrote in Luke 1:1-4 that he was writing an orderly account of the things, which were prophesied in the Old Testament and which had now been fulfilled among them. He said, these things "were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye-witnesses and servants of the word." Twenty-five years after the resurrection of Jesus, more than 500 eye-witnesses of his resurrection were still alive! (1 Cor 15:5-6). Every one of them could confirm that the things, which the apostles proclaimed and later recorded in their books, were the truth.

Besides many witnesses, there were also many enemies of the Christians, who would have been quick to call attention to inaccuracies, if they had existed. If the apostles had taught and written things that were not the truth about Jesus Christ, these enemies would have called the attention of the crowds to it and they would have exposed the apostles as false witnesses. They would have done this precisely because among the crowds there were thousands who themselves were eye-witnesses of the works of Jesus and ear-witnesses of the words of Jesus! However, not a single person accused the apostles of lies! One of the strongest proofs of the testimony of the apostles was that they appealed to the knowledge of their enemies! So great was the confidence they had about the knowledge the crowds had about the things that happened among them! For example, in Acts 2:22, Peter said, "Men of Israel, ... Jesus ... was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, *as you yourselves know!*" The apostles appealed to things the crowds of people had seen and heard themselves!

Third. The oral transmission of the teaching of the apostles.

The message of the gospel was certainly *preached* before it was *recorded* in our present Four Gospels. The apostles consistently preached the most significant elements of the life of Jesus and the most important works and words of his ministry to the crowds. As the apostles preached the gospel over and over again to different people in many different places, the gospel message began to get the form that we have in the four written Gospels today. The main three parts were:

One. The introduction to Jesus, which included his origin, birth and beginning of his ministry.

Two. His ministry to the crowds in public and to his disciples in private.

Three. His death, resurrection and ascension.

In this way, Luke could write in Acts 2:42, that the new Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching”. And Paul could write in 1 Corinthians 15:3, “What I received I passed on to you.” Thus, *the teaching of the apostles* had a definite pattern and contents. Anybody trying to change the teaching of the apostles was in danger of being eternally condemned (Gal 1:6-9).

Fourth. The inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In John 14:26 and 16:13-14 the Lord Jesus Christ promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things, remind them of everything he had said to them, guide them into all the truth and would take from what is his and make it known to them. Thus the writers of the Gospels wrote their Gospels under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Jesus Christ himself.

The disciples of Jesus Christ were a unique group of people, because only they fulfilled the conditions written in Acts 1:21-22: They were the men who had been disciples of Jesus Christ during the whole time he went in and out among them, beginning from John’s baptism to the time of his ascension into heaven. Only such people could be witnesses of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit only used eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses to write the Gospels and the other New Testament books! Therefore the Bible teaches in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” The Holy Spirit not only *inspired the disciples of Jesus Christ in writing* the Gospels, but also *guided them in the selection and use of both oral and literary sources*. That is what Luke says in his introduction in Luke 1:1-4, “Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account ... so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” And according to 2 Peter 3:16, the apostle Peter was acquainted with the letters of Paul and calls them *Scriptures*. Also in the Old Testament we read how the inspired writers were at least acquainted with written materials other than their own. For example, the writers of the Old Testament made use of “the book of the annals of the kings of Israel” and of “the book of the annals of the kings of Judah” (1 Ki 14:19,29). And Daniel made use of the book of Jeremiah (Dan 9:2). Therefore we must conclude that just as *God’s grace does not exclude man’s responsibility*, so also *God’s inspiration does not exclude man’s intelligent research*.

POINT 2. THE SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THAT LED TO THE WRITING OF THE FIRST THREE GOSPELS

First. There are four reasons why the first three Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are so similar.

One. All three Gospels record many of the same words and deeds of the same Lord Jesus Christ.

Two. All three Gospels rest upon a thoroughly harmonious oral tradition between the time of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the time of writing the Gospels. The early Christian communities received and believed the message of the gospel as the word of God and experienced the work of God’s word in their own lives. Then they in turn passed the message of the gospel on to people living in other provinces. The oral tradition of the gospel was transmitted precisely because it was believed to be authentic in the form it was received and transmitted. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and 1:8 we read what Paul says about the Thessalonians, “When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. ... The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere.”

Three. All three Gospels, as we have them in the Greek language today, have a close literary relationship. The early church fathers say that Matthew was the first to have written a document, called “logia”, about the works and words of Jesus in the Aramaic language. All three Gospels probably made use of these earlier notes of Matthew.

Mark in about A.D. 44-46 was the first to write a Gospel in the Greek language and he based it on the preaching of the apostle Peter, with whom he worked together, and the notes of Matthew.

Matthew in about A.D. 62 was the second to write a Gospel in the Greek language and he based it on the Gospel of Mark, his own notes in the Aramaic language and his own research.

Luke, the co-worker of Paul, in about A.D. 62-63 was the third to write a Gospel in the Greek language and he based it on the Gospel of Mark, the notes of Matthew in the Aramaic language and especially on his own extensive research.

Four. All three Gospels have the same primary Author, namely, the Holy Spirit, who inspired them all.

Second. There are four reasons why the first three Gospels are so different.

One. Jesus himself preached his message in different ways and performed similar deeds in the different places he came.

Two. Different witnesses of the same works and words of Jesus made different observations. When three intelligent and honest persons see the same miracle and hear the same message, what they see and hear will generally not be exactly the same thing, but will vary in accordance with the respective personality of each of the three witnesses. Thus, although the oral tradition of what they saw and heard was harmonious in contents, it was multiform in character.

Three. With respect to their literary relationship, each Gospel writer made more or less extensive use of the early notes of Matthew in the Aramaic language and inserted these notes in various places according to their own purpose.

Four. In the use of his oral and written sources, each Gospel writer exercised his individual judgement, in accordance with his own character, education and general background, and with a view to the realisation of his own distinct purpose. But in this all, each writer of the gospel was guided by the same Holy Spirit into all the truth! The Holy Spirit not only helped the Gospel writers to remember everything Jesus had done and taught, but also controlled what they decided to include and what to leave out. The apostle John in John 20:30-31, clearly states the fact that he made a selection from all Jesus did and said, because of his specific purpose. He says, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

POINT 3. THE REASON WHY THE GOSPEL OF JOHN IS SO DIFFERENT

First. John refuted the false teachings about Jesus Christ.

The apostle John lived much longer than all the other apostles. John wrote his Gospel between A.D. 80-98. At that time there was a false teacher called Cerinthus. They both lived in Ephesus in modern Turkey. This false teacher taught the following false teachings. He separated *Jesus* from *the Christ*. He said that *Jesus* was merely human, a son of Joseph and Mary by natural generation, and that *Christ* was only divine. He said that at the baptism of Jesus, the divine Christ descended upon the human Jesus and hovered over him, without ever having entered into an actual and abiding union with him. The night before the human Jesus died, the divine nature Christ again left the human nature, so that only the human Jesus suffered, died and was resurrected, and not the divine Christ. This of course is a false teaching!

The church father Irenaeus wrote that the apostle John proclaimed the gospel in order to oppose this false teaching of Cerinthus in the Christian Church. The clear message of the Gospel of John is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John taught that God became a man in Jesus Christ; that Jesus Christ, besides having the divine nature, also assumed the human nature and never laid the human nature aside again. In his first letter, the apostle John writes, "Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist - he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also."

Second. John wrote about the divine nature and the Messianic office of Jesus Christ.

The main purpose of John was not to write a complete biography of Jesus Christ, but to confirm Christians in the truth they had received, especially the truth that Jesus is *the Messiah* and that he is *God who became man*. John selects exactly that material not found in the first three Gospels, which was best suited to clearly reveal the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, that would reveal the divine nature and the Messianic office of Jesus Christ. In distinction from the first three Gospels, John discusses not so much the kingdom as the King himself! In chapter 1-12 he records the public ministry of Jesus Christ. He reveals the glory of Jesus Christ with God the Father in heaven before he became a man on earth. He states that from the very beginning Jesus Christ asserted that he was the Messiah, the one about whom Moses and the prophets wrote (Jn 1:45). He describes how Jesus revealed himself to ever-widening circles of people. He shows that Christ's ministry extended over a period of at least three years, but records, with few exceptions only his work in Judea. He points out that Jesus was accepted by Samaritans, who were half-Jews, and Jesus Christ was sought by Greeks, who were non-Jews, but that he was rejected by Jews in Judea and in Galilee! In John chapters 13-21 he records the private ministry of Jesus Christ. He records in length the discourse of Jesus Christ during the night before his

crucifixion, his high priestly prayer, arrest, trial, death and resurrection and his appearances as the resurrected Christ. John emphasises the spiritual character of the work of Jesus Christ on earth!

POINT 4. THE PURPOSE AND CONTENTS OF THE FOUR GOSPELS

The main purpose of each Gospel is different. Matthew teaches that Jesus Christ is *the great Prophet*. He especially writes to a Jewish audience. Mark teaches that Jesus Christ is *the mighty King*. Luke teaches that Jesus Christ is *the sympathetic High Priest*. And John teaches that Jesus Christ is *the Son of God* or Word of God. All four Gospels follow the same general chronological order, but each Gospel makes a selection of all the works and words of Jesus Christ according to its main purpose.

The main three parts of the Gospels are: One. The introduction to Jesus Christ, which included his origin, birth and beginning of his ministry. Two. The ministry of Jesus Christ to the crowds and to his disciples. Three. The death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week, read through Matthew chapters 1-7.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".