

## **1. WHY TRUST THE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS? AN INTRODUCTION**

An ancient prayer of the church:

“Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.” (Psalm 119:18)

### **DISCUSS WHILE WE WAIT TO BEGIN...**

1. Do you believe that the Bible is given to us by God?
2. If so, why?
3. If not, why not?

## **1. THE NEW ATHEISTS AND THE BIBLE**

### **Earlier critics of the Bible**

#### **Richard Dawkins**

“The fact that something is written down is persuasive to people not used to asking questions like: ‘Who wrote it, and when?’ ‘How did they know what to write?’ ‘Did they, in their time, really mean what we, in our time, understand them to be saying?’ ‘Were they unbiased observers, or did they have an agenda that coloured their writing?’ Ever since the nineteenth century, scholarly theologians have made an overwhelming case that the gospels are not reliable accounts of what happened in the history of the real world. All were written long after the death of Jesus, and also after the epistles of Paul, which mention almost none of the alleged facts of Jesus’ life. All were then copied and recopied, through many different ‘Chinese Whispers generations’... by fallible scribes who, in any case, had their own religious agendas.”

(Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, p118).

#### **Philip Pullman**

*His Dark Materials* (1995, 1997, 2000)

*The Good man Jesus, and the scoundrel Christ* (2010)

\* “truth” and “history” are not the same \*

\* “the stories began to weave themselves together” \*

## 2. BEGINNING TO RESPOND

(a) A preliminary question: how do we know what is true?

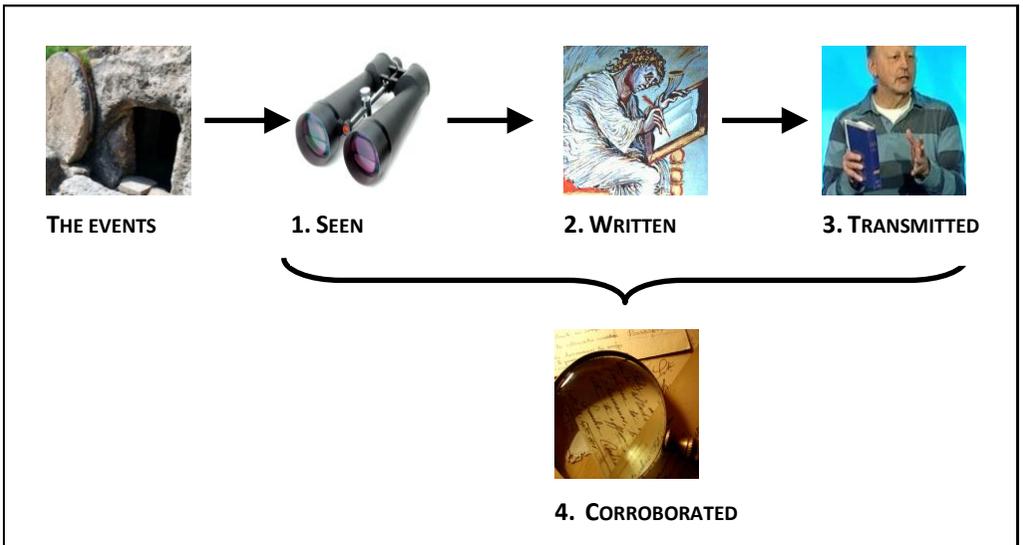
- Scientific evidence
- Other sorts of evidence

(b) A practical question: why are we only examining the gospels?

- Theologically...
- Practically...
- Polemically...

(c) What is it we're going to examine?

*“What really happened in New Testament times? What are the events of the gospel – and what do they mean? Are the gospels that we read in our Bibles a reliable record of those events back then?”*



**(d) Questions**

- Clarification
- Hopes

**(e) A challenge! Let the Bible inform us about the Bible**

Luke 1:1-4, "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."

John 21:24, "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true."

1 John 1:1-3, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-- this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. <sup>2</sup> The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. <sup>3</sup> We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

## USEFUL RESOURCES

### **Introductory**

*Is the New Testament history?* Paul Barnett

*The Christ files: how historians know what they know about Jesus*, John Dickson (book and DVD)

*The Da Vinci Code: from Dan Brown's fiction to Mary Magdalene's faith*, Garry Williams

*The truth about Jesus: the challenge of evidence*, Paul Barnett

*Bethinking.org* – various resources

### **Advanced**

*Jesus and the gospels: an introduction and survey*, Craig Blomberg

*Jesus and the eyewitnesses: the gospels as eyewitness testimony*, Richard Bauckham

*A new Eusebius: documents illustrating the history of the Church to AD337*, J. Stevenson and W.H.C. Frend

*An introduction to New Testament textual criticism*, J. Harold Greenlee

*A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament*, B.M. Metzger

*The Old Testament documents: are they reliable and relevant?* Walter C. Kaiser Jr

## OTHER EVENTS AT IMMANUEL CHURCH BRENTWOOD

### **Carol service**

Carols old and new, Christmas Bible readings, plus a short and gripping talk about Jesus.

**Saturday 22 December at 6.00pm** at Brentwood County High School.  
Refreshments follow. Creche available.

### **Christmas Family Fun**

Fun, singing, puppets, Christingles & much more—for all the family.

**Sunday 23 December at 10.30am** at Brentwood County High School.  
Refreshments follow. Creche available.

### **Christianity Explored**

A seven week course introducing the Christian faith. A great place to ask questions or just listen to others as we work our way through the Gospel of Mark.

**For details of our next course** contact Andrew Grey  
[andrew.grey@immanuelbrentwood.org](mailto:andrew.grey@immanuelbrentwood.org).