

Psalm 2:1-6, 10-12 (NLT)

Why are the nations so angry?

Why do they waste their time with futile plans?

²The kings of the earth prepare for battle;
the rulers plot together
against the LORD

and against his anointed one.

³“Let us break their chains,” they cry,
“and free ourselves from slavery to God.”

⁴But the one who rules in heaven laughs.
The Lord scoffs at them.

⁵Then in anger he rebukes them,
terrifying them with his fierce fury.

⁶For the Lord declares, “I have placed my chosen king on the throne
in Jerusalem,^[a] on my holy mountain.”

¹⁰Now then, you kings, act wisely!
Be warned, you rulers of the earth!

¹¹Serve the LORD with reverent fear,
and rejoice with trembling.

¹²Submit to God’s royal son, or he will become angry,
and you will be destroyed in the midst of all your activities—
for his anger flares up in an instant.

But what joy for all who take refuge in him!

Luke 1:1-4 (NLT)

Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. ²They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. ³Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus, ⁴so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught.

Today, we're starting a new series. This is a series for adults who were introduced to the Bible as children. And this is a series for adults who were introduced to the Bible as adults by adults who were introduced to the Bible as children. Because either way you go, **most of us know some Bible stories, but very few of us know the story of the Bible.** That is, how we got the Bible to begin with. Understanding how we got the Bible is almost as important as knowing what's in the Bible, because, as we're gonna see, the backstory sheds enormous light on the story.

This is an extraordinarily important topic. And it's a fabulous story, because **if you don't know the story of the Bible, it's easy to discount the stories in the Bible.** In fact, some have walked away from faith, or you have friends or a family member or kids who've walked away from faith and it's understandable. Because they don't know the story.

The big problem is that the way that we got our Bibles is not the way the world got the Bible. By the time you got your Bible, it had been chaptered and versed up, right? It had been footnoted. It was in English. All the type was set. There were maps. There were titles. There were headers. And there were cross-references; there was a concordance. When you got your Bible, it was all done, but that's not how the world got the Bible. The story of how the world got the Bible sheds extraordinary light and gives us insight into the stories in the Bible.

The truth is, for most of us, we developed an understanding of and a respect for the Bible not based on reading it, because very few people actually read it. We based our understanding on what we were told about the Bible and the stories that were selectively told to us as children, as high school students, and, ultimately, as adults.

So, regardless of where we're coming from, what happens is that all of us carry our childhood perspective of the Bible into adulthood.

Now, for many of us, if the Bible says it, that still settles it. But for many others it's just not that simple anymore, because somewhere along the way somebody pointed out what else the Bible says: **the parts they didn't talk about in Sunday School, the parts they don't talk about at many churches.** In fact, you may be in a situation where you brought some of those parts to your parents' attention, or to your pastor or priest's attention, the parts they skipped over in Sunday school or in catechism. And you find yourself having a very difficult time reconciling what

you found in the Bible with the reality that you live in and the world that you live in.

Now, you may be surprised to learn that the story of the Bible does not begin in the beginning. The story of the Bible actually begins toward the end of the middle. The story of how we actually got the Bible begins with a first-century doctor who was not Jewish, but Greek, and his name is Luke. Luke actually spent the time necessary to document the events of the life of Jesus. And the reason he sat down to document the events of the life of Jesus is that he had a wealthy friend named Theophilus. Theophilus was a first-century Jesus follower like many people in this region of the world, he had heard enough stories about Jesus and had met enough of the eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and miracles that he had put his faith in Jesus. But Theophilus wanted an orderly account of how this whole thing transpired.

So, Luke decided, for the sake of this wealthy friend, to sit down and write an orderly account of the events of the life of Jesus. And here's how his document begins. He says: **"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us."** (Luke 1:1)

Something had happened worth documenting, and the interesting thing is that Luke says, "I'm not the only one trying to document all this. I'm not the only one who's trying to put down the story of the events that actually happened here in this region of the world."

He goes on. With this in mind, he says this: **"Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honorable Theophilus"** (Luke 1:3)

Now, this is really, really important, what I'm gonna say next. When Luke was writing this document, Luke was not writing the Bible. Luke had no idea that this (Hold up Bible) would ever exist.

Luke is simply creating an orderly account of the events of Jesus' life based on eyewitnesses and based on the people that He interviewed. And Luke (because of the way He did this) tells us why and how the story of the Bible began.

The reason we even have a Bible is because when it seemed to the people who followed Jesus in the first century, that Jesus was not who He claimed to be,

that's when the story of the Bible actually began. Jesus said and did some wonderful things, and then He was crucified. (There is other extra-biblical literature that tells us that Jesus was a historical person, that Jesus was actually crucified or put to death under the Roman Empire, so nobody disputes that.) But in the first century, when Jesus' followers recognized that Jesus had been put to death by Rome, it was game over; there was no story. Nothing was going to change.

So Luke is documenting something fabulous that happened in the first century, and his story tells us that a man named Joseph of Arimathea, a part of the Jewish supreme court, and a man named Nicodemus (two people that everybody in that region would have known) that these two men went to the cross and took Jesus' body down. But they were so disappointed because, they thought (at the time) that maybe Jesus was not who Jesus claimed to be.

In fact, Luke says, "I thoroughly investigated it, and here's what happened". **He (Joseph of Arimathea) went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Then he took the body down from the cross and wrapped it in a long sheet of linen cloth and laid it in a new tomb that had been carved out of rock.**" (Luke 23: 52-53) Luke gives us all this detail. He goes on, and He says this, **"As his body was taken away, the women from Galilee followed and saw the tomb where his body was placed. Then they went home and prepared spices and ointments to anoint his body.**" (v.55-56) Why? They were gonna come back and re-fresh the body. Why would they come and re-fresh the body? Because Jesus was dead, and everybody expected Jesus to stay dead.

Remember at this time, there are no Christians. There is no "church". There is no hope. There are just brokenhearted women and disillusioned disciples who are scared for their own lives. And if it had ended there, there would be no "The Bible," there would be no Christians, there would be no church, and there would be no Old or New Testaments. And there would be no account by Luke looking into the details of the life of Jesus. This is so important.

Luke documented the life of Jesus because the story of Jesus didn't end on a Roman cross. If the story had ended there, there would be no story.

Luke tells us the reason that He was a Jesus follower was because Jesus was seen alive. Once He came back to life, His followers came out of hiding and they went to Jerusalem.

And they went into the streets of Jerusalem and faced down the very people that had Jesus taken to Pilate to be crucified, and they got arrested. Luke documents these early sermons. Luke documents what these men said in the face of extraordinary circumstances, in the face of being arrested and put to death just like Jesus was. In fact, here's just one sentence from one sermon that Luke documents. Because again, He's trying to document everything that happened surrounding the life of Jesus and beyond.

Peter, one of Jesus' followers, says to Caiaphas, the high priest, **"God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are witnesses of it."** (Acts 2:32) We didn't read about it. We didn't hear about it. We saw Him. And so the Jesus movement, the church, was birthed. But still, there's no Bible. Luke goes on to document what happens for the next thirty years following the resurrection. He documents it in a book in our Bible called Acts, or Acts of the Apostles.

Luke knew Peter. He interacts with Peter. There are conversations between Luke and Peter that are documented. Luke knew John. There are conversations between Luke, John, and James, the brother of Jesus. These men knew each other. Luke traveled with the apostle Paul all around the Mediterranean Basin planting churches, and He documents the rise of the Gentile church. But here's the thing that you need to know. Luke admits right up front, "Hey, I'm not the only one. I'm not the only one trying to document what happened in our midst."

The question that we all should wrestle to the ground is this. Why so many? That wouldn't be unusual now for multiple people to cover the same event in detail, but back then it was expensive to write. Most people were illiterate anyway.

Why would Luke and why would others feel compelled to document the events that happened in the first century surrounding the city of Jerusalem? And the answer is undeniable, because **something extraordinary happened**. (Not something extraordinary was written that would come later.) Something extraordinary happened, something that had to be preserved.

In fact, Peter dictated his account to a young man, a young Greek named John Mark. We know this from a second-century writer named Papias, who tells us that the Gospel of Mark came from the lips of Peter. And Peter was probably illiterate: an illiterate (but smart) fisherman. So consequently, he sat down with another Greek, and he gave him his story. Mark is short. It's action, action, action. This is how the fisherman's account would sound. It's bottom line. It's event-driven.

John Mark traveled with the apostle Paul. John Mark knew Luke. He was a friend of Luke. And this document was written in the fifties, just about twenty years after the resurrection. Luke said several people sat down to document this extraordinary event. Matthew was one of them. A document addressing first-century Jews to say, "Trust me. Jesus is the one we've been waiting for. Jesus is the Messiah." And He leverages Old Testament passage after Old Testament passage after Old Testament prophecy, saying, "Look. All the Law and the prophets pointed to the coming of the Messiah, and Jesus fulfilled so many of those prophecies. I believe that He is who He claimed to be."

The church fathers (that's what we call the group of people that came after the disciples in late first and second century) indicate that there was actually a Hebrew copy, a Hebrew version. They indicate that the original version of Matthew was probably written in Hebrew, which makes sense; it was written to the Jews. But then it was translated into Greek, and the version that we have today is a Greek version.

Why would a Hebrew document be translated into Greek? Because Greek was the language of the Eastern Empire. This was not simply a message for Jewish people. This was not simply a message for people in that region of the world. This was a message for the whole world.

So, there's Luke, there's Mark, there's Matthew, and then there's John. John decided that he, too, needed to get out of him the story and the experiences he had with Jesus. And in his document that we call the Gospel of John, he tells us at the end of his account why he bothered to write in the first place, John writes: **"Jesus performed many other signs . . ."** John's just given us a list of things that Jesus has done, so he says, "Oh yeah, we're getting to the end of this thing, but I want you to know this isn't the whole story. **'Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples.'**" (John 20:30)

These weren't done in secret and by disciples, he's not just talking about the Twelve. He's talking about the hundreds of people that follow Jesus from the banks of the Jordan River right through to the crucifixion, and then showed up after the resurrection. Here's something very important for you to know. When John says that there are events that Jesus accomplished and things that Jesus did that don't show up in "this book," "this book" is not a reference to the Bible.

"This book" is a reference to the document he's writing. And then He says something so important. **"But these.., (the ones I have chosen) these are written.."** In other words, "As I face the end of my days, as I face the end of my life, my faith is still intact, not based on what I see around me now, but based on someone I met and what I saw."

And so John says, "I wanna speak to future generations. I want future generations to know what I saw and what we experienced."

Here's what He says: **"But these things are written that you . . ."** (And do you know who "you" is? "You" is you, and "you" is me, it's all of us.) John is saying this: "The reason I've written this account of the life of Jesus is so that whoever stumbles across this document . . ." He says: **"... these are written that –you– may–believe!"** Now the question that I hope you'll wrestle to the ground and the one that John wants you to wrestle to the ground is this: "What is the 'it' that you don't believe?" If you walked away from faith, or considered it, or are considering it, what is the "it"?

John is about to tell you the only "it" that really matters. This is so important. John, an eyewitness, someone who spent time with Jesus, says this: **"...these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name."** (John 20:31) Regardless of what you've heard, regardless of what you've seen, regardless of what you've experienced in your life, John says this is the "it." That's it, and that's the only "it" that really matters. And the implications of this statement in this document (we call the Gospel of John) are staggering. And here's why I say that. If John's account of the life of Jesus is all you have, John's account is all you need.

He said, "I have written this in such a way that if this is the only message you stumble across, if this is the only document you ever read, if this is the only

bundle of stories you are ever aware of, it's enough for you to have confidence that God has done something in the world on your behalf." John recounts Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus; " **For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.**" (John 3:16-17)

John saying, I have been eyeball to eyeball with the Son of God and if this is all you ever hear, this is all you'll ever need."

That brings us up to the end of the first century. At the end of the first century, there's still no "The Bible." At the end of the first century, there are thousands and thousands of Christians—Jewish Christians, Greek Christians, Roman Christians, and Christians in other parts of the world. And there are dozens, and then hundreds, and then eventually thousands of copies of these documents floating around, telling about the life and the works of Jesus. And they're meticulously copied, and they're bundled together. Some people have a gospel, and some people have two gospels. Some people have three, and some people have a part of one and fragment of another.

And can you imagine? Can you imagine if you were a first-century Jesus follower? Or a second-century Jesus follower? Can you imagine how valuable these documents would be to you? That perhaps you had only heard the stories of Jesus. Then somebody comes to your town or your village, or your grandfather shows up, and says, "Let me show you something." And He uncovers, "Here is a full copy of John's recollections of his life with Jesus." Can you imagine this?

From the very beginning, they were considered valuable and reliable. From the very beginning, they were considered sacred, and, eventually, inspired. And it should come as no surprise that, very quickly, **these four documents; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, were considered sacred Scripture.** Two hundred and seventy years before one of these (Hold up Bible) ever existed. Isn't that amazing?

Now, to catch you up, the Roman Empire was very suspicious of Christians. And the reason the Roman Empire was suspicious of Christians was not because of what Christians believed.

It was because of what Christians didn't believe. Because Christians didn't believe in "the gods". Now, Rome could care less who you worshipped as long as you did

a grain offering every once in a while to Caesar, and a grain offering every once in a while for the sake of “the gods” of Rome. And that was a problem for Christians. Because Christians refused to declare that Caesar was their lord. They declared that Jesus was their Lord, which offended Caesar and “the gods”.

So, anytime something went bad in the Empire (we still do this today), they looked for someone to blame.

So, from time to time, when things were bad in the Empire, Christians got too much attention from the Empire. And I’ll end with this. This culminated in the year 303, when Emperor Diocletian issued an edict that resulted in the worst state-sponsored persecution of Christians that had happened up until that time. It was very official. This edict declared that every single house of Christian worship must be destroyed and that assembly by Christians was illegal. It declared that the leaders were to be rounded up and forced to recant and offer a sacrifice to the gods and declare that Caesar was their lord, or they’d be punished by death.

But perhaps, worst of all, all Christian literature was to be turned in and was to be burned. And if you were caught with Christian literature, you could lose your life after you watched your wife, your daughter, and your son lose their lives in order. And hundreds and hundreds of Christians risked and lost their lives protecting not-the-Bible, there still wasn’t a “Bible.” They risked and lost their lives protecting fragments of Matthew and Mark and Luke and John.

And the reason that those valuable documents survived the third and early fourth century is because of their confidence that these documents told the truth about something that had happened on planet Earth in the first century. That God showed up in the person of Jesus Christ. They died rather than give up the sacred documents.

Even during that persecution, Christianity continued to spread, and then political change brought about reform and an easing of hostilities. By the year 324, Constantine the Great became the undisputed Emperor of both sides of the Empire, canceled those edicts, returned property to the church, and allowed Christians to worship freely.

And Christianity, as you know, became the preferred religion of the Empire. And then, for the first time ever, Christian scholars were able to work in the open. Christian scholars could gather together without fear of persecution and without fear of having their ancient documents taken away. For the first time, they were able to bring together this extraordinary collection of valuable, letters and documents. The stage was set for the assembling of the very first Bible. But there is so much more to this story. And we will pick the story up there next time, in Part 2 of The Story of The Bible! (Hold up Bible)