

VBS

BY DAVID POSEY

Since 2004, the Folsom church of Christ has been conducting a Vacation Bible School (VBS) for five days in the summer. This year, VBS will take place beginning tomorrow (Monday, July 10th).

Over the years, several members have been involved in putting it together. For the last couple of years, and now again this year, Dennis and Sharron Wade have taken the reins — and it's a huge job. They have solicited the help of many of our members and the elders appreciate all who are pitching in to help make it a memorable week for the kids.

VBS is designed to be an immersive experience; the aim is to teach our children specific lessons in an environment that replicates, as much as possible, the

more timely theme than this. Our children need to know that the gospels are accurate, that Jesus is real and that the words he spoke and the signs he performed actually took place, just as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John recorded them.

Many of the problems with faith that kids face later in life are due to an insufficient grounding in



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daily life of those who lived during the timeframe of the theme.

This year's theme is *"The Ministry of Jesus: Eyewitness Accounts."* Dennis Wade presented a lesson on the theme on June 4th (you can listen to the sermon at folsomchurch.com). The theme will emphasize the authenticity of the Bible in its accounting of the life of Jesus in the gospels. The gospels, as you probably know, were written either by eyewitnesses or by men who were informed by eyewitnesses (e.g., the source for the gospel of Mark may have been the apostle Peter).

In these days, when skeptics and cynics seem to have the upper hand in our culture, there is not a



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the gospels. They learn stories from the Old Testament, but sometimes those stories are not connected to Christ. In that case, they are no more than isolated incidents that may show great faith and/or courage, but do nothing to build faith in Christ as Lord and Savior.

So, an apologetics theme is more than appropriate for VBS — *it's vital!* The aim, in this enterprise, is to drive home the point that the Bible can and *must* be believed, if we are to have any hope of getting to heaven. That takes faith and our aim at Folsom is to help our children come to the place where Abraham came: *"fully convinced that God is able to do what he has promised"* (Romans 4:21).

In his sermon, Dennis laid out some of the evidence that the gospels are true, so I won't review all of that here. Just keep in mind, though, that if one argues that the gospels are *not* true, then they have to accept several propositions:

1. If the gospels are not true, then the authors were liars. Someone wrote those books, so if the events the writers are describing did not actually take place, then they lied, for some reason.
2. If the gospels are not true, then how does one explain the rapid expansion of Christianity throughout the world in the 1st century?
3. If the gospels are not true, then the history in the book of Acts is not true, since it was written by one of the writers of the gospels (Luke).
4. If the gospels are not true, then all of those who have believed the gospels are fools for thinking that Jesus is the way to heaven and was raised from the dead. Paul said, *"If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied."* 1 Cor. 15:19
5. If the gospels are not true, then millions of people will go to hell because they have placed their faith in a legend, instead of truth.
6. If the gospels are not true, then those who wrote them — and those who believed them — are certifiably crazy. The men who wrote them died because of what they wrote and believed and claimed. Why would they do that if they were making it all up? Wouldn't at least some of them disavow the gospels on the threat of death?
7. If the gospels are not true, one would expect to find some evidence of this "lunacy" in their writings. But do the documents sound as if they are written by crazy people?

As Dennis pointed out, there is more manuscript evidence for the Bible than any other ancient book. Thousands of manuscripts exist for the New Testament. By comparison, the *Iliad*, by Homer, can claim less than a 1,000 manuscripts. Yet, no one denies the authenticity of the *Iliad* or Homer. And that book is still many manuscripts behind the New Testament. (The chart below is actually a bit outdated; at latest count, there are something like 5500 copies of the New Testament).

Having a plethora of manuscripts does not prove the historicity of the New Testament — that is, it doesn't prove the Bible is accurate history. But it does show that it is a *reliable* source of information. Whether one believes it or not is one's prerogative — it takes faith. *"Faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17).

But still, one should ask, "why so many manuscripts, if the books are mere fiction." Many manuscripts, found in many different locations, assure us that the books were at least considered important enough to be shared far and wide, throughout the world. And then there is the sim-

ple fact that 40 men wrote 66 books over 1500 years; yet they are consistent in doctrine and worldview. Every so-called "inconsistency" in the Bible can be reasonably explained and none of them impact the central message of the gospel. How can that happen if the authors were not directed by some higher power?

Most of those who reject the authenticity of the New Testament are not intellectually consistent. They quote freely from Pliny, Tacitus and Herodotus and will accept most of their historical statements as accurate. They rarely, if ever, question their authenticity as historical documents. Yet there are only a few copies of manuscripts of those books.

That explains why I've included "Robin Hood" on the chart. Many years ago, an article appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* about a discovery found in the ledger book of an old inn in England. It appeared to be signed by one "Robin Hood." Those who discovered it dated it to the time that Robin Hood was supposed to have lived and engaged in his adventures. Of course, it has long been considered a legend, but these men, and the writer of the article, felt the entry in the ledger might prove that there was a real Robin Hood — on the basis of *one entry* (manuscript), written many years ago in now faded ink.

My point is that people are anxious to believe what they want to believe. We see it all the time — a shred of evidence will do, if we want to believe it's true. The Shroud of Turin, Jesus of the Tortilla (look it up), minimal and debatable entries in hotel ledgers. It seems that if we like the implications that the evidence produces, even if on shaky ground (*"Robin Hood was a real man!"*), we more readily accept it as true.

Comparison of Ancient Texts

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	No. of Copies	Time Span
? - Robin Hood	1261?	1261-62	1	1yr
Caesar	1st Cent. BC	900 AD	10	1000 yrs
Pliny	61-113 AD	850 AD	7	750-800 yrs
Tacitus	c. 100 AD	1100 AD	20	1000 yrs
Thucydides	5th Cent. BC	900 AD	8	1300 yrs
Herodotus	5th Cent. BC	900 AD	8	1300 yrs
Demosthenes	4th Cent. BC	1100 AD	200	1400 yrs
Plato (Tetralogies)	427-347 BC	900 AD	7	1200 yrs
Homer	900 BC	400 BC	643	500 yrs
New Testament	50 - 100 AD	c. 130 AD	4,969 (Gk Manuscripts) 24,633 Total Copies	30-80 yrs

We see this today in oft-cited “fake news.” Networks and newspapers can get by with lying or exaggeration because they believe their listeners and readers are anxious to believe what they see and hear. So, they lie and perpetuate myth, instead of objectively searching and writing the truth.

Were the authors of the New Testament perpetrators of “fake news,” recording fictional accounts because that’s what people want to hear? Not likely. For one thing, the teachings of Jesus are not popular — and *they never have been*. If this is just another book, it’s doubtful that it would have made the bestseller list of its day.

Consider the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount — his insistence that we give up our rights, never take revenge, avoid sexual sin, stay married, etc. Consider the central point of the “good news” (gospel) that every writer of every gospel accentuates: that a poor carpenter died on a cross, in a little town called Jerusalem, in AD 30 or so. Why? So people could be saved from their sins. Is thinking about and confessing our sins a popular topic?

But it gets even less believable, from a human standpoint: this poor carpenter, killed because he taught an unpopular doctrine, is claimed to have been raised from the dead! Seri-

ously? If these books — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John — had not met the test of authenticity, they would never have spread very far from wherever they were created. People would reject them as works of fiction.

But their authenticity — that they were written by actual men who, by all accounts, seem to be reasonable men — lends to their historicity (i.e., that the men are describing actual events, as they witnessed them). That leads many to believe in their power — that what is said and claimed there is authoritative for us and that we should believe it and put our faith in the man whom these authors wrote about.

The gospels are eyewitness accounts of the man, Jesus Christ, and his works and words. There are many more reasons to believe they are true than there are to believe they are fiction — and many have tried their best to prove the latter. We believe our spiritual destiny depends on our faith in the words of these gospels — as does our children’s faith.

VBS is all about getting that message across, in an interesting, “immersive” way. Let’s do all we can to make it a great, productive, instructive week for the kids. And thanks, Dennis and Sharron for your hard work.