

Epic: More Than A Story – 2 Pet 1:16-21

Welcome to our ministry year kick-off; If you're visiting with us, we're super glad you're here; We've already had a great weekend of leadership training Friday night and Saturday morning about 300 leaders gathered here to focus on a quality of discipleship this year
And we look forward to all God is going to do as a result

We also have a new theme (**Refresh**), and a new series we're starting
The theme being an over-arching thought and encouragement that I hope you'll take to heart all year long, and a mini-series . . .
That will be the focus of our study for the next 8 weeks or so; 2 Pet 3:1-2

➤ This is the passage on which our theme is based, where Peter says . . .
[1] *This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, [2] that you should remember*
Remember what? All that they had learned from the Scriptures – OT and NT alike
Peter wanted to stir them up and refresh their minds – *by way of reminder*, that they would remember*****

And I want to do the same; That's why we're going to start with an overview of the Bible, called **Epic** – Discovering God's work of redemption from creation to eternity
That's epic; Something that's larger than life and larger than us
Something massive in scope, and earth-shattering in achievement
That's the Bible; That's God's work of redemption among us; It's epic

➤ But here's the deal – if it's not true, it's just a story; Just like any other epic
Like Homer's *Odyssey*; Or *Gone With The Wind*; Or *Romeo and Juliet*
Grand in scope and great in literature, but just stories
And if that's all the Bible is, then it has no more significance for our life than *Peter Rabbit* or *The Hunger Games*

So the question is, is it true? Is this book an epic of *truth*, or an epic of fiction?
Is it *more* than a story, or *just* a story? Is it the Word of *God*, or a book of well-intentioned mumbo-jumbo, written by over-zealous fanatics . . .
Who were eager to advance their own cause?

It's a legitimate question; And I hope to show you that in fact it's an epic of truth, and *far* more than a story; You ready for that?

1. It's based on actual events

So many times through the years, the Bible has been questioned and derided and dismissed, b/c some of the events it describes couldn't be verified
And time and time again, those critics have eaten their words with the discovery of new sources and new data

For instance, the fall of Nineveh in the books of Nahum and Zephaniah was long thought to be a complete fabrication by biblical critics
As was the capture of Jerusalem in 2 Kings 25
And then the **Tablet of Nabopolassar** was found in the early 1900's, confirming both

Or how about the conquer of Babylon by Persia in the 5th century BC? And the subsequent freeing of the Israelite captives by Cyrus the Great? (Ezra 1&6)
“Laughable; That didn't happen” critics said
Until the **Cyrus Cylinder** was discovered in 1879, confirming both

Or how about the life of Christ? People used to say that even *he* wasn't a real person*****
Until more and more *extra*-biblical sources were found referring to him
In fact, in the first 2 centuries alone, no less than 10 *non*-Christian writers refer to him;
Some of them even *anti*-Christian
Like the writers of the Jewish Talmud; And Josephus; In addition to Suetonius, Thallus, Pliny the Younger, Lucian, Celsus, and Tacitus
Real people who wrote about a real person; Proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Bible is based on actual events, and more than a story

2. It's written by eye-witnesses

2 Pet 1:16-18; After saying that he would make *every effort* to teach us and remind us about the life that God desires for us, Peter tells us why
[16] *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*
[17] *For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him [or spoken to him] by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” [18] we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.*

He's talking about the Mount of Transfiguration when Peter, James, and John saw the face of Jesus shine *like the sun, and his clothes* [become] *white as light* (Mt 17:2)
The point being, they *saw* it; Far from peddling cleverly devised *myths*, they were retelling actual *events* that they *witnessed*
Which means the things they were declaring about Jesus are true and reliable; *Far* more than just a story

➤ It would be like someone writing a book about what your hometown was like back in 1980; Correctly and accurately describing your town's . . .
Politicians, laws, industry, weather patterns, local slang, roads, geography, churches, hotels, statues, even the depth of the water in your harbor or marina . . .
And in so doing, claiming to have *visited* your town in that year, or interviewed several people who had

Wouldn't you think they were telling the truth? Of course you would
B/c only *eyewitnesses* can provide that kind of detail
And only eyewitnesses *would* provide that kind of detail, otherwise you'd expose them as a fraud

That's the type of testimony we have in the Bible – writers who claim to be eyewitnesses, and whose detail backs it up; Details that were easily verified . . .
Or commonly known at the time of writing; Which makes it more than a story

3. It's confirmed by archeology

For years, critics said that the account of Abraham going to the land of Canaan in Genesis *had* to be fabricated, because the word *Canaan* didn't even exist at that time

On top of that, there was no evidence of two cities named Sodom and *Gomorrah* in that land; *Further* indication that the Genesis account was a fraud

Until, archeologists found the **Ebla Tablets** in Northern Syria in 1975, dating 3-500 years *before* Abraham, and including references to – *Canaan, Sodom, and Gomorrah* And that barely scratches the *surface* of the cities/structures/places/houses that have been uncovered; All verifying and corroborating the biblical record*****

Not that everything in the Bible has been found; It hasn't
But with the massive and growing amount of archeological *evidence* that exists, it's no longer intellectually honest to say the Bible is just a story . . .
B/c of a few outstanding questions or unsubstantiated references

4. It claims divine inspiration

After saying that they were eyewitnesses of actual events, Peter goes on in 2 Pet 1:19-21 to say that there's something even *better* than their account
Something even *more* valuable
[19] *And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed* [more sure than our own eyes], *to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts*
That is, until the prophecies of God are fulfilled, and Christ returns
We have the prophetic word *more* fully confirmed he says; And *more* sure than our eyewitness account Peter says

[20] *Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture* [the Bible, sacred writings] *comes from someone's own interpretation.* [21] *For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

Better than what their eyes perceived, they were writing the very words of God that the Holy Spirit laid on their heart; It's a claim of divine inspiration

And then there's **2 Tim 3:16** which says – All Scripture [all the Bible] *is breathed out by God*; IOW it all came from *him*

Men spoke and wrote, in their own style and personality, as God brought the words and thoughts to mind; Once again, it's a claim of divine inspiration*****

None of which proves that it's more than a story; *Anyone* can say that their book is from God; And many have
But none are based on actual events, supported by archeology, and written by eyewitnesses as well; And if it is God's Word, you'd expect it to say so
Which it does; All of which gives credence to the claim, and serious significance to the epic

5. Its writers were persecuted

Writers of novels don't get persecuted; At least not like the apostles and those close to them who wrote the NT
And personally witnessed the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; Believing and preaching and writing that he was God in the flesh and Lord of all
They were persecuted for that; And *killed* w/out recanting a single word

Which tells us that what they said is true – that the Bible really *is* an epic of truth
B/c *nobody* willingly dies for something they *know* to be false
Plenty of people die for causes they *believe* to be true, like suicide bombers, but nobody intentionally dies for something they *know* to be false

So if the NT writers who lived at the time of Christ say that his life, death, and resurrection *happened*, it must be true
Otherwise they would have died for something they *knew* to be false
Which makes no sense at all unless they were completely delusional
And *that* doesn't fly, b/c their writing is so clear and consistent; Far from delusional

So the only reasonable conclusion, is that they gave their lives for something they knew to be *true*; It's one more indicator that the Bible is more than a story

6. Its content is honest

It's not sanitized, it's not cleaned up, and there's no embellishment of the events
Which was the *norm* in most religious writing of that day
But not the Bible; It's different; It's just the honest, straightforward account of the truth

Which, if you were inventing a new religion, you'd *never* do
You'd *never* include embarrassing facts about yourself
You'd never portray yourself as dim-witted – not getting it at first; Like the apostles
You'd never portray yourself as uncaring – telling little kids to stay away
And you'd never portray yourself as cowardly – denying Christ 3 times in Peter's case

Nor would you portray the followers of your religion, like the Israelites of old, as people who were caught up in a cycle of sin and punishment
And the leaders who led them as obstinate and sinful

And you *certainly* wouldn't portray your Savior as being thought of as a drunkard, a madman, a loner, and someone who was deserted and distrusted by his own family
Those aren't good ways to gather a following

And yet that's exactly what you find in the Bible; B/c it's content is honest
Complete with uncomfortable accounts of bloodshed that are hard on our sensibilities
And divergent details that are hard to reconcile sometimes; Like in the Gospels where Matthew refers to *one* angel at the tomb, and John mentions *two*
Anybody making up a religion would have conferred with one another, or edited one of the accounts, so as not to cast any doubt on what they were saying
But not the Bible – its content is honest; Making it more than a story

7. Its message is consistent

If I told you to go out and compile a book, written by 40 different people from 3 different countries and cultures and languages . . .
Including people from widely differing walks of life – like fisherman, priests, shepherds, kings, tentmakers, tax collectors, scribes, and prophets . . .
And, they had to have lived over a span of 1600 years . . .
And agree on all the ethical, spiritual, and social issues of life without any collusion or collaboration . . .

And on top of that, it had to have a common thread of supernatural intervention by the same deity, woven throughout all its writings . . .

And needs to point a common deliverer and identical future . . .

If I told you to do that, you couldn't do it; But that's the *Bible*

Which makes it *far* more than a story; With unity and consistency despite its diversity
And a consistent message despite its inconsistencies in authorship, content, style, and perspective

8. Its prophecies are fulfilled

Conservatively speaking, there are 65 prophecies about the Messiah in the OT, the promised deliverer, that are fulfilled by Jesus in the New

Prophecies that were written between 500-1500 years before he was even born

Like Is 9 and 11 – which say that the Messiah would be a descendant of David, born to rule; And Micah 5:2 that says he would be born in Bethlehem
And Is 7:14 that says he would be born of a virgin
And Is 53 that says he would be crushed for our iniquities
And Ps 22 & Zech 12 that say he would be forsaken by God and crucified
And the list goes on; Which you can find by the way, on our website under the *Current Issues* page; Specific, detailed prophecies

But those aren't the only ones

There are other prophecies dealing with cities, the rise and fall of specific nations, and the plight of various people groups

All prophesied well before their time, and all fulfilled

No wonder Peter said in v19 that *we have something more fully confirmed*

Something *better* on which to rest our faith; Namely, the *prophetic word*, the Bible

Containing hundreds of fulfilled prophecies

It's something no other book can even come close to, and leads us to believe that in fact it *is* more than a story

9. Its effect is powerful

A mere story would not have caused thousands of devout religious Jews, including

staunch Pharisee priests who were firmly entrenched in their Judaism . . .

To abandon their closely held beliefs, and embrace Jesus as Lord of their lives

A mere story would not have spread under such intense persecution by *peaceful* means

Violent means maybe, but not peaceful

A mere story would not have changed the heart and mind of doubters like Thomas, or enemies like Paul

And a mere story would not change *your* heart, or give you peace, or completely realign your life to match God's purposes

But the epic of God's Word does; It's effect is powerful

Revealing the sin in your life and the condition of your heart like nothing else can; And offering a solution no one deserves

A solution called salvation; A solution of forgiveness; A solution of life forever and life to the full (**Summary**)

And it's yours to receive when you admit that you're a sinner, and *believe* in Jesus, and *receive* him into your life to live for him the rest of your days

That's *powerful*; And epic in its own right; And far more than a story

Pray – Lord, thank you for your Word; For how it's living, and active, and life-giving;
May it exceed all else as food for our soul and light to our paths; Give us a greater and greater hunger to know it; We give now with a heart of thanks

Close – Visitor bags; Announcement