



Shortening the Leap

Dr. Robert Tuttle, Jr.

Introduction

"How Can I Preach What I No Longer Believe?" (The Crisis)

I was standing outside my office in a theological seminary when a student walked by, obviously upset. I try never to say, "How are you?" without meaning it (though I sometimes do) so when he simply grumbled something inaudibly I invited him inside. As I closed the door he began to weep quietly and then erupted into sobs. When I made an awkward attempt to console him he blurted out, "Just an hour ago I received word that I've been appointed to serve a church in my home conference and I am now realizing that I do not believe any of it anymore. In two months time I will be the pastor of a church and I have nothing to offer--absolutely nothing! Nothing of Christianity makes sense to me anymore--whatsoever! How can I preach what I no longer believe?"

I said, "Let's talk."

He described the crisis as best he could. Then after ten or fifteen minutes of denying everything in the faith that he had once held precious, I simply said, "Frank, we need to go back to the basics. We need to talk about Jesus. Get him right and all the rest falls into place."

He flashed, "You're not listening. I don't even believe the man existed."

Somewhat surprised, I flashed back, "Whoa, there's more hard evidence for the existence of Jesus than for Julius Caesar."

Frank managed to look up, "OK, I grant you. There was a man named Jesus who walked the face of the earth 2000 years ago."

I said, "That's a start. Tell me about him."

"Well, he was a good man. He might even have been a prophet if there is such a thing."

"OK, Frank, that's progress. In less than a minute we have gone from zero to a man named Jesus who walked the face of the earth 2000 year ago, who was a good man, a prophet if there is such a thing. If there is such a thing as a prophet would he have been a true prophet or a false prophet?"

Frank looked up at the ceiling; he looked back down the wall; he finally looked at me, "Do you want the truth?"

"Yes, Frank, I've got to have the truth."

Exhaling he said, "I cannot in good conscience say he was a false prophet."

I'm thinking, this is too easy so I said once again, "We're making real progress now. We have a man named Jesus who walked the face of the earth 2000 years ago, who was a good man, a prophet if there is such a thing, a true prophet, so why did they crucify him?"

Frank shrugged, "Everybody knows that. They crucified him because he claimed to be the Son of God."

I added, "Then it seems to me that he either was the Son of God or he was a madman. Was he a madman?"

Once again Frank looked up at the ceiling; he looked back down the wall; he looked at me, "Do you want the truth?"

"Yes, Frank, I've got to have the truth."

"I cannot in good conscience say he was a madman. Just too much of what he had to say had the ring of truth."

I concluded, "Listen up dear brother. In less than five minutes we've gone from zero to a man named Jesus who walked the face of the earth 2000 years ago, who was a good man, a prophet if there is such a thing, a true prophet, who claimed to be the Son of God, who was not a madman. You

know I would do if I were you? I think I would risk believing that he was and is who he said he was and is."

With that Frank looked at me (a faint smile rising out of the gloom) and said something I will never forget as long as I live, "You've just shortened my leap."

A Stated Purpose

For some time now I've been collecting questions that pose problems for people struggling with doubt. I've asked a host of different people--including students, day laborers, teachers, farmers, lawyers, stonemasons, doctors, and stay-at-home moms--what challenges faith the most? Although there are a number of good books attempting to answer the age old "hard questions," most of those tumble out of the theological or philosophical mindsets of the various authors. I wanted to address the more contemporary issues from the point of view of those actually asking the questions.

So, generally speaking this book attempts to answer real questions about life, and (as the title, "Shortening the Leap," suggests), provide insights for people for whom faith is a giant leap. In fact, these people tend to define faith (since it apparently lies beyond the senses, perhaps even the realm of their experiences altogether) as trying to believe in something they can't quite believe in, that's just out of reach, just beyond belief. They sometimes ask, "Must I check my brain at the door of the church or does the Christian faith make sense? Furthermore, what's the point? What's in it for me?"

This is not just a book on apologetics, however. It is a book that links the gospel of Jesus Christ to the issues at stake when speaking or doing that good news in normal everyday encounters. I've been doing and teaching Christian theory and praxis for over 40 years. It is painfully apparent to me that what communicated just a few years ago might not communicate as well today. Oh, the message is the same but the understanding is sometimes different. Thankfully, the old man is still learning new and wonderful things. So, the need for a book that addresses the issues of faith from a little different perspective, a book that seeks to move people--both within and without the Church--from honest doubt to *enduring faith*. How do we gain it? How do we find it again if we've lost it? Then, how do we help others find it as well?

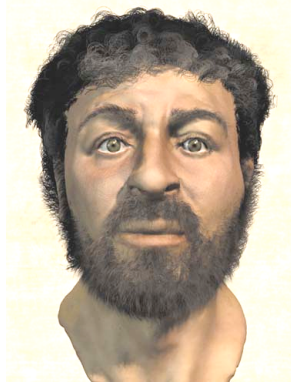
I rarely encounter real atheists. Most so-called atheists are simply tossing out some notion of God that I tossed out nearly 50 years ago. Most of the world has a measure of faith in something. One of the significant

things about New Age, for example, at least there is room at the table for a kind of spirituality. Post-modernity has a growing perception that there is more to reality than sight and reason. The challenge is not so much with atheists, or even agnostics, but (to borrow a word from my colleague George Hunter) with *ignostics*. Len Sweet refers to those distracted by cyberspace and the myriad of games available on the Internet as a culture of *vidiots*. So, my task here is to move people from doubt to faith, but also from faith to faith--from small measures of faith that perhaps just miss the mark to the kind of faith that is in touch with a reality that can move them from point A to point B, that can make a difference in their lives, that really does move mountains.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is always afoot. The first words out of the mouth of God following the fall, "Where are you," mean that God alone takes the initiative in the drama of rescue. Ultimately God has more invested in our lives than we do. My prayer, even as I write these words, is that God will enable you to find something in these pages to move you from doubt to faith (or from faith to faith) so that life can be more manageable, more meaningful, and more joyful.

I do not for a moment pretend to be objective. That is the price of passion. I have an incredible bias--he is Jesus. If you expect me to give Jesus and his detractors equal time as if I were offering you a choice that is merely up to public opinion, you will be greatly disappointed. If, however, you expect me to make a case for faith in Jesus Christ that can change your life forever, then you might well be in for the greatest experience of your life.

I know that faith is not always easy. For some this adventure will be more difficult than for others but know one thing for certain, I've written this book for one reason and one reason alone, to influence you for God. Endure the bumps, but enjoy the ride.



Shortening the Leap

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Chapter One

“Why Jesus?” (Exploring the basic content of faith)

The portrait at the head of this chapter appeared in a *Popular Mechanics* magazine a few years ago as a representation of what Jesus (as a Galilean Jew in the first century) might have looked like. It is not particularly prepossessing. So, honest doubt wants to know why such a man still commands global attention over 2000 years after his death?

Recently a student came into class asking the question many of the youth in her church were asking, “Why Jesus?”

I love that question. What better platform for a winsome (and hopefully intelligent) presentation of the gospel. Evangelists tell us that salvation is the free gift of God. There is nothing that we can do to earn it. Then they tell us that we must repent of our sins and put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ if we are to have a relationship with God and experience the power of the Holy Spirit “to go and sin no more.” So, what is the theology at work in all of this? Where does Jesus come into the picture? Why his sacrifice on the Cross? What, if anything, can faith in Jesus do that faith in the other religions of the world cannot do?

Andre Crouch says, “If Jesus is a crutch, give me two.” Some of us Christians become so obsessed with communicating to a post-Enlightenment, post-Modern, post-Christendom kind of a world that we sometimes forget the

simplicity of Jesus.¹ When Karl Barth (arguably the greatest theologian of the last century), was asked, "What is the most profound theological insight for Christians today," he replied, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

I'm a historian. My best insights are usually in retrospect. Soren Kierkegaard was fond of saying, "We live our lives forward, but we understand them backward. How can we know where to go if we don't know where we've been?" The challenges and opportunities present in the world today have never been greater. Thankfully, the enduring message of God's love toward humankind was recorded throughout the Bible and epitomized by Jesus in his birth, his early years, his baptism, his temptation, his ministry, death, resurrection and ultimately, his glorification.

The Sermon on the Mount and his Great Commission speak both the content and the call of Jesus. As a result the Book of Acts captures the mindset and community impact of that content and call. The early Church really believed that Jesus said and did all of those things recorded in the Gospels and that it was important for others to believe those things if they were to be put right with God and experience the power of God's Holy Spirit. So, how does it work? Again, why Jesus?

First of all let me set the broader stage. Let me attempt to explain redemption from a cosmic perspective. Planet earth is out of orbit with God. There is a gravitational pull away from the things of God (the books of the Bible describe the cycle all too well). "The whole world is under the control of the evil one" (I John 5:19).² Luke 4 describes Jesus (after his baptism) being driven by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. At one point "the devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to...'" (vv. 5-6). Whenever I read that passage my first reaction is always, that's a lie, but have you ever known Jesus not to get in the face of a lie, especially a lie of such proportion? The implication is that

¹ That is not to say that these challenges are not real. Certainly they are. James K.A. Smith's book, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Baker Academic, 2006) cites the July 15, 1972 demolition of the Pruitt-Ingoe housing development for low-income peoples in St. Louis (the so-called "machine for modern living" was deemed an uninhabitable environment), along with the 1968 student riots and the fall of the Berlin Wall as evidence of the collapse of modernity's naive attempts to solve the world's problems without striking the root.

² This and all other quotations from the Bible (unless otherwise noted) are from the *New International Version* (Zondervan Press).

although humankind was given dominion over planet earth (Gen. 1:26; Ps. 8:6), that dominion now belongs to Satan. God did not give it to him. *We* gave it to him, for a promise, or a lie, what I sometimes refer to as the biggest lie of all. Watch it happen.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:1-4).

They did *not* become like God. Instead, they instantly became aware of their own nakedness and were ashamed. Suddenly, God's good creation became mortal and prone to sin.

Most think that the admonition not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is about temptation. That's not about temptation. That's about choice. *If you cannot say no, your yes is meaningless.* We chose to sin and in so doing, gave the title deed to planet earth to the enemy of God. So, how and when do we get it back?

I once heard Mark Nyswander preach a sermon on Jesus as our kinsman redeemer. His logic went something like this.

In Biblical times property was forever linked to the original owner. If an Israelite sold a piece of property the title deed was sealed and registered in a public place. The original owner had the right to redeem that property in perpetuity if three things were in place.³ First you needed proof that you were the original owner (or a direct descendant of the original owner as kinsman redeemer). Second, you needed enough collateral for the full market value for that piece of property, and third, you needed the power and authority to remove a reluctant seller or usurper.

Now turn to Revelation 5:

³In fact (although there is no real evidence of this having taken place), every 50 years (during the year of Jubilee) all sold property should have reverted to the original owner (Lev. 25:8-55).

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it (vv. 1-3).

Although opinions differ as to the identification of this scroll, let's, for a moment, imagine that it represents the title deed for planet earth.⁴ All of its contents are sealed and registered, but there is no direct descendant worthy to redeem the full market value or powerful enough to remove the usurper. There is weeping and despair. But WAIT! Suddenly the Lamb ("looking as if it had been slain," but "with seven horns and seven eyes") appears standing in the center of the throne of God. As the Lamb takes "the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne" all Heaven breaks loose, singing, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God..." (vv. 6-9). Surely, the Lamb is worthy. Let's follow the logic.

First of all the Lamb can prove that He is a direct descendant of the original owner because as the Incarnate Son of the living God he now has a navel.

I was once asked to debate a well-known television evangelist on the university campus of the seminary where I was then teaching. At one point my opponent gave me a bit of a nudge, "Tuttle, don't give me a Jesus in a hair shirt and a sheep under his arm, he now rules at the right hand of *glory*!" My reply, "As long as you don't give me a Jesus in pinstriped suit and a Wall Street Journal under his arm, because the Jesus of glory still bears the marks of the Incarnation, and not just in his hands, his side and his feet, but in his navel, because the suffering began in the manger, not on the Cross."

All of the Incarnation was a passion narrative--cradle to grave. Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion*, doesn't know the half of it. It hurts God to be squeezed into human seed and implanted in a mama.

For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make

⁴ Some commentators identify the scroll with a divine decree, God's ultimate will (see Craig Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, pp. 76ff.).

atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Heb. 2:17-18).

It has always been significant to me that God does not have to imagine how I hurt when I hurt inside, God knows how I hurt when I hurt inside because God has been here.

Second, the Lamb, the Son of the Living God, was not only a direct descendent, he had sufficient collateral for full market value in that he was "a Lamb without blemish or defect" (I Peter 1:19). As a result, when Jesus, our kinsman redeemer,

...had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Heb. 10:12-14).

Third, the Lamb had authority to remove or defeat the entrenched enemy, Satan. Recall that the Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes--the symbol for ultimate authority throughout the book of Revelation (Rev. 5:7-14).

Surely the Lamb is worthy. Michael Card's song "Jubilee," proclaims "Jesus as our Jubilee." Ultimately, he alone fulfills the nature of the covenant first established, or cut with Abraham, but fulfilled on the Cross. He alone is our kinsman redeemer, not only of planet earth, but for our own personal salvation as well. Sacrifice in Biblical times was corporate as well as individual (Heb. 9:7). Revelation speaks of the eventual redemption of the world, but the Gospels speak of the redemption of the Church, *here and now*. We have been redeemed. We need not wait until all time has been fulfilled to receive it.

Furthermore, Mark 13:10 states that this gospel must be preached in every nation BEFORE Christ will return and establish God's ultimate reign in both heaven and earth. 2 Peter 3:12 admonishes:

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in

keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

Note, Peter tells the Church to "*speed its coming*." My former student and friend, John Breon, comments on this thought, "Wow! Does this mean that God is depending on us to bring about conditions for Jesus' return? I'm sure that God's sovereignty is not totally dependent on our action or response. But it is amazing how far God will go, how humble God will be to include us. 2 Peter 3:9 also indicates that God delays the end to give more people time to repent."

This last comment is significant as well. *Our task as the Church is not to create more programs simply to attract more people; it is to extend the ministry of Jesus*. In his farewell discourse Jesus tells us

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it (John 14:12-14).

So, why Jesus? Because God created us for fellowship and wants to be known as a God of love, mercy, justice, faithfulness and longsuffering. I frequently refer to the Biblical images of the gospel as *good news/bad news/good news*. The first good news is that we were created in the image of God--original righteousness--we were immortal (Gen. 1:27). It was easier to obey God than to disobey God. We were righteousness prone.

Then the bad news--original sin--so that now we are mortal (Gen. 3:19). It is easier to disobey God than to obey God. We are sin prone.

Then, the ultimate good news that God is in Jesus Christ reconciling the world. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).⁵

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

⁵ It should be said that some theology has no original good news (in effect beginning with the "bad" news), so there is nothing to be restored to, while some theology has no bad news, so there is no need to be restored.

You do not have to die to go to hell. Too many of my friends are languishing there already. The Parable of the Wedding Banquet speaks to the point. In order to understand the story fully it is important to realize that in Biblical times the host (especially a king) might make preparations for a wedding banquet for months. Not only was the food and wine provided, but the guests were given special clothes to wear as well. Those first invited refused to come and were punished. The king's servants were then instructed to go into the streets and gather all they could find, both good and bad. When the king went to greet his guests he noticed a man who was not wearing the garment provided. The king asked, "Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" When the man had no excuse the king instructed his attendants, "Tie him hand and foot and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are invited, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:13-14).

The broader context provides the best interpretation. The authority of Jesus had been challenged constantly by the scribes and Pharisees. In fact, his power to work miracles had been attributed to demons. Then Jesus quotes Psalm 118,

The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes?

Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be
taken away from you and given to a people who will produce
its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but
he on whom it falls will be crushed" (Matt. 21:42-44).

Let me give you still another perspective. Heaven without the clothes of righteousness would be the worst kind of hell. There are things in my life that I am grateful you know nothing about (though at my age my sins tend to bore most people). Still, I hide nothing from God. God sees me as I really am. Imagine me showing up at heaven's door unwashed by the blood of Jesus (God has given us the sacrificial righteousness of Jesus Christ as a wedding garment), presuming to plead my own case, with my sins hanging out, utterly exposed for the rest of eternity. John Wesley insisted that this would be a fate worse than hellfire and brimstone. In fact, Wesley took a line from some of the mystic writers and insisted that hell was the creation of God's love, not God's wrath. The mystics imagined our showing up in

heaven, presuming to plead our own case, believing that our own righteous clothes were really quite adequate, thank you very much. Suddenly God comes to welcome us to our new home, and, observing the misery of our nakedness, creates the darkness of hell to give such presumption a place to escape the awful exposure.

I recall an "Andy Capp" cartoon (the despicable little English sot is always getting drunk and chasing women). It seems on one occasion Andy is stumbling down the street only to pause long enough to pop a penny a box, "Save Our Roof Fund," attached to the door of the of the local parish vicarage. At that point the vicar comes out and says, "Thank you Andy, you will go to heaven for that, *but you won't like it.*" Never mind the theology here, the point is that Andy would not like heaven because Andy could not bear the light. In order to "enjoy God forever" we must put on the wedding garment, the righteousness of God's son Jesus Christ.

My Friend in Cornwall

Shortening the leap does not always begin with Jesus, however. Honest doubt sometimes asks the question behind the question. I have a friend named Taff who claims to be an atheist (though in my opinion not a very good one). He lives in a small fishing village nestled in a cove on the English Channel in Cornwall, England and is one of the few remaining small boat fishermen along the southwestern coast. I've known Taff for almost 10 years, visiting his village nearly every year for a week or so of rest and relaxation. His only perception of anything beyond the senses involves two unrelated experiences. One is to sit in his overstuffed chair with a glass of scotch looking out his living room window at the reflection of the moon on a shimmering sea. The other is to remember the love of his father who was a fisherman along that same coast, who after he retired would climb the coastal path, sit on a boulder high above the sea, and watch over his son as he fished alone in his boat far below. My friend believes that occasionally his father will suddenly appear on that boulder, still watching over him more than 10 years after his death. The experience is sometimes so real that he blinks his eyes to see if the image can be sustained. The apparition of his father will sometimes remain there for hours. He once asked if I believed that possible. My response? Of course it's possible, but it takes faith to believe that your dad is still there watching over you after all these years. Without faith you would miss out on this wonderful experience altogether. He nodded. Then I said, that is the same way with God. Without faith we

can miss a heavenly Father who is watching over us as well. He tapped his head and said, "You got me thinking."

God appeared in Jesus to convince us that our heavenly Father watches over us as well. The seeds of faith are already at work and my task is simply to pray that God will give me the insight to cultivate that seed so that you, and people like Taff, can move from doubt to faith, from belief that the man Jesus not only lived, but died, that you might have life everlasting.

The Story of Evangelism

Dr. Robert Tuttle, Jr.

Introduction

Evangelism is the story of a loving God in pursuit of all creation. The Scriptures tell that story well and then remind us that we are to be instruments for the telling. Obviously, we need to get it right.

Getting it right should be the point of this book, and every other book on evangelism. Unfortunately as I began the research I could not find any previous works from a truly global perspective. Most are embarrassingly western. Philip Jenkins book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, has convinced me that Christianity in the next generation will be moving east of the Urals and south of the equator.⁶ Increasingly the previous works that tell the western story of evangelism so well will become less and less helpful for those parts of the globe that are now on the cutting edge of what God is doing in the world. Admittedly, some look on these predictions with open criticism and the demographers that produce such figures make no claim to infallibility. Yet, few would deny that the spread of the gospel needs to prepare for just such a movement if we are to learn from their mistakes and benefit from their successes.⁷

Let me ask two questions. Is it possible for one who is unashamedly evangelical to write a book on evangelism that does not read like a polemic against the rest of the world? Is there an understanding of evangelism that is at once global and comprehensive, relevant and inclusive, informative and inspirational? This is an honest attempt to move us in that direction.

Good News/Bad News/Good News

The history of evangelism begins before time, before even the void that consumed all but its Creator. Since history is normally bound by time this seems a mystery to all but those who understand the nature of God. In essence God, even as Creator, is love and the very nature of that love must be freely given; it must be shared; it needs an object. The void was not enough. So, in the beginning God spoke and the heavens and the earth sprang into being as an expression of that love. If theology—at its best—can be described as good news, bad news, good news, that is the good news.

Then we experienced the bad news. Rather than return that love, creation loved itself more than its Creator. If one reads straight through the Bible at least two sins keep surfacing time and again—oppressing the poor (you really don't want to do that), and self-reliance. Tillich was right; our desire for autonomy—to go it alone apart from God—is the beginning, if not the essence of sin. The first unbelief was a mechanism

⁶ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁷ Some statistics suggest that while 10% of Christians lived south of the equator in 1900, as many as 30% in 2000, and perhaps 60% by 2025.

gone wrong. In spite of our good beginning we have struck ourselves all but senseless. Now, nearly oblivious to that which is beyond the senses, we have locked ourselves into a five dimensional box—attempting to measure reality only in terms of height, width, depth, time and motion. We perceive most of reality only through a glass darkly so that we see without seeing; we hear without hearing; we feel without feeling. Our metaphysical systems know little or nothing of the supernatural.⁸

Then the ultimate good news—God continues to love this rebellious creation and offers reconciliation to those who would receive it. That is the gospel down through the ages, the story of evangelism.

So, evangelism is important. Too often the caricature of evangelism is of God (or perhaps some lonely prophet) wielding a Bible and screaming, “You are a sinner and if you don’t do better you’re going to bust hell wide open.” While that may be true, that is not very winning and we can do better. In fact, God has done better—much better—since the beginning.

God’s love for creation is first recorded as primeval history (that is, time before there was an approximate date). Genesis singles out Adam and Eve, Enoch and Methuselah. Even when creation had nearly perfected its own evil God’s love prevailed and is revealed to Noah and his family. As wonderful as those stories are, history without an approximate date is not enough. We need something we can sink our teeth into; we need real time, real people, real places. We want stories that can be documented beyond mere bits of wood on some Turkish mountaintop.

A step in that direction can be found in Genesis 11—perhaps toward the end of the third millennium, BC. Can we document the historicity of the Biblical characters from this point on? Is there evidence to support the story of Abram as a historical character? Although some are convinced, apart from the Scriptures the evidence is scant.⁹ Let’s not miss the point, however. Over 60% of the religious peoples in the

⁸ It is interesting that those parts of the globe that are presently experiencing revival are being led by Christians whose metaphysical systems are big enough, not only to believe, but to expect the supernatural—especially with regard to healing and deliverance.

⁹ Some confidence in the historicity of Abraham comes from recent books like *A Biblical History of Israel* by Provan/Long/Longman (Westminster, 2003). On page 113ff. they write that “A major part of the modern discussion concerning both the dating and the historical portrait of the patriarchs has centered on whether materials from the broader ancient Near East establish their existence or at least support their setting within this time frame.... this debate over supporting evidence has been intense and has occupied decades of scholarly endeavor. At its center for much of that time stand the Nuzi (and nearby Arrapha) tablets. The Nuzi tablets were discovered beginning in the 1920s, and C. J. Gadd published the first group of tablets.... The discussion has, rather, centered over whether evidence affirms the biblical picture of the patriarchs in the time period ascribed to them [2100 and 1500 BC].... For the first couple of decades after their discovery, a consensus of sorts emerged that the Nuzi documents firmly established the patriarchal period as a historical fact of the first half of the second millennium B.C.” All this is to say that the parallels between the Nuzi documents and the Mari materials do suggest that the customs detailed in Genesis could have been representative of the period in question. Having said that, actually, the only possible extrabiblical evidence for Abraham that is

world today—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—trace their roots to the following text.

This is the account of Terah.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot....

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan...(Gen. 11:27, 31).

But wait! I get ahead of myself. That story must be reserved for the pages ahead.

Presuppositions

Every writer comes to a tale with a peculiar eye. Bultmann believed that such yeast spoiled the loaf. History, therefore, could not carry the weight even of necessary truth, let alone absolute truth. Though I see his point, I disagree. Once we understand the culture, we can make allowances, make the necessary corrections, and arrive safely with a reasonable assurance that at least we have the right address.

When I was in seminary some of my professors pretended to be objective. I could only guess where they were coming from, so I did not know from which direction I might need to listen, to make some correction, to make some allowance. So, you might find it helpful if I reveal at least some of my presuppositions from the beginning.

I am an evangelist. I have a tremendous bias (and if the truth be known, don't we all). I believe—right or wrong—that it is Jesus Christ alone who puts us right with God, who heals the brokenness of our time, and makes us fit to share the heritage of God's glory. If you would challenge me with being too narrow, I simply reply, "My believing in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ does not make me right, but it sure makes me an evangelist." So, this book is a study of the history of evangelism *and although it is important to make an honest attempt to describe other religions, and even the spirituality of others, in a way that is at least sympathetic to their point of view*, do not for one moment think that I am pretending total objectivity. I have read and pored over my research with one thing in mind—to influence you for God. My intent is to tell the story, and to tell it in such a way that will give you a feel for how evangelism has been done down through the millennia (both good and bad). Then I want to motivate you to do evangelism yourselves, to enable you to overcome your fear of evangelism, and, finally, to demonstrate how some of those who have gone before us have set a powerful precedent for just how we can do it better.

There is an argument that since post-moderns have rejected the Enlightenment that post-modernism has been conditioned in ways unknown to any who have gone before us making all historical precedents irrelevant. It is my opinion that post-moderns

fairly widely accepted is in the topographical list (nos. 71-72) of Shoshenq I (Shishak) of Egypt in 925, giving what may be read as "The Enclosure of Abram." K.A. Kitchen's *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, 2003.

have not so much rejected the Enlightenment—that, in fact, would be a response typical of the Enlightenment—as they are not particularly impressed by it. Let me illustrate.

My own denomination has its roots in the Wesleyan revival, but has not been a Wesleyan Church for over 150 years. Does that mean that we abandon those roots entirely, or can we allow the old man John Wesley’s spirit to linger among us and help us to make decisions—even today?

Where evangelism is concerned there are significant historical precedents. The intent here is to allow the spirits of those who have gone before us to linger among us and help us to make decisions—even in a post-modern world. That makes history important. There is a solid precedent for doing evangelism in a way that is winsome and intelligent.

On Being Inclusive

I believe that most books on evangelism have failed to understand the importance of being inclusive, especially with regard to language, women, people of color, and whole parts of the world that have thus far been largely overlooked. I have made an honest attempt to correct this. I will try not to make a single gender reference to God except for the occasional Scripture quotation—I really do hesitate to rewrite the Bible—and do it in such a way that you are not even aware of it. As for women, history is packed with marvelous examples, especially in the field of evangelism. Women like Sarah, Miriam, Esther, Hannah, Mary (the mother of Jesus), Pricilla, Helena, Catherine, Teresa, and Guyon cry out to be included.

The same could be said for people of color. To begin with Apollos and Augustine would not even scratch the surface. In the same spirit, what about those parts of the world that have thus far had little or no mention in such studies?

At the outset we stated that evangelism is not simply a western phenomenon. That attitude has gotten us into enough trouble already, especially on the “mission” field? Courageous Christians have spent their lives in places like Manchuria, the sub-continent of India, Micronesia, and even Australia without so much as a whisper of notice. I will still miss a great deal. No doubt your suggestions would enable me to rewrite this book even better a hundred times over. It is not as if we haven’t been warned. “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.”¹⁰ So, for now, simply know that I have made an honest attempt in the midst of the more classical examples, to be inclusive in all of these areas as well.

Precept and Example

We hear much of late of walking the talk. Perhaps we have forgotten that we still have a mandate to talk the walk. Surely Rom. 10:14 is to the point:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?
And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And
how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can

¹⁰ John 21:25.

they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Not that evangelism is all talk. Certainly not! St. Francis said something like, “Preach at all times and when necessary use words.” I have a quotation attributed Carl Jung above the desk in my office at home; “Bidden or unbidden, God is present.” God has more invested in evangelism than we do. God wants to be known so that God can be loved. To know God is to love God. If any love is self-authenticating, it is God’s. One of my heroes in the faith was Sam Shoemaker. Nearly 50 years ago he wrote a book on *How to Become a Christian*. One of my favorite passages from that book talks about grace and faith. He writes:

The Divine initiative comes first. “By grace ye are saved through faith.” That verse says it all. It is grace, not gumption or glands or goodness, that saves us. But grace saves us “through faith.” Grace is God’s part. Faith is our part. What is faith? Well, what is faith in a person?... Faith is a belief in someone’s integrity and capacity. You can trust them. Faith in God is like that. It has intellectual factors in it, but also has in it a preponderance of loyalty, or confidence, or active trust. Sometimes we think faith is given to some people and not to others, like an ear for music, or a striking personality. Faith is much more like falling in love, which can come to anybody. Faith does not so much depend on my capacity to give it as on the other person’s capacity to arouse it. It is more like admiration, neither can I withhold my admiration. It is just so with faith. It is my belief that nobody can stay around our Lord Jesus Christ very long without coming to believe in Him. The faith is mine, but it is provoked by Him. Faith is my response to Him.¹¹

The Love of God Restated

I continue to be struck by the fact that the New Testament insists, “the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect... was chosen *before the creation* of the world.”¹² This means that God redeemed us before God created us. God loved us before God made us. God as a God of love, whose very nature is love, needs an object to love. The whole of creation is the object of God’s love--and even though we have messed it up, God wants it back--and that is the story of evangelism.

I was recently in Cambodia. I was deeply impressed with the peoples of Cambodia. At the end of nearly half a century of political turmoil where most of an entire generation of Cambodians was slaughtered in the killing fields, the peoples in the churches of Cambodia know that they are loved and this sustains them. The task of evangelism is to gather people into the kind of community that brings them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and then sustains them with the kind of support that guarantees their walk in the Spirit so they can finish the race. If we can see that demonstrated in the

¹¹ Sam Shoemaker, *How to Become a Christian*, p. 95,

¹² I Peter 1:17-21, emphasis added.

Cambodian Church—which for the most part is less than ten years old—what can we learn from the history of the Church that is thousands of years old? I am convinced we can learn a great deal.

I frequently say that I am not into Christianity for the pain. I'm into Christianity for one reason—to stay alive. I need someone who knows my name to pray for me every day by name and to watch my back. The Cambodian people know the importance of prayer and of watching each other's backs. I keep telling my students that we remember and forget, remember and forget, remember and forget, but outside community, mostly we forget.

Methodology

With some of our goals clearly in mind, let's say just a word about methodology. From the Table of Contents you can see that I have gathered information representative of the various styles of evangelism relevant for a particular segment of history. Although there is a great deal of overlap and similarity from one segment to another, there is also dissimilarity as well. If it is important to understand fully how styles of evangelism must adapt from one culture to another we must also realize that evangelism must adapt from one time period to another, even within the same culture—thus the historical approach.

The basic outline of the book is divided into periods or sections. Each period will then consist of three chapters and a bibliography. The first of these chapters describes the **setting**—a brief but honest attempt at a global perspective. Here we discuss the various cultural factors (social, political, religious...) relevant to establishing the need for evangelism from the broader context.

The second of the period chapters introduces the **speaker**, an evangelist unique to the time under consideration. Here we describe in some detail (partly in first person) the various characteristics of evangelism important for that period and epitomized by the speaker.¹³

The third of the period chapters describes the **impact**—of the speaker and others around the globe attempting to do evangelism. Here we discuss the results of the overall evangelistic effort—some well done, some not so well done—and provide transition into the next period.

Each period will then conclude with a bibliography for the student of evangelism who might like to study the period in question in greater detail.

¹³ Once again, note that many of the speakers are women. I discovered that much of evangelism throughout the ages was carried out by women--behind the scenes. The fact that some of these women might not be as well known as most of the men proves that much of what goes on in evangelism happens among the distant saints, who hover in shadows, pray for wayward sons and daughters, intercede for the people, and persist before the throne of grace. God takes notice and responds--lest the God of justice and mercy be worn out by these daughters of justice and mercy. Also note that some of the speakers are people of color. Many of us do not realize, for example, that Augustine, and his mother, Monica, were most likely black and provide significant insight into the work of evangelism and its importance for the development of the Christian Church from the beginning.

This is a story of incredible courage and sacrifice in the midst of a world that still reels from its own attempts to slay itself. In spite of the “bad news,” the gospel is still good news (if you have ever heard the gospel and it did not sound like good news, you did not hear the gospel of Jesus Christ) for God is still

...in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors of Christ, since God is making his appeal through us...¹⁴

I want the next history of evangelism to be a book about you as well. Let God arise.

¹⁴ II Cor. 5:19-20.

