



## The Team

Sometime in the spring of 26 AD \*, Jesus of Nazareth walked up to a group of fishermen in northern Galilee. He wasn't widely known at the time, a status that would soon change. A religious firebrand had singled him out as the "Lamb of God", the promised leader all Israel had been waiting for, and the person "whose shoe laces I'm unworthy to tie".

Significantly, the visit to this shoreline marked an important milestone. After thirty years, Jesus of Nazareth was ready to begin his mission. The clock was thus set for what would be the short remainder of his life.

He walked up to the fishermen as a thirty-year old. Three years later he would die on a cross. And after his death, he achieved something so mysterious and unbelievable, it would polarize the world for thousands of years. He returned from the dead. How do we know about his resurrection and the amazing proofs of His mission? The blind were healed, children were raised from the dead, and people with mortal diseases were restored to health, that was the legacy of Messiah.

But Jesus didn't write his story. The amazing things he said and did found initial narrative voice, starting with this small group of fishermen. Jesus was building a team of reporters. Even though others would join him as he walked from place to place during that short three year period, the twelve witnesses he now sought would be his closest confidants, and provide testimony about what He said and did.

The members of his team were known as "disciples," or "apostles". A teacher surrounded by a band of student-followers was a social convention well-known in the ancient world. The configuration of a teacher with a team might also explain a number of questions that show up frequently in any discussion of written records.

The blind poet, Homer, made a living from his travels throughout ancient Greece. He sang ballads about the gods; he told stories that explained the nature of Greek reality. There's only one problem. If Homer was blind, how did he manage to "write down" his two greatest works, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*?

While we don't know a lot about Homer, there's a possibility - blind or not - a team of followers traveled with this balladeer-minstrel-storyteller, and from that group, someone wrote a transcription of Homer's performances. Those words marked the start of a narrative-trail that survives to this day.

A lot of scholarship has been expended analyzing Homer's transcribed "voice", enumerating the disjunctions in the narrative. Textual clues and inconsistencies lead some to speculate that Homer was not a real person. Skeptical researchers often suggest that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were not the product of one writer, but the conflation of many.

Plato didn't see it that way, evidently. He suggested that most people credited Homer as the "educator for all Greeks", which is one explanation for why people teamed up around the notables of the ancient world. Education. If there was an entourage traveling with Homer (highly possible though not proven), it was most likely made up of people who joined him for any number of reasons, with education at the top of the list. The "teams" in the ancient world sought enlightenment, and a teacher to bestow it. For Plato, Socrates was the teacher. He was a member of the student-team.

You see the concept in other places, other times. A thousand years before Christ, a hero traveled the same spaces, later walked by Jesus. David would become the second king of Israel, eventually, but in the years before he ruled, young outcasts, the marginalized, men who'd been warriors, fell into community around David and came to be known as "David's men".

Given what we know about David, his team probably weren't looking for a teacher. Many were speculators. They knew the David-story; they knew about his victory over Goliath, and the small army forming around him. David was also a poet, musician, and composer of renown. But he was also the meal ticket for many who joined his entourage. Men and women sought to get involved with his life for the promise it held. If he did rise to kingly prominence, they would have easier access to the opportunities of his court, or maybe even become his queen.

The teams in the ancient world might be made up of students, warriors, ordinary fans (many teams were probably just that: fan clubs), along with biographers, historians and undeclared opportunists.

In the *Bible*, the great prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18:22; 19:10-14,) lamented his abandonment. He counted himself as one who loved God, but declared that he was "alone" in his zeal. It's pure speculation, but given the political situations surrounding his life, perhaps he didn't have a team on account of ... hanging out with Elijah during his lifetime was dangerous to one's health.

Perhaps lonely Elijah was saying: "Where's my team?"

The "team" in the ancient world was a community. And for Jesus of Nazareth, his traveling community became first-hand witnesses to his mission.

In a moment both disgusting and funny, Christ's team-members engaged in a argument over who was the greatest (Luke 22:24). In a similar passage, the mother of James and John attempts to jockey her sons into positions of leadership on the team (Matthew 20:20-23).

Team members were often seeking an advantage.

Like Homer, perhaps the celebrity at the center of a group wrote his history, but there's a possibility, someone on the team did the writing. There might even have been several writer's who provided the service.

When ardent believers talk about the divine inspiration of the Bible, what do they mean? It often comes as a shock to find out, biblical narratives had no verse numbers in the original language. Paragraphs, pages, and verse numbers came later, inspired by organizing principles that originated well apart from the inspired narrative.

The modern reader, as well as many scholars, often overlook the realities of biblical authorship and find themselves engaged in arguments about who wrote what, and whether the apparent "contradictions" in biblical narrative were inspired, as well.

An ancient book, read and quoted by the ancients - including Jesus - was the apocryphal book of Enoch. "Apocryphal" meaning that while the biblical character - Enoch- may have experienced what we read in the book, Enoch probably didn't write the book that bears his name.

Shock. Enoch didn't write Enoch.

The issue of authorship, of "who wrote it," lies at the heart of how the various books in the Bible came to be adopted. Certainly, when an author like St. Paul writes to various churches and signs his name to the document, Paul is definitely the author. When he doesn't sign, as is the case with the book of *Hebrews* in the **New Testament**, the narrative sounds so much the themes and arguments made in his other writings, Paul is suspected of being the author. Objectively speaking, though, *Hebrews* could have been written by someone on "Paul's" team.

Should the fact that Paul might not have written *Hebrews* disqualify its inclusion into the canon (standard reference-text) of the **New Testament** ? If it's not directly Paul's work, what "quality" serves to recommend it to prominence?

The qualification for a book's inclusion in the **Old** or **New Testaments** must lie somewhere, outside attribution. To discover the answer, though, we might have to draw a larger circle for our understanding. And while the enlargement might bring greater accuracy and perspective to our knowledge of the **Bible**, it won't answer all the resulting questions. Some questions about how the holy book came into existence will result in other, more difficult questions and an ultimate challenge-of-faith for some who are auditioning what they believe, and demand easy answers.

*\* The actual date and time of year are not known. Many scholars calculate that the year of Jesus' birth was probably between 4 and 6 BC, and that his visit to Galilee, and encounter with fishermen, might suggest a time of year that wasn't the dead of winter.*

*New York Times on the translation of the King James Bible. Quotes.*

[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/15/books/earliest-known-draft-of-king-james-bible-is-found-scholar-says.html?WT.mc\\_id=2015-OCTOBER-FB-MC4-AUD\\_DEV-1001-1031&WT.mc\\_ev=click&ad-keywords=AUDDEVREMARK&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/15/books/earliest-known-draft-of-king-james-bible-is-found-scholar-says.html?WT.mc_id=2015-OCTOBER-FB-MC4-AUD_DEV-1001-1031&WT.mc_ev=click&ad-keywords=AUDDEVREMARK&_r=0)