INTRODUCTION

The Author – Lee Strobel – What do we know about him?

Investigative Reporter for Chicago Tribune

Atheist to Christian – The Struggle of Unbelief

**Notes from Book**

Have you ever asked a question like Lee Strobel asked when he said, “WHO was in the manger that first Christmas morning?”

Strobel talks about a family he met while doing an investigative report for the Chicago Tribune. It was Perfecta and two young children, Lydia and Jenny. Can you tell a little about just those three persons?

What had just happened to them?

What made the family interesting enough to do an article on them?

After the fire, they were left with nothing but the clothes on their back, what happened after Lee Strobel’s article?

How did Perfecta Delgado respond to their newfound ‘wealth’?

When Strobel found out what Perfecta was doing with the ‘wealth,’ he seemed surprised by Perfecta’s reason for doing so. What did she say to Strobel? Three answers shocked Strobel. What are they?

* “Our \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ are still \_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. We cannot have \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ while they have \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. This is what \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_!”
* “We did \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to deserve this – it’s a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_. But, it’s not \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_. No, we celebrate that tomorrow. That is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”
* His response was, “To her, this child in the manger was the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ gift that meant \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ – more than \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, more than \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, more than \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. And at that moment, something inside of me desperately wanted \_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ – because, in a sense, I saw Him in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

This experience with the Delgados made Strobel ponder the differences between his beliefs as an atheist and the stories of Christmas and this Christ. He still could not get past the facts. Virgins don’t \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. There is \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_ that would come as a helpless human baby.

When reading this, what questions about Christ, Christmas, or Christianity have you heard or wondered yourself? **Write them on a 3x5 card and hand them in**to Bob, so, as we go through this study, we might answer them if not fully covered in the material.

Strobel faced with his wife, Leslie, giving her life to Christ and his own beliefs that there was no God, began to do just what he did for a living as an investigative reporter with the Chicago Tribune. Of what did Strobel say his job consisted? (p 11)

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How did Perfecta’s witness to her faith and generosity do for Strobel? His answer was “They had \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ despite \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, they knew the \_\_\_\_\_\_ of generosity, while I only knew the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; they looked \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for hope, while I only looked \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; they \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the wonder of the spiritual, while I was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to the shallowness of the material – and something made me long for what they had.”

SESSION 1: Session Title: Setting the Record Straight

Chapter 1 of Book -- Title: Eyewitness Evidence: Can the biographies of Jesus be trusted?

* Can the Biographies (Gospels) of Jesus be Trusted?
* Testimony from a distant time
* An Interview with an Expert on the Gospels
* Delving into Specifics
* Ancient verses Modern Biographies
* When Was Jesus Born?
* The Mystery of Q
* The Unique Perspective of John
* Jesus’ Most Audacious Claim
* The Gospels’ Theological Agenda
* Hot News from History
* Believing the Virgin Birth

Going Back to the Beginning

**Notes from Book**

Who were the following people (pages 13 & 14), and why are they important to our study?

Leo Carter

Leslie Scott

Sam Blue

Elijah Baptist

Henry Carter

What motivated, other than being the right thing to do, Leo to testify against Elijah Baptist and his two friends?

The phrase ‘Eyewitness testimony is powerful’ was used in this story. Why is eyewitness testimony important in our study of Christmas?

Where do we find eyewitness reports in the Bible?

Who are the eyewitnesses to the Christmas story?

Who were the ‘investigative reporters’ in the Christmas story?

How can we know these ‘eyewitness accounts’ were true?

Who is Dr. Craig L. Blomberg, and why is he important to our study?

Lee Strobel interviewed Dr. Blomberg and asked several questions; how did Blomberg answer these questions?

* “Is it really possible to be an intelligent, critically thinking person and still believe that the four Gospels were written by the people whose names have been attached to them?” (p 16)
* “How uniform is the belief that they were the authors?” (p 16)
* “Would anyone have had a motivation to lie by claiming these people wrote these gospels when they really didn’t?” (p 16)
* “What specific evidence do you have that they are the authors of the Gospels?” (p 18)
* “We can be assured that the events they record are based on either direct or indirect evidence.” (p 19)

What other persons had opinions of the validity and truthfulness of the Gospel writings?

Strobel said that the Gospel accounts did not look like modern biographies. What did he learn from the answer he was given?

What was the literary reason given for the accuracy of the biographies found in the Gospels?

What was the theological reason given for the accuracy of the biographies found in the Gospels?

There is a side-bar discussion about “When was Jesus born?” What did we learn from that, and why does or doesn’t this make a difference?

What is “Q”?

How does “Q” support or not support the Gospel views of Jesus?

What are the synoptic gospels? How does that help us with our study?

What is the difference between the synoptic gospels and John’s gospel? What is unique about the Gospel of John?

What are some of the most audacious claims Jesus made of Himself or was made by the Gospels about Jesus?

* Jesus is God
* When Jesus said, “Fear not, it is I” or literally “I am!”
* I am the “Son of Man”
* Jesus claims to forgive sins
* Jesus accepts prayer and worship
* The idea that final judgment is based on accepting Jesus as God

What did you understand, prior to this study, the term “Son of Man” mean and what do you know now?

What are the theological agendas of the Gospels?

* Matthew
* Mark
* Luke
* John

What was the “Hot News” from history (p 31)?

What is the purpose of this Hot News?

How does the dating of the Gospels, along with all the other accounts, help confirm the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ?

In the side-bar discussion about “Believing the Virgin Birth” on page 32, how does Dr. Craig answer the question?

Strobel poses another question (p 35) to be answered, “How early can we date the fundamental beliefs in Jesus’ atonement, his resurrection, and His unique association with God?”

What are creeds? Why do they exist even today?

What are some of the earliest creeds?

**Notes from the Video**

Social culture of the time of Jesus’ birth would have deemed it unthinkable to deny accommodations to a pregnant woman. And would have led to be ostracized from society. How does that change your perspective on the Christmas story?

Can rejecting room for the birth of Christ in you be a parallel to the Christmas story? Why do you believe this is true or false?

The Greek word ‘katalyma’ means “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” Does this in any way change your understanding of the Christmas story?

In Luke’s Gospel account he uses the phrase “While they were there” in Bethlehem. From the video, how does that help describe the timing of Jesus’ birth?

From whom did the idea of Mary giving birth in a cave even though the gospels do not mention this?

Can we know the Gospel accounts are reliable and trustworthy when they describe the birth, the teachings, the death and resurrection of Jesus? What are the two reasons given?

1. They were written \_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to the events they describe than some critics claim.
2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ has consistently ­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the biblical record.

**Group Discussion Questions**

What struck you as the most significant point as the myth of Mary being refused a room at the inn was rebuked?

One scholar suggests that Mary and Joseph could have been in Bethlehem “five minutes or five weeks” before the baby Jesus was born. He emphasizes that there wasn’t an emergency situation when they were looking for a place for the birth. How does this change your understanding of the Christmas story?

What are your thoughts about the reliability of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?

**Between Sessions Personal Study (AKA homework)**

**Studying God’s Word**

This week read Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth (Matthew 1:18-2:12.

What stands out in the passage that you didn’t notice as much previously?

Go back through the passage circling key words (limit to twenty). Make a three-column table. In first column put key word. In second column put the answer to the question “Why do you consider this word to be key to the text?” In the third column, write the definition of the key word.

**Put It into Practice**

How would knowing you can trust the accuracy of the Bible the way you live your life?

How would trusting the Bible change your home life and your life at work?

Would trusting the Bible change your personal life and your relationships?

What is the biggest truth you learned this week?

What have you learned from your study this week?

What is the difference from what you believed before this week’s study and what you believe now?

How has this week’s study impacted your faith much like how the Delgado’s response changed Lee Strobel?