



The DAILY JESUS NEWS #005
Jesus' 30 Years of Preparation for Ministry
Jesus' Birth and Growth into Maturity

The Historical reliability of the Gospel
Luke 1.1-4

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¹ Because many people have attempted to compile a written declaration of the things that have been permanently fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us as authoritative oral traditions by those who were actual eyewitnesses from the beginning of Jesus' ministry and were servants of the Word, ³ it seemed good to me as well to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus (meaning "friend, or lover of God").

⁴ Because I have carefully investigated all of the facts from the very beginning, you can be fully assured of the certainty of the things that you have been taught.

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus.*

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	Asia Minor
Time	Around 60 AD
Stage of Jesus' Life	Stage II: His 30 Years of Preparation for Ministry
Chapter 2	Faith, Prayer and Prophecy Prepared for Jesus' Incarnation
Section #005	The Historical Reliability of the Gospel

This reading begins the second major stage of Jesus' life--the thirty year period in which he was perfectly prepared to begin his ministry. This period covers the Scriptural record of the events preceding his birth, his nativity, early years, growth into maturity, and the beginnings of the ministry of John the Immerser (Baptist), up to the day John introduced Jesus to the world as God's Son and Messiah.

At this point in the Scriptural narrative of Jesus' life, history becomes especially important. Jesus' eternal pre-existence as God was pre-history. From the creation of the universe our record of "history"

begins. The pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus were real encounters with Isaiah, David, and Daniel, but they involved the timeless, pre-existent Christ. So Stage I of Jesus' life was historical, yet it transcended time and space, as only God does.

Stage II of Jesus' life began the human phase of Jesus' life, in his incarnation in a real flesh and blood body. His humanity was unpoluted by sin, and was therefore more real than any other person who has ever lived. Jesus' life entered the realm of history; of space and time; of culture and society and languages and economics and relationships--the world in which we live.

Are the four gospels, and other Scriptural witness about Jesus reliable? Are they truthful? Is this the kind of historical information we can risk our lives upon? As we begin this phase of Jesus' life it is encouraging to have a clear statement of historical reliability from one of the gospel writers. Luke carefully investigated the body of historical evidence available to him about the life of Jesus. He mentions three specific sources. As these are crucial for understanding the four gospels, we will take more time in our comments today than usual.

1. The eyewitnesses themselves. By this Luke meant primarily the apostles. These were hand-picked by Jesus for this task as men who had been with him from the beginning of his ministry, to his resurrection. Luke personally interviewed more than one apostle. There were many other eyewitnesses as well, such as Mary and Martha, James the half-brother of Jesus, and his mother Mary. Many of these eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and ministry were still alive at the time Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote their gospels. Luke spoke to as many of them as he could.

2. The authoritative oral tradition of Jesus' life. These were the stories of Jesus told repeatedly by the apostles in their preaching that were memorized by the believers, and then written down. During the first 6 years of the life of the church in Jerusalem, the apostles spoke in turn, every day, in the Court of Solomon in the outer Temple area. The believers would come by and listen as they could. The content of Jesus' life that we have in our four gospels today was repeated, over and over again in the temple in these years. The believers then carefully memorized and repeated the stories themselves. This was the way information was preserved and promulgated in the primarily non-literate society of the first century. How did this work?

Each gospel we have today only takes a couple hours or so to read out loud. All of the content of our four gospels could have been delivered by the apostles in just one day in the Temple. They delivered the same content, day after day, for about 2000 days before the persecution under Saul drove the church in Jerusalem underground for a few years. Through this process the 15-25,000 believers in Jerusalem all became walking, talking depositories of the content of the four gospels, totally memorized, and were ready to share it with anyone in their witness about Jesus.

When these believers were pushed out of Jerusalem because of Paul's persecution, they spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and the surrounding areas, proclaiming these same stories and teaching the new believers in the churches to memorize and pass them on in the same way. The oral version of the four gospels thus spread everywhere the gospel was preached.

All of the gospel writers wrote down these same stories, verbatim, from the oral tradition when they composed their gospels. This is why there is such similarity in content between the gospels. In the case of Matthew, John, and Peter, the oral tradition they wrote down was their own eye-witness testimony in the first place.

3. The third source of information that Luke carefully investigated were written documents. One of these was a document that scholars call "Q," from the latin word for "source" (quelle in latin). Q was a collection of the sayings of Jesus, and John the Immerser. There are many places in the Synoptic gospels (MT, MK, LK) in which the writers quote from this common written source. It is the same, word

for word, in each gospel where Q is quoted, so Luke's description of using written sources like "Q" in his gospel bears up under the most intense scrutiny. Mark was already published by the time Luke wrote his gospel as well, and it is quite evident that Luke used Mark as a written source. He might have had access to Matthew's gospel as well.

In any case, the progression from eye-witnesses, to an oral tradition which was their collective, repeated preaching of the events they had experienced with Jesus, to written sources which put the sayings and stories of Jesus onto paper, exactly as they eye-witnesses had spoken them--these three sources provided a thoroughly reliable, accurate, verbal memory of the true, historical life of Jesus. Jesus had promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would enable them to remember his words, and that is what happened (JN 14.25-26). The entire process was guided by the Spirit, so that the truth was preserved.

To put this body of information about Jesus into perspective, there is much more historical information about Jesus, than there is about the life of Julius Caesar. (More than a hundred-fold.) No one doubts that Julius Caesar lived, and few people question the historical accuracy of the information we have about his life. If we take the historical truth of Julius Caesar for granted, there is much more reason not to doubt the historical information about Jesus, either.

Luke carefully examined all of this evidence and wrote down a basically chronological account of Jesus' life. His goal was to provide absolute certainty about the historical reliability of everything affirmed to be true in his gospel. What he wrote about his gospel could be said by the other three gospel writers in the same way.

Luke dedicated his gospel to "Theophilus," which means "lover of God." Theophilus probably paid for the enormous cost of the papyri sheets on which Luke wrote His gospel. By writing to one "lover of God," Luke was also writing for everyone who is transformed into a "lover of God" through the "good news about Jesus Christ." Seeing Jesus in the gospel can only cause us to love the Trinity because of the way we have first been loved by God through His Son, Jesus.

APPLICATION:

Luke came to faith in Jesus through the gospel, just like we do. He became a life-long "learner/follower" of Jesus through the same gospel content that we have in our hands today. Since the power of the Spirit was able to transform Luke through this gospel into a person who knew Jesus intimately enough to write this glorious gospel, having never seen Jesus with His own eyes, the same Spirit working through the same gospel can give us the same degree of personal knowledge and intimacy with Jesus that Luke delighted in. THAT is why we need to see Jesus every day in the gospels.

What priority does learning of Jesus in the gospels have in your life on a daily basis? Are you satisfied with the amount of time and energy you give to the pursuit of knowing Him?

In addition to reading the DAILY JESUS NEWS, make a commitment to reading from the gospels every day. About 20 verses a day would be a good place to start. Will you make that commitment today?

Start with the gospel of Mark, then read Matthew, then Luke/Acts, and end the cycle with John. Then begin with Mark again. Repeat this cycle for the rest of your earthly life.