

Abide in Me

John 15:4

*Bible studies for disciples
who make disciples*



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The week of December 5, 2021

Unbelievable
An Unbelievable Book
Luke 1:1-4

THE BIG PICTURE

Apart from any Bible verse, we know from other sources that Jesus of Nazareth was a Jewish man who lived in Israel during the reign of Tiberius. He who was born out of wedlock. He became a popular teacher who performed a variety of miracles, gathered around Him at least five disciples, and challenged the application of Jewish Law. He angered the Jewish leaders who turned Him over to the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, who had Him executed for sedition. Despite His death, His followers claimed to have seen Him alive and began to teach, sing songs, and worship Him as the Savior of the world.

That's pretty amazing. However, we can know more than just the minimal Jesus of history. The Gospel accounts, which are a form of ancient biography, fill out the portrait of Jesus. In this study, we are going to explore the reliability of the four Gospels (i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) and ask whether they can be regarded as credible and trustworthy accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus.

READ LUKE 1:1-4

Among the Gospel writers, Luke was a first-rate historian whose methods of inquiry and investigation rank him as one of the finest historians of the ancient world. As you read this passage:

- Place brackets around each of the sources which enabled Luke to compile his biography of Jesus.
- Place in parenthesis *among us* (v. 1) and *to us* (v. 2).
- Circle the phrase that indicates Luke's basis for writing his gospel.
- Double underline the word *certainty* in verse 4.

¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

DISCUSSING THE PASSAGE AND THEMES TOGETHER

1. In your experience, do you think most people have examined the reliability of the Gospels before drawing a conclusion about Jesus? What do you think are common misconceptions about the Gospels?
2. How is Luke's introduction an invitation for us to evaluate his written record? What does he reveal about his sources? In what ways do the all four Gospels pass the test of historicity?
3. What does it mean to evaluate the Gospels on the basis of the literary and historical standards of the first century?
4. Luke is indicating that he wrote this Gospel during the lifetime of eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus. Why is this important?
5. What was Luke's motivation for writing this Gospel? Why does he want Theophilus and us to be certain of what he has recorded? What does it mean to have certainty in something?
6. The Gospel writers did not shy away from recounting the miraculous works of Christ and His supernatural claims. How can we contend for the accuracy of the Gospels to those who question anything that points to the supernatural?
7. Where in your life have you been called to be like Luke, testifying to the truth of Jesus?

A CONVERSATION TIP

The aim of this series is *apologetic*, which means to give a defense of the gospel. When talking about the four Gospels with those who are skeptical, the idea that the history of Jesus was written by the “winners” is a popular idea. How do we counter the common misconception that powerful forces in the early church banned or cancelled the accounts or “lost gospels” they didn’t like? Memorize the three ideas in the acronym E.A.R.

E - *Eyewitness testimony*. The Gospels were written by Apostles of Jesus or those who were close companions to an Apostle.

A - *Authorial confirmation*. All four Gospels were attached to each writer’s names very early on.

R - *Recognized authority*. The church did not pick the “winners” *per se* as much as the church recognized and received those accounts which were a part of the chain of acceptance and authenticity.

