

SoulManna

The Sources and Certainty of the Gospel Record

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,² Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;³ It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,⁴ That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.” **Luke 1:1-4**

Looking at the Word:

In the years following the death and resurrection of Christ, the gospel message spread far beyond the confines of Palestine. Promised forgiveness from sin and hope of eternal life revolved around the words and works of a young rabbi named Jesus of Nazareth. For many, Jesus' words claiming to be God seemed blasphemous, and his reported miracles sounded unbelievable. Verification was needed to lift these stories above mere hearsay and rumor. God inspired the human authors of the four canonic gospels to fill this need. In the opening verses of Luke, he lists the sources for his information, giving assurance his gospel presentation will be a trustworthy account of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

- ❖ **Testimony from Eyewitnesses and Servants of the Word (Luke 1:1-2):** The canonic Gospels come with full apostolic authority. Two of the gospels were penned by Apostles (Matthew and John). These men had been with Christ from the earliest days of his public ministry. They had walked with Jesus. They had listened to Jesus teach. They saw the miraculous power of Jesus demonstrated time and again throughout his three and a half years of ministry. They were eyewitnesses to Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension (Acts 1:21-22; 1 John 1:1-3). Furthermore, Christ entrusted these men with representing him before the world (Acts 1:8). Wherever they went, the Apostles witnessed to Christ in their church planting efforts. Apostolic witness also found expression in the Gospel record. The other two authors (Mark and Luke) were similarly engaged in the gospel ministry of the first century church. Luke was closely associated with the apostolic ministry of Paul (Acts 16:10-18; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16; 2 Timothy 4:11) while Mark labored in the gospel ministry with Peter (1 Peter 5:13). They had ample opportunity to hear firsthand accounts of Christ's life and ministry not only from the Apostles, but also from others in Galilee and Judea, whose lives had been forever changed by their contact with the Savior.
- ❖ **Testimony from a Diligent Investigation of Jesus' Life and Ministry (Luke 1:3):** The Greek phrase, translated “having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first” in the KJV, has the figurative idea of a careful and diligent investigation. The implication is that before taking pen in hand, Luke had personally verified the facts and details surrounding the life and ministry of Christ. For example, Luke reports details of Christ's birth not touched upon by the other gospel writers. Perhaps it was during Paul's two year incarceration in Caesarea (Acts 24:27) that Doctor Luke sat down with Mary to hear her recount the birth of Jesus, as only a mother could do. Not only did God use the gospel writers own experience and meticulous research to give a historically accurate and trustworthy account of Jesus Christ's life and ministry, but the Holy Spirit also personally superintended the Gospel record of the Son's sojourn among men (John 14:26; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:16-21).
- ❖ **Written to Give Assurance Concerning Gospel Instruction (Luke 1:4):** Truth was on the march but so were the spiritual forces of darkness. There were many so-called “gospels” which were circulating at that time claiming to present the statements or miracles of Christ. At best, they were written by men whose religious exuberance and imagination mixed fact with fiction. At worst they came from men who were less than honorable, and who had a theological ax to grind which was diametrically opposed to the apostolic message. God's antidote for this spiritual poison was to send forth the pure life-giving water of the Word. When Luke penned the gospel bearing his name, the writings of Matthew and Mark were already in circulation among the Christian community. Scripture speaks about the importance of multiple witnesses to verify a matter under dispute (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1). Luke's words of introduction were not intended to disparage the efforts of the apostolic writers, but rather to confirm them. Luke addressed his work to Theophilus. The name literally means “God-lover.” There is some debate as to whether this refers to an individual believer, befriended by Luke, or to the larger Christian community. Regardless, Luke's purpose was to give an orderly presentation of the life and ministry of Christ so that the faith of Theophilus might stand strong in the simplicity and grace of the gospel.

Application and Meditation:

Satan's question back in Eden of “Yea, hath God said,” is still being whispered in the ears of God's children today. The notion of secret gospels which reveal the “real words of Christ” is an old poison recycled every few years by the agents of hell to ensnare the spiritually naive. We don't need an archaeologist or scholar to unearth buried writings before we can know what God has said. The Bible we already hold in our hands is the Word of God. He has already revealed everything we need to secure an eternal life in heaven and a holy life on earth. Paul reminds us in Romans 10:17 “So then “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” If we would learn of Christ and strengthen our walk with Him, then let us spend time in God's Word feeding our souls on God's bread of life. © 2009, SoulManna – All rights reserved