



3

The Gospel Truth

Key Theme

- God used men to record His words.

Key Passages

- Luke 1:1–4; John 6:16–21, 21:24; Matthew 14:22–33

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain why the apostles wrote the Gospels.
- Explain why we can trust the Gospels more because of the differences we find in them.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Students will practice the memory verse by working on the Memory Verse Puzzle and reciting the verse to a friend or to the class.



Activity 1: The Gospel Truth Class Notes

Students will fill out The Gospel Truth Class Notes as you study the lesson.



Studying God's Word

The four Gospels are books that were written about the events of Jesus's life and death, and the events after His death. They were written so that we would believe. Each is different, with different details and perspectives from eyewitness accounts. Their differences serve to confirm the truth of God's Word.



Activity 2: Retelling of an Accident

Students will act out a skit about a person who hears accident reports from three different sources. They will see how eyewitness accounts can all be the truth—even though they are different from each other.

Lesson Preparation

WHAT YOU WILL DO

WHAT YOU WILL NEED



COME ON IN

- Print one Memory Verse Puzzle from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.

- Memory Verse Poster
- Memory Verse Puzzle for each student



THE GOSPEL TRUTH CLASS NOTES

- Print, collate, and staple the two pages of The Gospel Truth Class Notes from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student. Keep the answer key for your use.

- The Gospel Truth Class Notes collated and stapled for each student
- The Gospel Truth Class Notes Answer Key
- Pencils



STUDYING GOD'S WORD

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.

- Student Take Home Sheets



RETELLING OF AN ACCIDENT

- Print four Retelling of an Accident Scripts from the Resource DVD-ROM.

- Four Retelling of an Accident Scripts
- Optional props: chair, TV, remote, newspaper



Memory Verse

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

► **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above with this background.

God has been pleased to give us the gospel, meaning “good news,” of the birth, life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ for the redemption of sinners. This news is found in the four books we know as the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

We know that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16). And God in His infinite wisdom ordained the Gospels to be written by men. Through Luke, God was pleased to set in order a narrative of the things seen in Christ and His life. Luke recorded his testimony from eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word so followers of Christ would know that what is heard about Jesus is certainly true (Luke 1:1–4). Similarly, John stated that he wrote his Gospel account so the reader may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing he may have life in His name (John 20:31).

As we study the four Gospels, we find that they are not identical in content or style. In fact, each is unique to the man who penned it. Consequently, each Gospel is focused on different details of Christ’s life. For example, each of the Gospels begins at a different point in the life of Jesus, and they each end in a slightly different way.

However, the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are similar in that they record the same basic events—although not all three men recorded each event in exactly the same way. These books are referred to as the synoptic gospels because they often take the same point of view.

The Gospel of John is very different from the other three. John included information not recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Jesus’s early ministry in John 2–4 and the account of Jesus raising Lazarus in John 11 are examples of events recorded exclusively by John. John also left certain events out of his work that the other Gospels did document. Some of the accounts John left out include the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, the Sermon on the Mount, and the narrative parables.

All four Gospels primarily focus on the three years of Jesus’s public ministry and largely skip over the early years of His life. We have very little information about the early years apart from the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke and the trip to Jerusalem in Luke 2. After that, all of the writers jump forward to the time when Jesus was about 30 years old and entered into His formal ministry.

Many Bibles have headings indicating references to the same account in the other Gospels. For example, in the New King James Version being used to write this background, the account of the feeding of the 5,000 is recorded first in Matthew 14:13–21. The Bible has a heading at that reference where this account can be found in the books of Mark, Luke, and John. Understanding how your Bible cross-references passages can help as you continue your study of the full counsel of God’s Word.

Each of the Gospels reveals something unique about the life of Jesus Christ. The entire picture cannot be seen without seeing all four Gospels presented side by side. This is called a “harmony” of the Gospels. Your Bible may have a section or a chart—a harmony of the Gospels—that shows the events of Jesus’s life and where those events are recorded in each of the Gospels.

The Gospels are another example of God’s amazing revelation to His people. That these four unique men could each write a personal account of his Savior Jesus Christ, and that all four of these accounts would complement each other, is evidence of the inspiration of their writings through the Holy Spirit to present to His people a complete and perfect testimony.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Many skeptics point to the apparent inconsistencies in the parallel accounts in the Gospels to suggest that the Holy Spirit could not have inspired the writings or else they would be exactly the same. Well, how do they know that is the case? To make that assertion, they have to know how God thinks and how He would do things—the very thing they are denying we can know by reading the Bible. This attempt by the skeptic to discredit the authority of the Bible is simultaneously an elevation of man’s word above God’s Word as he sits in judgment over what God has revealed to us.

Stop and think about this for a moment: If you heard a news report of a car accident on the TV news, read about it in the newspaper, and then heard about it from a friend who witnessed it, would you expect the three accounts to be exactly the same? Would differences cause you to doubt the truthfulness of any one witness? For example, if one report said it happened in front of Taco Town and another said it happened across the street from the mall and your friend said it was on Third Street, would that mean there was a contradiction? Not at all if Taco Town is on Third Street right across the street

from the mall. This is analogous to the subtle differences we see in the Gospels. These subtle differences actually help to corroborate the truthfulness of the accounts. If a police officer was investigating the accident and two witnesses told about the collision in exactly the same words, he would likely think they were working together to conceal something. Matthew and Mark didn't have a meeting to decide how to tell the same story—the Holy Spirit directed their writing. When we examine the books carefully, the apparent contradictions disappear, despite the claims of the skeptics whose hearts are hardened to the truths of God.

Another irony of those who are skeptical about the truthfulness of the Gospels is the number of witnesses. Four witnesses recorded the same basic information of the life of Jesus, and we have reliable records of their initial reports. From the biblical perspective, a matter is established on the word of two or three witnesses, so the four we have in the Gospels is more than sufficient to lead us to trust what they record (Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16). No one else from Jesus's time has such a rich historical record as that of Jesus. And no one could because it was God the Holy Spirit who directed the recording of the earthly life of God the Son who was sent by God the Father.

It did not take long for false gospels to appear and cause confusion about what was true and what was false (2 Peter 2:1). Many writers tried to take portions of the real Gospels and blend them with mystical teachings. These mystical ideas developed into what we call Gnosticism. Some of these false gospels have been popularized in movies, novels, and documentary-style films that seek to discredit Jesus as God or redefine His teaching and work in some blasphemous way. Other false gospels blended Jewish and Christian ideas, and others tried to fill in the "gaps" of the true Gospels.

One such false gospel, *The Infancy Gospel of*

Thomas, was written more than 100 years after Jesus died. This gospel reveals a young Jesus who was an infant prodigy, performed miracles, breathed life into clay birds, cursed a boy who then died, healed a man's foot, and other acts. These ideas directly contradict the true nature of Jesus we see recorded at the direction of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were directed by the Holy Spirit to record the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. And through God's providence, we have the truth of those accounts in the first four books of our New Testament. We can absolutely trust these as true regardless of the attacks that come from skeptics and regardless of the doubts that may even arise in our own minds. As we study the Scriptures, asking the Holy Spirit for wisdom, we can know the truth and be emboldened to share that truth with others.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Precious Lord, thank you for your Word and the truth of it. My understanding of how you put the Gospels together has grown. You have perfectly woven the truth about Jesus into these four Gospels through imperfect men who were eyewitnesses to the accounts they have written about—under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As you open my eyes to the truth of this Word, I realize that it was written so that I would believe! May my students walk away from this lesson with more confidence in your Word—that it is the true, inspired Word of God by which men can be saved! And may they one day believe all that is written in it. To you be all the glory, Lord!



COME ON IN

As students arrive . . .

- They will review the memory verse by completing the Memory Verse Puzzle using the puzzle piece shapes as clues. If time allows, they will recite the verse to a friend or to the class.

This time at the beginning of class should be used to review the memory verse. We have provided a worksheet on the Resource DVD-ROM for you to use. You may have other ideas and ways to encourage your students to memorize the verse.



REVIEW

Using the Lesson Theme Posters provided with each lesson, quickly review the previous lesson(s) with your students. Take 5 to 10 minutes to reinforce the important truths the students have heard so far in your class.

Ask the children questions about the previous lessons as you display the Lesson Theme Posters. Reflect briefly on the passages you read, bringing the objectives and themes back into focus. This will refresh the truths in your students' minds and maintain continuity as you teach through the lessons.



The Gospel Truth Class Notes

MATERIALS

- The Gospel Truth Class Notes (2 pages collated and stapled) for each student
- The Gospel Truth Class Notes Answer Key
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Print the class notes for each student. Pass them out at the beginning of class. Have students fill in the blanks as you study the lesson.

We are going to read about one biblical event written by two different apostles and compare them. And we will understand better how the differences in the Gospel accounts can actually help us believe the Bible is true.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

As we compare the Gospels on our class notes today, we will see that even though the men were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write exactly what God wanted them to write and were eyewitnesses who knew Jesus, or friends of eyewitnesses, they sometimes recorded differently what happened. All the Gospels are God's true Word.

They were written so that we would believe. Each Gospel shows us different things about Jesus. We will see why we can trust these Gospels because of the differences. The differences actually serve to confirm the truth of God's Word.

► Use the New Testament History Poster included with your teacher kit as you teach the lesson. Emphasize that Jesus ministered only 3 years and He lived only about 35 years. Yet His life changed the world forever and brought eternal life to all who believe.



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

- ? Today our lesson is about the first four books of the New Testament. Does anyone know what the first book of the New Testament is? *Matthew.*
- ? And the second? *Mark.*
- ? And the third? *Luke.*
- ? And the fourth? *John.*
- ? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These four books have a special name. Does anyone know what these books are called sometimes? *Allow discussion. Gospels.*

Yes. These four books are often called the Gospels.

In the last lesson we said we could trust the New Testament to be true.

- ? *Refer to the Lesson 2 Lesson Theme Poster.* Who can tell me why we can trust it? What did we talk about? *Allow discussion.*

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come and help His disciples to remember the things that happened—the things God wanted them to write.

And these writers of the New Testament were eyewitnesses of the events, or friends of eyewitnesses, in the case of Mark and Luke.

One of those writers was Luke. He wrote the Gospel of Luke. He wrote differently from the other Gospel writers—but he wrote the truth. Let's see what Luke had to say about Jesus. Turn to Luke 1:1–4 in your Bibles. We'll begin reading there. *Choose students to read the verses.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Those verses tell us a lot. Let's answer questions about them so that we can understand them better.

Observe the Text

- ? First look at Luke 1:1. Luke mentions a "narrative." What is that? *Allow discussion.*

Luke was telling us that he wanted to set down in an orderly way an account of what happened in Jesus's life.

- ? But how did Luke know what to write? Look at what it says in verse 2. *Luke 1:2. Allow discussion. He learned them from eyewitness.*

Yes. Luke gathered his information from those who were eyewitnesses. Many of these eyewitnesses were the apostles who had walked with Jesus

Luke 1:1–4

Narrative: A narrative is an account of what happened.

and learned much from Him personally. They told Luke what happened, and he wrote this Gospel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

- ? So why did Luke write these things down? *Re-read Luke 1:4. Allow discussion. So people would know what happened and know it was true.*

Luke wrote these things so that believers in Jesus Christ could know that what they heard about Jesus was true.

Now let's turn to another one of the Gospels. The Gospel of John was written by the Apostle John. He was one of Jesus's very closest friends. Turn in your Bibles to John 21:24. Will someone read that? *Choose a student to read the verse.*

John 21:24

- ? Who is the disciple this verse talks about? I'll give you a hint. It's the one who wrote the book of John! *John.*

Yes. This is what the Apostle John wrote. Remember, he was one of Jesus's very closest friends. He spent a lot of time with Jesus.

- ? And what does this verse say about John? *He testifies of these things. He wrote these things.*

- ? When John said he testified of "these things" what does he mean? What things? What do you think? *Allow discussion.*

John wrote about Jesus. He wrote about His life, His death, and His Resurrection. He was an eyewitness of Jesus's life, death, and Resurrection. And he told us what Jesus taught as He lived and walked on earth. This is all very important stuff. And we need to take notice. Jesus is the Savior. What He said and did are very important.

- ? What did John especially want us to know about his testimony? It is at the end of this verse. *That his testimony is true.*

Discover the Truth

We just looked at some verses from two of the Gospels in the Bible—Luke and John. They both wrote about the life of Jesus. They both were very careful to write down what had been seen and heard about Jesus. They wrote all these things down because they wanted us to know about Jesus's life, His death, and the events that occurred after He died. The things they wrote were true. The books of Luke and John that we have in our Bibles today are the very books that these two men wrote nearly 2,000 years ago.

Refer to the New Testament History Poster. Take a look at our New Testament History Poster. All the Gospels were written very soon after Jesus's life while the eyewitnesses were still alive. The testimonies were accurate, but because the Gospels were written by different men, what they wrote down was not exactly the same. Let's explore that a little.



READ THE WORD

We know the Bible is true! It was written by people who knew Jesus and knew His friends. But sometimes what we read in one Gospel is not exactly like what we read in another Gospel. Some people get confused about this, but it isn't confusing or hard to explain. Let me show you what I mean. We are going to read and outline two events from the Bible.

First we will read Matthew 14:22–23. It is on Page 1 of your class notes. After we read it, we'll go back and answer the questions on that page.

Choose students to read the verses.

Matthew 14:22–33

► You can follow the Teacher Guide below or use the class notes to read the text. Complete statements 1–10 on the class notes as you read. The class notes statements align with the questions below.

EXAMINE THE WORD

These verses reveal a dramatic account in the lives of Jesus and the disciples.

Observe the Text

- ? What did Jesus do in Matthew 14:22—#1 on your class notes? *He made His disciples get into the boat.*
- ? What did Jesus do then—#2 on your class notes? *Matthew 14:22. He sent the multitudes (people) away.*
- ? What did Jesus do after He sent the people away—#3 on your class notes? *Matthew 14:23. He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray.*
- ? Where was the boat—#4 on your class notes? *Matthew 14:24. In the middle of the sea.*
- ? What was happening to the boat—#5 on your class notes? *Matthew 14:24. It was being tossed by the waves and wind.*
- ? What did Jesus do—#6 on your class notes? *Matthew 14:25. Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.*
- ? What did the disciples think about this—#7 and #8 on your class notes? *Matthew 14:26. They thought He was a ghost. They were afraid.*
- ? What did Jesus say to them—#9 on your class notes? *Matthew 14:27. Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.*
- ? What did Peter ask Jesus—#10 on your class notes? *Matthew 14:28. Lord, command me to come to you on the water.*

Peter wanted to walk out on the water to be with Jesus. And Jesus said to Peter, "Come!" Peter left the boat and was walking on the water. But Peter looked around and saw the waves and that the wind was blowing! And suddenly he started to sink! Peter cried out, "Lord, save me!" And Jesus grabbed Peter's hand and brought him into the boat. When they got into the boat the wind stopped blowing! This was an exciting evening for Jesus's disciples.

OK. Good. That was Matthew's account. There were a lot of details. Now let's go to John's account. Look on Page 2 of your class notes.

- ? What is the first thing you notice as you compare what Matthew wrote to what John wrote? *Allow discussion. John's version is shorter.*
- ? John's version is shorter. That leads me to believe he didn't include as much detail. Let's read it. *John 6:16–21. Choose students to read the verses from the class notes.*
- ? What did the disciples do—#11 on your class notes? *John 6:16–17. Went to the sea. Got in the boat.*
- ? Where were the disciples going—#12 on your class notes? *John 6:17. Capernaum.*
- ? Was Jesus with them—#13 on your class notes? *John 6:17. No. They were alone.*
- ? What happened in John 6:18—#14 on your class notes? *The sea rose because of a great wind.*
- ? How far had the disciples rowed—#15 on your class notes? *John 6:19. About 3 or 4 miles.*
- ? What did the disciples see—#16 on your class notes? *John 6:19. They saw Jesus walking on the water.*
- ? How did the disciples feel—#17 on your class notes? *John 6:19. They were afraid.*
- ? Who did they see? What did He say to them—#18 on your class notes? *John 6:20. They saw Jesus. He said, "Do not be afraid."*
- ? What happened next—#19 and #20 on your class notes? *John 6:21. Jesus got in the boat and the boat landed.*

Another exciting night. But not exactly the same as what we read in Matthew.

Discover the Truth

- ? Do you think these two accounts are talking about the same event? *Allow discussion.*

There are a lot of things that are alike in these two accounts, enough that we know it is the same account about the same stormy night. But they are different too, aren't they? Well, let me explain.

- ? Who wrote these two accounts? *Matthew and John.*
- ? Who gave us more information about the stormy night? *Matthew.*

Right. Two different men wrote about the same night.

Yes. Matthew tells us a lot more. Matthew tells us that Jesus told them to get in the boat, that Jesus sent the crowds away, that Jesus went up on the mountain to pray, and even what time it was when Jesus walked on the water. And Matthew tells us all about Peter's attempt to walk on

John 6:16–21

➤ Again, you can follow the Teacher Guide below, or use the class notes to read the text. Complete statements 11–20 on the class notes as you read. The class notes statements align with the questions below.

➤ As you discuss these points, refer to the verses on the class notes.

the water—how he reacted, and how Jesus saved him. Peter started to sink. Peter spoke to the Lord. Peter wanted Jesus to save him. Peter cried out to the Lord. And the Lord caught Peter and then they got into the boat. Matthew even tells us what Jesus said to Peter as He saved him. And Matthew tells us that when Jesus and Peter got in the boat the wind stopped. John didn't mention any of that!

John tells us much less. But he does include some things Matthew did not. He tells us that the disciples were headed to Capernaum, and that the disciples had been rowing for three or four miles when they saw Jesus. John mentioned that Jesus was not with them, but unlike Matthew, he doesn't tell us that Jesus went up to the mountain to pray. And John said nothing about Peter walking on the water and almost drowning!

Do you see? These two books, Matthew and John, were written by two different men. Each man reported what he thought was important about the stormy night when Jesus walked on the water. It makes sense that what they wrote would not be exactly the same. But when we put the accounts together we get a better understanding of EVERYTHING that happened. There is nothing in these accounts that contradicts the other; they are just from two different perspectives.

People want to say that the differences in the Gospels prove that the Bible is not true. But actually those differences give us confidence that it IS true. Let me explain. Those differences show that different people wrote the Bible at different times. And because of that it makes sense that many of the events don't appear exactly the same in the Bible. If people had wanted to write the Bible to fool people with made-up stories, they would have been careful to get all the details the same. Instead, they reported actual eyewitness accounts, with differences like we'd expect to find. But at the same time, the events are similar enough so that we can be sure they are the same event and they are true!





Retelling of an Accident

MATERIALS

- Four Retelling of an Accident Scripts from the Resource DVD-ROM
- Optional props: chair, box with a hole cut in it to serve as a “screen” for the newscaster, remote, newspaper

INSTRUCTIONS

Assign three students to play the characters. Encourage the actors to speak up and play their roles with enthusiasm.

This fun skit may help you understand how people can witness the same event yet describe it differently. It’s a modern-day example of what it is like to hear about something from three different sources. Pay attention to what is similar and what is different. *Have students perform the short skit.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

The first time Jason heard about the car crash was on TV when the newscaster said it happened near Taco Town. The second time he heard about the accident was in the newspaper article.

? Where did the paper say the accident happened? *On Third Street.*

Yes, on Third Street. And when his friend came over he said the accident was by the mall.

? Which one was right? *They all were.*

? What things were the same in the different versions? *Allow discussion. SUV rolled, two girls stuck inside, the jaws of life.*

Even though all the accounts were told in a different way based on what the witnesses saw, there were enough details that were the same. As Jason read and heard each of the three accounts, he knew they were the same.

The newscaster didn’t mention who it was or if the children were taken to the hospital.

The newspaper said the accident was on Third Street. Someone called 911. The mother was panicked. The airbags deployed.

Jason’s friend knew who it was and what happened to them. He knew someone was in the hospital, but he didn’t mention the dog. And he didn’t know some of the other details.

The three accounts of the accident were different. But that doesn’t mean the people were lying or that the event didn’t happen. It made the event seem even more real because witnesses see things differently.

It is the same with the four Gospels. Four different men wrote the accounts, and they each told what they thought was important about Jesus’s life. What is really neat is that God worked it in just a way that when we read all four Gospels, we find out everything God wanted us to know about Jesus’s life!





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

The Gospels were written to tell about Jesus and His life on earth so that we would believe in Him. They tell us about His special birth, His life, and His death, and even what He did after He died. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote the Gospels. Today we looked at some verses from Matthew and John—two of the Gospels. Both men were very careful to write down what witnesses saw and heard about Jesus. And they wrote all those things down because they wanted us to know about Jesus's life and believe in Him.

We saw in two accounts of Jesus walking on the water that Matthew and John each had some different things to say. We know that they were talking about the same stormy night. They just each wrote about different things and different details. These Gospels were written by two different eyewitnesses. And they would not have seen, heard, or experienced everything exactly the same. That is why some of the details are different.

Those differences shouldn't make us doubt the Bible. In fact, those differences confirm that the Bible is true! It confirms that different people wrote the Bible, and that those people were writing about the same things—things that really did happen!

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

Some people have doubts about the truth of the Gospels. They say if the Holy Spirit really inspired the men who wrote the Gospels, then all of them should say the same thing. We've already talked a lot about eyewitnesses and how they will report the same thing differently.

In fact, if everyone that witnesses an event described the details exactly the same, it would seem fake. Did you know that when police detectives question the witnesses of a crime, they will doubt the testimony of two people if they tell the exact same story?

It's because two people giving the exact same testimony about something is not realistic. It usually means that the people got together to agree on a fake story before talking to the police. So, again, I'll remind you that the differences in the Gospels show that they are true.

Now I want you to consider something else. When someone says that because the Gospels are different, they can't be true, that person is not just questioning the Gospels. He is questioning the Author of the Bible who put it together.

? Who is the Author of the Bible? *Allow discussion. God.*

God is the Author of the Bible. God put the Gospels together just exactly how He wanted them to be. It was His plan to have four Gospels instead of one or five. It was God who inspired all four men to write everything just the way they did.

? Who do you think knows the best way to write the Bible—the person who says all the Gospels should be the same or God? *God.*

Right! God knows what is best for us in every area. So, of course, He knows the best way for authors to write down the events of Jesus's life on earth. He wrote it, so we can know it's true and written just the right way!



➤ Pass out the Student Take Home Sheets and remind the students to practice the memory verse this week.



MEMORY VERSE

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

- Praise God that by His sovereign inspiration we have the Bible to read and study so that we can know Him.
- Thank God for assuring us that the Gospels are true.
- Ask God to help us to believe in and love Jesus more and more as we learn about His life and all He has done for us.

