

## Luke 1:1-4

*NIV Harmony 25-29; Compassionate 9-18*

### Introduction

1. With this lesson we undertake a lengthy study of the unique gospel material found in Luke and Matthew.
  - a. We have just completed a twenty month study of the Gospel of Mark.
  - b. Most scholars today believe that Mark's gospel was written first and that Matthew and Luke used it along with other sources in writing their own gospels.
  - c. However, Mark was not their only source. So, there is unique material that we need to study in these other two gospels.
  - d. As we look at the gospel story presented by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we will gain a better picture of who Jesus is and what He came to do.
  - e. The three synoptic gospels have a similar view of Jesus, but each one brings unique insights worthy of our attention.
2. **Read Luke 1:1-4.**
3. G. Campbell Morgan writes, "Four things Luke tells us in this preface. He names his subject; gives the sources of his information; describes the method of his work; and reveals the purpose of his writing" (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 12).

### A. Who was Luke?

1. Each gospel is anonymous, and Luke's name is not mentioned within the gospel attributed to him.
  - a. Those who collected the gospels assigned the identities of their authors.
  - b. The best church tradition unanimously concludes the author of this gospel was Luke, but who was he?
2. Luke was the travelling companion of the Apostle Paul and is mentioned three times in Paul's writings.
  - a. In Col 4:14 Paul stated, "Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings."
    - 1) The Greek term *iatros*, translated as "doctor," is the common Greek word for a physician.
    - 2) A.T. Robertson conjectures that Paul and Luke were fellow students in the school at Tarsus, but there is no evidence to support this view.
    - 3) Warren Wiersbe notes, "No wonder he began his book with detailed accounts of the births of two important babies! No wonder he emphasized Christ's sympathy for hurting people! He wrote with the mind of a careful historian and with the heart of a loving physician" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate*, 17).
    - 4) Also, in Col 4:11, Paul named all of the Jews who were with him. The absence of Luke's name and his subsequent mention in Col 4:14 indicate that Luke was a Gentile and not a Jew. Some scholars believe that Luke became a Jewish proselyte before becoming a Christian, but there is no clear evidence to support this supposition.
  - b. In Phil 23-24 Paul writes, "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers."
  - c. In 2 Tim 4:11 Paul writes, "Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry."
3. Luke also wrote the Book of Acts.
  - a. Note the similarity of the prologue of Luke and Acts 1:1-2: "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen."
  - b. The mention of Luke by Paul coupled with the "we" sections in Acts 16:10-17, 20:4-15; 21:1-18, and 27:1-18:6 indicate that Luke not only wrote Acts but was an eyewitness of much of Paul's ministry.
    - 1) According to the "we" narratives in Acts, Luke joined Paul at Troas (cf., Acts 16:10f) as Paul prepared to depart for Philippi on his second missionary journey.
    - 2) Luke travelled with Paul until he reached Athens, where he was left behind.
    - 3) Luke later rejoined Paul in Philippi (cf., Acts 20:5-6) on Paul's third missionary journey and stayed with him through his journey back to Jerusalem, his two year imprisonment in Caesarea, and his journey to Rome.
4. According to the best scholarly investigation, Luke wrote his gospel sometime between CE 70-90 which is after the events of Acts 28 and at a time when the Gospel of Mark would have been available to him.

## B. Luke's Subject and Sources (1-2)

1. Charles Erdman comments, "This preface is a perfect gem of Greek art; even in the English Version it loses little, if anything, of its literary charm. As a prologue it is regarded as unsurpassed for brevity, modesty, and dignity. However, its value lies not in its beauty but in its testimony to the veracity of the writer and to the historic worth and absolute credibility of the gospel story. . . . Here we are admitted to the study of a great historian. We see about him his tools and his material; we are informed as to his motive and methods in work, and are told of the qualifications he possesses for his great task. . . . he intimates that he is living and writing amidst the scenes and in the very atmosphere of the events he is recording; . . . Further, he assures us of the absolute accuracy with which he has investigated the incidents of the life and ministry of Christ, even from the earliest scenes; he has sifted his material and weighed the evidence and is to record only established facts" (Charles Erdman, *Gospel of Luke*, 17-18).
2. Luke's Subject
  - a. Luke's subject was "the word" (Gk., *tou logou*) (2)
  - b. The "word" (Gk., *logos*) is the name associated with Jesus in John's gospel (cf., Jn 1:1).
  - c. Luke speaks of consulting "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" in v. 2. Certainly, he refers to eyewitnesses and servants of Jesus.
  - d. The accounts of "the things that have been fulfilled among us" that Mark mentions in v. 1 can be none other than the prophecies from the OT fulfilled in the life and actions of Jesus Christ, the Word.
3. Luke's Sources
  - a. Luke begins by stating that "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us." (1)
  - b. We have identified these accounts as being the life and actions of Jesus.
  - c. Who are the "many" who have drawn up or written down these accounts?
  - d. Luke mentions "eyewitnesses . . . of the word" (2).
    - 1) The word "eyewitnesses" in Greek is *autoptai*, from which our word autopsy is derived. An appropriate word for a doctor to use.
    - 2) These eyewitnesses had first-hand information about Jesus' life and actions.
  - e. Luke also mentions "servants/ministers of the word" (2). – Morgan writes, "The word 'minister,' is equally interesting *Uperetai*. It also was a word in medical use. Literally it means underrowers. This word was used for doctors who were in attendance upon the principal physician in any case internes, as we might call them. Thus this doctor is using medical terms. He said, I obtained my information from those who personally investigated Jesus, those who served Him in the days of His flesh, those under-rowers, who were in attendance upon Him, the Great Physician, as He went out upon His work everywhere" (Morgan, 12).
  - f. Who were these eyewitnesses and servants?
    - 1) Certainly Mark's gospel is a likely source for Luke based on the large portion of Mark's gospel included in Luke.
    - 2) Matthew may be another source, if his gospel was written before Luke's.
    - 3) Jesus' mother Mary is a likely source due to the important birth and childhood narratives of Jesus included in this gospel.
    - 4) Peter, who Luke may have met in Rome as he travelled there with Paul, is a possible source.
    - 5) There may also have been other written sources, such as Q or the disciple's notebook, which were available to Luke but have been subsequently lost.

## C. Luke's Method and Purpose (3-4)

### 1. Luke's Method

- a. Luke says, “. . . I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account . . .” (3)
- b. First, Luke “carefully investigated” (Gk., *kamoi parekolouthekoti* – “having come alongside; been acquainted; known/understood”) – This is the same word Jesus used for the Holy Spirit who comes alongside us as a helper, counselor, comforter. Luke stood at the side of eyewitnesses who helped him understand the facts about Jesus.
- c. Second, Wiersbe notes that the phrase “from the beginning” (Gk., *anohen*) “. . . can be translated ‘from above,’ as it is in John 3:31 and 19:11. It speaks of the inspiration of the Spirit of God on the message that Luke wrote” (Wiersbe, 18). So, Luke discerned the truth not only from human sources but sought the confirmation of the Holy Spirit in what he recorded.
- d. Third, Luke wrote an “orderly (Gk., *kathexes*) account” - Morgan notes this is the word “. . . of the artist. He claims that having obtained his material, and sifted and examined it, and put it in proper relationship, he wrote it in artistic order” (Morgan, 13).

### 2. Luke's Purpose

- a. We conclude that Luke wanted to write a carefully researched account of the life and ministry of Jesus based on eyewitness testimony and the confirmation of God's Spirit. But why did he do this? Was this gospel simply for his own confirmation of the truth?
- b. Luke clearly states his purpose of preparing his gospel account was “. . . for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (3-4).
- c. Who was Theophilus?
  - 1) The name Theophilus means “friend of God” or “lover of God.”
  - 2) Wiersbe writes that Theophilus was “. . . probably a Roman official who had trusted Christ and now needed to be established in the faith. It's also possible that Theophilus was a seeker after truth who was being taught the Christian message, because the word translated instructed in Luke 1:4 gives us our English word catechumen, ‘someone who is being taught the basics of Christianity’” (Wiersbe, 18).
  - 3) Luke uses the title “most excellent” (Gk., *kratiste*) in speaking to Theophilus. This term may give a clue to his identity. A.T. Robertson concluded that Luke was probably a freed man and that Theophilus was his patron, who gave him his freedom and remained his friend after they both became followers of Jesus (A.T. Robertson, *Luke the Historian in the Light of Research*).
  - 4) As noted earlier, Luke writes his second volume, Acts, for the benefit of Theophilus as well.
- d. Why did Theophilus need Luke's account?
  - 1) Luke says it is “so that you may know (Gk., *epignos*) the certainty of the things you have been taught (Gk., *katechetes*)” (4)
  - 2) Luke wanted Theophilus to have full, intimate knowledge about Jesus, the one whom he trusted for salvation.
  - 3) Morgan surmises, “Theophilus, his friend, had been instructed, not through writing, but by oral instruction. . . . Theophilus evidently was not in possession of a writing upon which he could depend. Luke wrote that he might have certainty, safety, that he may know security. . . . the writing gives fixity to the truth” (Morgan, 13).
  - 4) Erdman concludes, “. . . this preface shows the supreme purpose of Luke was to confirm the belief of Theophilus, who is apparently his patron and friend, and to deepen his conviction of the truth of the gospel story. Surely such an introduction must remind every reader that our Christian faith is based upon an impregnable foundation of historic fact” (Erdman, 18).
  - 5) We and the numerous other believers who have read Luke along with Theophilus are the beneficiaries of the author's careful, inspired work in preparing a well-researched narrative of the life of Jesus in order that we may know Him and His purpose in coming more fully.

## D. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection

1. Which is your favorite gospel? Why?
2. Who first told you about Jesus? Why were they a reliable source for you?
3. To whom are you passing on your knowledge of Jesus so that they too might know Him?