



# So You May Know

Luke 1:1-4



## Gospel<sup>1</sup> of Luke

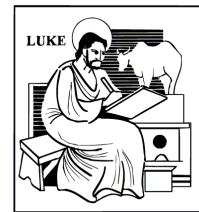
- ❑ **Author:** Luke – a physician, and a coworker and traveling companion of the apostle Paul. Luke also wrote the book of Acts, which is the companion and sequel to the Gospel of Luke.<sup>2</sup>
- ❑ **Audience and Purpose:** Both Luke and Acts are addressed to “Theophilus” (*Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1*). He was probably a Gentile (non-Jew) and a person of high position (*Luke 1:3*). Luke’s purposes were multiple, including his intent to provide a reliable account of Jesus’ ministry so that people would understand the meaning and purpose of his coming. Luke’s audience extends to all believers who need to be strengthened in faith, and also to nonbelievers who are seeking truth.
- ❑ **Time and Place of Writing:** Probably early 60s, though many scholars date it later (around AD 80). Various places have been suggested for the Gospel’s origin and destination.<sup>3</sup>

## Preface

- ❑ Luke begins his Gospel with a preface, similar to other writers of his time. Read Luke 1:1-4.
- ❑ Luke’s preface can be broken into two parts: 1) previous work of others (*1:1-2*); and 2) Luke’s contribution (*1:3-4*).

## Previous Work of Others

- ❑ Prior to Luke’s effort, others “have undertaken to draw up (compile) an account<sup>4</sup> of the things that have been fulfilled<sup>5</sup> among us” (*1:1*).
1. What are the sources of these accounts?<sup>6</sup> (*1:2*)



## Luke’s Contribution

- ❑ Luke adds himself to the previous compilers because he feels he has something to contribute.
  - He “carefully investigated” (*1:3*).<sup>7</sup>
  - He investigated “everything from the beginning.”<sup>8</sup>
  - Based on his investigation, he “[wrote] an orderly account.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘gospel’ means ‘good news’ (from Anglo-Saxon *godspell*; Greek *euangelion*). The first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) present the story of Jesus and the ‘gospel.’ Thus they are called ‘Gospels.’

<sup>2</sup> Neither Luke nor Acts names the author. However, there is a strong tradition of Luke’s authorship. Paul mentions Luke in his letters (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24). Luke’s authorship is supported by the ‘we’ passages in Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16). It is likely that Luke was born a Gentile but had some contact with Judaism.

<sup>3</sup> A good discussion of dating and other introductory matters is too lengthy to present here, but can be found in study Bibles (in brief form); commentaries; and Bible introductions, dictionaries, and encyclopedias. Ask Jay if interested.

<sup>4</sup> ‘account’ (*diēgēsis*) refers to an orderly narration of connected events, not merely isolated pieces. Such accounts included written accounts (likely including Mark’s Gospel) but might also include oral accounts.

<sup>5</sup> ‘fulfilled’ (*peplērophorēmenōn*) – likely refers to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

<sup>6</sup> The sources are ‘eyewitnesses and servants of the word’ (1:2). This would include members of the 12 disciples, and others who knew Jesus ‘from the first.’ For example, there is good evidence that Peter was the primary source for Mark’s Gospel. And the other Gospels are attributed to Matthew and John, who were part of the 12. These eyewitnesses not only saw, they reliably reported what they saw. They were ‘servants of the word.’ These eyewitness accounts were ‘handed down’ (*paredosan*) – a technical word used for the delivering of authoritative tradition.

<sup>7</sup> *parēkolouthēkoti...akribōs* – ‘investigated (followed, traced)...carefully (accurately, with close attention)’

<sup>8</sup> ‘from the beginning’ (*anōthen*) – probably refers to the beginning of Jesus’ life, though it could be translated ‘for a long time,’ thus referring to the length and extent of Luke’s investigation.

2. What was Luke's purpose in writing his "orderly account" of Jesus?<sup>10</sup> (1:4)

- ❑ Luke clearly believed that his Gospel accurately presented the truth concerning Jesus Christ.
3. If Luke was so sure, why do people today *not* believe the Gospel of Luke (and other New Testament books)? What reasons are given?



## Is Our New Testament Authentic?

- ❑ Some people think the New Testament (NT) has been significantly changed since its original writing. But the evidence refutes this idea. There are roughly 5,500 Greek manuscripts (copies) of the NT, either in fragments or in whole.<sup>11</sup> Some of the most significant manuscripts are:
  - 📖 John Rylands Fragment (c. AD 125) – papyrus contains John 18:31-33, 37-38 (oldest)
  - 📖 Bodmer Papyri (c. AD 200) – papyrus contains most of John and Luke along with Jude, 1 and 2 Peter.
  - 📖 Chester Beatty Papyri (c. AD 200) – papyrus contains major portions of the NT
  - 📖 Codex Vaticanus (c. AD 325-350) – vellum contains nearly all of the NT and Greek OT
  - 📖 Codex Sinaiticus (c. AD 340) – vellum contains whole NT and portion of Old Testament
  - 📖 Codex Alexandrius (c. AD 450) – vellum contains whole NT
- ❑ No other ancient book has such an abundance of manuscripts. Homer's *Iliad* (9<sup>th</sup> century BC) is second with 643 manuscripts. Caesar's *Gallic War* (c. AD 50) has only 9 or 10 good copies.
- ❑ Assuming the New Testament was originally written between AD 45 and 100, most of the above manuscripts were copied 50 to 300 years after the original. This is significantly less time than other ancient manuscripts, which are at least 700 to 1000 years after the original.
- ❑ Though the manuscripts are numerous and widely distributed, textual variance (difference) between the copies is insignificant. Overall, 99% of the NT can be reconstructed beyond any reasonable doubt, and no Christian theological teaching is endangered by textual variation.
- ❑ Considering the quantity and dating of ancient manuscripts, and their wide geographical distribution, the NT "has far and away better attestation than any other ancient work."<sup>12</sup>

## Is the New Testament Reliable?

In response to this question, let us ask some more specific questions, as follows:



### *Were the Original Authors Able to Record Reliable History?*<sup>13</sup>

- ❑ The human authors of the New Testament were either eyewitnesses of the events or had direct access to eyewitness accounts of the events. The authors were *near* enough to the actual events to record accurate history. The historical books include the following:

<sup>9</sup> 'orderly' (*kathexēs*) – orderly in a logical or (generally) chronological sense, or both combined.

<sup>10</sup> So that Theophilus (and others) 'may know the *asphaleian* ('certainty' or 'exact truth') of the things [he had] been taught' (1:4). The things he had been 'taught' (*katēchēthēs*) were the teachings of the Christian faith.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Rhodes Eddy & Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 382.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>13</sup> In this lesson, we concentrate on human ability. It should be noted that Christians believe that the Bible is 'God-breathed' (2 Timothy 3:16). The authors were 'carried along by the Holy Spirit' in their writing (2 Peter 1:21). Nonbelievers are not usually impressed by such claims, but there is good reason to believe in the reliability of the New Testament, even if the only evidence considered is on the human level.

- 📖 Matthew – written by the apostle Matthew (AD 60s)
  - 📖 Mark – written by Mark, probably informed by the apostle Peter (late AD 50s to mid 60s) – usually considered to be earliest Gospel
  - 📖 Luke – written by Luke, a traveling companion of the apostle Paul (early AD 60s)
  - 📖 John – written by the apostle John (perhaps AD 80s)
  - 📖 Acts – also written by Luke (early AD 60s)
- ❑ The exact dating of these books is disputed, but most scholars agree that all of them were written in the first century. Since Christ died around AD 30, these books were written within one or two generations after the events took place.<sup>14</sup>
  - ❑ Though the NT letters (epistles) are not considered historical narratives, they are set in history and make constant reference to historical events. In the apostle Paul’s letters (written between AD 49 and AD 67), the most significant details of Jesus’ life are presented, and are thoroughly consistent with the history recorded in the Gospels.

### *Did the Original Authors Intend to Record Reliable History?*

- ❑ We have already seen that Luke intended to record reliable history. Other authors did as well.
  - 📖 John: “The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe” (*John 19:35, NIV*).
  - 📖 Peter: “For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (*2 Peter 1:16*).
- ❑ Accepting the original authors’ *ability* and *intent* to tell the truth, any misrepresentation would need to be the result of self-delusion or outright deceptiveness. However, there are too many different authors, witnesses, and independent events to accept some type of collective delusion. And there is no evidence that the authors were dishonest or deceptive.

### *Did the Original Authors Succeed in Recording Reliable History?*

- ❑ Scholars use various criteria for evaluating the historicity (historical authenticity) of events or sayings. It is beyond the scope of this lesson to discuss modern Biblical criticism or “criteria for authenticity” (subjects that are addressed in the sources listed in the Bibliography). Anyway, the historicity of the NT stands firm in the face of critical scholarship.
- ❑ The New Testament writings were circulated during the lifetime of those who could dispute them. The shortness of time between the events and the writings, along with the presence of living eyewitnesses, would hinder significant deviation from the truth.

### *Do Non-Christian Writings Support the Reliability of the New Testament?*

- ❑ Various details of New Testament history are affirmed by Jewish and Roman sources, including the following: (1) Jewish historian Josephus (AD 37-100); (2) the Jewish *Talmud* (c. AD 400-500); (3) Roman historian Tacitus (c. AD 55-117); (4) Roman historian Suetonius (c. AD 70-160); (5) governor Pliny the Younger (c. AD 61-113); and others. “At least seventeen non-Christian writings record more than fifty details concerning the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus, plus details concerning the earliest church.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Two recent books are especially helpful in addressing the reliability and stability of eyewitness accounts and their oral recitation and transmission over time, based on recent studies of orally dominant cultures. These books are *The Jesus Legend* by Eddy & Boyd, and *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* by Richard Bauckham. See the bibliography.

<sup>15</sup> Gary R. Habermas, ‘Why I Believe the New Testament is Historically Reliable,’ in *Why I Am a Christian*, ed. Norman L. Geisler and Paul K. Hoffman (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2001), 148. See the quotation of Edwin Yamauchi in Jay’s ‘The Reliability of the New Testament’ on the ICF website.

### *Does Archeology Support the Reliability of the New Testament?*

- ❑ “Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history” (respected archeologist William F. Albright).<sup>16</sup>

### *What About the Seeming Contradictions in the New Testament?*

- ❑ Some people question the reliability of the Bible because of supposed contradictions. However, many of these people have not bothered to do their own research. Most of the “contradictions” can be removed when the text is studied in context.<sup>17</sup> Some difficulties remain, but every difficulty has been addressed by competent Bible scholars. If you have a question about an apparent contradiction or inaccuracy, seek an explanation. (Contact Jay.)

### *What About the Miracles Recorded in the New Testament?*

- ❑ Some reject the historicity of the Bible miracles because of their own naturalistic presuppositions. In this case, their objection takes the form: “It cannot happen, so it did not happen!” Thus the fundamental question is not “Is the Bible reliable?” but rather “Are miracles possible?” This is a philosophical question, which must be adequately addressed *prior* to a fair evaluation of the historical accuracy of the Bible.



### *Reflection/Application*

- Do you believe Luke’s statements in verses 1-4 of his Gospel? Do you believe his Gospel is reliable? If not, identify your specific reasons and seek Christian responses to your objections.
- As a believer, do you need to be assured of the things you have been taught? Begin to read Luke with an open heart, asking God to teach you and change you. (Read chapters 1-4 this week.)

### *Bibliography*

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<sup>16</sup> Since Albright’s statement, there has been significant archeological activity. In a tone of academic objectivity, Eddy & Boyd say, ‘it seems to us that archeological discoveries, especially over the last few decades, have on the whole served to enhance our confidence in the general reliability of the Gospels’ (Eddy & Boyd, 447).

<sup>17</sup> This context includes the orally dominate culture in which the Gospels arose. Eddy & Boyd claim that our ‘post-Gutenberg literary paradigm’ imposes inappropriate standards on the texts relative to exact similarity and verbatim representation (see Chapter 10 of their book).