



Luke 1:1-4

How the Gospels Were Written

To everyone who believes on Him, Jesus Christ will usher them into the presence of the living God.

A complete biography of this wonderful person cannot be written because the Gospel records only a few selected words and acts of Jesus. They have a message to proclaim, and they achieve their purpose in writing it by choosing events in the life of Christ that fulfilled that goal (cf. John 20:30-31; 21:24-25).

During the last forty-six years I have preached through each of the four Gospels. For some time I have wanted to do a series on the Gospel of Jesus Christ following A. T. Robertson's *Harmony of the Gospels*.

Our principle source of information for these studies is the four Gospels by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first three are called the Synoptic Gospels because they agree in the general order of events and content. John provides additional information not included in the other three.

WHY FOUR GOSPELS?

I have been asked many times why four gospels and not just one life of Christ in the Bible. It helps us to keep in mind that each of the gospel writers has a specific purpose and audience in mind as he wrote. The word *gōspel* means good news of salvation available to all who believe on Christ.

Biographies as we know them today were not a literary form two thousand years ago. The purpose of the gospels was to present the life and work of Christ in a manner that people would believe on Christ as their savior.

Only four gospels were considered inspired by God, authoritative and valuable enough to be included in the canon of the New Testament. The four gospels were written by apostles or by men who were closely associated with them in their ministry.

Three of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke are similar in content, with common presentation of the work and teachings of Jesus. They follow a similar pattern, but supplement additional materials to accomplish their specific goals. These are called the Synoptic Gospels because they have this common view. All but thirty-one verses in Mark are found in Matthew and Luke. Of the 661 verses in the Gospel of Mark, 350 are found in the Gospel of Luke.

When we examine the Gospel of John we have additional material not included in the other three, and he organizes his material around long discourses without contradicting the other three.

Mark was the first of the four Gospels to be written before 60 A.D. The apostle Simon Peter was Mark's primary source and was a witness with vivid descriptions, which could only come from an eyewitness. Papias (130-160 A.D.) says, "Mark, who was Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he recollected of what Christ had said and done."

In reality, Mark's Gospel served as a chronological framework that was followed by the other Synoptic Gospel writers. It is filled with action and vivid details. He wrote to win Romans to Christ.

The Gospel of Matthew was the second one written a little later than Mark but before 70 A.D. because the Temple was still in use and Jerusalem was still standing in the Gospel. The Romans destroyed the city and the Temple in 70 A.D.

Matthew wrote for a Jewish audience to prove that Jesus was the Messiah foretold in the many prophecies and types in the Old Testament. His Gospel is filled with Messianic prophecies and their fulfillment in Christ Jesus.

Luke probably wrote the Gospel in Caesarea around 60 A.D. while the apostle Paul was imprisoned there with the purpose of encouraging a Greek believer Theophilus. He was the Beloved Physician and traveling companion of the apostle Paul. He was with Paul in Rome and possibly died with him at the same time. He dedicated both of his books to most excellent Theophilus. The preface is written in excellent classical Greek with a carefully constructed sentence. Therefore it is a literary work worthy of an educated audience.

The Gospel of John complements the other three by emphasizing Jesus' ministry in Judea and Jerusalem whereas the other three placed more emphasis on the Galilean ministry of Jesus. He fills in some gaps that Mark does not include in his chronology.

John probably wrote around 85 A.D. and died about 100 A.D. He was an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus and one of the twelve disciples. He gives us his aim in writing in John 20:30-31. "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

John's goal is that his readers believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name."

Luke tells us "many have undertaken to compile an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us (Luke 1:1 NET). The Gospel of Mark would have been one of these sources and well as Matthew, which had been written previous to Luke's Gospel.

Other Gospels

Luke opens his Gospel saying, "If as much as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught" (Luke 1:1-4).

This is one long sentence in the Greek, but our English translators help us with the complexity of the sentence by placing it in shorter sentences.

I like the smoothness of the NET Bible: "Now many have undertaken to compile an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, like the accounts passed on to us by those who were eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the beginning. So it seemed good to me as well, because I have followed all things carefully from the beginning, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know for certain the things you were taught."

Luke is definitely not referring to any of the Gnostic gospels because they came much later in the second to the fourth centuries. Luke is writing about 50 to 60 A.D. Yes, there were incipient Gnostic teachings by the time the apostle John wrote his Gospel toward the end of the first century about 80-90 A.D. But Gnosticism was not full blown until another one hundred years later. The Gnostic gospels came about 150 years after Luke's Gospel.

Luke writes, "If as much as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us . . . (Luke 1:1). How many of these accounts there were no one knows, but more than two or three. Definitely not eighty as a popular novelist recently declared.

Divine design

What is it that has been fulfilled among us (NET)? It is the life and work of Christ Jesus.

Luke has in mind something that has been fulfilled by a divine design. It is as if he is saying, "I saw God do it!"

His emphasis is on the divine design which can be clearly illustrated in the words of Jesus in Luke 24:25-27, 44-47. "And He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. . . . Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'"

Luke by quoting Jesus is declaring that in Jesus the divine promises of the Old Testament have been fulfilled. The salvation promised has now fully come to pass. It has been completely accomplished just like He said it would be.

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Luke does not suggest failure or cast any blame on the other writings about Christ. The apocryphal gospels or Gnostic writings came much later and would not be in his thinking as he writes. None of them are dated in the first century A.D. His research gave him more information to share about Jesus.

Luke is fully convinced or persuaded of the events about which he is writing. He has a full and accurate knowledge concerning the events about Jesus, which have been widely known among the Christians.

He is a Gentile Christian writing to Gentiles and his command of the Greek language is excellent. Christ Jesus is the Savior of the world and he states it in good clear expressive Greek. Obviously, he is a well-educated, medical doctor and thinker.

LUKE'S SOURCES

Luke tells us his sources were those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word have handed them down to us (Luke 1:2).

Eyewitnesses

The disciples of Jesus who became the apostles were the eyewitnesses who gave their testimonies to the public. They were the first generation of witnesses in the church. Many people knew Jesus personally and were still alive when Luke interviewed them. The apostle Paul called upon these as evidences of his preaching on the death and resurrection of Jesus in First Corinthians 15:3-8. He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now . . . (v. 6). He is saying if you do not believe me, you can ask them.

Luke was a constant traveling companion of Paul and would be fully aware of this great body of witnesses. He was in contact with them as he traveled in Judea, Jerusalem and places in the Roman Empire where the Christians had migrated to because of persecution. Their vivid memories and minds were full of the teachings and miracles of Jesus.

Luke could still verify the accuracy of the accounts with the eyewitnesses. They were eyewitnesses from the beginning referring to the beginning of Jesus' ministry and early preaching of the Gospel (1 John 1:1-5; Acts 1:14; 1 Peter 5:1; Luke 24:48; 1 Cor. 15:5; 2 Pet. 1:16-17).

They told what they had seen as eyewitnesses. Luke describes them as eyewitnesses and servants of the Word. He is not describing two groups of people, but two descriptions of the same group. These eyewitnesses from the beginning were servants of the Word from the beginning. These faithful eyewitnesses passed on accurate accounts to each church. No doubt educated members of the churches wrote these down just like we take notes in our day.

Moreover, Matthew and John were eyewitnesses who wrote down their observations and experiences. Here is John's testimony in the preface to his First Letter. This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and our hands have touched (concerning the word of life and the life was revealed, and we have seen and testify and announce to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us). What we have seen and heard we announce to you too, so that you may have fellowship with us (and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ). Thus we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:1-4 NET). The writer is saying he was an eyewitness to all he is writing.

At the end of his Gospel John certified: This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these

At the end of his Gospel John certified: This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written (John 21:24-25). It is his certified statement of authenticity and absolute truth.

Second generation

The second generation of Christians was not actual eyewitnesses, of course. Luke and Mark wrote down what Peter and other eyewitnesses told them about Jesus. The second generation was in contact with the eyewitnesses and wrote down their testimonies. This Jesus God raised up, and we are all witnesses of it, ” declared Peter (Acts 2:32).

Luke does not claim to have been an eyewitness of the life and work of Christ, but he does say he possessed first-hand sources of information from these eyewitnesses. His travels brought him in close personal contact with the actual eyewitnesses of these events in the life of Jesus. He has not missed out on anything important to the early roots of Christianity.

Luke tells us many other writers set about this task. How many we do not know, and only a few fragments have survived. The four Gospels in our New Testament stood the test of time, and gave evidence of being inspired by God the Holy Spirit. We have the orderly arrangement Luke and Mark made after making their interviews and listening to the evidence. What had been accomplished was now being delivered in these four Gospels. The eyewitnesses were now the servants.

What we hold in our hands is an accurate account of the actual events in the life and work of Jesus Christ. We can have assurance that what we read is historically accurate. There is no reason to doubt it.

The accounts were handed down from one generation to another. The verb is a technical term for handing down material, whether in oral or written form, as authoritative information.

Luke used both written and oral sources and verified his information with eyewitnesses. Even the oral traditions were rooted in those who saw and experienced what they reported to the churches. Keep in mind the Jewish people knew how to handle with care a steady stream of traditions. They were known for their accuracy in the communication of this oral tradition.

Luke’s account is constructed with the same care.

LUKE’S PERSONAL INVESTIGATION

Luke’s account is based on solid principles of investigation.

It seemed fitting to me as well (Luke 1:3a). After being a part of this great movement and experiencing God’s grace in his life Luke said, It seemed good to me as well to write down these events.

Luke is not critical of the other accounts, but will add more information and a second volume about all that Jesus began to do and teach in His incarnate body, and all that He continues to do and teach through His new Body, the church.

Careful investigation

Having investigated everything carefully from the beginning (v. 3b). Luke writes as a historian. He is not writing a historical novel; he claimed a full knowledge of the events before he wrote.

Luke's credibility and accuracy as an ancient historian is beyond question. A hundred and fifty years ago the critics investigated thoroughly and viciously the writings of Luke. Archaeological discoveries over the past 150 years have certified Luke as an accurate credible historian with remarkable ability to use details. He would have been very disturbed by the so-called facts of Dan Brown. Luke focused on factual truths. He claimed to be investigating thoroughly and accurately the historical facts. He writes these down in an orderly fashion. The most critical studies and researches into the Gospel of Luke have proved time and time again the amazing accuracy of his writings.

Luke was ready to write only after he had investigated everything carefully his sources. He has examined the evidence and has followed it accurately. He uses an interesting word that means, to follow along a thing in mind, to trace carefully or investigate anything accurately. He mentally followed along in his investigation all these events that were relevant to his theme and got them ready in his mind before he began to write. He began to write with a full and accurate knowledge of the person and work of Christ. He used the word *akribos* meaning to write accurately going into the minute details. Godet says Luke was like a "traveler who tries to discover the source of a river, in order that he may descend it again, and follow its entire course." That is what Luke does mentally as he prepares his evidence.

He has taken a long and careful look at all the facts he has gathered. He went back to the beginning and interviewed eyewitnesses. He got his historical facts and geographical and political information together. He made a thorough investigation of everything that related to Christ Jesus. He has about thirty percent more information, not included in the other gospels. He concentrates on the parables and miracles of Jesus.

Luke is a careful, thorough and accurate historian. He is not concerned about a chronological order of the life of Christ. However, he does present it in a logical and topical manner as a narrative history. He follows Mark's general chronological order for the most part, except in 9:51-18:10 where he gives a more topical presentation. It is more of a logical-topical arrangement of materials. Luke makes no mistakes as a historian. To him a logical or topical connection is at times more important than a precise sequential order. The important thing for Luke is an accurate orderly account of the facts demonstrating that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

The apostle Paul spent two years in prison in Caesarea. Since Luke was his traveling companion he would have taken full advantage of the opportunity to interview eyewitnesses in Judea. He writes as accurately as possible with an eye for vivid details.

Luke was associated with John Mark, the author of the second Gospel who had been an eyewitness to some of the events in the life of Christ, and a companion of Peter (Col. 4:10, 14; Philemon 24; 2 Tim. 4:11, 13).

Christians who could write would have committed to writing information concerning Jesus. As the first disciples died or were martyred it would have been necessary to commit to writing the saying and stories about Jesus. That writings were available in the early church is evident in the instruction the apostle Paul gave Timothy. When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments (2 Tim. 4:13). Luke had an exceedingly large number of firsthand sources of information both oral and written, available to him in his travels.

Luke tells us he investigated everything carefully (v. 3). This would indicate he examined all available data with a goal of seeking the truth with accuracy. He selected, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, from this

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with a goal of seeking the truth with accuracy. He selected, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, from this abundant amount of information that which would help him communicate his intended purpose in writing his Gospel. Luke is the most comprehensive of the four Gospels.

Luke examined carefully all the narratives previously written including Matthew and Mark. He compared these with the oral traditions he had heard and the eyewitness he interviewed. He studied the facts and arranged them into a careful, thorough scholarly work.

Not only is his integrity and credibility at stake, but the Christian Way as well. He is aware of that as he researches and presents his work.

Like the other three gospel writers, Luke selects saying and events in the life of Jesus, summarizes and arranges it in a logical presentation to accomplish his goal in writing it.

Luke paints for us with words a magnificent portrait of Jesus. This portrait of the Savior of the world is not a figment of his imagination or a work of fiction. The picture is well grounded on facts of a man in a specific time and place in history. These are real historical events and we know they are true because Luke was careful to pen only what he knew to be accurate facts. Luke says he checked and double-checked his sources.

Christianity is based on historical facts, not a myth or personal opinions. His gospel is absolutely trustworthy; you can go to the bank with it. Our faith is not based on a mystery religion or Gnostic mystical experiences or alternative religions, but true, accurate, factual knowledge of a perfect man who died for our sins and rose from the dead.

Let's not lose sight also that he had another thing going for him as he wrote his gospel. The breath of God was upon him leading, guiding and choosing what to write. It is the product of divine inspiration.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). This statement is true of the four Gospels as well as the Old Testament.

God revealed Himself to a lost world in Jesus

PURPOSE OF WRITING THE GOSPELS

Luke wrote his Gospel for Theophilus. His name means "God-lover."

We, like Theophilus, can have absolute assurance that the Gospel we read in the Bible is the record of the facts we need to know about Jesus. We have a sure knowledge of the truth. It is accurate and trustworthy. Luke testifies that in this Gospel we have a full knowledge of the exact truth concerning Jesus.

Luke wrote this gospel to reassure his friend of the truth concerning Jesus because Christianity is Christ.

Theophilus is probably a Gentile believer who wants to know the exact truth about the things he has been taught (Luke 1:4). He has some knowledge about Jesus, but how much we really do not know. I think he was a socially prominent, man of means, and a disciple of Luke. The title "most excellent" is like "Your Excellency" and may refer to an office of importance in the government or just an intelligent middle-class Roman citizen.

The four Gospels are a unique genre of writings that center on the person of Jesus and His saving work. They are not biographies because they do not tell the whole story of the life of Jesus. The material included in the

are not biographies because they do not tell the whole story of the life of Jesus. The material included in the Gospels is selective to accomplish a predetermined purpose. It contains both history and theology in a presentation to confirm the faith of his friend. Luke's Gospel is intensely practical, evangelical and pastoral. Repentance, faith and forgiveness are characteristic themes as well as the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

1. Luke assures his readers that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught (v. 4). That you may know for certain expresses the definiteness, trustworthiness, absolute certainty and truthfulness of the Gospel. He is saying I certify that this is the absolute truth so help me God. He does not want to see anyone go to hell because he has believed in a false gospel. It is with full certainty that he writes. He will stake eternity on its truthfulness.
2. It is important for every believer to know the exact truth about Christ Jesus. Eternity depends on it. God has given us the four Gospels so we can have a solid secure foundation upon which to build our faith in Christ. The Christian faith rests on solid, historical facts.
3. God has revealed Himself fully in the person of His Son. The Gospels tell us what we need to know in order to have an intimate personal relationship with God in Christ Jesus.
4. Christ Jesus is the promised Redeemer, the Servant of the LORD. What is our response to the truth of God's Word? Jesus had a word of rebuke for those who would not believe the witnesses (Luke 24:25-27). We will be held accountable to the truth we have received.
5. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for all who will repent and believe on Him as their Savior. He is the friend of all sinners. And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God (Luke 13:29). Let's be faithful in proclaiming the Gospel.
6. The historical grounds upon which our Christian faith rests are unshakable. The God who sent His incarnate Son to be the Savior of the world by His own divine superintendence guided and preserved the writing of the story.
7. Someone said, "When God spoke, He didn't stutter. He said precisely what He meant and He meant what He said."

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