

Luke 1:1-4

“Luke and his gospel”

Background

Facts you may not know . . .

It is the longest book in the NT.

Along with Acts (the second volume) it makes up ¼ of the NT, which means Luke wrote more of the NT than any other author. They cover the first 60 years of the Church Age.

The book is the most comprehensive account of the life of Christ, beginning with the birth of John the Baptist.

Luke himself

Colossians 4:14, “Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.”

2 Timothy 4:11, “Only Luke is with me . . .”

Philemon 24, “. . . as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.”

From this we learn that he was a physician who accompanied Paul during Paul’s first and second imprisonments. The “we” passages in Acts show Luke was with Paul during his missionary journeys, and Acts 1:19, “And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood” shows that he was a Gentile.

Authorship

The early Church was unanimous in accepting Luke’s authorship. No other candidate was put forward, and it is unlikely Luke would be suggested if he was not truly the author since he was not a very significant person in the early Church. Justin Martyr cites Luke as the author (c.160) as do other 2nd and 3rd centuries writers, and the oldest surviving manuscript (c. 300) has Luke as the author.

Also, the “we” passages in Acts indicate that the author was with Paul. When others mention by name in those passages are eliminated, the only other people known to travel with Paul are Luke and Titus. Titus has never been suggested as a possible author.

The gospel of Luke

The book was probably written about c.60 AD. This explains the abrupt ending of Acts, and the lack of Luke mentioning any detail later than 61 AD. This includes the death of James, Nero’s persecution, or the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Certain narratives only in Luke include the histories of Zacharias and Elizabeth, Zacchaeus, the penitent thief, the rich man and Lazarus, the prodigal son, and the walk to Emmaus.

It is written to Theophilus, a name which means lover of God. Some in the early church took this as a metaphor for all early believers, but recent scholarship is convinced that this was a real person of some influence who was educated and probably a new believer.

It is the longest and most thorough of the gospels narratives. Taken as the first half of the narrative continued the Acts, it emphasizes “the things accomplished among us” – that is, the sovereignty of God, among other themes.

Text

This opening prologue is a single sentence written in a very literary style as did most ancient authors to begin their work (Herodotus, Thucydides, Josephus). Its intent is to command respect and to ensure the work is seen as a serious one. Interestingly, the remainder of the book is written in the more common everyday Greek of the NT.

many have undertaken to compile an account

Clearly others had already begun to write down stories about Christ. These include Matthew and Mark, whom Luke probably read or knew about, as well as others that have been lost (and obviously were not canonical).

Luke is not critical of the other writers, and he is not writing his account to correct inaccuracies. His purpose in mentioning them is to both authenticate his own account as reliable and to place it in the orthodox tradition.

as they were handed down to us

“handed down” – literally to give over, or to entrust. It is a technical term for passing on an authoritative truth.

Oral tradition is invaluable in antiquity, and was generally very accurate to three generations. As societies became literate, written records were, of course, preferable.

by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses

This shows that Luke, himself, was not an eyewitness; that is, not an apostle. He was, like Mark, a companion of the apostles.

This does not undermine the inspiration of God.

servants of the word

This description of followers of Christ at the beginning is still true today.

having investigated everything carefully

Whether Luke actually “read” the gospels of Mark and Matthew, he had access to the men themselves, since Mark also traveled with Paul and Matthew was in Jerusalem when Paul (and Luke) visited (Acts 21:17). While there Luke could also have consulted others who knew Christ during His lifetime (about 25 years had passed).

that you may know the exact truth

The main object of Luke’s writing. The emphasis is on truth. Ours is a faith based on facts. It is not doctrines and principles only, but the facts related to the person and work of Jesus Christ. The facts came first, the doctrines later.

Take Aways

Are we still “servants of the Word?”

Do we appreciate knowing “the exact truth” of our faith?