

# Always Read the Prologue (Luke 1:1-4)

## Four reasons why the prologue is essential to the Gospel according to Luke:

### 1. It informs the reader how the gospel was ordered and written (v.1-2)

- Luke's gospel account is the direct result of many "narratives." Since Luke most likely produced this work in the early 60's (nearly thirty years after Jesus of Nazareth's life, death, burial, and resurrection), he is dependent on other sources, as he is not an eyewitness to any of these events, nor claims to be. He is not being critical of any of these narratives, nor implying that there are any defects. Instead, after investigating, he is compiling all of these into one document.
- These many "narratives" include both written and oral traditions.
  - Written narratives: this includes some of the gospel according to Mark. In addition to this gospel, Luke has used other reliable (although unidentifiable) first century sources that we do not have today.
  - Oral accounts: Luke has received the oral testimony of those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning. Ancient Near East culture was largely an oral culture, as most men, women, and children were illiterate. Combined with illiteracy and lack of access to written documents, their memory was tremendous.
- He was not a disciple of Jesus Christ and is completely dependent on these sources. These sources include "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" who themselves were the disciples and apostles.

### 2. It identifies the investigative nature of Luke as a historian (v.3)

- Luke, as a competent historian, investigates all claims within the full body of written and oral accounts he has received and has access to. Since Luke had not witnessed any of the events recorded in the gospel, he is dependent on the reliability of his sources. His goal is to write a historically accurate account that is carefully researched and well-organized.
- Luke may have been a Gentile (Col. 4:10-14). There is no non-Jewish author that reports on Judaism, Jewish worship in the synagogue and temple, Jewish practices and parties with greater accuracy, knowledge, and positiveness than Luke currently in the first century.
- How can Luke have all this information? He is a historian who spent a great amount of time with the apostle Paul:
  - Luke is mentioned thrice among Paul's letters (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11). He spent considerable amount of time with Paul in both imprisonments, along with some of Paul's missionary journeys. He would have met John Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Timothy, Titus, Silas, Epaphras, and Barnabas as a result of being a disciple of Paul.
- In all four gospels, none of the writers identify within the body of work who the author is. Indeed, one-third of the New Testament books do not identify authorship within the source, and there is no direct statement within the gospel itself who its author is. We can confidently conclude that it was Luke, the physician (Col. 4:14) for four reasons:
  - A. Internal evidence in this gospel includes many healing accounts that overlap with Mark, not including five healings unique to Luke's account (7:11-17; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; 17:11-19; 22:51). Much of his terminology parallels ancient Greek medical writers (Hippocrates, Galen, and Dioscorides).
  - B. Earliest manuscripts (~130 AD) title the document "the gospel according to Luke. This Luke was a physician."
  - C. The Church Fathers (Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome) unanimously identify Luke, the physician, as the author.

D. The "we" sections in the Acts of the Apostles (16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16) thematically connect Luke to much of the New Testament.

- Within the gospel according to Luke, there are several themes:
  - a) Salvation: that Jesus died for sinners who participate in God's salvation by repenting or turning from their sins to God (Luke 5:32; Acts 13:3-4; 15:7-8; 16:30; 17:3-4), receiving the judicial and forensic results of that repentance: forgiveness of sins (Luke 1:77; 3:18; 4:18; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18), and preaching the gospel to all the nations of the earth.
  - b) Christology: Jesus is the core of the gospel of Luke. The disciples had continually asked "who is this?" (5:21; 7:49; 8:25; 9:9).
  - c) Lordship: Jesus has power over nature (8:22-25; 9:10-16), disease (4:38-40; 5:12-16; 7:22), death itself (7:11-17; 8:51-56), and the cosmic powers of darkness (4:1-13, 36, 41; 8:26-39; 10:17-20) demonstrating that He is Lord.
  - d) Ordination: the coming of the Christ, His ministry, and the results of His incarnation had all been ordained by God and carried out according to His will (4:43; 9:33; 19:5), in not only His death, but also His resurrection (9:22; 17:25).
  - e) Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit is the point of continuity between the life of Jesus and the mission of the early church. The Holy Spirit is mentioned seventeen times in the gospel and forty times in Acts.
  - f) The Church: When Jesus chose the twelve (6:12-16), He was establishing the pillars and foundations of the church who would be used as vehicles to advance and populate the kingdom of God in the hearts of men.
  - g) Prayer and Worship: Luke is known as the "theologian of prayer." At nearly every turning point in Jesus' ministry He is in prayer (3:21; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 22:41-42; 23:34, 46).
  - h) The Marginalized and Poor: Christ demands that His followers alleviate suffering everywhere they are able. The use of wealth in this manner is a way to accumulate for themselves "friends" (Luke 16:9).
  - i) Women: nearly 40% of all names in the Gospel of Luke are women. Women are patrons of the apostolic band (8:1-3), and official witnesses of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (23:49; 55-56; 24:10).

### 3. It infuses assurance in the reliability of the Scriptures (v.4)

- Luke's primary audience is Theophilus. He is a literal, historical person, whose name means "lover of God, God lover, or loved by God." Both the gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles (Luke 1:4; Acts 1:1) are addressed to this man.
- Luke acknowledges that these things happened "among us" not "in front of us."
- It was customary in Greek antiquity to dedicate books to real people, not fictional ones. Luke calls Theophilus "Most Excellent" which indicates that he may have been a prominent man of wealth. It was customary, in dedicating this work to him (v.3: "for you"), as a patron, he would then pay for the publication and dissemination of the work.
- We are unsure of whether Theophilus had placed his faith in Christ, but he was taught and informed on much of what is included in this gospel.
- The audience of Luke may have been predominantly Gentiles, as his genealogy is from Abraham to Adam. Jews are referenced in third person (7:3; 23:51), and there is a focus on a Gentile mission (Acts 10-11; 13:46-48; 18:6; 28:24-28). Additionally, all the details to Jewish customs would be unnecessary if the audience was primarily Jewish.
- Tens of thousands of men, women, and children had witnessed the sayings, and the miracles of not only Christ, but his disciples and apostles. Even though these witnesses who are scattered all over the Roman Empire may not have faith, they would be living testimonies of the details in this account.