

A Sacred History and a Sacred Historian

LUKE 1:1-4

The gospel of Luke is a carefully researched history concerning the life of Jesus Christ. The book is a collaboration between God and the historian

I. THE SOURCES (VS 1-2)

Jesus' life and ministry were very public. There were plenty of sources that recorded the events of his life, death, and resurrection from different perspectives.

- A. SEVERAL PUBLIC RECORDS (1)
- B. TRANSMISSION (2a)
- C. RELIABLE EYEWITNESSES (2b)

II. THE METHOD (VS 3a)

This is a good description of how God inspires the authors of scripture and how He expects us to approach our study of scripture.

- A. CAREFUL STUDY
- B. HARD WORK
- C. THE HOLY SPIRIT

III. THE PURPOSE (VS 3b-4)

The purpose of the gospel is to inform us who Jesus is, his mission, and the truth of his claims.

- A. FOR PEOPLE TO COME TO KNOW JESUS AND TO LOVE HIM (3b)
- B. TO BE REASSURED OF OUR SALVATION (4)

A Sacred History and a Sacred Historian

Luke 1:1-4

This morning, we are going to start a journey through the Gospel of Luke. Traditionally it has been said that the Gospel of Matthew was written primarily to Jews. His intent was to demonstrate that Jesus was the promised Messiah. The symbol for the Gospel of Matthew was a lion. It represented the Lion of Judah, strength, power, and royalty. The Gospel of Mark is said to have been written to a Roman audience in order to show that Jesus was indeed an innocent and noble man and indeed was the Son of God. The Gospel of Mark's symbol was a bull. It symbolized power. The Gospel of John was written from a theological and an emotional perspective and was symbolized by an eagle. The eagle symbolized deity. However, the Gospel of Luke was written to a worldwide Gentile audience. Luke's Gospel was symbolized by a man. It stood for wisdom and character. Luke includes the historical perspective of women, children, the less fortunate, and non Jews. Luke's Gospel is described as the universal Gospel. The Jesus Film that has been used as an evangelistic tool all over the world is taken directly from the Gospel of Luke. It is interesting to note that the symbols for John and Matthew are almost always the same. However, some traditions characterized Mark's Gospel with the man because Mark's Gospel is simple and straightforward. It is a barebones report of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Luke is sometimes portrayed as a calf symbolizing the sacrificial nature of Jesus' life and death.

Luke is recorded in history as a physician whose home town is Syrian Antioch. Tradition says he remained unmarried and died at the ripe old age of 84. Luke was written probably around 62 AD. Luke is the longest book in the New Testament and it contains some of the best Greek found in the New Testament. In fact, many scholars argue that the four verses we are studying this morning is the best Greek found in the Bible. We have early manuscripts of Luke that date back to 175 AD. It is a well attested book and there has been no real serious challenge to Luke as the author.

As we study through this Gospel, I'm hoping that we will do more than view this as an historical journey. I'm praying that we will come to know Jesus intimately, so intimately that we will start to think and act like Him.

Sometimes, we Christians just learn facts about Jesus so we use them when we need them. One day at breakfast, two brothers started to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw an opportunity for a moral lesson. She said, "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'" The oldest boy turned to his younger brother and said, "You be Jesus this morning."

I'm hoping that we will be much better at letting the Gospel transform our individual lives.

The main idea of this morning's text is this. **THE GOSPEL OF LUKE IS A CAREFULLY RESEARCHED HISTORY CONCERNING THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST. THE BOOK IS A COLLABORATION BETWEEN GOD AND THE HISTORIAN.** In other

words, we know that God the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible. However, He used the hard work, personality, and background of many different people. Even though Luke was inspired by God as he wrote this Gospel, he was still very careful to do research and investigation. Even though the Holy Spirit helps us to read and understand the Bible, we need to be as diligent in our study of the Bible as Luke was in his composition. The Gospels are a sacred history that covers the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Obviously each Gospel has to be selective in the material it records because as John says at the end of his Gospel:

“²⁵And I suppose that if all the other things Jesus did were written down, the whole world could not contain the books” (John 21:25 / NLT).

THE SOURCES (VS 1-2)

The authors of the Gospels, in fact all the authors of the entire Bible are sacred historians. They are revealing God to us as inspired by God the Holy Spirit. In verses 1-2, Luke reveals the sources he used in writing his Gospel. **JESUS’ LIFE AND MINISTRY WERE VERY PUBLIC. THERE WERE PLENTY OF SOURCES THAT RECORDED THE EVENTS OF HIS LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.**

Since the ministry of Jesus was so public and so widespread, it is no surprise there were several public records as Luke informs us in verse one. Luke states that many have undertaken the task of recording the events surrounding a man called Jesus. We know there were three other Gospels; Matthew, Mark, and John. In addition, there were other New Testament authors, who in writing to the early church, referenced events and teachings from the life of Jesus. Jewish and Roman historians alike refer to Jesus. The New Testament writers refer to Jesus as the God-Man, the promised Jewish Messiah. The secular sources refer to Jesus simply as a man. The Bible is a reliable source that reveals to us Who Jesus is and what He has done. In fact, the Bible reveals the nature and character of God, and His will for our lives. At any rate, Luke had all sorts of sources to draw from in researching material for his composition.

Look at the second phrase in verse one, “of the things that have been fulfilled among us.” The NIV uses the word fulfilled here. The NLT, NASB, ESV use the phrases took place among us or accomplished among us. The King James Version translates it, “which are most surely believed.” All of these are very legitimate translations. I think in order to catch Luke’s meaning; we have to use the full semantic range here. Jesus’ ministry was very public. In fact He was crucified on the top of a hill in the middle of two thieves. In Kittles Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, the word *plērophoreō* is defined with the broad semantic range of bringing something to fullness, to fulfill, to complete, to convince, and to come to full certainty. I think that Luke envisions all these meanings. For example, Luke will demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and prophecies. He will portray Jesus as One Who brings wholeness and healing to life. Jesus completes our life and without Jesus, no one can ever be whole. For Luke, Jesus is the answer.

In the first half of verse 2, we get some idea of how the Bible was transmitted. We know that the Old Testament culture passed down a lot of the information through oral tradition. In fact

there are cultures today that still hand down history through oral tradition. When sociologists followed some of these cultures, they were astonished at how accurately the stories were passed down from generation to generation. Further, we know that the Apostles wrote letters to the early churches. These letters were circulated to other local churches. We know there were early Christian hymns that circulated around the church that told stories about Jesus. It seems as if Jesus' teachings, as well as the Apostles' teachings were either memorized or written down, and handed down to the local churches and circulated to other churches.

In the second half of verse 2, Luke makes a point to inform us that he got testimony from eyewitnesses. I love how Luke describes the Apostles. He describes them as the primary eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Let's deal with primary eyewitnesses first. In order to replace Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Christ and hanged himself, the Apostles laid out the following criteria for choosing a replacement Apostle:

"²¹So now we must choose another man to take Judas's place. It must be someone who has been with us all the time that we were with the Lord Jesus—²²from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us into heaven. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22 / NLT).

But there were a ton of witnesses. Jesus preached to crowds of thousands, performed miracles in front of thousands, healed, and touched all sorts of people. In defending the resurrection, listen to how Paul challenges people to go ask witnesses:

"³I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me—that Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. ⁵He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. ⁶After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died by now. ⁷Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, I saw him, too, long after the others, as though I had been born at the wrong time" (I Corinthians 15:3-8 / NLT).

Since Luke traveled with the Apostle Paul, He would have access to Timothy, Titus, and had probably come in contact with several of the original Apostles. Luke would have had a chance to interview people who Jesus had touched and people who witnessed Him alive after the crucifixion and burial. But Luke makes a point that the Apostles were the primary witnesses of Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection. Their teaching was authoritative and was faithfully transmitted to local churches by letters, personal sermons, and messengers.

But Luke also refers to the Apostles as servants of the word. The Bible refers to all of written Scripture as the Word of God. However, Jesus is also referred to as the living Word of God. In fact John starts out his Gospel by referring to Jesus as God and as the Word. The primary task of the Apostles was to minister the Word of God to the world. It was their task to reveal Jesus and His wonderful offer of salvation to everyone. In fact, the Apostles took their job so seriously, they didn't want anything to distract them from the appointed task of preaching the Gospel. In his second book, Luke records it like this:

"¹But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew, saying that their widows were

being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. ²So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers.

‘We apostles should spend our time preaching and teaching the word of God, not administering a food program,’ they said. ³‘Now look around among yourselves, brothers, and select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will put them in charge of this business. ⁴Then we can spend our time in prayer and preaching and teaching the word.’ ...

⁷God’s message was preached in ever-widening circles. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too” (Acts 6:1-7 / NLT).

Luke consulted a wide variety of sources to include eyewitness accounts. The reliability of the New Testament documents are certain. **JESUS’ LIFE AND MINISTRY WERE VERY PUBLIC. THERE WERE PLENTY OF SOURCES THAT RECORDED THE EVENTS OF HIS LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.**

THE METHOD (VS 3a)

In the first half of verse 3 Luke gives us some insight into the method he used. This is instructive for us in this sense. **THIS IS A GOOD DESCRIPTION OF HOW GOD INSPIRES THE AUTHORS OF SCRIPTURE AND HOW HE EXPECTS US TO APPROACH OUR STUDY OF SCRIPTURE.** In other words, it seems to me that oftentimes people tend to choose a school of thought and hang on to it even to the exclusion of other evidence. Let me quote one of the main passages we use to define our doctrine of inspiration:

“¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right” (II Timothy 3:16 / NLT).

The word for inspired in Greek is *Theopneustos*. Literally it means God-breathed. In fact some translations, including the NIV translate it God-breathed. In other words all Scripture is God-breathed. The question and the debate are how does God inspire the Bible? Some say God dictated the Bible. In other words, God spoke and the authors of Scripture merely copied God’s words. This view of the Bible preserves the integrity of every word. And often God does dictate word for word. He actually wrote out the Ten Commandments for Moses. He often dictated to prophets what He wanted them to say.

On the other side of the argument are those who make the Bible a totally human work. They say that the authors of Scripture were inspired as composers are when they compose a song, or an artist paints a picture. God may have been the inspiration for them to write, but the thoughts and the words are totally human. I don’t really see this anywhere in Scripture.

However, I do see a middle approach. God clearly superintended the writing process. However, God allowed the authors of Scriptures to phrase things in words and grammar that was familiar to them and their time. Here Luke points out that he did a careful investigation of the facts. We

know that several Old Testament accounts refer to other historical works that paralleled their writings.

Luke said that his book was written after a careful study. Luke didn't just sit under a tree and wait for God to dictate the Scripture. Luke is mentioned by name only three times in the New Testament (Colossians 4:14, II Timothy 4:11, and Philemon 24). We know that he traveled with the Apostle Paul and his entourage. Luke also wrote the book of Acts as a follow-up to his Gospel. Listen to how he starts out the book of Acts:

¹Dear Theophilus: In my first book I told you about everything Jesus began to do and teach ²until the day he ascended to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions from the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:1-2 / NLT).

In the book of Acts while describing the journeys of Paul, he often has sentences where he uses “we.” These “we” sections are found in Acts 16:10-17, 20:4-15, 21:1-18, and 27:1-28:16. Luke worked carefully and sifted through all his material to make sure what he was writing was completely accurate.

The Bible is a spiritual book inspired, God-breathed. It contains spiritual truths and therefore, in order to understand the Bible, we need the Spirit of God to give us understanding. Listen to how Paul explained this to the church in Corinth:

¹²And God has actually given us his Spirit (not the world's spirit) so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. ¹³When we tell you this, we do not use words of human wisdom. We speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. ¹⁴But people who aren't Christians can't understand these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them because only those who have the Spirit can understand what the Spirit means. ¹⁵We who have the Spirit understand these things, but others can't understand us at all. ¹⁶How could they? For, 'Who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who can give him counsel?' But we can understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ” (I Corinthians 2:12-16 / NLT).

But here is what I want us to understand from Luke's method. Yes, Luke had the Holy Spirit Who guided him in his research, study, and writing, but he did a careful study. We cannot just sit and wait for the Holy Spirit to communicate spiritual truth to us. We are commanded to read, study, and memorize the Bible. We should do careful studies before we assume something is true. I know that it was popular when I was in college for Bible study groups to simply get together, read a passage of Scripture and then go around the table and ask each other what the passage meant to them. And every interpretation was given an equal amount of credit. Everyone was entitled to their interpretation and their opinion. But where was the question, “What did God and the author of this text mean?” There is no substitute for careful Bible study.

And Luke goes on to remind us that good Bible study is hard work. He says that it seemed good to write an orderly account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. William Barclay says that these four verses are the best Greek in the entire New Testament. God deserves our best. When we preach or teach, lead a small group, or participate in a small group, we need to carefully study and put a lot of hard work into it. I know a survey was done that revealed that most Sunday School teachers prepared their lessons on Saturday evening. I also know that many pastors

prepare their sermons on Saturday evening. If we want to grow as Christians, we must learn to use the tools of Bible study and diligently study the Bible.

But again, as all the passages indicate, all the hard work and literary technique still is useless unless the Holy Spirit leads us and guides us into all truth. We have no excuse to be lazy, but we also have no excuse to become arrogant. Good Bible study must include listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to understand the Scripture and to apply it. It seems to me that although we have many examples of God dictating Scripture, and we see Jesus plainly telling the Apostles the meaning of His teaching, we also see people carefully researching and then writing as they submit to the leading of God's Holy Spirit. We have been given the Bible in which God reveals Himself to us and reveals His will for us. He expects us to diligently study it and He promises to lead us into all truth. I think as we have studied through Luke's method we can use it this way. **THIS IS A GOOD DESCRIPTION OF HOW GOD INSPIRES THE AUTHORS OF SCRIPTURE AND HOW HE EXPECTS US TO APPROACH OUR STUDY OF SCRIPTURE.**

THE PURPOSE (VS 3b-4)

We have seen the source of Luke's Gospel and Luke's method of research and writing. In the second half of verse 3 and verse 4 we are introduced to the purpose of Luke's Gospel. **THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL IS TO INFORM US WHO JESUS IS, HIS MISSION, AND THE TRUTH OF HIS CLAIMS.** In other words, as we read and study through this Gospel, we want to come to know information about God, but much more than that, our goal is to come to know God. In other words, God desires to be in an intimate, personal, and passionate relationship with us. Jesus came to earth in order that we could see what God is like. Further, Jesus came to save us from our sins by dying on the cross for us.

The second half of verse 3 reminds us that the Gospel is for people to come to know Jesus and to love Him. Luke says that he was writing to Theophilus. Most people identify Theophilus as some sort of a Roman government official since "most excellent" is a common title for government officials in the Roman Empire. The meaning of this official's name is God-lover. So perhaps Theophilus is a newly converted Christian and Luke wants to make sure he has a good grasp of the Gospel and the God he has put his saving faith in. What is interesting is that Luke is presenting the Gospel to a Gentile from a Gentile perspective. I think as we study through the Gospel of Luke, we can all start to see the Gospel from an outsider's perspective, from a woman's perspective, from a man's perspective, from a child's perspective and from an adult's perspective. It speaks to the rich and poor, to the sick as well as the healthy, and it speaks to those of us who find ourselves in some real down and out places.

Luke wants Theophilus and us to be reassured of our salvation as he describes it in verse 4. He says that he wants Theophilus to be certain of the things he had been taught. As we study through the Gospel of Luke, my prayer is this. If unbelievers come to church, or if you are an unbeliever, I pray that you and others will come to fall in love with Jesus, receive Him into your life, and find salvation and eternal life in Him.

If you find yourself as having wandered away from your relationship with Jesus, I pray that like the Prodigal Son, you will find your way back.

If you are a believer, I pray that we will fall more passionately in love with Jesus. I have no hidden agenda here. I want people to know and fall in love with Jesus. **THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL IS TO INFORM US WHO JESUS IS, HIS MISSION, AND THE TRUTH OF HIS CLAIMS.**

I have to tell you that I am completely jazzed to study through and preach the Gospel of Luke. Let's be in prayer that many people find freedom, salvation, and eternal life through our study. **THE GOSPEL OF LUKE IS A CAREFULLY RESEARCHED HISTORY CONCERNING THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST. THE BOOK IS A COLLABORATION BETWEEN GOD AND THE HISTORIAN.**

Tradition has it that John was the last living apostle. During his lifetime, he saw the Gospel message twisted and distorted. Listen to how he wants us to understand the message of the Gospel:

"¹³I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13 / NLT).

I pray that during the next year many will come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, that many come back to Christ, and that all of us fall more passionately in love with Christ. But like Luke and John, I want all of us to be convinced that we have eternal life in Jesus alone.