

# Luke 1:1-4: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 00 ] Luke's Gospel, chapter 1, verses 1-4 The identification of the author of the third Gospel and of the Book of Acts is not something given to us by the Scripture itself.

But the claim that it was Luke is strongly supported by the early Christian tradition. The historical veracity of the claim that Luke was the author of the third Gospel is strengthened by the consideration that, had he not been the author, there would have been very little motivation to identify him as such.

Luke is a very minor figure in the New Testament, mentioned on only a few occasions, in the concluding greetings of Colossians, in 2 Timothy and in Philemon. From these few short references, we learn little beyond the fact that Luke was likely a physician, a fellow worker of Paul, and he was with him in the last period of his life.

If the author of the third Gospel is the same Luke as the physician mentioned in Colossians 4, verse 14, we might think it most likely that he was a Gentile, on the basis of verses 10-11 of that chapter. The absence of Luke in this list suggests to many that he was not a Jew, not someone of the circumcision.

[ 1 : 47 ] We can likely say with more certainty that he was not a Palestinian Jew. If he were a Jew, it would have been most likely that he had belonged to the dispersion. This claim that Luke was not a Jew could be put in question by Romans chapter 16, verse 21, if the Lucius referred to there is the same person as Luke, as Paul refers to him as his kinsman.

The Lucius of Cyrene, mentioned in Acts chapter 13, verse 1, has also been identified with Luke by a number of people over the course of church history, such as Origen. It is quite likely, however, that both Romans chapter 16 and Acts 13 refer to a different person entirely.

Luke seems to have a familiarity with Judaism. That gives weight to the idea that he was likely a Gentile God-fearer, associated with the synagogue even before becoming a Christian. Craig Kino writes that he probably traced his spiritual heritage to the Hellenistic Jewish Christian movement of Acts chapter 6.

The identification of the author of the third gospel with the author of the book of Acts is a strong one, held by almost all scholars. The books have pronounced similarities of structures and themes and narrative unity.

The book of Acts also begins with a reference back to a former account, the account of the gospel. It refers to the same addressee as at the beginning of the gospel, Theophilus. If the author of the epistle is the same person, then we can learn further things about Luke from the we passages in the book of Acts, places where, although not mentioning himself by name, the author's use of first-person plural pronouns makes clear that he was a member of Paul's missionary company.

[ 3 : 24 ] In Acts chapter 16, we witness a shift in pronouns between verses 7 and 10. And when they had come to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

So passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, Come over to Macedonia and help us. And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Such we sections are also found in chapter 20 verses 5 to 15, chapter 21 verses 1 to 18, chapter 27 verses 1 to 37, and chapter 28 verses 1 to 16. From these passages, it seems that Luke joined Paul for part of his second missionary journey, with Paul and Silas and Luke going in different directions after the imprisonment in Philippi.

Luke seems to join Paul again in Macedonia. Perhaps Luke remained in Philippi, a Roman colony, in the intervening period. They then travelled together to Jerusalem, before Paul was arrested in the

temple.

[ 4 : 33 ] Luke later accompanies Paul on his journey to Rome. In the course of his travels with Paul, he would have had extensive access to him. He seems to have worked with Paul at the same time as Mark, who was likely the author of the second gospel.

He stayed with Philip, the evangelist. He spent some time in Jerusalem, where they were welcomed by the leaders of the church there. It is quite likely that he spent time with eyewitnesses during this period, among them possibly Mary, the mother of Jesus, using that time to gather and assemble written and oral testimony and bring it together into a unified account.

Luke likely spent time in Caesarea before travelling on with Paul to Rome. As someone who travelled so widely, and met so many apostles and leading early Christians, he was perfectly suited to collect their testimonies and fashion them into the histories of Luke and Acts.

If he was, as the tradition suggests, a physician, he was likely educated and of higher status. As someone who was likely a Gentile God-fearer, a physician, a missionary, and well-travelled, Luke would have had extensive exposure to the Jewish, Greek, Roman, and Christian worlds of his day, albeit from the unique perspective of one who lived and moved between them.

Perhaps this might be one reason why Luke is particularly attentive to issues of inclusion. It also means that he was eminently suited to write the Book of Acts, which narrates the movement of the Gospel through the ancient worlds of Palestinian Judaism, Hellenistic Judaism, and the Judaism of the Dispersion, along with the societies of Greece and Rome.

[ 6 : 06 ] The Jesus of Luke's Gospel is a traveller too. Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in the Gospel of Luke takes 35% of the Gospel narrative, in contrast to Matthew, where it's only 6%, and Mark, where it's only 8%.

Luke, as an educated God-fearer who was familiar with Judaism, was in a perfect position to write a historical account. He addresses his Gospel and the Book of Acts to Theophilus, who was likely a man of some status.

Some have suggested that Theophilus, meaning dear to God or lover of God, is just a symbolic name for Luke's general reader. But this is quite unlikely, even though it does seem clear that Luke wrote envisaging a much more general readership.

Luke presumes a greater measure of cultural literacy of his readership than some of the other books of the New Testament, so it is possible that his primary intended readers would have been artisans. In the opening of Luke chapter 1, the Gospel writer introduces himself as the latest in a line of several to write a narrative of the events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Luke not only had access to eyewitnesses, but also seems to have had access to prior writings, quite possibly some version of Mark, for instance. Luke doesn't present himself as being in competition with these other Gospel works, but as someone endeavouring to produce another work for their company.

[ 7 : 28 ] Beyond the fact that Luke had much to commend him as the writer of such a Gospel work and its sequel, given his access to the eyewitnesses and a variety of sources, it is important to remember that the Gospels, like the rest of Biblical history, are not just bare accounts.

Luke makes this clear when he declares that the purpose of his work is to give Theophilus certainty concerning the things that he has been taught. John makes a similar claim at the end of his Gospel in John chapter 20 verses 30 to 31.

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

A Gospel account, then, is not merely a blow-by-blow record of what happened. It's a theological portrayal that invites the reader to perceive the events from a specific angle.

This angle is established by the structure of the text, by the narratives and details that are included or excluded, by the sequence of events, by the attention and focus given to certain events over others, by the typological parallels and contrasts established, by the use of Old Testament scripture, and all sorts of other such things.

[ 8 : 41 ] Luke declares his intention to produce a detailed and orderly account for Theophilus. In order need not refer to strict chronological order. There is chronological reordering of material in the Gospels for thematic and other purposes, as we find elsewhere in the scriptures.

A similar expression is found in Acts 11, verse 4, but Peter began and explained to them in order. The term refers to a well-structured narrative, which achieves its purpose of informing and persuading people, most immediately Theophilus, in the truth of the faith.

The content of the narrative is By this statement, Luke leads with his theological perspective. He is relating the acts of God in fulfilment of his promises, not merely a story of human affairs.

Luke is telling the story of God's work, not merely in its beginning in the ministry of Christ, but also in its continuing effects in the community formed by Christ and his apostles.

The apostolic eyewitnesses and the ministers of the word in the early church delivered their testimony concerning the work of Christ to the wider church of which Luke is a member.

[ 9 : 50 ] The reference to those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses might relate to the importance of John the Baptist's ministry as the starting point of the story. In guarding and preserving this deposit, Luke wishes to compile a narrative that is faithful to and clarifying of this tradition, suitable to pass it on in turn to others.

Luke, like the other gospel writers, likely has an eye to generations long after they have gone, a movement that expected the end of the world in just a few years' time would probably not write such books.

In writing his epistle, Luke is putting together a great many sources and eyewitness testimonies into a single narrative with a strong theological message, the goal of which is both to assure people in their faith and to lead new converts to the faith.

A question to consider. Can you think of some of the ways in which Luke's theological emphases as an evangelist differ from those of the other gospel writers?