

The Exact Truth
Luke 1:1-4 (10/28/18)
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Luke 1:1-4 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 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; 4 so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

I want to start our study of Luke's beautiful Gospel with one phrase in verse four – "the exact truth." The Greek word is "asphaleian," which literally means unable to fall, totter, or slip. We get our word asphalt from it. We all enjoy highways paved with asphalt highways. They provide a quiet, smooth ride. Luke took great pains as he wrote his Gospel to give us an account of Jesus Christ that is **the exact truth**. You can rest your entire soul on it. You are standing on solid truth that is *asphaleian* – unable to fall. It is infallible, inerrant, absolutely authoritative. Luke would say the same thing about his second volume, the book of Acts. There Luke begins referring back to his Gospel in Acts 1:1-2 like this: "The first account I composed, Theophilus, **about all that Jesus began to do and teach**, 2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven...."

So we have the wonderful privilege of studying this Gospel of Luke over the next year and a half. Luke is the longest Gospel, 24 chapters long; the first chapter has 80 verses and would have taken 30 feet of parchment to write them. Luke will give us information that none of the other Gospels do. While Matthew presents Jesus as the King, Mark as the Servant, and John as the Logos, the God-Man, Luke presents Jesus as God's loving Redeemer for the entire world, the Perfect Man, our Savior, our Friend. He'll tell us about people like Zaccheus, a Prodigal son, a self-righteous Pharisee, a repentant thief on the cross. He'll use words none of the others use, words that reflect Luke's training and practice as a physician, because that's what he was. The other gospels record how Peter sliced off Malchus' ear when they came to arrest Jesus; only Luke notes that Jesus healed his ear.

WHO WAS LUKE?

So who was Luke? He wasn't a Jew and didn't walk with Christ in Palestine. He wasn't an apostle. He was a Gentile and wrote his Gospel with a Gentile audience in mind. He was a physician, well-educated, and wrote excellent Greek. In fact, this introduction in verses 1-4 is written in an eloquent literary Greek style, with phrases well balanced. It's all one sentence. The early church leaders give abundant testimony to that fact that Luke wrote this Gospel and the book of Acts.

We meet Luke first in Acts 16 when Paul is in Troas on his second missionary journey. The narrative is written in the third person. However, that changes in Acts 16, where the personal pronouns change from the third person to the first person plural for the most part.

*Acts 16:8-10, and passing by Mysia, **they** came down to Troas. 9 A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' 10 When he had seen the vision, immediately **we** sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called **us** to preach the gospel to them.*

From here on except for a few times it's "we" doing this and going there. Luke became Paul's fellow traveler, perhaps personal physician, and loyal friend and brother all the way up to Rome and Paul's imprisonment. Paul refers to him in Colossians 4:14 as the beloved physician. He mentions him in Philemon as a fellow worker. And then when Paul writes 2 Timothy during his second Roman imprisonment, just before his execution, he says this, "Only Luke is with me." Luke was his faithful, loyal friend.

Most Bible students believe Luke wrote his Gospel around AD 60-62, before Paul's execution and before Rome's sack of Jerusalem in AD 70. So we have Luke, a well-educated, literate, trained physician, and a Gentile with a heart for Christ and the entire world. His Gospel is worthy of our careful study.

WHY ANOTHER GOSPEL?

Luke tells us his reason for writing this Gospel in verses 1-3. He wanted the exact truth told. After Jesus ascended to heaven, many people tried to either orally or in written form preserve what they knew and remembered about Jesus. But like today, many people may write books about Christianity, but that doesn't mean they write the truth. And even if they do, they may not be telling it accurately or fully. Luke was concerned the truth be told about all Jesus did – the things accomplished or fulfilled among us.

Mark may have been one of these accounts. Peter gave Mark his information. Oral tradition was very strong among the Jews. Instead of sitting around watching the Eagles or Colts or the world series, they sat around the fire and told the stories of what happened when Jesus of Nazareth was still here. Some may have written these stories down in piecemeal fashion.

Luke knew first hand eye witnesses and servants of the gospel ministry about Christ. These were people who actually saw Christ, heard Him, touched Him, grasped His hand, and sat with Him many times. They saw it all. They saw Him after the resurrection. They saw Him eat broiled fish and even watched Him ascend into heaven. Jesus was not some Gnostic phantom that only seemed to be there. Gnostics taught matter was evil; therefore Jesus could not have a body; He just appeared to be there. No, Jesus was really there. Phantoms don't eat broiled fish.

Luke writes "it seemed fitting for me as well" to write a Gospel. He knew God's people needed an authoritative, accurate account. We know that later there were all kinds of fake gospels that flew around the Roman world. So God moved in Luke's heart to start investigating, tracking down the facts, and determining the truth. He interviewed these people and gathered any writings he could get his hands on. He says he investigated everything carefully, a Greek word that means with exactness or accuracy. Just like a physician who would carefully examine and record what he found in a patient. Luke the physician knew how important it was to get the facts straight. The Amplified version says, "**also after having searched out diligently and followed all things closely and traced accurately the course from the highest to the minutest detail.**"

Not only that, but he wanted to get the story straight from the very beginning (vs 3). So he starts with Gabriel appearing to John the Baptist's father in the temple. God's great plan of redemption through the Messiah was beginning to be fulfilled after those 400 silent years since the prophet Malachi. Luke was determined to give us a full, infallible, orderly account.

But who is this most excellent Theophilus? Some think he really didn't exist; that it is just a literary device. But we believe he did exist and here's why. When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. Luke's writings show he was very familiar with public officials; he refers to them constantly in his writings. Even in Luke 2 and 3 he gives the names of public officials from Caesar to the governor to Pilate and Herod. No, Theophilus was a real person, probably a public official who well may have been Luke's patron who helped fund this great work for God's kingdom. Verse 4 indicates he had already been taught much about the life of Christ. And so Luke dedicates his two volumes to Theophilus, which means "lover of God."

WHAT WAS LUKE'S GREAT PURPOSE?

Verse 4 begins with a word of purpose – "so that." Here was Luke's purpose – so that Theophilus and all believers everywhere, you and I, would know fully, beyond doubt, **the exact truth** about this compelling story of God bringing redemption into this world in Jesus Christ. We must have the exact truth. Unshakable truth. No slipping. Firm. Certain. Infallible. You can stand here sure-footed.

Think about this. All other religions are speculations and figments of men's imaginations. Where did the book of Mormon come from? The mind of Joseph Smith, who claimed an angel (Moroni) gave him golden plates with writings only he could read. Where did the Koran come from? The mind of Mohammed who

said Gabriel told him what to write down. Do you want to rest your eternal destiny on the thoughts spun out of the minds of men like Darwin, Freud, Marx, or Charles Taze Russell of the Jehovah's Witnesses, or Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy of Christian Science, or L. Ronald Hubbard of Scientology?

Remember this: every religion, every cult, every philosophy has its origin in human minds. And in great contrast, the Bible's origin is in God's mind, leading and guiding human authors by God's Spirit, using human minds, human experiences and witnesses, written down as God-breathed, so we have the inspired, inerrant, authoritative, infallible Scriptures on which we can rest our faith.

But how do we know Luke's Gospel is inspired by God? Luke says he did the research, he tracked down the details, and he worked hard to provide a history of Christ and the early church that is the exact truth. If it came from God, wouldn't God just have dictated all this to Luke, or somehow mystically moved Luke to write? But that's not how God inspired the Scriptures.

John MacArthur explains:

The process of inspiration never bypassed or overrode the personalities, life experiences, vocabularies, or writing styles of the Bible's human authors; their unique traits are indelibly stamped on all the books of Scripture. The Spirit used Luke's knowledge, gave him additional information, guided his selection of material, and controlled every word so that he wrote exactly what God wanted written – 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed." Therefore, his original account is infallibly and inerrantly true. (from the Luke Commentary).

But how do we know Luke belongs in the Bible? What about all those apocryphal gospels like the gospels of Thomas, Judas, Mary, Philip, Marcion, or even the Gospel of Truth? There are at least three standards for a book to be considered Scripture: 1) Was it written by an apostle or close associate, like Luke? 2) Is it consistent doctrinally and factually with other Scripture? and 3) Was it universally accepted by God's people in the early church?

Luke meets all these criteria. Paul even quotes Luke in 1 Timothy 5:18, "The laborer is worthy of his wages," quoting Luke 10:17! We are more sure of Luke's Gospel as the exact, absolute, infallible, *asphaleia* truth than President Kennedy's assassination – is the one shooter theory of the Warren Commission true? Or 9/11 – did the US government orchestrate it? History is full of controversies, conspiracies, and fake accounts.

But Luke, the God-guided historian of the life of Christ and the early church, has thankfully given us the exact truth that is beyond controversy! He was a scholar absolutely committed to accuracy. Read it again in verse 4, "So that you may know beyond a doubt the exact truth about the things you have been taught."

WHO WAS LUKE'S UNIQUE AND GLORIOUS SUBJECT?

Let's finish by focusing on Luke's distinctive presentation of Christ. Wiersbe wrote, "If ever a man wrote a book filled with good news for everybody, Dr. Luke is that man.... He presents Jesus Christ as the compassionate Son of Man, who came to live among sinners, love them, help them, and die for them." Christ offers forgiveness and redemption for all, regardless of race, generation, or merit, for Samaritans, pagans, Jews, publicans, prostitutes, outcasts, the poor and rich, for women and men.

Luke had the greatest possible subject about which to carefully pen this exact truth. No historical event is more astounding, amazing, mind-boggling, astonishing, awesome and glorious than the fact that over 2000 years ago the infinite eternal and unchanging Creator God united with the ovum of a young Jewish girl and entered the human race. Nothing like it happened before or since. The incarnation of God the Son as a human being should be written in the sky every day for all the world to read.

Luke's gospel is the only one to present details of Jesus as a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. His detailed writing allows us to rejoice with the shepherds, scrounge for food with the prodigal, and scramble down the sycamore tree with Zaccheus to join Jesus with other sinners at his home. We admire that Samaritan who gets off his steed and ministers to the half-dead traveler who was robbed and beaten on the Jericho Road. We feel the thirst and agony of the rich man in torment begging for a drop of water.

We find comfort with the repentant thief when Jesus says to Him, and to every repentant sinner, you and me, "This day you'll be with me in Paradise!" We rejoice with the lady when she finds her lost coin, the shepherd when he finds his lost sheep, and the Father as he embraces His lost son and exclaims, "My son was lost, but now he's found!" Only Luke records that Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Luke well may be the most beautiful book ever written.

In our study of Luke we will see Jesus sweating drops of blood in the garden. We'll go with Jesus to Pilate's hall, flinch as the soldiers flay His skin, spit on Him, beat Him and mock Him, and take Him out to crucify Him. We'll walk to Emmaus with those two fellows downcast because they had just seen Jesus, who they hoped would be the Messiah, die on the cross. But there He is walking beside them, risen from the dead, alive, and explaining to them how He fulfilled the Law, Writings, and the Prophets. Luke will take us out to watch Him ascend into heaven.

Why did Luke write this "exact truth" about Christ? To bring you salvation! To provide His righteousness and His perfection, and to bear the wrath you deserved. To bring you forgiveness. For you to hear, "This day you'll be with me in Paradise." Aren't you that sheep that was lost and now is found? Luke's key message is this, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."