

The Purpose of Luke's Gospel

Luke 1: 1-4

DIG: What do you learn from these verses about Luke? What do you learn about why he wrote this Gospel? What do you learn about where he got his sources?

REFLECT: How much assurance do you have? Do you *know* that you are a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ? Do you *know* that the Bible is the Word of God? If you *really* knew the Word of God, would you believe it?

Luke begins his Gospel with a formal prologue similar in style to other writers of the first century, most notably Josephus in his book *Contra Apionem*, a work written in two parts with a preface to the whole work at the beginning of the first book and a brief review at the beginning of his second book.¹⁴ He is the only one of the four Gospel writers that stated his purpose at the beginning of his book. Being familiar with other writings about **the life of Christ** and the message of the Good News, these verses contain some of the finest literary Greek in the first century. **Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.** Obviously, an educated and skilled writer, Luke stressed the historical reliability of his book, claiming to have received information from **eyewitnesses**.¹⁵

It is almost certain that in the process of writing his gospel, Luke sought details about Jesus' birth and life from Mary. Since Luke included several details that only Mary could have known, we can be fairly sure that Miryam herself was one of Luke's primary sources. Luke's inclusion of several facts from Yeshua's early life (Luke 2:19, 48, 51), suggests that this was the case. Mary's own **eyewitness** testimony must also have been Luke's source for the account of Simeon's prophecy (Luke 2:29-32), for who but she could have known and recalled that incident? Apparently, the old man's prophecy never left her mind.¹⁶

Two words are important in this passage that we should not overlook. The first is the word **eyewitness**. It comes from the Greek word *autoptai* - *auto* meaning *that which is of itself*, and *opsomai* meaning *to see*. *To see for yourself*, would be an **eyewitness**. It is a medical term that means *to make an autopsy*. So it is as if Doctor Luke is saying, "We are eyewitnesses who made an autopsy, and I am writing to you about what we found." The second important word is **servants**, which is the Greek word *huperati*, meaning *an under-rower on a boat*. In a hospital the *under-rower* is an intern. What Luke is saying is that all of them were just interns under **the Great Physician**. As a physician and a scholar, Luke said that **he** made an autopsy of the records of those who had been eyewitnesses.¹⁷

Ancient writers customarily gave some statement concerning their qualifications for writing. So here **Luke** states his credentials. He said: **With this in mind, I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning.** Luke carefully investigated all accounts to ensure their truthfulness, and produced an **orderly account** of the **Messiah's** earthly ministry. We do not know all the resources **Luke** had at his command. It is clear, however, that aside from **the Holy Spirit**, the inspired Gospel of **Mark** was his main source. He does not criticize his predecessors, but wanted to write **Luke** and **Acts** to provide sound biblical teaching on the part of those who had already been taught, but perhaps imperfectly or incompletely, in **the life of Christ**. **Luke** wanted his audience to be able to sift out what was reliable from what was uncertain.

It seemed good also to me and to the **Rauch HaKodesh (Acts 15:28)**, to write an **orderly historical account for you**. The Greek word for an **orderly account** means a chronological **account**; therefore, **Luke** is the only Gospel writer that claims to write his book in a chronological manner.

The purpose of **Luke's** Gospel is to confirm for **Theophilus**, whose name means *lover of God*, the truth of the *Good News*. This was a polite form of address used for lofty persons, and found only here in the Gospels, and in **Acts 23:26, 24:3** and **26:25**.¹⁸ **Theophilus** was probably a public official of some kind, whose title was the **most excellent**, and **Luke's** literary patron who gave his book wide circulation in the early Church.

Luke wanted **Theophilus** to know that the faith that he had embraced had a secure historical foundation. **So that you may know the certainty**, the exact truth, **of the things you have been taught**. It is the same for us today. Doctor **Luke** wrote his Gospel to guarantee us of **the certainty** and assurance about **the Lord Jesus Christ**.