

Luke 1:1-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/luke/luke-1/luke-11-4/>

Luke begins his Gospel account with a preface to a man called Theophilus, whose name means: “friend of God.” Luke says it seemed fitting for him to investigate everything carefully about the life and teachings of Jesus and to write them out in consecutive order so that Theophilus may have certainty and precision about the things he has been taught and heard of concerning Jesus.

The parallel gospel accounts for this passage are Matthew 1:1-17, Mark 1:1, and John 1:1-18.

The Gospel of Luke begins with a preface from the author addressed to a man he identifies as *most excellent Theophilus* (v 3b).

Who is *Theophilus*? He is not mentioned anywhere else in scripture outside the introductions to Luke and Acts (Acts 1:1). The name *Theophilus* comes from two Greek words, “Theos” (God) and “Philo” (friend). So it means “friend of God.” No one knows if this was a specific person, perhaps a nickname or an alias for a Roman official who was also a believer. Or it possibly could be a catch-all name for any friend of God who reads Luke’s accounts, any believer in Jesus. Similar to saying, “Dear Reader” or “To Whom It May Concern,” but with a more specific idea of the intended audience.

The Gospel of Luke, like its sequel—the Book of Acts—was written by Luke.

Luke was a believer in Jesus, and a physician (Colossians 4:14). He was likely a Gentile. For one, the name Luke is Greco-Roman, unlike Matthew, Mark, and John, which are Jewish. Moreover, Luke is also not mentioned by Paul to the Colossians among those “who are from the circumcision (i.e. Jewish)” who send their greetings (Colossians 4:10-11, 14), which also indicates that Luke is a Gentile.

Luke partnered with Paul and accompanied him at the tail end of his third missionary journey, joining him in Troas (Acts 20:5). Luke travelled with Paul as he visited the Roman province of Asia (modern Turkey) and on his way to Jerusalem, where Paul was arrested in the Temple (Acts 21:27 – 23:23). Luke remained with Paul during his two-year imprisonment at Caesarea as he awaited his trial (Acts 23:24-26:32). And Luke travelled with Paul to Rome and was with him as the Book of Acts comes to a close (Acts 27:1-28:31). ([See Map](#))

The Gospel of Luke tells the good news of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, the son of God. Its sequel, Acts, tells the good news and the acts of the Holy Spirit during the early decades of the Christian church. The two books fit together seamlessly and when combined make up more than 25% of the entire New Testament.

Luke states that the reason he wrote this account, was *so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught* (v 4).

There are three Greek words to note in this remark.

1. The expression that is translated as *exact truth* is a form of the Greek word: ἀσφάλεια (G803 – pronounced: “as-fal'-i-ah”). It means to be firm or to have certainty or be sure of truth.
2. The word that is translated as *things* is a form of the Greek word λόγος (G3056 – pronounced: “log'-os”). It is often translated as “word.” In this instance it could mean “sayings,” “teachings,” or “ideas.”
3. The word translated as *taught* is a form of the Greek word κατηχέω (G2727 – pronounced: “kat-ay-kheh'-o”). It places special emphasis on things which have been *taught* orally and refers to what a person has heard or learned audibly.

Putting these three thoughts together it is clear that Luke’s expressed purpose in writing his Gospel is to give *Theophilus* certainty *about the things* he has heard concerning Jesus’s life and teachings, through the form of the written word.

Luke is unique among the Gospels in so far as the primary source for this gospel does not appear to have been one of Jesus’s twelve disciples. Matthew and John were among the twelve. And Peter appears to have been the main sponsor for Mark’s Gospel.

Indeed, Luke opens his letter acknowledging the Gospel efforts of others:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word (v 1-2).

Among the *many* who *have undertaken to compile an account of the things* Jesus *accomplished that were handed down to us* likely included the existing Gospels of Matthew and Mark as well as any oral accounts that existed at that time.

The accounts of Matthew and Mark were respectively based on Matthew and Peter *who were both eyewitnesses and servants of the word from the beginning* of Jesus’s earthly ministry. It is believed that one or both were in circulation before Luke’s account was written. (Tradition holds that the Gospel of John was compiled later, when the last surviving disciple was exiled on the isle of Patmos.)

Moreover, Luke’s Gospel seems to heavily reflect both Matthew and Mark’s when compared to John’s, which suggests that he borrowed from Matthew and Mark (but not John’s because it wasn’t yet written) as Luke *investigated* and wrote his Gospel narrative.

Luke told *Theophilus* that *it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order* (v 3).

This means that in addition to relying on existing Gospel accounts (i.e. Matthew and Mark), Luke conducted his own research. He *investigated everything carefully from the beginning*.

It very well may have been when Luke stayed with Paul, during the “untimely born” apostle’s (1 Corinthians 15:8) two-year imprisonment in Caesarea on the coast of Judean province, that Luke was able to *carefully* investigate and research his own Gospel account (Acts 23:23-26:1 – especially Acts 24:27).

It seems apparent that Luke interviewed Mary, the mother of Jesus, as part of the work he *carefully investigated*. For instance, when discussing Jesus’s conception, birth, and childhood, Luke features Mary and recounts inner thoughts and feelings of her heart (Luke 2:19).

Moreover, Luke claims to have written *everything from the start, in consecutive order*. The phrase: *consecutive order* comes from the Greek word: καθεξής (G2517 – pronounced: “kath-ex-ace”). It literally means “one after another” and describes a succession of things in their right *order*. Luke is the only Gospel writer to claim this for his account. Matthew, Mark, and John roughly retell the events of Jesus’s life in chronological *order*, but they rearrange the sequence to draw out specific themes and associate ideas and events from Jesus’s life accordingly. Only Luke claims to tell his Gospel in chronological *consecutive order from the beginning*.

All four Gospels begin with a unique perspective because even though they all tell the same story and core message of Jesus, they each offer a different portrait whereby we can see and know the person of Jesus.

Matthew portrays Jesus as the Messiah He was, as well as the prophet like Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19) and the shepherd-king like David (2 Samuel 7:8-17; Ezekiel 34:23-24).

Mark depicts Jesus as a dynamic and divine miracle-worker who serves people and suffers on their behalf. In Mark, we see Jesus as the world’s Servant and Savior.

John stresses the deity of Jesus as the living Word of God made flesh (John 1:1,14)

Luke emphasizes the humanity of Jesus as the Son of Man. He details the circumstances of Jesus’s conception and birth (Luke 1:30-35; 2:1-7). Jesus is the picture of what God looks like in human form (Colossians 2:9).

The church traditionally associated different beasts to symbolize these different perspectives. The Gospel of Matthew was symbolized by a Lion because Jesus is the king, the Son of David, the Lion of Judah. The gospel of Mark was symbolized by an Ox because Jesus is a strong servant. The Gospel of Luke was symbolized by a Man because Jesus became human. And the Gospel of John was symbolized by an Eagle because Jesus’s divinity soars over everything. Note that these four symbols (lion, ox, man, and eagle) are the exact beasts recorded by John that surround God’s heavenly throne in Revelation 4:6-8.

All of the four Gospels’ portrayals of Jesus are different. And all are true.

These different portrayals of Jesus in each Gospel are tailored to accurately depict Him to each Gospel's primary audience.

Matthew seems to have written primarily to the Jews. His account is filled with many allusions and references to Jewish scripture and culture as he presents Jesus as the long anticipated Messianic Prophet and King.

John wrote to everyone, including non-believers. He wrote "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). His account focuses on special miracles and claims that Jesus made which demonstrate His deity.

Mark (sourced from Peter) seems to have written primarily to the Gentile Romans. The Romans were concerned more with performance, duty, and results rather than philosophy. Consequently, their account is action-packed and results oriented. In an effort to appeal to its audience, the Gospel of Mark highlights Jesus's deeds and accomplishments with minimal explanation, and often without extended teachings.

Luke seems to have written primarily to Gentile Greeks. The Greeks were preoccupied with philosophy, particularly the notion of ideal man and society. Luke presents Jesus as He was—the perfect man. And unlike the Romans, the Greeks were into the details. They wanted to know *everything*. Luke *carefully* includes details about Jesus's biological life such as His birth, childhood, and bodily frailties, which reveal the full essence of His humanity.

Two subjects which the Greeks pioneered and particularly cared about were philosophy and history.

The philosophical-minded Greeks famously pursued the "good life." To this end, Luke shares Jesus's teachings (Luke 10:41-42) and parables (Luke 10:30-36, 15:11-32, 16:19-31, 18:10-14) that are not found in the other Gospels which lead to human flourishing. By pointing out frailties such as Jesus's hunger, thirst, weariness, etc., Luke demonstrates Jesus's virtue and heroic dedication to and the soundness of the principles He taught.

Historical accuracy and proper record-keeping were imperative to the Greeks. Within the Western tradition, the "science" of history with its citing of dates and proper sequencing of events was largely invented (Herodotus) and developed (Thucydides, Xenophon) by the Greeks. The term, "history" comes from the Greeks. It originally meant: "researches."

For a historical account to be credible, Greeks required facts to be verified by proper sources and placed in their right *order*.

Luke *investigated everything carefully from the beginning*, and relied on the accounts of *eyewitnesses to write* his historical record of Jesus *in consecutive order*.

Luke's approach helped Greeks, who were critical thinkers, understand that the miraculous life and life-giving teachings of Jesus were not some strange Jewish myth, but that they were real historic events with real and profound consequences. By explaining **when** and **how** these things

actually happened, Luke's Gospel resonated with Greeks, and helped them believe **that** these things actually happened.

Luke's meticulous record keeping enables us to do the same. Luke's accurate records hold up to history. They help demonstrate how and prove that Jesus was a real, historic figure, and not some mythically amalgamated character that developed over time.

Luke *investigated* and wrote his Gospel account as he did *so that you may know the exact truth* (i.e. have certainty) *about the things you have been taught* (heard) about Jesus.

It seems apparent that Luke wrote Acts with an emphasis on documenting and validating Paul's authority as an apostle. Paul's letters make clear that his authority was routinely contested, primarily by his countrymen who contended against his teaching of God's grace to the Gentiles.

Luke began Acts by documenting the deeds of Peter, most particularly that God revealed first to Peter that His grace of salvation was to be given to the Gentiles, apart from the Law (Acts 15:7-9). Luke then documented that Paul also did similar deeds as those of Peter.

It could be that part of Luke's motivation for writing Luke was similar to his approach in Acts. One of his purposes in starting with the entire story of Jesus in his Gospel of Luke may have been to ground and/or validate his account of Paul in Acts.

Biblical Text

¹ 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.