

Introduction to Luke

Lesson 2

Read Luke 1:1-4.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are called Gospels -- Biblical accounts of the life of Jesus Christ.

Luke was a medical doctor (Col. 4:14) and companion of the apostle Paul. The Gospel of Luke is the first volume of a two-part work (Acts is the sequel).

I. Why this little introduction is significant: *because it counteracts skeptical notions about the four Gospels and how they were put together.*

A. Many skeptical critics presume to redefine the purpose of the four Gospels, in such a way as to attack their integrity.

1. A standard line of unbelievers is that the early Christians exaggerated in reporting what Jesus did, and that the Gospels are more “theological” than historical.
2. One group of revisionist historians, with an agenda to malign Luke, says he “was not an academic historian attempting to achieve an historically accurate picture.” In their view, the Gospels are “folklore” that cannot be trusted.

B. Fortunately, we do not have to rely on someone else to tell us why Luke wrote. He tells us himself, in his own words! The introduction we’ve just read (1:1-4) establishes four basic points:

1. The life of Jesus was so momentous, even when eyewitnesses were still around, that Luke speaks of the “the things accomplished (fulfilled) among us”;
2. The “eyewitnesses,” he adds, “delivered them to us”;
3. These powerful events did not remain *word of mouth*, as many had already “undertaken to compile a narrative”; and
4. Luke’s unequivocal aim was that the reader might “know the exact truth” (“have certainty”).

C. To this end, he cross-checked his sources, “having investigated everything carefully from the beginning.”

1. I.e., he did the kind of research a historian does.
2. Like a good detective, he collected firsthand information in order to reconstruct exactly what happened.
3. How do fairy tales begin? (“Once upon a time...”). Is that how the Gospel of Luke reads? (cf. 3:1)

II. What this means to you

A. Luke was only one step removed from eyewitnesses, and he was in contact with them.

1. In Acts 26:26 (part 2 of Luke’s work), the apostle Paul will say of these marvelous events, “This has not been done in a corner.” Eyewitness testimony is a constant theme.

2. Skeptics have admitted: “The foundation of the critical approach to the gospels is the recognition that much of the information in the gospels is based on hearsay.” (The Jesus Seminar’s *Acts of Jesus*, p. 4).
3. Don’t believe everything you are told about the Bible!
4. Who was in a better position to state the author’s intentions – the author himself or his modern detractors?
5. Who was in a better position to know what really happened – a first-century doctor or a 21st century skeptic?
6. Who has a higher ethical code – a Christian who wants to tell us exactly what happened or a revisionist historian with an anti-supernatural agenda?
7. If someone asserts that Luke’s record is flawed, who then has the burden of proof?

B. One of the neatest things about the first two chapters of Luke is that we can probably identify Luke’s first eyewitness:

1. Mary was “greatly troubled” at the angel’s statement (1:29);
2. Mary “arose and went with haste” to visit her relative Elizabeth (1:41);
3. Mary “stayed with her about three months” (1:56) – presumably long enough to witness the birth of John, since this was the 6th month (cf. 1:26);
4. Mary “wrapped [the baby Jesus] in cloths, and laid him in a manger...” (2:7);
5. Mary “treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart” (2:19);
6. Simeon blessed Jesus in the Temple and warned Mary, “A sword will pierce even your own soul” (2:34-35);
7. Jesus’ parents “used to go to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of Passover” (2:41) – an incidental detail;
8. “His parents were unaware” of his staying behind in the city at age 12 (2:43);
9. When they finally found him, “his mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us this way?’” (2:48);
10. After returning to Nazareth, “his mother treasured all these things in her heart” (2:51).
11. Incidentally, Mary is still alive when the church begins and would no doubt have been called upon to leave a record of her remembrances (cf. Acts 1:14). The first two chapters of Luke have her fingerprints all over them!

C. In future classes, we’re going to read about some remarkable episodes in the life of our Savior.

1. You have very good reasons for confidence that this record is historically accurate.
2. This is not the product of an overheated imagination. In the words of the apostle Paul, these are “words of sober truth” (Acts 26:25).
3. As we embark on an exciting journey of discovery together, we challenge you to “consider the source.” In this case, it’s one you can trust!

Extra Notes for Teachers:

- Each paragraph in Luke builds some aspect of faith. The focus here is on **conviction**. Christianity is a system based on evidence, and evidence is what produces conviction.

- The Christian faith is based on two broad lines of evidence:
 - The World: God's Book of Nature (Ps. 19:1-6)
 - The Word: God's Book of Scripture (Ps. 19:7-14)
- According to 2 Peter 1:16-21, the evidence in the revealed Word (the Bible) can be broken down into at least two categories:
 - Eyewitness testimony of supernatural interventions in history (especially regarding Jesus)
 - Predictive prophecies that are now fulfilled
- In teaching this unit, these are some sample questions you can use to generate thought and discussion:
 - If you were a first-century Christian writing a book about Jesus, how would you begin?
 - How do we know these things really happened?
 - How do fairy tales usually begin?
 - Why is it significant that Mary should be an apparent eyewitness?
 - Eyewitnesses usually reveal some of their own personal perspectives and *gut reactions*. Do we see this on Mary's part?
- Here are some other sections of Luke that build conviction:
 - **5:17-26.** Jesus does something that is visible and tangible to prove His ability to do what cannot be tested empirically.
 - **16:19-31.** Acceptance of the evidence requires a certain mindset.
 - **24:1-53.** He is risen! Eyewitnesses see Him.