

# The Authorship of Luke

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## Lesson Text

### **Luke 1:1-4**

1 Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,  
2 Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;  
3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,  
4 That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

### **Acts 1:1-8**

1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,  
2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:  
3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:  
4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.  
5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.  
6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?  
7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.  
8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

## Focus Verse

### **Revelation 1:11**

Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

## Focus Thought

*The inspired writing of the Scriptures has preserved God's Word for all mankind. God called Luke and others like him to document His Word for the generations.*

### Writing—the Means of Receiving the Scriptures

by R. L. Gilstrap

This lesson would never have been possible had writing not been invented and developed by early man. If the projections of archaeologists and anthropologists are correct, thousands of years ago man was not content with just verbal expression. He became interested in written expression. These experts cannot agree upon the origin of writing. All they really know is that long before man wrote, he spoke.

No one really knows when the first words were written. In fact, writing did not begin with words being written. Archaeologists tell us ancient civilizations developed the earliest forms of writing by drawing pictures on the walls of caves and cliffs. These pictures, or pictographs, developed into more elaborate symbols called cuneiform in the area of Mesopotamia and hieroglyphics in Egypt. All of this, including the development of alphabets and words as we know them, occurred over many years.

It was this ancient technology that allowed God to inspire the writing of what has become known as our Bible. “Holy men of God spake [and wrote] as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Peter 1:21). Because men were able to write, we have the preservation of inspiration such as the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, which Luke authored.

#### I. LUKE'S REASONS FOR WRITING

- A. To Communicate Knowledge
- B. To Record History
- C. To Transfer Perfect Understanding
- D. To Defend and Preserve Truth

#### II. LUKE'S QUALIFICATIONS FOR WRITING

- A. Was Prepared to Write by Virtue of Training
- B. Was an Eyewitness to the Events
- C. Wrote with an Intense Desire to Communicate Truth

#### III. THE INSPIRED WORD

- A. The Word Is Inspired by the Spirit
- B. The Word Is Infallible
- C. The Word Is Authoritative
- D. The Word Is Relevant

#### IV. THE LIVING WORD

- A. The Word Became Flesh
- B. Believers Are Living Testimonies

Mankind was fashioned in the image of God, which is evident in his ability to think and reason. Through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, holy men of old used their God-given abilities to write these divine expressions. Thus God did not dictate His thoughts to men of old; He breathed His thoughts into them, and they verbalized them in written form according to their unique abilities, training, and social and historical context.

The Holy Ghost inspired Luke to write both an account of the life of Jesus Christ and the Book of Acts, a history of the early years of the New Testament church. Luke did not personally witness the life of Jesus Christ, but his education, training as a physician, and ability to synthesize sources qualified him to pen important details about the birth, life, and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Luke interviewed or corresponded with eyewitnesses of certain events. He consulted written sources about the life of Christ. Preserved over the centuries, the Book of Luke impresses modern-day biblical commentators as “a work of high literary quality.” One scholar views the Gospel of Luke as “the most beautiful book that has ever been written. The subject matter as well as the author’s literary talent combine to give the book an interesting appeal and polish conspicuous in the New Testament” (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*).

## Contemplating the Topic

Thoughts acquire significance only when a person expresses them. When an individual articulates his thoughts, he reveals and shares his ambitions, feelings, and history. The best and most permanent way to convey thoughts is to put them in writing. God in His inspired Word, shares with mankind His thoughts, desires, feelings, and the history of mankind’s reactions to and interactions with all of these divine expressions.

Luke's active part in the apostle Paul's missionary journeys and his companionship of the imprisoned apostle in Rome qualified him to deal with the theme of the growth of the infant church, particularly the transition from Judaism to Gentile Christianity.

## Searching the Scriptures

### I. LUKE'S REASONS FOR WRITING

#### Transparency 1

Transparency 1 lists the focus of each of the four Gospels.

#### A. To Communicate Knowledge

Mark had targeted the Romans in writing his account of the life of Christ, and Matthew had addressed a Jewish audience, but Luke wrote his Gospel to communicate knowledge of the Messiah to the Greeks. Luke probably had heard Paul preach that "the gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

Luke appealed to the Greeks' great desire for knowledge. He viewed the world through an erudite lens, and his book reflects this broad spectrum of knowledge. He referenced secular history, customs, institutions, and political leaders of the time more than the other Gospel writers. His book has probably inspired more religious art than any other book in the Bible.

Luke's thorough treatment of the narrative and attention to detail are the most meticulous of the four Gospels. The Book of Luke contains the most complete genealogy of the Messiah, beginning with Jesus Himself and ending with Adam. Paul used Luke's lineal portrait of Jesus to contrast the first Adam and the last Adam (I Corinthians 15:45). Some details in the Book of Luke do not appear in the other Gospels; for example, the angel's announcement to Zacharias and the birth of John the Baptist, the songs of Elizabeth and Mary, certain details about the birth of Jesus such as the visit of the shepherds, and Mary's inner thoughts.

Although Luke wrote for a Greek audience, his Gospel is the only one of the four that is dedicated to an individual. He wanted his friend Theophilus, whose religious instruction had been limited, to know the veracity of the

events surrounding the birth, life, and death of Christ (Luke 1:4).

#### B. To Record History

Historians of any age seek to preserve for future generations an accurate, orderly record of events as they transpired. Luke had the instincts of a historian. Since he was not present during the events in the life of Christ, Luke interviewed "eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word" (Luke 1:2). His record not only preserves the events in logical order, it also offers personal testimonies, verifying "those things which are most surely believed among us" (Luke 1:1).

#### C. To Transfer Perfect Understanding

Personal interviews with the original apostles and other eyewitnesses gave Luke a valuable accumulation of knowledge. Greater than his knowledge was his understanding of the importance and the scope of the message of Jesus Christ. Luke's concern for the impartation of knowledge and understanding caused him to record carefully information about the life of Christ that none of the other Gospels contained, and to preserve for believers the texts of many sermons of the apostles and disciples in the Book of Acts.

*Our faith as believers rests upon the fact of Jesus' resurrection.*

#### D. To Defend and Preserve Truth

It is crucial that faith in Jesus Christ be based upon indisputable facts and evidence. Luke was concerned that what Theophilus had been taught should be substantiated by an accurate, orderly account of the life of Christ. Luke's picture of Christ not only defended what Theophilus had been taught, but it also perpetuated the truth of Christ's identity.

The Book of Acts is a historical narrative, but it also has profound theological significance. As Paul proclaimed in I Corinthians 15:1-4, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. More than five hundred witnesses attested to the actuality of the Resurrection. Our faith as

believers rests upon this fact. If Jesus did not rise again, then our faith and hope are in vain. Luke wrote the Book of Acts to assure believers that their faith and hopes are founded in the fact that Christ rose from the dead. And because He ascended and was glorified, He sent the Comforter, which ended the infant church with the power of His Holy Spirit.

## II. LUKE'S QUALIFICATIONS FOR WRITING

### Transparency 2

Transparency 2 gives some of Luke's qualities.

#### A. Was Prepared to Write by Virtue of Training

It is most likely that Luke was a Gentile rather than a Jew, which would make him the only Gentile writer of a New Testament book. Luke's voice is important because he translated and explained Aramaic words and Jewish customs for his Greek audience. Commentators consider Paul to be Luke's greatest influence because of their close association. Paul called Luke the "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14), indicating that he loved and respected his fellow minister of the gospel. Luke probably heard Paul unlock the "mystery" that the "Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6).

In his book *Exploring the Scriptures*, John Phillips supported this notion: "It has been suggested that Luke might have undertaken his medical studies at the university of Tarsus. Attached to that university was a school of philosophy and literature and it is not at all unlikely that Luke and Paul were contemporary students. Perhaps it was there that they began their life-long friendship. Luke emphasizes such Pauline words and concepts as faith, grace, repentance, mercy and forgiveness."

#### B. Was an Eyewitness to the Events

Unlike his Gospel, the events of which Luke did not witness personally, he was present for much of the action found in the Book of Acts. It is thought that the "we" sections of Acts (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16) show that Luke joined Paul on his second missionary journey, going from Troas to Philippi (Acts 16:11-12). Later he was with Paul in

Jerusalem after the third missionary trip, in the prison in Caesarea, and on the voyage to Rome (Acts 27-28). He remained with Paul in Rome until Roman authorities freed him (Acts 28:30; Philemon 24). During Paul's second imprisonment, Luke remained with him faithfully until the end (II Timothy 4:11).

*Truth communicated accurately becomes the secure, eternal base upon which individuals can build their lives.*

#### C. Wrote with an Intense Desire to Communicate Truth

Luke's second book continues the narrative from the point with which his Gospel ended. The Book of Acts begins with the ascension of Jesus and the initiation of the Great Commission in Jerusalem. Throughout the Book of Acts Luke demonstrated his typical attention to detail as he methodically chronicled the rapid propagation of the New Testament church.

Even more important than these details are the wonderful theological truths Luke preserved. In all, there are sixteen messages in Acts, and each is carefully recorded: Peter to the Jews—Acts 2:14-40; 3:13-26; 4:10-12; 5:30-32; Peter to God-fearers—Acts 10:34-43; Peter to believers—Acts 11:5-17; 15:7-11; Stephen to his persecutors—Acts 7:2-53; Paul to Jews—Acts 13:16-41; 22:1-21; 26:1-27; 28:17-20, 25-28; Paul to pagans—Acts 14:15-17; 17:2-31; 24:10-21; Paul to believers—Acts 20:18-35.

Each message met the unique needs of a specific audience, but all of them maintained the central theme of the book: salvation comes to all men—whether Jew, Samaritan, or Gentile—only through Jesus Christ. After two thousand years, these messages convey eternal truth that Apostolics continue to believe and preach. Truth communicated accurately becomes the secure, eternal base upon which individuals can build their lives.

### III. THE INSPIRED WORD

## Transparency 3

Transparency 3 states, “God breathed His thoughts into Luke, and the disciple wrote according to his unique abilities.”

#### A. The Word Is Inspired by the Spirit

In II Timothy 3:16 the Word of God makes its own claim to being divinely inspired: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable. . . .” The English word “inspiration” connotes divine guidance exerted directly on the mind and soul of the writer, stimulating his thoughts and feelings to unusual creativity.

Scripture has its origin in God, but it was mediated through human writers. The themes of sacrifice for sin, redemption, the resurrection, the judgment of the wicked, the reward of the righteous, and many others have a common thread woven throughout the Bible and suggest it is not a collection of human opinions.

*“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Peter 1:20-21).*

Forty writers on three continents over a period of sixteen hundred years wrote, for the most part, without personal knowledge of each other or collaboration with each other. Still, the writers neither contradicted each other nor deviated from the overall objective of revealing truth. These inspired writers came from a wide diversity of backgrounds, positions, and callings. Yet each in his own style and manner penned the authoritative message God gave to him. Who but the Spirit of God could have produced this amazing volume some have called a miracle in ink?

#### B. The Word Is Infallible

Jesus said, “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18). The authority of the law rests in the fact that every word was, is, and will be fulfilled. The Word of God is absolutely binding and cannot be broken (John 10:35). God upholds all things by His powerful spoken word (Hebrews 1:3), and He Him-

self is infallible. It must follow that His written Word, the Bible, is infallible as well.

The Scriptures teach that the Word is the breath of God so it is without error (II Timothy 3:16). The character of God as revealed by the Scriptures tells us that God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; I Samuel 15:29; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). If the Bible came to us from God and His character stands behind it, then it must be infallible (Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*).

#### C. The Word Is Authoritative

The Bible is the Word of God and He holds all power; therefore, the Word of God is the last court of appeal for every subject relating to God and His creation. God is His own authority. There is nothing outside of Him or above His power on which His authority rests. When He made a covenant with Abraham, God could not swear by any greater authority than Himself (Hebrews 6:13).

The authority of the Scriptures necessitates that we believe its contents are, in fact, the truth of God without error. It is therefore binding on our conscience and actions. To reject it or avoid its teaching will condemn our souls; but to embrace and obey its teaching will save our souls.

At the last judgment the world will be brought to justice and several books will be opened, one of which is the Scriptures (Revelation 20:12). God created all things, and His power holds His creation accountable to what He has written in His Word.

*The song of the redeemed  
in Heaven will come  
from the mouths and  
hearts of a universal  
multitude of people who  
have all been redeemed  
by the blood of Jesus  
Christ.*

#### D. The Word Is Relevant

In every age, culture, or nation, God has always had a plan to facilitate His relationship

with humanity. Although the Word of God was written several thousand years ago, its precepts and principles are still morally and spiritually appropriate for the entire world.

God's plan of salvation produces consistent results everywhere it is preached. Peter preached his first message of salvation to Jews in Jerusalem. About twelve years later when he preached the same message about Jesus Christ in Caesarea at Cornelius's house, they received the Holy Ghost as the Jews had. Peter then commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:48).

The song of the redeemed in Heaven will not come from a single nation of people nor will it be sung from only one time period in history. It will issue from the mouths and hearts of a universal multitude of people who have all been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

*"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5:9).*

#### **IV. THE LIVING WORD**

##### **A. The Word Became Flesh**

1. *Through Jesus Christ.* "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). In his *New Testament Survey*, Merrill C. Tenney stated, "A new supernatural revelation had invaded the field of history."

In Genesis 1, God's spoken word gave life to His newly created world. In Mary's womb, the Word of God became flesh, or the living word. Hundreds of years in advance of Jesus' birth, more than three hundred Old Testament prophecies had predicted every event in the life of the Messiah. The writing of the Old Testament spanned nearly fourteen hundred years. The last prophet, Malachi, wrote his book four hundred years before Christ. The only possibility of one man satisfying even a few of these predictions was the miraculous life of God manifested in flesh. Jesus Christ, as the living word, confirmed the written Word of God. The life of Christ fulfilled each of the predictions by the prophets exactly as they were written.

2. *Through Christ Living in Us.* When a believer is born again of the water and of the

Spirit, he becomes the dwelling place, the temple, of the living God (I Corinthians 3:16). "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

For a believer, the exciting event of being born again is the result of having the Word of God preached to him and basing his faith on it (Romans 10:14; I Corinthians 1:21; 15:1). Planted in the soil of his soul, the seed of the Word can produce Heaven's crop of everlasting life. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (I Peter 1:23). The spoken (preached) word becomes the living word by faith in the life of the believer. It is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

*For a believer, the exciting event of being born again is the result of having the Word of God preached to him and basing his faith on it.*

Paul wrote to the Galatians, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). When a believer receives the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues, he can begin to participate in the divine nature that lives within him.

*"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:3-4).*

## B. Believers Are Living Testimonies

*“Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men”  
(II Corinthians 3:2).*

Wherever we go in this earthly life, we bear the identification marks of the blood and the name of Jesus Christ. God calls us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice (offering) to Him (Romans 12:1). The divine stamp of ownership remains, regardless of the changes in our physical bodies.

Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). The light shining from our lives issues forth from Christ, who dwells in us. We do not turn on the light; Jesus Christ turns it on. When Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men,” He simply meant we should let nothing shade or block or snuff out the light of life. The apostle Peter pointed to the importance of our Christian testimony. “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (I Peter 2:12).

### Internalizing the Message

The Word of God is unique in its origin, continuity, authority, and eternity. No other book in the history of the world has been printed in so many languages and circulated so widely as the Bible. The writers believed that what they had written was the Word of God, and God verified what had been written with miraculous signs and fulfillment of prophecies. “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (I Corinthians 14:37).

Luke carefully recorded the testimonies of eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus Christ. His goal was to provide his friend Theophilus, and others, a full and orderly understanding of the events in the life of Christ. Much more important than the chronology of events was Luke’s identification of Jesus Christ and His message to a lost world. With the completion of his books, the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, Luke ensured the perpetuation of the vital truths found in Jesus’ miracle birth, ministry, teaching, sacrificial death,

and resurrection. He continued the account in the sequel, which preserved the events that took place after the resurrection of Jesus, how the disciples fulfilled the Great Commission, and the inception and growth of the early church.

The written Word of God provides many infallible proofs of the fleshly manifestation of the Spirit of God. Jesus Christ was the Word that became flesh (John 1:14). “In the beginning . . . the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Jesus Christ fulfilled more than three hundred Old Testament prophecies. The divine proactive plan of redemption prepared for our salvation before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8).

As long as Jesus was in the world, He was the light of the world (John 9:5). Later, Jesus told His disciples they were the light of the world. They should do nothing to extinguish or block the light of God from shining from their lives (Matthew 5:14-16). When the living Word resides in the heart of a born-again believer, he becomes a shining light in the world (Philippians 2:15). In today’s dark world, God needs more beacons to light the way.

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### REFLECTIONS

- If Luke did not witness personally the life of Christ, what qualified him to write two major books of the Bible? Discuss.
- List several of the theological truths Luke preserved for us in the Acts of the Apostles. Discuss the impact and importance of his books in today’s world.
- From where does the Bible derive its authority? Discuss.
- Discuss the spiritual phenomenon that the Scriptures have one author but many writers from diverse countries and in different time spans.
- What does it mean to have Christ “formed in you”? Discuss.
- In what ways is the living Word manifested in the life of a believer today? Discuss.