

¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, Luke 1:1 Who was Luke? We know nothing of his origins. We know him as the only Gentile author of a Gospel. We don't even know how he came to Christ or when. We do know he was well educated, a doctor, historian, theologian and mature in Christ when he began traveling with the Apostle Paul. Some say his accounts are some of the finest pieces of historical writing in ancient literature.

He appears to be a humble man, for in both of his works, Luke and Acts, he remains in the background only to mentioned by the plural personal pronouns in Acts (ie: "we" and "us" in Acts 16:10ⁱ; 20:5ⁱⁱ; 21:18ⁱⁱⁱ etc.). Paul appreciated his companionship and assistance mentioning him numerous times in his letters. Tradition suggests Paul was referring to him in 2 Corinthians 8:18^{iv} as the brother "who is praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel." Luke was with Paul right up until Paul's martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:11^v).

We can date the letter to the early 60s. Luke is the longest of the gospels and adds information not in the others. I'll point those out when we get to them. In fact, the first two chapters are full of information not recorded in the other gospels. Kent Hughes writes, *Luke has given us an invaluable gift the most extensive and varied of the Gospels, as well as the most artistically constructed and the most beautifully reasoned and written.* ^{vi}

Luke starts his gospel telling us that many have undertaken to compile a narrative of what was accomplished among them, meaning the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the beginnings of the church. That was necessary because the apostles were being martyred and those still living could not visit all the widespread and growing churches. This second generation of believers became dependent on the recorded accounts. Mark wrote down what Peter had taught. Matthew and John were the two who wrote firsthand of what they witnessed. Luke gathered his information from eyewitnesses and recorded sources. The four accounts of the life of Christ that survived were called the four pillars of the church by a church father in the second century^{vii}. Paul refers to the facts recorded of Jesus' life as "the traditions" in his letters (2 Thessalonians 2:15^{viii}; 1Corinthians 11:23^x; 15:3^x; etc.).

² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, Luke 1:2 From an examination of Luke and Mark, it appears that Luke had Mark's account from Peter as he wrote. It is important to realize that the people who witnessed the recorded events were still alive to testify to the authenticity of the stories (1 Corinthians 15:6^{xi}). Skeptics try to date the writing of the Gospels much later to get around that fact, but at the same time ignore that the Gnostic Gospels were written in the second century and later. The Learning Channel did a special on the dating of the Gospels and showed from material evidence and writing style that the earliest of the four Gospels was written before A.D. 50 when eyewitnesses would still have been living. The DVD is entitled The Eyewitnesses.

³ *it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,* Luke 1:3 Luke uses three Greek words to describe his gathering and recording of information about Jesus: followed, closely, and orderly. Followed implies investigation, and Luke adds "all things." This tells us he did careful research into every avenue available to him to record accurately each account.

ESV translates *anōthen* as "for some time past," but it also can be translated from the start or beginning. And that is where his gospel does begin with the announcement of Elizabeth's pregnancy. The coming of John the Baptist would prepare the way for the Messiah.

"Closely" could be translated as "accurately" for it has the idea of being exact. It implies that he checked and double checked to be sure what he was writing was correct. Archeology has proven many of the details he recorded to be accurate. Luke was interested in facts. The word "orderly" may not necessarily mean in chronological order, but rather a properly structured account of the accepted facts about Jesus and His message.

⁴ *that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.* Luke 1:4 We do not know who Theophilus was or his standing in Christ. Luke is writing this account to fill in the gaps in what Theophilus was taught to this point, perhaps with the hope that a more detailed account will bring him to faith. This tells us that this is a good gospel to share with the seeker who knows something of the life of Jesus but has not yet become a believer. It should assure them that this is more than myth, but rather historical facts that call us to a decision about Jesus. If you are longing for certainty about your faith, this is the gospel for you. *Without apology Luke claims it for his Gospel, and its real meaning becomes plain. Read what I have written, he says, and you will see the facts on which Christianity is based; and you will find there something firm and solid and absolutely trustworthy, a sure foundation for faith.*^{xii} Luke uses the Greek word *epignos* which is to know with certainty not just mentally but with conviction of the heart. And how does Luke expect Theophilus and us to have such conviction? It is not by a mystical experience, or philosophical logic, but rather by reading the plain facts about Jesus' life and words and letting the power of it transform our hearts and minds.

⁵ *In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.* Luke 1:5 Luke starts his orderly gospel at what he referred to as the beginning, which we find to him meant the announcement of the coming birth of John the Baptist, the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah. The setting is the temple in Jerusalem. The time is during the reign of Herod the Great, 6 or 7 B.C.. By marrying into the Jewish royal family, Herod, of Idumean descent, had become the king of Judea by Rome's decree.

The priestly community had different family groups, here referred to as "orders" which would take their turns serving in the temple. The eight division of Abijah minister two one-week periods each year. Zechariah is not the prophet Zechariah whom we just studied but lived about 500 years later. There is a connection though in that Zechariah the prophet gave us so much information about the coming Messiah. Zechariah's wife was Elizabeth, and she was also a descendant from the line of the first high priest Aaron, the brother of Moses.

⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. Luke 1:6 They are described as righteous and blameless concerning the Law of God. Sometimes with our limited understanding we think Scripture appears to contradict itself. After close scrutiny we see it never does. We know from Scripture in both the Old and New Testament that no one is blameless before God (Psalm 14:3^{xiii}; Romans 3:23^{xiv}). None is righteous, that is, except by faith (Romans 1:17^{xv}).

Now some would ask, yes, but how can they have faith if Jesus had not yet died for them? They are righteous in the same way that Abraham was declared righteous: they believed God and that belief was counted to them as righteousness (Romans 4:3^{xvi}). That is the same way that all who came before Jesus were saved; by faith they believed God. They knew the sacrifices pointed forward to some way that God would provide for their sins. They looked forward to God's provision just as we look back in faith and trust in the death of Jesus taking the wrath we deserved as justice for our sins. They did not know the details that we know, but nevertheless they had faith that God would provide.

That accounts for their righteousness, but what about blameless according to the Law? The Apostle Paul claimed the same thing in Philippians 3:6^{xvii}. And yet we know that is impossible because of what Jesus taught about issues of the heart and mind being equal to actions (Matthew 5:22^{xviii}). So, we must consider this as outwardly blameless, which is how those before Jesus' words were spoken would have considered it.

⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. Luke 1:7 Even though they were people of faith, Elizabeth was barren and past the age fertility. Jewish women saw their value in bringing the next generation of the family line into the world. To be barren felt as if they were somehow unworthy. It was a heavy burden to bear. This should call to mind the account of Abraham and Sarah, and other accounts in the Old Testament. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. He often chooses impossible situations to show that what takes place is not of man but of God.

*⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty,
⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.* Luke 1:8-9 The group that was to serve in the temple that week was decided by casting lots to choose 56 men out of 300. While Zechariah's division was on duty the time came for putting incense on the altar of incense. The privilege of who would do so was also selected by casting lots to select one of the 56 men. It was a once in a lifetime privilege. The Scriptures declared the casting of the lot

is of the Lord (Proverbs 16:33^{xix}). Stones representing individuals were placed in a pot and the first drawn out was the one. Zechariah was the one whom God had selected this time. This method was not practiced by the church after Pentecost.

¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.

Luke 1:10 The incense represented the prayers of the people, so while Zechariah placed the incense on the altar and removed the excess ashes, the other priest stood outside offering up prayers for the nation.

¹¹ And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. Luke 1:11-12 When Zechariah entered the Holy Place he was shocked to see an angel of the Lord standing to the right of the altar. There is no description of the being, but Zechariah knew he was an angel and, like most encounters with angels, he became very afraid. I imagine that if it happened to you or me we would be asking ourselves if we had done something wrong or were in trouble. Sudden spiritual encounters often cause us to search our hearts such as the time Isaiah saw the Lord (Isaiah 6:5^{xx}). The holiness of that realm stands as a stark contrast to the fallen world in which we live.

¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

Luke 1:13 Angels almost always have to say, "Do not be afraid." They are awesome other worldly beings that cause man to tremble in fear, not little chubby babies with wings, or long wavy haired female figures in lovely flowing robes. That is an artist way of ignoring the power, justice, and holiness of God. And what was the prayer of Zechariah that was heard? His duty would have been to pray for the redemption of Israel, the coming of which their miraculous son would announce. The child was to be named Yohanan, meaning God has been gracious.

The angel has wonderful news. *¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.*

Luke 1:14-15 This was no ordinary child. He would bring great joy and gladness. Obviously, his birth was quite special, bringing great joy to Elizabeth and the immediate relatives but also to all longing for the Messiah. This child would become great before the Lord, a Nazirite - one who does not drink the fruit of the vine or any alcohol. There is a reason alcohol is called spirits. It is not forbidden by Scripture but in several places is set in contrast to the Holy Spirit such as is the case here (Ephesians 5:18^{xxi}).

There is no other person in Scripture who is said to be filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb. Jeremiah is said to be consecrated from the womb (Jeremiah 1:5^{xxii}), and the Messiah is said to be called from the womb and was surely filled with the Spirit (Isaiah 49:1^{xxiii}). John indeed had a very special destiny.

¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a

people prepared.” Luke 1:16-17 John's assignment is clearly that of the messenger who would prepare the way of the Lord by calling the people to repent and prepare their hearts to receive the Messiah. The angel referred to passages from the last prophet Malachi (Malachi 3:1^{xxiv}; 4:6^{xxv}). The angel was clearly saying that John would be a fulfillment of this one predicted by Malachi, the last prophet who delivered his message 400 years earlier. That was a long wait, but the right time had finally come.

It is important to see that John is not Elijah reincarnated. He has the same anointing or spirit and power that Elijah had, though we don't read of any miracles that John performed. His power is in the words he speaks. One passage says that all Judea came out into the wilderness to listen to him (Matthew 3:5^{xxvi}). Like most great preachers it is not so much the words themselves but the power of the conviction of the speaker and the work of the Holy Spirit through those words.

Turning the hearts of the fathers to the children could imply that simple childlike faith that Jesus would later speak of (Matthew 18:3^{xxvii}). The angel added that John would turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. The disciples were young men, most of them in their teens during Jesus' ministry, but their impact touched the older men, a reverse of that cultural norm.

18 And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." Luke 1:18 Zechariah knew this miracle was physically impossible, so he asked for a sign or proof that this would happen. It was like saying, "Are you sure you have the right couple? Look how old we are?" One wouldn't think you should question an angel, but if you went home and told your wife that the hope she had given up on was going to come to pass, you'd want to be sure it really was.

19 And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news." Luke 1:19 "Excuse me but do you know who I am? I am the one whom God sent to Daniel with messages (Daniel 8:16^{xxviii})! I live in the presence of Almighty God. The message of this good news is from Him. And *you* want to question my words?" Ought oh!

20 And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." Luke 1:20 Doubting God's word is arrogant and foolish. Here Zechariah had this amazing privilege, but he questioned that God could do such a thing, even though it had been done before in Scripture. The sign given to him was nine months of being mute, and the Greek word used here can imply being deaf as well. That would give you plenty of time to think about the importance of not questioning God. He wanted a sign and God gave him one. Be careful what you ask for.

I think we are all guilty of this in one way or another. God tells us we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3^{xxix}). Do we believe it? He tells us to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17^{xxx}), and I often hear people question whether it is possible? He tells us that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called to His purposes (Romans 8:28^{xxxi})? Have

you ever doubted that? I've asked for a sign. Even a couple of weeks before working on this message I was discouraged over some events and asked God to give me a sign to encourage my heart. I was immediately reminded of a number of Scriptures, like the one that says I already have the sign of the resurrection (Matthew 12:39^{xxxii}), what more do I need. And there was the man in Hades asking for someone to come from the dead to warn his brothers, but the Lord said that if they don't believe the Scriptures they wouldn't believe someone who came back from the dead (Luke 16:31^{xxxiii}). And faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of what is not seen (Hebrews 11:1^{xxxiv}). And then I say, "But Lord, I need something now to lift my spirit." And then He reminded me of Philippians 4:8^{xxxv} to think on whatever is good... in other words count my blessings. "Thank you Jesus for being more patient with me than You were with Zechariah!" And most of us can say, "Amen!"

21 And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. 22 And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. 23 And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home. Luke 1:21-23 Zechariah was to come out and pronounce a blessing, but instead he came out mute and deaf (see verse 62) trying to convey with signs what took place. They got the message that something miraculous had happened. All those priests knew that was a special day and were probably watching to see what would become of it. In Acts 6:7^{xxxvi} we read that a great many of the priests became followers of Jesus. No wonder, for many of them saw or heard about this and would then take seriously what John proclaimed. So when Jesus would later ask the leaders if John was sent from God, they wouldn't answer for so many people knew of this background (Matthew 11:25^{xxxvii}).

24 After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, 25 "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people." Luke 1:24-25 Did she hide herself hoping not to miscarry because of her age? She certainly saw it as a blessing from the Lord. Surely Zechariah wrote the details of the encounter with the angel for her to read, and perhaps Luke found a copy of that description for his gospel or at least heard from Mary who had read it or heard from Elizabeth.

Do you realize you are more blessed than Elizabeth? If you are in Christ, the Lord has taken away your reproach from before your Creator (Colossians 1:22^{xxxviii}). The curse of sin and death was lifted off you and placed on Jesus your Savior (2 Corinthians 5:21^{xxxix}). Don't doubt it. Live in the joy of it. And now something greater than a child is being formed in us. Christ Jesus Himself is taking shape in us as we increasingly yield our lives to the Lord (Galatians 4:19^{xl}).

Questions: 1 Who was Luke? 2 How and why did he write his gospel? 3 Why were eyewitnesses important? 4 How could Zechariah and Elizabeth be righteous? 5 Go over the history of barrenness in Scripture. 6 Recount the angel Gabriel's words. 7 Why would Zechariah have a hard time believing? 8 Is God more patient with us at times? 9 What was the later effect on the priests? 10 How has our reproach been removed?

ⁱ Acts 16:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

ⁱⁱ Acts 20:5 (ESV)

⁵ These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas,

ⁱⁱⁱ Acts 21:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

^{iv} 2 Corinthians 8:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel.

^v 2 Timothy 4:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

^{vi} Preaching the Word – Luke, Volume I: That You May Know the Truth.

^{vii} Irenaeus, disciple of Polycarp, disciple of John wrote: "There are four gospels and only four, neither more nor less: four like the points of the compass, four like the chief directions of the wind. The Church, spread all over the world, has in the gospels four pillars and four winds blowing wherever people live" (Against Heresies, 3, 11, 8).

^{viii} 2 Thessalonians 2:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

^{ix} 1 Corinthians 11:23 (ESV)

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,

^x 1 Corinthians 15:3 (ESV)

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

^{xi} 1 Corinthians 15:6 (ESV)

⁶ Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

^{xii} - The Bible Speaks Today – The Message of Luke: The Saviour of the World.

^{xiii} Psalm 14:3 (ESV)

³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

^{xiv} Romans 3:23 (ESV)

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

^{xv} Romans 1:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

^{xvi} Romans 4:3 (ESV)

³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

^{xvii} Philippians 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

^{xviii} Matthew 5:22 (ESV)

²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, "You fool!" will be liable to the hell of fire.

^{xix} Proverbs 16:33 (ESV)

³³ The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

^{xx} Isaiah 6:5 (ESV)

⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

^{xxi} Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

^{xxii} Jeremiah 1:5 (ESV)

⁵ "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

xxiii Isaiah 49:1 (ESV)

1 Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.

xxiv Malachi 3:1 (ESV)

1 "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

xxv Malachi 4:6 (ESV)

6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

xxvi Matthew 3:5 (ESV)

5 Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him,

xxvii Matthew 18:3 (ESV)

3 and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

xxviii Daniel 8:16 (ESV)

16 And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision."

xxix Ephesians 1:3 (ESV)

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

xxx 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV)

17 pray without ceasing,

xxxi Romans 8:28 (ESV)

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

xxxii Matthew 12:39 (ESV)

39 But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

xxxiii Luke 16:31 (ESV)

31 He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

xxxiv Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

xxxv Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

xxxvi Acts 6:7 (ESV)

7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

xxxvii Matthew 11:25 (ESV)

25 At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children;

xxxviii Colossians 1:22 (ESV)

22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

xxxix 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

xl Galatians 4:19 (ESV)

19 my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!