

LUKE'S INTRODUCTION

Luke 1:1-4

"Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. ³ It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed."

INTRODUCTION

James Garfield (1831-81) became 20th President of the United States in 1881. Born in a log cabin near Cleveland, OH, his father died before he was two. He knew poverty. His mother struggled to raise him and her older children on a small farm. But James took responsibility for his future. In his teen years, he towed barges on the Ohio Canal to help support his family. He applied himself so diligently to gain an education that he was able to begin college studies at 19. He also attended a camp meeting that same year and gave his heart to **Jesus**. He wrote, "Today I was buried with Christ in baptism and arose to walk in the newness of life." He took his faith seriously and so desired to share **Jesus** that he became a lay preacher.

James Garfield started out in life needing to play catch-up, lacking the financial and educational advantages of many others. But he applied himself with commitment to make the best of every opportunity. He threw himself into a steep learning curve to quickly catch up on the knowledge and skills each new task demanded of him. This enabled him to rise through the ranks to become a college teacher of Latin and Greek at age 25, college president at age 26, Ohio State Senator at 28, and brigadier general in the Union Army at age 31. Despite his lack of military experience, he ably commanded troops at the Battle of Shiloh in April, 1862, and distinguished himself in later battles. In October, 1862, he gained election to the U. S. Congress. Then, in 1881, his diligence and incorruptible Christian character led him to the White House.

As a college teacher, ambidextrous Garfield would amuse his students by writing on a chalkboard in Greek with one hand while writing at the same time in Latin with his other hand! A father once came to him to complain the academic course at the college was too long and rigorous. "Could it be shortened?" he asked. "Certainly," Garfield replied. "But it all depends on what you want to make of your boy. When God wants to make an oak tree, He takes a hundred years. When He wants to make a squash, He requires only two months." The father got the message: there are no shortcuts to a life of noble and worthwhile achievement! This same message is embodied in the life of "Luke, the dearly loved physician" (**Colossians 4:14**), and one of the closest "coworkers" of the Apostle Paul (**Philemon 24**). Luke's willingness to pursue a steep learning curve, after he embraced Christ as His Savior when probably well into his 30s and with little prior knowledge of Israel's God, enabled him to gain an appreciation of and closeness to **Jesus** that rivaled His original disciples. Luke's commitment to serve **Jesus** with excellence stirred him to thoroughly research the facts and events of our Savior's earthly life. Luke has blessed the world with some of **Jesus'** most memorable stories and teachings in the Bible, like the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son!

Last week we gained a general introduction to Who Luke Is, as a person, and What *Luke* Is as a Book of the New Testament. Today we will explore the Scope, the Sources, and the Sureness of Luke's Gospel.

I. LUKE'S SCOPE

Formal writings of the Roman Empire customarily began with a prologue; an introduction identifying the intended audience and the purpose of this work. Luke's artistic prologue, in the finest Greek of the New Testament, consists of a single sentence with two parts: **Vss. 1-2** describe the prior efforts of others, both written narratives and the testimony of "eyewitnesses" and of those who first proclaimed the Gospel ("servants of the word") who "handed . . . down" their oral recollections. In **vss. 3-4**, Luke presents his

credentials as an historian and his purpose for preparing his account. As the only Gentile, non-Jewish, writer of the New Testament, Luke crafts his overview of **Jesus'** life to make most sense to people who were not rooted in the centuries-old Jewish faith and who were not eyewitnesses to the events of **Jesus'** life.

In the Greco-Roman world, a "book" available in the form of a rolled-up scroll did not lend itself to informal browsing. The first column of writing on the scroll, even the first sentence, performed much the same purpose as a dust jacket on modern books to stir a reader's interest. Lucian was a Greek author of the 2nd century A. D. His satire, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, is one of the earliest pagan descriptions of "Christians" and their "crucified" leader, whom "They took . . . for a God." Lucian's letter, *How to Write History*, said historians should convince readers their work is "important" and "useful," and their narration is "true."

"Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us,² just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us.³ It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence." Luke here lists his credentials as a reliable historian by telling us four things about what he is writing before he tells us why he writes. (1) He has "investigated" the story. He has followed these events closely, taking a long and careful look at what he's about to tell us. (2) Luke says he's going to start "from the very first," at the beginning of this important story, which is why he opens his account of the life of **Jesus** with John the Baptist, **Jesus'** forerunner. (3) Luke is thorough, having looked at "everything" he could find to give us the fullest possible story in his narration. This explains why 42% of what Luke records may not found elsewhere in the New Testament. (4) Luke worked "carefully," making every effort to present his research in an orderly way so that what he tells us can be clearly understood. We could add a fifth fact about Luke, based upon his words, "It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything." This is the only place in the four Gospels where the writer explicitly refers to himself in the first person. This may have been Luke's way of revealing that, as a Gentile for whom the God of Israel had previously been a foreign and unknown God, as an outsider to the Jewish hope of a Messiah who would become the Savior of the world, Luke's life has been transformed by the reality of what he's reporting. We may not be the best person to share with others about **Jesus** if our lives are not transformed by Him, as was Luke's. A father once told his boy, "You better get ready. The bus will be here in a minute to pick you up and take you to Sunday School." The boy asked, "Did you go to Sunday School when you were a boy?" The father replied, "Yes I did." The boy said as he was getting dressed, "It probably won't do me any good either!"

Luke's prologue shines the most light upon the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture of any passage in the Bible. **II Peter 1:20-21** (NIV), referring to writings of the Old Testament, informs us, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things.²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." **II Timothy 3:16** (NCV) assures us all we read in our Bibles embodies God's own instructions to us: "All Scripture is inspired by God [literally, "God-breathed"] and is useful for teaching, for showing people what is wrong in their lives, for correcting faults, and for teaching how to live right." Luke's **Gospel** gives every evidence of being inspired on par with any Biblical writing, yet Luke reveals his **Gospel** is also the fruit of his efforts to "carefully investigate" and collect his source material, which God's Spirit then guided him to organize and record. The Holy Spirit did not fill Luke's mind miraculously with the details of his Gospel, while he sipped lemonade by the Mediterranean Sea!

"Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events" employs Greek terms then commonly used in historical works seeking to provide a reliable report of specific events in an orderly way. "About the events that have been fulfilled among us." This refers to the events, miracles, and teachings of **Jesus**. Luke's account will add to what's already known about **Jesus** to convincingly demonstrate even to Gentiles that **Jesus** is indeed "the Christ," God's Messiah foretold by Scripture, as in **Isaiah 53:5-6** (NIV): "But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace

was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

"It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence." Luke's Gospel is the easiest to read because he arranged his material to most dramatically present **Jesus** in all His powerful and yet sacrificial glory as the Son of God and our Savior. Luke is not tied to a chronological recounting of events, as when he records Peter's denial immediately after **Jesus'** arrest, for literary impact (**Luke 22:54-62**), rather than after **Jesus** had been interrogated for some time by the Sanhedrin, as do **Matthew 26:57-75** & and **Mark 14:48-72**.

II. LUKE'S SOURCES (quality of witnesses)

Let's look briefly at Luke's Sources. **Luke 5:24** records **Jesus** declaring, "But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' He said to the paralytic—I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home." How closely do Luke's words match **Mark 2:10-11**: "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—He *said to the paralytic, ¹¹ 'I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home'"? Then read **Matthew 9:6**: "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—then He *said to the paralytic, 'Get up, pick up your bed and go home.'" Biblical scholars have long debated the extent to which Matthew, Mark, and Luke borrowed from each other's writings. Most now conclude **Mark** is the earliest Gospel. About 90% of **Mark** is found in substance in **Matthew**, and about 53% of **Mark** is in **Luke**. Many stories and sayings of **Jesus** continued to be passed down orally, even outside of what the four Gospels record. One such saying known to the Apostle Paul is recorded in **Acts 20:25**, "[R]emember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Luke evidently proved to be the most diligent in tracking down and making notes of all the oral tradition he could find concerning **Jesus**. Luke also had a Gentile's sensitivity to what would most be of interest to people of a non-Jewish background, as he was. Over 40% of what Luke tells us would otherwise be unknown to us to this day!

Acts 21:1-8 reveals Luke came with Paul in A. D. 57 to Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea, Rome's capital over Israel and Syria. He did not sail with Paul for Rome until more than two full years later (**Acts 27:1-8**). As the Apostle Paul's trusted companion, this gave Luke ample time to "carefully investigate" the facts about **Jesus** and to personally interview many "original eyewitnesses and servants of the word" who knew **Jesus** on earth. The remarkable insights into the private world of **Jesus'** earthly mother, Mary, and her family, recorded in **Luke 1 & 2**, suggest Mary (ca. 77) may have been among those he interviewed.

III. LUKE'S SURENESS

This brings us to Luke's Sureness. "I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed." Do we ever discourage ourselves over uncertainty about matters important to us, and then we are relieved when we discover our fears are unfounded? A man once texted his best friend in panic, "My wife left me because she says I'm too insecure." This was quickly followed by another text, "No, wait. She's back. She just went to make a cup of tea."

"Theophilus," to whom both **Luke** and **Acts** are addressed, appears to have been a Gentile believer of some wealth and social status. Aside from his name in Greek meaning, "friend of God," nothing else is known of him. The more he thought about the majority of Jews rejecting **Jesus** as the Messiah, Theophilus may have wanted assurance about his decision to embrace **Jesus** as his Savior. Whatever doubts or confusion we may have about who **Jesus** is, what He has taught or done, or what **Jesus** is asking of us, Luke's Gospel was written to confirm our faith in **Jesus** and to put our uncertainties to rest.

CONCLUSION

When built for the White Star Line in 1912, the Titanic was the marvel of her age. At nearly 883 feet in length, the Titanic was longer than the tallest structures on Earth at the time. Over 2200 people left England on what the owners of the White Star Line called an "unsinkable" ship," but only 706 arrived. After striking an iceberg on April 14, 1912, it took the Titanic just two hours and forty minutes to sink.

This much history is widely known today. What is little known is that while the Titanic was sinking in the North Atlantic, another ship was being built in the United States. The 410' SS Medina was not nearly as large or grand as the Titanic when commissioned in 1914. It made no claim to being unsinkable. When WWI broke out, the Medina served as a troop ship and survived an attack when two ships in its convoy were sunk. Between the Wars, it resumed its routine service as a freighter. During World War II, it was converted to a troop ship and carried soldiers across the Atlantic. It was bombed and torpedoed, but the ship refused to sink. On one crossing it was the only vessel in its convoy to reach its destination. After the War it was sold as scrap, but it was rescued and converted into a Panamanian cruise liner called the Roma. In 1977, it was put up for sale again and purchased by the Christian charity Operation Mobilization. It was refitted to become a floating Christian conference center and to distribute Christian literature worldwide. It was then rechristened the MV Doulos. "Doulos" is the Greek word for "bond-servant," as the apostles of Christ liked to call themselves (as **Jude 1**), because they'd surrendered their lives to serve "our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (**Jude 4**) alone. For many years, the MV Doulos held the record as the oldest active passenger ship in the world. In 32 years, she welcomed over 22 million visitors in 601 ports and in 108 countries. Many lives were changed and countless others came to Christ as Savior through its service to our King. Finally, in late 2009, 95 years after being built, the MV Doulos was finally decommissioned. Its new owners have converted it into a dry-docked resort hotel based on an island of western Indonesia, under its new name, Doulos Phos, Servant of Light.

God is in the business of taking useful but ordinary things and converting them into great instruments of His grace and glory, like the MV Doulos and like Luke. Both served admirably, faithfully discharging their varied duties; some noteworthy and some routine. Their service brought blessings to countless people. While it may be the great "Titanics" of the world that make the headlines, it is the faithful Douloses of the world that are making the most enduring differences for the Lord. God is always on the lookout for people who will so completely and so diligently abandon themselves to His service that they can become much more than history watchers. They can become history makers! "The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him" (**II Chronicles 16:9**, NLT).