

# Harmony Of The Gospels

## Lesson #1

### Prologue To The Gospels

#### Luke 1:1-4

#### I. **A Declaration**

- A. The introduction to Luke is one long, carefully constructed sentence in the tradition of the finest historical works in Greek literature.
  - 1. It was customary among the great Greek and Hellenistic historians, including the first-century Jewish writer Josephus, to explain and justify their work in a preface.
  - 2. Their object was to assure the reader of their capability, thorough research, and reliability.
- B. Luke begins by indicating that there was considerable interest in information about Jesus and His work prior to the present work.
  - 1. Many ancient writers begin by criticizing their predecessors. Not Luke. He is out to convey certainty, but he does not disparage others.
  - 2. "Set forth in order a declaration" means to write a report, an account, or a narrative, relating events in an orderly way.
- C. The contents of this work are what has been "believed among us."
  - 1. The word used here speaks of the accomplishment of the purposes of God in the life and work of Jesus.
  - 2. The facts concerning the life of Christ had been fully established among the Christians then living; there was no room left for a reasonable doubt.

#### II. **Eyewitnesses And Ministers**

- A. In this verse Luke stresses the validity of the information concerning Jesus' words and deeds (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:23; 15:3). They were probably broken and incomplete accounts. Although the "eyewitnesses and ministers" may have included some of the "many" (vs. 1), they are mostly to be distinguished from them because they were prior to them.
- B. Witnesses are important to Luke to establish the validity of his information. The words "from the beginning" (probably meaning from the early days of Jesus' ministry) are tied grammatically to the word "eyewitnesses" (primarily the apostles, whose authority Luke upholds throughout Luke and Acts).
  - 1. These were not passive observers but "ministers of the word." "Word" (*logos*) means the message of the gospel, especially as embodied in the words and deeds of Jesus (cp. Luke 8:12).

2. In Acts 1:1, Luke combines the words "do" and "teach" when he describes Jesus' work. In summary, vs. 2 makes a serious claim regarding careful historical research that has weighty implications for our estimate of the entire gospel.
3. Inspiration was never meant to encourage mental laziness. Luke had searched diligently to gain all the facts about the life and deeds of Jesus. He followed up everything to the source. He investigated the evidence and became convinced of its truth.
  - a) Except in some specialized cases, inspiration does not mean dictation. God did not whisper into the ears of the biblical authors, but rather worked through each author's own circumstances, thoughts, intentions, and personalities to communicate His divine message. The exceptions would be in those cases where the author is told to write exactly what he is told (as in some prophetic texts) or where God Himself inscribes the text (Exodus 31:18). Evidence that inspiration does not mean dictation is the differences among biblical authors in literary styles, including vocabulary choice, sentence structure, level of diction, and choice of genre. Mark's gospel, for example, is written in a rather rough Semitic style, with a great deal of parataxis (parallel sentences linked by "and"), while Luke's has a more refined Hellenistic literary style.
  - b) The process of writing scripture -- like scripture itself -- was a dynamic interplay between the human and the divine. The authors' own experiences, recollections, research, selection, editing, and composition were together guided by the Holy Spirit so that the result was the accurate word of God. The fact that Luke used outside sources should not be intimidating.
    - (1) The authors of Kings and Chronicles drew from a variety of sources, both canonical and noncanonical (1 Kings 11:41; 14:19, 29; 1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 12:15; 20:34; 24:27; 26:22).
    - (2) The letter of Jude cites or alludes to various intertestamental works, including 1 Enoch (Jude 14) and the Assumption of Moses (Jude 9). Paul occasionally quotes from pagan poets and philosophers, including Menander (1 Corinthians 15:33), Epimenides (Titus 1:12-13), and Aratus (Acts 17:28 [Luke quoting Paul]).
  - c) Christians of that day had the best opportunity to know whether what was reported about Jesus was true. Many had seen what He did, and all others had the account from those who had witnessed it.

### III. ***Theophilus***

- A. Luke now describes his own work of investigation and writing. The word "all things" may partially explain how his work differed from that of the "many" (vs. 1).
  - 1. He plans to start from the beginning of Jesus' work and to record his research accurately and in an orderly manner.
  - 2. The term "orderly" does not tell us what the principle(s) of order is (are). Of the four canonical gospels, Luke is most like a biography, beginning with detailed circumstances of Jesus' birth and frequently tying notable events to secular history and people.
- B. The identity of Theophilus is unknown (cf. Acts 1:1). It has been conjectured by some that the name ("friend of God") did not refer to any particular individual, but to any man that loved God.
  - 1. Theophilus was, however, a proper name, and "most excellent" naturally suggests an actual person of some distinction. The term occurs only in three other places in the New Testament, and is there given to men in office -- to Felix and Festus (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25).
  - 2. He may have even been Luke's literary patron or publisher, after the custom of the times.

### IV. ***The Certainty Of Those Things***

- A. Though it is not clear whether Theophilus was a Christian, he had doubtless received some instruction in the words and the deeds of Jesus.
- B. "Instructed" (from which our word "catechism" is derived) is often used of the instruction of Christian converts or inquirers (Acts 18:25; 1 Corinthians 14:19; Galatians 6:6).
  - 1. For some reason Theophilus needed assurance as to the truth of what was taught him. A written record was needed, not a tradition or fading memory.
  - 2. Possibly he was troubled by denials of the resurrection and other historical foundations of the faith that incipient Gnostic speculation was challenging.
- C. The main impact of Luke's prologue is that the gospel is true and is capable of confirmation by appeal to what had happened.