

## ***A Physician Looks at Jesus • Luke 1:1-4***

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Luke was a physician by profession. He was highly educated in classical Greek, in the Hebrew religion and in science. Because he lived nearly 2000 years ago we may not think much of his knowledge and skills compared to modern physicians, but that is really not fair. While he did not know about bacteria or antibiotics or modern anesthesia or MRIs or CT scans, he was not ignorant or unintelligent.

Hypocrates was known as the “father of medicine”. He lived 500 years before Luke or the writing of the New Testament. It may surprise you to know that some of his writings were used as textbooks in Western medical schools as recently as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many of his observations concerning diseases and their treatment are still amazingly valid today.

Doctors in the Roman Empire had to be keen observers of every detail of human experience because they could not rely on laboratory tests as physicians do today. In some ways you can argue that they had to be brighter and better because of when and where they practiced their medicine.

Luke brought all his skill and training to the writing of a biography of the most famous and important person who has ever lived, Jesus of Nazareth. It is not that others had not written Jesus’ story, but Luke’s approach was different. He is analytical and systematic. He begins with the highest style of Greek language and literature. His was the biography for the educated while

Mark wrote more in the style of a journalist of a daily newspaper who is facing a midnight deadline.

The first four verses of Luke’s gospel are his introduction to the biography of Jesus. He begins with a startling assumption that distinguishes Jesus’ biography from that of anyone else in history. Luke claims that the events of Jesus’ life were predicted generations, in fact centuries, before Jesus was even born. Luke says, “Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us. . . .”

Now if Luke is correct, if his biography of Jesus proves his claims, there should be no doubt that Jesus is not only supernatural but that he is the Son of God himself and that everything he said was true. If his life is the fulfillment of prophecy then God not only knows the future but specifically foretold the future of Jesus.

There are documented Old Testament prophecies about the town in which the Messiah would be born, direct quotes he would speak and the manner in which he would die. Luke knew that many of his readers would include highly educated skeptics who were not easy to convince. They would read and reread the evidence like scholars in a university or jurors in the jury room.

Of course, predictions don’t really mean very much unless they come true. That’s why Luke adds that the source of his biography was “those who from the first were eyewitnesses.” You see, unlike Jesus’ other biographers, Luke was not himself an eyewitness.

Matthew and John were there when Jesus taught and performed miracles and was crucified and resurrected. Luke was not.

This may discredit his biography in the minds of some, but it should not. In some ways this makes Luke a more credible biographer. He had to conduct hundreds if not thousands of first-hand interviews. He traveled to the cities where Jesus’ life was lived. He compared testimony with tes-

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timony. Luke writes more as a scholar and researcher than from his own personal experience.

These eyewitnesses were really quite amazing. There is strong consistency between each of the reports of Jesus' life, especially his death and resurrection. These were not legends or creative fiction. Indeed, many of the eyewitnesses were persecuted, imprisoned and executed for their testimony.

Imagine being asked to give public testimony to something you witnessed, only to discover that the courts didn't want to hear what you planned to say and might execute you for your testimony. Wouldn't you be tempted to forget or say, "I'm not quite sure" rather than be killed?

Did you know that all but one of Jesus' original twelve disciples died a violent death? Only John died from natural causes. These eyewitnesses knew what they had seen and heard. They had no doubt. And, it was much more than information to them. Their lives were revolutionized because they knew Jesus was God on earth. They were willing to be crucified, to be beheaded, to be beaten to death rather than change a single detail of their story. This Jesus had changed their lives and their destiny. They were different because of him to the point that they were prepared to die!

These eyewitnesses provided the material for Luke's biography of Jesus. Christianity is based on historical facts—not on made-up myths or current ideas or religious speculation. Christianity is now and always has been about the truth. History and documentation and eyewitness reports are at the foundation of all that Christians believe.

In Luke 1:3 Dr. Luke explains the process and attention he gave to the writing of this book: "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus."

Some background information may be helpful here to understand what Luke was saying. In our English Bibles, in the first four verses of Luke 1, we have two lengthy sentences. But when Luke wrote it in Greek, he didn't have two sentences, he had one sentence that tied together all of his introductory statements.

He used a style that is very typical of the introductions to classical Greek literature. He even

included a dedication for his book—to "Theophilus". We don't know who Theophilus was although his name is a combination of two Greek words meaning "lover of God".

As a writer of books, dedications are a special interest to me. Books I have written have been dedicated to my wife Charleen, to my parents and to the people of Wooddale Church. Dedications are typically written to those who are especially important in the life of the author.

It may have been that Theophilus was not a Christian. I wonder if Luke thought, "If I dedicate the book to him, not only will he be honored, but he will probably read it. And if he reads it, maybe Theophilus will come to believe in my Jesus."

But I'm especially interested in his statement that this biography is "carefully investigated" and that it is "an orderly account". In other words, Luke gave his very best to writing this story. In part, I suppose that was because of the kind of person Luke was—a careful and well-organized physician. However, I think there may be something more to why he researched and wrote the way he did. Luke thought that Jesus deserved the very best! Nothing less than excellence was to be given to anything that carried the name of Jesus Christ.

There is a powerful lesson here for us modern Christians. It is that Jesus still deserves the very best. Everything we say about him and everything we do that carries the name of Jesus Christ in our lives should be given the best of care and order. Only the best for Jesus!

Finally, Luke states the purpose for his biography of Jesus: ". . . so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." This was to be something far more than a routine history book. Jesus' biography is riddled with life-and-death, heaven-and-hell issues and decisions. Jesus claimed to be God in a human body. Jesus claimed to be able to forgive human sins. Jesus taught how to have meaning and hope in life. He showed us how to deal with the toughest problems any person could ever face. Jesus said that he was the only one in the world who could guarantee heaven when a person dies.

Anyone who believes and follows Jesus will never be the same again. But it can't be a wishy-washy faith. Jesus wants us to really believe in

him and his teachings and to live accordingly.

Luke wrote Jesus' story in a way that readers will do more than learn. He wrote so that we would be absolutely completely convinced. Certainty! Maybe you say to yourself, "Wow, I would like to have that kind of faith. I'd like to believe without doubt. I'd like to be certain!" Then read and study this book. It was written specially for you. It was written so that you and I can be certain about Jesus Christ.

When I was growing up my parents had a wonderful set of books prominently displayed in our home. It was a set of Carl Sandberg's popular multi-volume biography of Abraham Lincoln. The red hardcover books were held in place with brass Lincoln-head bookends on mahogany bases. My parents had this set before I was born and long after I had graduated from high school and moved out of their home. I saw those books almost everyday from the time I was born until I graduated from high school and hundreds of times after that . . . but I never opened one volume one time and I never read a page. It's amazing how something can be so familiar and still remain completely unknown.

A life without Lincoln is a small loss. A life without Jesus Christ is an eternal tragedy! I encourage you to carefully read the biography of this most amazing and supernatural Jesus. It is the story that can transform your life with the certainty of God himself.

In one writer's impressive summary of the life of Jesus Christ it says:

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty, and then for three years he was an itinerant preacher. He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put his foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness.

He had no credentials but himself. . . . While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves.

While he was dying his executioners gambled for the only piece of property that he had on earth—his coat. When he was dead, he was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the

pity of a friend. Nineteen long centuries have come and gone and today he is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that were ever built, all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as that one solitary life.

Our Father, thank you one more time for our amazing Jesus. We praise you, God, for your Son. We are grateful for his biography. But we ask that Jesus be far more than a character from history. May he be now and may he always be the Lord Christ of our lives.

Amen.

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