

UNDERSTANDING LUKE'S TASK: CAREFULLY BUILDING ON PRECEDENT (LUKE 1:1-4)

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Introduction

There is only one Gospel where the writer spells out his purpose and preparation in detail. That is the Gospel of Luke. The introduction of Luke's Gospel is significant because he not only tells us why he writes and how he writes but also indicates the state of the tradition about Jesus at the time he writes. In addition, the meaning of the passage is hotly debated, with virtually every phrase a matter of dispute. This article seeks to examine the preface and its meaning.¹

Structure, Genre, and Luke's Description of Narrative

Structure

Luke begins his work, as other ancient writers do, with a preface. The entire paragraph is one long Greek sentence. Luke writes with balance as he argues his connection to the past and his desire to give his readers assurance about the instruction they have received. Luke discusses the tradition he inherited in v 1. Then he traces the origin of that tradition to eyewitnesses and servants who preach the Word in v 2. Luke 1:3 is the main clause of the preface and discusses how Luke wrote his account. The purpose of Luke's writing is found in the last verse. He desires to give his reader, Theophilus, assurance about the events surrounding Jesus. Theophilus had prior knowledge of these

¹ This article represents a slightly reworked portion of a forthcoming two-volume commentary on the Gospel of Luke by the author.

events, and Luke wishes to reassure his recipient that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises. Luke 1:1 speaks of fulfilled events to raise the note of God's activity at the very start. History makes it clear that Theophilus was not the only one who benefited from Luke's labor. The church is the major beneficiary of Luke's work.

The structure of Luke 1:1-4 reflects balanced Greek periodic style with a protasis, vv 1-2 ("Inasmuch as" or "since"), and an apodosis, vv 3-4 ("so also it seemed good to me").² BDF describes how the periodic parallelism works: "many" is parallel to "also to me," while "to compose a narrative" goes with "to write for you," and "even as eye-witnesses and servants handed down" is tied to "in order that you might have assurance." The parallelism in the third unit is not as clear as in the first two units.³ Tiede notes how the period lays out in parallel lines.⁴ He parallels the suggestion of BDF. So the parallelism of Luke 1:1-4 goes as follows:

- a) Inasmuch as many have undertaken (v 1a)
 - b) to compile a narrative of the things. . .(v 1b)
 - c) just as they were delivered to us by . . .(v 2)
- a') it seemed good to us also. . .(v 3a)
 - b') to write an orderly account for you. . . (v 3b)
 - c') in order that you may know the truth (v 4)

The balance of the passage provides an aesthetic touch to the introduction. The parallelism also reflects the effort Luke spent in trying to create a culturally appropriate introduction to his work.

Ancient Parallels: Other Historical Prefaces

There are ancient parallels to the prologue. Some are in Hellenistic-Jewish writings.⁵ Here one can note 2 Macc 2:19-31, which parallels Luke in some particulars. The writer of 2 Maccabees cites a predecessor and then explains what his own goal is in writing a new summary work (v 23). He compares his work to painting an already constructed house (v 29). He wishes to entertain and provide facts for the profit of the reader (v 25). Josephus' prologue to *Ant.* 1.1. 1-4 and the *Ep. Arist.* 1. 1-8 should also be mentioned. There also is the prologue to Sirach, where this writer also explains the rationale for his work.

² BDF 464.

³ The main clause is in Luke 1:3. A stylistic parallel to the period exists in Acts 15:24-25.

⁴ D. Tiede, *Luke* (Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988) 33.

⁵ W. Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (THKNT 3; Berlin: Verlagsanstalt, 1988) 38, n.l.

Josephus says that he writes to set out events in which he took part and to remove the prevailing ignorance that exists about important events. Josephus' introduction in *Ag. Ap.* 1.1. 1-5 even has a dedicatory line to "most esteemed Epaphroditus" and describes the quality of the witnesses on whom Josephus relies. He writes this work to convict detractors of falsehood, to correct ignorance, and to instruct all who desire to know the truth. Aristetas' prologue speaks of a "trustworthy" narrative of memorable matters (vv 1, 6). The author of Sirach has simply tried to present to the outside world the legacy of Israel's traditions of wisdom and discipline.

Greek parallels also exist for this form. Tiede mentions a later work by Lucian of Samosota (c. AD. 125-180), who wrote in his treatise, *How to Write History* 53-55 that unlike the orators, he will not appeal for a favorable hearing. He desires to interest his audience and instruct them. Earlier, he had said that the only task of an historian is to tell the truth (39-40).⁶ Fitzmyer notes that the ancients knew how to distinguish between fact and fiction.⁷ The goals in many Greek writers are like those of the author of 2 Maccabees and the other Jewish historian-theologians. Lucian argues if what is said is important and essential, it will receive attention. The goal is to be clear, set forth causes, and outline the main events. Luke is written with similar goals. Alexander argues that Luke is a writer in the classic "ancient scientific" mold.⁸ This places Luke in the "middle brow" of classical writing. In Alexander's view, such a work respects tradition, uses sources, but also has some reworking of tradition.

Luke's Term: Narrative Account

Among the ancients, there are various terms tied to writing history. The term, ψυχαγωγία (*psychagogia*, "persuasion") is often negative.⁹ It refers to the goal of some writers, while others refuse to adopt it. Another term is ὑπόμνημα (*hypomnema*, "records," "memorial," "commentary," or "minutes").¹⁰ Still a third idea is ἱστορία (*historia*,

⁶ Tiede, 34-35.

⁷ J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (AB 28, 28a, 2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981,1985) 16. .

⁸ L Alexander, "Luke's Preface in the Context of Greek Preface-Writing," *NovT* 28 (1986) 48-75, esp. 60-63. F. Bovon (*Das Evangelium nach Lukas: Lk 1, 1-9, #50* [EKKNT 3.1; Zurich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener Verlag, 1989], 30, n. 1) notes that these comparisons with ancient prologues date back to the 18th century with G. Raphelius and J. J. Wettstein. C. F. Evans (*St. Luke* [TPI New Testament Commentaries; Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990] 116-19) cites several of these "scientific prefaces."

⁹ LSJ 2026.2.

¹⁰ LSJ 1889.2.4. These are often unpolished materials. Lucian *On How to Write History* 47-48.

"inquiry," "information," "narrative," or "history").¹¹ The absence of references to these other terms in BAGD show that Luke chose none of these terms to describe his work. His term is διήγησις (*diegesis*, "narrative account").¹²

Buschel in *TDNT* notes that the term διήγησις simply means "narrative" and does not refer to some form of an incomplete literary work that one could compare to the individual, detached traditions of modern form criticism.¹³ Luke has longer materials in mind than individual pericopes. His note 3 gives some extra-biblical texts using the term. Some texts describe oral reports. Others refer to written reports or to historical accounts: Sir 6:35 (oral); 9:15 (oral); 22:6 (oral); 27:11, 13 (oral); 38:25 and 39:2 (concerning discourses of famous men); *Ep. Aris.* 1. 8.322 (written); 2 Macc 2:32 (written); 6:17 (historical narrative). LSJ adds Plato Rep. 392d; Phaed. 246a, and LXX-Hab 1:5.¹⁴ The term in the NT speaks of both oral and written accounts: (oral)--Luke 8:39; 9:10; Acts 8:33; 9:27; 12:17; (written)--Mark 5:16; 9:9; Heb 11:32. So whatever type of narrative Luke alludes to in v 1, it is not clear whether the sources are oral, written, or both. What is clear is that these accounts are long and that Luke's work is similar to them, as v 3 makes clear.¹⁵ This association might suggest written sources but does not guarantee it.

Major Themes

So Luke explains why he has written and establishes that his work has precedent. However, Luke makes other points as well. He highlights the eyewitness origin of tradition; he points out his account is the result of a careful consideration of the events; and he notes that the study was carefully done. In fact, the account begins at the start and is thorough. Luke's contribution is significant not only because of his careful work, but also because only he writes a second volume in which he ties fulfillment in Jesus to God's work in the church.

So the basic outline of Luke 1:1-4 is as follows:

Carefully Building on Precedent: Luke 1:1-4

A. The Precedent (1:1-2)

1. What Came Before (1:1)

2. The Source of Earlier Accounts: Apostolic Eyewitnesses (1:2)

¹¹ LSJ 842.2.

¹² BAGD 195; Bauer, 6th ed., col. 392; LSJ 427, defines it broadly as "recount."

¹³ *TDNT* 2.909.

¹⁴ F. Buschel's reference to Hab 2:16 is incorrect

¹⁵ R Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* vol. I (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 1.10.

B. Luke's Contribution (1:3-4)

1. Luke Describes His Work (1:3)
2. Luke's Purpose (1:4)

Translation

(1) Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things which have been fulfilled among us, (2) even as those who were from the beginning eyewitnesses and servants of the Word delivered to us, (3) it seemed good also to me, having followed all things carefully from the beginning to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, (4) that you might know certainty concerning the things about which you were instructed.

Meaning: Luke Carefully Builds on Precedent

The Precedent (1:1-2)

What Came Before (1:1). Luke's work is not novel. His Gospel begins by noting the precedent of others in recounting what Jesus did. The term ἐπειδήπερ (*epeideper*, "inasmuch as") gives a condition and is usually causally related to the action in the main clause, so "since many have undertaken."¹⁶ The accounts of others laid the groundwork for why Luke writes. Ancient writers loved to show how what they were doing had precedent.

Luke also produces an introduction with stylistic parallels in other ancient writings. Fitzmyer cites similar beginnings from Josephus J. W. 1.6.17 and Philo *Legatio ad Gaium* 164.¹⁷ No LXX usage exists for the introductory term ἐπειδήπερ ("inasmuch as"), but this style of introduction is common. The causal nuance is defended by Marshall and Schneider.¹⁸

So Luke is not the first to write about Jesus. "Many" (πολλοί, *polloi*) refers to his literary and or oral predecessors. For most scholars today, this would allude, at least, to Mark and Q. Q is a posited source or set of sources that contained teaching material from Jesus to which both Luke and Matthew had access. Those who hold to the existence of Q usually think that Mark was the first Gospel. For those who think Mark is first, Luke uses Mark, Q and a set of special traditions called "L." Others believe that Matthew is a source that precedes Luke, and

¹⁶ BDF 456.3.

¹⁷ See above for more examples, also cr. Fitzmyer, 290-91.

¹⁸ I. H. Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 41; G. Schneider, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (Okumenischer Taschenbuch Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 3; 2 vols.; Gerd Mohn: Gillersloher Verlagshaus, 1977) 38.

some who hold to Matthew as a source do not think an appeal to Q is necessary. When scholars hold to the Griesbach or Augustinian hypothesis, then Matthew is the first Gospel, and Luke's sources depend on which variation is preferred (Griesbach: Matthew, Luke, then Mark; Augustinian: Matthew, Mark, then Luke). Regardless of the view preferred, and good arguments exist on each side of the debate, Luke does tell us that he had predecessors, even if he does not name them for us.¹⁹

"Ἐπεχείρησαν (*epecheiresan*, "have set their hand," "attempted") describes the work of Luke's predecessors. The idea of "setting the hand" to tell a story might well suggest written accounts here, except that other terms in the context can suggest organized oral reports. So Luke's remark suggests the presence of written materials but need not be limited to such sources. Is this term neutral or pejorative? Did Luke think Jesus' story was well served by previous accounts? First, the term is the natural term to use for composing an account.²⁰ The use of κάμοι (*kamoi*, "and I also") in v 3 looks as if Luke joins himself to his predecessors.²¹ But Fitzmyer argues that the stress on accuracy and research shows Luke still thought work needed to be done. Klostermann also views a critique as implied.²²

However, another fact complicates the discussion. Luke's sequel makes his task unique as he seeks to join Jesus tradition and church history together. Luke adds to the recorded accounts of Jesus' ministry with more detail and includes the additional discussion of the church's rise (a third of the Gospel contains "L" material). He does so without necessarily downgrading his predecessors, who blazed a diffi-

¹⁹ G. Caird, *St Luke* (Pelican Gospel Commentaries; Baltimore: Penguin, 1963) 23-27. For evaluation of this issue, see the introduction and the excursus in the introduction to Luke 3:7-9 in D. L. Bock, *Luke* (forthcoming). See also S. McKnight, "Source Criticism," in *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation* (D. A. Black and D. Dockery eds.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming, 137-72); and R. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987).

²⁰ BAGD 304; Bauer, 6th ed., col. 617; H. J. Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, part 1, ed. by F. J. F. Jackson and K. Lake; London: MacMillan, 1922) I.2A93.

²¹ ARC. Leaney, *The Gospel According to St Luke* (2 ed.; Black's New Testament Commentaries; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966) 77; Marshall, 40-41; Creed, 3, and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St Luke* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1922) 2, have good discussions, as does G. Delling, *TDNT* 8.32-33, esp. n. 3. Here Delling makes it clear that a censure of the predecessors is not in view. He cites the 1st century B. C. historian Diodorus Siculus 1. 1.1-3. as a parallel. To this H. Conzelmann (*TDNT* 9:596) adds from the same work 1.2.7. and 1.4.4-5.

²² E. Klostermann, *Das Lukasevangelium* (HNT 5; 3d ed.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1975) 2.

cult trail ahead of him.²³ One can note the neutrality in the term by citing common usage from Moulton/Milligan.²⁴ Acts 9:29 and 19:13 represent other NT uses, which are more negative, but *καῖμοί* in Luke 1:3 is the key to the problem. The phrase is not as pejorative as Danker suggests when he includes the possibility of heretics in this group.²⁵ Along with Luke 1:3, the connection of these accounts with the apostolic eyewitnesses shows that they are seen in a good light (v 2).

Luke describes the previous accounts. *Ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν* (*anataxasthai diegesin*) means to "compile an orderly account." Fitzmyer has a detailed lexical survey of *διήγησις*, which refers to historical narrative.²⁶ *Ἀνατάξασθαι* refers to an orderly account.²⁷ Thus, others had given accounts of the events surrounding Jesus. Delling suggests that the term refers to the movement from oral to written tradition.²⁸ Taken with this sense, the Lucan reference is exclusively to written sources, but it is not guaranteed that this is the point. The term itself can refer to oral or written accounts, so the idea that only written accounts are in view cannot be defended merely from the use of this term.²⁹ This term is a technical expression of ancient historians for different kinds of recounting.³⁰

²³ For a defense of the unity of Luke-Acts and the prologue as serving both volumes, Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Studies of the New Testament and its world; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982) 4-6.

²⁴ Moulton and Milligan, 250-51; Cadbury (2:494), has a list of texts where the term is both neutral and pejorative. As always, context determines the proper force in a given example.

²⁵ F. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 24. For Bovon (34) the usage in Acts is decisive for a negative sense, but he calls the criticism "discrete."

²⁶ Fitzmyer, 292. Note also the discussion above.

²⁷ BAGD 61; Bauer, 6th ed., col. 122.

²⁸ G. Delling, *TDNT*, 8.32-33.

²⁹ For more on *διήγησις*; as meaning oral and written accounts, see key terms above and *TDNT* 2.909, where Buchsel provides a nice summary of usage. One parallel to note is Polybius 5. 31. 4.

³⁰ W. C. van Unnik, "Luke's Second Book and the Rules of Hellenistic Historiography," in *Les Actes des Apôtres: traditions, redaction, théologie* (BETL; ed. J. Kremer; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979) 40-42, cites Lucian's use of the term in *De Acte conscribentae historiae* (*On Writing History*) 47-48, cf. esp. 42, n. 23. See also W. C. van Unnik, "Once More St. Luke's Prologue," *Neot* 7 (1973) 7-26. It should be said, however, that when used in a prologue and tied to a term like "setting down an orderly account," the term suggests written or, at least, well-organized reports. Also arguing for written predecessors is L L du Plessis, "Once More: The Purpose of Luke's Prologue (Lk I 1-4)," *NovT* 16 (1974) 262-63. Written sources are still the most likely referent here. Our point is that it is not guaranteed that this is all that is meant.

These were not just any set of events. They had a special character. *Περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ὑμῖν πραγμάτων* (*peri ton peplerophorememon en hemin pragmaton*) means "concerning the fulfilled events among us." The meaning of "fulfilled" is disputed.³¹ Does it mean 1) "completed events";³² 2) "assured events";³³ or 3) "fulfilled events"?³⁴ The third meaning, "fulfilled," is the best since Luke's emphasis in his volumes is on the fulfillment of God's plan (Luke 1:20, 57; 2:6, 21-22; 4:21; 9:31; 21:22, 24; 24:44-47). The passive participle *πεπληροφορημένων* ("which were being fulfilled") suggests God's acts with its use of the "theological" passive.³⁵ These fulfilled past events continue to color how one should see the present. The effect of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection lives on. Luke will chronicle one of the immediate effects, the rise of the church, in his second volume. In Acts, Luke makes the point that Jesus continues to work in the world as the exalted Lord (Acts 1:1-5).

These divinely wrought events did not occur in a corner. *Ἐν ἡμῖν* describes "events fulfilled *among us*." At the minimum, the first person plural pronoun refers to those believers who saw the time of salvation history's initiation, the "first generation." Both Fitzmyer and Leaney stress the reference here is to those who observed these events.³⁶ Leaney is more narrow, taking "us" to refer to only this original group. But Fitzmyer correctly extends the reference to all affected by salvation history, as does Marshall.³⁷ Dillon argues that this phrase moves away from a reference only to the original events to the effect of those events in a later time for all who came to believe. It refers to the "second" and "third" generations.³⁸ He notes correctly that the perfect tense of the participle "fulfilled" can include a reference to a group that was not originally present at these events. Past and present believers are united by these events and share in

³¹ Fitzmyer, 293.

³² So Cadbury, 2.495-96. Cf. RSV, NASB--"things which have been accomplished." Similar translations are found in Neu Luther and Zurcher.

³³ K. Rengstorf, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (NTD 3; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1937) 14.

³⁴ Fitzmyer, 293, Marshall, 41, E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Luke* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 11. Du Plessis, Luke 263-64. Cf. NN, NKJV--"things that have been fulfilled." The German *Einheitsubersetzung* speaks of events which occurred among us and were fulfilled, combining meanings one and three. Marshall, 41. A "theological" passive is the use of the passive voice when the context suggests that God acts.

³⁶ Fitzmyer, 293-94; Leaney, 77.

³⁷ Marshall, 41.

³⁸ R Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word* (AnBib 82; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978) 271, n. 115. The perfect participle suggests a broader time frame for the remark.

their significance. The historical ground that produced this impact is the topic of Luke's two volumes.

The Source of Earlier Accounts: 1:2. Luke 1:2 details the ultimate source for these accounts. The conjunction καθώς (*kathos*, "even as") describes how the accounts originated by comparing the previous accounts about Jesus to their point of origin.³⁹ The term stresses the reliable basis on which these accounts rested (Marshall, 41). The accounts of v 1 go back to traditions passed down to the reporters by the eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word. There is a two step process described here; but the nature of the sources guarantees the quality. Luke still is discussing the other earlier accounts here, not his own study, which he will describe in Luke 1:3-4.

The ultimate sources of the Jesus tradition are described by two terms, αὐτόπται (*autoptai*, "eyewitnesses") and ὑπηρέται (*hyperetai*, "ministers"). Here is a clear allusion to the original oral level of the tradition. This is the only NT use of this term for eyewitness. These servants served Jesus' cause as eyewitnesses who preached the Jesus they saw.⁴⁰ Fitzmyer notes that the word order favors a reference to one group that holds a twofold role: early witnesses who became ministers of the Word.⁴¹ The one article, οἱ (*hoi*, "the"), and the trailing participial phrase, γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου (*genomenoi tou logou*, "became of the Word"), argue for this view, though the plural makes it less than certain, since the Granville-Sharp rule does not apply in plural constructions. Fitzmyer suggests the reference is to those disciples who became apostles. Those eyewitnesses go back to "the beginning" (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, *ap arche*) of Jesus' ministry, a ministry that started after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist (Acts 1:21-22; 10:37-41). One group is referred to as they functioned in two stages of church history: they saw, and then they reported.⁴²

Fitzmyer argues that Luke is a third-generation Christian because before him there were 1) those present at the beginning and 2) those who ministered the Word.⁴³ But if the same group is present

³⁹ Fitzmyer, 294; BDF 453.

⁴⁰ K Rengstorf, *TDNT*, 8.543; also W. Michaelis, *TDNT*, 5.348, 373. Luke will call these men "witnesses" later in Luke-Acts (Luke 24:44-48; Acts 1:8). Such eyewitnesses were important to ancient historians, Thucydides 1. 22. 2. Josephus Ag. Ap. 1. 10. 55, and Lucian's parody in *Variae Hist* (True History) 1.4; Du Plessis, 265.

⁴¹ Fitzmyer, 294; J. Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* (Word Biblical Commentary 35a; Dallas: Word, 1989) 7.

⁴² So also E. E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, (New Century Bible; London: Oliphants, Marshall, & Scott, 1974), 65; For details, see Dillon, 270-71, esp. n. 114. The title of this work alludes to the unified view of this phrase.

⁴³ Fitzmyer, 294; also Goulder, 201.

in these two periods" then Luke could be a direct descendent of the original group. Even though Luke may be "second generation," he is describing three stages of history in the tradition: 1) the experienced events; 2) the witnesses' formulation of the events' tradition; and 3) the recording of that tradition and the reflection upon those events. Ellis' description of Luke as second generation is more accurate than seeing Luke in the third generation.⁴⁴

The reference to the Word is to the Christian message about Jesus, which was a message about divine events.⁴⁵ The Word preached as God's authoritative message is powerful.⁴⁶ The ministers served not their own ends, but the cause of God's message.⁴⁷

The message was preached and it was passed on, as *παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν* (paredosan hemin, "passed on to us") indicates. This verb, *παρέδοσαν*, is a technical term for passing on official tradition.⁴⁸ Since an account (v 1) was made of what these ministers passed on (v 2), it is likely that the reference in v 2 is to apostolic oral tradition.⁴⁹ The reference to "us" in v 2 alludes to the tradition's transmission to a later generation of the church, to those of Luke's time. The appeal to eyewitnesses is more than mere literary convention. Creed notes against Cadbury that one mentions eyewitnesses in the hope that one's account will be believed. The recording of this tradition preserves this important material for all time.

Luke's Contribution (1:3-4)

Luke Describes His Work: 1:3. This verse introduces the main clause of the prologue. Here is Luke's view of his own work. *Ἔδοξε καὶ μοί* (*edoxe kamoï*) means "it seemed well to me also."⁵⁰ Luke wishes to join himself to those others who have catalogued the events of Jesus' life. As v 2 makes clear, they drew from the apostolic tradition for these accounts. Luke joins a line of accounts about Jesus. Most agree that Luke wishes to add to this tradition of writing because he feels he has something to contribute (Schneider, Fitzmyer). Any

⁴⁴ Ellis, 65.

⁴⁵ H. K. Luce, *The Gospel According to S. Luke* (Cambridge Greek Testament; London: Cambridge University Press, 1933) 82.

⁴⁶ Cf. Leaney (77), who mentions the responses to Jesus and the apostles throughout this book as examples of this theme; Luke 4:22; 6:17; Acts 2:36-37; 4:13-14.

⁴⁷ Marshall, 42.

⁴⁸ 1 Cor 11:2, 23; 15:3; Mark 7:13; Jude 3; Fitzmyer, 296. On the form of this aorist verb, cf. BDF 95. 1.

⁴⁹ So also J. M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (London: MacMillan, 1930) 4.

⁵⁰ The grammatical parallels to the *ἔδοξε καὶ μοί* construction are Acts 15:22, 25, and 28; Fitzmyer, 296.

description of Luke's meaning contrasting him to his predecessors does not honor the presence of **καί** (*kai*, "and") in the verse.⁵¹

Luke notes four characteristics of his work in v 3, but the meaning of several terms in the verse is disputed. So the terms surrounding each characteristic need careful study in order to determine exactly what Luke asserts. The first key term is **παρηκολουθηκότι** (*parekolouthekoti*), whose literal rendering is "having followed along closely." The verb basically means "to follow," but its precise force here is very much debated.⁵² Though six possibilities exist for the term, the dispute boils down to three options. 1) The term refers to "following closely the progress of certain events," so it means, "to keep up with a movement."⁵³ In this view, it refers to following something with interest or by association, as opposed to describing research. 2) The term refers to the investigation of past events.⁵⁴ 3) Some Fathers took the term differently, referring it to Luke as a self-description of his role as an apostolic follower. They argue it means to accompany, a meaning that is close to the first sense found here, but that stresses Luke's direct involvement more than the first view would (Irenaeus *Ag. Her.* 3. 10; Justin, *Dial. with Trypho* 103). If this third sense were the meaning, one wonders why Luke would appeal so strongly to the testimony of others as eyewitnesses, since he would have been one himself. Why would Luke be so obtuse about his own direct involvement?

Haenchen argued strongly for the second view against Cadbury. Haenchen asserted that the meaning "to investigate" was present in Josephus and that Cadbury's interpretation did not fit the Lucan context.⁵⁵ A check of Josephus will show that he meant "to follow," but with a catch. The idea was to follow an account or events so as to understand them. If Luke's meaning parallels that of Josephus, then the gospel writer is asserting here that he gave careful attention to the events, something that implies investigation, since he did not experience all the events.

Haenchen continues his case against Cadbury by noting one cannot be intimately associated "carefully," which is what Cadbury's

⁵¹ **Κάμοί** is crasis for **καί** plus **μοί**. It means "and to me" or "also to me."

⁵² Fitzmyer, 296.

⁵³ So Cadbury, "'We' and 'I' in Luke-Acts," *NTS* 3 (1956-57) 131, who argues the meaning "to investigate" is unattested in Greek, so also Luce, 82. Cadbury's argument has roots in an earlier article, "The Knowledge Claimed in Luke's Preface," *Exp Tim* 24 (1922) 401-21, where he notes the six possibilities for the verb. So translates RSV.

⁵⁴ So most take it including Fitzmyer, Creed, Ellis, Schweizer, Marshall, and G. Kittel. *TDNT* 1.215-16, who cites Polybius 3. 32. 2; and Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 1. 10. 53; *Life* 357.

⁵⁵ Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 1. 10. 53 and 1 23. 218; E. Haenchen, "Das 'Wit' in der Apostelgeschichte und das Itinerar," *ZTK* 58 (1961) 263-65.

linking his sense of the term to ἀκριβῶς (*akribos*) would mean. Also ἄνωθεν (*anohen*) is unlikely to mean "a long time" which is what it must mean for Cadbury's definition of the term to stand.⁵⁶ Now Luke is not an eyewitness, so his ability "to follow" the events carefully can only be the result of investigation.⁵⁷ Robertson also entered the discussion, noting that the choice for "investigation" is contextually generated because of the perfect participial form of the verb, since the meaning is that Luke "followed along" before he wrote.⁵⁸ So Luke declares first of all that his work is the fruit of investigation.

The second description applies to the extent of the investigation. It is tied to the term ἄνωθεν (*anohen*) in the phrase ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς (*anohen pasin akribos*), which could be translated "from the beginning all things [or events] carefully." However, ἄνωθεν can mean either "from the beginning"⁵⁹ or "for a long time."⁶⁰ If the latter translation is chosen, Luke refers to the length of his personal study. The solution comes from Lucan usage. The parallelism of the expression ἀπ' ἀρχῆς; with Luke 1:1 and Acts 26:4-5 suggests the first meaning here.⁶¹ An emphasis on the length of the study would make the later reference to the care of the study somewhat redundant. So Luke makes a temporal reference back to the earliest events.

Fitzmyer raises the question if the beginning referred to here is the start of Jesus' life (with the birth of John the Baptist) or the beginning of the apostolic tradition. He opts for the latter but gives no clear reasons.⁶² The first option remains the best.⁶³ If one notes the emphasis on fulfillment in the infancy material and also the unique contribution of Luke to this period of Jesus' life, then it would seem natural that Luke intends to say that his inquiry goes back to the very begin-

⁵⁶ Cadbury takes ἀκριβῶς with γράψαι (*grapsai*, "to write") in order to solve the contextual problem of his view. So in his view, Luke writes carefully. But word order makes such a connection grammatically unlikely, as Creed makes clear, 5.

⁵⁷ See Plummer, 4, for a defense of the term with this meaning; BAGD 619 cites other ancient texts; also Bauer, 6th ed., col. 64. Among them are the already noted texts Josephus' *Ag. Ap.* 1.10. 53; 1. 23 218; du Plessis, 267.

⁵⁸ A. T. Robertson, "The Implications in Luke's Preface," *Exp Tim*, 35 (1924) 319-21. Robertson believes that Luke may have been an eyewitness to the events, but the language of the earlier verse makes this unlikely for the events in Luke's Gospel. The "we" sections of Acts are another matter.

⁵⁹ So hold most including Buchsel, *TDNT*, 1.378. So read NKJV ("from the first"), NIV, NASB, *Neu Luther, Zucher*, and the *Einheitsubersetzung*.

⁶⁰ So Cadbury and Marshall; for options, see BAGD, 77; Bauer, 6th ed., col. 153, 2a. So reads RSV:

⁶¹ Luce, 82-83. Even though ἀνωθεν in Acts 26:5 means "a long time," it looks back to the earliest point in Paul's ministry, where it is paired with ἀπ' ἀρχῆς in v 4.

⁶² Fitzmyer, 298.

⁶³ Schneider, 39, Plummer, 4, Creed, 4.

nings of this life. Therefore, though Jesus' ministry does not begin until after John the Baptist, the fulfillment starts with his coming to earth, a coming that is paralleled to and contrasted with that of John the Baptist in Luke 1-2. As such, Luke may well have viewed his new material on the infancy to be a contribution to the church's information about Jesus. So his material goes back to the start of the story.

The reference to "everything" (πᾶσιν, *pasin*), gives a third characteristic of Luke's work. It tells what he studied. He not only investigated the accounts and went back to the beginning, but he also looked at everything. A question exists whether "everything" is masculine, referring to the study of all the sources, or is neuter, referring to the study "events."⁶⁴ If "from the beginning" refers to the events starting from the infancy narrative, then it is most natural to see a reference to events here as well. Fitzmyer seems inconsistent in taking the previous phrase to refer to apostolic tradition, while referring this phrase to events; Luke examined all the events going back to Jesus' birth.⁶⁵ Given Luke's associations in the church, he could make such inquiries. Given his personal acquaintances, we should not think of Luke as a student locked up in a library, especially since written material was so rare in the ancient world. Here is an inquiring student who took in whatever he could, oral or written.

Ἀκριβῶς (*akribos*) describes a fourth characteristic of Luke's study. It tells how Luke did his work.⁶⁶ He investigated the material "carefully." Some commentators try to place this description on how Luke wrote his material rather than as a description of his investigation. But the word order of the sentence makes this connection less likely. So, Luke's study is the fruit of a careful and thorough investigation going back to Jesus' birth.

Luke describes his undertaking with καθεξῆς σοι ψράψαι (*kathexes soi grapsai*, "to write an orderly account for you"). The connection of καθεξῆς; could be disputed. 1) Does it describe the manner of study and go with παρηκολουθηκότι? If so, it means "having investigated in an orderly manner." 2) Or does it describe the nature of the account? If so, it goes with γράψαι and means, "it seemed good to write an orderly account for you." The parallel structure of the prologue argues for καθεξῆς describing what Luke wrote for Theophilus, or view 2.⁶⁷ Luke writes an orderly account of these events.

⁶⁴ Fitzmyer, 297, opts for the latter.

⁶⁵ So agrees Klostermann, 3.

⁶⁶ Josephus liked this term to describe his work, *Ag. Ap.* 1. 10. 53; *J. W.* 1.2.6. 17; du Plessis, 268 n. 50.

⁶⁷ Fitzmyer, 298, who correctly notes on the other view the parallel line starting with σοι would be very short. Almost all translations go this way.

But to what does *καθεξῆς*, "an orderly account," refer? Is the order 1) "broadly chronological,"⁶⁸ 2) "a literary systematic presentation,"⁶⁹ 3) "a salvation-historical linkage."⁷⁰ 4) "a complete presentation,"⁷¹ 5) "a continuous series,"⁷² 6) the presentation that follows the prologue,⁷³ or 7) a presentation without gaps?⁷⁴

One can only determine this question by what Luke has done. It would seem that the first three views all have some merit; but each by itself is inadequate. Luke is broadly chronological in its flow, but not strictly so. There is some rearrangement of material (e.g., Luke 4:16-30 from Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:1-13, where the temptations' order differs from Matthew; and the placement of John the Baptist's imprisonment before Herod, Luke 3:19-20). These rearrangements and others rule out a strictly chronological arrangement though a general chronology is present in the Gospel.

There is a literary, geographical arrangement to the material as well. This movement goes Galilee, Samaria, Jerusalem, Judea-Samaria, and then Rome. This arrangement is not artificial since it represents the broad geographical sweep of Jesus' ministry and the church's growth. However, the organization of this material with this clear emphasis is Luke's work.

The order also is salvation historical in that it shows the growth of the faith under God's direction. This growth starts from its founder and works to one of the most representative messengers of the faith, Paul. This salvation-historical focus runs from Israel to the Gentiles. It moves from promise in the infancy material to fulfillment in Jesus' ministry and in the church. This two-part promise fulfillment structure for God's plan has more merit than the threefold division advocated by Conzelmann (promise, Jesus, church), since it is not entirely clear that Luke separates the Jesus period from the church period as

⁶⁸ So argue Marshall and Plummer.

⁶⁹ So argues Fitzmyer, who cites Acts 11:4 as a parallel.

⁷⁰ So Schneider, both in his commentary and in an article (see n.73 below).

⁷¹ G. Klein, "Lukas 1,1-4 als theologisches Programm," in G. Braumann, *Das Lukas-Evangelium* (Weg der Forschung 28; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974) 194-96.

⁷² M. Volkel, "Exegetische Erwagungen zum Verstandnis des Begriffs *καθεξῆς* im lukanischen Prolog," *NTS* 20 (1973-74) 289-99.

⁷³ J. Klirzinger, "Lk 1,3:... ἀκριβῶς *καθεξῆς* σοι γράψαι," *BZ* 18 (1974) 249-55.

⁷⁴ F. Mussner, "*Καθεξῆς* im Lukasprolog" in Jesus und Paulus (ed E. E. Ellis and E. Grasser; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975) 253-55. Evaluation and rejection ' of views 4-7 can be found in G. Schneider, Lur Bedeutung von *καθεξῆς* im lukanischen Doppelwerk," *ZNW* 68 (1977) 128-31. It is hard to determine the difference between views 4 and 7, except that view 4 says the account is full, while view 7 might suggest it is exhaustive.

greatly as Conzelmann implies.⁷⁵ Thus, the order of Luke's account works on many levels.⁷⁶ It is broadly chronological, geographic, and salvation historical.

Now Schneider correctly argues that the focus of the account is salvation historical. Luke does not just link the events but shows that what has been fulfilled gives assurance about what is still to be fulfilled: worldwide proclamation of the gospel and Jesus' return.⁷⁷ He appeals especially to Acts 3:17-24 and 11:4 for this concept. Schneider has put his finger on a significant part of Luke's concern, but his restriction of assurance to future events is too limiting when one looks at Luke 1:4 in light of the whole of Luke-Acts.⁷⁸ Luke is also interested in Christology and Gentile mission.

The recipient of the book comes next with *κράτιστε Θεόφιλε* (*kratiste Theophile*, "most excellent Theophilus"). The identity and spiritual status of Theophilus are unknown. Some have suggested that the name is symbolic of "pious Christians," since the name means "beloved of God."⁷⁹ However, the address to him in the vocative *κράτιστε*, "most excellent," seems to indicate a specific person of high social standing (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25).⁸⁰ This greeting could suggest that Theophilus is the patron or monetary backer of Luke's work (so Ellis), but there is no clear way to determine this point. Marshall, Caird, and Fitzmyer mention traditions and speculation about his exact identity.⁸¹ Is Theophilus a believer or an interested unbeliever? This question turns on v 4 and the meaning of *κατηχήθης* (*katechethes*, "you were instructed" or "you were informed"). Caird argues that an unbeliever is present because the dedication is too formal for a reference to a believer and because Luke's work is apologetic in character.⁸² But these arguments are not convincing. Luke's prologue is formal because it purposely has taken on a literary character. As

⁷⁵ Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 77-83; D. Bock, "A Theology of Luke-Acts," in *A Biblical Theology of the Bible*, vol. 2 (ed. R Zuck, E. Merrill, and D. Bock; Chicago: Moody, forthcoming).

⁷⁶ Tiede, 37, who alludes to Lucian's comparison of a historian's work to a work of a fine sculptor.

⁷⁷ G. Schneider, "Zur Bedeutung," 128-31.

⁷⁸ See Luke 1:4 discussion.

⁷⁹ Plummer, 5, seems to waver between a symbol and a real person.

⁸⁰ This is the polite form of address, BDF 60. 2. However, that Theophilus is of high rank is not guaranteed; Bovon, 39, n. 64. See Theophrastus Charatares 5, who says that the address is usimple flattering speech. Nonetheless, Luke's usage does strongly suggest a person of high standing.

⁸¹ Marshall, 43; Caird, 44; Fitzmyer, 299-300; Ps.-Clementine Recognitions 10.71.

⁸² Caird, 44; So also argues H. W. Beyer, *TDNT*, 3.639. Bovon, 41, also prefers a profane sense, "to know."

such the formality need not indicate the audience beyond suggesting someone of high culture. Luke's goal, as stated in the preface, is to give knowledge or assurance (see below ἀσφάλειαν, *asphaleian* in v 4). The characterization of the Gospel as apologetic is not the best description of the work. The contents of the Gospel and Acts do not represent a defense but a proclamation of Jesus, a review of his teaching and that of the church about which Theophilus has already heard (v 4). So, edification and encouragement better describe Luke's goal. If this description is correct, then Luke is probably addressing a new believer, or at least one whose faith needs bolstering. Since Theophilus is a name used both by Greeks and Jews, the name does not indicate the nationality of Theophilus.⁸³ However, "his social station suggests that he is probably a Gentile, as does the amount of energy Luke spends in Acts defending the Gentile mission. Nevertheless, just because the work is dedicated to Theophilus does not mean that Luke intended his work for just one individual. Other ancient writers dedicated their works to individuals knowing full well that they were writing for a larger audience (Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 1. I. 1-5).

Luke's Purpose: 1:4. Luke 1:4 covers the purpose of Luke's work. Luke wants Theophilus to realize something about the material.⁸⁴ What is realized is ἀσφάλειαν. However, the meaning of ἀσφάλειαν ("truth," "trustworthiness," "assurance") is disputed. Is its meaning vouching for the message's 1) correctness; 2) reliability, or 3) is it giving certainty-assurance to the reader? Is Luke interested in accurate facts (view 1) or more (views 2 and 3)? The Greek word's position at the end of the sentence is emphatic, so it is a key term for Luke. Lucan usage again answers the question. In Acts 2:36; 21:34; 22:30; and 25:26, he consistently uses the term of assurance or of determining the facts with certainty.⁸⁵ Thus, Luke wishes Theophilus, and those who have questions like him, to be certain of the teaching's truth (ie., either view 2 or 3).

The resulting assurance is probably not of a political nature. Luke is not writing an apology to a Roman official who wonders if Christianity should be granted a legal status. Schweizer notes these volumes are too long and deal too little with political issues to be

⁸³ Fitzmyer, 299.

⁸⁴ So one should read ἐπιγνώσῃς (*epignos*, "you might know"). G. Bertram (*TDNT*, 1.704) argues it means "to confirm," but this comes more from the context than from the term itself; Acts 22:24; 23:28.

⁸⁵ Fitzmyer, 300; Creed, 5; Marshall, 44; K. L. Schmidt, *TDNT*, 1.506, who cites the Lucan usage noted above. In the LXX the term normally refers to something that is safe or secure (2 Macc. 3:22), as it does in Acts 5:23. Its tie in Luke to a verb of knowing means it looks to a psychological goal. It refers to knowing the truth, but doing so securely.

written for that purpose.⁸⁶ What official, he asks, would wade through all this information for just that point? Rather, it seems that the assurance is of a religious, theological nature.⁸⁷ Theophilus' question would seem to be, "Is Christianity what I believed it to be, a religion sent from God?" Perhaps such doubt resulted from the judgment suffered by the church, especially as a result of its inclusion of Gentiles. Why should a Gentile suffer frustration for joining what was originally a Jewish movement? Is the church suffering God's judgment because she has been too generous with God's salvation? Will the rest of God's promises come to pass? Questions like these seem to be Luke's concern in Acts, where Gentile mission and Paul's ministry receive detailed review. Can one really be sure Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise and brings God's salvation both now and in the future? By the emphasis on fulfillment in Jesus (v 1), Luke intends to answer these questions with a resounding "yes." The gospel of Jesus is from God and is available for all, Jew and Gentile alike (Marshall, 43-44).

The phrase *περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων* (*peri hon katechethes logon*, "concerning matters on which you were instructed") tells us Theophilus knows something about Jesus. The meaning of this phrase is disputed, but that meaning is clarified once *ἀσφάλεια* is shown to mean "certainty" or "assurance." *Λόγων* (*logon*) can mean 1) "matters" and refer to the events of salvation (Luke 7:17; Acts 8:21; 15:6). It can also refer to 2) "instruction" (Luke 4:32; 10:39). *Κατηχήθης* (*katechethes*) can refer 1) to "a report of information" (Acts 21:24, so Cadbury, RSV) or 2) to "receiving instruction," (Luke 1:20; 6:47; Acts 18:25; NKJV; NIV; NASB; *Neu Luther, Einheitsiibersetzung*; and *Zurcher*).⁸⁸ The difference in sense for the options surrounding *κατηχήθης* is that the first meaning could refer to a report of information given to anyone, including an unbeliever, while the second sense looks more to received teaching and would imply a believer is addressed. Since the reference to assurance suggests that a new believer is addressed, a reference to instruction is the most likely sense. More importantly, the amount of material in the Gospel pressing for commitment and for remaining faithful until Christ returns also suggests this force. Luke's Gospel is not pressing for decision, but for faithfulness.

Whether *λόγων* means "events" or "teaching" is less certain, since either meaning can fit the context. Fortunately, the difference between the two senses is slight. Whether they were taught about the events or

⁸⁶ Schweizer, 13.

⁸⁷ G. Schneider, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, 40.

⁸⁸ For options, see also Fitzmyer, 301. This is not a reference to a formal catechism, though this term can refer to a catechism, but rather it means simple instruction (Gal 6:6; Rom 2:18; 1 Cor 14:19).

simply given teaching, the result is virtually the same. If teaching is in view, then the events' significance may be included in the remark. But since the events are seen as "fulfillments" (v 1) anyway, the difference becomes almost meaningless. Luke's point is that Theophilus reconsider the teaching that he had previously received. He is to receive assurance about that teaching as a result of reading Luke's account. Ellis suggests that heretical teaching, perhaps of a gnostic-like flavor, was circulating in the church, but it is more likely that the assurance deals with the pressures produced by a church suffering rejection and persecution.⁸⁹ Such concern about the nature and extent of God's salvation is the subject of the accounts in Acts. Luke's goal is to give Theophilus assurance concerning the events of salvation's fulfillment tied to Jesus, a salvation that even involves the Gentiles and about which Luke's reader has already received instruction.

Conclusion

The goal of Luke's prologue is to place his work alongside other, church materials that have recounted the eyewitness, apostolic testimony about Jesus. Luke's contribution to this type of account is found in a fresh presentation of this salvation history starting from John the Baptist's birth and running through the extension of the church into Rome. Luke's work involved investigation that was thorough and careful. In the orderliness of the account and its careful, systematic presentation, Luke hoped to reassure Theophilus and those like him about the certainty of what the apostles taught about Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment both of God's promise and salvation, which are now available directly to all nations.⁹⁰

Many have suggested that because Luke's prologue used a literary convention in making claims about accuracy, it proves nothing about the real historical character of his work. The argument goes, Luke makes great claims for accuracy, as other ancients did who in fact were not very accurate.⁹¹ It must be noted, however, that the goal of what Luke wishes to accomplish, assurance, is greatly affected by his accuracy. Also, unlike many of the historians to whom Luke is compared, Luke writes within a period contemporary to the events he describes. As a result, his ability to be careless with the facts is limited. Assurance grounded in "propaganda" that can be readily exposed is no

⁸⁹ Ellis, 66.

⁹⁰ Bovon, 31, compares this emphasis on the account's trustworthiness to John 20:30-31; 21:24-25; Rev 1:1-3; 22:18-19. Note also 2 Pet 1:16-18.

⁹¹ So Cadbury, who is very responsible for this view, and most recently, C. H. Talbert, *Reading Luke* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 10-11.

great comfort to the doubting, For Luke to produce false propaganda in a period when people had experienced what had happened would be counter productive.

One could also question the morals of a writer who believes in a religion which stresses the telling of the truth, and yet goes on in fact to misrepresent the history he describes. Such moral constraints did not exist for many ancient secular writers. Thus, the comparison of Luke to these other prefaces, though superficially compelling, does not deal with the unique personal and religious factors controlling Luke's account. The test of Luke's accuracy lies in the analysis of his work, for he possibly did not execute his goal well. However, a cavalier dismissal of the claims of his preface is not possible either. Neither does a quick appeal to extrabiblical parallels do justice to the statement of the author's goals. Luke's desire is to assure Theophilus, or anyone who reads his Gospel, of the truth of the apostolic teaching about Jesus. His claim is that he was careful about his task in order to achieve this goal. He had precedent grounded in eyewitness testimony, and Luke sought to build carefully on that precedent. One must examine the account to see if Luke met his own standard with the presumption that he tried to do so.

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