

Luke's opening sentence

Luke begins with a long sentence of forty-two words (in Greek) explaining his qualifications for writing, his methods, his aim, and the circumstances in which he is doing his writing.

'Since many have undertaken to compile an account of the things that were accomplished among us ^{□1} (in agreement with those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word) ^{□2}, it seemed fitting for me as well, having followed everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in an orderly manner – most excellent Theophilus ^{□3} – so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught ^{□4}.'

□1 1:1

□2 1:2

□3 1:2

□4 1:2

These words let us know a lot about how the gospels were written.

1. Facts

1. **The gospel of Jesus is about facts.** *'Since many have undertaken to compile an account of the things that were accomplished among us...'* Certain events had taken place, and everyone knew about them. There were people who made known these basic facts, 'the things that were accomplished'.

2. Momentous and significant events

2. **The gospel of Jesus is about momentous and significant events.** The word that Luke uses, 'accomplished', suggests that these great events were brought about by God. They were 'fulfilled' or 'accomplished'. God had said that He would do certain things, things that were impossible for men and women; the time came when He 'accomplished' them.

3. The events were well known to the early Christians

3. **The events of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus were well known to the early Christians.** Luke says they were things that happened 'among us'. The early Christians included people who had witnessed for themselves Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension, people like Mary, the mother of Jesus, and James, the brother of Jesus, and dozens more. They were some of the 120 people who had been present on the day of Pentecost.

4. Luke had predecessors

4. **Luke had predecessors.** Others had written 'gospels' before Luke wrote this one. Many people had *'undertaken to compile an account of the things that were accomplished'*. The gospel of Jesus had **partly** been handed down orally, but there were **also** some written records. Some disciples may have taken notes of Jesus' teaching. So there were plenty of witnesses to the facts of the gospel. Luke refers not to two groups of people (that is, one group who were 'eyewitnesses' and another who were 'servants of the Word') but to one group who were both 'eyewitnesses and servants of the Word'.

• Witnesses and preachers

(i) Some people were eyewitnesses of the gospel but were not servants of the Word. They had seen what had happened but were not specially called to be preachers.

(ii) Some people were servants of the Word but were not eyewitnesses. They had become preachers later but were not among the original group who had actually seen Jesus in His life and ministry and death and resurrection.

(iii) Some people were neither eyewitnesses nor servants of the Word.

They were neither preachers nor had they been present with the physically risen Jesus.

(iv) Some people were **both** eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus **and** preachers of the Word of God. It was this small but well-informed and highly qualified group of people who were present at the beginning of the historical events of the Christian faith. They gave the next generation ('to us') the outline of the events that had taken place.

Other Gospels

- Mark – short
- Matthew for Jewish readers
- Luke – extra material – for Gentiles

So Luke is joining a group of people who had already written accounts of what had happened. *'It seemed fitting for me as well...'* says Luke. Others had written gospels. He wants to write a gospel as well. Why should he want to write another one? He is not **criticising** his predecessors, but he feels that he has a contribution to make, and that he can add to what they have already done. Mark's Gospel was short. Luke had much more information and the Christians would benefit by having the extra material that Luke had. Matthew's Gospel was very Jewish; it was specially designed for Jews and it was laid out in a way that was intended to show Jews that Jesus was their Messiah, and to explain to Jews why and how it happened that the gospel was going out to the entire world.

Luke's Gospel



- Carefully researched
- Mostly chronological
- Written for a high-born Christian

Luke needed to write a gospel that included the extra information he had. It was designed for Gentiles and used the style of a Greek historian.

Luke tells us how he set about his work. He wrote *'having followed everything carefully from the beginning'*. The word 'follow' here means to observe closely, to investigate, to follow along with what has happened. Then Luke says he wrote out his material *'in an orderly manner'*. It is mostly in chronological order. On the few occasions when it is out of order (such as in Luke 3:19–20), the material is being put in a section dealing with the same subject matter.

He says that he wrote for a high-born Christian, named Theophilus. *'It seemed fitting for me... to write it out for you . . . most excellent Theophilus'*. His purpose was that this man 'might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.'

These claims of Luke in Luke 1:1–4 fit what is known about Luke from other sources. Luke is concerned to tell the facts about Jesus, showing that He is the One who brings salvation to the entire world.

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