

Luke's purpose in writing Luke and Acts was to write a defence of Christianity, somewhat akin to a legal brief. If this theory is correct, Luke's writings were designed to defend Paul in court against charges of insurrection and, at the same time, to defend Christianity against the charge that it was an illegal, anti-Roman religion.

2.7. Conclusion

- Like every good author Luke remains in the shadows but the reason he gives for writing his two books is 'so that we may know the certainty of the things we have been taught' Luke 1:4
- Above all Luke wants his gentile audience to know the historical account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and how the early church exploded all across the Roman world.

3. Questions to consider at home

1. Why was Luke important to Paul?
2. Why does Luke write to Theophilus?
3. Why had 'many undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us' Luke 1:1?
4. If every good author leaves an imprint of themselves from what they write, what do we learn about Luke from his two books in the Bible?
5. A close friend argues that he cannot trust what is written in the Gospels because unfortunately they were written so far after the events that we cannot rely on the memory of the eye witnesses. How would you respond?
6. Does it matter that we do not know who Theophilus was?

Matthew Street 7th November 2021



The Parish of Foxcote with Shoscombe

Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-5 - The words we leave behind will be a lasting picture of who we are

Passage, Talk Notes and Questions

1. Talk Passage – Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-5

Luke 1:1-4

1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. 3 With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught

Acts 1:1-5

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit."

2. Talk Notes

2.1. Introduction

- How many of us have looked at a great work of art, watched a famous film, listened to a well known piece of music or read a great book or poem and then thought I wonder what this tells me about the artist, the film director, the composer, author or poet?
- I suspect many of us, here today, are not budding artists, film directors, composers, authors or poets but in our own small way we are all leaving a little imprint of ourselves on those around us.
- Once a year on All Saints Sunday we come together to remember the imprint that our loved ones have made on us. All of us will in some little way reflect those who we have journeyed with. There will be phrases that we use, mannerisms that we have and habits that we have formed.
- Although we know few facts about Luke's life. He has left us a strong impression of himself by what he wrote. In his gospel, which is the longest of the four, he emphasises Jesus Christ's compassion. He vividly records both the power of Christ's life and the care with which he treated people. Luke highlights the relationships Jesus had with women and some scholars would argue that he actually met Mary the mother of Jesus and that his gospel is in many ways her eye witness account of the facts. His writing in Acts is full of sharp verbal pictures of real people caught up in some of the greatest events of history.
- Let us therefore learn:
 - i) Who Luke was,
 - ii) What was the subject matter of his two books,
 - iii) What was his methodology,
 - iv) Why he wrote his two books, and finally
 - v) Who was Theophilus to whom Luke wrote both books?

2.2. Who was Luke?

- We learn three important facts about Luke from three of Paul's letters:
 - i) Firstly, that Luke was a doctor. Paul writes towards the end of his letter to the Colossians, written whilst he was under house arrest: *'Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings'* Colossians 4:14.
 - ii) Secondly, that Luke was a fellow worker with Paul. From Paul's letter to Philemon, in whose home the Colossian church meets, Paul writes: *'Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.'* Philemon 23-4.
 - iii) Thirdly, that Luke was a travelling companion of Paul's. Towards the end of the last letter we have of Paul's in scripture we read: *'Only Luke is with me.'* 2 Timothy 4:11
- Luke started travelling with Paul on his second missionary journey as they set sail from Troas to Neapolis: *'From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis'* Acts 16:11. and was clearly with Paul from then onwards.

2.3. What was his subject matter?

- *'In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven'* Acts 1:1-2. In his Gospel Luke wrote an historical account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and detailed the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire in his second book, the Acts of Apostles

2.4. What was his methodology?

- Luke also wants his readers to know about his methodology:
 - i) Firstly that he has carefully investigated the facts: *'I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning'* Luke 1:3 and
 - ii) Secondly that he has made an orderly account: *'I too decided to write an orderly account'* Luke 1:3
- Luke does this *'so that we may know the certainty of the things we have been taught'* Luke 1:4. Luke is keen for us to know that he was a careful and exact historian and throughout his gospel we get little snippets of conversations that suggest he must have spent time talking to the eye witnesses. For example in Luke 2:19 we read: *'But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.'*

2.5. Why did Luke write his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles?

- *'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.'* Luke 1:1-2. We learn two important things from this verse:
 - i) Firstly, that Luke's Gospel was not unique: *'Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us'* Luke 1:1
 - Luke wants to bring his perspective on the events of Jesus' life. He is a gentile writing to a non Jewish audience. The only gentile of the 40 authors of the Bible. He is a doctor and tells us that: *'I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided 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 1:3-4
 - In the New Testament we have got four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. All four undertake to *'draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us.'* Scholars however are divided about when these various Gospels were actually written. For example, suggested dates for the writing of the Gospel of Matthew range

from as early as 40 A.D. to as late as 140 A.D. Many liberal theologians have argued for a later dating of many of the New Testament books than is probably warranted or valid, in an attempt to discredit or cast doubts upon the content and authenticity of the Gospel accounts.

- On the other hand, there are many scholars who look to a much earlier dating of the New Testament books. There are some that believe there is good evidence to support the view that the whole New Testament, including Revelation, was written prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. These scholars argue that Matthew's Gospel was originally written in Aramaic and then translated into Greek. If so, then Matthew's Gospel was written ten to twelve years after the death of Christ.
- Assuming Luke's Gospel was written between 60 and 65 A.D. when Paul was under house arrest in Rome then Luke certainly had access to Matthew's Gospel and most scholars would agree that he also had access to Mark's as well and that John's Gospel came last.
 - ii) Secondly, that the facts *'were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.'*
- The eye witnesses were getting old. Scholarship is divided between 4 and 6 B.C for the birth of Jesus and 30 and 33 A.D for his death. Assuming Luke wrote his Gospel in 60 A.D. then 27 to 30 years have elapsed since Jesus' death. For example Mary the mother of Jesus would have been in her late seventies by 60 A.D. assuming she had given birth to Jesus at the age of 12 to 14.

2.6. Who was Theophilus to who Luke wrote both books?

- Who was Theophilus? The fact is that we really do not know who Theophilus was, which is why there are several different theories as to who he might be.
- The name "Theophilus" literally means "loved by God," but carries the idea of "friend of God." This has led some to believe that "Theophilus" is just a generic title that applies to all Christians. However, from the context of Luke and Acts, it seems clear that Luke is writing to a specific individual, even though his message is also intended for all Christians in all centuries. While both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts have applications for all Christians, they were probably written to a specific individual whom Luke addresses as *"most excellent Theophilus"* Luke 1:3
- Paul uses the same word *'excellent'* when addressing Felix in Acts 23 verse 26 and Acts 24 verse 2 and Festus Acts 26 versus 25. Therefore, one of the most common theories is that Theophilus was possibly a Roman officer or high-ranking official in the Roman government.
- Another possibility is that Theophilus was a wealthy and influential man in the city of Antioch. There are second-century references to a man named Theophilus who was "a great lord" and a leader in the city of Antioch during the time of Luke. Such a man would fit the description, as many scholars believe that Theophilus could have been a wealthy benefactor who supported Paul and Luke on their missionary journeys. That would account for Luke's wanting to provide an orderly and detailed account of what had happened.
- Another theory about who Theophilus was is that he was the Jewish high priest named Theophilus ben Ananus. Theophilus ben Ananus was high priest in Jerusalem in A.D. 37-41. He was the son of Annas and the brother-in-law of Caiaphas. While less popular, this theory seems to be gaining popularity among some groups.
- Still another theory is that the Theophilus Luke was writing to was a later high priest named Mathias ben Theophilus, who served in Jerusalem in A.D. 65-66.
- Yet another theory about the identity of Theophilus is that he was the Roman lawyer who defended Paul during his trial in Rome. Those who hold this theory believe that