



Luke 1:3–4

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.

Reflection

To any reader or hearer of the original language Luke certainly has our attention.

His two volume work, Luke-Acts, begins with stylistically the most perfect Greek sentence in the New Testament. Here is an educated man. Perhaps only the author of Hebrews has his measure. He's a medical doctor, a scholar, the close friend of Paul, and his travelling companion for at least half the book of Acts going by the amount of times he writes 'we' instead of just 'Paul' or 'they' between chapters 16 and 28 of the book. And the opening sentence of his Gospel announces loudly to the ancient world that Luke isn't writing philosophy, or legend, politics, fiction or even religion – he's writing history. Here's how Luke begins, yesterday's passage and today's combined, one near perfect sentence in the Greek, Luke 1:1–4,

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 eye witnesses 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.

Now listen to the historian Josephus, a contemporary of Luke, in *Against Apion*,

‘In my history of Antiquities, most excellent Epaphroditus, I have, I think, made sufficiently clear ...’

Just like Josephus, Luke is writing history. And dates, and titles, and ‘in the year of’ scattered regularly throughout his work will constantly remind us that his is a work of historical fact and not fiction. Hear him again in today’s passage,

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.

These events are real. Luke has carefully investigated everything from the beginning. He most certainly has Mark’s Gospel in front of him. And no doubt many other gospels, fragments and scraps of paper

now lost to us in antiquity, confirming every written record with eyewitness testimony. From some of them perhaps he took Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son, each unique to his Gospel. He's wracked the Apostle Paul's brain for everything he knows, written down his speeches and made copious notes from their travels. He probably interviewed Peter too, or those close to him; how else could he write the first half of Acts in so much detail? Luke very likely travelled to the land of Jesus' birth and spoke at length with Mary to write chapters 1 & 2 of his Gospel. And no doubt he sought out many who had seen the resurrected Jesus to prove to himself beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus really did rise from the dead. Perhaps he spoke to several of those five hundred people who saw the resurrected

Jesus together one day, and certainly he spoke to Cleopas and another of Jesus' followers whom Jesus appeared to on the road to Emmaus, the story appearing in no other Gospel than his. Medical professional, scholar and historian Luke has checked and cross-checked eyewitness testimony. He's carefully investigated everything from the beginning and set down a comprehensive and orderly account of his findings.

Why? Well it appears that a person by the name of Theophilus has something to do with it. Luke addresses and dedicates his work to him,

‘most excellent Theophilus’

Theophilus is a Greek name meaning

‘lover of God’. ‘Most excellent’ implies a man of status and honour, and probably of wealth. It was customary in the ancient world to dedicate works to a patron. Perhaps Theophilus was a wealthy benefactor, a new convert to Christianity who provided the funds for Luke to carefully investigate everything from the beginning. Think research grant, or down payment on a book. Or think a wealthy convert to Christianity so overwhelmed by the grace of God that he redirects his substantial resources towards Luke’s Gospel project so that many more of his friends and family might come to know the Lord just as he has done. Listen to Luke again, see if you can catch his purpose in writing,

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.

Luke writes so that Theophilus, and all who pick up his work, may know the certainty of the things they have heard said about Jesus. Here's the proof, the historical evidence meticulously gathered and vetted for all to see.

There's a couple of things I love about this passage and Luke's Gospel in general. Here we have Luke writing to Theophilus, two Gentiles, two Greeks, two non-Jews corresponding together and working together for the glory of God. Luke's the largest contributor to the New Testament and how striking it is that his work is produced

by a Gentile for a Gentile. Just look at Jesus' Great Commission being fulfilled as the Gospel goes to the ends of the earth!

You see for Jesus and for Luke, the Gospel is for everyone. The Gospel is for all people, even if ultimately all people will not be saved by it. And for Luke especially the Gospel is for everyone. Not only will Luke go on to depict many classes of people, he'll go even further to show us particular people within those classes. He'll impress upon us that the Gospel is not only for Jews, but also for Greeks – and Romans and Samaritans too. It is not only for males, but also for females – and not simply for important women like the wife of Herod's steward, but widows and cripples and prostitutes as well. It is not only for the free, but also for slaves – and

indeed for all whom society despises: for the poor, the weak, and the outcast, for the thief on death row and even for the traitor collecting taxes for Rome. The Gospel is for everyone. And Luke who has carefully investigated everything, delights in presenting before our eyes a galaxy of individual portraits, sinners all, from all walks of life, who have been saved by grace. Because the Gospel is for everyone and no matter who you are or what you have done you can be saved by grace too.

Think

Spend some time today thinking over the relationship between Theophilus and Luke. The wealthy benefactor funding the most important Christian work ever commissioned. Luke leaving the medical pro-

fession behind for the mission field. They make a powerful combination each redirecting their God-given financial resources and talents towards a Gospel project. One man has a vaunting faith, the other perhaps in need of assurance. Together they are sublime. Consider the two of them today and the result of their sacrifice and ministry. Is there a project at church you can fund, or lead, with your professional background and skills? Can you be a patron or benefactor to a worthy Christian cause? If God puts it on your heart today why not Google the International Justice Mission as one excellent example of the good that your money can be doing in our so often dark world.

Pray

Thank God today for Christian partnerships like those of Theophilus and Luke; many now great organisations big and small brought together by God to be light in our world. Pray that God would impress on your heart similar convictions and bless your endeavours to his great glory.