TMSJ 8 / 1 (Spring 1997) 61-82

LITERARY DEPENDENCE AND LUKE'S PROLOGUE

Paul W. Felix[1]

The first four verses of Luke's gospel set that book apart from Matthew, Mark, and John in giving information about the writer's research. Attempts of some to use the information to prove Luke's literary dependence on Mark necessitate a closer look at this prologue. The carefully structured sentence tells the context of the author's writing project (1:1-2) and gives a commentary on the writing project (1:3-4). Others had preceded Luke in attempting to put together accounts of Jesus' life, but for some reason Luke found their efforts unsatisfactory. He decided to write an account himself, basing it ultimately on reports from "eyewitnesses and servants of the word." His credentials for the task were impressive, including careful investigation of all events from the beginning of Jesus' life and putting the results down in chronological order. His purpose in doing this was to furnish Theophilus with exact information. Implications of the prologue preclude Luke's use of another canonical gospel as a source, but allow for his familiarity with other written sources. He depended on many sources, not two or three, but was most heavily dependent on oral reports from "eyewitnesses and servants of the word." He followed chronological order, not an order supplied by Mark. So the prologue does not support any type of literary dependence among the canonical gospels, but points to their independence of each other.

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

Each gospel writer begins his gospel differently from the others. Matthew commences his with "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ" (Matt 1:1) and proceeds to trace the Lord's genealogy from Abraham to Joseph. Mark abruptly begins with the words "the beginning of the gospel

---

[1]Paul Felix is Senior Pastor of the Berean Bible Church of Denver, Colorado, and an alumnus of The Master's Seminary. A forthcoming work entitled *The Jesus Crisis: How Much Will Evangelicals Surrender?* (Kregel), scheduled for release in the fall of 1997, will incorporate the essence of this article along with other analyses and implications of Historical Criticism.

of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). The apostle John introduces his book with a prologue that unfolds some of the major themes developed through the rest of the book. John's prologue begins with the declaration that Jesus is God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Luke introduces his gospel with a prologue too,[2] but his introduction differs from John's as it does from the other two gospels.[3] Luke 1:1-4 constitutes his prologue.

[2]"Prologue," "preface," and "introduction" are used interchangeably in the following discussion.

[3]Craig A. Evans, *Luke* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1990) 17; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, vol. 28 of *AB* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1981) 287; Walter Liefield, "Luke," in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 821.

Luke's prologue is unique for several reasons.[4] First, its literary style stands out among the writings of the NT because of its close similarity to contemporary secular writings of the period. The author of the third gospel began his work the same way that other ancient writers did, that is, with a preface that fell into a prescribed format. Luke followed that convention very closely.[5]

A second reason for the uniqueness of Luke's preface lies in the attention that Historical Criticism has focused upon it in an attempt to force the passage to contribute a certain kind of information regarding the origin of the Synoptic Gospels. Among the gospel writers Luke alone partially divulges his method of research and the nature of his research materials.[6] Historical critics have taken alleged information from the prologue and have fashioned it into a standard for judging theories about the origin of the gospels.[7]

A third and final reason for the uniqueness of Luke's prologue relates to the second. That is its role in discussions of the Synoptic Problem.[8] Virtually all dialogues on this issue refer to the preface of Luke in one way or another. The many individuals who hold that Matthew, Mark, and Luke depended on each other in some literary way use Luke's prologue as a basis of proving he used either the gospel of Mark or the

---

[4]Cadbury has noted the importance of the prologue of Luke to biblical studies several years ago. He wrote, "In the study of the earliest Christian history no passage has had more emphasis laid upon it than the brief preface of Luke. It is the only place in the synoptic gospels where the consciousness of authorship is expressed, containing as it does the only reference outside the gospel of John to the origin or purpose of the evangelist record. It has naturally been repeatedly treated in special monographs, as well as in introductions and commentaries, and has been cited in connection with every problem of early Christian literature" (Henry J. Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," *The Beginning of Christianity*, F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979] 2:489).

[5]I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 39. For a more detailed discussion on the use of prologues by secular writers of the time, see C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990) 116-20; Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* 288.

[6]Cf. Ray Summers, *Commentary on Luke* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1972) 19.

[7]For example, Plummer has written, "This prologue contains all that we really know respecting the composition of early narratives of the life of Christ, and it is the test by which theories as to the origin of our Gospels must be judged. No hypothesis is likely to be right which does not harmonize with what is told us here" (Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke*, ICC [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896] 2).

[8]A simple definition of the Synoptic Problem is, "The difficulty encountered in devising a scheme of literary dependence to account for the combinations of similarities and dissimilarities has been labelled the *Synoptic Problem*" (Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* [Chicago: Moody, 1978] 274).

gospel of Matthew as one of his sources for research.[9] On the other hand, the few who hold that the first three gospels did not depend on each other in a literary way confirm literary independence by referring the opening verses of the gospel of Luke.[10]

These last two areas of uniqueness deserve attention when considering the relationship of the first four verses of Luke's gospel to literary dependence and the Synoptic Problem. Since Luke alone tells how his gospel came into existence, the possibility of that impacting discussions of gospel relationships renders it necessary to investigate this passage thoroughly to determine what it contributes to the issue of literary dependence versus independence among the synoptic writers.

The following discussion will undertake this task, first through an exegetical study of Luke 1:1-4 and then through an analysis of the prologue expressly aimed at applying the results of the exegetical process to the specific issue of the Synoptic Problem. It will limit the discussion of those results to what is relevant in the prologue.

THE INTERPRETATION OF LUKE'S PROLOGUE

An English text[11] of Luke 1:1-4 with a Greek text and its English transliteration within brackets following each word or phrase is as follows:

> [1]Inasmuch as [1Epeidh/per, *Epeideper*] many [pollo/, *polloi*] have undertaken [e)pexei/rhsan, *epecheiresan*] to compile [a)nata/jasuai, *anataxasthai*] an account [dih/ghsin, *diegesin*] of [peri/, *peri*] the things accomplished [tw=n peplhroforhme/nwn, *ton peplerophoremenon*] among [e)n, *en*] us [h(m=n, *hemin*], [2]just as [kaqw/, *kathos*] those who [oi(, *hoi*] from [a)p', *ap'*] the beginning [a)rxh=, *arches*] were [geno/menoi, *genomenoi*] eyewitnesses [au)toptai, *autoptai*] and [kai/, *kai*] servants [u(phre/tai, *hyperetai*] of the word [tou= lo/gou, *tou logou*] have handed them down [paredosan, *paredosan*] to us [h(m=n, *hemin*], [3]it seemed fitting [e)do/doje, *edoxe*] for me as well [ka)moi/, *kamoi*], having investigated [parhkolouqhko/ti, *parekolouthekoti*] everything [pa=sin, *pasin*] carefully [a)

---

[9]Numerous books and commentaries are the basis for this observation. Examples of those works include Marshall, *Luke*, 41; Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 63; John M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (London: Macmillan, 1957) 3; William F. Arndt, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956) 39; William R. Farmer, *The Gospel of Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1994) 25-38.

[10]E.g., Eta Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 190; Thomas and Gundry, *Harmony* 19.

[11]All Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible.*

kribwvw, *akribos*] from the beginning [ajnwvuen, *anothen*], to write [grajcai, *grapsai*] *it* out for you [soi, *soi*] in consecutive order [kaqexhvw, *kathexes*], most excellent [krativste, *kratiste*] Theophilus [Qeovfile, *Theophile*]; 4so that [i{na, *hina*] you might know [ejpignwvw, *epignos*] the exact truth [th;n ajsfavleian, *ten asphaleian*] about [periv, *peri*] the things [w|n lovgwn, *hon logon*] you have been taught [kathchvqhn, *katechethes*].

The Greek text of the four verses consists of one long sentence. The extended sentence is called "the period" and reflects the elegant style of the preface.[12] The structure includes a protasis (1:1-2) and an apodosis (1:3-4). Both the protasis and the apodosis contain three parallel phrases.[13] "Many" in verse 1 parallels with "for me" in verse 3, "compile an account" in verse 1 compares with "to write it out for you in consecutive order" in verse 3, and "exact truth" in verse 4 answers to "eyewitnesses" in verse 2.[14] The following table reflects the correspondences more graphically:

Luke 1:1-2	**Luke 1:3-4**
Inasmuch as *many*	It seemed fitting *for me* as well
have undertaken to *compile an account* of the things accomplished among us,	having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, *to write it out for you in consecutive order*, most excellent Theophilus;

[12]"The period" is "the organization of a considerable number of clauses and phrases into a well-rounded unity." Its use in the New Testament is rare, but the construction occurs frequently in Hebrews (F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. by Robert W. Funk [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961] §464).

[13]Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* 288.

[14]Stein, *Luke* 63.

just as those who from the beginning were *eyewitnesses* and servants of the word have handed them down to us.	so that you might know the *exact truth* about the things you have been taught.

As noted earlier, the structure of Luke's introduction closely resembles the prefaces used by ancient Greek writers in their works. Yet, one must avoid the mistake of not taking each word and phrase in the prologue seriously.[15] Luke is not just another secular or ancient writer. He wrote under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit in composing this document. Therefore, in keeping with a proper view of inspiration, an adequate exegetical study must regard each word and phrase as important.

An interpretation of Luke's prologue is no simple task. In fact, anyone who seeks to understand this passage faces a number of obstacles and challenges in almost every word and phrase.[16] Among the many interpretive issues, this study's purpose dictates a concentration of attention on matters that have a direct bearing upon the issue of literary dependence/independence among the Synoptic Gospels.

An outline of Luke's preface is as follows:

I. The context of Luke's writing project (1:1-2).
   A. The activity of his contemporaries (1:1).
   B. The activity of the eyewitnesses (1:2).
II. The commentary on Luke's writing project (1:3-4).
   A. The credentials of the writer (1:3).
   B. The purpose of the work (1:4).

The Context of Luke's Writing Project (1:1-2)

The activity of his contemporaries (1:1). Before Luke comments on the specifics of his writing project (1:3-4), he takes time to discuss the historical

---

[15]Dillon commits this mistake when he writes, "The exegete is inevitably tempted to extract from the concise, somewhat ornamental phraseology of the passage more of a self-portrait than the author meant to give. Just as with ecclesiastical pronouncements which hew strictly to conventional formulas, here too, virtually any viewpoint can be justified by working the language beyond its wonted limits" (Richard J. Dillon, "Previewing Luke's Project from His Prologue [Luke 1:1-4]," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 [1981]:205-6).

[16]A number of writers have expressed this sentiment. An example is John Nolland who has written, "Despite Luke's careful composition, the sense of almost every element of the prologue has been disputed" (*Luke 1:1-9:20*, vol. 35A of *Word Biblical Commentary* [Dallas: Word, 1989] 5).

context in which he produced his gospel (1:1-2). Two leading factors led to his creation of the third gospel: first, the literary activity of his contemporaries (1:1) and, second, the communication of eyewitnesses regarding the events about which Luke writes (1:2).

A stately compound conjunction that was frequent in classical Greek and was suitable for issuing a solemn warning begins Luke's preface: ejpeidhvper (*epeidēper*, "inasmuch as"). As frequent as were its occurrences in classical Greek, it does not occur elsewhere in biblical Greek, neither in the LXX nor in the NT.[17] Further, its position at the beginning of the sentence is unusual. It normally introduces a causal clause following a main clause. Luke's use of the conjunction expresses a reason for some fact or condition already known.[18] The cause for the writing of the gospel of Luke is the literary activity of people living during Luke's time and a generation before him. Their writings were foundational for Luke's task of producing a gospel. Somehow earlier efforts to record the words and works of Jesus had either created a need or left a void that placed on Luke the obligation of writing his gospel.

The preface does not identify the earlier writers by name, but simply describes them as being "many" (pollouv, *polloi*). That designation raises two critical questions: "How many individuals is Luke referring to?" and "To whom does the expression refer?" In answering these questions, it is important that the interpreter not allow an assumption of literary dependence and his personal opinion about a solution to the Synoptic Problem influence his answer.[19]

Is it even legitimate to ask how many individuals Luke is referring to when he uses the term "many"? Some would say that it is not. They would dismiss the question because ancient discourses employed the term frequently in a formal manner at beginnings of speeches and documents. In such cases, a literal understanding of the word was unnecessary. The emphasis was not on the number of a writer's predecessors, but on the legitimacy of his claims to be associated with them.[20] Even though this

---

[17]Plummer, *Luke* 2.

[18]Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* 290-91.

[19]Too many commentators are guilty of discussing the meaning of "many" in light of their solution to the Synoptic Problem. Inevitably—if they think that the gospel writers depended on each other, thereby creating the Synoptic Problem—results of their exegesis matches their conclusion about the nature of literary dependence and colors the identity and number of the "many" they assign. Pate, among others, exemplifies this when he writes "Who the `many' were is not specified, but probably included at the very least Mark's gospel, a collection of the sayings of Jesus (Q), and Luke's own special material" (C. Marvin Pate, *Moody Gospel Commentary: Luke* [Chicago: Moody, 1995] 43).

[20]Marshall, *Luke* 41. Stein adopts the same position. He views "many" functioning as a

may be true in secular writings, the NT uses the "many" elsewhere in similar book introductions with a clearcut emphasis on specific numbers (cf. Acts 1:3; Heb. 1:1).[21] Therefore, it is valid to think of a definite number of individuals.

However, those who agree that the question is legitimate are not unanimous as to the number indicated by "many." Proposals range from three[22] to a larger number that no one knows for sure.[23] Surely Arndt is correct when he says, "How many persons Luke has in mind one cannot say."[24] Yet, this does not rule out the conclusion that the term implies plentiful activity in the production of elementary "gospels."[25] This conclusion harmonizes with the context which gives the impression that Luke is emphasizing "many" as opposed to a "few."

With regards to the second question ("to whom does the expression refer?"), a complete answer must await an examination of more of the preface. In anticipation of that answer, it is possible to eliminate writers of extant apocryphal gospels, since they wrote their works much later.[26]

1Epexe3rhsan (*Epecheir•san*, "Have undertaken") characterizes the literary activity of the "many," Luke's predecessors in writing about Jesus.

"topos" (i.e., a commonplace notion or stereotyped expression), thereby eliminating any special emphasis on the word (Robert H. Stein, "Luke 1:1-4 and *Tradionsgeschichte*," *JETS* 26/4 (December 1983):422.

[21]In Acts 1:3, pollo@w indicates the large number of "sure signs" by which Jesus showed Himself alive repeatedly over a period of forty days following His resurrection (cf. Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, gen. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981] 254). In Heb. 1:1, the prefixing of the adverbs polymerw/w and polytro3pvw with poly- (from the adjective poly/w) indicates the many parts and the many ways God used to communicate His revelation in the OT (cf. Marcus Dods, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," in *Expositor's Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956] 247-48).

[22]Fitzmyer is certain that the term must mean at least three persons, but not necessarily limited to three. Yet his solution to the Synoptic Problem has obviously influenced his conclusion. He states, "Luke is dependent on the Markan source, the source `Q,' and a source, not necessarily written, which is called `L'" (*Luke I-IX* 66).

[23]Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1930) 2:3.

[24]Arndt, *St. Luke* 39.

[25]Bruce states, "The term is not an exaggeration, but to be taken strictly as implying extensive activity in the production of rudimentary `Gospels'" (Alexander B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974] 1:459). Lenski agrees with this when he writes, "How many are included in *polloi* we have no means of knowing, but quite a number must be referred to" (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1946] 24).

[26]Plummer, *Luke* 2.

The word literally means "to put the hand to," "take in hand," "attempt."[27] Two elements comprise this compound word: the preposition ἐπί (*epi*, "upon") and the noun χείρ (*cheir*, "hand"). It occurs frequently in classical Greek literature, but appears only here in the NT. Use of the word has produced a lively discussion concerning whether the term is neutral or pejorative. The issue confronting the interpreter is to determine if Luke views his predecessors in a positive light or as having failed in some way in the task they have put their hands to.

A majority of interpreters favors assigning the term a neutral force.[28] They offer impressive support for their position.[29] First, Luke identifies himself with the literary activities of his contemporaries by saying "for me as well" (κἀμοί, *kamoi*) in verse 3.[30] He undertakes the same task as his predecessors. Second, the term is a natural one to use for composing an account.[31] Third, this word is common in the papyri for undertaking a project, in which usages no hint of failure appears.[32] In addition, if the writer wanted to deprecate those who wrote before him, he would not have used the causal conjunction "inasmuch as" (*epeidēper*), but the concessive "although."[33] The final piece of evidence for this view has to do with the dependence of the accounts written by the "many" upon the witnesses and ministers of the word in verse 2. In Acts Luke regards the witnesses and ministers of the word quite positively (e.g., Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 26:16).[34]

Despite the impressive case that takes "have undertaken" in a neutral sense, some argue that the verb is pejorative. Several evidences support the negative sense. One is that the term occurs only two other times in the NT, each time in Luke's writings (Acts 9:29; 19:13). In both uses it describes unsuccessful attempts.[35] In itself, the word speaks only of

---

[27]Ibid., 2.

[28]E.g., Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Moisés Silva, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 56; Marshall, *Luke* 40-41; Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* 291; Stein, *Luke* 63.

[29]Ned B. Stonehouse (*The Witness of Luke to Christ* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951] 31-32) gives a good representation of the evidence for the neutrality of the term.

[30]Stein, "Luke 1:1-4" 423.

[31]Darrell L. Bock, "Understanding Luke's Task: Carefully Building on Precedent (Luke 1:1-4)," *Criswell Theological Review* 5/2 (1991):188.

[32]Robertson, *Word Pictures* 2:3. The passages cited by Moulton and Milligan (cf. J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974]) confirm the neutrality of the term according to Bock (*Luke 1:1–9:50* 55).

[33]Pate, *Luke* 43.

[34]Stein, *Luke* 63.

[35]C. F. Evans, *St. Luke* 123.

an attempt, not of a successful attempt. The context must tell whether or not the attempt was successful. The early church historian Eusebius viewed attempts of the "many" as unsuccessful when he wrote, "Luke has himself at the beginning of his treatise prefixed the cause which had led him to its composition: showing that *many* others had somewhat rashly taken it upon them to compose *a narrative* of those *things* of which he had *been fully persuaded*. . . ."[36] In other words, "What others have somewhat rashly attempted I will remedy. I will correct what those others have written."[37] Though the word may not be so strongly negative in its reflection on earlier attempts as Eusebius indicates, the preface contains at least a slight allusion to the insufficiency of earlier attempts.[38] Otherwise, Luke would not have undertaken the task. The existence of his gospel is evident testimonial to that.

In addition, Luke's stress on accuracy and research shows that the previous works needed some improvement.[39] Though the church fathers are not always correct in their interpretations, it is significant to note that prominent individuals like Origen and Jerome also took the term in a negative sense.[40] Besides this, if Luke had been entirely satisfied with what his forerunners had written, he would not have found it necessary to write his gospel.[41] Fitzmyer says the following about Luke in this connection:

> The contrast of himself with them and his pretensions to accuracy, acquaintance, completeness, and order as well as his claim to offer "assurance" (*asphaleia*) suggest that he envisages his task as one needed in the church of his day. Their works seemed perhaps mere attempts to record the tradition about the momentous events that had taken place. They were faced with the problem of handing on a tradition; Luke is conscious of this task too and proposes to do it again, in his own better way. . . .[42]

Deciding between the two views of the meaning of *epecheirēsan* is not easy. But in light of the fact that Luke is going to put great emphasis

---

[36]Eusebius *H.E.* 3.24.15.

[37]A paraphrase of Eusebius' words by William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, in New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 54-55.

[38]F. Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, trans. from 2nd French ed. by E. W. Shalders, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n.d.) 1:55.

[39]Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* 292.

[40]C. F. Evans, *St. Luke* 123.

[41]Creed, *St. Luke* 3.

[42]Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* 291-92.

on his credentials for writing this gospel, it is inescapable that he saw a need to improve upon earlier reports about Jesus. This does not mean that Luke's contemporaries utterly failed at their task. Yet, it is clear that in the mind of Luke there was room for improvements. The nature of the improvements surface in his words of verse 3.

The "many" put their hands "to compile an account" (ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν, *anataxasthai diegesin*). The verb that Luke uses for "to compile" (*anataxasthai*) is a rare one. It has the sense of "to draw up, compile," perhaps to draw up an orderly account in writing in contrast to oral tradition.[43] Yet, the verb implies more than oral tradition or a mere written fixation of oral tradition. It emphasizes the idea of the account being orderly.[44] That would not be applicable to oral recitals of isolated facts. Others had attempted the very thing Luke attempts in writing his gospel.

The term that Luke uses for "an account" (*diegesin*) is just as infrequent as *anataxasthai* is. This is the only time it appears in the NT. Arndt states, "It is derived from ἡγέομαι (*hegeomai*), `to lead,' and refers to something that takes a person through (διά, *dia*) a series of events."[45] Among ancient historians it was a technical expression for different kinds of recounting. The term is broad enough to refer to oral or written accounts.[46] The context would tip the scales in favor of Luke's having written accounts in mind.

A natural question to ask relates to the identity of the earlier accounts. Do they include canonical Matthew and/or Mark? He could not have referred to Matthew because he distinguishes the "many" of verse 1 from the apostolic eyewitnesses of verse 2. Since Matthew was one of those eyewitnesses, Luke could not have had his gospel in mind.[47] On the other hand, Mark was not an apostle. Yet according to tradition, he was an eyewitness (Mark 14:51-52) and wrote under the auspices of the apostle Peter.[48] It is also highly improbable that Luke would have chosen to use the somewhat derogatory "have undertaken" to refer to a work received by the church as one of the essential documents about the life of Jesus.[49] If

---

[43]Marshall, *Luke* 41. The noun for "an account" (διήγησιν) does not necessarily exclude a reference to oral tradition (Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* 292). See below.

[44]I. I. Du Plessis, "Once More: The Purpose of Luke's Prologue (LK I I-4)," *Novum Testamentum* 16/4 (1974):262-63.

[45]Arndt, *St. Luke* 39.

[46]Bock, "Understanding Luke's Task" 189.

[47]Godet, *St. Luke* 1:56.

[48]Ibid., 1:57.

[49]Ibid.

Matthew or Mark had been one of his sources, he would more likely have given it the recognition of "Scripture" as Paul did for Luke's gospel just a few years later (cf. 1 Tim 5:18).

According to tradition, Matthew wrote earlier than Luke, but Luke's careful wording makes it clear that he had not seen Matthew's gospel before he wrote his own. He may have seen Aramaic material written by Matthew, material referred to as "the oracles" (tâ lógia, *ta logia*) by an early church Father named Papias, but that writing differed from Matthew's gospel in the Greek language.[50] In all probability, the three Synoptic Gospel writers wrote without having seen the works of each other. That means that the works to which Luke refers are writings whose incompleteness condemned them to extinction as the three canonical gospels spread thoughout the early church.

Luke is not explicit about whether he used those now-nonextant written accounts in writing his own gospel, but he probably used every speck of information he could locate to compare with other sources to be sure he had his information correct. However, his primary dependence would have been on the "eyewitnesses and servants of the word." They were principal sources on whom the "many" depended for their attempts at compiling accounts too.

Luke describes the literary activities of his predecessors as centering on "the things accomplished among us" (tvn peplhroforhmènvn ên h̔m@n, *tōn peplērophorēmenōn en hēmin*). When used in reference to persons, "accomplished" (*peplērophorēmenōn*) means "persuade fully, convince." In reference to things, as here, it means "fulfilled, accomplished."[51] The idea of "fulfilled" fits nicely since Luke puts emphasis on the fulfillment of God's plan in both Luke and Acts (e.g., Luke 1:20, 57; 2:6, 21-22; 4:21; Acts 9:23; 13:25; 24:27). These fulfilled events and time periods refer to the carrying out of God's plan in the world in connection with the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke declares these events to have been fully accomplished "among us" (*en hēmin*). Whom does Luke have in mind in the pronoun "us"? The answers have ranged from first generation witnesses of God's fulfilled plan all the way to Christendom as a whole. The pronoun undoubtedly

---

[50]Ibid., 56. Matthew probably wrote his Greek gospel after leaving the Aramaic-speaking territory of the Jews and did so not too long before Luke researched for his gospel. Because of distance and timing and because of slow communications of the time, his work in Greek was unavailable to Luke who sought out sources in the area where Jesus lived and ministered, but not throughout the Mideast. He did not have access to information, for example, from Antioch, Syria, the city where Matthew perhaps composed his Greek gospel.

[51]Plummer, *Luke* 3.

includes those who witnessed firsthand the events of the Jesus' life. But it also must include Luke and his contemporaries in the sense that they experienced the continual results of these events.[52]

The activity of the eyewitnesses (1:2). In verse 2, Luke shifts attention from the activity of fellow compilers to that of the earlier generation of eyewitnesses. Individuals who provided the foundation for Luke and his literary predecessors to build on comprise that first generation. Compilation of the earlier accounts was in harmony with the communicative activity of the eyewitnesses ("just as," kauvw, *kathos*). Was this correlation one of strict exactness[53] or general exactness?[54] Strict exactness is improbable because of the unlikelihood that the "many" intended to transmit a word-for-word reproduction of what had been handed down to them. As Evans has noted, "This would deprive `compiled' of its force."[55] The agreement of the later written accounts with eyewitness reports lies in the area of "the things accomplished" (1:1). That is what the apostles and others handed down and what became the basis for the writings of the "many." Luke thereby affirms the general reliability and soundness of the previous narratives, even while he strongly implies shortcomings in those accounts through his use of *epecheiresan* in verse 1 and in his undertaking of a similar project.

Luke calls the individuals responsible for initiating the communication "eyewitnesses" (aujtovptai, *autoptai*) and "servants" (uJphrevtai, *hyperetai*). These are not two separate groups but one group that has a twofold role. It is best to see these terms as describing one group, not so much because the terms are governed by a single article (oiJ, *hoi*). With plural nouns, a single article governing two nouns connected by *kai* may or may not constitute a single entity.[56] But the position of the participle (genovmenoi, *genomenoi*, "were") after the second noun justifies this interpretation. The participle does not separate the two nouns "eyewitnesses" and

---

[52]For a detailed discussion on this matter, consult Richard J. Dillon, *From Eye-Witness to Ministers of the Word* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978) 271-72. In particular, see his discussion of the perfect tense of *peplerophoremenon* with its inclusion of abiding results of completed action.

[53]Plummer, *Luke* 3.

[54]C. F. Evans, *St. Luke* 125.

[55]Ibid., 125.

[56]Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 278. Of the five possibilities when the substantives are plural, the present combination would fall into the category of both groups being identical (cf. ibid., 281-83) because of placement of the participle genovmenoi and of the phrase ajp' ajrchvw. See below.

"servants." Instead, it separates the noun "servants" from the genitive "of the word" (toy lôgoy, *tou logou*).[57] A further factor favoring a reference to one group instead of two is the position of the prepositional phrase "from the beginning" before the first term "eyewitnesses." That has the syntactical effect of viewing the two nouns as a single entity. In light of these considerations, it is best to see the group as those who began as "eyewitnesses" and then became "servants" of the word.[58]

The word "eyewitnesses" (*autoptai*) occurs only here in the NT. As the source of the English medical term "autopsy," its literal meaning is to see with one's own eyes. Luke uses the word to inform his readers that what he and others have written comes straight from people who were directly in contact with events being reported.[59] These "eyewitnesses" are not recent additions to the Christian movement. Rather, they were "from the beginning" (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, *ap' archēs*) observant participants in the life and ministry of Jesus. That beginning was in particular the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist (Luke 3:23; cf. Acts 1:21-22; 10:37).[60]

The second term highlights the ministry of these individuals. They were simply servants, helpers, and assistants. Marshall points out, "The term emphasizes that they were not propagandists for their own views of what happened with Jesus but had unreservedly put their persons and work in the service of Jesus' cause."[61] They were ministers "of the word" (*tou logou*); that is, they proclaimed a gospel whose substance was the words and works of Jesus Christ.

Who were these "eyewitnesses and servants"? The group included some of the apostles at least. Luke later notes one of the qualifications for apostleship was to have been an eyewitness from the beginning (Acts 1:21-22). It is clear that these were Luke's predecessors. That Luke was not one of their number is evident from his own description of his task in 1:3-4. That the group included others besides apostles is probable, but their identity is unknown. Judging from the content of Luke's first two chapters, one of them may have been the mother of Jesus.

The nature of the activity of the eyewitnesses is described as "have handed them down" (parêdosan, *paredosan*). The verb that Luke uses is a technical term for passing on official tradition, whether orally or in writing,

---

[57]Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* 294.

[58]Fitzmyer's discussion of this issue is helpful (*Luke I-IX* 294).

[59]Earle E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) 65.

[60]For further elaboration, see Plummer, *Luke* 3 and Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* 7. John 15:27; 16:4 verifies that this is the beginning of which Luke speaks.

[61]Marshall, *Luke* 42.

as authoritative teaching.[62] Paul used the verb's cognate noun *paradosis* to refer to Christian tradition that eventually acquired a fixed verbal form.[63] He instructed the Thessalonian church to hold fast to the "traditions" (*paradoseis*) they had been taught (2 Thess 2:14). The eyewitnesses of whom Luke speaks made it their business to pass on what they saw and knew, thereby laying the foundation for a much larger body of tradition. And they passed it on to those whom Luke identifies as "us." This term does not allude to the same "us" as in verse 1. The personal pronoun in verse 2 refers to himself, his literary predecessors, and other unidentifiable Christians.[64] In other words, its scope is narrower in verse 2.

The Commentary on Luke's Writing Project (1:3-4)

The credentials of the writer (1:3). The first two verses of the prologue focus on the writing activities of others (1:1-2). Next Luke describes to the reader his own undertaking (1:3-4). In verse 3 he presents his credentials for launching such a major task as his gospel turned out to be. As pointed out earlier, this verse comprises the main clause and apodosis of the sentence of which "inasmuch as many have undertaken . . ." (vv. 1-2) is the protasis. Verse 4 gives the purpose of his undertaking, which is also the reason that his monumental project is worth the effort.

In light of the literary activity of his predecessors (1:1) and the transmittal activity of the eyewitnesses (1:2), Luke put his hand to a task similar to what others had done, or as he says, "It seemed fitting for me as well" (1:3). He made a personal decision to involve himself in a venture similar to those of the "many." Did this resolve of Luke imply a certain superiority in comparison to the efforts of the "many"? Despite the fact that Luke does not contrast himself with his predecessors, and even honors them,[65] he does claim a certain advantage they did not have. This is evident first of all in the needlessness of adding another collection to the narratives concerning Jesus, unless Luke felt he had nothing new to contribute.[66] He ranks himself with the others as possessing the same

---

[62]The verb also occurs in Mark 7:13; Acts 6:14; 1 Cor. 11:2, 23; 15:3; 2 Peter 2:21; Jude 3 (cf. Marshall, *Luke* 41-42).

[63]Friedrich Büchel, "d3dvmi, dyron, k. t. l.," *TDNT* 2:171-73.

[64]"The eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word delivered the gospel matters `to us,' i.e., to the Christians in general, including the many and also Luke" (Lenski, *St. Luke* 28).

[65]Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* 59. Plummer states, "He does not blame the "many"; he desires to imitate and supplement them. It is their attempts that encourage him to write. What they have done he may do, and perhaps he may be able to improve upon their work" (Plummer, *Luke* 4).

[66]Godet, *St. Luke* 1:60.

advantages as they, but implies he is really better positioned than they in some way.[67] Furthermore, his scrupulous description of his credentials argues that he is really better situated than those who wrote before.[68] He did not confine himself simply to collecting bare apostolic traditions, but took the necessary steps to select, supplement, arrange, and check the materials furnished through oral reports. Discussion above has excluded canonical gospels from the earlier materials available to him, removing any possible derogatory implications regarding them.

"Having investigated" (parhkoloyuhkóti, *parekolouthekoti*) sums up Luke's qualifications for undertaking such a work. The Greek word means literally "to follow along a thing in mind, to trace carefully, to accompany." These meanings frequent the pages of ancient Greek literature.[69] The author's use of the perfect participle of this verb has drawn much attention.[70] The present discussion will center on the two major views. The first one holds that the word refers to following closely the progress of certain events, so that it means to keep up with a movement. In this sense, Luke depicts himself as somehow keeping in touch with the events as they occurred. This interpretation emphasizes the literal meaning of the word. Also implied in this view is that Luke did not investigate anything; he simply followed along as events unfolded.[71] In other words, Luke was one of the eyewitnesses and servants of the Word. The other view interprets the word as referring to an investigation of past events. The approach takes the word in a figurative sense of mentally following along beside the events.[72]

An inherent weakness of the former view lies in the meaning it must assign "from the beginning" (ἄνωθεν, *anothen*) in 1:3, because it is clear that Luke was not an eyewitness of Jesus' baptism and other early events of His life. Advocates of the view assign the meaning "a long time" to the phrase, but this is impossible.[73] It is better to give a meaning similar to

---

[67]Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* 296.

[68]Godet, *St. Luke* 60; Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* 296.

[69]Robertson, *Word Pictures* 2:6; Marshall, *Luke* 42.

[70]For a full treatment of this subject see the following: Henry J. Cadbury, "The Knowledge Claimed in Luke's Preface," *The Expository Times* 24 (1922):401-22; A. T. Robertson, "The Implications in Luke's Preface," *The Expository Times* 35 (1924):319-21; John Wenham, "The Identification of Luke," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 63:1 (1991):16-32. Various commentaries also furnish helpful information on this subject (e.g., Marshall, Fitzmyer, Plummer).

[71]Cadbury, "Knowledge Claimed" 401-21.

[72]This is the popular view (Bock, "Understanding Luke's Task" 193-94; Robertson, "Implications" 319).

[73]Stonehouse points out the weakness of Cadbury's argument that the term means a

"from the beginning" (*ap' archēs*) in verse 2, although the starting point for "the beginning" is different in the two cases. Also, the idea of an individual being *intimately* associated "carefully" (ἀκριβῶς, *akribōs*) does not register a good sense.[74] Furthermore, the author distinguishes himself from the eyewitnesses in the immediate context. Luke clarifies that he is not an eyewitness, but is dependent on them.[75]

The strengths of the latter interpretation further confirm that this term is referring to a following of past events through research. This was the meaning in such ancient writers as Josephus and Nicomachus.[76] The concept also fits Luke's remarks about his investigation in the remainder of verse 3.

He expands upon his qualifications for this task by making four comments about procedures utilized. First, he investigated "everything" (πᾶσιν, *pasin*). He was comprehensive and thorough in studying the subject matter. He carefully sought out anything available on the subject and weighed it carefully in preparation for writing. Second, he did his work "carefully" (*akribōs*). This refers not only to his method of writing, but also to the quality of his research. He claims accuracy for his findings. Third, the starting point for his research was "from the beginning" (*anōthen*). As stated above, some understand this as a reference to how long Luke worked at his project.[77] But it is better to take the adverb as synonymous with the prepositional phrase "from the beginning" in verse 2.[78] The presence of the birth narratives following the prologue would also argue for this interpretation. Luke's investigation went back to the birth stories as its starting point.

The fourth comment about his research relates to its intended result: "to write it out in consecutive order" (γράψαι καθεξῆς, *grapsai kathexēs*). He wanted his work to be in "consecutive order." What does Luke mean by "consecutive order"? The term *kathexēs* means "in order, one thing after another" (cf. Acts 11:4; 18:23) or "as follows, the following" (Luke 8:1; Acts 3:24).[79] The natural meaning would be chronological order, but Stein, for example, argues a case that Luke's order is literary-logical by pointing out

---

"long time" (*Witness of Luke* 36).

[74]Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* 297.

[75]Ibid., 297.

[76]Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20* 9.

[77]Marshall gives this as a possible meaning (*Luke* 42-43).

[78]Acts 26:4-5 is an example that would argue this point (Bock, "Understanding Luke's Task" 194).

[79]Marshall, *Luke* 43.

sequences of narrative in the gospel that are not chronological.[80] Yet, allowing for details that may not be strictly in temporal order, the gospel does follow a broadly chronological arrangement in treating the life of Christ.[81] The debate on the type of order indicated by the word is widespread,[82] but it is hard to deny compelling evidence provided by a lexical study of this word. Such a study leads to only one conclusion: Luke is referring to some type of chronological and historical order. The use of the word and its cognates by Luke himself is the best evidence of that (Luke 8:1; Acts 11:4; 18:23).

The recipient of this monumental work is "most excellent Theophilus" (kratiste Ueofile, *kratiste Theophile*). The epithet that is translated "most excellent" often applies to individuals of rank in the sequel to this gospel. In Acts, it refers to Felix (23:26; 24:3) and Festus (26:25). Yet, Theophilus is not necessarily a person of rank (cf. Acts 1:1 where his name lacks the adjective). One cannot be dogmatic in concluding that Theophilus held a high position. But Luke clearly held him in high esteem. This was probably due to the recipient's social standing.

Attempts at identifying Theophilus as a symbolic name for "pious Christians" are tenuous. Frequent occurrence of this name for both Jews and Greeks from the third century B.C. onward make such an association highly improbable.[83] Also, the vocative "most excellent" argues that a particular person is in mind.[84] Even though the spiritual status of Theophilus has no bearing on the Synoptic Problem, it is best to view him as either a believer or a person with a serious interest in Christianity.

The purpose of the work (1:4). Assuming the traditional authorship of the third gospel,[85] Luke's credentials for writing his gospel (1:3) are impressive, but his purpose for doing so (1:4) was also worthy. He undertook to compile an account of Jesus' life so that the recipient of the account "might know the exact truth" (epignyw thna sfaleian, *epignōs ten*

---

[80]Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24 of *The New American Commentary*, David S. Dockery, gen ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1992) 65.

[81]Marshall, *Luke* 43; Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* 62.

[82]A good summary of the debate appears in an article: Gregory J. Lockwood, "The Reference to Order in Luke's Preface," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 59/1-2 (January-April 1995):101-4.

[83]Nolland, *Luke 1:1–9:20* 10.

[84]Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* 63.

[85]Some question Lukan authorship of the third gospel (cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX* 35-59), but the present study accepts it on the basis of strong testimony from the ancient church and the "we" sections in Acts.

asphaleian) concerning the things he had been taught. Thus, this gospel in the hands of Theophilus demonstrated the truthful quality of the instruction he had received. To accomplish this, Luke must have done a thorough job of research and writing.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF LUKE'S PROLOGUE

What relation do the opening verses of Luke's gospel have to the issue of literary dependence/independence among the gospel writers? Does Luke acknowledge his dependence in a literary way upon Matthew or Mark? Neither his prologue nor any other single passage can completely resolve the issue. Yet a careful interpretation of Luke's prologue results in important information that must be part of that discussion. Frequent references to that preface to prove that he used the gospel of Mark or Matthew as one of his sources of research necessitate some attention to it. Does an exegesis of Luke 1:1-4 substantiate such a claim?

The meaning of the prologue of Luke has several ramifications with regards to the issue of the interrelationship of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. First, the opening verses of Luke's gospel do not indicate, as many purport, that its author used any canonical gospel (i.e., Matthew or Mark) as a source. Of course, it is hard to deny that Luke used sources, but to claim that these sources included the gospel of either Matthew or Mark is merely an assumption read into the text of the prologue by an interpreter. Nothing in the four verses identifies one of the other Synoptic Gospels as a source. Those who use Luke's prologue to justify a written gospel as a source read that into the passage without adequate exegetical evidence.[86] In fact, some who believe in literary dependence between the first three gospels readily admit that fact.[87]

Second, the preface of the third gospel does not state that its author is directly dependent on two or three sources such as Mark, Q, and L. Luke 1:1 establishes the existence of "many" literary predecessors.[88] The

---

[86]Stein is one who does this in his work on the Synoptic Problem (Robert H. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987] 29-44).

[87]E.g., "Not Luke's statement about his relationship to these preexisting Gospels, but the patterns of similarity and dissimilarity between the synoptic Gospels as we have them, have convinced the world of scholarship that there is dependence, almost certainly of a literary kind, between the three Gospels" (Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20* xxix).

[88]Linnemann's position is that the accounts of the "many" were exclusively oral: "Literally, Luke states that many had undertaken to develop a lengthy narration (description) of Jesus' life. There is no hint that such narration was extant in written form. To translate *anataxasthai* (from *anatassomai*, which the NIV translates `draw up') in Luke 1:1 as `write' or `compose' is misleading" (*Synoptic Problem* 190). Her point is the same,

relationship of these writings to Luke's research is ambiguous in the eyes of some.[89] Since Luke acknowledges thorough research in his preparation, it a reasonable conclusion that he examined the writings that preceded his. But it is unwarranted to conclude that he relied on these heavily, i.e., with the type of reliance mandated by those who advocate literary dependence on another canonical gospel. Luke had many sources, both oral and written. For him to depend primarily on one or two of them does not harmonize with his methodology of a thorough examination of Christ's life in composing his gospel. The extensive research that Luke claims (cf. 1:3) is not necessary for a person who is simply copying or editing an earlier writing. His self-described meticulous methodology argues against that simple a procedure.[90]

Third, Luke's prologue argues against his using the gospel of either Matthew or Mark as a source. Several lines of reasoning substantiate this. It is unlikely that Matthew or Mark was one of the "many" who were his literary predecessors. The "many" (1:1) did not include the apostle Matthew because he was among "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (1:2). And even though Mark was not an apostle, Luke probably would have considered him to be an eyewitness. The two were acquaintances (cf. Col 4:10, 14; Phile 24), so Luke knew at least what modern NT scholars know about Mark, i.e., that he was an eyewitness to some events in Jesus' life and that he was closely familiar with the preaching and teaching of Peter.[91] Conceivably, Mark could have been among Luke's "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" on whose oral reports he depended.

Additional evidence that supports Luke 1:1-4 in its argument

---

however: neither Matthew nor Mark were among the "many."

[89]Some commentators suggest the possibility that the prologue does not say one way or the other whether Luke used the literary works of his contemporaries. Evans comments, "Thus, even if the mention of the `many' who had previously written accounts of the Christian events is more than simply conventional, Luke does not indicate whether he had read or used them" (C. F. Evans, *St. Luke* 15). Arndt concurs with this statement when he says, "While he speaks of compositions about Christ that had come into existence prior to his own writing, and while he states that these productions were intended to set forth the reports made by the original apostles, there is no express declaration that he availed himself of either one of these possible sources" (Arndt, *St. Luke* 8).

[90]Paul Benware, *Luke*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1985) 19.

[91]Geldenhuys has written, "It is, moreover, noteworthy that Luke was very intimately associated with Mark. The latter is the author of the second Gospel and had himself very probably been an eyewitness of at least some events in the life of Jesus. In any case he was an intimate follower of Peter, and it is generally recognised that his Gospel is mainly a rendering of Peter's preaching concerning Jesus" (Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954] 24).

against Luke using either Matthew or Mark as a source is the implausibility of his doing a thorough investigation on a document that was written by an apostle or one so close to an apostle. Yet, Luke states this was part of his method of operation in preparing for the writing of his gospel. Remember too that Luke saw some inadequacy[92] in accounts done before his with which he was familiar. Would Luke question the writing of one he knew to be an apostle (cf. Luke 6:13-15)? Would he sense the need to investigate the writing of Mark, whose close acquaintance with Peter he well knew?

Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that Luke would consider either Matthew's or Mark's gospel as unsuitable to give to Theophilus to furnish him with the exact truth concerning the things he had been taught.[93] The authors of both of these gospels considered them sufficient to be given to the church independently, rather than packaged as a trilogy. Likewise, the use of these two gospels in the history of the church has demonstrated their ability individually to stand on their own in declaring the good news about the words and works of Jesus Christ.

A fourth implication of Luke's introduction relates to the author's special attention to writing out "in consecutive order" (1:3) the details of Christ's life and ministry. Though dogmatism is impossible, it is highly probable that this phrase refers to some type of chronological order. One of the arguments used by proponents of literary dependency among the first three Gospels is that Matthew and Luke followed the order of events in Mark.[94] If, for the sake of argument, this is the case, then Luke did not need to highlight this feature of his gospel, since it was also true (even more so) of the gospel of Mark. The implication of "in consecutive order" is that this was not a distinguishing trait of the writings of the "many." But it has to have been if Luke was dependent on Mark for the order of events in the life of Christ.

---

[92]Recall the slight pejorative force of the pexeirhsan in 1:1 and Luke's improved perspective in 1:3.

[93]Thomas and Gundry, *Harmony* 19.

[94]Caird, who is a staunch supporter of some type of documentary connection between the gospels, has this to say: "Matthew and Luke have abbreviated, polished, corrected; but even so, in the parallel passages, they still reproduce respectively 51 per cent and 53 percent of Mark's actual words, and they follow his order so closely that there is only one small incident which is differently placed in all three Gospels" (G. B. Caird, *The Gospel of St. Luke*, [Baltimore: Penguin, 1968] 18). Wenham, coming from a different perspective, agrees with Luke's use of the chronology of the gospel of Mark. He comments, "Perhaps Luke's kauejhw (1:3) may suggest that he too was aware of Mark's interest in chronological order. If Luke knew Matthew (as I am inclined to believe), it is nonetheless Mark's order that he follows with great fidelity" (John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992] 107).

A final ramification of the prologue is that it provides the reader with insight into some possible sources that Luke used. His use of written sources is probable. As part of his "investigation," he checked these resources for accuracy. Luke also relied upon the testimonies of eyewitnesses. The form of these testimonies was more than likely "oral" as opposed to written. As a companion of the apostle Paul, Luke had several opportunities to contact those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and servants of the word. His relationship with Paul also afforded him occasions to discuss matters with Paul.[95]

CONCLUSION

Luke 1:1-4 is significant in a study of the origins of the canonical gospels, as well as having important input regarding the Synoptic Problem. In order for the verses to have their full say in the discussion, their interpretation must be accurate. Too often, an individual view about literary dependence has dictated or been a part of the meaning assigned to Luke's prologue. The proper approach, and the one that this study has attempted to follow, is to understand first the meaning of the verses grammatically and historically. Then, the interpreter must allow the meaning of the passage to have its impact on the issue of interrelationships of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

The impact of a proper interpretation of Luke's preface has major implications for those who hold to literary dependence among the first three gospels. This is not to suggest that the opening verses of Luke's gospel alone solve the Synoptic Problem. But they do clarify some issues involved. They rule out certain proposed solutions or suggest that no such problem exists because no literary dependence exists. One eliminated theory is that Luke used the gospel of Mark as a source. Another discarded theory is that he used the gospel of Matthew as a source. Exegetically, the use of Luke 1:1-4 to support the idea that a relationship of literary dependence exists among the gospels written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke is quite improbable.

---

[95]For a good discussion on Luke's oral sources, see William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* 28.