



**Was Luke an Eyewitness?**



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*Was Luke an Eyewitness?*

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## *Preface*

A presentation defending the claim that the four gospels are, in fact, eyewitness accounts is beyond the scope of this article, which is focused on the question: *“Was Luke an Eyewitness?”* However, Luke himself makes reference to the fact that the gospels are, indeed, eyewitness accounts:

“<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us **by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses** and servants of the word.”<sup>1</sup>

Along with Luke, the apostle John also testifies that his gospel is an eyewitness account:

“This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true.”<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, Early Church fathers like Papias of Hierapolis, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Eusebius put forth the tradition that Mark’s gospel was the eyewitness account of the apostle Peter. And there are highly respected works of contemporary theologians which argue for the fact that the gospels were eyewitness accounts: *“Jesus and the Eyewitnesses”* by Richard

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:1-2

<sup>2</sup> John 21:24

Baucham, “Cold-Case Christianity” by J. Warner Wallace, as well as the writings of Craig Blomberg on the historical-reliability of the gospels.

Nonetheless, as I’ve stated, the focus of this article is the question: “Was Luke an Eyewitness?”

## *Introduction*

The introduction of Luke’s gospel reads:

“<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, <sup>3</sup> *it seemed fitting for me as well, having **investigated** everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order,* most excellent Theophilus; <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.”<sup>3</sup>

How are we to understand this: Luke **was not an eyewitness**, but rather, *he investigated and compiled the reports of eyewitness* in order to write his gospel? Or Luke **was an eyewitness**, but he also *investigated and compiled the reports of*

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 1:1-4

*eyewitness together with his own, making his gospel a very comprehensive historical account?*

I think the key to getting the correct understanding is to ascertain the meaning of the Greek word, *parakoloutheo*, which the NASB translates as “investigated”, but has “followed” in the margin.

### *“Investigated”*

It is true that Luke was not one of the original 12 disciples.<sup>4</sup> But that does not mean he was not an eyewitness. To say he was not an eyewitness is an assumption. There are things which indicate that he was, in fact, an eyewitness. The theory that Luke was not an eyewitness is based on a particular interpretation of Luke 1:3. So let’s look at that Greek word *parakoloutheo*.<sup>5</sup> The root word is, *akoloutheo*,<sup>6</sup> which means “accompany, be in the same way with, follow like a disciple”.<sup>7</sup>

That is the meaning of *parakoloutheo* in 2 Timothy 3:10 where Paul wrote about his disciple, Timothy: “You, however, have **followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim**

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 6:13-16

<sup>5</sup> Strong’s # G3877

<sup>6</sup> Strong’s # G190

<sup>7</sup> Strong’s Concordance

**in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness.”**  
Certainly, Timothy wasn’t merely “investigating” Paul’s life and ministry.

So, *parakoloutheo* could be translated more literally, “follow near to”. And rather than the case being that Luke had no information except for what he could glean from eyewitnesses, the case could be, in fact, that **Luke was following and recording Jesus of Nazareth, and had his own personal eyewitness information which he compiled with information from other eyewitnesses, making for a very comprehensive historical account.** I personally believe that is exactly what the Holy Spirit desired to do in choosing to inspire Luke. *As a learned physician, he was gifted to gather, observe, and consider all the facts in order to make a full and objective report.*

## *The Book of Acts*

This is exactly what Luke did with Paul, the apostle. It was his calling and ministry to travel with – “follow near” – Paul, and record his journeys – namely, The Book of Acts, which Luke wrote **after** he wrote his gospel.<sup>8</sup> **Luke “followed near to” and chronicled Jesus; and then he “followed near to” and chronicled Paul.**

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<sup>8</sup> Acts 1:1

## *Scriptural Verification?*

Is there scriptural verification that Luke traveled with and chronicled Paul? I believe so. On two different occasions, Paul said that Luke was **with him** in his travels.<sup>9</sup> Luke is listed as one of Paul's "fellow workers".<sup>10</sup> In writing the Book of Acts, Luke referred to his being with Paul in his travels by using the word "we" instead of "they".<sup>11</sup>

## *Dates*

Obviously, Luke traveled with Paul prior to Paul's death. And he most likely wrote the Book of Acts shortly after Paul's death, which took place sometime during Nero's reign, circa 54-68 A.D. So, Luke wrote Acts sometime during those years or shortly afterward. And since he wrote Acts after his gospel<sup>12</sup>, he wrote his gospel circa 54-68 A.D. – or before. This is the same time period scholars believe the other synoptic gospels were written - Mark: 55-59 A.D.; Matthew: 55-65 A.D.; and John's gospel was, of course, later: 85-90 A.D., some think prior to 70 A.D. If we accept that Matthew and Mark recorded as eyewitnesses writing 20+ years

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<sup>9</sup> Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11

<sup>10</sup> Philemon 1:24

<sup>11</sup> Acts 16:9-12

<sup>12</sup> Acts 1:1

after Christ's ascension, we should not have difficulty also accepting Luke as an eyewitness.

## *Eyewitness Accounts*

But is there scriptural verification that Luke was an eyewitness – that is, personally followed and chronicled Jesus of Nazareth? I believe so. There are certain gospel accounts found only in Luke's gospel – and therefore, were not gleaned from Matthew and Mark – **these were Luke's personal reports:**

- The Sending Out of the 70: Luke 10:1-24
- The Parable of the Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37
- The Parable of the Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-32
- On the Road to Emmaus: Luke 24:13-35

If the above accounts are indeed true – that is, inspired by the Holy Spirit to be recorded in the Canon of Scripture as historical accounts; and they were not “gleaned” from the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and John, then they must be eyewitness accounts.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> If we cannot accept that as proof that Luke's account is an eyewitness account, how can we believe that the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and John were eyewitness accounts?

**Luke was an eyewitness,<sup>14</sup>** but he also *investigated and compiled the reports of eyewitness together with his own,* making his gospel a very comprehensive historical account?

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<sup>14</sup> Was Luke an eyewitness to the travel and ministry of the apostle Paul as recorded in the Book of Acts? For further reading: [“84 Reasons Why We Know Luke Was a Traveling Companion and Eyewitness of the Miraculous Life of the Apostle Paul”](#) by Eric Manning – a response to Bart Erhman’s book, “*Forged*”.

Bill & Frances Furioso

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Bill Furioso and his wife, Frances, have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years making disciples, establishing churches, and training church leaders. Over a span of 40 years, they also traveled extensively in an itinerant Bible teaching ministry which took them to hundreds of gatherings on four continents ministering in churches, conferences, spiritual formation seminars, and home gatherings. They have shepherded several churches, disciplined many to Christ, and mentored church leaders in the USA and abroad.

Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done both formal and informal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed worldwide. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, he can no longer travel, so their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now shared primarily via the Internet...

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