

# EXPLORING CHRISTIANITY - EYEWITNESS

H C A E L

## THE BIBLE

Can we trust a book written  
2000 years ago?

## EYEWITNESS

Did the writers of the New  
Testament get their picture  
of Jesus right?

## GOD - MAN

Is Jesus really God?

## RESURRECTION

Did Jesus really rise from  
the dead?

## RELIGIONS

With so many religions, why  
Christianity?

## SUFFERING

If there is a God, why is  
there so much suffering?

## TRINITY

Understanding the Trinity.

## SCIENCE

The complementary nature  
of Science & Christianity.

## FORGIVENESS

What it is and why it  
matters?

## GUIDANCE

How does God guide?

## REPENTANCE

What it is and why you can't  
get to heaven without it.

## BORN AGAIN

What does it mean to be  
converted and born again?

## SAVING FAITH

The kind of faith that will get  
you to heaven

## Eyewitness Testimony in the New Testament Luke

Luke was an educated Greek, a doctor by profession. He wrote Luke and Acts which together account for two-fifths of the New Testament. He covers the period from the birth of Christ into the first thirty years of the story of the early church, a period of 60 years. His writing gives a historical context for the rest of the New Testament.

### Luke's record as a historian

Luke's ability as a historian has been amply documented. There are numerous instances where he refers to rulers and historical events in his two books. These can be tested from other sources. It is interesting to note the number of times in which Luke has been thought to have been wrong in the particular titles he has given to rulers in certain countries or cities, and which later archaeological and other discoveries have proved to be right. Some examples are: reference to Philippian rulers as praetors, his choice of the word *proconsul* as the title for Gallio in Corinth, his describing of *Publius* as "the leading man of the island" in Malta, and his usage of *politarchs* to denote the civil authorities of Thessalonica. (He gets no less than fifteen Roman governor titles right.) Luke's accurate employment of the various titles used in the Roman Empire has been compared to the easy and confident way in which an Oxford man in ordinary conversation will refer to the Heads of Oxford colleges by their proper titles - the Provost of Oriel, the Master of Balliol, the Rector of Exeter, the President of Magdalen, and so on.

His accuracy in such details extends also to the more general sphere of local colour and

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## **ASSURANCE**

Can I know for sure that I am going to heaven?

## **TRUTH**

What is truth and does it matter?

## **MORALITY**

Does it matter how we live?  
A Christian view of morality.

## **THE CHURCH**

God's vision for his family, the Church. A call to the churches of the new millennium.

## **PURPOSE**

How can I find a great purpose for living?

## **IDENTITY**

Who am I; Finding my true identity as a human being and as a child of God.

## **SELF-ESTEEM**

How can I feel good about my self? The Christian basis for proper self-esteem.

**"Luke is a consummate historian, to be ranked in his own right with the great writers of the Greeks."** E.M. Blaiklock

atmosphere in such places as Jerusalem, Syrian Antioch, Philippi and Ephesus. He gets the atmosphere right every time. It is worth noting that the description of his sea voyage with Paul to Rome, and their shipwreck on Malta, in Acts 27, has been called "one of the most

instructive documents for the knowledge of ancient seamanship" that we possess. There is, in fact, only one other document in existence that gives similar detail as to what sailing was like in those days. The eminent Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White said of Acts:

*Any attempt to reject its basic historicity, even in matters of detail, must now appear absurd.*

Classical scholar E. M. Blaiklock said of Luke:

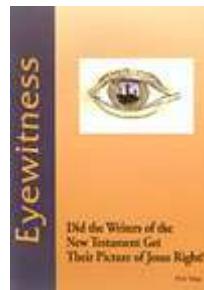
*Luke is a consummate historian, to be ranked in his own right with the great writers of the Greeks.*

Luke's ability as a historian is evident, but does that quality extend to the things he tells us about Jesus? The respected British scholar F. F. Bruce makes the following pertinent comment:

*A man whose accuracy can be demonstrated in matters where we are able to test it is likely to be accurate even where the means for testing him are not available. Accuracy is a habit of mind...Luke's record entitles him to be regarded as a writer of habitual accuracy.*

## **Eyewitness testimony in Luke**

Although Luke never knew Jesus personally, he makes two specific claims: to have obtained his material from eyewitnesses and to have done his homework. He says the things he records were given to him **"by those who from the first were**



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**eyewitnesses" and "I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning"**  
(Luke 1:1-4).

It will be informative to briefly trace Luke's association with early Christians. In Acts there are three passages where, instead of saying that "Paul" did this, or "Paul" did that, he uses the term "we". In other words, he was with Paul at the time and describes events in which he was a participant. These "we" passages occur in chapters 16, 20, 21, 27 & 28. From these passages we know that Luke first met up with Paul in Troas on Paul's second missionary journey and travelled with him to Philippi. He joined Paul again in Macedonia on his third missionary journey and travelled back with him to Jerusalem. Two years later he travelled with Paul to Rome.

Certain historical references in Luke's writings allow us to date some of these happenings with a fair degree of accuracy. It is almost certain that it was AD 57 that he arrived in Jerusalem and probable that he stayed in Palestine for the two years that Paul was imprisoned at Caesarea. Whether he had been to Palestine before he first teamed up with Paul we do not know. We do know, however, that he spent time there about 27 years after Jesus was crucified.

Now a lot can happen in 27 years. However, one thing is certain. Many of the people who had known Jesus, including some of his inner circle of disciples, would still have been around. One of these was James, Jesus' half brother, born to Mary after Jesus. James was the leader of the Church in Jerusalem at this time. Later, about AD 61, he was martyred, according to the Jewish historian Josephus. I can imagine Luke spending many hours with James, questioning him about his brother, and no doubt taking notes in the process!

Luke uses written sources in compiling the story of Jesus, as well as the oral accounts which he received from those who had known him. He

quotes a good deal from Mark's gospel (as does Matthew). In fact he says in his first sentence that there were many written sources available (Luke 1:1). However, there are two sections in Luke that I have always thought to have a very distinct "eyewitness" feel about them. The first is the section dealing with the events surrounding the birth and childhood of Jesus, told from Mary's point of view. The second is the story of Cleopas and his friend (maybe his wife) meeting with the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus in chapter 24.

It is interesting that twice in the early chapters we read something very personal about Mary. "**Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.**" (Luke 2:19) and "**his mother treasured all these things in her heart**" (Luke 2:51). How did Luke know that? What is more natural than that it was Mary who told him the story? We have no record of when Mary died. If she was in her late teens when Jesus was born she would have been about 80 when Luke arrived in Jerusalem. This is possible. If not, then I would expect that it was from James, and possibly other family members, that Luke obtained these stories. Regarding the story in chapter 24, I would expect that Luke heard this from Cleopas, because he is the one who is named in the story.

