

Text in FOCUS



Text in Focus number - 001

LUKE 1:1 - 3

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THE ISSUE

This text (Luke 1:1-3) is our subject matter because it is one of the primary passages used by many students and scholars to support the notion that Dr. Luke used a, or some, written source(s) when he wrote the Gospel of Luke. As indicated below, the actual evidence does not sustain this notion. We may not clarify the stated origins of Luke's Gospel, as stated in this passage, but we shall clarify the issue.

The three verses appear thusly in three formidable English translations:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to [compile an account](#) of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, 3 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; [NASB]

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to [set forth](#) in order a [declaration](#) of those things which are most surely believed among us, 2 Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; 3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, [KJV]

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to [compile a narrative](#) of the things which have been accomplished among us, 2 just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent The-oph'ilus, [RSV]

The words marked in blue are those which primarily interest us. All three renditions reflect the same Greek word: διηγῆσιν. Via these three renditions alone, it is not surprising that readers may wonder why—"narrative" "compile", "to set forth a declaration" and even the apparent conflation "to compile a narrative"—vary so much and why some give the sense of an oral or a narration, and others of a written account.

Part of the reason is that this particular Greek noun is only used here in the New Testament. A rare word, in the New Testament. So, let us dwell upon this term, as it is a key element in the three verses.

THE SOLUTION

The root Greek word for διηγῆσιν is διηγησις it is an old term seen often in Greek classical writings. Students of the Greek should immediately recognize a similar word, ἐξηγησις which means *exegesis*. The first syllable seems to contain aspects of a prefixed preposition. And indeed the root stem is ἄγω which means *to lead out*, and *to carry*, *to refer*, *to observe*. Generally the context prescribes the precise connotation. If the first syllable is the apparent preposition δια- prefixed, then the meaning becomes: *to carry throughout*, *to lead throughout*, *to refer throughout*. Consequently the function as a narration or narrative becomes obvious, a speaker leads the listener's mind via the combination of words in orderly speech. Thus we arrive at the verb form of our noun, διηγῶμαι which means: *to describe*, *set out in*

detail, an oral description. This verb form is seen about 51 times in the LXX (not counting the Apocrypha). In each case it means: tell, say declare or relate. For example:

Thus they **told** him, and said, "We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. [note "told" - Numbers 13:27, NASB]

Our actual noun form διηγησις is used several times in the LXX (again not counting the Apocrypha). Usually it means a *speech* or *narrative*, or *riddle*. For example:

"Will not all of these take up a taunt-song against him, Even mockery and **insinuations** against him, And say, 'Woe to him who increases what is not his-- For how long-- And makes himself rich with loans?' [note "insinuations" - Habakkuk 2:6, NASB]

At Judges 5:14 we have several LXX readings, one of which may mean the "staff of the conductor" or of the "musterer-general", per Keil and Delitzsch. The Hebrew original can mean one who "writes". The LXX, however, in some manuscripts reads:

....ἔλκοντες ἐν ῥάβδῳ διηγήσεως γραμματέως

A somewhat confusing rendition for the "musterer-general" or for the "general's secretary", a technical term in the Hebrew original. Little value can be placed upon our term as used in this LXX passage.

When we observe how the various versions rendered our noun in Luke 1:1, διηγησιν, we note the following:

Peshitta (Syriac): ܩܕܝܫܐ verb, meaning "to write" or "chronicle"

Latin Vulgate: *narrationem* noun, meaning a "narrative or speech"

Sahidic: ܥܨܐܝ meaning "to say" or "to announce" such as at I John 1:5, even "to blaspheme", often represents λογος.

Bohairic: ܥܨܥܥ meaning same as Sahidic, but leans more towards "written" accounts.

Gothic: *mēljan* meaning "to write", a "census" (Luke 2:1)

Anglo-Saxon: *gesaga* meaning "story" or "narrative" (probably translated directly from the Vulgate.)

The above reflect the variations seen in the English translations, due again to their unfamiliarity with this Greek noun. The original Greek definition is foremost, and it means a *narrative*. There can be no better rendering into English as *narrative*. A verbal statement or speech.

Several papyri from Egypt, dated in the early 600s, do show διηγησις as meaning "to write". As one progresses into the Byzantine era, the meaning of "to explain" is developed. However these temporary "vulgar" uses disappear as in modern Greek the word means "to tell" or "to narrate" exclusively.

It may be interesting to note that in verse three, of Luke 1, we have an addition which reads thusly:

it seemed good to me [and the Holy Spirit](#), having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you...

"And the Holy Spirit", is seen in two Old Latin manuscripts, Beuron 4 and 13 (MSS *b* and *q*). The addition is also seen in the Gothic. It occurs in no known Greek manuscripts, as far as I can ascertain. Its originality stands on slim evidence, but internally, it is a good reading and lends support to those other passages which mention this function of the Holy Spirit: I Peter 1:12, and II Peter 1:20,21:

knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. 21 For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit. [ASV]

In one sense there is good reason why Satan would like to have these words omitted, perhaps they were original!

Whatever else scholars may divine from our text in focus, they are wrong to render $\delta\iota\eta\gamma\eta\sigma\iota\nu$ as some sort of a written document; that, it is absolutely not. Luke's source was the Holy Spirit, and I am convinced that he composed his account completely independent of Matthew or Mark. It is true, oral accounts were circulating, and it is possible that Dr. Luke had discussions with Mary the mother of Jesus. He certainly listened to his mentor, the Apostle Paul. But when it came time for him to write his account, God (via the Holy Spirit) gave to Luke all of the words; as well as the chronology, the unfolding

of events and the particulars unique to Luke's gospel. God is the Author, and in reality, Luke was the scribe.

Divine Inspiration, a miracle in itself, trumps oral or written sources, at least in this present writer's mind. God used Dr. Luke's mind in a supernatural way, a way which will always haunt the rationalists.