

Luke 1:1 Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Before we have a chance to walk three feet away from these words, which don't seem to be very exciting, we need to plow into them a bit, and dig a little deeper. By the way, I would pretty much bet the farm if I had one that these words have never been read for a sermon in this sanctuary in the last 100 years, if ever. It would make sense for them not to be read. Almost the entire Gospel of Luke is wonderful, and much of it has been read. But not these first verses. Let's look back and dig deeper for a moment...

I don't know if you noticed this, but these words are all actually ONE big long sentence! 77 words in English (although only 42 in the original Greek). ***This is one big long sentence.*** That might be why we have not seen it before! This writer is elegant and educated. But he is beginning something that he claims is not original. This writer will also be the one who gives us the **Book of Acts**, as we call it. So literally, almost 28% of the New Testament will come from this one writer whom we call Luke. Tradition came to claim that he was a doctor, although we have no evidence to back that up. All we do know is that this

person was a great writer, and he gives us a super clue this morning regarding another Secret of the Bible!

So if we read these words again, taking a breath, understanding line by line, we see the following: 1) he says that *others have already tried to set down an orderly account* of “the events that have been fulfilled among us.” Simply put, other people have written stories like this! He continues, 2) things were handed down from the beginning by faithful witnesses and servants of the word. Simply put, there was information passed along from others. And finally 3) I too decided to write an “orderly account” for you so you would know the truth.

These words do an amazing thing: they let us know that other people wrote special stories about Jesus (which we call **the Gospels**) and now this writer is going to do one as well. So he does, and he gives us the Gospel of Luke, which actually happens to be my favorite by far. His story is different from some of the others, although there are things that are very similar. We are going to see an example of that now. We have 4 Gospel stories, but how many of them tell us a story about Jesus meeting up with John the Baptist? Actually all 4 Gospels talk about John. But only 3 are going to talk about Jesus being baptized. We will quickly review pieces of these stories now:

Up on the screen we will see the following:

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judaeian countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the

river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

This is actually from the opening words of the Gospel of Mark. The first thing that happens is that Jesus gets baptized and meets John. But then we see another version:

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

³ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

⁴ Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Here we see Matthew chapter 3, with an expanded story of Jesus and John. Much is still similar. But then we see still another version:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

- ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
5 Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

Okay! I cannot go into detail about the changes here, but we can see that some things are similar, while others are different, or even more detailed. You are about to learn a special secret of the Bible that most people who go to seminary learn early on: We have a word on the screen that remains: **SYNOPTIC**. This is a key word. For probably the last 300 years, Bible scholars in Europe, especially Germany, began to notice things about some of the Gospel stories. They noticed that when you really take your time, and really look, things look very similar between Mark, Matthew, and Luke. You will notice I am mentioning Mark first, and for a good reason. Mark is the smallest, with only 16 chapters. And then we have Matthew and Luke, which are both much larger. And then when we really look carefully, we see it: *Lots of the Gospel of Mark is INSIDE of Matthew, acting like a skeleton, giving it bone structure.*

Actually, when we check we see that 90% of the Gospel of Mark is right there inside of Matthew. Well, is there Mark inside of Luke as well? Less, but YES. 50% of the Gospel of Mark is inside of Luke, just sitting there. Which makes us wonder about the following possibility: Could it be that **MARK** was the first

Gospel story, which was then later rebuilt and absorbed by both Matthew and Luke as they told their version of the stories later on? Well, that is exactly what many people have come to believe. I am one of them. And what does this give us? They are called the “Synoptic Gospels,” and they are very special and influential on the Church. We do have a Fourth Gospel called JOHN, although it seems to be in its own world, and very different. So, we see this word SYNOPTIC, and we wonder what that means? The answer is this: it means “with the same eye,” or “Through the Same Eyes.” When we look at these three Gospel stories of the Church, we see special connections and similarities. And it would probably be a good thing for us to try to study these things and understand as much as we can.

Some people who want to attack the Bible like to say that it doesn't say the same things, that there are differences. Well, what do we do about that? We investigate, we study, we get to know the books, so that we can understand and even respond! This morning, right now, we wrap up this month's little adventure about “Secrets of the Bible.” The funny thing is, these things are not secrets. They are simply not known by most people. And why are they not known? Possibly because people have not looked. We have been introduced to the first story of the Bible, and how it uses the number 7 to emphasize just how important it is that people keep Holy the Seventh Day, the Sabbath Day. That is not a secret. It is there. We have seen how Sepher HaTorah, the Scroll of the Teaching was lost in the Temple, and how the people knew they were in big trouble, and

how their King wished they had been reading Instructions from God that would have lead them down a better path than the one they were on. Last week we learned that the Psalms are actually The Book of Praises, Tehillim, and how that is the home of the word Hallelujah. And today we learn that the first three Gospels are interconnected, and that we should understand that better in case others start asking questions. Are any of these things secret? No.

We have more access to the Bible than any people ever. We have been taught to read. We have Bibles everywhere! We can get one for a dollar at Good Will! Many are written today at a 7th grade reading level, like the NIV Bible. There is no need to talk about *Secrets of the Bible*, as if this is information we cannot get unless someone reveals those secrets. Everything I have mentioned is right there in plain sight. Maybe we just haven't really taken the time to look. Well, can we fix that? In early August when this idea hit me, I had no idea where it would lead. I thought it would be fun to show you all some great things in the Bible. But I have realized, they are not secrets at all. And that is a good thing. But if we don't explore and study, we will continue to not see them. This can be fixed. May the Spirit of God motivate us to start, little by little, and see if we cannot get to know some of these things better. For the sake of the Church of Jesus Christ, and the hope of the coming Kingdom of God. We can do this. AMEN.