

Associates for Scriptural Knowledge • P.O. Box 25000, Portland, OR 97298-0990 USA  
 © ASK, January 2019 • All rights reserved • Number 1/19

**Telephone: 503 292 4352**

• **Internet:** [www.askelm.com](http://www.askelm.com) •

**E-Mail:** [askoffice@askelm.com](mailto:askoffice@askelm.com)

## Memory in Luke

by David Sielaff, 2006, 2019<sup>1</sup>

Edited by David Sielaff

Read the "[January 2019 Newsletter](#)"



God's memory is perfect and our memories will be perfect after our resurrection. Our human memory now is the measure by which we are accountable to God and how He brings His Word to our mind. In the Old Testament memory of God's commandments was to lead people to act according to His will. Our memory recalls the commandments of Jesus: to love God with all your soul and might, and to love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27). In Luke's Gospel memory is significant because the physician himself relied on the memories of those who experienced Jesus. People close to Him remembered events declared from their testimony to Luke.

YHWH told the Israelites to put fringes on their garments while they were in the wilderness and as they went through their daily life they would encounter and come in contact with the fringes. They were intended to remind them of their Covenant with God at Mount Sinai, for them to be obedient and holy unto Him alone:

**"And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that you may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of YHWH, and do them; and that you seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you use to go a whoring [after other gods]: That you may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God."**

• *Numbers 15:39–40*

The Psalmist also writes about the benefits of remembering the commandments of God.

**"The mercy of YHWH is from everlasting to everlasting [from *olam* to *olam*, from eon to eon] upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them."**

• *Psalms 103:17–18*

One way Scripture explains memory is to say a person keeps or hides thoughts in their heart. **"Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against you"** (Psalm 119:11). Daniel expresses the same thing:

<sup>1</sup> A shorter version of this article appeared in a May 19, 2006 Commentary, "Speaking in California and Memory in Luke."

**“Hitherto is the end of the matter. As for me Daniel, my cogitations [thoughts] much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me: but I kept the matter in my heart.”**

• *Daniel 7:28*

In other words Daniel thought much on the matters he had been shown in the visions and prophecies he had been given. By thinking seriously and often about highly significant events, our thoughts are put into memory. Such thoughts are said to be put into “long-term memory.”<sup>2</sup> With this introduction, we now get into the the Gospel of Luke, Acts, and the apostle Paul’s writings.

### ***What Were Luke’s Sources of Information?***

The Gentile Gospel writer Luke was not an apostle or even a disciple of Jesus. The memories Luke presents to us were recalled and retained by others, as Luke tells us in his opening statements in both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Their memories were told not by a few witnesses but by several, although we do not know exactly who they all were. In many cases, however, we can deduce their identity by the topics presented. I present Luke’s introduction to his Gospel and to Acts 1:1–4 side-by-side, but Luke’s Gospel is the focus in this article. They do not correspond, but they say similar things in a different order. Luke relies on eyewitness testimony for information he writes about in the early portion of Acts, until the time he began to travel with the apostle Paul at some unknown time and place.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Luke 1:1–4<sup>3</sup></b> Events Prior to Jesus’s Crucifixion and Resurrection</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Acts 1:1–4</b> Events After Jesus’s Resurrection</p>
<p><sup>1</sup> <b>Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,</b></p> <p><sup>2</sup> <b>Even as <u>they delivered them</u> [their memories] <u>unto us, which</u> [or who] <u>from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;</u></b></p> <p><sup>3</sup> <b>It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto you <u>in order</u>, most excellent <u>Theophilus,</u></b></p> <p><sup>4</sup> <b>That you might <u>know the certainty of those things</u>, wherein you have been instructed.</b></p>	<p><sup>1</sup> <b>The <u>former treatise</u> have I made, O <u>Theophilus</u>, of all that <u>Jesus</u> began both <u>to do and teach</u>,</b></p> <p><sup>2</sup> <b>Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:</b></p> <p><sup>3</sup> <b>To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God;</b></p> <p><sup>4</sup> <b>And, [He] being assembled together with <i>them</i>.</b></p>

Luke says he was a keen and long-time student of the events he writes about and he is giving an accurate

<sup>2</sup> See my July 2015 Commentary “[Thoughts about Babel](#)” where I inquire about the change in long-term memory before and after the flood during Noah’s time, and the reason for the development of writing. Writing may have filled an important need among all people in a post-Babel world when people suddenly could not remember the single language of mankind and groups became separated and temporarily isolated by different languages.

The dead have no memory (until they are resurrected to judgment) as it says in Ecclesiastes 9:5–6:

**“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them [the dead person’s memory] is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.”**

<sup>3</sup> The Concordant Literal New Testament gives a clearer English translation, in my opinion, of Luke 1:1–4:

**“Since, in fact, even many take in hand to compose a narrative concerning the matters of which we are fully assured among ourselves, according as those who, from the beginning coming to be eyewitnesses and deputies of the word, give them over to us, it seems good to me also, having fully followed all accurately from the very first, to write to you consecutively [in order], most mighty Theophilus, that you may be recognizing the certainty of the words concerning which you were instructed.”**

narrative (“... **the certainty of those things**”) from accounts compiled by those who witnessed those important events of the life of Jesus.

It is also interesting to note that those who **“from the beginning were eyewitnesses”** were also **“ministers of the word.”** The word “ministers” is better rendered as officers or deputies. They were not ministers in a traditional understanding of a church minister today. They were subordinate to the word, to the truth of the word, even as the eyewitnesses delivered their message **“unto us,”** we who are believers in Jesus the crucified and resurrected Messiah and Savior. The witnesses told what they saw and heard and experienced as accurately as possible.

Luke compiled his account because apparently there was some confusion from accounts (both written and accounts given orally from memory). In fact, **“many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration ...”** meaning those other accounts existed when Luke composed his Gospel. Luke does not say the eyewitnesses were wrong or even confused, but elements of the eyewitness accounts needed to be **“set forth in order.”** Luke’s Gospel is not arranged by topic but as the most chronological of the four canonical gospels.

When Luke presents his material **“in order,”** that means he is putting the events in a sequence according to when the events happened. The Gospel of Luke and Acts (see Acts 1:1–3 which reinforces Luke 1:1–4) are both excellent to establish a chronological timeline and sequence of events. The other New Testament documents can relate to, be compared with, and inform the events set forth in the order found in Luke. This also applies to the Book of Acts. They are chronological benchmarks of Jesus’s life and the apostolic period up to Acts 28:31. Examining some sources in Luke’s account, we start with John the Baptist’s birth narrative.

### ***Birth of John the Baptist***

John the Baptist’s birth narrative goes from Luke 1:5 to verse 25, then verses 57–80. Read this portion:

**“And they made signs to his father [Zecharias], how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, ‘His name is John.’ And they marveled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, and praised God.**

**And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, ‘What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.’”**

• **Luke 1:62–66**

These events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist had a great impact upon everyone who learned about the events, and the details were spread widely around Judea. These were significant events in the town where Zecharias and Elisabeth lived and in the surrounding **“hill country of Judea”!** The people **“laid them up in their hearts.”** They remembered.

Where did Luke learn this information? Did he learn it from local gossip? He learned it from Mary, the mother of Jesus. She was in close contact with Elisabeth. Both Elisabeth and Zecharias were **“old”** (Luke 1:18, 36) and likely did not live to see the ministries of John and Jesus. They certainly were not alive when Luke wrote his narrative some 45 years after the events surrounding John’s birth.

Mary, however, was a young woman, likely 14 or 15 years old, a common age for marriage in those days, perhaps even younger depending on the onset of puberty. Mary would be an obvious source of information for all events relating to Jesus’s birth, the one account in His childhood, and to most all later events when she was present.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Mary was a participant in events in the other Gospels such as:

- the wedding at Cana (in John 2:1–12),
- later at Capernaum with the brethren of Jesus (Matthew 12:46–49),
- at the crucifixion (John 19:25–27)

and, of course, after the resurrection when she was numbered with the disciples (Acts 1:14).

The texts state explicitly, she clearly remembered details of the events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist. No one else could have given those details. Almost all of the first two chapters of Luke likely have Mary as the primary source. This means the entire account from Luke 1:8 to 2:52. In fact, Mary was the most likely if not the only person who could have been the source for this narrative.

Mary was either a direct participant or extremely close in affection to the participants, such as John the Baptist's parents. Elisabeth was a close relative to Mary, "**And, behold, your cousin Elisabeth ...**" (In Luke 1:36, the word "**cousin**" actually means "relative," the exact relationship is unspecified, but they were obviously very close in circumstance).

Elisabeth was 5 months pregnant before she went public with her happy news (Luke 1:24–25). At the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Elisabeth's pregnancy Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel and told that she herself was to become pregnant with a child who would be the prophesied Messiah (Luke 1:26–38). After an unknown period of time the pregnant Mary visited Elisabeth before John was born, and stayed three months (Luke 1:56). We do not know if she was present at the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:57–80). Whatever the case, all the relatives ("cousins" in the KJV) heard and rejoiced at Elisabeth giving birth (Luke 1:58). That would include Mary who in verse 36 was referred to as "cousin."

### ***The Shepherds at Jesus's Birth***

The events surrounding John the Baptist's naming was a "big deal," to the area where Zecharias and Elisabeth lived. Likewise the appearance of the angels to the shepherds was a "big deal" to the people near Bethlehem, and understandably so. A glorious supernatural being made an appearance to them: "**the glory of the Lord shone round about them**" (Luke 2:9), which was likely seen in the surrounding area. Then the angel spoke to the shepherds, and gave them an important announcement. After the message was given, "**a multitude of the heavenly host**" appeared and praised God (Luke 2:13). I see no reason others near Bethlehem would have not witnessed it as well. What use is inaudible praise?

Soon after the birth of Messiah the angels gave a message to the shepherds to spread abroad, who later told Mary and Joseph the message. Here too, Mary would have been the best source (and perhaps the only source) for this account written down by Luke:

**"And, lo, the angel of the Lord<sup>5</sup> came upon them, ... And the angel said unto them, 'Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ [*christos* means "Messiah"] the Lord."**

• **Luke 2:9–11**

The shepherds sought the child that the angel told them about, "**And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger**" (Luke 2:16). The announcement of the angels proved true, and they were not shy to report the message of the angels and about the child to anyone who would listen:

**"And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child."**

• **Luke 2:17**

The shepherds told people before they saw the child. They told more people after they saw Joseph, Mary, and Jesus which spread the news even farther. An angelic announcement of the birth of the Messiah (as the angel said) was news and had a profound effect on those they told; it was a wonder to all that heard the report of the shepherds:

**"And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ... And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard**

---

<sup>5</sup> This "**angel of the Lord**" is mentioned several times in Scripture. This powerful angel is identified in "[Chapter 21: The Antichrist Will Establish the Mosaic Law](#)" in Dr. Martin's book [The Essentials of New Testament Doctrine](#).

and seen, as it was told unto them.”

• **Luke 2:17–18, 20**

Other translations for “wondered” have “were amazed,” “were astonished,” “marveled,” all of which communicate the awe and fright of the appearance (Luke 2:9). They were terrified by the supernatural appearance yet excited with joy when they went and saw the newborn babe (Luke 2:15–18).

### ***Mary’s Reaction***

Notice what Mary did. It is most important. It relates directly to her being an eyewitness, and relates secondarily to everything that took place from Luke 1:8 to Luke 2:20: “**But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart**” (Luke 2:19). The Greek is actually stronger than the KJV presents it. The Greek indicates she remembered, treasured, and cherished the memory of all that transpired highly personal. She thought about the events over and over.

Later in Luke 1:46–55, Luke quotes Mary’s words of a song of praise to God, the Magnificat. She expressed highly personal thoughts that could only come from Mary herself. She probably told no one (except perhaps Elisabeth) about that song until after the resurrection of Jesus.

Mary was a participant, an eyewitness, and a recipient of eyewitness reports from others (Elisabeth, Zecharias, Joseph, the shepherds). These events had a profound and powerful effect on her and they were recalled in detail to Luke later in her life. Luke 2:19 is the kind of statement typical of a direct eyewitness source. This is not the kind of statement that would be made up by Luke. The text “reads” naturally, like a narrative that tells about significant events that actually happened.

The entire narrative is from Mary’s point of view, even those parts where Luke relates background information when Mary was not present but learned from others. The entire narrative from Luke 1:8–2:20 is summed up in verse 2:19. The entire narrative has both its climax and denouement (in a literary sense) in the small details that Mary “**kept**” (remembered) and “**pondered**” (thought deeply and often) the events that occurred in her life in that period of some 15 months. Mary provides information from eyewitnesses to events, as well as being a direct participant or eyewitness herself. And keep in mind that all the events of this period were good and happy and marvelous. There was no evil in the entire story. Evil things came later.

### ***Another Event Witnessed by Mary***

Another occasion took place when Mary was a direct participant and she again remembered the events precisely, “**in her heart,**” in her memory. That was the event of Jesus, a boy then of 11 or 12 years old, at the Temple in Luke 2:41–52 during the feast. Read the entire account, but note the conclusion of the event:

**“And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.”**

• **Luke 2:51**

Again Mary remembered and communicated these events to Luke at an appropriate time.

### ***Jesus’s Admonition to Remember***

In the parable of the Sower, Jesus reminds his audience that it is not only important to hear the Word of God, but to remember it and then act on it:

**“But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”**

• **Luke 8:15**

Later, after He had cast out a devil, Jesus was accused of casting it out by Beelzebul (Luke 11:14ff). After Jesus explained what was taking place, He was praised by a woman:

“Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the paps which you have sucked.’ But he [Jesus] said, ‘Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”

• Luke 11:27–28

It is not enough to “hear the word of God” but one must dwell upon it, ponder it, study it — and “keep it.”

### *Peter’s Remembrance*

When Jesus was undergoing His trial and Peter denied Him:

“And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, ‘Before the cock crow, you shall deny me thrice.’”

• Luke 22:61

After that could anyone believe that Peter would ever forget that moment? That moment was seared into his memory. Peter was most likely the source for Luke.

### *The Resurrection*

After Christ’s resurrection the women came to the tomb. Note how the words “remember” and “remembered” are central to the narrative:

“And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they [two men, verse 4] said unto them, ‘Why seek you the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spoke unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, ‘The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’ And they remembered his words.”

• Luke 24:5–8

The angel’s admonition for the women to “remember” was known only by the women. They remembered the words, both the words from Jesus and the angels.

The other Gospels and the rest of the New Testament books each have their own unique way of presenting their witness and sources. See for example John 2:17, 22, 12:16, 14:26, 16:4; Acts 11:16; 1 John 5:20, to give just a sample.

The Word of God is too important for anyone to dismiss valid eyewitness accounts because the simple and straightforward accounts do not agree with theological presuppositions and biases. Pray for those who have such blindness of mind and heart, so they may come to acknowledge the valid witness of the Word of God, and for God to open their minds to the truth of the Gospel of His Messiah, Jesus, the Son of God.

Note what the apostle Paul (Luke was Paul’s companion) wrote and how memory is central to the proper understanding of the Gospel, that we may act accordingly and obtain God’s approval:

“Consider what I say; and the Lord give you understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ [Messiah] of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel:

... It is a faithful saying: For [or because]

- if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:
- If we suffer, we shall also reign with him:
- if we deny him, he also will deny us:
- If we believe not, yet he abides faithful: he cannot deny himself.

Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.”

• 2 Timothy 2:7–8, 11–16

On another level it is clear that Scripture was written to be understood. In his Gospel Luke wrote simple words in plain language. It is important not to make texts more difficult to understand than it is by inserting theological thinking and terms into simple narrative. After all, the Gospels in particular were written largely for uneducated people to listen to as the text was read to them. To put it another way, we should not over-analyze the Scriptures. Luke's narrative is set out in a straightforward manner in chronological order whenever possible. Remember what the renowned Jewish sage Groucho Marx said: **"A child of five would understand this. Send someone to fetch a child of five."** We should approach the text of Luke with the simplicity of children. After all, we are Children of God and the Gospels are the foundations of our Christian education.

While some of what the apostles Paul and John have written is subtle and sometimes difficult to understand, the Gospel of Luke is written plainly.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of the Scriptures is for them to be understood. The apostle John states this explicitly:

**"And we know [1] that the Son of God is come, and [2] has given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal [eonian] life."**

• **1 John 5:20**

Mary keeping in her heart and in her memory the early events as told by Luke can be duplicated by each witness, even though explicit citation is not always given to our modern sensibility. The New Testament consists of accounts of witnesses (the Gospels and Acts), Letters (the Epistles), a sermon (the Book of Hebrews), and John's vision (Revelation). Each document is genuine and rational, and each document gives a different testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the central event in the entire panorama of the children of Adam, until all are transformed to be the children of God.

**"So shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."**

• **Isaiah 55:11**

These witnesses that comprise the Word of God in the New Testament cannot be ignored, dismissed, or remembered solely as literary artifacts. God's word will be fulfilled.

Luke was the amanuensis or scribe for the apostle Paul. The gospel Luke wrote was Paul's gospel. Paul told the Corinthians to keep in memory the Gospel he told to those members of the *ekklesia*:

**"I declare unto you the gospel**

- **which I preached unto you,**
- **which also you have received, and**
- **wherein you stand**
- **By which also you are saved,**

**if you keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain."**

• **1 Corinthians 15:1-2**

The memories of Luke's sources are reliable and true. Do not let anyone tell you differently.

David Sielaff, January 2019

---

<sup>6</sup> In the Old Testament, the study of the Book of Isaiah is a life's work in itself. Isaiah was one of the best writers of all Scripture. Peter says Paul writes some difficult things, but then he goes on to say that they are Scripture, 2 Peter 3:15-16:

**"... even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."**

The book of Hebrews, written by Paul contains very sophisticated writing and arguments. Peter may be referring to Hebrews, or the writings after God's revelation of the Mystery as told in Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.