



Introduction to the Book of Luke

Luke is the third book of the New Testament and the third of the four gospels of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is “the most complete account of the life of Christ which has survived from the apostolic age” (Wycliffe Bible Commentary, The Iverson-Norman Association). The gospels are the only authentic records of the greatest life ever lived.

I. Author

A. Luke

The writer of the book is Luke (Latin, Lucas, which means “of or belonging to Lucania”). All four gospels are named after their writers, even though the writers are not named in their books. There is no reason to doubt their authenticity which is corroborated by internal and external evidence (New Testament Survey, Merrill Tenney).

Luke's authorship of the books of Luke and Acts has never been seriously questioned. Both books are dedicated to Theophilus, and Acts takes up where “the former treatise” ended -- with the ascension of Christ. The “we” passages of Acts (16:10-17; 20:5-28:31) establish Luke as an eyewitness of the apostle Paul's second and third missionary journeys, his two year imprisonment at Caesarea, his shipwreck, and his house arrest in Rome. Luke lived during the period about which he wrote.

1. Historian

Luke wrote as an historian. He documents events with names, dates, and places. For example, *in the days of Herod, the king of Judea* (1:5); *while Quirinius was governing Syria* (2:2); *in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar* (3:1). He wanted to provide an accurate, orderly account (1:3). During the two years Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea, Luke had opportunity to seek out and interview those who had known Jesus, such as Mary, His mother. Luke's account of Jesus' virgin birth gives details only she could supply. Luke gives more personal stories than any other gospel.

“The writings of Luke, the Gospel, and Acts, provide the largest amount of consecutive historical data by any one writer. Together they comprise almost a quarter of the New Testament” (New Testament Times, Merrill Tenney).

2. Evangelist

An evangelist is one who proclaims the glad tidings to those who have not known them. The gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are called evangelists, as emphasized in the key verse of Luke, *For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost* (19:10).

3. A Gentile

Luke may have been a Hellenistic Jew, but according to tradition, He was the only Gentile among the New Testament writers (see Introduction to Luke, The Open Bible, Expanded Edition). He was well educated and had an outstanding command of the Greek language. His vocabulary distinctively reflects Greek and Semitic terms with equal ease as appropriate to the context. Most scholars believe that Luke was Greek or Roman.

4. Physician

Dr. Luke is called “the beloved physician” by Paul, who may have evangelized him. Luke may have been Paul's personal physician (Colossians 4:14).

5. Loyal companion

In Paul's last days, Luke remained near him. *Only Luke is with me* (2 Timothy 4:11). His close association with Paul has led to some referring to his book as “Paul's Gospel”, even as Mark's book is called “Peter's Gospel”, because they were relatives. Paul called Luke *beloved friend and fellow laborer* in his letter to Philemon.

B. Holy Spirit

Behind the human authors of Scripture is the divine author, the Holy Spirit. *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God* (2 Timothy 3:16). This means that God *breathed* (2 Timothy 3:16, ESV) into the words of the writers in a way that is unique, making the Bible different from all other writings. *Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit* (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Bible is God-given and did not originate with man. It is His love-letter to you and to the human race.

II. Date

Luke wrote around AD 53-60 from Ephesus, Caesarea, or Rome. The Book of Acts ends while Paul was still living, the story unfinished. Paul was beheaded in Rome about AD 65. The story of the Christian Church is still unfolding.

III. The Gospel of Luke

A. A Synoptic Gospel

1. Definition

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called “the synoptic gospels” because of their similarity in view and structure. “Syn” means “together”, and “optic” means “to see”, so synoptic means “to see together”, or “to see similarly”. The first three gospels present similar views of Christ's life. John is quite different. While also loosely following the life of Christ, his organization is around the ceremonial Jewish feasts in Jesus' life, particularly Tabernacles and Passover.

2. Distinctives of Luke

Luke is distinguished from Matthew and Mark in its:

- a. Details of Jesus' birth, from Mary's experience;
- b. Greater amount of biographical material;
- c. Volume of personal stories, parables, and sayings;
- d. Presentation of the humanity of Jesus.

Mark, the shortest gospel, has common narrative with both Matthew and Luke. Ninety-one percent of Mark is also recorded in Matthew, while fifty-three percent of Mark is also recorded in Luke. The verbatim passages are Matthew 10:22a, Mark 13:13a, and Luke 21:17. This has led to the so-called “synoptic problem” which seeks an explanation for apparent repetitions and overlap.

3. Explanations of synoptic similarities

Some of the explanations offered are:

- a. Oral traditions,
- b. A hypothetical earlier gospel,
- c. Use of written fragments,
- d. Interdependence (collaboration),
- e. A “Q” document which is non-existent.

See New Testament Survey by Merrill Tenney, pages 133-135, for a fuller discussion.

Authors writing about a person will obviously work with the same basic facts regarding birth, events, key people, and death. During the prime of higher criticism, it was fashionable to claim that the gospels were written much later than the first century and by others than the evangelists. Much of the debate evaporates when accepting the gospels as written in the first century by the authors named. Matthew was a disciple and an eye-witness. Mark was Peter's young nephew, one of Paul's first and last traveling companions. Luke lived during the time the events occurred, travelled with Paul, and sought out first-hand witnesses. John was the youngest disciple, especially close to Jesus, and outlived all the others. He could have set the record straight in his writings if needful. Instead, the Gospel of John supplements it.

Furthermore, there is no conclusive proof to doubt the first century writers as the authors despite a century of exhaustive research by scholars. On the contrary, all evidence confirms the gospels as authenticated and worthy to be taken at face value without reservation. Such is the keeping and preserving power of God over His Word. You can wholeheartedly believe it and even stake your life upon it.

4. Canonicity

According to the NIV Study Bible, the acceptance of Luke was established as early as AD 170 by the Muratorian Canon and the works of Irenaeus, an early Church Father.

B. Emphases in Luke

1. The Holy Spirit - 1:35,41,67; 3:16; 4:1, to name a few.
2. Women and family - 7:46; 8:3,42;9:38; 10:38-42; 11:27;23:27.
3. Poor and outcasts - 6:20-22 (There are many “St.Luke” hospitals today).
4. Personal accounts - such as Mary, the shepherds, the centurion.
5. Jesus' humanity - 10:21; 22:43-44; 23:46; 24:49, and more.
6. Prayer.
7. Closing ministry in Judea and Perea.

C. Four Gospels

While all four gospel writers agree on a general outline of Christ's life and all intersect at some points, each has a different reason for writing and each targets a different audience. “Each gospel was selective according to the purpose of the author, and is complete in the sense that it carries out his intent” (New Testament Survey, Merrill Tenney).

1. Matthew - Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and King

Matthew wrote especially to the Jews to present Jesus as their Messiah and King, beginning with His royal lineage as a son of David and his ancestry as a son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1). Matthew organizes his book around five major discourses of Jesus.

2. Mark - Jesus as the Obedient Servant

Mark wrote especially to the Romans and presents Jesus as God's servant. Rome regarded the entire world as its servant. A servant needs no proof of ancestry, only deeds and actions. Mark's key word is "straightway" and he emphasizes the actions of Jesus.

3. Luke - Jesus as Son of Man

Luke wrote especially to the Greeks who idealized humanity and sought the perfect, ideal man. Luke presents Jesus as the perfect man and emphasizes His humanity.

4. John - Jesus as Son of God

John wrote to the world, *God so loved the world* (3:16), and he presents Jesus as Son of God, the eternal Logos, whose miracles were signs pointing to His deity.

IV. CIRCUMSTANCES

A. A Roman World - The Pax Romana

In the first century, Rome dominated the known world by its military prowess. The Caesars ruled from Rome with iron-clad and undisputed authority. They were regarded as divine beings. Government was their pride and governing was their pure joy. Therefore, when Jesus was born, most of the world enjoyed the Pax Romana, the Roman peace. For the next thirty-three years, and for the only time in history, there was no war anywhere, perhaps due less to the Pax Romana than to the presence of the Prince of Peace on earth.

B. Greek Language and Culture

Three hundred years earlier, Alexander the Great had swept across the Middle East as swift as a leopard, conquering everything until, at thirty-three years of age, he wept that there were no more worlds to conquer. Everywhere his armies went they spread the highly developed Greek culture of philosophy and ideas, Hellenism, and the richness of the Greek language, the "lingua franca". All educated people were tri-lingual, understanding Greek, speaking Latin in their daily lives, and clinging to their own ethnic language (such as Aramaic or Hebrew).

It has always baffled scholars that the gospel writers, three provincial Jews and one obscure doctor, wrote such excellent Greek.

C. Persian Roads and Postal System

In overthrowing the Persians, Alexander the Great used Persian built roads. The Persians had united their empire by a roadway system that facilitated transportation and communication. They also created the first postal system.

Due to the conjunction of these three seemingly unrelated circumstances (Pax Romana, Greek culture, and Persian roads), Jesus of Nazareth came into the world at a time of optimum and unprecedented opportunity for the rapid spread of His message and the gospels about His life.

V. Detailed Outline of the Book of Luke

I. Growing to Manhood - Luke 1-3

A. Preparations for the Birth of the Savior - Chapter 1

1. Preface - 1:1-4

2. Pre-birth Announcements - 1:5-56

3. Birth of John the Baptist - 1:57-80

B. Birth and Childhood of Jesus - Chapter 2

C. The Forerunner, John the Baptist - Chapter 3:1-20

D. Baptism and Genealogy of Jesus - Chapter 3:21-38

II. Great Galilean Ministry - Luke 4-9

A. Temptation and First Tour of Galilee - Chapters 4-5

B. Controversy and Choosing the Twelve - Chapter 6

C. Miracles, John's Question and Pharisees - Chapter 7

D. Second Tour of Galilee - Chapter 8

E. Third Tour of Galilee - Chapter 9

1. Withdrawal to Surrounding Regions - 9:1-27

2. Transfiguration - 9:28-36

III. Going up to Jerusalem - Luke 10-19

A. First Stage - Chapters 10:1-13:21

B. Second Stage - Chapters 13:22-17:10

C. Third Stage - Chapters 17:11-19:28

D. Triumphal Entry - Chapter 19:29-48

IV. Giving His Life in Suffering and Death - Luke 20-23

A. Last Controversies with Jewish Leaders - Chapter 20

B. Last Prophetic Discourse - Chapter 21

C. The Last Night - Chapter 22

1. Last Supper - 22:1-38
2. Gethsemane and Arrest - 22:39-53
3. Peter's Denial and the Religious Trials - 22:54-71
- D. Roman Trials and Crucifixion - Chapter 23

- V. Glorious Resurrection and Ascension - Luke 24
- A. Resurrection - Luke 24:1-49
 - B. Ascension - Luke 24:50-53

General Outline of the Book of Luke, the life of Jesus:

- I. Growing to Manhood - Luke 1-3**
- II. Great Galilean Ministry - Luke 4-9**
- III. Going up to Jerusalem - Luke 10-19**
- IV. Giving His Life in Suffering and Death - Luke 20-23**
- V. Glorious Resurrection and Ascension - Luke 24**

Applications

1. What part of each day will you give to God for the study of Luke, believing that He will give it back to you?
2. What could you remove from your life to make time for God's Word? Lengthy telephone conversations? One television program? Laziness? Time spent on Facebook or other "social media"?
3. How would you like to be more like Jesus each day? In your home? At your work? In your relationships? In your life goals?

QUESTIONS

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read lesson notes and references.

1. Which section of the notes interested you most? Why?

2. a. How does Luke differ from the other Gospels?

- b. In what particular way does Luke present the Lord Jesus Christ?

3. List the main divisions of Luke's Gospel.

DAY TWO: Read Luke 1:1-7 and Acts 1:1-3.

4. To whom does Luke dedicate his Gospel and Acts? Give verses.

5. Give three reasons Luke mentions for writing his Gospel.
 - a. 1:1-2

 - b. 1:3

 - c. 1:4

6. Name the three people mentioned in 1:5 and tell something about each one.
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

7. a. Which two are described in 1:6-7?

- b. What is said about them?

DAY THREE: Read Luke 1:8-18.

8. What was Zacharias' job?

9. Why was he startled while doing his work?

10. Give several points of the angel's message to Zacharias.

11. a. How do you think you would have responded if you had been Zacharias?

b. How did Zacharias respond to the angel's message?

DAY FOUR: Read Luke 1:19-33.

12. a. Who was the angel?

b. What authority did he possess?

13. a. What happened to Zacharias because he doubted the power of God?

b. What happened to Elizabeth?

14. a. When did the angel Gabriel next appear?

b. To whom?

c. What was his message?

15. a. Give five points of Gabriel's message about Mary's Son. Give verses.

b. In the boxes, add a Circle to the ones which are fulfilled. Add a Check to the ones that have yet to be fulfilled.

b. Find things in John's prophecy that apply to your life. Give verses.