



The Gospel of Luke - Introduction

The Bible is made up of the words of man and the Word of God. It has many human authors but only one divine editor. Most of the authors were responding to an immediate need and had no idea that, what they were writing, would one day be part of scripture. We can, therefore, study the books of the bible at two levels: the historical and the existential.

On the historical level we ask:

- Why was it written?
- What was the human reason for it?

On the existential level we ask:

- Why is it in our bible?
- Why does God want us to know about this?

This will be our method as we consider both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts later on. The two books have the same author and together they make a rather special case.

Author

The third Gospel does not name its author. This is also true of the Book of Acts, which is the author's second work. This does not mean, however, that the original readers did not know who wrote the two books.

The Lukan authorship of Luke-Acts is affirmed by both external evidence, i.e. church tradition, and internal evidence. Church tradition supporting Luke as the author is both early, from the mid-2nd Century AD, and unanimous. In fact, it was never doubted until the 19th Century when so-called Christian scholars seemed to challenge every aspect of scriptural integrity; most of which has since been overruled.

The 'we' sections of Acts 16:10-17, Acts 20:5-21:18 and Acts 27:1-28:16 indicate that the author was a companion of Paul and participated in the events described in those sections. Thus the author of Acts was clearly one of Paul's closest companions, as listed in his letters written during those periods. Luke is mentioned in Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:11 and Philemon 24, and is not one of those referred to in the third person in the 'we' sections, i.e. Acts 20:4-5.

It is known that the author was from the second generation of the early church, was not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry according to Luke 1:2, and was a Gentile. Eusebius,

in Ecclesiastical History 3.4.6, says that Luke was 'by race an Antiochian and a physician by profession', which is confirmed in Colossians 4:14, which says: <<Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings>>. The testimonies of early church fathers Origen (early 3rd Century), and Epiphanius (late 4th Century), both claim that Luke was Jewish and one of the 72 sent out by Jesus. If this were the case, it would negate Luke's own claim as not being an eyewitness. Jerome, from the same period as Epiphanius, claims that Luke was never married and that he suffered martyrdom at the age of 84. There is no historical evidence to support the location or to hold this as a fact.

However, despite some anomalies and hypotheses, all of this confirms the tradition that Luke was the author of the third Gospel.

Because Luke travelled with Paul, his Gospel was received as having apostolic endorsement and authority from Paul. Therefore, it is considered a trustworthy record of the Gospel that Paul preached. Eusebius reports that Paul quoted from Luke by saying: 'According to my Gospel' (Ecclesiastical History 3.4.7).

Date

The earliest possible date of Luke-Acts is immediately after the events that Luke recorded in Acts Chapter 28, i.e. around AD62. In fact, Luke was probably written slightly earlier than this and Acts could have been completed around that time. This seems likely as most scholars hold that Paul was released from imprisonment in AD62/63 and undertook another missionary journey, before being re-arrested and executed.

The specific date centres on two questions:

- Would Luke have added to his Gospel later?
- Did he make use of the Gospel of Mark in writing his own Gospel?

If Luke wrote Luke-Acts after the martyrdom of Paul, in the mid-60s AD, then it is suggested that the omission of the details of Paul's trial and death seems strange. In addition, Luke makes no mention of the terrible persecution of Christians under Nero in AD65 but gives a very positive picture of Paul preaching the Gospel in Rome for two years. This is seen with the closing words of Acts, which says: <<with all boldness and without hindrance>> (Acts 28:31). So we conclude that he must have written both books sometime before AD65.

Those who hold to a later date for Luke reply that ending with Paul preaching in Rome is natural because it shows that the preaching <<to the end of the earth>> in Acts 1:8 has been fulfilled. Since a primary purpose of Luke-Acts is to tell the story of how the Gospel spread to the Gentile capital of Rome, then that purpose is accomplished, the story could come to a natural end, regardless of what happened to Paul.

Concerning the relationship of Luke to Mark, the great majority of scholars believe that Luke made use of Mark in writing his Gospel. There is no real difficulty in dating Mark in the mid to late 50's AD, which would allow for a date of Luke in the early 60's. Other scholars dispute this and claim that the predictions of the fall of Jerusalem in Luke 21:20-24 are so vivid that they could have been written only after the fact. This would mean that Luke and Acts were written after AD70. These scholars would then date Mark somewhat before Luke in the late 60's, i.e. shortly after the deaths of Paul and Peter. However, many evangelical scholars, who consider Chapter 21:20-24 to be a predictive prophecy by Jesus, would hold to a date for Luke in the early 60's.

Theme

Luke wrote his Gospel so that his readers would understand that the Gospel is for everyone, i.e. Jews and Gentiles alike, since Jesus is the promised one of God as prophesied in the OT. This is then attested through God's saving activity in Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

In addition to this, Luke emphasised the truthfulness of the Christian traditions his readers had been taught so that, by believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, they would receive the promised Holy Spirit, whom he gives to all who believe in and follow him.

Purpose of Luke's Gospel

Both Luke and Acts are addressed to Theophilus, and there is no reason to deny that he was a real person, although attempts to identify him have been unsuccessful. Luke uses the same description 'most excellent' in his address to Theophilus as he does in the Book of Acts to describe the Roman governors Felix, see Acts 23:26 & 24:2; and Festus, see Acts 26:25. Theophilus was probably a man of wealth and social standing, and 'most excellent' served as a respectful form of address.

At least one account has Theophilus as a judge or barrister, employed either to hear Paul's trial in Rome or to conduct his defence there. It is supposed that Luke-Acts was supplied to Theophilus so he could understand the facts and issues at stake. However, there is little evidence in support of this theory.

Luke's broader intended audience consisted primarily of Gentile Christians. Theophilus was probably one of these, who had already 'been taught' about Jesus (Luke 1:4). But Luke no doubt realised that his recounting of Jesus' life and message would also be useful for evangelism among non-Christians.

Luke probably had several goals in writing:

1. To assure his readers of the certainty of what they had been taught. This is accomplished by demonstrating his credentials as an historian, as confirmed in Luke 1:1-4, which speaks of having: <<followed all things closely for some time past>>, in order: <<to write an orderly account>>. He also mentions that the material he is sharing is well known, see Luke 24:18 and Acts 26:26. The fact that the material in Luke comes from eyewitness testimony further assures his readers that what they were taught is certain, see Luke 1:2, Luke 24:48 and Acts 1:8. Luke also seeks to assure his readers by demonstrating that the events recorded in Luke-Acts were the fulfilment of ancient prophecy, e.g. Luke 1:1, 3:4-6, 4:17-21 and 7:22-23; and the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecies, e.g. Luke 9:22, 9:44, 11:29-30, 13:32-34, 17:25 and 18:31-33.
2. To help his readers understand how Israel's rejection of Jesus and the Gentiles' entrance into the Kingdom of God are in accord with the divine plan, Luke emphasises that Christianity is not a new religion but rather the fulfilment and present-day expression of the religion of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is not clear whether Luke had gained a deep knowledge and understanding of Judaism by becoming a proselyte, i.e. a convert to Judaism, or through his research and association with Jewish colleagues such as Paul.
3. To clarify for his readers Jesus' teaching concerning the end times. He shows that Jesus did not teach that the Parousia, that is the return of Christ, would come immediately but that there would be a period between his resurrection and

his return; see Luke 9:27, 19:11, 21:20-24 and 22:69, as well as Acts 1:6-9. Nevertheless, Jesus would return in bodily form, see Luke 3:9, 3:17, 12:38-48, 18:8 and 21:32; and Acts 1:11; and believers should live in watchful expectation according to Luke 21:34-36.

4. To emphasise that his readers need not fear Rome. Luke hints at this theme by highlighting Herod's and Pilate's desire to release Jesus and the Roman centurion's recognition of his innocence or righteousness. Luke also records, in Acts, several occasions where Roman authorities came to Paul's rescue. When Roman officials did persecute Paul and his companions, Luke explains that it was due to error and that the persecution ceased, immediately when the error was discovered, e.g. Acts 16:22-39.

Summary of Salvation History

Jesus comes as the messianic King to deliver the poor, the needy and the downcast, see Luke 4:18-19. He fulfils the whole OT messianic prophecy, see Luke 24:44-47; especially with regard to its promises of everlasting salvation. The fulfilment of his mission comes with his crucifixion and resurrection.

Writing Style

The narrative of Luke was written in Greek and, as a whole, follows the chronology of Christ's life and death. No Gospel encompasses such a complete range of subgenres as Luke: annunciation stories, birth narratives, lyric praise psalms, Christmas carols, prophecies, genealogies, preparation stories, temptations, calling stories, recognition stories, conflicts, encounters, miracles, pronouncements, parables, beatitudes, sermons, proverbs, passion stories, trial narratives and resurrection accounts. Stylistically, Luke is beautifully written and he is known for his vivid descriptive details and ability to make scenes come alive in the reader's imagination.

The Gospel of Luke finds its fundamental unity in the person of Jesus Christ, and in his mission to seek and save the lost. From the first announcement of his coming to his ascension into heaven, Jesus is at the centre of everything. The songs are for his praise, the miracles are by his power, the teaching is from his wisdom, the conflict is over his claims and the Cross is that which only he could bear.

Luke gives his account further literary unity by intertwining the stories of Jesus and John the Baptist, by beginning and ending his story at the temple, by presenting the life of Jesus as a journey toward Jerusalem and by following the progress of the disciples as they learn to count the cost of discipleship. The unity of the Gospel is also expressed in Jesus' pronouncement to Zacchæus: 'The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost' (Luke 19:10).

Key Themes

1. God's sovereign rule over history. The promises God made through the prophets are already being fulfilled. Examples are found in Luke 13:33, 22:22, 22:42 and Acts 1:16-17, 2:23, 4:28, etc.

2. The arrival and actual presence of the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, the consummation of the Kingdom is still a future event, which is a blessed hope that the church continually prays for. Examples are found in Luke 11:2, 11:20, 16:16, 17:20-21, 18:1-8, 21:27-28, 21:34-36, Acts 1:11, 1 Corinthians 16:22 and Revelation 22:20.

3. The coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus and his followers. The Spirit is present in the Gospel of Luke from the births of John the Baptist and Jesus right to the end. The Holy Spirit is present at Jesus' dedication in the temple, his baptism, temptation, early ministry and first sermon. The Holy Spirit is central to the message of John the Baptist. And Jesus, at his ascension, promises the Spirit's future coming in power. Examples are found in Luke 1:15-17, 1:35, 2:25-27, 3:16, 3:22, 4:1, 4:14, 4:18, 5:17 and 24:49.

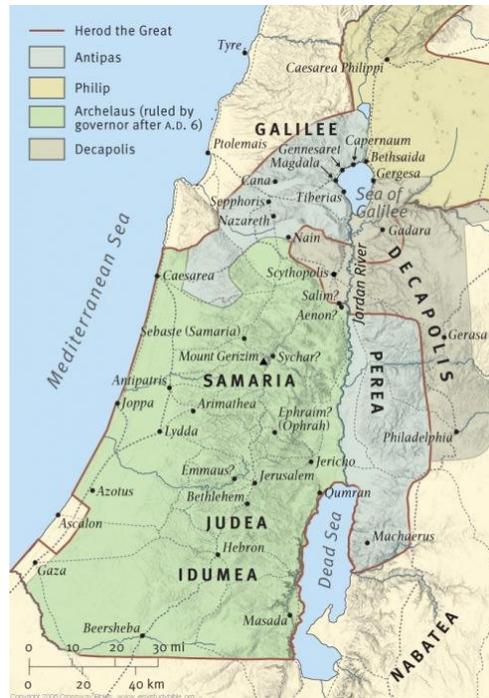
4. The great reversal taking place in the world in which the first are becoming last and the last are becoming first; the proud are being brought low and the humble are being exalted. Luke places great emphasis on God's love for the poor, tax collectors, outcasts, sinners, women, children, the sick, Samaritans and Gentiles. In keeping with this concern, many of the episodes that appear only in Luke's Gospel feature the welcome of an outcast, e.g. the Christmas shepherds, the Prodigal Son, the persistent widow, the chief tax collector Zacchaeus, etc. Examples are found in Luke 1:48, 1:52-53, 6:20-26, 13:30, 14:1 and 18:14.

5. Believers are to live a life of prayer and practice good stewardship over their possessions. In Luke's narrative, prayer occurs at every major point in Jesus' life: at his baptism, at his selection of the Twelve, at Peter's confession, at Jesus' transfiguration, in his teaching the Lord's Prayer, before Peter's denial, etc. Examples are found in Luke 3:21, 6:12, 9:18, 9:28-29, 11:1-4, 12:33-34, 16:9, 18:1, 22:32, 22:40 and 22:46.

6. The danger of riches is constantly emphasised in Luke, for the love of riches chokes out the seed of the Gospel and keeps it from becoming fruitful. The danger is so great that Jesus often warns his listeners not to set their hearts upon riches and to give generously to the poor. The woes pronounced upon haughty, rich people stand in sharp contrast to the blessings pronounced upon the humble poor. Examples are found in Luke 5:11, 6:20-26, 8:14, 12:13-21, 14:33, 16:10-13, 16:19-31, 18:22, 21:3-4; and Acts 2:44-45 and 4:32.

The Setting of Luke

The events in the Gospel of Luke take place almost entirely within the vicinity of Palestine, an area extending roughly from Cæsarea Philippi in the north to Beersheba in the south. During this time it was ruled by the Roman Empire. The opening chapters describe events surrounding Jesus' birth, at the time when Herod the Great had been appointed king by the Romans. The closing chapters end with Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension during the rule of Pontius Pilate and the tetrarchs Herod Antipas and Philip.



Outline

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- I. Introduction (1:1-4)
 - II. The Infancy Narrative (1:5-2:52)
 - a. The birth of John the Baptist foretold (1:5-25)
 - b. The birth of Jesus foretold (1:26-38)
 - c. Mary visits Elizabeth (1:39-56)
 - i. Mary's Song (1:46-55)
 - d. The birth of John the Baptist (1:57-80)
 - i. Zechariah's Song (1:67-79)
 - e. The birth of Jesus Christ (2:1-52)
 - i. Jesus is born (2:1-20)
 1. The Shepherds and the Angels (2:8-20)
 - ii. Jesus presented in the temple (2:21-40)
 - iii. The boy Jesus in the temple (2:41-52)
 - III. Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus (3:1-4:15)
 - a. John the Baptist prepares the way (3:1-20)
 - b. The Baptism and Genealogy of Jesus (3:21-4:13)
 - i. Jesus' baptism (3:21-22)
 - ii. The genealogy of Jesus Christ (3:23-38)
 - iii. The temptation of Jesus (4:1-15)
 - IV. The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee (4:16-9:50)
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- a. The beginning (4:16-5:16)
 - i. Jesus rejected at Nazareth (4:16-30)
 - ii. Jesus drives out an evil spirit (4:31-37)
 - iii. Jesus heals many (4:38-44)
 - iv. The calling of the first disciples (5:1-11)
 - v. The man with leprosy (5:12-16)
- b. The beginning of controversy (5:17-6:11)
 - i. Jesus heals a paralytic (5:17-26)
 - ii. The calling of Levi (5:27-32)
 - iii. Jesus questioned about fasting (5:33-39)
 - iv. Lord of the Sabbath (6:1-5)
 - v. A man with a withered hand (6:6-11)
- c. Jesus teaches the disciples (6:12-49)
 - i. Twelve apostles (6:12-16)
 - ii. Jesus ministers to a great multitude (6:17-19)
 - iii. The Beatitudes (6:20-23)
 - iv. Jesus pronounces woes (6:24-26)
 - v. Love your enemies (6:27-36)
 - vi. Judging others (6:37-42)
 - vii. A tree and its fruit (6:43-45)
 - viii. The wise and foolish builders (6:46-49)
- d. Who is this Jesus? (7:1-50)
 - i. The faith of the centurion (7:1-10)
 - ii. Jesus raises a widow's son (7:11-17)
 - iii. Jesus and John the Baptist (7:18-35)
 - iv. Jesus anointed by a sinful woman (7:36-50)
- e. Jesus teaches in parables (8:1-21)
 - i. Women accompanying Jesus (8:1-3)
 - ii. The parable of the sower (8:4-8)
 - iii. The purpose of the parables (8:9-15)
 - iv. A lamp on a stand (8:16-18)
 - v. Jesus' mother and brothers (8:19-21)
- f. Jesus, Lord of nature, demons, disease and death (8:22-56)
 - i. Jesus calms a storm (8:22-25)
 - ii. The healing of a demon-possessed man (8:26-39)
 - iii. A dead girl and a sick woman (8:40-56)
- g. Jesus and the Twelve (9:1-50)
 - i. Jesus sends out the Twelve (9:1-6)
 - ii. Herod Antipas is perplexed by Jesus (9:7-9)
 - iii. Jesus feeds the 5,000 (9:10-17)
 - iv. Peter's confession of Christ (9:18-20)
 - v. Jesus foretells his death (9:21-22)
 - vi. Jesus teaches the disciples (9:23-27)
 - vii. The transfiguration (9:28-36)
 - viii. The healing of a boy with an evil spirit (9:37-43a)
 - ix. Jesus again foretells his death (9:43b-45)
 - x. Who will be the greatest? (9:46-48)
 - xi. Anyone not against us is for us (9:49-50)

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- V. The Journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27)
- a. The first mention of the journey to Jerusalem (9:51-13:21)
 - i. Samaritan opposition (9:51-56)
 - ii. The cost of following Jesus (9:57-62)
 - iii. Jesus sends out the seventy-two (10:1-24)
 - iv. The parable of the good Samaritan (10:25-37)
 - v. At the home of Martha and Mary (10:38-42)
 - vi. Jesus' teaching on prayer (11:1-13)
 - vii. Jesus and Beelzebul (11:14-23)
 - viii. The return of an unclean spirit (11:24-26)
 - ix. Various warnings and teachings (11:27-13:9)
 - 1. The sign of Jonah (11:29-32)
 - 2. The lamp of the body (11:33-36)
 - 3. Six woes (11:37-54)
 - 4. Warnings and encouragements (12:1-12)
 - 5. Parable of the rich fool (12:13-21)
 - 6. Do not worry (12:22-34)
 - 7. Watchfulness (12:35-48)
 - 8. Not peace but division (12:49-53)
 - 9. Interpreting the times (12:54-59)
 - 10. Repent or perish (13:1-5)
 - 11. Parable of a fig tree in a vineyard (13:6-9)
 - x. A crippled woman healed on the Sabbath (13:10-17)
 - xi. The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast (13:18-21)
 - b. The second mention of the journey to Jerusalem (13:22-17:10)
 - i. The narrow door (13:22-30)
 - ii. Jesus' sorrow for Jerusalem (13:31-35)
 - iii. The healing of a man on the Sabbath (14:1-6)
 - iv. Various teachings and parables (14:7-17:10)
 - 1. Places of Honour (14:7-14)
 - 2. The parable of the great banquet (14:15-24)
 - 3. The cost of being a disciple (14:25-35)
 - 4. The parable of the lost sheep (15:3-7)
 - 5. The parable of the lost coin (15:8-10)
 - 6. The parable of the lost son (15:11-32)
 - 7. The parable of the shrewd manager (16:1-15)
 - 8. Additional teachings (16:16-18)
 - 9. The rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31)
 - 10. Sin, faith, duty (17:1-10)
 - c. The third mention of the journey to Jerusalem (17:11-19:27)
 - i. Ten healed of leprosy (17:11-19)
 - ii. The coming of the kingdom (17:20-37)
 - iii. The parable of the persistent widow (18:1-8)
 - iv. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9-14)
 - v. The little children and Jesus (18:15-17)
 - vi. The rich ruler (18:18-30)
 - vii. Jesus again predicts his death (18:31-34)
 - viii. A blind beggar receives his sight (18:35-43)
 - ix. Zacchaeus the tax collector (19:1-10)
 - x. The parable of the ten minas (19:11-27)

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- VI. The Ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem (19:28-21:38)
- a. The Triumphal Entry (19:28-40)
 - b. Jesus wept over Jerusalem (19:41-44)
 - c. Jesus at the temple (19:45-48)
 - d. The authority of Jesus questioned (20:1-8)
 - e. The parable of the tenants (20:9-18)
 - f. Paying taxes to Cæsar (20:19-26)
 - g. The resurrection and marriage (20:27-40)
 - h. Whose son is the Christ? (20:41-44)
 - i. Beware of the teachers of the law (20:45-47)
 - j. The widow's offering (21:1-4)
 - k. Signs of the age (21:5-24)
 - i. Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple (21:5-6)
 - ii. Signs before the destruction (21:7-9)
 - iii. Nation will rise against nation (21:10-19)
 - iv. Jesus foretells the destruction of Jerusalem (21:20-24)
 - l. Jesus foretells the coming of the Son of Man (21:25-38)
 - i. The coming of the Son of Man (21:25-28)
 - ii. The lesson of the fig tree (21:29-33)
 - iii. Watch yourselves (21:34-38)
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- VII. The Suffering and Death of Jesus (22:1-23:56)
- a. The plot to kill Jesus and the Passover meal (22:1-38)
 - i. Judas agrees to betray Jesus (22:1-6)
 - ii. The Last Supper (22:7-38)
 - 1. Preparations for the Passover meal (22:7-13)
 - 2. The Passover meal and the institution of the Lord's Supper (22:14-23)
 - 3. Who is the greatest? (22:24-30)
 - 4. Jesus foretells Peter's denial (22:31-34)
 - 5. Scripture must be fulfilled in Jesus (22:35-38)
 - b. The arrest and trial (22:39-23:56)
 - i. Jesus prays on the Mount of Olives (22:39-46)
 - ii. Jesus arrested (22:47-53)
 - iii. Peter disowns Jesus (22:54-62)
 - iv. The guards mock Jesus (22:63-65)
 - v. Jesus before the council (22:66-71)
 - vi. Jesus before Pilate (23:1-5)
 - vii. Jesus before Herod Antipas (23:6-16)
 - viii. Pilate delivers Jesus to be crucified (23:18-25)
 - ix. The crucifixion (23:26-43)
 - x. Jesus' death (23:44-49)
 - xi. Jesus' burial (23:50-56)
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- VIII. The Resurrection (24:1-53)
- a. The empty tomb (24:1-12)
 - b. The road to Emmaus (24:13-35)
 - c. Jesus appears to the disciples (24:36-49)
 - d. The ascension (24:50-53)