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Introduction to "Luke"

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Luke

The Gospel of Luke is the longest of the four Gospels in the New Testament. While Matthew presents Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah who has come as a new Moses to bring about an even greater deliverance for the people of God, Mark depicts Him as the suffering Messiah who came to give His life as a ransom. Luke focuses on Jesus as the Savior of the world. It announces the good news of God's plan to include both Jews and Gentiles as equal members in the family of God and the blessing salvation brings.

AUTHOR

The Gospel according to Luke is the first section of a two-part work (Luke-Acts). Like the other Gospels, the book was originally anonymous. The reader hears the author's voice in the prologue of the Gospel (1:1-4) as well as in the prologue and other passages of the book Acts of the Apostles (1:1-5), the sequel to the Gospel. Irenaeus first attributed the book to Luke in the late second century and associated him with the apostle Paul—an identification also found in the New Testament (2 Tim. 4:11; Phil. 24; see the introduction to Acts for the "we-passages" in which the author accompanies Paul on some of his journeys). Colossians 4:14 mentions that Luke is a physician, which would account for the eloquent Greek of the Gospel. As implied in the *Anti-Marcionite Prologue to the Gospel of Luke*, he was possibly from Antioch. Even if the evidence concerning his background is scarce, elements within the Gospel point toward him being a Gentile.

Since Luke was not an eyewitness to the events in the life of Jesus, he appears to have relied upon the previous accounts of Mark and Matthew, and also to have personally interviewed some of the earliest followers of Jesus, including perhaps Jesus' mother and brothers (cf. Acts 1:14), possibly during the time Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea (cf. Acts 24:26-27; 27:1).

DATE

The Gospel of Luke does not provide any clear indication of when it was written. The prologue of the Gospel (1:1-4), however, makes it clear that the author used sources and eyewitness testimonies to prepare his book. According to the so-called two-source hypothesis, both Matthew and Luke employ the same primary story line for their own Gospels only when they agree with Mark, indicating that he probably served as one of their sources. Besides that, Matthew and Luke include several parables and a few stories not found in Mark, which could indicate that they had access to a second hypothetical source that scholars call Q, though both authors wrote independently of each other. We do not know whether such a source actually existed, for there is no



Date of writing
ca. AD 60

archaeological or written confirmation of such a document. Since Matthew was one of Jesus' disciples, and Luke states that he interviewed eyewitnesses, other explanations for material common to both Gospel writers are possible as well.

Assuming Mark was written first, sometime in the late 50s or early 60s, followed by Matthew a little later, Luke may have been written in the late 60s or 70s (see the introduction to Acts). Comments by the Church Fathers indicate that it had already begun to circulate by the middle of the second century.

AUDIENCE

According to the prologue, the author wrote the book of Luke, along with Acts, for Theophilus (1:1-4; cf. Acts 1:1), a name common among both Jews and Gentiles. It is possible that he, as a person of means ("most excellent" indicates that he was someone of rank; cf. Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25), was the patron who funded the production of the book, a highly expensive undertaking in ancient times. But even though he addressed it to an individual, Luke undoubtedly intended the Gospel for a wider public. Emphases such as the reference to secular history (3:1), the universal implications of the gospel, and the tendency to cite the Greek equivalent for Jewish titles (10:25, "lawyer" instead of "scribe") indicate that the author had a Gentile audience in mind.

PURPOSE AND MAIN THEMES

One of the main goals of the Gospel of Luke is to emphasize salvation history, and the new phase brought about by Jesus' death and resurrection. In the broader context of Luke-Acts, the story does not end with Jesus but continues through the work of the Holy Spirit through the church in spreading the good news of redemption to the whole world. Luke presents God as the Lord of history who has fulfilled the promises He made through the Old Testament prophets (Luke 1:1; 2:40; 4:21; 9:51) in Christ as well as in the spread of the gospel to the nations (Luke 24:44-47; Acts 1:16; 3:18; 19:21). A concept important to Luke, the fulfillment of the promises in salvation history, begins with the gospel to Israel (Luke 1:16; 4:43; 8:1; 16:16) and then expands to the nations as well (Acts 9:15; 11:1, 18; 28:28). Within this broader perspective of salvation history, the death and resurrection of Christ serve as the key to understanding Scripture (Luke 24:45-47).

Another significant emphasis in Luke is that the gospel is for everyone, especially the poor and the marginalized of society, which Jesus makes clear in His sermon that marked the beginning of His ministry (4:18-21; cf. Isa. 58:6; 61:1, 2). It is a theme that often appears in Jesus' teachings (Luke 6:20-26; 14:15-24) and in His interactions with people (18:15-17, 35-43; 19:1-10). Women find special prominence in the Gospel of Luke, with 43 passages especially about them, about half unique to Luke.

STRUCTURE

While many of the stories Luke shares are found in the other Synoptic Gospels, Luke arranges and supplements the material to highlight his interest in the inclusive nature of Jesus' ministry. In doing this, Luke divides the ministry of Jesus into three sections: (1) The events leading up to Jesus' ministry (3:1-4:13); (2) an overview of the

Galilean ministry of Jesus (4:14–9:50), and finally (3) stories Luke recounts in connection to Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:27).

Luke concludes his account with the events that occurred during the final week of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem (19:28–24:53). Although these events are largely described in the other Gospels, Luke provides an expanded account of several events, as well as some new details. Examples include the trial of Jesus before Herod Antipas (23:8-12); Pilate's insistence on the innocence of Jesus (23:4, 13-16, 22); details connected to the crucifixion (23:27-31; 34, 39-43, 46); the centurion's declaration of Jesus' innocence (23:47); Christ's appearance on the road to Emmaus (24:13-35); and His ascension (24:44-53). Luke's description of the final events connected to Jesus' death and resurrection reveal that Jesus was the innocent Lamb of God whose death was not merely a miscarriage of human justice but at the heart of God's ultimate plan to redeem the human race.

When reading the stories that Luke recounts, especially note how Luke emphasizes the universal nature of Jesus' ministry and how it relates to his overall purpose in presenting the gospel.

OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction: Preface and Infancy Narrative (1:1–2:52)
 - A. Preface (1:1-4)
 - B. Infancy Narrative: John the Baptist and Jesus (1:5–2:52)
- II. Preparation for Ministry (3:1–4:13)
 - A. John the Baptist Prepares the Way (3:1-20)
 - B. The Baptism, Genealogy, and Testing of Jesus (3:21–4:13)
- III. The Galilean Ministry of Jesus (4:14–9:50)
 - A. Early Galilean Ministry (4:14-44)
 - B. Disciples and Opposition (5:1–6:49)
 - C. Responses of Faith to Jesus' Ministry (7:1–8:56)
 - D. Preparation for Leadership (9:1-17)
 - E. Confession and Misunderstanding (9:18-50)
- IV. The Journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:27)
 - A. Training in Discipleship (9:51–18:30)
 - B. Preparing for the Passion (18:31–19:27)
- V. Closing Ministry at Jerusalem (19:28–21:38)
 - A. Conflict in Jerusalem (19:28–21:4)
 - B. The Olivet Discourse (21:5-38)
- VI. The Passion and Resurrection (22:1–24:53)
 - A. Betrayal, Arrest, and Trial (22:1–23:25)
 - B. Crucifixion and Burial (23:26-56)
 - C. Resurrection and Post-Resurrection Appearances (24:1-53)

ARCHAEOLOGY

The Gospels do not give us much information about Jesus' childhood. The only story we have, other than of Jesus' birth, appears in Luke, relating His visit to the temple when He was 12 years old (Luke 2:41-47). From history, we know that during those years, many social and political incidents caused continuous problems for the people of Galilee, the region where Jesus grew up. After the death of Herod in 4 BC, the Romans divided his kingdom among his family, leading to years of revolts and attacks in all of Palestine. Judas the Galilean led one rebellion in the city of Sepphoris, only four miles from the town of Nazareth. After the destruction of the city during the revolt, Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, decided to rebuild Sepphoris as his glorious capital. Josephus would later call it the "ornament of all Galilee." As was customary in those days, Jesus would have been trained in his father's trade. Joseph was a carpenter, a skill that would have been valued in the massive rebuilding project going on in Sepphoris. Excavations there have uncovered a theater, large houses, aqueducts, and possibly a sophisticated sewage system, as well as Jewish ritual baths. Though it is impossible to say for sure whether Jesus and Joseph worked in the construction of Sepphoris, which took many years to complete, undoubtedly that important urban center would have significantly affected life in Nazareth.