

Text: Luke 1:1-4

Title: Introduction to the Gospel of Luke

Truth: In which we consider Luke's contribution to the Bible.

Date/Location: Sunday July 23, 2023 at FBC

Introduction

Luke's gospel is a sizable portion of our Bibles. It is 59 pages in length in the study Bible that happens to be on my desk. Luke also wrote Acts, again over 50 pages, so he is responsible for about 27% of the New Testament. Paul wrote 23% (or 27% if he wrote Hebrews), and John wrote 20% of it.

John presents Jesus as the Son of God; Mark as the Servant; and Matthew as the King. Theologians sometimes summarize Luke's gospel as the gospel of the Son of Man. These summaries are a bit too restrictive for my liking, but the value of them is that they remind us of the various aspects of who Jesus is. But He is also a priest and prophet. He is a shepherd and lion as well as so many other things.

I. Who was Luke?

His name only appears in three texts in the New Testament, all by Paul (noted in **boldface** type below). Luke was:

- A. The author of the gospel of Luke. You can figure this out by a process of elimination using Luke and Acts, especially the "we" passages. The early church attributed the gospel to Luke as well.
- B. A beloved physician (**Col. 4:14**). The term *physician* can be used of a healer of physical disease, as here or with Jesus who healed people's illnesses (Mark 5:26, Luke 4:23), or of one who heals spiritual sickness, as Jesus also did (Mark 2:17).
- C. A travel companion of Paul (**2 Tim. 4:11**, "we" portions in Acts).
- D. A co-worker with the apostle Paul (**Philemon 24**). As such, he would have had regular contact with the progress of the gospel in its first several decades, and information from Paul who received it from the Lord Jesus.

- E. A first-rate historian. He knew many primary sources and, I believe, interviewed many people with knowledge of the early Christian faith. He knew Philip, for example, one of the seven deacons in Acts 6. His attention to detail as a physician, evidenced in the text with time markers and narrative details that other gospel writers did not include, supports the claim that Luke was a great historian.
- F. An acquaintance of Theophilus. This name means “one who loves God” or “friend of God” or “loved by God.” The modifier “most excellent” in Acts 23:26 refers to Roman governor Felix. Perhaps therefore Theophilus was the Christian name of a governing ruler in the Roman empire. Luke had contact with him somehow, possibly treated him as a medical patient, and wanted to help his soul and not just his body. Theophilus had been instructed in the Christian faith at some time in the past but needed more information to support him.
- G. Luke also was a “second generation” Christian. He was documenting what was passed down from the eyewitnesses of the Lord.

II. Purpose of Luke’s Gospel

- A. Luke was writing to evangelize or at least buttress the uncertain or shaky faith of his reader by establishing the truth of the things concerning Jesus Christ. In other words, we could say in modern theological parlance that he had an “apologetic” purpose. That is, his purpose was to defend (not apologize!) for the Christian faith. It was to give reasons for why he believes the Christian faith and the person and work of Christ.

This book is for you if you have ever had doubts, or your faith has been shaken. God knew there would be many Theophiluses out there, people who think they know God and have a sense that it is important to get to know the good news about Jesus but are uncertain about the facts. Perhaps you have been confused by the attacks and denials they hear in the world. You have been undermined by the doctrines of the devil, what is taught in schools religious and secular, philosophies in the popular media, rumors, and the like. Perhaps one or more “problems” have troubled you

and you are holding back from believing fully. In such situations, it is helpful to go back to the basics—What are the facts? What do I know for certain?

- B. Luke’s purpose was to put together an orderly, though not necessarily 100% chronological, account of the events and meaning surrounding the life of Jesus. Many others had made efforts in this area. Some of them were inspired accounts—Matthew and Mark came before Luke. John almost certainly came later. Others were summaries or commentaries by individuals who were burdened to write and explain what they knew about the gospel, maybe mixed with legend or errors. He was not disparaging any of them, but said “it seemed good to me also…” to undertake a similar project but with more detail and accuracy.
- C. According to his plan, it was the first of a two-volume series that would deal with what Jesus began in His ministry and teaching, and what He would continue to accomplish through the apostles by means of the work of the Holy Spirit.

III. Luke’s View of His Material

- A. Open. By this, I mean that it was open to many people. Many others had decided to write accounts of the events. Almost all of those are lost, but perhaps they were some of Luke’s source material. The truth about Jesus is not closed or “esoteric knowledge” or secret. It is open-source knowledge.
- B. Narrative. Though he documents such things as miraculous events which strain credulity to the natural mind, these exist in the context of a sequence of other events that were undeniably natural and real. Luke and others before him wrote narrations of these things. They are non-fiction, narrative-able events, not pretend.
- C. Fulfillment. The idea of fulfillment is basically that events “happened.” But they did not just happen to happen; they were not happenstance. They were part of God’s plan and connected these events back to a rich history of Jewish prophecy of which these events became the fulfillments. The Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament are the root of what Luke writes about.

- D. Actual history. There is an order to it. It consists of real events. There were eyewitnesses—the apostles, but not Luke himself until events recorded in Acts in which he participated. Eyewitnesses are a standard of reasonable proof. Luke is a history book covering a key period of just over three decades in world history—specifically Jewish history—but also Christian history and which had an impact on the entirety of the world since.
- E. Worthy of extended and careful treatment. Luke must have spent hundreds of hours researching and putting his book together. At a time when written communication was difficult and expensive, he had the ability to compile and write and re-write, and get secretarial help to write and copy, and then send via courier.
- F. The result of careful research. The key phrase in verse 3 on this point is “having had perfect understanding of all things.” In Greek, it gives the sense that Luke had taken careful, accurate note of everything he could pick up about these events, and now he was recounting that in organized fashion. You can imagine that he came upon this or that event or parable or detail at various times over the years, and in his composition, he inserted it in the proper place so we would have a more ordered arrangement than the order in which he encountered the facts.
- G. Utterly certain, reliable, dependable, truthful. This indicates that what he writes partakes of divine authority. Luke 10:7 says, in part, that “the worker is worthy of his wages.” 1 Timothy 5:18 has Paul quoting from the Old Testament about not muzzling the ox, and from Luke 10:7 about the worker worthy of his wages. There is no other quotation like this from the Old Testament, so we conclude that the apostle Paul is putting the stamp of “inspired” approval upon Luke’s writing. It is part of Scripture and has apostolic approval to that effect. It is part of what the Lord Jesus wanted to communicate to His church.

IV. Unique Material in Luke

- A. The gospel of Luke is not merely another redundant report of the life of Jesus. It has several unique elements that add much to our understanding of His ministry.

- B. "It gives details of Jesus' infancy found in no other Gospel: the census of Caesar Augustus, the journey to Bethlehem, Jesus' birth, the adoration of the shepherds, Jesus' circumcision, the words of Simeon, and Jesus at age 12 in the temple talking with the doctors of the law. It also is the only Gospel to give an account of the Ascension. Among the notable parables found only in Luke's Gospel are those of the good Samaritan and the prodigal son."¹
- C. Going back to our study on the parables, we find there are many parables that appear only in Luke's gospel:

The blind leading the blind.....	6:39-42
The two debtors	7:36-50
Good Samaritan.....	10:30-37
The persistent friend	11:5-13
The rich fool.....	12:13-21
The barren fig tree (2)	13:6-9
Attending and hosting a dinner.....	14:7-14
The great supper	14:15-24
Counting the cost	14:25-35
Lost coin.....	15:8-10
Lost son (Prodigal Son).....	15:11-32
Unjust steward	16:1-13
Rich man and Lazarus.....	16:19-31
Unprofitable servants.....	17:7-10
Persistent widow	18:1-8
Pharisee and tax collector	18:9-14
Delay of the kingdom	19:11-27

That is 17 in number, including some particularly important information. Without Luke, we would be missing a lot.

Conclusion

Luke wrote under the influence or superintendence of the Holy Spirit of God. What he wrote is true and without error. It is authoritative. It is meant to strengthen the faith of Christians, or to encourage

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gospel-According-to-Luke>

nascent faith of not-quite-Christians so they can have a stable, certain foundation on which to build faith.

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