

Exploring Luke

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are the two parts of a work addressed to Theophilus (compare 1:1-4 with Acts 1:1-2). The author of Acts apparently accompanied Paul on some of his journeys – note the "we" in Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1 – 28:16. A comparison of Acts with Paul's epistles indicates that Luke the physician was the author of Acts and, hence, of the third Gospel.

OUTLINE

The events preceding Jesus' ministry (1:1-4:13) can be divided into three sections: The prologue (1:1-4), which records Luke's purpose in writing the Gospel; the infancy narrative (1:5-2:52), which parallels the annunciation and birth scenes of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ; and the preparation for Jesus' ministry (3:1-4:13), which tells of John's ministry, the baptism of Jesus and Jesus' victory over Satan.

Luke divides Jesus' public ministry (4:14-21:38) into three sections:

1. Jesus' ministry in Galilee (4:14-9:50) shows him preaching in the synagogues throughout the region. He performed numerous miracles, which helped the people but brought him into conflict with the religious authorities.
2. The travel narrative (9:51-19:27) begins when "**Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem' (9:51)** and ends with his triumphant arrival there. Luke documents numerous references to Jesus continuing on his journey (9:52, 53, 56; 10:1, 38; 13:22, 31-33; 14:25; 17:11; 18:31, 35; 19:1, 11, 28). This section contains many parables unique to Luke's Gospel: the good Samaritan (10:29-37), the friend at midnight (11:5-8), the rich fool (12:13-20), the returning master (12:35-38), the barren fig tree (13:6-9), the wedding banquet (14:7-14), the great banquet (14:15-24), the lost coin (15:8-10), the lost son (15:11-32), the shrewd manager (16:1-9), Lazarus and the rich man (16:19-31), the unjust judge (18:1-8) and the Pharisee and the tax-collector (18:9-14).
3. Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem (19:28-21:38) includes his triumphant entry, a lamentation over the city (19:41-44), the cleansing of the temple (19:41-48), his teaching on tribute to Caesar and the temple tax (20:19-26), and his prophecy of the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem (21:1-38).

Finally, the passion narrative (22:1-24:53) portrays Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection. Luke includes three of Jesus' sayings on the cross not found in the other accounts (23:34, 43, 46), including a plea for God to forgive those who were crucifying him (23:34)¹

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

In some ways, the best way to read Luke is to study it and Acts as a continuous work, written by the same author. For example, knowing how important the Holy Spirit is to the

story in Acts helps us appreciate its role before and at Jesus' birth (1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25-26) and in guiding his ministry (3:22; 4:1, 18).

Luke-Acts, as the work is called by scholars, has a more historical emphasis than the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John. As in the historical books of the Old Testament, God is the main character in Luke-Acts – his unseen hand guides events to fulfill his purpose. But Luke also places these events into "the context of world history. He connects it not only to the story of Israel but also to the larger *oikoumene*, the civilized world of Hellenism.

Thus he alone of the evangelists provides chronological references for key events (see Luke 1:5; 2:1-2; 3:1-2; Acts 18:12)" (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina Series, Vol. 3, pp. 5-6).

Luke, an educated man, wrote in very good Greek. Where the parallel accounts merely transliterate a Hebrew or Latin word, Luke often uses a Greek word instead. Luke explains to his largely gentile audience how God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament came to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and how the gentile mission came to be included in those promises.

LEARNING ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

Although Luke, like the other evangelists, acknowledges Jesus' divine status, he is careful to stress his humanity. Luke portrays the Jesus who entered history as a human being.

Only Luke's record of Jesus' genealogy goes back to Adam (3:23-38). Only Luke records Jesus' circumcision (2:21), his presentation at the temple (2:22-38), his growth as a child (2:40), his meeting at age 12 with the religious teachers in the temple (2:41-51) and his continued development "in wisdom and stature" (2:52). These precise details establish Jesus as a historic personality.

Jesus' humanity is again stressed in Luke's account of the temptation scene (4:1-13). He also paints Jesus against a background of pious Judaism. He mentions Jesus' custom of attending synagogue on the Sabbath (4:14, 16, 31, 44) and that he was frequently the guest of Pharisees (7:36; 14:1). Luke tells us, "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16).

Only Luke records Jesus praying at certain crucial periods in his life: at his baptism (3:21), before calling his disciples (6:12), before Peter's pivotal confession of Jesus as Christ (9:18) and before the transfiguration (9:28). These prayers highlight Jesus' human need to pray to God.

OTHER TOPICS

- ?? **WOMEN:** Luke-Acts shows us that, both during Jesus' ministry and in the early church, several women were among the most dedicated of his followers. D.L. Block comments: "Luke features the responsiveness of women (7:36-50; 8:1-3; 8:48; 10:38-42; 13:10-17; 24:1-12). Often it is not just a women but a widow who is cited, since she represented the most vulnerable status within society (2:37; 4:25-26; 7:12; 18:3, 5; 20:47; 21:2-3). Whether in parable or by example, these women show that they are sensitive to the message of Jesus. Though on the fringes of first-century society, they are in the middle of Luke's story. Often they are paired with men (2:25-28; 4:25-27; 8:40-56; 11:31-32; 13:18-21; 15:4-10; 17:34-35; Acts 21:9-10), a feature suggesting that the gospel is for both genders" (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, p. 506).
- ?? **PRAYER:** The early church experienced dramatic answers to prayer on several occasions (Acts 4:31; 8:15-17; 9:40; 12:5-11). Luke shows that the practice of prayer is rooted in Jesus' example (5:16).
- ?? Luke also "includes parables which teach so much about prayer, the friend at midnight (11:5 ff.), the unjust judge (18:1ff.), the Pharisee and the tax-collector (18:10ff.). In addition Luke records some exhortations to the disciples to pray (6:28; 11:2; 22:40, 46), and he has a warning against the wrong kind of prayer (20:47)" (Leon Morris, *The Gospel of Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, p. 50).
- ?? **WEALTH.** Luke has many statements relating to the affluent and the influential. They direct the rich to help the poor, and show the proper use of money generally: "[Luke] has the parable of the two debtors (7:40-43); of the rich fool (12:16-21); of the rash builder of the tower (14:28-30); of the unjust steward and his astute financial manipulations (16:1-9); of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31); of the servants and the pound (19:11-27)" (William Barclay, *Introduction to the First Three Gospels*, p. 219).

WHAT THIS BOOK MEANS FOR YOU

Luke portrays a Jesus Christ who defined his mission as follows:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (4:18-19).

Jesus brought good news to everyone, including the poor and oppressed, to all groups who were despised or marginalized by society in first-century Israel. Luke's Gospel

emphasizes that through Jesus Christ, salvation is available to all, freely and without prejudice.

Only Luke's Gospel records the parable of the good Samaritan (10:30-37) and the story of the Samaritan who expressed gratitude to Jesus for being healed (17:11-19). These incidents foreshadowed the entrance of the Samaritans into the church of God (Acts 8:4-25).

In Luke, despised tax collectors become examples of repentance and discipleship (in parable and in reality) (3:12; 5:27-32; 18:9-14; 19:2-10). Jesus forgives and praises a sinful woman (7:36-50) and promises paradise to a repentant thief (23:43). Repentance and forgiveness of sins are to be preached in Jesus' name to all nations (24:47). "All mankind will see God's salvation" (3:6)

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