

Grace to You :: *esp Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Luke

Scripture: Luke

Code: MSB42

Title

As with the other 3 gospels, the title is derived from the author's name. According to tradition, Luke was a Gentile. The Apostle Paul seems to confirm this, distinguishing Luke from those who were "of the circumcision" (Col. 4:11, 14). That would make Luke the only Gentile to pen any books of Scripture. He is responsible for a significant portion of the NT, having written both this gospel and the book of Acts (see Author and Date).

Very little is known about Luke. He almost never included personal details about himself, and nothing definite is known about his background or his conversion. Both Eusebius and Jerome identified him as a native of Antioch (which may explain why so much of the book of Acts centers on Antioch—cf. Acts 11:19–27; 13:1–3; 14:26; 15:22, 23, 30–35; 18:22, 23). Luke was a frequent companion of the Apostle Paul, at least from the time of Paul's Macedonian vision (Acts 16:9, 10) right up to the time of Paul's martyrdom (2 Tim. 4:11).

The Apostle Paul referred to Luke as a physician (Col. 4:14). Luke's interest in medical phenomena is evident in the high profile he gave to Jesus' healing ministry (e.g., 4:38–40; 5:15–25; 6:17–19; 7:11–15; 8:43–47, 49–56; 9:2, 6, 11; 13:11–13; 14:2–4; 17:12–14; 22:50, 51). In Luke's day, physicians did not have a unique vocabulary of technical terminology; so when Luke discusses healings and other medical issues, his language is not markedly different from that of the other gospel writers.

Author and Date

The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts clearly were written by the same individual (cf. 1:1–4; Acts 1:1). Although he never identified himself by name, it is clear from his use of "we" in many sections of Acts that he was a close companion of the Apostle Paul (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16). Luke is the only person, among the colleagues Paul mentions in his own epistles (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24), who fits the profile of the author of these books. That accords perfectly with the earliest tradition of the church which unanimously attributed this gospel to Luke.

Luke and Acts appear to have been written at about the same time—Luke first, then Acts. Combined, they make a 2-volume work addressed to "Theophilus" (1:3; Acts 1:1; see Background and Setting) giving a sweeping history of the founding of Christianity, from the birth of Christ to Paul's imprisonment under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30, 31).

The book of Acts ends with Paul still in Rome, which leads to the conclusion that Luke wrote these books from Rome during Paul's imprisonment there (ca. A.D. 60–62). Luke records Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (19:42–44; 21:20–24) but makes no mention of the fulfillment of that prophecy, either here or in Acts. Luke made it a point to record such prophetic

fulfillments (cf. Acts 11:28), so it is extremely unlikely he wrote these books after the Roman invasion of Jerusalem. Acts also includes no mention of the great persecution that began under Nero in A.D. 64. In addition, many scholars set the date of James' martyrdom at A.D. 62, and if that was before Luke completed his history, he certainly would have mentioned it. So, the most likely date for this gospel is A.D. 60 or 61.

Background and Setting

Luke dedicated his works to "most excellent Theophilus" (lit. "lover of God"—1:3; cf. Acts 1:1). This designation, which may be a nickname or a pseudonym, is accompanied by a formal address ("most excellent")—possibly signifying that "Theophilus" was a well known Roman dignitary, perhaps one of those who had turned to Christ in "Caesar's household" (Phil. 4:22).

It is almost certain, however, that Luke envisioned a much broader audience for his work than this one man. The dedications at the outset of Luke and Acts are like the formal dedication in a modern book. They are not like the address of an epistle.

Luke expressly stated that his knowledge of the events recorded in his gospel came from the reports of those who were eyewitnesses (1:1, 2)—strongly implying that he himself was not an eyewitness. It is clear from his prologue that his aim was to give an ordered account of the events of Jesus' life, but this does not mean he always followed a strict chronological order in all instances.

By acknowledging that he had compiled his account from various extant sources, Luke was not disclaiming divine inspiration for his work. The process of inspiration never bypasses or overrides the personalities, vocabularies, and styles of the human authors of Scripture. The unique traits of the human authors are always indelibly stamped on all the books of Scripture. Luke's research is no exception to this rule. The research itself was orchestrated by divine Providence. And in his writing, Luke was moved by the Spirit of God (2 Pet. 1:21). Therefore, his account is infallibly true.

Historical and Theological Themes

Luke's style is that of a scholarly, well-read author. He wrote as a meticulous historian, often giving details that helped identify the historical context of the events he described (1:5; 2:1, 2; 3:1, 2; 13:1–4).

His account of the nativity is the fullest in all the gospel records—and (like the rest of Luke's work) more polished in its literary style. He included in the birth narrative a series of praise psalms (1:46–55; 1:68–79; 2:14; 2:29–32; 34, 35). He alone reported the unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of John the Baptist, the annunciation to Mary, the manger, the shepherds, and Simeon and Anna (2:25–38).

A running theme in Luke's gospel is Jesus' compassion for Gentiles, Samaritans, women, children, tax collectors, sinners, and others often regarded as outcasts in Israel. Every time he mentions a tax collector (3:12; 5:27; 7:29; 15:1; 18:10–13; 19:2), it is in a positive sense. Yet, Luke did not ignore the salvation of those who were rich and respectable—e.g., 23:50–53. From the outset of Jesus' public ministry (4:18) to the Lord's final words on the cross (23:40–43), Luke underscored this theme of Christ's ministry to the pariahs of society. Again and again he showed how the Great Physician

ministered to those most aware of their need (cf. 5:31, 32; 15:4–7; 31, 32; 19:10).

The high profile Luke accords to women is particularly significant. From the nativity account, where Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna are given prominence (chaps. 1; 2), to the events of resurrection morning, where women again are major characters (24:1, 10), Luke emphasized the central role of women in the life and ministry of our Lord (e.g., 7:12–15, 37–50; 8:2, 3, 43–48; 10:38–42; 13:11–13; 21:2–4; 23:27–29, 49, 55, 56).

Several other recurring themes form threads through Luke's gospel. Examples of these are human fear in the presence of God; forgiveness (3:3; 5:20–25; 6:37; 7:41–50; 11:4; 12:10; 17:3, 4; 23:34; 24:47); joy (1:14); wonder at the mysteries of divine truth; the role of the Holy Spirit (1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25–27; 3:16, 22; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; 11:13; 12:10, 12); the temple in Jerusalem (1:9–22; 2:27–38, 46–49; 4:9–13; 18:10–14; 19:45–48; 20:1–21:6; 21:37, 38; 24:53); and Jesus' prayers (6:12).

Starting with 9:51, Luke devoted 10 chapters of his narrative to a travelogue of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem. Much of the material in this section is unique to Luke. This is the heart of Luke's gospel, and it features a theme Luke stressed throughout: Jesus' relentless progression toward the cross. This was the very purpose for which Christ had come to earth (cf. 9:22, 23; 17:25; 18:31–33; 24:25, 26, 46), and He would not be deterred. The saving of sinners was His whole mission (19:10).

Interpretive Challenges

Luke, like Mark, and in contrast to Matthew, appears to target a Gentile readership (for a discussion of the Synoptic Problem, [see Introduction to Mark: Interpretive Challenges](#)). He identified locations that would have been familiar to all Jews (e.g., 4:31; 23:51; 24:13), suggesting that his audience went beyond those who already had knowledge of Palestinian geography. He usually preferred Greek terminology over Hebraisms (e.g., “Calvary” instead of “Golgotha” in 23:33). The other gospels all use occasional Semitic terms such as “Abba” (Mark 14:36), “rabbi” (Matt. 23:7, 8; John 1:38, 49), and “hosanna” (Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9, 10; John 12:13)—but Luke either omitted them or used Greek equivalents.

Luke quoted the OT more sparingly than Matthew, and when citing OT passages, he nearly always employed the LXX, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Furthermore, most of Luke's OT citations are allusions rather than direct quotations, and many of them appear in Jesus' words rather than Luke's narration (2:23, 24; 3:4–6; 4:4, 8, 10–12, 18, 19; 7:27; 10:27; 18:20; 19:46; 20:17, 18, 37, 42, 43; 22:37).

Luke, more than any of the other gospel writers, highlighted the universal scope of the gospel invitation. He portrayed Jesus as the Son of Man, rejected by Israel, and then offered to the world. As noted above (see Historical and Theological Themes), Luke repeatedly related accounts of Gentiles, Samaritans, and other outcasts who found grace in Jesus' eyes. This emphasis is precisely what we would expect from a close companion of the “apostle of the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:13).

Yet some critics have claimed to see a wide gap between Luke's theology and that of Paul. It is true that Luke's gospel is practically devoid of terminology that is uniquely Pauline. Luke wrote with his own style. Yet the underlying theology is perfectly in harmony with that of the apostle's. The centerpiece of Paul's doctrine was justification by faith (Rom. 3:24). Luke also highlighted and

illustrated justification by faith in many of the incidents and parables he related, chiefly the account of the Pharisee and the publican (18:9–14); the familiar story of the Prodigal Son (15:11–32); the incident at Simon's house (7:36–50); and the salvation of Zacchaeus (19:1–10).

Outline

I. The Prelude to Christ's Ministry (1:1–4:13)

A. Preamble (1:1–4)

B. The Birth of Jesus (1:5–2:38)

1. The annunciation to Zacharias (1:5–25)
 2. The annunciation to Mary (1:26–38)
 3. The visitation (1:39–45)
 4. The Magnificat (1:46–56)
 5. The birth of the forerunner (1:57–80)
 6. The nativity (2:1–38)
- #### **C. The Boyhood of Jesus (2:39–52)**

1. In Nazareth (2:39, 40)
 2. In the temple (2:41–50)
 3. In His family (2:51, 52)
- #### **D. The Baptism of Jesus (3:1–4:13)**

1. The preaching of John the Baptist (3:1–20)
2. The testimony of heaven (3:21, 22)
3. The genealogy of the Son of Man (3:23–38)
4. The temptation of the Son of God (4:1–13)

II. The Ministry in Galilee (4:14–9:50)

A. The Commencement of His Ministry (4:14–44)

1. Nazareth (4:14–30)
 2. Capernaum (4:31–42)
 - a. A demon cast out (4:31–37)
 - b. Multitudes healed (4:38–42)
 3. The cities of Galilee (4:43, 44)
- #### **B. The Calling of His Disciples (5:1–6:16)**

1. Four fishermen (5:1–26)
 - a. Fishing for men (5:1–11)
 - b. Healing infirmities (5:12–16)
 - c. Pardoning sins (5:17–26)
2. Levi (5:27–6:11)
 - a. The gospel: not for the righteous, but for sinners (5:27–32)
 - b. The wineskins: not old, but new (5:33–39)

- c. The Sabbath: not for bondage, but for doing good (6:1–11)
- 3. The twelve (6:12–16)
- C. The Continuation of His Work (6:17–9:50)

- 1. Preaching on the plateau (6:17–49)
 - a. Beatitudes (6:17–23)
 - b. Woes (6:24–26)
 - c. Commandments (6:27–49)
- 2. Ministering in the cities (7:1–8:25)
 - a. He heals a centurion's servant (7:1–10)
 - b. He raises a widow's son (7:11–17)
 - c. He encourages John the Baptist's disciples (7:18–35)
 - d. He forgives a sinful woman (7:36–50)
 - e. He gathers loving disciples (8:1–3)
 - f. He teaches the multitudes with parables (8:4–21)
 - g. He stills the winds and waves (8:22–25)
- 3. Traveling in Galilee (8:26–9:50)
 - a. He delivers a demoniac (8:26–39)
 - b. He heals a woman (8:40–48)
 - c. He raises a girl (8:49–56)
 - d. He sends out the Twelve (9:1–6)
 - e. He confounds Herod (9:7–9)
 - f. He feeds the multitude (9:10–17)
 - g. He predicts His crucifixion (9:18–26)
 - h. He unveils His glory (9:27–36)
 - i. He casts out an unclean spirit (9:37–42)
 - j. He instructs His disciples (9:43–50)
- III. The Journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:27)**

A. Samaria (9:51–10:37)

- 1. A village turns Him away (9:51–56)
- 2. He turns away the half-hearted (9:57–62)
- 3. He sends out the seventy (10:1–24)
- 4. He gives the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37)
- B. Bethany and Judea (10:38–13:35)

- 1. Mary and Martha (10:38–42)
- 2. The Lord's prayer (11:1–4)
- 3. The importance of importunity (11:5–13)
- 4. The impossibility of neutrality (11:14–36)
- 5. Woes upon Pharisees and lawyers (11:37–54)
- 6. Lessons along the way (12:1–59)
 - a. Against hypocrisy (12:1–12)
 - b. Against worldly materialism (12:13–21)
 - c. Against worry (12:22–34)
 - d. Against unfaithfulness (12:35–48)
 - e. Against love of ease (12:49–53)
 - f. Against unpreparedness (12:54–56)

- g. Against division (12:57–59)
- 7. Questions answered (13:1–30)
 - a. About the justice of God (13:1–9)
 - b. About the Sabbath (13:10–17)
 - c. About the kingdom (13:18–21)
 - d. About the few who are saved (13:22–30)
- 8. Christ's lament (13:31–35)
- C. Perea (14:1–19:27)

- 1. Guest of a Pharisee (14:1–24)
 - a. He tests them about the Sabbath (14:1–6)
 - b. He teaches them about humility (14:7–14)
 - c. He tells them about the heavenly banquet (14:15–24)
- 2. Teacher of multitudes (14:25–18:34)
 - a. The cost of discipleship (14:25–35)
 - b. The parable of the lost sheep (15:1–7)
 - c. The parable of the lost coin (15:8–10)
 - d. The parable of the lost son (15:11–32)
 - e. The parable of the unjust steward (16:1–18)
 - f. The rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31)
 - g. A lesson about forgiveness (17:1–4)
 - h. A lesson about faithfulness (17:5–10)
 - i. A lesson about thankfulness (17:11–19)
 - j. A lesson about readiness (17:20–37)
 - k. The parable of the persistent widow (18:1–8)
 - l. The parable of the Pharisee and the publican (18:9–14)
 - m. A lesson about childlikeness (18:15–17)
 - n. A lesson about commitment (18:18–30)
 - o. A lesson about the plan of redemption (18:31–34)
- 3. Friend of sinners (18:35–19:10)
 - a. He opens blind eyes (18:35–43)
 - b. He seeks and saves the lost (19:1–10)
- 4. Judge of all the earth (19:11–27)
 - a. The end of a long journey (19:11)
 - b. The parable of the minas (19:12–27)

IV. The Passion Week (19:28–23:56)

A. Sunday (19:28–44)

- 1. The triumphal entry (19:28–40)
- 2. Christ weeps over the city (19:41–44)

B. Monday (19:45–48)

- 1. He cleanses the temple (19:45, 46)
- 2. He teaches the Passover crowds (19:47, 48)

C. Tuesday (20:1–21:38)

- 1. He contends with the Jewish rulers (20:1–8)
- 2. He teaches the Passover crowds (20:9–21:38)

- a. The parable of the wicked vinedressers (20:9–19)
- b. An answer to the Pharisees about paying taxes (20:20–26)
- c. An answer to the Sadducees about the resurrection (20:27–40)
- d. A question for the scribes about messianic prophecy (20:41–47)
- e. The lesson of the widow's mites (21:1–4)
- f. A prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem (21:5–24)
- g. Some signs of the times (21:25–38)
- D. Wednesday (22:1–6)

- 1. The plot against Jesus (22:1, 2)
- 2. Judas joins the conspiracy (22:3–6)
- E. Thursday (22:7–53)

- 1. Preparation for Passover (22:7–13)
- 2. The Lord's Supper (22:14–38)
 - a. The New Covenant instituted (22:14–22)
 - b. Disputes among the disciples (22:23–30)
 - c. Peter's denial predicted (22:31–34)
 - d. God's provision promised (22:35–38)
- 3. The agony in the garden (22:39–46)
- 4. Jesus' arrest (22:47–53)
- F. Friday (22:54–23:55)

- 1. Peter's denial (22:54–62)
- 2. Jesus mocked and beaten (22:63–65)
- 3. The trial before the Sanhedrin (22:66–71)
- 4. The trial before Pilate (23:1–25)
 - a. The indictment (23:1–5)
 - b. The hearing before Herod (23:6–12)
 - c. Pilate's verdict (23:13–25)
- 5. The crucifixion (23:26–49)
- 6. The burial (23:50–55)
- G. The Sabbath (23:56)

V. The Consummation of Christ's Ministry (24:1–53)

- A. The Resurrection (24:1–12)
- B. The Road to Emmaus (24:13–45)
- C. The Ascension (24:46–53)

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2024 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with

Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).