

A Survey of the Gospel of Luke

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Author:

The gospel of Luke is the third, and the final, of the synoptic gospels. The author wrote anonymously, and in a third person viewpoint, but it is traditionally ascribed to the Gentile physician Luke (**Colossians 4:10**). Outside of the “we sections” in Acts (**Acts 16, 20-21, 27-28**), Luke is mentioned three times in the New Testament (**Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24, II Timothy 4:11**). In all of these cases Luke is accompanying Paul in prison. Luke was one of the most influential Gentiles in the early church.

The Old Testament was penned by Jews, but the New Testament is different. Gentiles, like Luke, played a significant role in the expansion of the church, and their writings were exalted. Luke wrote more of the New Testament than any other man (unless Paul wrote Hebrews), which comprises 25%. The gospel of Luke is the longest book in the New Testament. When Luke and Acts combined they are longer than the thirteen letters of Paul combined.

Arguably, Luke is the most polished writer of the New Testament with the possible exception of the writer of Hebrews (which he may have also penned). The writings of Luke have a wide vocabulary and nearly 800 words are found in his writings that do not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. With the exception of Luke 1-2, he quotes exclusively from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX). He also ties the genealogy of Jesus to Adam, not just to David or Abraham. Clearly, this plays a part in his overall theme. Also, the medical knowledge and interest in seafaring are apparent in Luke’s gospel.

Date:

This book was probably written from Rome in the late 50's or early 60's AD. Some scholars speculate a date of about 62 AD. It would have been written after Paul's two year Roman imprisonment (**Acts 28:30-31**), but before Paul's trial, otherwise that information would have been included in the conclusion of the book of Acts. Another way we can conclude an early date for Luke is because the apostle Paul quotes **Luke 10:7** in **I Timothy 5:18**.

Theme:

The theme of his gospel seems to be that Jesus is the Son of Man. In the early church, this gospel may not have gained as much popularity as Matthew and Mark, but only because it may not have been regarded well by the early Jewish readers. Gentiles could relate to this theme. However, as Luke's education, scholarship, and view of culture shines through one cannot help but appreciate its value. As he begins his gospel it is apparent that he has collected his material from several eyewitnesses and other written documents, which is unlike the apostle Matthew, and John Mark who is writing for the Apostle Peter, with firsthand information.

Luke is careful to date the birth of Jesus, noting six rulers of his time. He reveals a fresh new perspective on the nativity scene, the childhood of Jesus, and a glimpse into the boyhood home and relationship with his parents. He includes poetry early on to grab the attention of his readers and pulling them into his narrative.

Audience:

Luke's gospel undoubtedly targets Gentiles. Specifically, his gospel is addressed to Theophilus (**Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1**), but noticeably its depth and length reveal a broader audience. The book of Acts refers to the gospel of Luke as the first book. Therefore, the two books are meant to be seen as volume 1 and volume 2. The second book is a continuation of the work of Christ, the Son of Man, through His apostles.

One unique characteristic of this book is that Luke exalts women. He mentions thirteen women otherwise omitted by the other gospel writers. These women include Elizabeth, the widow of Nain, Anna, Lot's wife, the widow (and her mite), and the ladies who ministered to Jesus in addition to many others. More details are given by Luke on the lives of Mary and Martha (**Luke 10:38-42**), Mary Magdalene (**Luke 8:1-3**), and some of the other women who followed Jesus closely. The chapter reveals stories about these women and their homes.

Luke stresses the compassion of Jesus toward the poor. There are many parables about money unique to Luke: the two debtors (**Luke 7:41-43**), the rich fool (**Luke 12:16-21**), the unrighteous steward, the rich man and Lazarus (**Luke 16**), and the pounds (**Luke 19:13-37**). He also takes time to lift up the outcast and underdog: the sinful woman (**Luke 7:36-50**), the good Samaritan (**Luke 10**), the word of praise for the grateful Samaritan leper (**Luke 9:46-56**), the persistent widow (**Luke 18:1-8**), the praying publican (**Luke 18:9-14**), Zacchaeus (**Luke 19:1-10**), and the penitent thief on the cross (**Luke 23:39-43**). The miracles in Luke even seem to highlight Christ's work among those often neglected or forgotten. This continues in the book of Acts.

The sense of realism and genuineness sets Luke apart from the other writers. With the exception of the gospel of John, few writers could connect emotionally with the audience in such a vivid fashion. The gospel is written like a dramatic narrative. He gives prominence to prayer, gently handles the mistakes of the apostles, and describes the agony of the apostles after Jesus' death. He gives his readers a raw view of Jesus in the garden and on the cross.

Key Verses:

Luke 1:29, 2:1-20, 4:4, 4:18-19, 5:32, 6:21, 6:27-28, 6:37, 8:21, 11:9, 11:13, 11:28, 12:22, 13:3-5, 14:7-11, 15:1-32, 16:19-30, 17:24, 18:9-17, 19:1-10, 19:46, 20:34-38, 22:17-22, 23:39-43, 24:25-26, 24:44-49

Outline:

- I. *The Preface (1:1-4)*
- II. *The Birth & Early Life of Jesus (1:5-2:52)*
- III. *The Preparation for Jesus' Ministry (3:1-4:13)*
- IV. *The Galilean Ministry of Jesus (4:14-9:50)*
- V. *The Journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27)*
- VI. *The Jerusalem Ministry of Jesus (19:28-21:38)*
- VII. *The Betrayal, Trials, and Death of Jesus (22:1-23:56)*
- VIII. *The Resurrection and Great Commission (24:1-53)*