

Gospel of Luke Session 01

Send questions to: pastornick@htchurch.com

Introduction to the Gospel of Luke

On YouTube: @htchurch

Housekeeping Items & Homework

- Be sure to get class notes every week.
- Sessions are available on our YouTube channel, at @htchurch.
- Audio podcast is also available (ask if you need help with this).
- There's also a Group for this course on our Realm app.
- We'll be doing a verse-by-verse study in Luke. Be sure to do your homework – there will be weekly readings that will take us through Luke by mid-June.
- Be sure to meditate on the Word!
- Invite a friend to join us or at least watch our sessions on YouTube.
- Our Q & A times are also important. Besides our question times during class, you can also email questions to pastornick@htchurch.com.

Luke and the New Testament Generally

In the New Testament we can identify four different kinds of writings:

- The Gospels (the records that the Bible gives us of the life of Jesus)
- History (the Book of Acts)
- Letters (or Epistles)
- Prophecy (the Book of Revelation).

The Gospels are named for the men who wrote them: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Early Church Father Irenaeus (d. ~202 AD) passed down this tradition:

Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also handed down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned on his breast, himself published a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia. (Against Heresies, 3.1.1)

- The Gospels are not a complete record of Jesus' life. They're only designed to show us certain key aspects of Jesus' life and teachings. The Gospel of John concludes by saying this: "...there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (John 21:25)
- The New Testament also contains some letters or epistles written by the apostles or people connected to them.
- The final book of the New Testament is the Book of Revelation. *Revelation* is what we call an apocalyptic book. That means it's a kind of literature that depends on symbolic visions that the writer received.

Luke is the only book in the New Testament with a sequel. After writing his gospel, Luke then wrote the one book of history in the New Testament, the Book of Acts.

Luke begins with the stories of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, and it runs up through the Jesus' ascension back into Heaven. *Acts* runs from the Ascension until close to the end of the Apostle Paul's ministry. *Luke* and *Acts* were probably written some time before 64 AD, when Paul was martyred by Nero.

Understanding Luke's Gospel

1. Who is the author of the book?

Traditionally, the author has been believed to be Luke. Luke was a physician who accompanied Paul during much of Paul's travels. When you read *Acts*, you will notice some spots where Luke uses the word "we" instead of saying "they."

Luke is unusual in that he is probably the only Gentile to write any of the Bible. Much of his gospel and *Acts* is about the spread of the Gospel to the nations. Some people think Luke was a proselyte: a convert to Judaism.

Luke's gospel is the biggest book in the New Testament, both in terms of the numbers of verses and the Greek word count.

Luke seems to have been a devoted Christian and a faithful co-worker with Paul.

- In *Colossians* 4:14, Paul refers to Luke as "the beloved physician."
- In *Philemon*, Paul calls him one of his "fellow laborers (v. 24)".
- In *2 Corinthians* 8, Paul refers to a brother "whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches" (8:18). Many people have thought this was Luke.

- A final reference to Luke comes when Paul tells Timothy, “Only Luke is with me” (see 2 Tim. 4:11).

Luke would have been considered very educated in that society. He uses the best Greek of any NT author. His writing is detailed, and he is a careful historian.

2. Luke's Investigations

The purposes of Luke and Acts were largely the same:

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed. (Luke 1:1-4)

We can learn quite a bit from this.

1. A number of people had already attempted to write the story of Jesus.
2. Luke says that these events were *fulfilled*, not that they *happened*.
3. He was not an eyewitness. He believed through the testimony of those who were eyewitnesses, and who ministered the Word.
4. He has a perfect or complete understanding of the events.
5. He is writing to someone called Theophilus, to assure him concerning the faith.

Let's round out the picture by looking at the introduction to *Acts*:

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:1-3)

1. Luke refers to his gospel as *the former account*.
2. Luke describes his gospel as everything Jesus *began* to do and teach.

3. *The purpose of the Gospel of Luke and Acts.*

A. A careful account.

People suggest that while Paul was imprisoned in Judea, Luke had time to travel the land and interview people. Perhaps he spent time with Peter, Mary, and Jesus' brothers. Notice how Luke's Gospel gives us so much of the Christmas story: John the Baptist's birth, the Annunciation to Mary, the Bethlehem shepherds, and the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Only Luke gives us these stories.

B. A defense of the faith.

Some say that Luke wanted to speak favorably to the Roman authorities about Christianity. The question of Theophilus' identity has been debated since the Early Church. Some think he was a Roman in a position of authority.

Others believe there was no Theophilus, and that *Luke* and *Acts* are written to every believer, to every friend of God.

C. Seeking to promote favorable treatment.

Luke might have been trying to take advantage of the special status the Romans gave the Jews. He could have been presenting Christianity as simply another Jewish sect.

D. Luke's purpose is also to show God's purpose to reach the nations!

We begin to see glimmers of God's heart to reach the Gentile world.

4. Some Important Things to Look For in Luke

- First, an emphasis on the nations. Luke is very inclusive.
- We also see Luke emphasizing women.
- There is emphasis on the poor and marginalized people generally.
- Luke is very interested in talking about God's salvation going to all the world. A key verse is Luke 19:10, where Jesus says, "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke also has the "Chapter of Lost Things."
- Luke makes much of the Holy Spirit and experiencing the Spirit's life and power.
- Luke has a focus on joy. We see this in the Christmas story, and elsewhere.
- Praising God is important in this Gospel.
- Prayer is yet another highlight.

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