

LUKE'S GOSPEL

INVESTIGATING THE
MAN WHO IS GOD



BY PASTOR MARK DRISCOLL

Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

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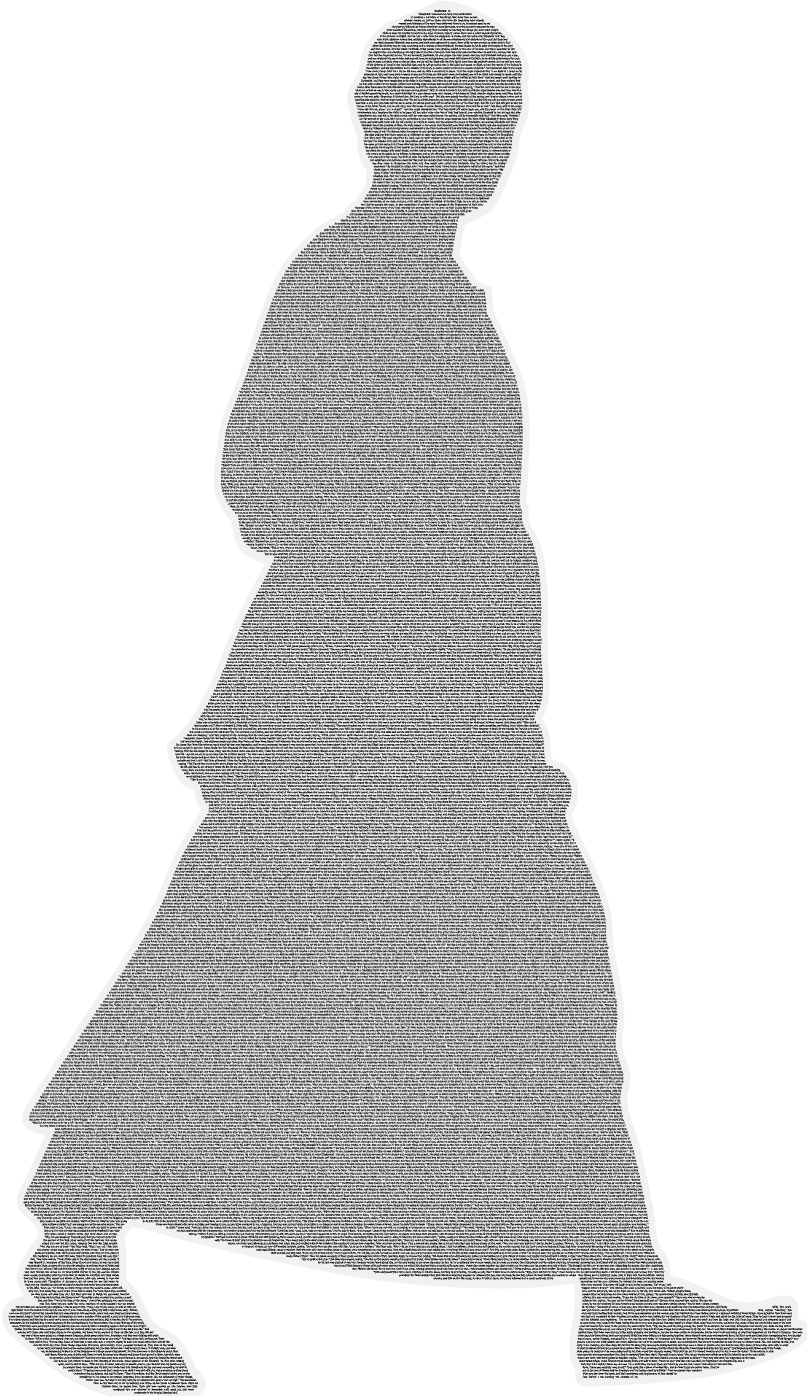


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LUKE'S GOSPEL

INVESTIGATING THE MAN WHO IS GOD

What happens when a wealthy benefactor funds a costly and lengthy investigation by an educated medical doctor and historian of the life of a man who claimed to be God? The Gospel of Luke.

In the opening lines of Luke's gospel we are told that Luke is aware of other biographies written about Jesus Christ, but that he was compelled as a historian to have personally "investigated everything carefully" (NASB) so that there would be "an orderly account" (1:1-4).

For Luke to undertake his investigation, he needed to be financially freed up to spend perhaps a few years personally interviewing the eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Practically, this means that Luke personally interviewed Jesus' mother Mary, Jesus' brothers and sisters, any of Jesus' disciples who were living, Jesus' personal friends like Mary and Martha, and those who were among the crowds that were eyewitnesses to his preaching, miracles, and resurrection, along with individuals Jesus ministered to and healed.

A man named Theophilus underwrote Luke's investigation and thereby paid for his few years of travel and salary. He is mentioned at the beginning of both Luke and Acts. Both books are historical accounts written by Luke, tracing the history of Jesus and the early church respectively as a prequel and sequel of sorts. Theophilus' title "most excellent," a title of nobility in Luke's day, likely indicates that he was a successful business and/or political leader.

During his earthly life, the man Jesus Christ clearly, repeatedly, and emphatically declared himself to be the only God. This claim is without precedent or peer in the history of the world. Today, a few billion people who worship Jesus Christ as God believe that claim, making him the most significant person who has or will ever live. Luke's gospel gives us the most detailed, historically accurate account of the man who is God.

WE ARE GOING BIG ON LUKE

Luke is the longest book in the New Testament with 1,151 verses (586 of which contain words of Christ) compared to 1,071 verses in Matthew, 678 in Mark, and 869 in John. This makes preaching through the entire book quite a daunting task. Even John Calvin never preached consecutively, verse by verse, through the Gospel of Luke. Still, between 1559 and 1564, Calvin did preach sixty-five sermons on the harmony of the Gospels.¹ Some noted contemporary pastors who have preached through Luke in its entirety have taken anywhere from over one hundred to nearly three hundred sermons.

Admittedly, a growing church of our size with plans for additional rapid expansion is not supposed to undertake a project of this magnitude. Nearly all of the "experts" in the areas of megachurch trends and church growth agree that if we want to plant dozens of Mars Hill Campuses, plant hundreds of Acts 29 churches, and baptize thousands of new converts in the next few years, the last thing we should do is tackle the longest book in the New Testament with sermons lasting an hour or more. Instead, to accommodate people's short attention spans and consumer desires, we should do simple, short series with pithy self-help topics compacted into brief feel-good sermons.

But we are Mars Hill Church. We've always been far more about following the Holy Spirit than following the trends. Furthermore, we have always been a church that has opened the Bible to learn about Jesus. So, after a few years in prayer and listening to the Holy Spirit, I proposed to the Executive Elders that they permit me to undertake the longest and most daunting preaching task of my ministry career, roughly three times as many sermons as my previous high (Genesis). After prayer and consideration, they agreed.

We do not know everything that will happen during the few years that we will be studying Luke, but one thing is certain: every week we will gather as God's people to open the Scriptures and learn about Jesus Christ as the beginning of all that we are and do. If our mission is to flourish, it must be for that reason and none other. We are far more concerned about faithfulness and fruitfulness than about fads.

As we study Luke, the hundreds and hundreds of Community Groups that meet throughout the week will be studying, discussing, and applying the text of Luke as well. We like to speak of our preaching and worship services as our "air war" and our Community Groups as the heart of our "ground war." We find it most beneficial to have the ground war follow the air war, which explains why our groups follow our sermons. Therefore, throughout our study of Luke, questions for weekly Community Group and family discussion will be posted online at marshillchurch.org and on The City (our password-protected social networking website).

On the weeks I am out of the pulpit, other Mars Hill elders will be preaching through the next section of Luke. This will allow us to get through the book about a year faster, allow the Community Groups to keep moving forward every week, and also maintain consistent theming and promotions. While this format is a break from how we have previously organized the preaching schedule, we have made this change for Luke because we believe it is in the best interest of our church and also

allows the elders and me to truly work as a preaching team; I will preach about 75 percent of the book of Luke and other elders (mostly Campus Pastors) will preach about 25 percent. Occasionally throughout Luke we will also have a guest preacher preach who is in town to lecture at our Resurgence Training Center that equips missional leaders. These guests, such as Dr. John Piper, will not preach from Luke, but will instead preach whatever the Holy Spirit burdens them to.

To supplement the Luke sermon series, each sermon (regardless of preacher) will open with an introductory video that will serve as the weekly Scripture reading in the service. For each video we will pre-record people reading the text for the day, and the narrating voices will correlate to the various roles and parts of people in the Scriptures. My family will be doing some of the readings; my daughter Ashley, for example, will read the parts of Mary, the young virgin mother; my son Calvin will read part of the story of Jesus as a boy at the Temple; and my son Zac will read the part of shepherd boys. Momma Grace will be reading women's parts. Together it will be a family project of sorts that will include other people as well. The Scripture readings will narrate video footage of the actual locations Luke mentions in his gospel.

In order to capture the video footage of where Jesus was throughout Luke's Gospel, we undertook an enormous film project. In conjunction with a tour of Israel that I led, we took a film and audio crew from the church to shoot Israel using state-of-the-art RED cameras, which have set a new industry standard for quality. Our friends at Ultimate Journeys Tour and Travel graciously gave us a very generous gift to make all of this possible and obtained for us a special bus to transport our gear and film anything we want. This allows us to show you where Jesus actually was and bring the text of Luke to life.

Furthermore, my preaching of the entire sermon series will also be captured live with RED cameras, which are simply as good as it gets and are used only for the best high-end films and television programs. The sermons played back at the video campuses will be even higher quality than the live sermon and will set a new standard for more than preaching, since the quality will be better than many films and television shows. As always, everything we do will be given away free online to tens of millions of people.

Why are we doing all of this? Because we are talking about Jesus Christ and want to do all we can to let the world hear about him.

Now that you have an idea of what we are doing and where we are going with this massive sermon series titled, "Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God," we will dig in and examine the book of Luke a little deeper (though by all means still introductorily) to help you get the most out of both the book and sermon series.

AUTHOR

Luke is commonly believed to be the author of both Luke and Acts. This makes Luke the most prolific New Testament writer. Altogether, the amount of his writing accounts for more of the New Testament than anyone else's, including Paul's and John's.

Luke is mentioned three times in the New Testament. In Colossians 4:14, Paul writes: "Luke the beloved physician greets you," and scholars have noted the amount of medical language used in Luke-Acts.² Paul refers to Luke in Philemon 24 as his "fellow worker." Luke and Paul spent lots of time traveling and laboring side by side in the work of the gospel. While many of Paul's companions deserted him as he neared the end of his life, it appears Luke remained steadfast. Paul writes to Timothy in his last known epistle: "Luke alone is with me" (2 Tim. 4:11). Paul does not include Luke in the group referenced in Colossians 4:11: "These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me." Therefore, most commentators have concluded that Luke was probably a Gentile and not a Jew.

Luke's name (Lucas) is a Greek word, indicating his Gentile origin. Scholars have pointed out that his written language and style are distinctively Greek, displaying a high level of sophistication similar to classic Greek writers. This is due to the fact that Luke is well educated as a medical doctor. Luke avoids common Semitic expressions and instead uses language substitutes from the Greek Septuagint, which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. Bible commentator I. Howard Marshall writes:

The literary style of Luke and Acts demonstrates that their author was a well-educated person with considerable gifts of expression. The traces of medical language and the interest in medical matters displayed in them are consistent with authorship by the "beloved physician." Luke's gifts as a historian have been recognized by many scholars who have viewed his work against its classical background and compared him favorably with the best of ancient historians.³

It is clear from Luke's prologue (1:1–4) that the Gospel's author was not himself an "eyewitness" to the ministry of Jesus. Rather, he personally investigated the life and ministry of Jesus Christ by interviewing those who were eyewitnesses. He writes that "the things that have been accomplished among us" were delivered or handed down to us from "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word."

Internal evidence from the book of Acts points to Luke as the author of the Gospel bearing his name. Bible scholar D. A. Carson writes: "Scholars agree that Luke and Acts were written by the same individual. Not only do the prologues connect the two books, but language, style, and theology also point to common authorship. Internal and external evidence combine to point strongly to Luke, the doctor, Paul's dear friend, as the author."⁴

The "we" passages in Acts, that is, those passages that are written in the first-person plural, seem to identify the author of Acts as Paul's companion at this point in his travels (see Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16). Traveling with the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys provided Luke with ample opportunities to gain first-hand knowledge about the life of Jesus and the history of the earliest Christian church. New Testament scholar Darrell L. Bock lists out the possible candidates to identify Paul's traveling companion: "The Pauline letters name some of Paul's traveling companions: Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke (Philemon 24; Col 4:14). To this list one could add figures such as Timothy, Titus, Silas, Epaphras and Barnabas. Yet despite the wide selection of potential candidates, early-church tradition singles out one name as the author of these volumes: Luke. By A.D. 200 this tradition had become firmly fixed without any hint of contrary opinion."⁵

There is a massive amount of early external evidence that unanimously affirms Luke's authorship of the Gospel.⁶ This external evidence also offers more glimpses into who Luke was.

The Muratorian Fragment (c. 180 A.D.), a second-century list of books accepted as belonging to the New Testament, affirms Luke to be the author of the Gospel: "The third book of the Gospel, according to Luke, Luke that physician, who after the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken him with him as companion of his journey, composed in his own name on the basis of report."⁷

Another early witness to Luke's authorship of the Gospel says, "Indeed Luke was an Antiochene Syrian, a doctor by profession, a disciple of the apostles: later however he followed Paul until his martyrdom, serving the Lord blamelessly. He never had a wife, he never fathered children, and died at the age of eighty-four, full of the Holy Spirit, in Boetia."⁸ In other words, Luke was (1) a native of Antioch, (2) a physician, (3) he wrote his Gospel in Achaia, and (4) he died single and childless at age eighty-four in Greece.

Several of the early church fathers affirmed Luke's authorship of the Gospel. The second-century church father Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) named Luke as the author of both Luke and Acts.⁹ Irenaeus (c. 202) not only attested to Luke's authorship of the Gospel but also said that "Luke was inseparable from Paul" and was "his fellow-laborer in the Gospel."¹⁰ Irenaeus further details:

We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith. Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand 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 upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.¹¹

Tertullian (c.160 – 220), the father of Latin Christianity in the second century, describes Luke as the author of his Gospel. While he affirms that Luke was not an apostle, he calls Luke an "apostolic man."¹² In other words, Luke (like Mark) was closely associated with the apostles in such a way that his writings were recognized as having the apostolic stamp of authority: "Luke . . . was not an apostle, but only an apostolic man; not a master, but a disciple."¹³ Which apostle, then, discipled Luke? According to Tertullian, "the apostle whom Luke followed" was "no doubt . . . Paul."¹⁴

The second-century church father Clement of Alexandria (c.150–215) quotes from Luke's Gospel (3:1, 2, 23) and states that this Gospel was written "by Luke."¹⁵ The early church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 263–339) affirmed Luke's authorship of both the Gospel and Acts:

Luke, who was of Antiochian parentage and a physician by profession, and who was especially intimate with Paul and well acquainted with the rest of the apostles, has left us, in two inspired books, proofs of that spiritual healing art which he learned from them. One of these books is the Gospel, which he testifies that he wrote as those who were from the

beginning eye witnesses and ministers of the word delivered unto him, all of whom, as he says, he followed accurately from the first. The other book is the Acts of the Apostles which he composed not from the accounts of others, but from what he had seen himself.¹⁶

Eusebius also described the close relationship between Luke and the Apostle Paul: "And they say that Paul meant to refer to Luke's Gospel wherever, as if speaking of some gospel of his own, he used the words, 'according to my Gospel.'"¹⁷

New Testament scholar Leon Morris makes a helpful point:

Luke was not, as far as we know, a person of such prominence in the early church as to have two such considerable volumes as these fathered on him without reason. If people were guessing, would they not be much more likely to come up with an apostle? Or Epaphras? Or Mark? The fact that a non-apostolic man of no known prominence is universally held in antiquity to have been the author must be given weight.¹⁸

Finally, Bible commentator I. Howard Marshall offers an insightful description of Luke, the author:

The picture which emerges is of a self-effacing man possessed of strong human sympathies who regarded himself as a servant of the Word. With his considerable literary, historical and theological gifts, he was well fitted to recount the story of the beginnings of Christianity in a new way, adapted to the needs of the second generation in the church.¹⁹

DATE OF WRITING

Marshall states the following about the dating of Luke:

The date of composition of the gospel is not known. There are two serious possibilities. The first is that the gospel was written in the early sixties of the first century; the second is that it belongs to the later decades, possibly around AD 80. The key factors are whether the gospel shows knowledge that Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem had actually been fulfilled, and whether Acts shows knowledge of the death of Paul. Most scholars would answer both questions affirmatively, but in fact we simply do not know.²⁰

Nevertheless, we do know that Luke's Gospel was the first of Luke's two-part narrative of early Christianity. The second in the series is Acts. Therefore, the gospel must have preceded the book of Acts. It is thought that Acts was written about 63 AD because its narrative ends with events only up to about 62 AD. Therefore, Luke's Gospel must have been written prior to that, but after Mark (which was written in the late 50s to early 60s AD). It is likely that Luke wrote his two volumes within a short time span, so somewhere around 62 AD is a good guess for the writing of Luke's gospel.

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

Both Luke and Acts are addressed to the same man, Theophilus, who was probably some sort of governmental official. His title of “most excellent” is used for governors in other places in Acts (cf. Felix and Festus in Acts 23:26; 24:2; 26:25). Luke was from Antioch, but traveled with Paul all over modern-day Southern Europe and the Middle East. The title “most excellent Theophilus” would suggest that the Gospel was sent to some Roman center of government like Rome or Antioch. Moreover, the emphasis Luke places on relationships between Jews and Greeks, rich and poor, and so on, makes the diverse population of Antioch as likely a candidate as any.

Bock explains:

It is unlikely that Theophilus is only interested in becoming a Christian or is a Roman official who needs Christianity explained to him in order to accept it as a legitimate religion. Neither is Paul per se the object of defense. Too little of the Gospel deals with such legal, political concerns and too much focuses on issues other than evangelism. Paul's importance in the latter part of Acts is due especially to the mission and perspective he represents. Luke 1:3–4 suggest that Theophilus had received some instruction. The amount of detail in Luke-Acts devoted to faithfulness, Jewish-Gentile relations and clinging to the hope of Jesus' return suggests a Gentile who was experiencing doubt about his association with the new community of Christians. This setting is also suggested in the controversy over table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles, the issue of Gentile inclusion in the worship of God and community of God's people, the detailed examples of how rejection was faced in the early church by both Jews and Gentiles for converting to the worship of Jesus as God, and the amount of attention devoted to ethical exhortation. Theophilus appears to be a man of rank (1:3). Having associated himself with the church, he is undergoing doubt whether in fact he really belongs in this racially mixed and heavily persecuted community. The Gospel openly includes Theophilus in the new community, calling him to remain faithful, committed and expectant, even in the midst of intense Jewish rejection.²¹

Throughout church history, some have speculated that because Theophilus means “love of God” that in dedicating both Luke and Acts to the man bearing that name that the secondary audience for Luke's writing is anyone who loves God. Indeed, if you want to love God, or grow in your love for God, then reading Luke prayerfully, carefully, and repeatedly is absolutely imperative. Before you read, it would be wise first to humbly pray and ask that the Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures to be written would illuminate your understanding of them. As you read, feel free to mark up your Bible, noting things that God impresses upon you. The average person can read the entire book of Luke in about two hours. As you have questions it will be helpful to discuss those with people in your Community Group and also purchase some of the reference books recommended in the appendix of this introduction to help deepen your Bible study.

STRUCTURE

Most pastors and commentators agree that the structure of Luke's Gospel breaks down nicely into largely geographical divisions. The book begins and ends in Jerusalem. The middle portion of the narrative is a progress from Galilee to Jerusalem. For example, Bock structures the book as follows:²²

- I. Luke's preface and the introduction of John and Jesus (1:1–2:52)
- II. Preparation for ministry: anointed by God (3:1–4:13)
- III. Galilean ministry: revelation of Jesus (4:14–9:50)
- IV. Jerusalem journey: Jewish rejection and the new way (9:51–19:44)
- V. Jerusalem: the innocent One slain and raised (19:45–24:53)

If the gospel of Luke were turned into a play or film, there would be five basic “settings”: (1) the infancy scenes (Zechariah in the Temple, John's birth, Christ's birth, Jesus in the Temple); (2) the region around the Jordan River (John the Baptist, Baptism, Temptation); (3) Galilean ministry (Nazareth rejection, calling of disciples, etc.); (4) On the way to Jerusalem; (5) Jerusalem (triumphal entry, temple cleansing, Last Supper, betrayal, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension). The geographic layout of Luke is one of the primary motivations we had for shooting film footage live on site in Israel so as to bring to life the places that Luke carefully introduces as the settings for his Gospel.

On the other hand, Kavin Rowe argues that the organizing principle or theme for Luke's Gospel is Jesus as “kyrios” or “Lord.” Rowe offers a comprehensive analysis of Luke's use of this word. The following outline is a summary of Rowe's thesis.²³

- I. The Coming Lord (Luke 1–3)
 - A. The Lord in the Womb (Luke 1–2)
 - B. Preparation for the Coming Lord (Luke 3)
- II. The Lord's Mission in Galilee (Luke 4–9)
- III. The Lord Moving Toward Jerusalem (Luke 10–19)
- IV. The Lord in Jerusalem (19–24)
 - A. The Entry of the Lord (Luke 19)
 - B. The Betrayed and Crucified Lord (Luke 22–23)
 - C. The Risen Lord (Luke 24)

MAJOR CHARACTERS IN LUKE

As you read and study Luke you will meet some primary characters that you will want to get to know as friends.

Jesus

Since a gospel is a theological narrative about Jesus Christ, it is not surprising that Jesus Christ is the major character in the Gospel of Luke. Bible scholar David Wenham is correct when he writes: “Luke’s first and foremost theme is Jesus. This is stating the obvious, but it is still worth stating. From the announcement of Jesus’ birth in chapters 1 and 2 of the gospel to the resurrection narratives, the exciting and important good news is of ‘the Savior, who is Christ the Lord’ (2:11).”²⁴ Another Bible scholar, Thomas R. Schreiner, writes: “The preeminence of Jesus is so pervasively woven into the Synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark, Luke] that he is the prominent character throughout the narrative.”²⁵ Jesus is depicted by Luke to be the beginning, middle, and end of God’s plan and purpose in the world. Bock writes: “At the center of God’s plan stands the Christ. Luke builds his Christology from the earth up. Starting with a miraculous birth, Luke’s portrait of Jesus shows he is special from the beginning. Jesus is seen as a teacher (6:20–48), a prophet (4:21–30), the Christ (9:18–20), the Son of Man (5:17–26; 9:21–27), and the Lord (20:41–44; 22:69).”²⁶ Lastly, a curious personal highlight of Luke is Jesus’ prayer life; the gospel records Jesus praying nine times, seven of which are found only in Luke.

The Holy Spirit

Luke highlights the work of the Holy Spirit in both his Gospel and in Acts. In fact, God the Holy Spirit is mentioned more in Luke than Matthew and Mark combined. John the Baptizer and his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, are filled with the Holy Spirit (1:15, 41, 67), and the old man Simeon was led by the Spirit into the Temple (2:25–27). Luke highlights the Spirit’s empowering work in Jesus’ ministry. Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit (1:35) and empowered by the Holy Spirit (3:22; 4:1, 14, 18), and baptizes others with the Holy Spirit (3:16). Jesus teaches that his Father gives the Holy Spirit (11:13), he warns against blaspheming the Spirit (12:10), he promises that the Holy Spirit will instruct the disciples (12:12), and after his resurrection Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come to clothe the disciples (24:49).²⁷

Women

Luke makes it a point to show the prominent role that women played in Jesus’ ministry. This was very countercultural, as women were not even allowed to be trained by a rabbi in those days. It serves as one more example of God’s heart for the oppressed, and of the universal scope of the gospel: it is for all men, and all women, excluding no one from the reach of God’s love (2:38; 7:36; 8:1–3; 10:38; 15:8–10; 18:1–5; 23:27–31; 24:1–11). Despite their low social standing in antiquity, women have leading roles in Luke: Mary (1:26–56; 2:19, 51); Elizabeth (1:39–45), Anna (2:36–38),

the widow of Nain (7:11–17), the sinful woman (7:36–50), Mary Magdalene (8:2), Joanna (8:3), Susanna (8:3), Mary and Martha of Bethany (10:38–42), the woman with a spirit of infirmity (13:10–17), and the women present at the crucifixion (23:49). Altogether, Luke refers to more women than any other gospel.

The Poor

It is instructive to compare the Sermon on the Mount as it appears in Matthew (5–7) to that in Luke (6). Although Matthew’s account is more extensive, Luke’s is much earthier. Where Matthew says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” Luke records, “Blessed are the poor.” Luke emphasizes Jesus’ concern for people’s physical needs and station in life, as well as their souls and eternal destiny. For those who have little in this life, Jesus promises much in the next, because of his compassion for them and his desire to correct the inequalities and injustices that people suffer in this life (4:18–19; 7:22; 12:16; 14:21; 16; 19:9).

The Outcast

Matthew’s description of Jesus’ birth includes a visit from some very rich, very noble wise men from the east. Luke, in contrast, tells the story of the shepherds in the field coming to see the baby Jesus. And throughout Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is not a haughty ruler-type, but the common man’s messiah, a servant-leader. Luke emphasizes Jesus’ tendency to hang out with the unfavorable in Israelite society. The prostitutes, the drunkards, and the tax collectors received more attention from Jesus than did the Pharisees and scribes. Luke shows that Jesus did not come to be honored, or respected, or successful. He came to show that God does indeed love all of his people, even though the religious establishment does not (2:8; 4:27; 13–14; 15:1, 11; 18:13; 22:37). Marshall writes:

Jesus brought salvation to the people who were under-privileged in Judea—to the poor, to women, to children who are often highly regarded in Luke (8:41–42, 8:51–55, 9:47–48, 10:21, 18:17 cf. 17:2), and to notorious sinners. Although for the most part he confined his work to the Jews, he indicated plainly enough that his message was also for the Gentiles and in particular for the Samaritans, the hated enemies of the Jews, and that it had social consequences for the oppressed—and their oppressors.²⁸

The Foreigner

Israel had come to resent foreigners, and who could blame them? First the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Medes, then the Greeks, and now the Romans, all took their turn at lording over them and ruling them harshly. But Luke makes sure that his audience understands that Jesus didn’t come to destroy the enemy, he came to win them over. The Kingdom of God isn’t about geographical boundaries, it’s about loyalty to the one true King of all the lands, Jesus. Therefore, he emphasized the essential unity of all national and ethnic groups, and God’s love for every one of them (3:6; 38; 4:26–27; 7:9; 10:30; 13:29; 17:15).

The Crowds

The crowds gathered and followed Jesus from the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry all the way down his slow journey toward Jerusalem. The word for “crowd” (oklos) occurs forty-one times in Luke (3:7, 10; 4:42; 5:1, 3, 15, 19, 29; 6:17, 19; 7:9, 11f, 24; 8:4, 19, 40, 42, 45; 9:11f, 16, 18, 37f; 11:14, 27, 29; 12:1, 13, 54; 13:14, 17; 14:25; 18:36; 19:3, 39; 22:6, 47; 23:4, 48).

CONTENT PARALLELS AND UNIQUE PASSAGES IN LUKE

While the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) do not vary in their central teaching about Jesus Christ as God and crucified and risen savior, they do each tell the story of Jesus uniquely. This is in large part because each was originally written to a different primary audience; each author contextualized the gospel in order to help people from different cultures understand the truth of Jesus Christ.

In my book *On The New Testament* I compare the Gospels to each other:

The four Gospels simply operate like your local nightly news. The first three gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) function like local network television affiliates for ABC, NBC, and CBS, which generally report the same stories with some variance in eyewitness accounts and particular details. This explains why roughly 60 percent of the first three Gospels contain common and shared information. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, functions more like one of the national cable television newscasts—such as CNN—which has news stories that are rarely found on the local nightly news. This explains why roughly 90 percent of John is unique to his account.²⁹

The following chart outlines what is distinct about each gospel.³⁰

Gospel	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Author	Jewish Christian, former despised tax collector	Jewish Christian, cousin of Barnabas	Gentile Christian doctor	Jewish Christian and Jesus’ youngest disciple
Primary Audience	Jews	Romans	Gentiles	Greeks
Portrait of Jesus	Jewish Messiah and King	Faithful servant	Perfect man	God
Jesus’ Genealogy	Traced to Abraham and David showing Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy	No genealogy because Jesus’ accomplishments, not his family, are important	Traced to Adam to show that Jesus was fully human	Jesus as the eternal Word of God

Notable Features	<p>Roughly 60 percent of the book is Jesus’ words teaching as a rabbi</p> <p>About fifty Old Testament quotes</p>	<p>Briefest gospel</p> <p>Few Old Testament quotes</p> <p>Explains Jewish words and customs for non-Jews</p> <p>150 present tense verbs emphasizing Jesus’ actions</p> <p>35 miracles</p> <p>40 percent of the book is Jesus’ words</p>	<p>Roughly 50 percent of the book is Jesus’ words</p> <p>Thirteen women mentioned that are omitted from other gospels</p> <p>Jewish customs explained</p> <p>A focus on Jesus’ early years and emotional life</p>	<p>Roughly 90 percent of John is unique to John</p> <p>No parables or exorcisms</p> <p>Seven “I AM” statements of Jesus prove He is God</p>
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Wenham also compares the material in Luke to the other Synoptic Gospels:

Luke acknowledges that he has used sources in composing his book by referring to his literary predecessors (1:1), but also claims to have used eyewitness testimony (1:2) and his own research (1:3). But working out precisely what Luke got from where is not straightforward, for Luke shares a good deal of material with Mark and Matthew, but also has his own distinctive perspective and contents. The large majority of Mark’s book is paralleled in Luke in more or less the same sequence, although Luke sometimes rewrites it in his own style and draws out his particular theological emphases and interests.³¹

Scholars often speak of Matthew, Mark, and Luke together as the “Synoptic Gospels” because they share so much common information. However, Luke contains forty-one unique passages that are not found in Matthew or Mark. All of these unique passages are listed here.³²

1. Infancy narratives 1:1–2:52
2. Jesus’ genealogy 3:23–38
3. A miraculous catch of fish 5:1–11
4. The anointing of Jesus by a sinful woman 7:36–50
5. Women who helped Jesus 8:1–3
6. Rejection by the Samaritans 9:51–56
7. The mission of the seventy 10:17–20
8. The parable of the good Samaritan 10:25–37
9. Martha and Mary 10:38–42
10. The parable of the friend at midnight 11:5–8
11. True blessedness 11:27–28
12. True cleansing 11:37–41
13. The parable of the rich fool 12:13–21
14. Repentance 13:1–5
15. The barren fig tree 13:6–9
16. Healing a bent woman 13:10–17
17. Who are in the kingdom? 13:22–30

18. That fox Herod 13:31–33
19. The man with dropsy 14:1–6
20. Invitation to a banquet 14:7–14
21. The parable of the lost coin 15:8–10
22. The parable of the prodigal son 15:11–32
23. The parable of the unjust steward 16:1–9
24. The covetous Pharisees 16:14–15
25. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus 16:19–31
26. Unprofitable servants 17:7–10
27. The ten lepers 17:11–19
28. The parable of the unjust judge 18:1–8
29. The parable of the Pharisee and the publican 18:9–14
30. Zaccheus 19:1–10
31. The parable of the pounds (similar to Matt. 25:14–30) 19:11–27
32. Lament over Jerusalem 19:41–44
33. Teaching in the Temple 21:37–38
34. Two swords 22:35–38
35. Jesus before Herod 23:6–12
36. Daughters of Jerusalem 23:27–31
37. Peter at the tomb 24:12
38. The walk to Emmaus 24:13–35
39. The appearance to the disciples 24:36–43
40. The fulfillment of Scripture 24:44–49
41. The ascension 24:50–53

Wenham provides a helpful summary of the unique parts of Luke’s gospel:

Luke tells quite a number of his own, unique stories, totaling 22–40% of his book, including his infancy narratives (chapters 1–2), his version of Jesus’ rejection in Nazareth (4:14–30), some parables (e.g. 15:1–16:9; 16:19–31; 17:7–10; 18:1–14), some healing stories (e.g. 7:11–17; 17:11–19), the encounter with Zacchaeus (19:1–10), elements of his crucifixion scene (23:1–16, 24f., 27–31, 39–43, 48, 51), and his resurrection narrative (chapter 24).³³

Interestingly, most of this unique material clusters at the beginning and end of the book and in the journey section.

Thus, Luke’s contribution to a faithful and thorough historical account of Jesus’ life and ministry is invaluable. His inclusion of details omitted from the other gospels gives us precious truths that without his work would have been forever lost. We will look a little closer at these gifts that Luke has given us.

Infancy Narratives

There are unique contributions in Luke’s Gospel at both the beginning and conclusion of his book. The so-called infancy narratives in Luke 1:1–2:52 are unique to Luke. These passages include both the foretelling of and the birth of John the Baptizer and Jesus (1:5–25; 1:26–38; 1:57–66; 2:1–21).

Songs and Praise

Leon Morris calls Luke’s Gospel “a singing Gospel.”³⁴ The four songs found in Luke 1–2 are unique to Luke’s Gospel and are recognized by many as great hymns of the Christian faith: Mary’s *Magnificat* (1:46–55), Zechariah’s *Benedictus* (1:68–79), Simeon’s *Nunc Dimittis* (2:29–35), and the *Gloria* (2:14) sung by the angels. It is common for characters in Luke’s narrative to respond to God’s blessing by glorifying or praising him (cf. 2:20; 5:25; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43). The book begins (1:14) and ends (24:52) with rejoicing. In fact, Morris notes that the verb “rejoice” occurs more often in Luke than in any other New Testament book.³⁵

The Ascension

Luke concludes his Gospel (as well as begins the book of Acts; see Acts 1:6–11) with the ascension of Christ into heaven (Luke 24:50–53). No other Gospel writer includes the ascension. Luke records this important event twice.

Parables

According to Klyne Snodgrass, the “parables make up about thirty-five percent of Jesus’ teaching in the Synoptics. . . . There is little agreement about the number of parables, with estimates ranging from thirty-seven to sixty-five.”³⁶ There are eighteen parables that are unique to Luke and about two-thirds of the parables are in Luke.³⁷ Most of the parables in Luke occur in chapters 10–20 and are thematically arranged within the travel narrative (e.g., 10:25–37; 12:13–21; 15:8–10, 11–32; 16:1–9, 19–31; 18:1–8, 9–14; 19:11–27).

Prayer

Although prayer is both taught and modeled by Jesus in Mark and Matthew, Luke highlights the prayer life of Jesus more than the other evangelists (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28; 10:21; 11:1; 22:31, 41–44; 23:46). Most of these texts are unique to Luke. Jesus not only models prayer in Luke, he also teaches about prayer (6:28; 11:1–13; 18:1–8; 20:46; 22:40–46).³⁸

Miracles

Luke records several miracles of Jesus in his Gospel (4:33–35, 38–39; 5:1–11, 12–13; 18–25; 6:6–10; 7:1–10, 11–15; 8:22–25, 27–35, 41–42, 43–48; 49–56; 9:12–17; 38–43; 11:14; 13:11–13; 14:1–4; 17:11–19; 18:35–43; 22:50–51). Four of these miracles are unique to Luke:

Healing of a woman with a disabling spirit, 13:10-17
Healing of a man on the Sabbath, 14:1-4
Cleansing of ten lepers, 17:11-19
Healing of the ear of the high priest's slave, 22:50-51

The Genealogy in Luke 3:23–38

Bible scholar D. S. Huffman explains the reason why Luke's genealogy of Jesus differs from the genealogy recorded in Matthew 1:1–17:

While Luke seems similarly concerned to show Jesus to be a descendant of David (Luke 1:27, 36, 69; 2:4; 3:31; 18:38–39; Acts 2:22–32; 13:22–23), he traces the messianic line through David's son Nathan instead of through Solomon. Even though no other known biblical or Jewish genealogy culminates in the naming of God, this is not to be used alone as an argument for Jesus' divinity any more than it is for the divinity of Joseph and the others in the list. It is noteworthy, however, that Luke traces Jesus' sonship all the way back to God immediately after his record of the voice from heaven declaring Jesus, "my beloved Son" (3:22). Likewise, after the genealogy Luke records the temptation of Jesus during which the devil asks Jesus if he is the Son of God (4:3, 9). Interestingly, the only voices in Luke to declare Jesus to be the Son of God are angelic (1:32, 35), demonic (4:41; 8:28), Satan's (4:3, 9) and God's (3:22; 9:35; cf. 22:70; Acts 9:20). While Jesus as the Son of God is more than a human ascription in Luke, his genealogy seems to underscore Jesus' humanity.³⁹

In other words, Huffman understands the genealogy in Luke to be a way to emphasize the universal scope of Christ's mission to seek and save all of mankind. Huffman continues:

What is clear in Luke-Acts is that the Evangelist saw all peoples—Jews and Gentiles—as invited into a relationship with God through Jesus. The Jews were the vehicle by which God brought the savior of all humanity into the world. Luke's point is not that all of humanity will be saved, but that salvation is equally offered to all of humanity. By placing this all-inclusive genealogy at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Luke indicates that the benefits of Jesus' ministry will be available to all (Luke 24:46–47; Acts 1:8; 13:46–48; 26:23; 28:28).⁴⁰

In sum, according to Bible scholar J. C. Ryle, every Christian should feel indebted to the Gospel of Luke because several wonderful passages of Scripture are only found in Luke's Gospel:

The Gospel of Luke . . . contains many precious things which are not recorded in the other three Gospels. Such, for instance, are the histories of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the angel's announcement to the Virgin Mary—and, to speak generally, the whole contents of the first two chapters. Such, again, are the narratives of the conversion of Zacchaeus and of the penitent thief—the walk to Emmaus, and the famous parables of the Pharisee and Tax-collector, the rich man and Lazarus, and the Prodigal Son. These are portions of Scripture for which every well-instructed Christian feels peculiarly thankful. And for these we are indebted to the Gospel of Luke.⁴¹

OVERARCHING THEMES

As you read Luke and discuss it with your Community Group, there are some overarching megathemes that you will need to be aware of since they thread together the entirety of the book.

Salvation Is for All People Groups

The theme of salvation is a major one in Luke. Luke uses the language of salvation (Greek *soteria/soterion*) more than the other Gospel writers. The noun "salvation" is found six times in Luke (1:69, 71, 77; 2:30; 3:6; 19:9), but never in Matthew or Mark. God and Jesus are both given the title of "Savior" (1:47; 2:11). The verb "save" (Greek *sozo*) is used seventeen times (6:9; 7:50; 8:12, 36, 48, 50; twice in 9:24; 13:23; 17:19; 18:26, 42; 19:10; twice in 23:35, 37, 39). Sometimes these references are in the sense of healing but often Luke uses the verb "to save" in a spiritual sense.⁴² For Luke, salvation is for all people, including the lowly and oppressed (1:52–53; 4:18; 6:20–26; 14:4–11). Luke emphasizes that the salvation that Jesus brings is for all who will repent and believe. Luke focuses much attention on groups of people who would have been considered outsiders and marginalized people within first-century Israel.

Discipleship: The Way To and Of the Cross

In the so-called "journey" section of Luke (9:51–19:27), Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem; he is on his way to the cross. It is during this journey to the cross that Luke chooses to include Jesus' teaching on discipleship. In other words, the journey section of Luke describes both the way to the cross and the way of the cross. Bible scholar Stephen I. Wright notes that

Jesus' literal "way to the cross" is mirrored in "the way of the cross," which he calls the disciples to travel. Luke's narrative of the journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:27) includes much teaching on the nature of discipleship. Jesus takes his people with him out of bondage to a new promised land. The travels of Paul in Acts, and especially his final journey to Rome (chapters 27–28), recapitulate Jesus' own journeying and suffering, suggesting the oneness of Christian disciples with their Master.⁴³

Bock also describes several key themes that span the books of Luke-Acts.⁴⁴

God's Activity in Fulfillment

Bock explains, "dominating Luke-Acts from the beginning is an emphasis on how the events of Jesus' life and that of the church result from the divine initiative and realize the divine promise."⁴⁵ Luke "tells the story in a way that declares that God is again at work in a powerful way."⁴⁶ We see this in Luke's writing style, which echoes that of Jewish Scripture, and in his many references and allusions to the history of Israel. Furthermore, we see again and again in Luke that Jesus' ministry fulfills the Scriptures, both in what Jesus says (Luke 7:18–22, cf. Isa. 29:18; 35:5–6; 42:18; 26:19; 61:1) and in how Jesus is identified by Luke (usually by referring to the ancient Scriptures, either by

citation or allusion; for example, see Ps. 2:7, cf. Luke 3:21–22; Ps. 110:1, cf. Luke 20:41–44; 22:69; Acts 2:30–36; Ps. 118:22, cf. Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Dan. 7:13–14, cf. Luke 21:27).

The Messiah as the Bearer of Forgiveness and the Spirit

Throughout Luke, we see that Christ offers all people forgiveness and the Spirit. Jesus is imaged as “the one who comes as the bringer of peace and the one who leads people out of darkness” (Luke 1:76–79; 24:46–47; Acts 13:26–41) and “the distributor of the Spirit” (Luke 3:15–17; Acts 2:30–36; 10–11).⁴⁷

The Response of Repentance, Reaching Out to Those Outside

Another key theme is repentance or turning, which is one’s response to the message. God’s people are “called to reach out to those who previously were thought to be excluded from the hope of salvation” (Luke 3:8–14; 5:32; Acts 3:19; 5:31; 26:18), as Jesus himself exemplified when he “taught lepers, tax collectors, immoral people, the blind, the poor, the humble and the lost in general” (Luke 1:46–55; 4:16–21; 7:22–50; 15:1–32; 19:1–10).⁴⁸ Moreover, “the church’s commission is to preach the message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 24:47).⁴⁹

A People Different from the World

Jesus’ people must be different from the world. Jesus’ people are called to serve the world without expecting anything in return, which means going beyond what sinners do for each other (Luke 6:20–49). We can see in the book of Acts that God’s people took this message seriously.⁵⁰

THEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

Throughout Luke, we see that Jesus is set forth as God who is worthy of worship. Still, to worship him means that the worshiper will suffer persecution of various sorts and kinds to various degrees, as Jesus did. For the original recipient, the wealthy Theophilus, and the rest of us who are graced to enjoy Luke’s gospel, the intent is to compel us to steadfastly continue walking faithfully as a Christian no matter what the cost. This explains why Luke emphasizes that Jesus’ people can be empowered by God the Holy Spirit as Jesus was. In fact, even if we are martyred, we will rise

as Jesus did to see our enemies judged by him. Under these primary theological concepts, Luke includes many additional insights that are essential to understanding the person and work of Jesus Christ. The following analysis of the gospel according to Luke is summarized from Darrell Bock’s work in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.⁵¹

God’s Plan

Luke reassures Theophilus by writing a detailed discussion of God’s plan, which he addresses more than any of the other Synoptic gospels (1:14–17, 31–35, 46–55, 68–79; 2:9–14, 30–32, 34–35; 4:16–30; 7:18–35; 13:31–35; 24:44–49). For Luke, this plan “involves both a connection to scriptural hope and divine design and elements of structure and progress within the Gospel’s story.”⁵² Supporting the theme of God’s plan is that of promise and fulfillment, especially as it relates to the Scriptures and Christology.

Christology and Salvation

Jesus and deliverance stand at the heart of the plan. Central here are the themes of Jesus as Messiah-Lord (a regal king figure), his teaching and work, and the blessings of the plan that come through him. In addition, Luke issues a call to respond to Jesus’ invitation by repenting of sin and trusting in him by faith.

At the center of God’s provision of salvation is the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Among the Gospel writers, only Luke describes the ascension; it links Luke 24 (the final chapter of the gospel) and Acts 1. Only a risen Savior can both rule and consummate his promise, can forgive and bestow blessings (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:21; 4:12; 10:43), and can receive and give the Spirit, who empowers God’s people (Acts 2). In sum, the ascension shows that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

Salvation involves sharing in hope, experiencing the kingdom, tasting forgiveness, and partaking in the Spirit’s enabling power. The life of relationship with God, engagement in mission, and ethical honor involves love, humility, service, and righteousness (10:25–37; 11:5–8; 14:1–12; 12:35–49; 15:1–32; 16:1–8, 19–31; 18:1–8; 19:11–27). Jesus did not come just to rescue people for heaven, but also to have them know God’s transforming presence.

The coming of the Holy Spirit is promised (3:15–17). The Spirit is power (or enablement) from on high (24:49; Acts 2:30–36; 10:44–47; 11:15–16; 15:8). The Spirit empowers and testifies to Jesus (3:21–22; 4:16–20), and empowers all believers to live like Jesus (3:15–17; 24:49; Acts 2:1–41).

The New Community

The new community formed around Jesus is not really an organized entity. Luke focuses on outcasts, the fringe of society, as members of this blessed community: the poor (that is, the materially and spiritually impoverished), sinners, and tax collectors (1:46–55; 4:18; 5:27–32; 6:20–23; 7:22, 28, 30, 34, 36–50; 10:21–22; 14:13, 21–24; 15:1–2; 16:19–31; 18:9–14; 19:1–10; 21:1–4). In addition, women receive special treatment in Luke, contrary to their place in first-century society (2:36–37; 4:25–26; 7:12, 36–50; 8:1–3; 8:43–48; 10:38–42; 13:10–17; 18:3, 5; 20:47; 21:23; 24:1–12). Furthermore, this new community is multiracial and multicultural.

In short, the make-up of the new community knows no boundaries. The good news is available to everyone, but society's weak and vulnerable are often most willing to respond. Jesus shows them a special concern, just as the world seems to ignore or rebuke them.

Luke uses three words to describe the response to the message that brings one into the community: "repent," "turn," and "faith." The term translated "repent" is rooted in the Old Testament word "to turn around" (24:44–47). Repentance involves a reorientation of perspective, a fresh point of view. For Luke, repentance results in fruit that expresses itself concretely. In material unique to Luke, John the Baptizer replies to those who ask, "What should we do then?" by teaching that repentance expresses itself in everyday life, especially in how we treat each other (3:7–14).

Members of the new community are given various blessings: forgiveness or release (1:77; 3:3; 4:18; 24:47); life (10:25; 12:15, 22–25; 18:29–30); peace (1:79; 2:14; 10:5–6; Acts 10:36); the kingdom; and the Spirit.

The Opponents of Salvation

Luke identifies spiritual and human opponents of the new community. The spiritual forces of evil (Satan and demons) are resistant, though powerless to frustrate the plan (4:1–13, 33–37; 8:26–39; 9:1; 10:1–12, 18; 11:14–26; 22:3).

On a human level, the opponents are primarily the Jewish leadership (scribes and Pharisees). The crowd's initial reaction to Jesus is mixed; they are interested, but their response is superficial and fickle. The crowd's eventual response typifies the response of most people in Israel. In the end, the crowd rejects Jesus and even shares the responsibility for his death (23:18–25).

One source of tension between Jews and Gentiles was the issue of the Old Testament Law. Luke understands the Law to be part of the old era, and portrays the church in Acts as slowly realizing that truth. The Law was no longer binding, though the early church allowed its observance where issues central to the new faith were not at stake. For example, Gentiles did not need to be circumcised (Acts 15), but Jews could continue to be.

In the face of opposition, disciples were called to a strong commitment to Jesus. Opposition would come. Indications of division are found early in Luke's Gospel (2:34–35) and continue throughout (8:14–15; 9:21–23, 61–62; 12:8–9, 22–34; 22:35–38). The disciples are pictured shrinking back from opposition, as in the account of Peter's denial. The exhortation to steadfast discipleship even under the pressure of conflict reveals one facet of the Gospel's origin: Luke wants to reassure Theophilus and others.

Response: Luke's Call

Luke is clear about how his readers should respond to Jesus and resulting opposition. He calls the community to a fundamental reorientation toward God expressed in faith, repentance, and commitment. Trust both initiates and sustains their walk with God (5:31–32; 15:17–21; cf. 12:22–32). The path is difficult and requires self-examination, total commitment, and daily dedication and cross-bearing (9:23, 57–62; 14:25–35).

The community is called to mission. Jesus' disciples are called to preach repentance and forgiveness to all nations, beginning with Jerusalem (24:47).

Love for God and for one's neighbor, including one's enemy, is part of the call. Jesus demonstrated in his daily life that his disciples are to be neighbors to all, without distinction of race or class, and are to follow him in reaching out to others (5:31–32; 15:1–32; 19:10). Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate act of love for others, even his enemies.

Under the pressure of opposition, the community is to remain steadfast and faithful (8:13–15; 9:23; 18:8; 21:19). Disciples are to fear God, not man (12:1–12), recognizing that the Lord will return and that they are responsible to him (12:35–48; 19:11–27; 18:8). They must hear the word, cling to it, persevere, and bear fruit until Jesus comes again (8:15). The return of Jesus will be horrific for unbelieving humanity, who will be severely judged. Luke emphasizes that the coming of the Son of Man places a responsibility on his disciples to be faithful and on all humanity to respond to the gospel. While the time of Jesus' return is unknown, it will come suddenly and the disciples must be prepared (12:35–40).

In conclusion, Bock offers this helpful summary of Luke's Gospel:

Luke's Gospel is pastoral, theological, and historical. The reality of God's plan influences how individuals see themselves and the community to which they belong. Old barriers of race are removed. New hope abounds. There is to be no doubt that the message of Jesus is one of hope and transformation. Anyone, Jew or Gentile, can belong. At the center is Jesus, the promised Messiah-Lord, who sits at God's right hand exercising authority from above. He will return one day and all will be accountable to him. His life, ministry, resurrection, and ascension show the He has the ability to be trusted. He can bring God's promises to completion, just as he has inaugurated them. In the meantime, being a disciple is not easy, but it is full of rich blessing that transcends anything else this life can offer. This is the reassurance about salvation that Luke offers to Theophilus and others like him.⁵³

EARLY CHURCH FATHERS ON LUKE

While we do not consider the early church fathers authoritative like Scripture, we do consider them insightful on Scripture. This is because they lived in a day that was more culturally akin to the days of Jesus and the apostles, and they were historically closer to the events that Scripture records. In fact, some church fathers were trained by Jesus' disciples or their students. Therefore, the following quotes about Luke from some of the church fathers are offered to provide some helpful insight.

Origen (c. 185–254): "Luke did not learn from rumors what he is going to write. He himself has grasped it from the beginning. Hence, the apostle Paul praises him deservedly when he says, 'He is praised for his Gospel throughout all the churches' (2 Cor 8:18). Scripture says this about no one else. It uses the expression only for Luke."⁵⁴

Athanasius (c. 293–373):

What the apostles received, they passed on without change, so that the doctrine of the mysteries (the sacraments) and Christ would remain correct. The divine Word—the Son of God—wants us to be their disciples. It is appropriate for them to be our teachers, and it is necessary for us to submit to their teaching alone. Only from them and from those who have faithfully taught their doctrine do we get, as Paul writes, “faithful words, worthy of complete acceptance.” With them we are back to ground level, because they did not become disciples as a result of what they heard from others. Rather, they were eyewitnesses and servants of God the Word, and they handed down what they heard directly from him.⁵⁵

Ambrose (c. 340–397): “So the Gospel was written to Theophilus, that is, to him whom God loves. If you love God, it was written to you.”⁵⁶

OTHER MAJOR THEOLOGICIANS AND PASTORS ON LUKE

To understand the enormous significance of Luke it is also helpful to hear what some noteworthy contemporary Bible scholars have to say about Luke.

Bible commentator Gordon Fee writes: “If Mark is one of those who cannot tell a story badly, Luke is the one who can tell it to perfection.”⁵⁷ Fee also writes: “Luke’s Gospel is one of the great treasures of the biblical story, emphasizing God’s fulfillment of His promises to Israel—that ‘the year of the Lord’s favor’ (Luke 4:19) had come with Jesus’ compassionate ministry of deliverance for and acceptance of the poor and helpless.”⁵⁸

According to I. Howard Marshall, Luke labors to connect the past history of the people of God with the future for the people of God. The key to both is Jesus:

Luke tells the story of Jesus as a piece of history. His gospel is more like a biography than the other gospels. . . . He is concerned to show the continuity between the story of Jesus and God’s past dealings with his people in OT times and also between the story of Jesus and the rise of the early church. The story of Jesus is part of the ongoing history of God’s activity in the world, but it is the most important part. By doing this, Luke has shown that the earthly life of Jesus is an essential part of the gospel.⁵⁹

Marshall further writes: “No writer has emphasized more clearly than Luke the wideness in God’s mercy; equally nobody has expressed more stringently the claims of Jesus. Intending disciples are

warned that they must count the cost, deny themselves and follow Jesus daily. God’s grace is not cheap grace; sinners must be prepared to repent and renounce their sin.”⁶⁰

Darrell L. Bock writes:

Luke’s Gospel is the longest of the four Gospels. It is also the only Gospel with a sequel. By continuing his literary project into the Acts of the Apostles, Luke not only introduces us to Jesus and his ministry, but also to how that ministry relates to significant events in the early church. This enables Luke to discuss how God brought his salvation in Jesus, how the church preached Jesus and how it carried out its mission to both Jew and Gentile. Luke’s two-part work highlights God’s plan. It explains how Jews and Gentiles could become equals in a community planted by God, even though that community was rooted in a promise to Israel.⁶¹

LUKE IN CHURCH HISTORY

Perhaps the greatest impact Luke’s gospel has made in church history is on the theology of mission. Andreas J. Köstenberger notes the significance of Luke–Acts and its contribution to the Bible’s theology of mission: “In the Gospel of Luke and its sequel, the book of Acts, the theme of mission is of profound importance. So significant is this motif that Luke’s two-volume work may be the clearest presentation of the church’s universal mission in all of the New Testament. The Gospel tells the story of Jesus and His salvation; Acts traces the movement of that salvation to Israel and the Gentiles.”⁶²

Marshall outlines how Acts tells the story of the church:

But already in the gospel he shows what the period of the church will be like. It is the time after which Jesus has ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of God. Meanwhile his servants must continue his work of evangelism among all nations. They are enabled to do this by the power of the same Holy Spirit who equipped Jesus for his work, and they seek God’s help in prayer just as Jesus did. Only when the task of mission is complete will Jesus return as the judge of humankind and set up his heavenly kingdom.⁶³

Other theologians look to Luke (not necessarily Acts) as a key starting point for their theology of mission. Christopher J. H. Wright appeals to Luke 24:45–47 as the basis for his “missional hermeneutic” that unlocks the grand narrative of the bible and reveals that “the proper way for disciples of the crucified and risen Jesus to read their Scriptures, is *messianically and missionally*.”⁶⁴

Another contribution to church history is Luke’s universal perspective. Bock highlights how this grand scope can bear fruit even in our modern culture:

Luke is the most pluralistic of the Gospels, so it is tailor-made for the modern world. After all, it is Luke that discusses in detail how the promise of God expanded to encompass the

Gentiles. . . . Only this Gospel writer produced a sequel to explain how Jesus' ministry relates to the development of the new community that became the church. Luke also offers much teaching that deals with the ethics of relationships and with wealth and materialism. Most important, Luke attempts to develop how God's plan met, meets, and will meet its fulfillment in Jesus. The gospel is universal in perspective and cosmic in scope, and Luke's story explains how an originally small Jewish movement grew into a community that spans all nationalities. As we look at our multicultural world with its sometimes bitter ethnic divisions, certainly there is relevance in a Gospel that highlights how men and women of different ethnic origins can be transformed into a unified community and how humanity can come together in a relationship with its Creator.⁶⁵

In the area of art and culture, the Gospel of Luke (particularly Luke 1–2) has been the inspiration behind countless numbers of paintings and Christian art. Church tradition actually teaches that Luke himself was a painter:

Luke is an appropriate subject, not only because it contains some of the most vivid and memorable scenes in the New Testament . . . but also because from early on in the Christian tradition, Luke was believed to be a painter himself, having painted a "true picture" of the Virgin Mary and subsequently was known as the patron saint of painters.⁶⁶

One interesting connection between early Christian art and the Gospel of Luke is the artistic symbol of an ox. The early church associated Luke's Gospel with the symbol of the ox. Why an ox? Oxen were used in temple sacrifices. When the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem, "an ox and a fattened animal" was sacrificed every six steps (2 Sam. 6:13). The ox was understood to be an appropriate symbol for Luke because of the centrality of Jerusalem and the temple in Luke's narrative. Ambrose explains that Luke's Gospel

is represented fittingly by the ox, because it begins with priests and ends with the Ox who, having taken upon himself the sins of all, was sacrificed for the life of the whole world. He was a priestly Ox. He is both Ox and Priest. He is the Priest, because He is our Propitiator. We have Him as an advocate with the Father. He is the Ox, because He redeemed us with His own blood.⁶⁷

The Gospel begins with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptizer to his father, Zechariah the priest, who was ministering in the temple. Also, Luke includes the parable of the Prodigal Son in which a fatted calf is slaughtered to celebrate the younger son's return home.

Theologian Stephen I. Wright argues that

in Ambrose, Augustine, and Bede, a connection is made between the symbol of the ox and the Evangelist's emphasis on the temple, the place of animal sacrifice (1:5–25; 2:22–52; 13:35; 24:53). This is seen as reflecting the truth of Christ's mediation as sacrificial victim and high priest.⁶⁸

For example, the church father Irenaeus (c. 130–202) wrote that Luke takes up the "priestly character" of the Messiah.⁶⁹

Obviously, there is much to explore in the Gospel of Luke. As we examine this amazing historical account of Jesus over the span of a few years, you will see Jesus as the only perfect and sinless man who has ever lived. By comparing yourself to him, you will see your own sinful shortcomings and become keenly aware of why he had to live, die, and rise in your place.

APPENDIX

Commentaries and Bible Studies For Further Study

This introduction to Luke is intended to help prepare you to more thoroughly benefit from the sermons along with your own personal Bible reading, study, and Community Group discussions. I would strongly recommend that everyone at Mars Hill start by purchasing the English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible. Simply put, this is the finest study Bible ever produced in what I consider the most accurate English translation. The notes on Luke in the ESV Study Bible are wonderful and everyone needs a copy of this Bible.

For parents wanting to have a children's Bible to read to their kids, I would recommend *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name* by Sally Lloyd-Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007). This is a beautifully illustrated Bible that does wonderful theological work connecting the Bible stories to Jesus. Every child needs to read this Bible and everyone who reads it to a child is guaranteed to learn as well.

The following additional resources will be helpful in your study of Luke. They are arranged by degree of difficulty in an effort to help you determine which resources would be most helpful for you.

Technical Commentaries

The best technical commentary on the Gospel according to Luke is the two-volume work by Darrell Bock.

Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (BECNT) Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994. (988 pages)
ISBN: 0801010535

Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* (BECNT) Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. (1162 pages)
ISBN: 0801010527

D. A. Carson writes: "The Gospel of Luke is now well served by several major commentaries. Pride of place goes to the two volumes of Darrell L. Bock. It is recent, comprehensive, well written, and intelligent."⁷⁰

Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008. (846 pages)

ISBN: 0802842410

While this work is not Luke-specific, Luke contains more parables than any other Gospel. Therefore, it might be helpful to own this in-depth textual, cultural, and theological analysis of every parable spoken by Christ as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels.

Non-Technical Commentaries

Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (NIVAC). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. (640 pages)
ISBN: 0310493307

Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (NTC). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994. (412 pages)
ISBN: 0830818030

Leon Morris, *Luke* (TNTC). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973/2008. (370 pages)
ISBN: 0830842330

Devotional Commentaries

R. C. Sproul, *A Walk With God: Luke*. Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005. (432 pages)
ISBN: 1845500946

J. C. Ryle, *Luke - Crossway Classic Commentaries*, Eds. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997. (320 pages)
ISBN: 0891079556

R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Vols. 1 and 2. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998. (944 pages) D. A. Carson calls the work by Hughes "a fine expository model."⁷¹
ISBN: 1581340281
ISBN: 158134029X

Simple Bible Study Guides

Luke: A NavPress Bible Study. The LifeChange Series. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995. (192 pages)
ISBN: 0891099301

Woodrow Kroll, *Luke: Glory to God in the Highest!* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, June 2009. (144 pages) (This study guide uses the text of the ESV.)
ISBN: 143350667X

NOTES

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- ³ I. Howard Marshall, “Luke,” in D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 703.
- ⁴ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992/2005), 203.
- ⁵ Darrell L. Bock, “Gospel of Luke,” in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 495.
- ⁶ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992/2005), 205.
- ⁷ Cited in Walter L. Liefeld, “Luke,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 10: 799.
- ⁸ “Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Luke,” as cited on http://www.ccel.org/p/pearse/morefathers/anti_marcionite_prologues.htm, (accessed April 27, 2009).
- ⁹ See Dialogues 103.19.
- ¹⁰ *Adversus Haereses* III.xiv.1, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.iv.xv.html>, (accessed April 27, 2009).
- ¹¹ *Adversus Haereses* III.i.1, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.iv.ii.html>, (accessed April 27, 2009).
- ¹² *Adversus Marcionem* iv.2, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03.v.iv.v.ii.html>, (accessed April 27, 2009).
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ *Stromateis* i.21, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.vi.iv.i.xxi.html>, (accessed April 27, 2009).
- ¹⁶ *Ecclesiastical History* 3.4.7, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.viii.iv.html>, (accessed April 27, 2009).
- ¹⁷ *Ecclesiastical History* 3.4.8, as cited on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201.iii.viii.iv.html>, (accessed April 27, 2009).
- ¹⁸ Leon Morris, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973/2008), 17.
- ¹⁹ I. Howard Marshall, “Luke,” in D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 703.
- ²⁰ I. Howard Marshall, “Luke” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson, electronic version, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
- ²¹ Darrell L. Bock, “Gospel of Luke,” in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 495.

- ²² Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 20.
- ²³ See C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), vii–viii.
- ²⁴ David Wenham, “The Purpose of Luke-Acts: Israel’s Story in the Context of the Roman Empire,” in *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 83.
- ²⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 169.
- ²⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 21.
- ²⁷ See the helpful overview in David Wenham and Steve Walton, *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospels & Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 237.
- ²⁸ I. Howard Marshall, “Luke” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson, electronic version, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
- ²⁹ Mark Driscoll, *On the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 55–56.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 56.
- ³¹ David Wenham and Steve Walton, *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospels & Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 238.
- ³² The material for this table is adapted from Leon Morris, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973/2008), 377–382.
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- ³⁴ Leon Morris, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973/2008), 50.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 22.
- ³⁷ Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories With Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 23.
- ³⁸ See Peter T. O’Brien, “Prayer in Luke-Acts,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 24 (1973), 111–127.
- ³⁹ D. S. Huffman, “Genealogy,” in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 253.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ J. C. Ryle, *Luke: Crossway Classic Commentaries*, Eds. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: 1997), 17.
- ⁴² See the helpful overview in David Wenham and Steve Walton, *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospels & Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 235–236.
- ⁴³ Stephen I. Wright, “Luke” in *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament*, Ed. Kevin J. Vanhooser, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005/2008), 54.
- ⁴⁴ The following material is summarized from Darrell L. Bock, “Luke-Acts,” in T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).
- ⁴⁵ Darrell L. Bock, “Luke-Acts,” in T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

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⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

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⁵⁵ *Festal Letter 2.7*. Cited in *Luke: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Ed. Arthur A. Just (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 3.

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⁵⁸ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 295.

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⁶³ I. Howard Marshall, “Luke” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson, electronic version, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

⁶⁴ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 30.

⁶⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 16.

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