

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – Luke

SB_LK_Introduction

Author: The author is not specifically identified in the book of Luke. This is true of most all of the historical books of the Bible. Early Christian writings of Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165) through Tertullian (born ca. 160) identify the author as Luke. Luke was a very educated man in his day and a physician. Colossians 4:10-14 seems to indicate that he was a Gentile. This would mean that Luke was the only Gentile author of a New Testament book.

Apparently, Luke was not an eyewitness to the events surrounding Jesus. Luke's Gospel narrative is the result of his efforts in analyzing the accounts of those who were eyewitnesses. It is likely that Luke became a believer relatively late since there is no mention of him until his presence with Paul is noted in the "we" sections of another narrative he wrote – the book of Acts (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16).¹ You may recall that John Mark, the writer of the Gospel of Mark, spent time with Peter, whereas Luke spent time with Paul.

Date of Writing: Sometime in the early to mid-A.D. 60's is the most accepted dating of this Gospel by most theologians. This dating is based upon a couple of major arguments:

- An interpretation of Luke 19:41-44 and 21:20-24 that concludes that Jesus was predicting the fall of Jerusalem that occurred in A.D. 70;
- The sequel to Luke, i.e. the Book of Acts, does not record either Peter's death, Paul's death, or even the fall of Jerusalem.

Both of these points lead to a conclusion by most theologians that Luke's Gospel was written prior to the fall of Jerusalem.

Note: As you may know, I do not accept the interpretation of Luke 19:41-44 and 21:20-24 as a prediction by Jesus of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. We will examine these passages in more depth later; however, you might compare these passages in Luke to Daniel 9:26 which is a clear prediction of the destruction of the city and the Sanctuary during the Tribulation period. Jesus had Daniel 9:26 in His eschatological (future events) frame of reference. The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 has similarities to what will occur during the Tribulation; however, the OT prophecies that formed the eschatological frame of reference of our Lord are prophecies related to the Age of Israel of which the Tribulation is a part. These OT prophecies did not relate to the A.D. 70 event which would have been within the Age of the Church.

Nevertheless, the dating of the Gospel in the 60's is still likely based upon the greater argument in point #2.

Recipients: Luke was the only Gospel addressed to an individual, i.e. Theophilus (1:3) who was most likely a Gentile believer. Luke's Gospel was designed to reassure Theophilus that God was still at work accomplishing His purposes even among Gentiles even though the promises relating to Jesus' ministry were intimately connected to Israel. Jesus was preached to Gentiles so that they too could know the kingdom program of God and participate in the kingdom by accepting the offer of the kingdom.

¹ I have compiled these introductory notes with a heavy reliance upon Dr. Stephen Bramer, "Gospel of Luke" (Unpublished class notes in 305N – The Gospels, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall 1999), 1. Other sources consulted include the introduction to the Gospel of Luke contained in Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, and H. Wayne House, editors, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1682-1684 and J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), 117-133.

Major Themes: Luke stresses the humanity of our Lord perhaps more than the other Gospel writers. He does so without detracting from Jesus' kingship, deity, and purpose in coming to earth. Luke stresses Jesus' humanity in various ways:

- Luke describes both the parents and birth of John the Baptist and Jesus in ways no other Gospel writer does
- Luke describes events of Jesus' childhood with different detail, e.g. how He was presented at the temple while still a baby (2:22-24), how He went to Passover with His parents (2:41-50), and how He advanced in wisdom and knowledge (2:51-52)
- Luke traces Jesus' genealogy back to Adam (3:23-38)

Other themes characteristic of Luke's Gospel include:²

- An emphasis upon prayer, especially Jesus' emphasis upon praying before important occasions (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 10:21; 11:1; 22:39-46; 23:34, 46)
- The prominent place given to women (chps. 1-2, 7:11-13, 36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 21:1-4; 23:27-31, 49; 23:55-24:11)
- A particular interest in poverty and wealth (1:52-53; 4:16-22; 6:20, 24-25; 12:13-21; 14:12-13; 19:19-31) [some wealthy are noted among Jesus' followers; however, He seems closest to the poor]
- Concern for individuals, especially "sinners" (e.g. the "good Samaritan" – 10:29-37; the prodigal son – 15:11-32; the thankful leper – 17:11-19; the penitent tax collector – 18:9-14; Zacchaeus – 19:1-10; the penitent thief – 23:39-43)
- An emphasis upon the family circle whereby Jesus' activity included men, women and children, with the setting frequently in the home
- Repeated use of the title "Son of Man" (e.g. 19:10)
- Emphasis on joy (1:14) and the Holy Spirit (4:1)

Literary Features of Particular Note: Luke's Gospel account is a unique Gospel account in several ways –

- Luke's language reflects an outstanding command of the Greek language. His vocabulary is extensive and his style sometimes approximates that of classical Greek (e.g. 1:1-4), yet at other times it is Semitic (1:5-2:52) – often in a style similar to the Septuagint. Luke even reflects a cultural sensitivity by adapting his language to the people and setting described, e.g. when he refers to Peter in a Jewish setting, he uses more Semetic language than when he refers to Paul in a Hellenistic setting.³
- The Gospel of Luke is a carefully researched and documented writing with a comprehensive scope that extends from Jesus' birth to His ascension. The arrangement is orderly, appeals to both Jews and Gentiles and is characterized by literary excellence.
- It is the only Gospel that has a sequel, i.e. the book of Acts.
- Only the Gospel of Luke includes an account of the Ascension (also included in the Book of Acts)
- Luke is the longest of the four Gospels
- Luke records a wide variety of miracles, teaching, and parables resulting in the fullest portrait of Jesus' ministry.
- Luke is the only Gospel addressed to an individual.
- Much of the material in chapters 9-19 appear only in Luke and in all, about one-third of the Gospel of Luke is unique.
- As a physician, Luke shows a particular interest in medical matters (4:38; 7:15; 8:55; 14:2; 18:15; 22:50)
- Four beautiful hymns (the four original Christmas carols) are found at the beginning of Luke's gospel:
 - The *Magnificat* of Mary (1:46-55)
 - The *Benedictus* of Zachariah (1:68-79)

² Dr. Stephen Bramer, "Gospel of Luke," 1-2.

³ See footnote 1 for an explanation of the various sources used to compile this list.

- *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* of the angels (2:14)
- *Nunc Dimittis* [permission to depart] of Simeon (2:29-32)

A Brief Outline:

- Chapters 1 – 2 – the fulfillment of Old Testament promises concerning a Messiah via the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus
- Chapters 3:1 – 4:13 – Preparation for the ministry
- Chapters 4:14 – 9:50 – the Galilean ministry of Jesus
- Chapters 9:51 – 19:27 – Jesus' ministry in Judea and Perea – the journey to Jerusalem
- Chapters 19:28 – 24:53 – Jesus in Jerusalem