

BIBLE SURVEY

LUKE

"That you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed." Luke 1:4

Who Was Luke?

Dr. Luke was the *"beloved physician"* (Colossians 4:14), a close friend and traveling companion of the Apostle Paul (2 Timothy 4:11). Paul describes Luke as: *"my fellow labourer"* (Philemon 24). Luke was a scholarly and well-read Gentile author. He has proved to be a meticulous historian, often giving details that helped identify the historic context of the events he described (1:5; 2:1-2; 3:1-2; 13:1-4). Luke is clearly observant, analytical and careful in his records, and one of the finest historians of his day. Luke is the only history writer in the New Testament. He writes in a polished high standard of Greek and shows particular interest in medical phenomena, giving high profile to Jesus' healing ministry.

Antioch

Church historians Eusebius and Jerome identified Luke as a citizen of Antioch, one of the largest cities in the world at that time. It was at Antioch that the first Gentile church was established and where the followers of Jesus were first called Christians. It is also from Antioch that the first Mission, that of Paul and Barnabas, was launched. Luke was part of Paul's missionary journeys from the time of the Macedonian call through to his awaiting trial in Rome (Acts 16:10; 20:6; 27:1; 28:16).

When Was Luke Written?

Luke mentions the fulfilment of the prophesy of Agabus (Acts 11:28), but not the monumentally important destruction of Jerusalem prophesied by Christ in Luke 21:20. Nor does Luke mention the severe persecution that broke out under the Emperor Nero from AD64. Therefore both Luke and Acts must have been written before those dates. The most likely dates for Luke and Acts are AD60 and AD61.

Who Was Theophilus?

Luke dedicated the Books of Luke and Acts to the *"most excellent Theophilus"* (1:3; Acts 1:1). Theophilus means *lover of God* and for this reason many have assumed that this is a symbolic name representative of those who are interested in finding out the truth about God. However, as Luke gives him the title *"most excellent"*, a term used in the legal profession at that time for either a lawyer or a judge, and considering that the Book of Acts concludes with Paul awaiting trial in Rome, it is a strong possibility that both Luke and Acts were initially researched and drawn up as defense briefs for Paul's trial in Rome. If Theophilus was Paul's defense lawyer, or even the judge at his trial, it would make sense that Dr. Luke would want to provide full details to the circumstances leading to the trial. How did the new Faith of Christianity begin? Who was the Founder? How did Paul come to be one of its advocates?

A History of the Founding of Christianity

During Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, Luke researched the life and death of Jesus from eye witnesses and when Paul was transported to Rome, Luke continued his research and recording of the growth of Christianity, particularly focusing on Paul's involvement in its Mission. It is noteworthy that the Romans are portrayed as entirely sympathetic to Christianity in both Luke and Acts. Luke includes the three statements by the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, that Jesus was innocent, He had done nothing wrong, He had done nothing to deserve death. Luke also records the Roman authorities in Caesarea who were evaluating Paul's case, declaring three times that he

was innocent and should go free. Luke makes it clear that the troubles surrounding the Christians were caused by jealous Jewish religious leaders.

In Defence of the Faith

A judge would require carefully researched facts, eyewitness testimony, first-hand accounts, presented in an orderly fashion. Certainly Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts present just the kind of careful investigation and factual accounts that would be required in a court of law. This would also explain why The Acts of the Apostles barely mentions most of the Apostles, dealing only with the Apostle Peter in the first twelve chapters and then, as Paul is converted, the Book begins to focus almost exclusively on Paul, accounting for two thirds of the Book of Acts. If this was to be presented at the trial of Paul it would make sense. Paul is a Roman citizen, innocent by Roman law, and deserving a "*Not Guilty*" verdict. Similarly the trial of Jesus in Jerusalem was not just irregular, but blatantly illegal. Jesus was crucified only because of malicious manipulations by the Jewish high priests and irrational demands by the mob. Hence Paul had appealed to Caesar to escape from the interference of those who had engineered the travesty of justice which had allowed Christ Jesus to be crucified.

The Ship Wreck on Malta

This theory of Luke and Acts as a defense lawyer's brief also explains why so much detail is given to the ship wreck on Malta. Paul endured three other ship wrecks, which are not described. However, the ship wreck on Malta highlighted Paul's exemplary behaviour in not attempting to escape in the confusion, but saving the lives of all on board, including his Roman captors, who were responsible for delivering him safely to the Roman court. One could imagine a lawyer, after recounting this heroic and patriotic effort of Paul, could conclude: "*I rest my case.*" This would explain why Acts finishes so abruptly.

So Was This Legal Defense Successful?

Yes, the evidence points to Paul being acquitted from his first trial in Rome. His letters to Timothy and Titus were plainly written after that first imprisonment. There is strong evidence that Paul ministered in Spain and even on the British Isles after this first detention in Rome. It was not just Paul that was on trial, but Christianity. Luke was doubtless aware that his work would benefit a wider audience too, so it was not only a defense brief, but a declaration of the Faith.

The Distinctives of Luke

Luke is the longest Book in the New Testament. Luke provides the most complete coverage of the births of both John the Baptist and our Lord Jesus Christ. Luke is the only Gospel writer to give the details of the angel's appearance to Zacharias in the Temple and the unusual circumstances of John the Baptist's birth (1:5-25, 57-80). While Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus focused on Joseph's experiences, Luke's accounts are all from the perspective of Mary. Luke must have known Mary well and had numerous interviews with her, because he gives details of the conception and delivery, even mentioning Mary's visit from the Angel Gabriel (1:26-38), Mary's journey to see her cousin Elizabeth (1:39-56); Jesus' birth in a stable and the visit from the shepherds (2:1-20). Only Luke gives the details of Jesus' circumcision and dedication to God in the Temple (2:21-38). The visit of Jesus to the Temple at age twelve is also only given in Luke (2:41-52). Luke is careful to link events in the life of Jesus with political rulers and world events (2:1-3; 3:1-2).

The Parables of Jesus

We read more of the teachings of Jesus in Luke than in any other Gospel. Only Luke includes the Two Debtors (7), the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10), the Rich Fool (12), the Wise Steward (12), the Great Feast (12), the Prodigal Son (15), the unjust judge and the Persistent Widow (18), the Pharisee and the Tax Collector praying at the Temple (18), the Friend at Midnight (11), the Barren Fig Tree (13), the Shrewd Manager (16) and the Rich Man and Lazarus (although that was probably not a parable, but an actual event, 16:19-31). Other unique incidents only recorded in

Luke includes the miraculous catch of fish, the sending out of the seventy to evangelise, and extra details about the Ascension.

Unique Incidents in Luke

Luke includes details about the prostitute who anointed Jesus' feet in the house of a Pharisee, the woman suffering from haemorrhaging of blood who touched the hem of His garment in the middle of a crowd, the meal in the home of Martha and Mary, the tax collector Zacchaeus who went up a tree to see Jesus and who ended up hosting Him in his house and doing full restitution. The crippled woman, the ten lepers who Jesus healed, but only one returned to give thanks, the dying thief at the cross asking for the Lord to remember him when He comes into His Kingdom, and the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus to whom Jesus appeared after His Resurrection.

Shocking Stories and Associations

Many of Jesus' teachings and actions were shocking and scandalous for the Jews of His time. Dr. Luke showed particular interest in those who were regarded as outcasts by the Jews: the Samaritans, Gentiles, children, the poor, tax collectors and harlots. The Samaritans were regarded as outcasts. So Jesus shocked the Jews by telling the story of a man who was attacked by robbers and left bleeding by the side of the road. Both a pharisee and a priest walked by the side of the road doing nothing to help, but a Samaritan stopped and helped the man and transported him to where he could receive care and attention. When Luke speaks of the ten lepers who were healed, he notes that only one, the Samaritan, returned to give thanks.

Fire on the Samaritans

The hostility and prejudice of the Jews against the Samaritans is demonstrated by how James and John wanted to call down fire from Heaven on the Samaritans. In the Book of Acts, we read how John came back to Samaria with Peter to pray that the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit and the fire of the Holy Spirit came down upon the Samaritans in Revival blessings! (Acts 8:14-17).

A Light to the Gentiles

Simeon described the Lord Jesus as "*a light to the Gentiles*". In his sermon at the synagogue in Nazareth the Lord Jesus mentioned the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian, who evidenced more faith than the people of Israel and who received God's miraculous answers to prayer. Luke also records the sending out of the seventy, a number which was regarded as symbolic of the nations as seventy nations were listed in the Table of the Nations in Genesis 10. Luke records that Jesus spent a major amount of His ministry east of the Jordan, in Perea working amongst Samaritans and Gentiles.

A Friend to the Outcasts

Luke records how the Lord Jesus had great interest in outcasts. Those whom others treated with contempt, He went out of His way to bless: the lepers, Samaritans, tax collectors, Romans, shepherds, prostitutes, women and children, the poor, the blind and the beggars. Shepherds were so despised by the Jews that a shepherd's testimony was not regarded as legitimate in a court of law. It was to shepherds that the angels appeared and they were the first to bear the Good News of the Incarnation of Christ. The Lord Jesus used the tears and generosity of the repentant prostitute to rebuke the self-righteous hypocritical pharisees.

The Women in Jesus' Ministry

Luke's Gospel includes ten women who are not mentioned anywhere else. Martha and Mary are prominent. The healing of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' cloak is recorded and Luke includes details about the women of Jerusalem weeping for the Lord as He carried His Cross to Calvary. Luke also mentions the wealthy women who supported Jesus' ministry financially. Luke's Gospel greatly honours women who feature prominently and receive the great privilege of being the first to proclaim the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead.

Good News to the Poor

While the Jews despised the poor, Jesus taught *"blessed are you who are poor"* and *"woe to you who are rich."* In Luke's Gospel poverty is seen as a blessing, in sharp contrast to the way it was regarded by the people of that time. Luke also records that Mary and Joseph brought a pigeon to the Temple, the cheapest possible sacrifice allowed under Levitical Law. At the Parable of the Great Banquet the Lord instructs: *"Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame."* In the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Lord Jesus spoke of the time when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. But in hell, where the rich man was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. Luke 16 speaks of a rich man who ended up in hell because of his **indifference** to others, his **indulgence** in himself and his **independence** from God.

Recognising Reality

In the context of the Roman occupation, Jesus taught to give to those who ask of you and if anyone takes what belongs to you do not take it back. Living as second class citizens under the oppression of the Roman Empire, there was no point in asserting one's rights when the most likely response was flogging, arrest, imprisonment or even execution. Those who ignored this wise warning of Christ perished in the futile rebellion of AD70.

Live in the Light of Eternity

In addition, the Lord taught that when you give a luncheon, or dinner, do not just invite your friends, your brothers, or relatives, or your rich neighbours. If you do they may invite you back and so repay you. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

Angels

Angels announced the birth of John to Elizabeth and told the priest Zacharias what to name his son. An angel announced the birth of Jesus to Mary. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness Luke records the ministry of angels. When the Lord agonised in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane we read: *"An angel from Heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him."*

The Holy Spirit

There is more about the Holy Spirit in Luke than in Matthew and Mark combined. Luke records that the Holy Spirit was responsible for the conception of Jesus: *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will over-shadow you."* Both Zacharias and Elizabeth are said to have been filled with the Holy Spirit and John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit within the womb. We read that Simeon in the Temple was moved by the Spirit to encounter the Baby Jesus. The Holy Spirit came upon the Lord Jesus at His baptism. We read that Jesus, *"full of the Holy Spirit"*, returned from the Jordan and was *"led by the Spirit"* into the desert. After the temptation we read that Jesus returned to Galilee *"in the power of the Spirit"*. When Jesus taught on prayer He added: *"How much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who go on asking him?"* The Gospel ends with the Lord Jesus commanding His followers to wait in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49).

Prayer

Luke writes more about the prayers of the Lord Jesus than any other Gospel writer. Seven of the prayers of Jesus are unique to the Gospel of Luke. Luke contains prayers of our Lord Jesus Christ at His baptism (3:21); in the wilderness (5:16); before choosing His disciples (6:12); at the Transfiguration (9:29); before giving the Lord's Prayer (11:1); for Peter (22:32); in the Garden of Gethsemane (22:44); on the Cross (23:46). In the Parable of the Persistent Widow Jesus encouraged us to keep on praying and not to give up (18:1). In the Parable of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee (18:9-14) He encourages humility in prayer. God resists the proud, but He gives

grace to the humble. *"Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

Joy

Luke has more references to joy, rejoicing and laughter than any other Book in the New Testament. We read that Jesus was full of joy through the Holy Spirit. There is more rejoicing in Luke than in any other Gospel. In chapter 15 we read of the joy of those who find what was lost: lost sheep, lost coin, lost son.

Songs of Praise

Some of the greatest Christian hymns of the Middle Ages are taken from the Gospel of Luke: The *Ave Maria*, from the words of the angel to Mary (1:28-33); The *Magnificat*, Mary's Song (1:46-55); the *Benedictus* of Zacharias (1:68-79); the *Glory in Excelsis* of the Heavenly Angels (2:13-14) and the *Nuc Dimittis*, the Rejoicing of Simeon (2:29-32).

Let the Earth Hear His Voice

Luke, in his genealogy of Jesus, does not merely go back to Abraham, as Matthew does, but back to Adam. The angel's song includes the words *"peace on earth, goodwill towards those on whom His favour rests"*. Luke quotes Isaiah declaring that *"all flesh will see the salvation of God."* The word *sarx* for all flesh includes all creation, animals included. The seventy are sent out not only to the lost sheep of Israel, as the Twelve were, but *"to every city and place."* We read that *"people will come from the East and West and North and South and will take their place at the feast in the Kingdom of God."* Jesus declares that ***"repentance and remission of sins will be preached in His Name to all nations."*** Luke 24:47. Here we see all nations in God's purpose.

Salvation

Luke tells us that *"today is the day of salvation."* This is said eleven times, compared to eight in Matthew and once in Mark. And *"now salvation has come"* (fourteen times - compared to four in Matthew and three in Mark). Luke emphasise that salvation comes through the Atonement on the Cross of Christ. Just as the Hebrews were liberated from captivity in Egypt, so in the Cross God provides a new Exodus for His people, called from all nations.

True Discipleship

"But why do you call Me 'Lord!, Lord!,' and not do the things which I say?" Luke 6:46

*"Then He said to them all, **'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'**"* Luke 9:23

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it." Luke 9:24

"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?" Luke 9:25

"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My Words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels." Luke 9:26

"And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:27

*"It is impossible that no offenses should come, **but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.** Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him..."* Luke 17:1-3

Jesus declared ***"I tell you, no!; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish!"*** Luke 13:3

The Fear of God

*"And I say to you, My friends, **do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!**"* Luke 12:4-5

An Outline of Luke

In Luke we see:

The **Preparation** of the Son of Man,
the **Teaching** of the Son of Man,
the **Ministry** of the Son of Man,
the **Suffering** of the Son of Man,
and the **Victory** of the Son of Man.

"These are the Words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day. And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold I send the promise of my Father upon you, but tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until you are endued with power from on high." Luke 24:44-49

Dr. Peter Hammond
Livingstone Fellowship
P.O. Box 74 Newlands 7725
Cape Town South Africa
Tel: 021-689-4480
Email: mission@frontline.org.za
Website: www.livingstonefellowship.co.za

