

Luke

Put It in Writing
(Luke 1:1-4)

With Study Questions

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9/24/2023

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Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed (Luke 1:1-4).

Introduction

It is customary when beginning a new book to spend a bit of time introducing the author. But since Luke's name is never even mentioned in this gospel, it would seem that he was not terribly concerned with being part of the story.¹ As the above verses indicate, he was more interested in being the teller of the story.

Nonetheless, we will briefly convey that Luke was not likely an eyewitness to the events he wrote about (which will change when we get to Acts). Like us, he came to faith via the testimony of others. Yet, having spent a great deal of time with the Apostle Paul (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1:24), he, little doubt, was an able student and well-informed in all the matters of which he wrote. Some have suggested that Luke was Paul's amanuensis (the one who wrote what Paul would dictate).

All indications are that he is the only gentile (non-Jew) to write a book in the New Testament. He was also a physician (Colossians 4:14). Such observations may help us grasp why Luke tends to emphasize certain things. For example, unlike Matthew, the genealogy in Luke doesn't go back to Abraham (who the Jewish reader would view as a predominant figure), but to Adam (the first man, predating the nation of Israel altogether). He is also quite detail oriented, as a physician might be.

¹ It is beyond dispute that Luke is the author based upon "we" passages in Acts, the style of writing, and the almost universal testimony of the early church.

A Painter of Pen-Pictures

Luke does not assume his readers have an awareness of Jewish culture, or even the Old Testament which, sadly, will help many of us in our study of this gospel. At times, when we are confronted with a difficult topic, a good teacher might say something like, "Let me paint a picture for you."

The philosopher and theologian, Joseph Ernest Renan, said of this gospel that it was "the most beautiful book ever written." In contrast to Mark's brief gospel where we see a photographer, moving quickly from scene to scene, in Luke's gospel (the longest gospel), we see painter of pen-pictures. Think Norman Rockwell, so famous for painting images of things simple, and real life: a family picnic, a child at the doctor, a couple in a diner.

In Revelation we had the difficulty of navigating things celestial, prophetic and apocalyptic. This will be quite the opposite. Luke writes of things palpable, touchable, personal. He tends to focus on Jesus, the man rather than Jesus the God-man. He also digs deeper into the humanity of those within the gospel stories.

Most of the types of things we see on people's lawns during Christmas come from the gospel of Luke. The nativity is treated thoroughly, as is accounts of Jesus as a twelve-year-old child (only in Luke). The story of the Good Samaritan is only in Luke. The Prodigal Son is only in Luke. The account/parable of the Pharisee and the publican is only in Luke, as well as Lazarus and the Rich Man.

Luke underscores, more than the other gospel writers, that it was the man, Jesus, who needed prayer. Luke tells us that Jesus "**often drew into the wilderness and prayed**" (Luke 5:16), that Jesus "**continued all night in prayer to God**" (Luke 6:12), prior to selecting the twelve apostles. Prior to the Transfiguration, Luke tells us that Peter, John and James "**went up on the mountain to pray**" (Luke 9:28). Luke records many of the same accounts of events seen in other gospels, but will add that prayer was included where the others may not.

Even the word "**salvation**," which is not found in Matthew or Mark is mentioned numerous times by Luke. The word "**grace**," also not found in Matthew or Mark, is prominent in Luke. Though other gospel writers

record Jesus being anointed by women for His burial (Matthew 26; Mark 14; John 12, 13), it is only Luke who mentions...

...a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, ³⁸ and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped *them* with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed *them* with the fragrant oil (Luke 7:37, 38).

Only Luke who records the final disposition of the occasion.

Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace" (Luke 7:48-50).

Luke, perhaps more than the other gospel writers, touches the human experience.

Luke goes into more detail in his pen-art, sketching the nefarious, murderous coalition of a dark clergy in their attack of Jesus; the venom of a betrayer's kiss, the panic-struck break-up of the apostles, the denial and blasphemy of Peter, the fiendish hypocrisy of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish court), the sarcastic mockery of Herod and the political expediency and cowardice of Pilate.

It's been said that...

...Luke sets forth Jesus in all the simple purity, lovely and naturalness, profound beauty, and moral sublimity of His sinless manhood.

What we will see in Luke is that Jesus was so humble, nothing could humiliate Him. He was so loving, nothing could dissuade Him. He was so honest, nothing could deceive Him. Even on the cross, Luke records something not found in the other gospels. The criminal next to him makes a final petition:

Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”⁴³ And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:42, 43).

Luke emphasizes that it was a *man* who was betrayed, denied, deserted, falsely accused and deceptively tried. He was nailed to a cross, anticipating the wrath of God, yet He ministered to His last breath. This is gallery of Christ that Luke bids us to walk through in this gospel.

Put It in Writing

I am occasionally asked if a handshake is sufficient for business dealings with friends. My standard answer (having plodded this narrow globe these many decades) is to put it in writing. Handshakes are nice, but sometimes relationships sour. And even if they don't, it is easy to forget what the terms actually were.

How much more critical this clarity when it comes to our relationship (or covenant) with God! Religion can be reduced to sentimentality, intuitions, emotions, nostalgia, culture, etc. Feelings can be a wonderful thing, but we've replaced the word 'think' with the word 'feel'. When I do weddings, I spend the majority of the event explaining what the words/vows truly mean.

By the time Luke wrote this gospel, other accounts of the events of Christ were already being written.

...many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us (Luke 1:1).

Luke is not writing here that those accounts were necessarily wrong or bad.² But it was in the mind of Luke by the Spirit of God...

... having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account (Luke 1:3).

² Roman historian Tacitus (though not an eyewitness and a later in the first century) wrote of Jesus. Josephus, a Jewish historian wrote of Jesus, as did others.

What we will see in our journey through Luke and Acts is an inspired (by the Holy Spirit), sequential, inerrant (without error), infallible (incapable of error) account of the accomplished work of redemption. God had made a promise, we see repeated time and time again in the Old Testament, to redeem mankind. Luke provides a full record of God keeping His promise.

This will begin with the birth of John the Baptist (who is months older than Jesus) and culminate and the end of Acts with the Apostle Paul, under house arrest, still delivering the message of the kingdom-of the gospel.

Luke is writing to Theophilus (which means lover of God), who is likely a Roman Christian. But like all of the letters of the New Testament, whether it is written to a church or an individual, it applies to any who find themselves in similar events. All to say, if you are seeking to be a lover of God, Luke and Acts is written to you.

Luke would have us know...

...the certainty of those things in which you were instructed (Luke 1:4).

The word “**certainty**” *asphaleian* can be translated “safety” or “security”. Luke uses the same word to describe the prison house locked “securely” (Acts 5:23).

In a world where it has become increasingly difficult to determine what is true,³ God has provided an oracle (a revelation). He has not left us to grope in the dark but has deposited that which is certain and secure in our midst. Year after year it is the best seller. Century after century it has been either attacked, disallowed or perverted beyond recognition.

I fear in our current era, none of those things are necessary because we have merely become lethargic. The words of A. W. Pink may sound harsh to current sensitivities, but he accurately and profoundly stated,

The Bible is no lazy man’s book! Much of its treasure, like the valuable minerals stored in the recesses of the earth, only

³ At some level this has always been true. Some newspapers didn’t record the death of Lincoln for a week or two after his assassination. Today, there would be numerous reports immediately. The problem is not speed, but accuracy.

yield up themselves to the diligent seeker. No verse of Scripture yields its meaning to lazy people.

There is an old saying that good fences make good neighbors. What is meant by this is not that we should separate ourselves from others, but that boundaries should be well known. Truth loves a definition. God has provided these defining parameters in His word.

Against common objections, the Bible is not merely the opinion of men or even of the church. The church did not establish the Bible, the Bible established the church. The church merely recognized that which God had provided. It was for our safety and security, as our confession states, that God committed His word “wholly unto writing.”⁴

Now it is up to us to read it. Luke assumes his words will be read. When I first taught the underground church in China, they had very little understanding of systematic theology or church history. These were things they wanted me to teach. What they did know was the Bible. I could hardly quote a verse that they did not know. And when I was able to help them understand how certain verses or passages functioned within the overall beauty and the consent of all the parts of Scripture, it fed them, and reciprocally fed me back.

One of the attributes of a true Christian is their response to the word of God.

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

I know that the discipline of reading has fallen upon hard times. But let us not be among those people to whom Jesus said, **“Have you not read” (Mt 12:3; 19:4; 21:42; 22:31)?** Get up in the morning and read a verse. Read a passage. Read a chapter. We need to lay bricks in our lives, even ever so small, that will move toward the edifice we are all called to be.

Though I would not embrace Emerson’s theology (Unitarianism), he was not far off with his words, “Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an

⁴ Westminster Confession of Faith 1, 1.

action reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.” Luke will help us sow thoughts. They will be thoughts of Christ.

Questions for Study

1. What do we know about Luke? What difference does this make in our understanding of this gospel (pages 2, 3)?
2. How is Luke different than Mark in style and approach (pages 3, 4)?
3. Why is it important for things to be in writing (page 5)?
4. What will be discovered as we proceed through Luke and Acts (pages 5, 6)?
5. What did Pink mean when he said the Bible is “no lazy man’s book” (page 6)?
6. How do true believers respond to the word of God (page 7)?