

LUKE: An Introduction

The Third Gospel

Why *four* Gospels? The sovereign decision and inspiration of God apart, the answer would seem to be because no one report or portrait could fully capture the many-sidedness of the Messiah's person and work. It has been suggested that there are four Gospels because there are four "faces" in Ezekiel and John's visions of God (Ezk 1/10, 10/14, Rev 4/7) – and Jesus is 'the face of God' to us (2 Cor 4/6 cf. John 1/18); the portrait of Christ in each Gospel corresponds to one of these faces. Some have suggested a further correspondence to the four colours found in the Tabernacle – and Jesus is indeed God 'tabernacling' (living) among us. The intended portrait of Jesus has affected each Gospel writer's selection, ordering and treatment of material.

<i>Gospel</i>	<i>Tabernacle colour</i>	<i>Face of God</i>	<i>Portrait of Jesus</i>	<i>Emphasis of Account; Introduction (credentials)</i>
MATTHEW	Purple (royalty)	Lion	Promised Messiah	Fulfilment of messianic prophecy Genealogy back to Abraham
MARK	Red (sacrifice)	Ox	Suffering Servant	Busyness and obedience No background (unimportant)
<u>LUKE</u>	Blue (humanity)	Man	Son of Man	Rounded perfection Genealogy back to Adam
JOHN	White (divinity)	Eagle	Son of God	Divine origin and nature Word come down from heaven

Author: Luke

Probably a Gentile by birth; possibly from Syrian Antioch or Philippi.

Well educated in Greek culture; his writing displays an outstanding command of the Greek language.

A physician by profession ("Our dear friend Luke, the doctor": Col 4/14). It was perhaps his medical training that made him such a thorough and accurate historian (Lk 1/3, Ac 1/1).

Like Mark, he was not one of the Twelve but was closely associated with an apostle and his ministry. He was a companion and "fellow worker" (Phm 24) of Paul's at various times, from Paul's second missionary journey to his first imprisonment in Rome (cf. the "we" sections of Acts: 16/10-17; 20/5-15; 21/1-18; 27/1 – 28/16). Luke was a loyal friend who remained with the apostle after others had deserted ("Only Luke is with me": 2 Ti 4/11).

Recipient: Theophilus / All believers

A Roman official or other person of high position and wealth ("most excellent Theophilus": 1/3); possibly Luke's patron, responsible for seeing that his writings were copied and distributed. (Such a dedication to the publisher was common at that time.) Theophilus was more than a publisher, however: the Gospel was intended for his own instruction and faith (1/4).

But it was also written for the instruction of those among whom the book would be circulated. The fact that the book was initially directed to Theophilus does not narrow or limit its purpose. The life of Jesus was "carefully investigated" and put into "an orderly account" to refute ill-founded reports about Jesus and provide a trustworthy one. It was written to strengthen the faith of all believers and to answer the attacks of unbelievers (1/1-4).

Luke was written either AD59-63 or in the AD70s/80s, possibly from Rome.

Purpose

Luke addressed his Gospel primarily to Greek (or non-Jewish) readers (the detailed designations of places in Palestine indicate the book was intended for readers unfamiliar with that land) and presented Jesus as man, Son of Man, and the representative man and ideal human being. Such a presentation would have had immediate appeal in the Greek culture which dominated the Roman Empire at the time: Greek philosophy had long sought after the "perfect man".

Thus Luke introduces Jesus with a genealogy which goes back not to Abraham (as in Matthew) but to Adam: Jesus is first a man, and the descendant of the first perfect or ideal man. (Indeed, the genealogy goes back to God: this is not a heretical claim to divinity for man, but Luke's attempt to stress that unfallen man does carry the glory of God, and that this possibility has been made available to man again through the unfallen Jesus, who carried that glory.) Luke then takes care to emphasize the rounded perfection of the boy Jesus (2/40,52); he is indeed the complete man.

Themes

AUTHOR (Gentile birth, Greek culture) + AUDIENCE (Gentiles, Greek culture) = THEMES / Emphases
(medical training, personal interests) / PURPOSE

(1) Jesus the Man (the humanity/humanness of Jesus)

The Ideal/Perfect/Complete Man (the realization of the Greek ideal)

The Son of Man (representative/heavenly man, progenitor of a new humanity)

(2) Dignity of all humanity/peoples – because Jesus was human (took on human form) & concerned for all men

Universality of Jesus and his message (Jesus is for all men / God's good news is meant for everyone /

recognition of Gentiles as well as Jews in God's plan)[2/10,14,31-32; 3/6; 9/56; 10/33; 17/16; 19/10; 24/47]

Luke wanted to show that the place of the Gentile Christian in God's kingdom is based on the teaching of Jesus

(3) Mission: Luke wanted to commend the preaching of the gospel to the whole world

Presents the works and teachings of Jesus that are especially important for understanding the way of salvation

Cf. structure of book: Jesus conducts his ministry among the peoples of Palestine with a view to the extension

of that ministry to all peoples afterwards through the ministry of his disciples (Jesus' story continued in Acts)

The main theme of the Gospel is the nature of Jesus' Messiahship and mission.

A key verse is 19/10: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Jesus – Ideal, Universal, Missional

Other themes/emphases include:

(4) The Holy Spirit

(5) Prayer – especially Jesus' praying before important occasions

(6) Joy at the announcement of the gospel or good news

(7) Special concern for the role of women

(8) Special interest in the poor (some rich were amongst Jesus' followers but he seemed closest to the poor)

(9) Concern for sinners (Jesus was a friend to those deep in sin)

(10) Stress on the family circle (Jesus' activity included men, women and children, with the setting frequently in the home)

Outline

Luke is structured around the tours of ministry undertaken by Jesus.

I	1/1-4	Prologue: The Life of the Son of Man
II	1/5 – 4/13	The Preparation of the Son of Man
III	4/14 – 9/50	The Galilean Ministry of the Son of Man
IV	9/51 – 18/30	The Judean & Perea Ministry of the Son of Man [or till 19/27]
V	18/31 – 21/38	The Jerusalem Ministry of the Son of Man [or from 19/28]
VI	22/1 – 24/46	The Passion of the Son of Man
VII	24/47-53	Epilogue: The Legacy of the Son of Man

Luke's uniqueness is especially seen in the amount of space devoted to Jesus' closing ministry in Judea and Perea. This section is predominantly made up of accounts of Jesus' discourses: 16/23 parables in Luke occur here vs only 4/20 miracles. It includes much material unique to the Gospels (10/1 – 18/14, 19/1-28).

LUKE 1/1-38

{Luke: Ultimate Man; Ch 1&2: God is near; 1/1-38: He said he would come and we saw him}

v1-4: Introduction

Could do a brief introduction to the book based on these verses: author, recipient(s), purpose, themes, etc

v5-38: Two angelic annunciations / Two births foretold

Miscellaneous preliminary (but profound) observations from the text (v5-13a)

v5-6: Zechariah and Elizabeth – unknown/obscure but qualified – God about to thrust them into the limelight

v7: how often God does this – so we know that it's him!

v8: what seems natural to us is spiritual – God determines outcomes & inhabits/uses the ordinary/routine

On seemingly inconsequential moments, great matters turn – the end to 400 silent years! (salvation paused)

v12-13a: the characteristic response to angels in Scripture (v some claims to angelic encounters today) and their normal reply

v13a: the God who hears prayer!

1. The revelation about John (who he will be, what he will do) – v13b-17

v16-17: “in the spirit and power of Elijah” cf. Mal 4/5-6

One *like* Elijah, in mission and anointing – not literally Elijah (Heb 9/27)

We see this fulfilled in ch3A, as John turns the crowd, tax collectors & soldiers to the wisdom of the right.

“to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” cf. Is 40/3, Mal 3/1, Lk 3/4 (prepare the way for the Lord)

v15&20: the choosing (“he will be great”) and timing (“at their proper time”) are sovereign (not parent/child)

v26-30: similar response to angel and his reply; similar sovereign choice of instrument = to be favoured by God

2. The revelation about Jesus (who he will be, what he will do) – v31-33&35

[i] Jesus (cf. Mw 1/21: he will save his people from their sins)

[ii] Son of the Most High

[iii] the throne of his father David

[iv] he will reign over the house of Jacob forever

[v] his kingdom will never end

[vi] the holy one

[vii] Son of God

v35: Believing the virgin birth is not only a doctrinal necessity but a necessity if we believe in the inspiration of Scripture

3. The contrasting responses of Zechariah and Mary (unbelief v faith) – v18,20 vs v34,38 (cf. v45)

Doubting (not believing) that it can/will happen (v18,20) vs Wanting to know how it will happen (v34)

v36-37: angel graciously builds (affirms) Mary's faith

v38: humble submission to the will of God even though (i) don't understand the how (ii) know the consequence

v45: she believes that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished

Application/Appeal

(1) Believers: in everything God is saying to us, let us respond with faith and submission – even if we don't (yet) understand the why or how

(2) Unbelievers: the one foretold has come and we have seen him – see who he is [i-vii] – believe on him!