

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE – SESSION 1

Academy of Christian Discipleship

Introduction

The Gospel of Luke, the longest of the four Gospels, was originally composed as the first of a two-part presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, with its sequel in the Book of Acts. Both documents are addressed to a nobleman named Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1), who may have sponsored their production, and both are characterized by the same educated Greek literary style. Although Luke and Acts are separated in modern Bibles by the Gospel of John, they were intended as a single work in two parts, the first (Gospel of Luke) narrating the life of Jesus in the first third of the first century, and the second (Book of Acts) narrating the mission and expansion of the early church in the second third of the first century. Together, Luke-Acts comprises the first sixty-five years of the Christian mission, and constitutes the largest single literary unit in the New Testament, nearly one-third of its total volume. In the early church the Gospel of Luke was the third most frequently quoted Gospel, after the Gospels of Matthew and John, and before the Gospel of Mark, which was quoted fourth and least often.

The unique characteristics of the Gospel of Luke include the following:

- The overarching theme of the Gospel is *salvation history, the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel*. Both John the Baptist and Jesus are introduced in the infancy narrative in this context, and in the final commission to the disciples, the resurrected Jesus identifies himself as the Messiah promised to Israel.
- Luke introduces Jesus through the longest *infancy narrative* (Luke 1-2) in the NT, which comprises one-tenth of the length of the Gospel. Luke 1-2 records the births of both John (the Baptist) and Jesus, and presents them both as fulfillments of God's promises to Israel.
- *Jerusalem* plays a central role in the Third Gospel as the point of origin of the fulfillment of salvation history (Luke 1-2), and seven references (9:51, 53; 13:22, 33; 17:11; 18:31; 19:28) identify Jerusalem as the divine destiny where Jesus must suffer and die.
- The Third Gospel contains a *large central section* (9:51-18:34) that is set between Galilee and Jerusalem, where Jesus instructs disciples on *the way of salvation*.
- The Third Gospel preserves *more parables* of Jesus than do the other Gospels.
- Luke frequently places Jesus' teachings in the context of *common meals*.
- Luke sets the major events in Jesus' ministry in the context of *prayer*.
- Luke emphasizes the gospel's saving purpose for *the whole world (oikoumenae)*. More than any other Gospel, Luke declares the good news of salvation to the poor and outcast, including women, but also to rulers, authorities, and people of influence.

- The Third Gospel depicts *Pharisees in a more positive light* than the other Gospels, with whom Jesus is often invited to eat. Responsibility for the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus belongs to the chief priest, not to the Pharisees, whose final mention in the Gospel precedes the Passion (19:39).

Notes (Sessions 1.1 – 1.3)

Luke 1:1-6:16

I. Introduction

Prologue to Luke (1:1-4)

What We Know About Luke

Date and Place of Third Gospel

Sources

Narrative Structure of the Third Gospel

II. Infancy Narrative (Luke 1:1-2:52)

General Comments

The Incarnation and Annunciation of Mary (Luke 1:26-38)

Caesar and Christ (Luke 2:1-14)

III. Early Ministry in Galilee (3:1-6:16)

General Comments

Jesus as God's Son (3:21-4:13)

The Inaugural Sermon of Jesus' Ministry (4:14-30)

Assignments

WEEKS ONE: Read through the Gospel of Luke carefully and thoughtfully. As you do so, pay attention to the *narrative structure* that we discussed in the first lecture, noting as clearly as you can the transitions from one section of the Gospel to the next. At the same time, look for the unique characteristics of the Third Gospel identified on page one of the syllabus that are either absent or less important in the Second Gospel.

WEEKS TWO: Read through the Gospel of Luke again carefully and thoughtfully. Allow the *audiences of Jesus'* teaching and ministry to be your chief focus. We mentioned in the introduction that Luke sees the gospel addressed to the *oikoumenae*, the entire world. Note the *people in need* with whom Jesus interacts. Who are they, why are they in need, and what does Jesus' ministry and teaching mean to them? Note also the *people of privilege* with whom Jesus interacts or addresses. Who are they, in what does their power and privilege consist, and what promises and claims does Jesus' ministry and teaching make to and on them?

WEEKS THREE: The chief members of the Twelve Apostles have already been introduced in the Gospel by the time Luke narrates their final selection in 6:12-16. What do we know about Jesus' prior knowledge of them, and how does Luke introduce them prior to their selection? What does Luke's introduction of the Apostles, and especially his description of Jesus in 6:12, tell us about knowing and following Jesus?

WEEKS FOUR: How would you describe the portrait of Jesus in the Third Gospel? Think in terms of Mark's portrait of Jesus: how does Luke's compare and contrast? In describing Luke's Jesus, you may want to consider Jesus' teaching style, especially his parables, his attitudes toward wealth, hospitality, women, Roman officials, his disciples, and the necessity of his bearing witness in Jerusalem.

Spiritual Exercises & Project

In the fourth week, you considered the portrait or profile of Jesus in the Third Gospel. Transpose Luke's portrait or profile of Jesus into your own church community and setting. How would Jesus interact within your church, within its worship service, preaching, music, liturgy, within its various ministries, within the various needs in the church and surrounding community, within its administrative structure(s) and leadership principles and strategies? Consider what he would say, positively as well as negatively.

Here is the key question: as you read the Gospel of Luke over the last month, what person or group did you most strongly identify with? And why? What would Jesus want to say to you NOW if you had an encounter with him? Turn this into a prayer.

Small Group Questions

1. Luke confesses that he is not one of the Twelve Apostles but learned the gospel story from “eye witnesses.” We suspect that among those witnesses was the Apostle Paul, with whom Luke traveled on various missions on the Antioch-Rome geographical axis. His knowledge and understanding of the gospel was thus derived from *good sources*. What are the best sources God has given to you in order to provide proper knowledge and understanding of the gospel?
2. No other Gospel contains an infancy narrative the length of the Third Gospel’s, in which Luke introduces the Gospel by the interplay of the annunciations, births, and receptions of John and Jesus. Luke makes a special point of showing how John and Jesus are both part of God’s providential plan extending back to the Old Testament. What is the purpose of Luke’s parallel presentations of John and Jesus for a proper understanding of the gospel of salvation?
3. Luke commences the ministry of Jesus with a sermon in a synagogue (4:16-30) in which Jesus reads a text from the Old Testament and interprets it as the model of his ministry. Discuss the importance of this inaugural sermon. What does it tell us about Jesus’ understanding of his ministry in relation to the Old Testament and history of Israel? What might be significant about the specific passage he chooses to preach from? What does he say about himself in the sermon? What does the reaction of his hometown synagogue tell us about possible consequences of authentically preaching the gospel?
4. The story of twelve-year old Jesus in the temple (2:41-52) is the only account of Jesus’ youth in the four Gospels. Why do you think Luke included this particular story in his Gospel? Why is it important?
5. If Jesus had to grow in wisdom and stature, what does that say about the role of “growth” at your church? We often think Christians become disciples by simply “going to church.” That is not necessarily wrong; it is incomplete. What can you do as a group to help people grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people?
6. Pray for each other.

Further Observations/ Notes/ Reflection
