**Introduction to the Gospel of Luke**

The Gospel of Luke is unique in its structure, content, and emphasis as it tells the story of Jesus Christ.

Each of the Gospels are different in this regard:

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| **Gospel** | **Who is Jesus?** | **Disciples ought to…** |
| **Matthew**  | A new Moses. One sent to fulfill the scriptures and fulfill the law of God.  | Learn and Keep Jesus’ teachings then go make more disciples.  |
| **Mark** | A bold, misunderstood, tragic figure who is initiating the kingdom of God.  | Take up their cross and follow Jesus in hurling oneself into the needs of those you meet.  |
| **John** | The Word incarnate: an otherworldly figure who reveals the work and desires of the Father.  | Respond with belief, be born from above, continue in relationship with Jesus (eat the bread of life) and abide in faithful community with others.  |
| **Luke** | A compassionate friend to outcasts and sinners who was sent to seek and save the lost of all nations.  | Give witness to the actions of Jesus and take up his mission extending compassion and bringing salvation to the suffering.  |

**Who wrote the Gospel of Luke?**

The Gospel of Luke was probably written by the same author as the Acts of the Apostles.

Read Luke 1:1-4 & Acts 1: 1-2

The author never reveals his name. However, Luke has long been associated as the author of this book. Which “Luke” is unknown, some speculation looks to Paul’s letters and since the book of Acts refers to “we” and “us” referencing Paul’s journeys a natural leap is to one of Paul’s companions as the author.

**Colossians 4:14**  14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you.

**2 Timothy 4:11**  11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry.

**Philemon 1:23-24**  23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

**Who was Theophilus?** \*\*

In Luke's prologue (1:1-4) the author addresses a person named Theophilus. Some people think that this Theophilus was an actual historical figure for whom the author prepared a new Gospel. The designation "most excellent Theophilus" may indicate that he was powerful, perhaps a wealthy patron who commissioned the writing of the book. Others suggest, because this common name from the ancient world means either "lover of God" or "beloved by God," that Theophilus could be the author's generic designation for any reader.

**When was it written? \*\***

Like the other Gospels, Luke was written some time after Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The best analyses conclude that it was written after Mark and Matthew, probably between 80 and 90 C.E. However, much material in Luke certainly comes from oral and written sources that had already been in circulation among Christians for some time.

**How do I read it? \*\***

The author of Luke wrote to reinforce a Christian audience's confidence about what it knew concerning the good news of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Luke aims to instruct and reassure its readers by telling the story of Jesus in an "orderly" manner, meaning that Luke's account is arranged and narrated in a way that attempts to express Jesus' significance. Notice, then, how Luke's story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection makes claims about what God declares through Jesus and about God's purposes for the world.

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**Structure of Luke’s Gospel**

Outline: (From New Interpreters Bible Commentary)

1. Luke 1:1-4 – Prologue
2. Luke 1:5-2:52 – The Infancy Narrative
3. Luke 3:1-4:13 – Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus
4. Luke 4:14-9:50 – The Ministry in Galilee
5. Luke 9:51-19:27 – The Journey to Jerusalem
6. Luke 19:28-21:38 – Jesus’ Ministry in Jerusalem
7. Luke 22:1-24:53 – The Passion and Resurrection Narratives

**Some notes on Structure:**

Luke’s Gospel is the only one that begins before Jesus’ birth narrative (Story of John the Baptist) and concludes with Jesus ascension. Luke wants to tell a comprehensive story that includes where Jesus came from and where he went.

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| **Gospel** | **Begins with:**  | **Ends with:**  |
| **Matthew** | Genealogy of Jesus (going back to Abraham) | Jesus commissioning the Disciples, “Go therefore…” |
| **Mark** | John the Baptist in the Wilderness | 16:8 – the women fleeing the tomb in terror. 16:20 – Commissioning of Disciples and Ascension of Jesus |
| **Luke** | Birth of John the Baptist | The Ascension of Jesus |
| **John** | In the beginning was the Word.  | Affirmation of the testimony of the Beloved Disciple |

**Themes:**

* **The Acts of the Apostles.** Because the same author is responsible for both Luke and Acts and because the two books share many literary and thematic connections, it is profitable to read them together as a two-part narrative about Jesus and his earliest followers. It is customary to speak of "Luke-Acts," referring to both books as a unified literary creation. Interpreters have speculated about the author's motives for writing both books, sometimes wondering whether the book of Acts may subtly diminish Jesus' importance by making the Christian church appear too important in its own right. However, both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles clearly situate Jesus and the good news on center stage. Both books proclaim Jesus as God's means of salvation for Israel and the whole world and as the Messiah who will come again. Acts helps readers appreciate how Jesus and the message about him continue to impact the world and its different cultures, even after Jesus' physical departure from the earth.
* **Money and possessions.** Several of Jesus' parables and teachings in this Gospel warn against wealth's potential to corrupt a person. Luke recognizes God's concern for the poor, as famously illustrated in the words of Mary, Jesus' mother, in 1:52-53.
* **Almsgiving and solidarity.** Luke's Gospel has much to say about wealth and possessions, including two instances where Jesus commends almsgiving (Luke 11:41; 12:33). The giving of alms entails more than simply handing over money and walking away; it implies creating a real association with the poor. Jesus' world, like today's, was one of radical inequalities among its socioeconomic classes. Conventions of patronage regulated that society, meaning that the wealthy (patrons) would give money or political favors to others (clients) in exchange for loyalty, honor, or political support. When Jesus praises almsgiving, he calls for people to give to the poor without expecting any kind of recognition or reciprocity. To give alms is to refuse to insist upon the privileges that society grants to those with status and power; to give alms is to create relationships of solidarity in authentic community.
* **The death of Jesus.** This Gospel describes Jesus' death in a unique way, emphasizing his innocence and faithfulness. At the crucifixion, Luke mentions the presence of many who support Jesus and grieve his death (23:27, 48). There is no description of the general public deriding him. A criminal turns to Jesus, defends him, and is promised a place with him in Paradise (23:39-43). Jesus dies with an expression of trust on his lips, quoting Psalm 31:5. The Roman centurion who witnesses the execution praises God and declares Jesus' innocence (23:47).
* **The ascension of Jesus.** Luke is the only Gospel that includes a description of Jesus' ascent into heaven (24:50-51), an event that Acts 1:6-11 also narrates but with differing details. At the ascension Jesus' followers worship him (Luke 24:52), indicating that they understand his coming as God's own visitation (see 1:68, 78; 19:44). In Acts the ascension is connected with Jesus' glorification by God and his role in sending the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:33-36; 3:19-21).
* **Jerusalem and the temple.** Jerusalem occupies an important position in Luke's geography. The Gospel begins and concludes with scenes of people at worship in the Jerusalem temple, and Jesus laments the unfaithfulness that characterizes the city (13:33-35; 19:41-44). While Matthew and Mark emphasize Galilee as the place for Jesus' followers to meet him after his resurrection, in Luke they encounter the risen Lord in and near Jerusalem, where they are instructed to remain until the Holy Spirit comes.
* **Jesus the Savior.** Using terms that do not appear in Matthew or Mark (and hardly at all in John), Luke speaks of Jesus as the "Savior" who brings God's "salvation" to the world. Salvation is not merely a synonym for forgiveness; it refers to a broader idea of rescue and deliverance. Throughout his life Jesus saves people in a variety of ways: he brings healing, forgiveness, wholeness, and restoration.
* **Judaism.** Many aspects of Luke and Acts suggest that these books attempt to make sense of the Gospel's implications for Judaism and God's relationship with the Jewish people. Although Jesus does make very severe statements about*certain* Jews (see, for example, Luke 11:48-51; 13:34-35), in no way does Luke suggest that a Gentile Christianity is meant to displace an obstinate Judaism. Luke recognizes Jesus as a divisive figure who speaks harsh criticisms (see 2:34-35; 12:49-53), but Jesus himself is also an expression of God's commitment to the people and traditions of ancient Israel (see 1:67-73; 16:17).
* **Outsiders.** Of the four Gospels, Luke gives the most attention to Jesus' significance for people who were not part of dominant society. Some of these people on the margins of Jesus' culture include those afflicted with diseases, the handicapped, aliens, refugees, children, women, the poor, slaves, prostitutes, widows, the elderly, shepherds, tax collectors, Samaritans, and Gentiles. These kinds of people figure positively in the Gospel and benefit from Jesus' ministry.
* **Prayer.** Luke frequently portrays Jesus engaged in prayer or encouraging his followers to pray (see 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 29; 11:1-4; 18:1; 21:36; 22:32). This emphasizes Jesus' reliance upon his Father and foreshadows the importance of prayer among believers in the book of Acts.
* **Repentance.** While Matthew and Mark also depict John the Baptist and Jesus calling people to repent, Luke mentions this more frequently. To repent is to adopt a new way of thinking, to take on a new or renewed disposition toward God. Some parables in Luke describe a person's repentance, using images of something being found by its owner, a situation that unleashes great joy in heavenly places (15:1-10).
* **Universal scope of the gospel.** Although Jesus is God's Messiah sent to the people of Israel, the salvation he brings is something that happens "in the presence of all peoples" (2:31). The Gospel of Luke is keenly aware of the wider world of the Roman Empire (see 2:1-2; 3:1-2), and the next part of the story told in the book of Acts describes the word of God moving out into this world.

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