

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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This resource has been adapted into multiple languages, including English, Tok Pisin, Arabic (عربي), French (Français), Hindi (हिंदी), Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), Portuguese (Português), Russian (Русский), Spanish (Español), Swahili (Kiswahili), and Simplified Chinese (简体中文).

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Luke

Luke describes the coming of Jesus as good news for the whole world. It is for people of every race, age, gender, ethnic group, and social position.

John the Baptist came first as a prophet to prepare the way. Then Jesus came as the Son of God and the Messiah (the promised king from David's family). He came to defeat Satan and to bring salvation and healing.

As Jesus served, taught, and announced the good news, the religious leaders opposed him. He went to Jerusalem as God's suffering servant. He warned the nation of coming judgment. Then he was executed as a criminal.

But God raised him from the dead. In this way, Jesus completed God's plan and began his Spirit-led mission to the entire world. The risen Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, is the Savior of all people everywhere.

Setting

Luke wrote his gospel account during a time of increasing conflict between the church and the Jewish synagogue (local place of worship). This was during the mid-to-late first century AD. The early church regarded itself not as a new religion, but as fulfilling Judaism. Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection fulfilled the promises made to the Jews in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament).

This continued through the early church's mission efforts. During this time, more gentiles (non-Jewish people) joined the church. Yet, many Jews rejected the gospel. Division increased between those who trusted that Jesus was the Christ and those who denied it.

The main question in this conflict was: Who are the true people of God? Are they the church, which includes Jews and non-Jews who believe Jesus is the Messiah? Or are they the Jews who reject Jesus as a false messiah?

Luke answers this question. He shows that Jesus is truly the Messiah who calls all people (both Jews and non-Jews) to put their faith in him.

Summary

Luke's Gospel starts with a formal introduction, written like the works of skilled Greek-Roman writers of Luke's time ([1:1-4](#)). This introduction shows the author's writing skills and explains the purpose of his work. Luke wants to provide a reliable historical account of Jesus's life that confirms the truth of the Christian message.

After this formal literary introduction, the writing style changes a lot. Luke describes Jesus's birth in a Jewish way similar to the ancient Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) ([1:5-2:51](#)). This birth story plainly shows the Jewish foundations of the gospel message. It introduces themes that develop in the rest of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

Like the gospels of Matthew and Mark, Luke starts Jesus's public ministry with stories about:

- John the Baptist ([3:1-20](#)),
- Jesus's baptism ([3:21-22](#)),
- Jesus's temptation ([4:1-13](#)), and
- Jesus's work in and around Galilee ([4:14-9:50](#)).

Jesus announced the kingdom of God, taught with authority, healed the sick, and drove out demons. This showed the kingdom's power through his words and actions. As in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, the emphasis of Jesus's ministry in Galilee was Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus then explained that the Christ must suffer and die in Jerusalem ([9:18-22](#)).

Jesus then traveled to Jerusalem to complete this mission ([9:51-19:44](#)). The most unique part of the structure of Luke's Gospel is the narrative of travel. It shares many of Jesus's well-loved stories and parables (symbolic stories with special meanings):

- the Good Samaritan,
- the Prodigal Son,
- the Rich Man and Lazarus,
- the story of Mary and Martha, and
- the story about Zacchaeus.

The main theme here is God's love and Jesus's work among the "lost": those living in sin, poor people, and those rejected by society. Luke states the

theme of the entire gospel at the end of the episode about Zacchaeus: "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" ([19:10](#)).

The high point of the story is Jesus's arrest, trial, and crucifixion ([22:1-23:56](#)). The main theme of the crucifixion in Luke is Jesus's innocence. Luke demonstrates that Jesus is the just servant of the Lord who suffers (see [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#)). At Jesus's death, the Roman officer at the foot of the cross exclaimed, "Surely this was a righteous man" ([Luke 23:47](#)).

The story concludes with Jesus's resurrection ([24:1-12](#)). Luke is unique by including the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus ([24:13-35](#)). As Jesus walked with two sad disciples who did not recognize him, he explained that his death was not a failure but fulfilled Old Testament promises. All of Scripture prophesied this important event of salvation ([24:25-27](#)). The story ends with a short account of God taking Jesus into heaven (the "Ascension") ([24:50-53](#)). The book of Acts describes this in more detail ([Acts 1:1-11](#)).

Luke follows the Gospel of Mark's basic outline, with a ministry in Galilee, a journey to Jerusalem, and the climax of Jesus's work there.

The main differences are:

1. Like Matthew, Luke starts with a birth story, which introduces the themes of the work ([Luke 1:1-2:52](#));
2. Luke leaves out a major part of Mark's account of the ministry of Galilee, often called the "great omission" ([Mark 6:45-8:26](#)); and
3. Luke expands Mark's account of the journey to Jerusalem from one chapter to ten chapters ([Mark 10:1-52](#); [Luke 9:51-19:44](#)). This adds much of Jesus's teaching and his work with those rejected from society in Israel.

Luke as Literature

The book of Acts and Luke's Gospel are companion works, so Luke meant readers to interpret them together. They form a literary and religious unity. When Luke wrote his gospel, he planned to write Acts. Themes like the salvation of the gentiles start in the gospel and finish in Acts. Scholars often call this two-volume work "Luke-Acts."

Luke wrote his gospel with a unique perspective and focus. To understand it best, one should read it as a separate account of Christ's life. Comparing it with the other gospels can also be helpful.

Author

From a technical perspective, all of the gospels are anonymous. This is because their authors do not name themselves. However, we can identify the author of "Luke-Acts" as Luke, a doctor and sometimes companion of the apostle Paul. In several first-person plural passages in Acts (the "we" sections), the author describes himself as part of Paul's mission activities ([Acts 16:10-17](#); [20:5-17](#); [21:1-18](#); [27:1-28:16](#)). Luke was a gentile ([Colossians 4:11-14](#)). One of his main themes is that God's salvation is for both gentiles and Jews.

Luke probably became a Christian through the apostle Paul's work. Although he was not there during Jesus's life on earth, he was a careful and skilled historian. He used personal accounts by witnesses. He also used written and spoken sources to thoroughly research the events he described. His goal was to write so that "you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" ([Luke 1:4](#)).

Occasion and Place of Writing

The exact place where Luke wrote his gospel is unknown. But possibilities include Rome, Ephesus, Caesarea, and Achaia (southern Greece). The date is also uncertain. Two main theories suggest he wrote it either between AD 59 and 63 or between AD 70 and 90.

The earlier date has its basis on the ending of Acts, where Paul is alive and in prison in Rome for two years (starting around AD 60). If Luke wrote the gospel before Acts, it probably dates to just before or during this imprisonment (AD 59–63). The later date, after AD 70, is suggested by those who think Luke used Mark's Gospel as a source. This also assumes Mark wrote in the late 60s, just before or during the Jewish war of AD 66–70 (see [Mark 13:14](#)).

Recipients

Luke wrote his work for a man named Theophilus, which means "one who loves God." Theophilus probably funded the costly task of researching and writing such a long book. He might have been a curious non-Christian. But it is more probable that he was a Christian wanting to learn more about the origins of the Christian faith. This personal address is like a dedication.

Luke-Acts was probably also meant for a wider Christian audience, mainly gentile Christians, but also some Jewish Christians. These Christians wanted confirmation and assurance that God's plan of salvation was continuous, even though many Jews rejected Jesus. Luke affirmed that the church represents God's true people today. Both Jews and gentiles who accepted Jesus as the Christ comprised it.

Meaning and Message

The story of Luke–Acts makes several important points:

4. Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.
5. His death on the cross did not cancel this claim. Scripture had already said that the Messiah would die and rise again ([Luke 24:26, 46](#)).
6. The mission to non-Jews (gentiles) came from the Spirit of God. This mission was predicted in Scripture and was part of God's plan to bring salvation to the whole world in the last days.
7. The people of God are now the church, which includes both Jews and non-Jews who believe in Jesus.

The main theme of Luke's Gospel is that God's promised salvation in the Scriptures came true through Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

A Historical Message

Luke, more than any other gospel writer, confirms that Jesus's story is historical. He assures readers that the gospel message is genuine. He emphasizes that his account relies on trustworthy personal witnesses ([1:1–4](#)). He carefully dates Jesus's ministry by referring to the rulers of his time ([3:1–2](#)).

Portrait of Jesus

Luke's depiction of Jesus emphasizes a theme of promise and confirmation. Luke presents Jesus as the "Savior" promised by God, the Christ from King David's family line. His birth was in Bethlehem, David's city, and will rule forever on David's throne ([1:32–33; 2:4, 11](#)).

Jesus did not achieve salvation through military power, but by enduring the fate of the prophets. He died as the Lord's servant, fulfilling Old Testament promises. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus became the "Savior" of the world ([Luke 2:11; Acts 2:36; 10:36](#)). His followers now proclaim this message of salvation worldwide.

Salvation for Outsiders

Luke highlights that salvation is for everyone who believes. He shows special concern for people who were seen as outsiders in Israel. These include the poor, people considered sinners, Samaritans (a despised ethnic group), women, and gentiles (non-Jewish people).

8. *The poor.* The kingdom of God brings a major change in fortunes. God helps poor and humble people. He will judge rich and proud people ([Luke 1:51–55; 16:19–31](#)). The gospel is good news for poor and abused people ([4:18](#)). This is because they recognize their need for God most ([6:20–21](#)). It is impossible for rich people to enter the kingdom when they trust their wealth instead of God ([12:13–21; 18:18–30](#)).
9. *Sinners.* God's love for the "lost" is evident in Jesus's time with those living in sin and tax collectors. He called Levi to be his disciple, although he was a tax collector hated by the people. As the "Great Physician," Jesus came to heal those who are sick with sin, not those who think they have spiritual health, "the righteous" ([5:27–32](#)). He praised a woman living in sin who poured expensive oil on his feet. She understood God forgives and loved Jesus much in return ([7:36–50](#)).

Jesus criticized the Pharisees and religious teachers: for thinking they were innocent, for their dishonesty, and their lack of compassion. God forgave the tax collector in the temple who asked God to show him mercy. The Pharisee gained nothing because he was full of pride ([18:9–14](#)). Jesus even forgave the main tax collector Zacchaeus when he changed his lifestyle and asked God to forgive him ([19:1–10](#)). Jesus forgave and promised paradise to the criminal on the cross who asked for mercy ([23:39–43](#)).

Jesus's parables share this theme too. For example, the father forgave his "prodigal son" when he changed his lifestyle ([15:11–32](#)). The gospel's message is that God's kingdom brings freedom from sin to all who ask God to forgive them and trust in Christ.

10. *Samaritans.* Jews hated Samaritans and considered them outsiders. However, in the book of Luke, Jesus praises a Samaritan "leper" for thanking God after Jesus healed him ([17:11-19](#)). Jesus also shares the parable of the "Good Samaritan," where a Samaritan is the only true neighbor to an injured Jew ([10:29-37](#)). God's salvation does not have its basis on ethnic identity or social status. It depends on having a changed attitude and life of love for God and others.
11. *Women.* In the first century AD, people considered women as lesser. However, Jesus gave women dignity in the kingdom of God. Luke's Gospel emphasizes women and mentions thirteen women not found in the other gospels. Jesus's birth story is from the perspective of the women Mary and Elizabeth. Only Luke mentions the women who were financial supporters of Jesus ([8:1-3](#)). In the story of Mary and Martha, Jesus praises Mary for learning as a disciple at Jesus's feet ([10:38-42](#)).
12. *Gentiles (non-Jewish people).* The gentiles were the ultimate outsiders, but Luke emphasizes that God's salvation includes them too. Although Jesus came from Israel, he would be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" ([2:32](#)). "All humanity will see God's salvation" ([3:4-6](#); [Isaiah 40:5](#)). Matthew's family line of Jesus focuses on Jesus's Jewish descent, starting with Abraham, the ancestor of the Israelites ([Matthew 1:1-17](#)).

In contrast, Luke's family line of Jesus traces back to Adam, the father of all humans ([Luke 3:23-38](#)). In his speech at Nazareth, Jesus stated that God had always shown grace to the non-Jews ([4:24-27](#)). Luke's message is that God loves everyone and wants to find all "lost" people ([15:1-32](#); [19:10](#)).

Rejection by Many People in Israel

The opposite side of including gentiles and other outsiders is that many in Israel rejected Jesus's message. In Nazareth, when Jesus said God had blessed gentiles, the people became angry and tried to kill him ([4:28-30](#)). This event started the rejection of Jesus by his own people and anticipated Jewish opposition to the church (as told in the Acts of the Apostles). Jerusalem rejected its Christ and encountered God's judgment ([Luke 13:33-35](#); [19:41-44](#)).

This pattern continues in Acts. While many in Israel believed the gospel, even more rejected it. Israel divided, and the gospel reached the gentiles. Luke stresses that this did not cancel the gospel message. The Old Testament prophesied Israel's rejection of Christ and this rejection continued Israel's history of a bitter attitude toward God ([11:29-32](#), [47-51](#); [13:34-35](#); [19:41-44](#); [23:27-31](#); [Acts 13:46](#); [28:25-28](#); see also [Romans 9-11](#)).