

The Gospel of Luke 3, 4 & 5. An Overview of the Gospel

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1. Luke, the historian

(Reference: Eckhard Plumacher in Anchor Bible Dictionary)

- 1.1. Follows the model of **Thucydides**, making similar claims (Luke 1:3)
- 1.2. Luke's **prologue** appears to be based on the instructions **Thucydides** gave on writing history
- 1.3. "We" passages often recount travels by sea because a trustworthy historian must be well-traveled (Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-8, 21:1-18)
- 1.4. **Speeches** in Acts, as in other ancient histories, don't necessarily match their context
 - Purpose of speech is to interpret the surrounding event
- 1.5. Action develops as a sequential series of events
- 1.6. Luke writes in a specific **style of Hellenistic historiography**, the tragedy/pathos-centered historiography
 - Makes use of highly dramatic events to reach the reader
- 1.7. Answers specific problems of the early Christians
 - Delay of the *parousia*, the second coming
 - Predominantly Gentile church that grew out of Jewish origins

2. Luke, the theologian

(Reference: I. Howard Marshall in Anchor Bible Dictionary)

- 2.1. **Luke-Acts** together comprises ¼ of the New Testament canon
- 2.2. Conzelmann believes Luke's **theological aim** to explain **delay of the *parousia***
 - Christians not living in the last days
 - Era of the Church part of God's salvation history, preceded by Israel
- 2.3. Conzelmann criticized by those who see continuity between Luke's theology and that of the other gospels
- 2.4. O'Toole's view: Luke wrote an **orderly salvation history** with the purpose of **strengthening the faith** of those who read it
- 2.5. Luke writes a **2 volume history**
 - With parallel accounts of the **story of Jesus** (Luke) and the **story of the church** (Acts)
 - Demonstrates that the **church is a continuation of the Jesus-story**
 - Demonstrates that **Jesus' proclamations** have come to **fruition** in the church
- 2.6. Luke differs from the other gospels in referring to **Jesus as Lord** before his exaltation on the cross
- 2.7. More extreme scholars (Sanders) view Luke as having written an **anti-Jewish diatribe**; most scholars see this rhetoric as reflecting an internal struggle over the proper extent of **Christian subjugation to Jewish law**
- 2.8. The **Spirit** plays an important role in Luke-Acts both in preparing Jesus and the church to fulfill their divinely appointed tasks

3. Luke, the gospel

(Reference: L. T. Johnson in Anchor Bible Dictionary)

3.1. Introduction

- 3.1.1. **Luke, the gospel**, the first volume of a **2-volume work**, Luke-Acts
 - Prologues (Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-2)
 - Style
 - Structure
 - Themes
- 3.1.2. Ancient sources do attribute both volumes to the **same author, Luke, a companion of Paul**
- 3.1.3. Consolidation of Luke-Acts based on **literary-critical approach** to biblical studies
- 3.1.4. Recognizes findings of **source and form criticism**, but gives deference to the present structural integrity of the work

3.2. Circumstances of Composition

- 3.2.1. Luke's status as **companion of Paul** supported by Pauline epistles (Philemon 24; Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11) & "we" passages of Acts
- 3.2.2. **Date of composition** varies to as late as the 2nd century
- 3.2.3. **Lack of reference to Paul's letters** is evidence of a date early enough that the epistles had not yet been collected
- 3.2.4. **Stylistic characteristics**
 - An elegant Greek style familiar with the use of rhetorical conventions
 - Rich knowledge of Hebrew scripture
 - Vivid vignettes and parables
- 3.2.5. Intended audience - Gentile Christians

3.3. Genre and Purpose

- 3.3.1. **Luke's unique stories** some of the best in New Testament
 - **Rich Fool** (12:13-21)
 - **Lazarus and Dives** (16:19-31)
 - **Prodigal Son** (15:11-32)
- 3.3.2. Had gospel of **Mark** as a model and source
 - Uses **Mark** so skillfully that without **Matthew** for comparison, would be difficult to identify
 - Follows Hellenistic tradition of rewriting source
 - Able to write in a **variety of styles**: compare prologue, infancy narrative, and Pentecost sermon
- 3.3.3. Main contribution: extended the story of Jesus into the story of the church and gave it a historical foundation that began with Adam (3:38)
- 3.3.4. **Prologue** states that Luke intends to write a sequential narrative (1:3 & 1:1)
- 3.3.5. Part of the meaning of the text is found in sequence of events itself
- 3.3.6. **Acts** portion of work is a commentary on the gospel portion
- 3.3.7. Most important character is **God**, who is behind everything that happens in Luke
- 3.3.8. Scholars expend much energy in determining **Luke's genre** because the ancient world valued adherence to **conventional forms** to convey specific meanings where our culture values novelty
 - 3.3.8.1. **Hellenistic romance or novel** (Cadbury and Pervo)
 - 3.3.8.2. **Hellenistic history**
 - Prologue matches form specified for histories and resembles prologues to other histories of the period
 - Only NT author to place his story in the context of crucial events in the larger ancient world (1:5; 2:1-2; 3:1-2)

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- Events in Luke move in a sequential manner
- Appears to be as accurate as other ancient historians
- 3.3.8.3. **Hellenistic biography**
 - Concentration on Jesus resembles ancient biographies of philosophers
 - Ex. **Laertius' Lives of the Philosophers**
 - 3.3.8.3.2.1. Life story emphasizing miraculous birth, deeds and teachings
 - 3.3.8.3.2.2. Narrative of teachings and designation of disciples to carry on
 - Opponents to this view say it ignores the author's stated intention in the prologue to write a history
- 3.3.8.4. **Jewish Apology**
 - Exhibits a positive attitude toward gentiles and the Roman Empire to convince gentiles of Christianity's harmlessness or
 - To convince fellow Christians to take a less stridently eschatological stance toward the Roman Empire
 - Tracing Christianity's roots back to Adam would reassure ancients of the validity and trustworthiness of their tradition (1:4)
 - Deals with problem of gentile receptivity to good news and overall Jewish rejection
 - "He sets himself to write the continuation of the biblical story not to defend the Christian movement as such but to defend God's ways in history."

3.4. Literary Aspects of Luke-Acts

3.4.1. *Style*: Skillful redaction of Mark

(Compare healing of the Gerasene demoniac in Luke 8:26-36 and Mark 5:1-20)

- 3.4.1.1. Corrects **Mark's infelicitous phrases**
 - Changes "I adjure" of **Mark** 5:7 to "I beg" (Luke 8:28)
 - Improves tense sequence of **Mark** 5:14 to a more consistent one in Luke 8:35
- 3.4.1.2. Clarifies certain **confusions in Mark's gospel**
 - Clarifies location of the **Gerasenes** (8:26)
 - Informs reader that Jesus stepped onto land,
 - Herdsmen witness the events before they flee
 - Gives motivation for people's request (8:37)

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- Replaces Mark's vague report (5:16) with a summary and interpretation (Luke 8:36)
- 3.4.1.3. Gives the narrative a **more logical order**
 - Explains the demoniac's actions by reference to his disorder (8:28-29) as compared to an initial statement (Mark 5:3-6)
 - Prepares the reader for later reference to the city (compare Luke 8:27 with Mark 5:14)
 - Tells the reader that the man was naked before exorcism(compare Luke 8:27 with Mark 5:15)

3.4.2. *Biblical imitation*

- 3.4.2.1. Gospel begins by sounding like **LXX** (except for Prologue) and gradually becomes more Greek as the gospel enters the Greek world
- 3.4.2.2. Skillful use of biblical allusions
 - **Annunciation** scene (Luke 1:28-38 and Judges 13:2-7)
 - 3.4.2.2.2. **Transfiguration** and **Moses** (Luke 9:35 and Deut 18:15)
 - 3.4.2.2.3. **Jesus** and **Elijah/Elisha** (Luke 9:54 and 2 Kings 1:9-16; Luke 9:61 and 1 Kings 19:20)

3.4.3. *Use of narrative devices esp. In Acts*

- 3.4.3.1. Summaries (Luke 1:80)
- 3.4.3.2. Speeches (Luke 4:16-30)
- 3.4.3.3. Journeys (Luke 9 - 19)
- 3.4.3.4. Parallelism
 - **Mary** overshadowed by **Holy Spirit** (Luke 1:34-35) and **Mary and disciples** overshadowed by **Holy Spirit** (Acts 1:13-14; 2:1-4)
 - **Peter** (Acts 3:1-10) and **Paul** (Acts 14:8-11) do miracles that reflect those of Jesus (Luke 5:17-26)
 - **Stephen's trial** (Acts 6:8-15) is a reprise of **Jesus' trial** (Luke 22:66-71), a connection made by the author himself in Acts 7:56
 - Makes character connections and joins the narrative

3.4.4. *Literary Structure*

- 3.4.4.1. **Geography** - in **Luke**, everything moves **toward Jerusalem**; in **Acts**, the action proceeds **outward from Jerusalem**
- 3.4.4.2. **Prophecy**
 - 3.4.4.2.1. Finding **prophetic fulfillment of Hebrew scriptures** in the life of Jesus a standard element of Christian apologetic
 - Characters in Luke's gospel utter prophecies that come to pass such as Jesus' predictions of his death (9:22, 44; 18:34-33) - called **literary prophecy**
 - Some of these **literary prophecies** actually interpret for the reader the events that follow such as **Simeon's** prophetic statement in Luke 2:34 that sets up the entire gospel as the story of a prophet who created a division in God's people
 - Some prophecies set up a literary irony like Jesus' saying that a prophet not acceptable in his own nation (Luke 4:16-30)

3.4.5. *Prophetic Structure (Acts as the fulfillment of Luke)*

- 3.4.5.1. **Apostles as prophets** - filled with the Spirit, they proclaim the good news and do miracles among the people
- 3.4.5.2. **Jesus as the prophet like Moses** - Pentecost as fulfillment of Joel 2:28- 32 and Deut 34:10-12
 - Jesus as the prophet "God raised up" (see Deut above)
 - **Spirit of Jesus** empowers the disciples (Acts 2:33; 4:10; 13:30,33)
 - Explicit connection between **Jesus** and **Moses** (Acts 3:22-23 & Deut 18:15, 18-19)
- 3.4.5.3. Jesus life follows the **Mosaic pattern of the necessity of suffering before glory** (Luke 24:25-27)
- 3.4.5.4. Gospel in the light of **Acts**
 - Tells of the first sending, the people's rejection, and the prophet being "raised up"
 - Acts tells of the 2nd sending (of the disciples) and judgment of God
 - This pattern is hinted at in the gospel in the narrative of the raising of the widow's son (Luke 7:11-16)

3.5. The Prophet and the People

3.5.1. The Infancy Account

- 3.5.1.1. Luke 1-2 viewed by scholars as a **haggadic midrash**
- 3.5.1.2. Complex internal structure
 - Annunciation to **Zechariah** (1:8-23) and to Mary (1:26-38)
 - **Birth of John** (1:57-66) and **Jesus** (2:1-21)
 - **Annunciations** followed by **Mary's visitation of Elizabeth** (1:39-45) and **Mary's canticle** (1:47-55)
 - Births followed by visit to temple for purification and Simeon's canticle (2:22-38)
- 3.5.1.3. John and Jesus are both prophets with special meaning for Israel
- 3.5.1.4. **Simeon's canticle and prophecy** prepare us for what comes later (2:29-35)

3.5.2. The Prophetic Messiah

- 3.5.2.1. Expressed in **Jesus' rejection in Nazareth** (4:16-30) - story found in **Mark**, but at a later point in his ministry instead of its inauguration
- 3.5.2.2. Jesus is **messiah** because he is anointed by the **Spirit** (4:18; Isaiah 61:1-2)
- 3.5.2.3. **Elijah** and **Elisha** are prophets through whom God "visits" those outside Israel (4:25-27) and the residents of Nazareth reject Jesus for this
- 3.5.2.4. Luke 4:18 is fulfilled in Luke 6:20-26 where the poor are blessed and the rich are cursed with woes; generally, the role of the poor is played by the sinners and tax collectors of the narrative and the rich are the Pharisees and teachers of the law
- 3.5.2.5. Just as **Elisha** healed a foreign diplomat with the intercession of a Jewish maid (2 Kings 5:1-14) so Jesus heals a centurion's servant with the intercession of Jewish elders (Luke 7:1-10)
- 3.5.2.6. **Elijah** raised a **widow's son** (1Kings 17:17-24); **Jesus** raises a **widow's son** (Luke 7:11-15)
- 3.5.2.7. Jesus is rejected by the pharisee in whose home he dines but is recognized by the woman who anoints him (Luke 7:36-50)

3.5.3. Formation of the People

- 3.5.3.1. Begins with a **core group of 12** and some women (8:1-3)
- 3.5.3.2. **Disciples** are given authority like Jesus'

(9:2,11) and help serve the hungry (9:10-17)

- 3.5.3.3. Formation occurs **during journey** (9:51-19:44) climaxing with the **Transfiguration** thus signaling that this journey parallels that of **Moses**
- 3.5.3.4. The **kingdom of God** is initialized during the **journey to Jerusalem** (17:21)
- 3.5.3.5. Journey ends with **Jesus' lament** that **Jerusalem** has not recognized its visitation (19:44)

3.5.4. The Passion Narrative

- 3.5.4.1. More unique than either **Mark** or **Matthew**
- 3.5.4.2. Jesus is portrayed as a sage exhibiting self-control, freedom from fear, and courage
 - Gives farewell address (22:29-30)
 - Disciples' sorrow (& therefore cowardice) are contrasted with Jesus (22:45)
 - Carries on his mission willingly (22:42)
 - Jesus is not only wise, but just or righteous (dikaos) (23:4,14,22; 23:15)
- 3.5.4.3. Luke minimizes the role of the people in Jesus' death (24:20-21) as compared to Matthew (Matt 27:25); in Luke the people exhibit repentance (23:48)

3.5.5. Resurrection and Ascension

- 3.5.5.1. **Jesus' Resurrection** is a sign of God's vindication (Acts 2:24; 3:13-15) just as **Moses** was vindicated by God (Acts 7:34-38)
- 3.5.5.2. Characteristics of **Resurrection accounts**
 - Centered in Jerusalem (Luke 24:6) - note women not told to go to Galilee
 - Jesus' passion predictions were fulfilled
 - Jesus' passion fulfills Hebrew scriptures beginning with Moses (24:25-26, 44)
 - Appearances are a mix of physical presence (24:30, 41-43), mistaken identity (24:13-35), and surprise (24:11,24,41)
 - Are prophetically fulfilled in Acts (24:47-49)
- 3.5.5.3. **Ascension story** is unique to Luke-Acts (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-11; cf Luke 9:31, 51)

Primary Reference

Anchor Bible Dictionary. Ed. by David Freedman.
Anchor/Doubleday.