

# Luke

## The Holy Writer

The ancient church has handed down to us the title “Gospel according to Luke” for this our third history of the life of Christ (the Book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke). Luke’s name is not mentioned in this or any of the Gospel records, but is mentioned three times in Paul’s letters. Paul indicates that Luke was not a Jew but a Gentile, since he is not grouped with those *“fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision,”* but separately (Colossians 4:8-14).

So who was Luke? Luke differs from the other Gospel writers in that he was not an eyewitness of the events surrounding the life of Christ. He states in the opening verses, *“Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us” (1:1-2).* It is very likely that Luke was a Gentile convert to Christianity who, following his conversion, avidly studied the life of the Lord Jesus, as he writes of himself, *“[I] having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first” (1:3).*

From Paul’s letters and the history recorded in Acts we know that Luke was a faithful companion of the Apostle Paul during parts of his second and third missionary journeys (Acts 16, 20-21), during his arrest in Jerusalem, imprisonment in Caesarea and Rome (Acts 21-28; Colossians 4; and Philemon 24), and also during Paul’s second imprisonment near the end of his life (2 Timothy 4:11).

He is referred to by the apostle Paul as, *“Luke the beloved physician” (Col. 4:14).* Luke is also very skilled in the Greek language, and uses over three hundred words that are peculiar to him, both indicating that Greek was his primary language. In addition, Luke refers to the Aramaic as *“their own language” (Acts 1:19),* which would seem to show that it was not his own language, and that he was not a Jew.

## First Readers

Luke 1:3 tells us, *“It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus.”* All we know of Theophilus is what Luke himself writes of him in the first few verses of Luke and in the Book of Acts, *“The former account I made, O Theophilus...” (Acts 1:1).* It is widely assumed that Theophilus was a man of high social standing, as Luke refers to him literally as “noble Theophilus,” an address normally reserved for men of high official standing. We may also assume that Theophilus was a recent Gentile convert, for Luke states his purpose in writing, *“...that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.” (1:4).*

## Purpose

Though not specifically stated in his introduction, Luke no doubt also intended his writing especially for those people whom Paul had reached on his missionary journeys. These people were predominantly Gentiles, like Luke and Theophilus. For this reason, and with these people in mind, Luke takes special care to show that Jesus is the Savior of all people. Luke shows that the Gospel is universal, and that it is intended by God for the whole world of sinners, Gentiles as well as Jews. He also shows again and again how Jesus is concerned about each individual sinner and his particular spiritual and bodily needs. In this Gospel Luke shows Jesus’ saving love for all sinners and for each sinner.

Luke puts particular stress on the sermons and parables of the Lord which emphasize this universality of salvation, many of which are not found in the other Gospels. Here are a few examples:

- The genealogy of Jesus is traced back to Adam (3:23-38).
- The angel announces to the shepherds, *“I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people” (2:10).*
- Simeon says that Jesus would be, *“A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles” (2:32).*
- Only Luke quotes Isaiah 40:5, *“And all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (3:6).*
- Only Luke mentions Jesus’ reference to the accounts of two Gentiles from the Old Testament, the widow of Zarephath, and Naaman the Syrian (4:25-27).

- The parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37).
- Luke emphasizes Jesus' desire to save the lost in several different parables found only in his Gospel: The parable of the lost sheep (15:3-7); the parable of the lost coin (15:8-10); and the parable of the lost (prodigal) son (15:11-32).
- The account of the 10 lepers (17:11-19).
- Only Luke refers to the ***"times of the Gentiles"*** (21:24).
- Luke alone records the comforting words of Jesus to the criminal beside him, ***"today you will be with Me in Paradise"*** (23:39-43).

Luke generally follows the chronological order of events of Jesus' life as he presents Jesus Christ as the perfect Man who came to seek and to save all sinners. Like Mark, Luke spends more time explaining Jewish customs and geography (1:26; 4:31; 24:13), as well as translating Jewish terms with Greek words to make them more easily understood by his Gentile reader (e.g. Luke uses the Greek word *"kranion"* instead of the Hebrew word *"golgotha"* which other Gospel writers use - Luke 23:33).

## Other Emphasis in Luke

In Luke's Gospel we also find a great deal of emphasis on the person of the Holy Spirit. Luke mentions the Holy Spirit more often than Matthew and Mark combined. Luke points out the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of John the Baptist (1:15-17); in the life and ministry of Jesus (1:35; 3:22; 4:1,14,18; 10:21); Elizabeth is described as being ***"filled with the Holy Spirit"*** (1:41) as she greets the mother of her Lord; Zacharias was ***"filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied"*** (1:67) after the birth of John in his old age; the Holy Spirit is upon Simeon in the temple (2:25-35) as he prophesies about the work of Jesus; John tells the people about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (3:16); and Jesus promises the help of the Holy Spirit as they witness Him to the world (12:12; 24:49).

Luke also emphasizes that the message is a good message, more than the other Gospel writers. The Greek word *"euangelizo"* (evangelize) literally means "good message" and is usually translated, "preach the Gospel." This word occurs only once in the other three Gospels combined, but is found ten times in the Gospel of Luke. The

angel Gabriel came to "evangelize" by proclaiming the birth of John the Baptist (1:19) and when he foretold the birth of Jesus (2:10). John the Baptist's main purpose was to "evangelize" (3:18). Jesus' purpose was also to "evangelize" (4:18, 43). During His ministry Jesus also sent his followers out ahead of Him to "evangelize" (9:6), and again after His resurrection He again reminds them that they are to serve as His witnesses.

Other points of emphasis in Luke:

- **Luke emphasizes praise and thanksgiving:** Luke records specific hymns which are not included in any of the other Gospels, but which have been used by the church through the years, and still today. Luke records the *Magnificat* of Mary (1:46-55); the *Benedictus* of Zacharias (1:67-79); the *Gloria in Excelsis* of the angels (2:14) and the *Nunc Dimittis* of Simeon (2:29-32). In addition, the expressions "praising God" (1:64; 2:13; 2:20), and "blessing God" (24:53), are limited to Luke's Gospel.
- **Women play an important role in Luke's Gospel:** Luke tells the most about Mary and Elizabeth. In addition Luke mentions many other women not mentioned in the other Gospels, such as: Anna, the widow of Nain, the woman bound by Satan, the women who ministered to Jesus, the sinful woman, the widow who appealed to the unrighteous judge, and the women who wept for Jesus on the way to the cross.
- **Prayer:** Prominence is also given to prayer, both by depicting Jesus at prayer (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18,28,29; 11:1; 22:32,41-46; 23:34,46) and in recording Jesus' teaching about prayer (11:5-13; 18:1-8, 9-14; 21:36).

## Outline

- I. Historical Introduction (1:1-4)
- II. The Preparation for the Savior (1:5-2:52)
- III. The Introduction of the Savior (3:1-4:15)
- IV. The Ministry of the Savior (4:16-9:50)
- V. The Mission of the Savior (9:51-18:30)
- VI. The Passion of the Savior (18:31-23:56)
- VII. The Resurrection of the Savior (24:1-53)