

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Introduction

The gospel according to St. Luke has been called the loveliest book in the world. When once an American asked him if he could recommend a good life of Christ, Denney answered, "Have you tried the one that Luke wrote?" There is a legend that Luke was a skilled painter; there is even a painting of Mary in a Spanish cathedral to this day which purports to be by him. Certainly he had an eye for vivid things. It would not be far wrong to say that the third gospel is the best life of Christ ever written. Tradition has always believed that Luke was the author and we need have no qualms in accepting that tradition. In the ancient world it was the regular things to attach books to famous names; no one thought it wrong. But Luke was never one of the famous figures of the early Church. If he had not written the gospel no one would have attached it to his name.

Luke was a gentile; and he has the unique distinction of being the only New Testament writer who was not a Jew. He was a doctor by profession (Colossians 4:14) and maybe that very fact gave him the wide sympathy he possessed. It has been said that a minister sees men at their best; a lawyer sees men at their worst; and a doctor sees men as they are. Luke saw men and loved them all.

The book was written to a man called Theophilus. He is called *most excellent Theophilus* and the title given him is the normal title for a high official in the Roman government. No doubt Luke writes it to tell an earnest inquirer more about Jesus; and he succeeded in giving Theophilus a picture which must have thrilled his heart closer to the Jesus of whom he had heard.

The Symbols of the Gospels

Every one of the four gospels was written from a certain point of view. Very often on stained glass windows the writers of the gospels are pictured; and usually to each there is attached a symbol. The symbols vary but one of the commonest allocations is this.

The emblem of Mark is a man. Mark is the simplest and most straightforward of the gospels. It has been well said that its characteristic is realism. It is the nearest to being a report of Jesus' life.

The emblem of Matthew is a lion. Matthew was a Jew writing for Jews and he saw in Jesus the Messiah, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the one whom all the prophets had predicted.

The emblem of John is the eagle. The eagle can fly higher than any other bird. It is said that of all the creatures only the eagle can look straight into the sun. John is the

theological gospel; its flights of thought are higher than those of any of the others. It is the gospel where the philosopher can find themes to think about for a lifetime and to solve only in eternity.

The symbol of Luke is the calf. The calf is the animal for sacrifice; and Luke saw in Jesus the sacrifice for all the world. In Luke above all, the barriers are broken down and Jesus is for Jew and gentile, saint and sinner alike. He is the saviour of the world. Keeping that in mind, let us now set down the characteristics of this gospel.

An Historian's Care

First and foremost, Luke's gospel is an exceedingly careful bit of work. His Greek is notably good. The first four verses are well-nigh the best Greek in the New Testament. In them he claims that his work is the product of the most careful research. His opportunities were ample and his sources must have been good. As the trusted companion of Paul he must have known all the great figures of the church, and we may be sure that he had them tell their stories to him. For two years he was Paul's companion in imprisonment in Caesarea. In those long days he had every opportunity for study and research and he must have used them well.

An example of Luke's care is the way in which he dates the emergence of John the Baptist. He does so by no fewer than six contemporary datings. "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (1), Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea (2), Herod being tetrarch of Galilee (3), and his brother Philip being tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis (4), and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene (5) in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas (6), the word of God came to John" (Luke 3:1, 2). Here is a man who is writing with care and who will be as accurate as it is possible for him to be.

The Gospel for the Gentiles

It is clear that Luke wrote mainly for gentiles. Theophilus was a gentile, as was Luke himself, and there is nothing in the gospel that a gentile could not grasp and understand. (a) As we have seen, Luke begins his dating from the reigning Roman emperor and the current Roman governor. The Roman date comes first. (b) Unlike Matthew, he is not greatly interested in the life of Jesus as the fulfilment of Jewish prophecy. (c) He very seldom quotes the Old Testament at all. (d) He has a habit of giving Hebrew words in their Greek equivalent so that a Greek would understand. Simon the Cananaean becomes Simon the Zealot. (cp. Luke 6:15 and Matthew 10:4). Calvary is called not by its Hebrew name, Golgotha, but by its Greek name, Kranion. Both mean the place of a skull. He never uses the Jewish term Rabbi of Jesus but always a Greek word meaning Master. When he is tracing the descent of Jesus, he traces it not to Abraham, the founder of the Jewish race, as Matthew does, but to Adam, the founder of the human race (cp. Matthew 1:2 and Luke 3:38).

Because of this Luke is the easiest of all the gospels to read. He was writing, not for Jews, but for people very like ourselves.

The Gospel of Prayer

Luke's gospel is specially the gospel of prayer. At all the great moments of his life, Luke shows us Jesus at prayer. He prayed at his baptism (3:21); before his first collision with the Pharisees (5:16); before he chose the Twelve (6:12); before he questioned his disciples as to who they thought he was; before his first prediction of his own death (9:18); at the Transfiguration (9:29); and upon the Cross (23:46). Only Luke tells us that Jesus prayed for Peter in his hour of testing (22:32). Only he tells us the prayer parables of the Friends at Midnight (11:5-13) and the Unjust Judge (18:1-8). To Luke the unclosed door of prayer was one of the most precious in the world.

The Gospel of Women

In Palestine the place of women was low. In the Jewish morning prayer a man thanks God that he has not made him "a gentile, a slave or a woman." But Luke gives very special place to women. The birth narrative is told from Mary's point of view. It is in Luke that we read of Elizabeth, of Anna, of the widow of Nain, of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee. It is Luke who makes vivid the pictures of Martha and Mary and of Mary Magdalene. It is very likely that Luke was a native of Macedonia where women held a more emancipated position than anywhere else; and that may have something to do with it.

The Gospel of Praise

In Luke the phrase praising God occurs oftener than in all the rest of the New Testament put together. This praise reaches its peak in the three great hymns that the church has sung throughout all her generations—the Magnificat (1:46-55); the Benedictus (1:68-79); and the Nunc Dimittis (2:29-32). There is a radiance in Luke's gospel which is a lovely thing, as if the sheen of heaven had touched the things of earth.

The Universal Gospel

But the outstanding characteristic of Luke is that it is the universal gospel. All barriers are down; Jesus Christ is for all men without distinction.

- (a) The kingdom of heaven is not shut to the Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56)
- (b) Luke shows Jesus speaking with approval of gentiles whom the orthodox Jew would have considered unclean.
- (c) Luke is supremely interested in the poor.
- (d) Above all Luke shows Jesus as the friend of outcasts and sinners.

(material taken from *The Daily Study Bible; The Gospel of Luke* by William Barclay)

Theological Contributions

Luke's powerful portrait of Jesus emphasizes his compassion and perfect humanity. It challenges Greco-Roman cultural values of personal achievement and self-fulfillment by portraying the ideal Man, who served and cared for the lowest people in society. Luke gives many illustrations of Jesus ministering to social outcasts—like tax collectors and Samaritans—to women, to children, and to the poor. These manifest qualities set Jesus

apart from the religious leaders who are hostile to him and make him accessible to the common man. Luke's portrait gives us the best insight of any of the Gospels into Jesus' humanity.

In this context, Luke's emphasis on the Holy Spirit, on prayer, and on evangelism is significant. Christ's birth was accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:15, 35). The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism (3:22). Christ was filled with the Spirit as he performed every earthly ministry (4:1, 34; 10:21). Because Jesus relied on the Spirit, Jesus' followers can live a Christ-like life, for God gives the same Spirit to those who trust his Son (11:13; 12:12; 24:49; compare 6:40).

Furthermore, Luke's Gospel presents Jesus as a man of prayer. He prays at his baptism (3:21), before he predicts his death and resurrection (9:18), at the Transfiguration (9:28, 29), and in many other instances recorded only in Luke (compare 5:16; 6:12; 10:21; 11:1; 22:31, 32; 22:39-46; 23:34, 46). Two parables on prayer are also found exclusively in Luke (11:5-13; 18:1-14).

In addition to the work of the Holy Spirit and prayer. Luke's Gospel emphasizes evangelism. Luke skilfully shares his joyous conviction that Jesus brought the world to a new era of salvation, Jesus himself being the one who "came to seek and to save what was lost" (Lk. 19:10). He portrays Jesus as "Lord" (compare 2:11), affirming the victory of the Gospel. Furthermore, Luke points to the universal message of salvation—for Gentiles as well as Jews (compare 2:14, 32; 3:4-6; 9:51-56; 10:33; 17:16).

(above material taken from The Revel Bible Dictionary)

Why was Luke Written?

Luke had several purposes:

1. He wanted to write a well-organised life of Jesus which was based on good eye-witness evidence (1:1-4)
2. He wanted to record the beginnings and development of Christianity, which he did in two parts. Acts is the second volume. Luke shows how God has been at work in history and especially in the way in which the followers of Jesus rapidly spread from Galilee to Rome.
3. He wanted to demonstrate that Jesus was a Saviour for all types of people and not just for a select group.
4. He wanted to show the Roman authorities that Christianity was not a threat to good political order.

The Message

1. Good news about salvation—the message of Luke is that God has come to rescue man from his sin and situation
 - God is a Saviour 1:47
 - Christ was born to save 2:11, 30; 3,6

- He came to save the lost 19:9,10
 - Salvation comes by faith 7:50; 8:12
 - Salvation means losing life now 9:24
 - Salvation is possible because Christ did not save himself 23:35-43
 - Salvation is available now 4:21; 19:9
2. Good news about a kingdom—The central section (9:51-19:44) has much to say about the kingdom of God which was central to Jesus' preaching 4:43; 8:1
- God's kingdom is everlasting 1:33
 - It belongs to the poor 6:20
 - His disciples should preach it 9:2,11
 - Its interests should come first 9:60-62; 12:31
 - Men should pray for it 11:2
 - It is the gift of God 12:32; 22:29
 - God's kingdom is like... 13:18-30
 - Rich men do not enter easily 18:18-30
 - It is near now 10:9, 11; 11:20; 17:20-21
 - But it is also to come 24:31
3. Good news seen in Jesus—The good news was not a myth or fairy story but was well supported by events which took place in the life of Jesus
- History is important 1:1-4
 - God planned it ages ago 3:23-38
 - God was at work in the life of Jesus. Many eye-witnesses saw it:
 - at his birth 2:30
 - at his baptism 3:22
 - in his miracles 4:36; 7:16
 - in his death 23:39-49
 - in his resurrection 24:1-49
 - Jesus still works through his disciples 24:48
 - Jesus is working all over the world. Jerusalem was just a beginning 24:47
- (above material taken from Opening up God's Word: The Compact Survey of the Bible by John Balchin)

Luke's Gospel presents Jesus as the perfect "Son of Man" who "came to seek and to save what was lost" (19:10). Luke emphasizes the perfect humanity and redemptive mission of Jesus. Christ's human qualities would be of particular interest to the Gospel's intended audience, first a government official known as Theophilus (1:3) and then others of an idealistic, Greek mindset. Luke emphasizes the universal message of the gospel more than the other Gospel writers, writing often about the faith of women and children, outcasts from Jewish society, Gentiles and Samaritans.

(above material taken from 30 Days to Understanding the Bible by Max Anders)

Unique and Unusual to Luke

Luke is the only Gospel to share Jesus' stories ("parables") of the good Samaritan (10:25-37), the prodigal son (15:11-32) and the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31). Luke is also the only Gospel to detail Jesus' actual birth and words He spoke in childhood (both in chapter 2).

Significant Quotes in Luke

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (12:34)

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over on sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (15:7)

Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it (17:33)

Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein (18:17)

For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost (19:10)
(material taken from *Know Your Bible—All 66 Books Explained and Applied*, Barbour Publishing)

Key Themes

1. Prayer
2. The Holy Spirit
3. Praise and joy
4. Forgiveness
5. Money
6. Women and children

Luke: A Reading and Study Guide

Chapter	Content Summary	Related Articles
1	The births of John the Baptist and Jesus are foretold by an angel. Mary and Zechariah praise God.	John the Baptist Incarnation
2	Jesus' birth is announced to the shepherds by angels. Twelve-year-old Jesus goes to the Temple.	Angel
3	John the Baptist calls on the Jews to repent. Jesus is baptized and his genealogy is recorded.	Repent Baptism
4	Jesus overcomes Satan's temptations. He is rejected in Nazareth but performs miracles in Capernaum.	Satan Tempt
5	Jesus calls his disciples. He heals a leper and a paralytic. He answers questions about fasting.	Healing Fast
6	Jesus announces his Lordship over the Sabbath. He teaches the Beatitudes and love for enemies.	Lord Judge
7	A Roman centurion displays faith, while John the Baptist expresses his doubts.	Centurion
8	Jesus tells the parable of the sower. He heals a possessed man and an infirm woman and raises a dead girl.	Demon Death
9	Jesus feeds 5,000. Peter confesses him as the Christ. Jesus is transfigured before three disciples.	Christ Transfiguration
10	Jesus sends out 72 disciples to preach. He talks about the Good Samaritan and visits Mary and Martha.	Disciple Woman
11	Jesus teaches on prayer. He is charged with being in league with Satan. He pronounces "woes" on his religious foes.	Prayer Woe; Pharisees
12	Jesus encourages his followers not to fear. He tells the story of the rich fool and urges disciples not to worry, but to be watchful and ready for his coming.	Fear Anxiety Second coming
13	Jesus calls for his repentance. He heals on the Sabbath and weeps over Jerusalem.	Sabbath

Chapter	Content Summary	Related Articles
14	Jesus eats at a Pharisee's house and tells the parable of a Great Banquet. He states the cost of discipleship.	Parable Hate
15	Jesus tells the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son.	
16	Jesus tells the parable of the shrewd manager and the story of the rich man and Lazarus.	Hell
17	Jesus commands forgiveness, heals ten lepers and speaks of his Second Coming.	Forgive Second Coming
18	Jesus tells the parables of the persistent widow and the Pharisee and the tax collector. He meets a rich young ruler, predicts his own death and heals a blind beggar.	Wealth
19	Jesus visits Zacchaeus, tells the parable of ten minas and enters Jerusalem in triumph.	
20	Jesus' authority is challenged. He tells the parable of the tenants and avoids two traps set by his enemies.	Authority
21	Jesus tells his disciples signs marking the end of the age.	Age Ages
22	Judas plans to betray Jesus. The disciples meet for the Last Supper. Jesus prays in Gethsemane and is arrested. Peter denies Jesus while Jesus is on trial.	Judas Iscariot Trial
23	Jesus is condemned and crucified. He dies and is buried.	Crucifixion Burial
24	Jesus is raised from the dead. He meets two disciples on the Emmaus Road and later appears to all the disciples before ascending to heaven.	Resurrection Ascension

(above material taken from The Revel Bible Dictionary)