



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 1:1-4

To understand the reason Luke wrote this Gospel.

An Introduction to the Gospel According to Luke

There is perhaps not a better place to begin an in-depth Bible study than one of the four Gospels. The Gospels present the life and ministry of Jesus in an easy-to-read, narrative format, while still exhibiting strong theological force. Luke's Gospel, one of the so-called synoptic Gospels (along with Matthew and Mark), begin with the birth of the Lord, cover many of His teachings and miracles, and conclude with death, burial, and resurrection.¹ Luke shares many similarities with Matthew's Gospel, but also has some of its own unique stories. Below is a brief overview of some key details of Luke's Gospel.

AUTHOR

Luke's Gospel never explicitly tells us who wrote it, but it was accepted as early as the second century as Luke. Several second century textual witnesses including Papyrus Bodmer XIV, the *Muratorian Canon*, Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses* (Against Heresies), and later by Eusebius. That Luke never records his name indicates that his identity is not chiefly important to the work.

What we know of Luke is that he was a traveling companion of Paul during some of Paul's missionary journeys. He is referred to as the "beloved physician" (Col. 4:14), indicating his medical acumen. Knowing that Luke was an educated individual sheds light on his command of the Greek language as well. His works are

¹ John's Gospel doesn't begin with the birth, but starts "in the beginning" with the pre-incarnate Word. John's focus is also a bit different, and thus John's Gospel fits into its own category.

closer to classical Greek than the normal koine Greek so common to the New Testament. He is also mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:11 and Philemon 24. If we accept Luke's authorship of Luke's Gospel (and we do), then we also must accept his authorship of the Acts of the Apostles (or more commonly, *Acts*). Luke writes to a "most excellent Theophilus" (Lk. 1:3) in the beginning of his Gospel, and begins Acts 1:1-2 as a second volume to his work: "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen." Luke and Acts should, then, be taken together as two-part volume.

DATE

Dating Luke is tricky, but there are some guidelines we have that give some clues to its origins. The general consensus is that Luke drew upon Mark's Gospel (along with Matthew). Given that Mark's Gospel is typically dated in the 60's, Luke likely didn't write his until at least the early 70's. That, coupled with some other literary and historical information, positions Luke in the 70's or 80's AD.

AUDIENCE

As mentioned, both Luke and Acts are written to someone named *Theophilus*. There has been some arguments made that Theophilus is not a real person, but a type of person. The name Theophilus means "friend of God," and so the argument goes that Luke is writing to anyone who is a friend of God. This argument is not compelling, however, and should be rejected. There is no reason to think that Theophilus was not a real person. He is generally believed to be a person of high rank in Roman government, and perhaps even someone charged to oversee Paul's legal charges in Rome, though this is all speculation. Whoever he was, he was also likely responsible for reproducing Luke's writings and circulating them around various Christian communities.

What's the Purpose?

Luke states his purposes fairly clearly in the opening verses. Below, each are outlined.

AN ACCURATE PORTRAYAL

"To write an orderly account" of the life and ministry of Jesus (Lk. 1:3). He is borrowing from various eye-witness accounts and a compilation of "a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us" (Lk. 1:1). This is one feature of Luke's Gospel that makes it a bit more unique. Luke is not writing from his own experience with Jesus, but from the careful examination of other eye-witness accounts of Jesus. Unlike Mark (who history tells us wrote Peter's account down) and Matthew and John (who walked with Jesus), Luke is writing based on a compilation of stories (hence his likely borrowing from Mark and Matthew, as well as additional stories).

CERTAINTY

The main reason that Luke seeks to give an accurate depiction of what happened concerning Jesus is given in verse 4: "That you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." For Luke, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not merely a fairytale or a legend but a lived and confirmed experience by a number of individuals who all were saying the same thing. This is so important for the modern reader today. Christianity is not a set of morals or principles or a way of life, but a historical unfolding of real events that took place in real time that have re-shaped human history in dramatically meaningful ways. It's important for you, as a Christ follower, to know that. Your faith has historic grounding. Real people witnessed these things take place, and in order to know for certain that it happened, Luke wrote it all down. As you read Luke's Gospel, keep that in mind. Visualize it. Imagine it. Put yourself in it. Don't allow yourself to create distance between what you

read, and what you accept as real. Luke's goal is for you to have absolute certainty that your faith is grounded in reality.

What About Now?

One take away from Luke is the reality that doubt regarding the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was present even as early as Luke's time, so much so that he felt it necessary to write this Gospel. If doubt was present then, how much more now? We can find comfort in knowing that doubt and skepticism do not make us odd or unique, but that these are qualities we share with even the earliest believers. However, we can also take satisfaction in knowing that what Luke wrote was not just something that he imagined, but was the written experience of many individuals who saw, heard, and even touched the Lord Jesus Christ. These truths counter our doubt with the reassurance that our faith is historically founded.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 1:1. Who do you think the "many" are that compiled a narrative? What narrative were they compiling?

2. Read Luke 1:1. When Luke refers to "us," who do you think that is in reference to? The apostles? Early believers? Why?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 1:2. Who do you think Luke is referring to when he talks about "eyewitnesses" and "ministers of the word?"

2. Read Luke 1:2. Luke mentions that these individuals delivered their narratives to us already. Which narratives is he likely talking about? (Hint: See above notes)

Day Three

1. Read Luke 1:3. According to the notes, who is Theophilus?

2. Read Luke 1:3. What does it mean that Luke sought to give "an orderly account?" Why is that important to him?

Day Four

1. Read Luke 1:4. What is the purpose of telling an orderly account?
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2. Read Luke 1:4. Luke implies that Theophilus has already been taught the faith, and that his Gospel is to give certainty to it. How do you think Theophilus was taught the faith?
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Week 1 Discussion: Knowing for Certain

Luke's Gospel sets out to give certainty to the Christian faith that was already being passed around by his time. He attempts to do this by sharing accurate accounts from other "eyewitnesses" and "ministers of the word" (Lk. 1:2). Knowing that our faith is more than just a tall-tale is important. Jesus *really* lived, and He *really* died, and He *really* lived again. History testifies to this. Talk as a group about the importance of knowing for certain that your faith is true.

1. Icebreaker: Talk about a life-changing experience you have had. Share the details of it with your group. Then ask them if they believe you, and if so, why?
2. Do you ever doubt the validity of the Bible? It's ok to answer honestly. How do Luke's writings help you with your belief?
3. How do you handle your doubt?
4. Do you feel ashamed of having doubt? Do you think other people feel that way? Why or why not?
5. What do you hope to learn from Luke's Gospel?
6. How committed are you to doing the work each week? Be honest.

Takeaways:

1. Luke wrote his Gospel based on a compilation of eye witness accounts that he carefully researched.
2. Luke wrote his Gospel for the purpose of giving certainty to the validity of the Christian faith.