

The Gospel According to Luke

Introduction

Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the synoptic gospels. They relate the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. The word “synoptic” means “seeing the whole together or at a glance.” These gospels relate essentially the same incidents, but with some characteristic differences. Each evangelist wrote from his individual point of view under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Matthew portrays Christ as the Messiah-King; Mark portrays Christ as the Servant at work; Luke portrays Christ as the Son of Man. The fourth gospel, John, not included in the synoptics, portrays Jesus as the eternal Son of God. The three synoptic gospels make the humanity of the Lord Jesus evident, but in no way exclude His deity. The full revelation of His deity is given in the fourth gospel, John, but it does not exclude the true humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who Wrote Luke?

Little is known about Luke apart from the fact that he was a faithful friend and companion of Paul. There are three references to him by Paul in his epistles: Colossians 4:14, “*Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.*”; 2 Timothy 4:11, “*Only Luke is with me*”; Philemon 24, “*Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.*” Although these are the only three places where Luke is mentioned by name, there are references in the book of Acts, in which he includes himself among the companions of Paul by changing the pronoun “they” to the first person plural “we.” It is most probable that Luke was of Greek origin. His name is Gentile—Lucanus, and shortened to Lucas or Luke. The same person who wrote the book of Acts also wrote the gospel of Luke and is the only Gentile writer in the canon of Scripture. Some think that Luke was a proselyte to Judaism before his conversion to Christianity because of his intimate acquaintance with the opinions and customs of the Jews. There is no record as to when he became a Christian. It is possible that he and Paul became friends at Tarsus during their years of schooling, and remained friends to the end of Paul’s ministry and death. After the death of Paul, we have no record in Scripture of his faithful companion, however, the early church fathers recorded many interesting aspects of the continuing history of this very beautiful writer and disciple of Christ.

“Luke, the Beloved Physician” (Colossians 4:14)

This reference to Luke’s profession is very interesting. We learn from Acts 16 and 20 that Luke joined Paul on his first missionary voyage to Europe, but that he remained at Philippi. Six years later he rejoined Paul on his third

missionary journey to Jerusalem and continued with him to Rome and his imprisonment. In 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul writes, "*Only Luke is with me,*" which tells us that Luke remained faithful to Paul during his confinement and was a comfort to him in his last days.

Luke's writings testify to his medical knowledge, and being called "*the physician*" suggests that he ministered in this capacity. Of all the apostle's friends, perhaps no other was dearer to Paul than Luke. His writings show a man of culture, of careful and diligent intelligence and of a very tender and sympathetic heart. The idealism of the medical profession stands nearest to the ministry of Christ in self-sacrifice and devotion to humanity. No other vocation demands the combination of intellectual and moral powers, or puts such great challenge to one's best qualities. Its highest services are never repaid with material or earthly reward. A physician who is a wise and faithful Christian has a unique ministry. Not only can he minister to a weak and sickly body, but he knows also the remedy for a sin-sick soul.

Leading Characteristics of the Gospel According to Luke

1. Luke, the Gentile, sets forth in his gospel the idea of the rejection of the Jews. Such expressions as "*Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel*"; "*Brood of vipers! . . . even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees*"; and "*because you did not know the time of your visitation*" are found in Luke's gospel.

2. Luke's gospel is referred to as "the gospel of humanity." The Lord Jesus Christ is emphasized as the Saviour of the world.

3. The genealogy of Christ is taken to Adam, the head of the human race, rather than to Abraham the progenitor of the Jewish people.

4. Keynotes throughout the gospel are forgiveness, pity and grace.

5. Luke's gospel includes the Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79), Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), the Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:29-32), Ave Maria (Luke 1:28-33), and Gloria in Excelsis (Luke 2:14). He is called the first Christian hymnologist.

6. Another important feature in the gospel is the prominence it gives to prayer. Luke emphasizes the importance of unceasing prayer as taught by Christ, and records the parables to instruct us in persistent prayer. Christ prayed on six different occasions: (1) at baptism, (2) after cleansing the leper, (3) before calling the twelve, (4) at His transfiguration, (5) on the cross for the malefactor, and (6) with His last breath.

7. The outstanding mark of the gospel according to Luke is its presentation of the good tidings of the gospel of Jesus Christ for every age, sex, nation, profession, and men of every opinion and character. Christ, our blessed Lord, is the Consolator, the Good Physician of both body and soul and the Desire of all nations. Luke presents the Saviour of all men everywhere, Jesus Christ.

8. Luke portrays the sacredness of infancy. He gives us the birth of John the Baptist, the annunciation, the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth, the song of the herald angels, the circumcision of Jesus, the presentation in the temple and Jesus growing in universal favor and submission. Luke also gives the account of the one incident in the otherwise silent thirty years of Jesus life when He was twelve years old and went to the temple with his parents.

9. Jesus Christ is not only a light to the Gentiles, but is the glory of His people Israel as well.

10. We will note in our study of this gospel, Jesus' graciousness and tenderness toward womanhood. Luke also includes the records which tell of the mercy of Christ toward the poor, the humble, the despised and the outcast. So it is with great anticipation that we begin our study of the evangelist, historian and painter who wrote the most complete of all gospels written about the life of Jesus Christ.

General Divisions of the Book of Luke

- I. Preface**
(Luke 1:1-4)
- II. Birth and Childhood of Christ**
(Luke 1:5-2:52)
- III. The Ministry of John the Baptist**
(Luke 3:1-4:13)
- IV. The Ministry of Christ in Galilee**
(Luke 4:14-9:50)
- V. Christ Travels to Jerusalem**
(Luke 9:51-19:27)
- VI. Christ in Jerusalem**
(Luke 19:28-21:38)
- VII. The Rejection, Suffering and Death of Christ**
(Luke 22:1-23:56)
- VIII. The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ**
(Luke 24:1-53)

Preface to the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:1-4)

The gospel according to Luke begins in a way different from the other gospels in that it has a preface, a declaration from the author himself as to how we should consider his work. First, he makes clear to us that he was not an eyewitness of the events he records, but that, through research and study, he had acquired a perfect understanding of all the history of the Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly, Luke tells us he undertook the writing of the gospel, although many had undertaken to do the same thing before, because he felt a writing was needed from the perspective he could give. It appears he had a desire to help Theophilus understand, in complete order, the account of the life of Christ and all that was most certainly believed among Christians. He wanted his friend to know the truth of this history. Who the “many” were Luke does not say. He does not comment on the merits of those who had previously written, but tells us he received his records from those who were eyewitnesses, checking out all things with diligence and with the most solicitous examination of what he had heard. At first consideration, the reason Luke gives for writing this gospel would seem to be an excellent reason for not writing.

Christianity presents so many different aspects to so many different minds that neither the preaching of the Word nor writing of books can ever exhaust the intellectual and spiritual riches of it. Every Christian student writes a life of Christ for himself. The Word of God is the Living Word and meets the needs of men where they are.

At the time of the writing of Luke’s gospel, the facts of Christianity were not only known as matters of current rumor, they were most surely believed. Thus, the facts of Christianity must be received with all faith and love and become the very source of our own spiritual life. Luke’s habits of observation as a physician would naturally lead him to scrutinize all alleged facts. How important it is for us today to have a knowledge of facts—a knowledge of the Word of God through diligent study and personal application rather than religious theory.

*Daily Bible Study Questions***First Day: Read the Introduction and Luke 1:1-4**

1. From your notes, list several facts about the author and gospel of Luke.

2. (a) To whom is this narrative written?

(b) What sources were used?

(c) What was the stated purpose?

3. Scan Luke 1. Who might have been the human source for this story?

Second Day: Read Luke 1:5-25

4. What information is given about Zacharias and Elizabeth that links them to the Old Testament priesthood? See Exodus 28:1, Numbers 3:5-13 and Nehemiah 12:1-4.

5. (a) Read Exodus 30:1,6,7. What do you learn about the altar of incense?

- (b) What was Zacharias' response to the angel visitation?
 - (c) Discuss verse 15 in relationship to Numbers 6:2,3.
 - (d) What did the angel say was John's mission? Read Malachi 4:5,6.
6. (a) For what was Zacharias asking in verse 18?
- (b) How did this indicate doubt and unbelief?
7. What was Elizabeth's reaction to her pregnancy?

Third Day: Read Luke 1:26-55

8. What do both verse 27 and 34 tell about Mary?
9. (a) What does Gabriel tell Mary about Jesus?
- (b) What confirmation does Gabriel give in verses 36 and 37?
- (c) What was Mary's response to Gabriel's announcement?

(d) Can you say those same words to God? Explain.

10. (a) How did Elizabeth's baby react to Mary's arrival?

(b) What did the Holy Spirit utter through Elizabeth?

(c) How would this encourage Mary?

11. (a) List attributes of God in Mary's song.

(b) What acts has God performed?

(c) Read Genesis 12:2,3 and verse 55. What did God promise Abram?

Fourth Day: Read Luke 1:56-80

12. (a) What had Zacharias learned during nine months of silence?

(b) What was the reaction of those who hear about Zacharias and his son?

13. (a) Summarize Zacharias' prophecy. (What theme is repeated in various phrases in verses 68-75?)
- (b) What did Zacharias prophesy about his son? Compare with Luke 1:17.
- (c) What part of this song of Zacharias is meaningful to you?

Fifth Day: Read Luke 2:1-21

14. Read Micah 5:2. How did God bring Mary and Joseph to the prophesied birthplace of Messiah?
15. (a) What effect did the angel's announcement have on the shepherds?
- (b) What effect should God's Word have on your life?
16. (a) How did people respond to the message of the shepherds?
- (b) How did Mary respond to the shepherds' visit?

Sixth Day: Read Luke 2:22-52

17. How did Jesus' parents obey the Jewish law? Read Leviticus 12:1-8.

18. (a) Give the phrases that recount the Spirit's work in Simeon's life.

(b) What did Simeon say about Jesus?

(c) What did Simeon say to Mary? Read John 19:25,26 and comment on his meaning.

19. How did Anna (verses 36-38) become another witness to Jesus' mission?

20. (a) What in Jerusalem attracted Jesus' attention?

(b) What did He do there?

(c) What did Jesus know that Mary and Joseph had yet to understand?

(d) How does Luke describe Jesus' boyhood in Nazareth? Use verses 40 and 52 in your answer.