

# The Gospel of Luke

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## Editors' Preface

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord. . . . All the preaching of the Church should be nourished and governed by Sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the power and goodness in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons and daughters, the food of the soul, a pure and perennial fountain of spiritual life.

Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* 21

Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?

Luke 24:32

The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture aims to serve the ministry of the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church. Since Vatican Council II, there has been an increasing hunger among Catholics to study Scripture in depth and in a way that reveals its relationship to liturgy, evangelization, catechesis, theology, and personal and communal life. This series responds to that desire by providing accessible yet substantive commentary on each book of the New Testament, drawn from the best of contemporary biblical scholarship as well as the rich treasury of the Church's tradition. These volumes seek to offer scholarship illumined by faith, in the conviction that the ultimate aim of biblical interpretation is to discover what God has revealed and is still speaking through the sacred text. Central to our approach are the principles taught by Vatican II: first, the use of historical and literary methods to discern what the

biblical authors intended to express; second, prayerful theological reflection to understand the sacred text “in accord with the same Spirit by whom it was written”—that is, in light of the content and unity of the whole Scripture, the living tradition of the Church, and the analogy of faith (*Dei Verbum* 12).

The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture is written for those engaged in or training for pastoral ministry and others interested in studying Scripture to understand their faith more deeply, to nourish their spiritual life, or to share the good news with others. With this in mind, the authors focus on the meaning of the text for faith and life rather than on the technical questions that occupy scholars, and they explain the Bible in ordinary language that does not require translation for preaching and catechesis. Although this series is written from the perspective of Catholic faith, its authors draw on the interpretation of Protestant and Orthodox scholars and hope these volumes will serve Christians of other traditions as well.

A variety of features are designed to make the commentary as useful as possible. Each volume includes the biblical text of the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE), the translation approved for liturgical use in the United States. In order to serve readers who use other translations, the commentary notes and explains the most important differences between the NABRE and other widely used translations (e.g., RSV, NRSV, JB, NJB, and NIV). Each unit of the biblical text is followed by a list of references to relevant Scripture passages, Catechism sections, and uses in the Roman Lectionary. The exegesis that follows aims to explain in a clear and engaging way the meaning of the text in its original historical context as well as its perennial meaning for Christians. Reflection and Application sections help readers apply Scripture to Christian life today by responding to questions that the text raises, offering spiritual interpretations drawn from Christian tradition or providing suggestions for the use of the biblical text in catechesis, preaching, or other forms of pastoral ministry.

Interspersed throughout the commentary are Biblical Background sidebars that present historical, literary, or theological information, and Living Tradition sidebars that offer pertinent material from the postbiblical Christian tradition, including quotations from Church documents and from the writings of saints and Church Fathers. The Biblical Background sidebars are indicated by a photo of urns that were excavated in Jerusalem, signifying the importance of historical study in understanding the sacred text. The Living Tradition sidebars are indicated by an image of Eadwine, a twelfth-century monk and scribe, signifying the growth in the Church's understanding that comes by the grace of the

Holy Spirit as believers study and ponder the Word of God in their hearts (see *Dei Verbum* 8).

Maps and a glossary are included in each volume for easy reference. The glossary explains key terms from the biblical text as well as theological or exegetical terms, which are marked in the commentary with a cross (†). A list of suggested resources, an index of pastoral topics, and an index of sidebars are included to enhance the usefulness of these volumes. Further resources, including questions for reflection or discussion, can be found at the series website, [www.CatholicScriptureCommentary.com](http://www.CatholicScriptureCommentary.com).

It is our desire and prayer that these volumes be of service so that more and more “the word of the Lord may speed forward and be glorified” (2 Thess 3:1) in the Church and throughout the world.

Peter S. Williamson  
Mary Healy  
Kevin Perrotta

### **Note to Readers**

The New American Bible, Revised Edition differs slightly from most English translations in its verse numbering of Psalms and certain other parts of the Old Testament. For instance, Ps 51:4 in the NABRE is Ps 51:2 in other translations; Mal 3:19 in the NABRE is Mal 4:1 in other translations. Readers who use different translations are advised to keep this in mind when looking up Old Testament references given in the commentary.



# Abbreviations

†	Indicates that a definition of a term appears in the glossary
//	Indicates where a parallel account can be found in other Gospels
AB	Anchor Bible
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
Catechism	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> , 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2003)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–)
ch(s).	chapter(s)
Denzinger	H. Denzinger, <i>Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals</i> , 43rd ed. Edited by Peter Hünermann. Latin-English (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012)
ESV	English Standard Version
FC	Fathers of the Church
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
KJV	King James Version
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
Lectionary	<i>The Lectionary for Mass</i> (1998/2002 USA edition)
LXX	Septuagint
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah
NABRE	New American Bible (Revised Edition, 2011)
NET	New English Translation
NETS	A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright, eds., <i>A New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OT	Old Testament
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
repr.	reprint
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SC	Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Cerf, 1943–)

v(v).	verse(s)
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WSA	The Works of Saint Augustine
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

### Books of the Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	Tob	Tobit	Ezek	Ezekiel
Exod	Exodus	Jdt	Judith	Dan	Daniel
Lev	Leviticus	Esther	Esther	Hosea	Hosea
Num	Numbers	1 Macc	1 Maccabees	Joel	Joel
Deut	Deuteronomy	2 Macc	2 Maccabees	Amos	Amos
Josh	Joshua	Job	Job	Obad	Obadiah
Judg	Judges	Ps(s)	Psalm(s)	Jon	Jonah
Ruth	Ruth	Prov	Proverbs	Mic	Micah
1 Sam	1 Samuel	Eccles	Ecclesiastes	Nah	Nahum
2 Sam	2 Samuel	Song	Song of Songs	Hab	Habakkuk
1 Kings	1 Kings	Wis	Wisdom	Zeph	Zephaniah
2 Kings	2 Kings	Sir	Sirach	Hag	Haggai
1 Chron	1 Chronicles	Isa	Isaiah	Zech	Zechariah
2 Chron	2 Chronicles	Jer	Jeremiah	Mal	Malachi
Ezra	Ezra	Lam	Lamentations		
Neh	Nehemiah	Bar	Baruch		

### Books of the New Testament

Matt	Matthew	Eph	Ephesians	Heb	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil	Philippians	James	James
Luke	Luke	Col	Colossians	1 Pet	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom	Romans	1 Tim	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	2 Tim	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal	Galatians	Philem	Philemon	Rev	Revelation

# Introduction

In countless ways, Luke's Gospel has been the source of inspiration for Christians for almost two thousand years. Because of Luke, hymns of praise such as the Gloria and the Magnificat were introduced into Christian worship, prayers such as the Hail Mary were developed, St. Francis of Assisi began the custom of the Christmas manger, and painters such as Rembrandt and Caravaggio produced some of their great works of art.

Luke's Gospel is itself a great work of art, as the human author used all of his literary and narrative skills to write the longest of the four Gospels (over 19,000 words, about 1,100 more than Matthew). In telling us the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, Luke's Gospel is also a work of history, written down after careful investigation and on the basis of eyewitnesses and other reliable sources (1:1–3). Moreover, it is a work of theology, written so that readers may know that the teachings of Christianity are true (1:4): Jesus Christ is indeed Savior, Messiah, Lord, and Son of God (1:35; 2:11). Luke's Gospel is all these things, and it is also divinely inspired, communicating to us what God wanted written for the sake of our salvation (Catechism 107).

## Authorship

The titles found at the beginning or end of the earliest extant manuscripts of the Gospel, including Papyrus 75, dated by scholars to around AD 200, attribute the work to "Luke."<sup>1</sup> Writing around AD 180, St. Irenaeus likewise ascribes it

1. Simon J. Gathercole, "The Titles of the Gospels in the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 104 (2013): 66–68.

to “Luke,” who was “Paul’s follower” and “set down in a book the Gospel that was preached by Paul.”<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus says that Luke also wrote the Acts of the Apostles and that Luke even accompanied Paul on some of his journeys, which he indicated by writing in the first-person plural, the so-called “we” sections (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16).<sup>3</sup> In the same place, Irenaeus also refers to two verses in Paul’s letters that mention Luke, one saying that Luke is with him (2 Tim 4:11) and one describing him as “the beloved physician” (Col 4:14). There is also a third (Philem 24), in which Luke is described as one of Paul’s fellow workers. The Muratorian Fragment and Church Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine similarly note such details.<sup>4</sup>

Among modern scholars, the view that the same author wrote both the Gospel and Acts is widely accepted. Also, the explanation considered most probable for the “we” sections in Acts is still the view that the author was present at the events narrated and so was a companion of Paul. Moreover, the traditional identification of this companion with the Luke mentioned in Paul’s letters, though a contested issue, is still accepted by many.<sup>5</sup> Luke’s relative obscurity also argues in favor of the traditional view; if the Gospel’s author were really unknown, it would have been attributed to a more famous person such as an apostle. Moreover, since the Gospel was dedicated to a named person—Theophilus (1:3; see Acts 1:1)—it is implausible that it was written anonymously.<sup>6</sup>

There are other interesting but more speculative details about Luke suggested by some Church Fathers as well as some modern scholars. For example, since Luke (Greek *Loukas*) is a diminutive form of Lucius (*Loukios*), he has at times been identified with the Lucius mentioned by Paul (Rom 16:21)<sup>7</sup> and/or the Lucius of Cyrene who was with Paul and Barnabas in Antioch (Acts 13:1).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Antioch is mentioned by some ancient sources as Luke’s city of origin.<sup>9</sup> Luke has

2. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 3.1.1, trans. Dominic J. Unger and M. C. Steenberg, ACW (New York: Newman, 2012), 30.

3. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 3.14.1.

4. See the discussion in Rick Strelan, *Luke the Priest: The Authority of the Author of the Third Gospel* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 69–98.

5. See the discussion in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 2 vols., AB (New York: Doubleday, 1981–85), 1:40–51; and, more recently, Michael Wolter, *The Gospel according to Luke*, vol. 1, *Luke 1–9:50*, trans. Wayne Coppins and Christoph Heilig (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 6–10.

6. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 301.

7. Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 10.39.1–2.

8. See the discussion in Strelan, *Luke the Priest*, 71; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:47.

9. *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* for Luke; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.4.6; Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* Preface.2.

also been identified as the unnamed disciple “whose praise is in the gospel” (2 Cor 8:18 KJV).<sup>10</sup>

Also of interest is the question of Luke’s ethnic background. Although it is often assumed that Luke was a Gentile, scholarly opinion on this question is actually divided,<sup>11</sup> and there is little support among the Church Fathers that he was a Gentile.<sup>12</sup> The main argument for considering Luke to be a Gentile comes from Colossians, where Luke (Col 4:14) is not included in the list of those like Mark “who are of the circumcision” (4:11). This is often interpreted as saying that Mark is Jewish and Luke is Gentile, but the phrase “of the circumcision” may instead refer to a subset of Jewish Christians—namely, the strict faction that was typically uncooperative with Paul (Gal 2:12). Paul would then be saying that from among this group, only a few, like Mark, are his coworkers.<sup>13</sup> Luke did not belong to this group, but could still have been Jewish. Indeed, Luke’s extensive knowledge of the Old Testament and interest in the Jerusalem temple and Jewish priesthood suggest that he was Jewish. His good command of Greek is well explained if he was a *Hellenistic Jew*. Luke may thus have been like Paul, a Jew whose ministry was largely to the Gentiles. Likewise, his Gospel was probably written mainly for Gentile Christians.

## Historical Context

Scholars who hold that Luke was indeed Paul’s coworker (in the 50s AD) generally set the 80s as the upper limit for the writing of Luke’s Gospel (or 90s at the latest).<sup>14</sup> Most modern scholars indeed favor a date for Luke in the 70s or 80s AD. One reason supporting this majority view is that it seems certain to most that Luke relied on Mark’s Gospel, which is itself generally dated in the range AD 60 to 75. However, since Mark and Luke at times were coworkers

10. E.g., Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 1.6; Ambrose, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke* 1.11; Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* Preface.2. These writers consider the “gospel” to which Paul is referring to be Luke’s Gospel.

11. Among recent commentators who consider Luke to be Jewish, see, e.g., Wolter, *Luke 1–9:50*, 10–11, and James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 8–10. On the other hand, John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 2, considers it probable that he was a Gentile.

12. As mentioned, Origen identified Luke with the Lucius of Rom 16:21, who was a kinsman of Paul—i.e., Jewish. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 51.11.6, considered Luke to be one of the seventy(-two) disciples whom Jesus sent out on mission (Luke 10:1), and hence Jewish.

13. E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, rev. ed., New Century Bible (Greenwood, SC: Attic, 1974), 52–53; David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 278.

14. Wolter, *Luke 1–9:50*, 11–12; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–15), 1:400.

together with Paul (Col 4:10, 14; 2 Tim 4:11; Philem 24), it is not necessary to assume a long interval (of a decade or more) between the two Gospels.

Another reason for the majority position is that Luke's account of Jesus' prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem, an event that took place in AD 70, contains certain details (Luke 19:43; 21:20) that are more specific than Mark's version (Mark 13:14), suggesting to some scholars that Luke wrote it down after the fact. This reason, however, has been rejected by other scholars, since the details in Luke use vocabulary typical for a siege of a city such as is found in various Old Testament prophetic texts, especially those about the first destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC.<sup>15</sup> There is also no reason why Jesus himself could not have prophesied the fall of Jerusalem using such Old Testament prophecies.

Some scholars take the minority view that Luke's Gospel was written before AD 70.<sup>16</sup> In this regard, another factor to consider is the dating of Acts, which Luke wrote after his Gospel (Acts 1:1). Acts ends with Paul's two-year Roman imprisonment (AD 60–62; Acts 28:30), saying nothing about Paul's death (around AD 64 or 67). This seems surprising if Acts was written much later (in the 70s or 80s). The reason may be that the plan of Acts is to show that Christianity spread to "the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), and this plan reaches completion when Paul arrives in Rome, the capital of the empire (28:14). However, a good case can also be made that Paul's death had not yet occurred when Acts was written.<sup>17</sup> Considering the numerous parallels between Jesus' passion in Luke and Paul's imprisonment in Acts,<sup>18</sup> which illustrate the theological principle at work in Acts that the life of Jesus is the model for the life of the disciples (see the sidebar, "Parallels between Luke and Acts," p. 376), Luke would have included Paul's death if it had occurred before he wrote Acts. For scholars who accept this argument, Luke's Gospel would therefore also have been written while Paul was still alive. Several Church Fathers held this view—for example, the Church historian Eusebius.<sup>19</sup>

As for the location where the Gospel was written, modern scholars propose many different places. Since Luke was Paul's coworker, all of these proposals

15. Alexander Mittelstaedt, *Lukas als Historiker: Zur Datierung des lukanischen Doppelwerkes* (Tübingen: Francke, 2006), 131–59. Drawing on Mittelstaedt's work, Wolter, *Luke 1–9:50*, 11, concludes: "The announcements of the destruction of Jerusalem . . . cannot function as dating criteria."

16. E.g., Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 16–18. Bock dates Luke to the early to mid-60s.

17. See Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 365–410.

18. Mittelstaedt, *Lukas als Historiker*, 170–71.

19. *Ecclesiastical History* 2.22.

have a connection to Paul: the city where Paul began his missionary career and from which Luke may have originated (Antioch in Syria), cities evangelized by Paul (Corinth<sup>20</sup> or Ephesus), or cities where Paul was imprisoned (Caesarea or Rome). Regardless of the place, the Gospel was probably originally intended for many church communities, in particular those that arose from Paul's missionary activity.

## Genre

Over the last several decades, "it has become much clearer that the Gospels are in fact very similar in type to *ancient* biographies (Greek *bioi*; Latin *vitae*)."<sup>21</sup> This was the view of St. Justin Martyr in the second century, who referred to the Gospels as the "memoirs" of the apostles, using a term indicating a biography.<sup>22</sup>

More specifically, like other ancient biographies, Luke's Gospel (1) begins with a brief preface that mentions both written and oral sources (1:1–4); (2) focuses on one individual—Jesus—especially his public life and death; (3) is within the typical range of ten thousand to twenty thousand words; (4) follows a basic chronological structure but with other material—for example, some of Jesus' teaching and parables—arranged topically or thematically; (5) portrays the subject through a selection of his significant deeds and words (see 24:19); (6) includes information about his birth (Luke 1–2), ancestry (3:23–38), and one significant childhood event (2:41–52); and (7) has the purpose of confirming what has been taught about the subject (1:4) and of proposing him as an example to be imitated.<sup>23</sup>

As a kind of ancient biography, Luke's Gospel was written with the intention of writing a historical account. This is evident from the preface (1:1–4), which mentions how Luke is writing a narrative about events, based on the testimony of eyewitnesses, after careful investigation, and so that his readers can know the truth of what they have been taught. Luke's work continues in Acts, whose genre is not specifically biographical but more generally historical.

Of course, besides being historical narratives, the Gospels are also theological because of the unique Christian claims about Jesus, claims that are rooted in

20. The *Anti-Marcionite Prologue* mentions the region of Achaia, where Corinth was located. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* Preface.2, also mentions Achaia and nearby Boeotia.

21. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 185 (emphasis in the original).

22. Michael F. Bird, *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 249–52.

23. Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 185–212.

the Scriptures and bring them to fulfillment (see 24:27, 44). Jesus is not only someone about whom it is important to know, or even someone whom it is important to imitate. He is also someone in whom it is important to believe: “Everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:43).

## Structure and Literary Features

After the four-verse preface (1:1–4), Luke begins his account with a selection of events regarding the birth of Jesus, which is paired with the birth of John the Baptist (1:5–2:52). This “infancy narrative” is a fitting introduction to both Luke’s Gospel and Acts—for example, through the titles used for Jesus that will be developed later: Son of God, Savior, Messiah, and Lord (1:35; 2:11). Also included in these two chapters are events that foreshadow Jesus’ passion and resurrection and that announce the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s plan. The Gospel continues with Jesus’ public ministry, following a general pattern similar to what is found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. A short section presents the ministry of John the Baptist and other events that prepare for Jesus’ ministry (3:1–4:13). There follows a section of Jesus’ teaching and healing ministry in Galilee (4:14–9:50). Unlike the other Gospels, Luke begins this section with Jesus’ reading and sermon in the Nazareth synagogue, a passage that explains his mission (4:16–30). The main question in this section concerns the identity of Jesus, who is frequently presented using the technique of comparison—for example, with Old Testament prophets like Moses, Elijah, and Elisha—showing that Jesus is greater than these predecessors. The section culminates in Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah. The transition to the next section is made with Jesus’ first passion prediction and the transfiguration, where Jesus’ “exodus”—that is, death—in Jerusalem is announced. The long central section covers the journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:44). This physical journey is the setting for the journey of discipleship of Jesus’ followers, who learn from his teaching, including many of the famous parables found only in Luke. Jesus also teaches here about the kingdom of God, and indeed the section culminates with the acclamation of Jesus as king as he approaches Jerusalem. The ministry in the Jerusalem temple follows (19:45–21:38), in which opposition to Jesus intensifies, leading to the account of his passion and death (22:1–23:56) and then his resurrection, concluding with his ascension (24:1–53).

Luke is the most skilled Greek writer among the evangelists, using complex sentence constructions (e.g., the four-verse preface is one long sentence) and a



wide vocabulary (e.g., words that occur only once in the New Testament). He can also write in different styles. For example, he writes the preface in classical Greek style, displaying his literary credentials, and then, beginning in 1:5, switches for the main story to a style typical of the †Septuagint, in order to show that the story of Jesus continues the story of God’s people in the Old Testament.

## Relationship to Other Biblical Writings

Luke’s Gospel needs to be studied in relation to various other books or parts of the Bible.

*Other Gospels.* Luke says that many have already written a narrative about the events of Jesus’ life (1:1). Most scholars would agree that among these written sources for Luke is Mark’s Gospel. More than a third of the material in Luke is also found in Mark. Moreover, the outline of Luke largely follows the outline of Mark, except for the omission of some sections (such as Mark 6:45–8:26). Luke also interweaves other material into this basic outline (a large block of it, for example, in the central section). As for Matthew’s Gospel, scholars are in less agreement regarding Luke’s direct dependence on it. An additional quarter of material in Luke (i.e., not found in Mark) is also found in Matthew, but it usually occurs in different contexts. The remaining 40 percent or so of the material in Luke is unique, derived from his own sources. Besides the relationship between Luke and the other †synoptic Gospels, there may also be some kind of relationship between Luke and John’s Gospel, written later. For example, only Luke and John mention the sisters Martha and Mary, Peter’s running to inspect the empty tomb, and Jesus’ resurrection appearance to the disciples in Jerusalem on the evening of Easter.

*Acts.* Luke is the only evangelist who provides a sequel to his Gospel—namely, the Acts of the Apostles. A common theological vision unifies the two works. Numerous parallels between them show that Luke presents the life of Jesus as the model for the life of the early Church, especially the lives of Peter and Paul. Moreover, passages in Acts may at times clarify or illustrate passages in Luke. For example, the Gospel’s emphasis on God’s salvation extending to the Gentiles (2:32; 24:47) becomes a reality through the apostles’ mission in Acts (Acts 1:8; 11:18; 28:28).

*Paul’s Letters.* Because Luke was Paul’s coworker, it can also be helpful to consider the possible relationship of his Gospel to some of Paul’s letters. One example that comes to mind is Luke’s account of the institution of the Eucharist (Luke 22:19–20),<sup>24</sup> which is more similar to Paul’s account (1 Cor 11:23–25)

24. Assuming, with most scholars, the authenticity of these verses.

than to those in Matthew and Mark. Moreover, with regard to their theology, some recent studies have emphasized what Luke and Paul share in common—for example, with regard to their understanding of Jesus as Lord and of justification.<sup>25</sup>

*Old Testament.* Luke's Gospel highlights that in Jesus the promises made in the Old Testament have come to fulfillment (18:31; 24:44), thus showing the continuity in God's plan of salvation. At times, this fulfillment is indicated by an explicit citation of an Old Testament passage (22:37, quoting Isa 53:12). However, many times Luke shows the fulfillment of the Old Testament by means of allusions (7:15, alluding to 1 Kings 17:23) and †typology. With the latter technique, he compares Old Testament figures like Elijah and Elisha (Luke 4:25–27) to Jesus, showing that Jesus' deeds are similar to but greater than those of his forerunners (7:1–17).

## Theological Teachings and Themes

Among the theological teachings and themes of Luke are the following: the fulfillment in Jesus of God's plan of salvation announced in Scripture (4:18–21); the extension of the message of salvation to the Gentiles (7:1–10); the role of the Holy Spirit in disciples' lives (11:13; 12:12); the proclamation of good news to the poor and marginalized (4:18; 6:20); the prominence of women disciples (8:2–3), including Jesus' mother, Mary (1:26–56; 2:1–52); the recurrence of meal scenes (e.g., 14:1–24), which may point to the Eucharist (24:30–35) and the kingdom banquet (22:30); and the importance of the Jerusalem temple (1:9; 24:53).<sup>26</sup>

Like the other evangelists, Luke above all presents the figure of Jesus. Jesus is prophet (4:24), king (19:38), God's chosen †servant (23:35), the Son of Man (22:69), the Messiah (9:20), the son of David (18:38–39), and the Son of God (1:35). More than the other evangelists, Luke emphasizes that Jesus is the Savior, the one who brings God's salvation (2:11, 30; 19:9). Luke also emphasizes that Jesus is Lord (Greek *kyrios*, 2:11), the same title used for the Lord God of Israel in the †Septuagint and elsewhere in Luke (1:68). Thus, as recent scholarship has shown, Luke “does indeed portray Jesus as Israel's Lord and God.”<sup>27</sup>

25. Stanley E. Porter, “Luke: Companion or Disciple of Paul?,” in *Paul and the Gospels: Christologies, Conflicts, and Convergences*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Joel Willitts (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 146–68; Sigurd Grindheim, “Luke, Paul, and the Law,” *Novum Testamentum* 56 (2014): 356.

26. The Church Fathers (e.g., Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 3.11.8; Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels* 1.6.9) who compared the four evangelists to the four living creatures (Rev 4:7; see Ezek 1:10) consistently identified Luke with the calf on account of the Gospel's interest in the temple and its priestly sacrifices. They understood Luke's Gospel to have a priestly character.

27. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 243.

## Reading Luke Today

In several ways, Luke's Gospel both invites and challenges today's readers. It invites them to answer Jesus' call to discipleship—"Follow me" (5:27; 9:23, 59; 18:22)—while challenging them to take seriously his words about detachment from material possessions and merciful care of the poor and needy (10:37; 12:15–21; 14:13, 33; 16:19–31). It invites them to develop a life of prayer (11:1–13) modeled after Jesus' own prayer (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 22:40–46), while challenging them to persevere "without becoming weary" (18:1) when an answer to prayer seems a long time in coming. It invites them to be witnesses (24:48) to the risen Jesus by their words and deeds, while challenging them to maintain their testimony in the face of persecution (21:12–13). Despite the challenges, however, Luke invites readers to experience the joy of the gospel (2:10; 15:32; 24:52).

Finally, Luke's readers today can know that through an encounter with Jesus, liberty from the captivity (4:18) of sin and the new life of grace are available not just at some future time but at the present moment. "Today . . . a savior has been born for you" (2:11). "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled" (4:21). "Today salvation has come to this house" (19:9). So, start reading Luke's Gospel *today!*

# Outline of the Gospel of Luke

- I. Preface and Infancy Narrative (1:1–2:52)
  - A. Preface (1:1–4)
  - B. Announcement to Zechariah of the Birth of John (1:5–25)
  - C. Announcement to Mary of the Birth of Jesus (1:26–38)
  - D. Mary’s Visitation to Elizabeth and Her Magnificat (1:39–56)
  - E. Birth of John and Zechariah’s Benedictus (1:57–80)
  - F. Birth of Jesus (2:1–20)
  - G. Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (2:21–40)
  - H. Finding Jesus in the Temple (2:41–52)
- II. Preparation for Jesus’ Public Ministry (3:1–4:13)
  - A. Preaching of John the Baptist (3:1–20)
  - B. Baptism and Genealogy of Jesus, Son of God (3:21–38)
  - C. Temptation of Jesus (4:1–13)
- III. Jesus’ Ministry in Galilee (4:14–9:50)
  - A. Jubilee Proclamation in Nazareth (4:14–30)
  - B. Miracles in Capernaum (4:31–44)
  - C. Simon Peter and the Catch of Fish (5:1–11)
  - D. Healing a Leper and a Paralyzed Man (First Controversy with Pharisees) (5:12–26)
  - E. Call of Levi and Two Banquet Controversies (5:27–39)
  - F. Two Sabbath Controversies (6:1–11)
  - G. Choice of the Twelve (6:12–16)
  - H. Sermon on the Plain (6:17–49)
  - I. Miracles of Jesus the Prophet for a Centurion and the Widow of Nain (7:1–17)

- J. John's Messengers and Jesus' Witness to John (7:18–35)
- K. Pardoning a Sinful Woman in a Pharisee's House (7:36–50)
- L. Women Disciples with Jesus and the Twelve (8:1–3)
- M. Parables on Hearing the Word of God (8:4–18)
- N. Jesus' New Family (8:19–21)
- O. Jesus' Lake Trip: Calming the Storm and Healing a Possessed Man (8:22–39)
- P. Healing a Woman with Hemorrhages and Raising Jairus's Daughter (8:40–56)
- Q. Mission of the Twelve (9:1–6)
- R. Herod's Perplexity about Jesus' Identity (9:7–9)
- S. Feeding the Five Thousand (9:10–17)
- T. Peter's Confession of Jesus as Messiah and Jesus' Revelation of the Cross (9:18–27)
- U. Transfiguration of Jesus (9:28–36)
- V. Healing a Father's Possessed Son and Instructions for the Disciples (9:37–50)
- IV. Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:44)
  - A. First Part of the Journey (9:51–13:21)
    - 1. Beginning of the Journey: Facing Jerusalem (9:51–62)
    - 2. Mission of the Seventy-Two (10:1–20)
    - 3. The Father and the Son Who Reveals Him (10:21–24)
    - 4. The Love Commandments and the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25–37)
    - 5. Martha and Mary (10:38–42)
    - 6. The Lord's Prayer and Other Teaching on Prayer (11:1–13)
    - 7. God's Kingdom over Satan's Kingdom (11:14–26)
    - 8. The Sign of Jonah and Sayings on Light (11:27–36)
    - 9. Woes against the Pharisees and Law-Scholars (11:37–54)
    - 10. Discourse on Authentic Discipleship, Treasure in Heaven, and Warnings to Repent (12:1–13:9)
    - 11. Healing a Crippled Woman (13:10–17)
    - 12. Kingdom Parables: Mustard Seed and Leaven (13:18–21)
  - B. Second Part of the Journey (13:22–17:10)
    - 1. The Narrow Door into the Kingdom of God (13:22–30)
    - 2. Herod's Wish to Kill Jesus and Jesus' Lament about Jerusalem (13:31–35)
    - 3. Healing a Man with Dropsy (14:1–6)

4. Banquet Parables and Teaching on Discipleship (14:7–35)
5. Parables about Finding Lost Sinners (15:1–32)
6. Parables about Mammon and More Teaching on Discipleship (16:1–17:10)
- C. Third Part of the Journey (17:11–18:30)
  1. Healing Ten Lepers (17:11–19)
  2. End Times: The Coming of the Kingdom and the Son of Man (17:20–37)
  3. Parables about Prayer (18:1–14)
  4. Teaching on Entering the Kingdom (18:15–30)
- D. Fourth Part of the Journey (18:31–19:44)
  1. Prediction of the Passion on the Way Up to Jerusalem (18:31–34)
  2. Events in Jericho: Healing a Blind Man and Saving Zacchaeus (18:35–19:10)
  3. Parable of the Returning King (Ten Gold Coins) (19:11–28)
  4. Events on the Mount of Olives: Riding a Colt and Being Hailed as King (19:29–40)
  5. Prediction of the Destruction of Jerusalem (19:41–44)
- V. Jesus' Ministry in the Jerusalem Temple (19:45–21:38)
  - A. Cleansing the Temple and Teaching in the Temple (19:45–48)
  - B. Jesus' Authority Questioned (20:1–8)
  - C. Parable of the Tenant Farmers (20:9–19)
  - D. Question about Tribute to Caesar (20:20–26)
  - E. The Sadducees' Question about the Resurrection (20:27–40)
  - F. Jesus' Question about the Messiah and David (20:41–44)
  - G. Warning about the Scribes and Praise for a Widow (20:45–21:4)
  - H. End Times: The Destruction of Jerusalem and Coming of the Son of Man (21:5–38)
- VI. The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus (22:1–24:53)
  - A. The Plot of Judas and the Chief Priests (22:1–6)
  - B. Preparations for Passover (22:7–13)
  - C. Last Supper: Institution of the Eucharist and Instructions for the Disciples (22:14–38)
  - D. Agony and Arrest on the Mount of Olives (22:39–53)
  - E. Peter's Three Denials (22:54–65)
  - F. Hearing before the Sanhedrin (22:66–71)
  - G. Trial before Pilate and Hearing before Herod (23:1–25)

- H. Way of the Cross: Simon the Cyrenian and the Women of Jerusalem (23:26–32)
- I. Crucifixion of Jesus and the Plea of the Good Thief (23:33–43)
- J. Death and Burial of Jesus (23:44–56)
- K. Women at the Empty Tomb (24:1–12)
- L. The Road to Emmaus and the Breaking of the Bread (24:13–35)
- M. Resurrection Appearance in Jerusalem (24:36–49)
- N. The Ascension of Jesus (24:50–53)

# Luke States His Purpose

## Luke 1:1–4

Immediately sparking the reader's interest and displaying his own literary credentials, Luke begins his Gospel with a stately preface—brief but remarkably packed with meaning—in which he sets forth his intention of writing a historical account of the words and deeds of Jesus. His purpose is to assure his readers, schooled in the Old Testament and the Christian faith, of the truth of these words and deeds.

### Preface (1:1–4)

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<sup>1</sup>Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup>just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, <sup>3</sup>I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup>so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

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OT: 2 Macc 2:19–32

NT: Luke 24:48; John 15:27; Acts 1:1–2, 21–22; 1 John 1:1–3

**Catechism:** three stages in the formation of the Gospels, 126; catechesis, 4–6

**Lectionary:** Third Sunday Ordinary Time (Year C)



1:1 Matthew and Mark directly introduce Jesus in the initial verses of their Gospels. Luke instead begins with the qualities and purpose of his Gospel about Jesus, writing a complex, one-sentence preface that extends for four verses. His Gospel is not the first, **since many have undertaken** to do what he is now doing. Luke likely refers both to written sources that still exist today (such as the Gospel of Mark) and to others no longer extant. He stands in the tradition of these earlier efforts and seeks to complement them.

What others have done and what he sets out to do is **to compile a narrative**. Since it is about past **events**—namely, those regarding the life of Jesus—Luke here signals that he is writing history, as the details in verses 2–3 further clarify.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, these events are not random happenings but **have been fulfilled among us**—that is, they are the fulfillment of God’s plan, especially as foretold in the Old Testament. Indeed, at the end of the Gospel, Jesus will tell his disciples: “Everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled” (24:44; see 4:21; 9:30–31).

1:2 Another indicator that Luke is writing history is that these events were observed by **eyewitnesses**. They were present **from the beginning**, which may refer to the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry (John 15:27; Acts 1:21–22) but also to the events surrounding his birth, with which the Gospel begins. Luke also mentions **ministers of the word**, who together with the eyewitnesses are the bearers of the traditions about Jesus and have **handed them down**.<sup>2</sup> Possible sources belonging to both categories are the twelve apostles (Luke 6:13–16; Acts 1:13, 26), eyewitnesses who became ministers of God’s word (Acts 6:4; 10:39–42). Other eyewitness sources likely include named characters in the Gospel, such as Mary Magdalene and Joanna (Luke 8:2–3; 24:10); Martha and her sister, Mary (10:38–42); Zacchaeus (19:1–10); Cleopas (24:13–35);<sup>3</sup> and even Mary, the mother of Jesus, for the account of Jesus’ birth (2:19, 51).<sup>4</sup> Luke’s companion Paul would be a source who was a minister of the Word but not an eyewitness of Jesus’ earthly life (1 Cor 15:3).

1:3 Luke’s aim to write history is evident also in his emphasis on **investigating** (or “following”) things **accurately and anew** (or “from the beginning” [NIV];

1. John Moles, “Luke’s Preface: The Greek Decree, Classical Historiography and Christian Redefinitions,” *NTS* 57 (2011): 462–63.

2. The verb *paradidōmi* is sometimes used as a technical term to refer to the handing down of traditions (Acts 16:4; 1 Cor 11:2, 23; 15:3). See also the related noun *paradosis* (“tradition”) in 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6.

3. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 29–30, 39–66, 117–19.

4. Richard Bauckham, “Luke’s Infancy Narrative as Oral History in Scriptural Form,” in *The Gospels: History and Christology*, ed. Bernardo Estrada, Ermenegildo Manicardi, and Armand Puig i Tàrrach, 2 vols. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 1:406–7.

see Acts 26:5), in order **to write** them **in an orderly sequence**. This last quality can mean chronological order (Acts 3:24), but also logical arrangement in narration (Acts 11:4). These qualities are meant to distinguish Luke’s Gospel from its predecessors (e.g., Mark’s Gospel does not recount Jesus’ birth) and to present Luke as a trustworthy and capable writer.

Luke addresses one reader in particular, **Theophilus** (also Acts 1:1), a person of high standing since he is called **most excellent**. Perhaps he is Luke’s patron, who financed the publication of the Gospel.<sup>5</sup> He may be a Roman official, like Felix or Festus (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25), although there were also prominent Jews named Theophilus.<sup>6</sup> Probably he is already a Christian believer (see Luke 1:4). An actual person is meant, but the name—which in Greek literally means “God-loving” or “loved by God”—also takes on a symbolic meaning for any such reader of Luke’s Gospel.

The Gospel’s purpose is to give **certainty**<sup>7</sup> to Theophilus and all its readers. 1:4  
Added emphasis is given in the Greek text since it is the last word of the sentence. Christian readers can have assurance of the truth of the **teachings** about Jesus they **have received**—literally, the things about which they have been instructed or “catechized” (verb *katēcheō*; see Acts 18:25).

## Reflection and Application (1:1–4)

*Reading like a “Theophilus.”* St. Ambrose comments, “The Gospel was written to Theophilus, i.e., to him whom God loves. If you love God, it was written to you. . . . Diligently preserve the pledge of a friend.”<sup>8</sup> And Origen remarks, “Anyone who is ‘Theophilus’ is both ‘excellent’ and ‘very strong.’ . . . He has vigor and strength from both God and his Word. He can recognize the ‘truth.’”<sup>9</sup>

*Scripture and catechesis.* Luke’s Gospel was written in order to aid instruction in the Christian faith and has served that purpose ever since. Catechesis today

5. Similarly, the Jewish historian Josephus dedicates several of his works to a patron named Epaphroditus (*Jewish Antiquities* 1.8; *Life* 1.430; *Against Apion* 1.1).

6. Theophilus, son of Annas, was the Jewish high priest from AD 37 to 41. See James C. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 440–43. Some have argued that years later Luke writes his Gospel to this Theophilus, the former high priest; see, e.g., David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 327–36.

7. The Greek word *asphaleia* (related to the word from which “asphalt” derives) indicates the firmness or stability of the teaching (see Ps 104:5 LXX).

8. Ambrose, *Exposition of the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke* 1.12, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1998), 23 (translation adapted).

9. Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 1.6, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard, FC 94 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 9. The word for “most excellent” is the superlative of “strong.”

## Luke the Historian and the Historicity of the Gospels



Commenting on the preface, St. Bonaventure notes that Luke's Gospel is historical: "Three attributes pertain to the narrative historian" (see 2 Macc 2:30): in composing his Gospel, Luke "took a sufficiency of material into account and was diligent and orderly."<sup>a</sup>

Similarly, Vatican II cites Luke's preface when affirming the historicity of the Gospels:

Holy Mother Church has firmly and constantly held and continues to hold that the four Gospels . . . whose historicity the Church affirms without hesitation, faithfully hand on what Jesus . . . actually did and taught for their eternal salvation. . . . In composing the four Gospels, the sacred writers selected certain of the many traditions that had been handed on either orally or already in written form; others they summarized or explicated with an eye to the situation of the churches. Moreover, they retained the form and style of proclamation but always in such a fashion that they related to us an honest and true account of Jesus. For their intention in writing was that, either from their own memory and recollections or from the testimony of those "who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word" we might know "the truth" concerning the things about which we have been instructed (cf. Luke 1:2–4).<sup>b</sup>

St. John Paul II likewise comments that "the Gospels do not claim to be a complete biography of Jesus in accordance with the canons of modern historical science. From them, nevertheless, *the face of the Nazarene emerges with a solid historical foundation*. The Evangelists took pains to represent him on the basis of trustworthy testimonies which they gathered (cf. Luke 1:3)."<sup>c</sup>

- a. Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* 1.4, 6, ed. and trans. Robert J. Karris, 3 vols. (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2001–4), 1:27, 29.
- b. Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation) 19, from *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, ed. Dean P. Bécharde (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 27–28.
- c. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (At the Beginning of the New Millennium) 18 (emphasis in the original). Unless otherwise indicated, Church and papal documents are quoted from the Vatican website.

should thus be nourished through frequent contact with the Gospels (and the rest of the Scriptures), so as to lead people to a knowledge of the Church's faith and to a deeper personal relationship with Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

10. See Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church) 72, 74.