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## The Journey Motif in Luke

Luke 9:51–19:40 relates the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. The reader is reminded repeatedly throughout this section that Jesus is “traveling” or “going up” or “on his way” to Jerusalem.

This section contains the bulk of the material in Luke that does not derive from Mark (according to dominant source theories). Other large non-Markan blocks in Luke include the infancy narrative (1–2), the Sermon on the Plain (6:17–49), and the resurrection appearances (24). But the journey is by far the largest such block in Luke’s Gospel.

The journey functions as a *literary device* that Luke has used to structure his material. Its significance must be evaluated from literary and theological perspectives. It does not always make sense when considered in terms of historical or geographical realities.

We might consider two oft-quoted remarks from veteran Lukan scholars:

Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem all the time, but he never makes any progress.

—Karl Schmidt

At times, Jesus seems to be in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and then suddenly he seems to be farther away. For example, in 13:31, after four chapters of traveling, he is back in Galilee again.

Jesus's route cannot be reconstructed on the map and, in any case, Luke did not possess one.

—Hans Conzelmann

Luke does not seem to have an exact picture of Palestinian geography. For example, he has Jesus pass directly from Galilee into Judea without going through Samaria (17:11).

The *literary effect* of the journey on Luke's Gospel is that it introduces a major new section of the story. Mark's Gospel consisted basically of two parts: the ministry of Jesus (in Galilee) and the passion of Jesus (in Jerusalem). Luke has added a new section, the journey of Jesus (from Galilee to Jerusalem), which is just as important as his ministry and his passion.

The *emphasis* of the material in the journey section is on the teaching of Jesus. Thus the reader of Luke's Gospel perceives that Jesus's teaching is just as important as his earthly ministry and his passion.

There is precedence for the journey motif:

- The book of Deuteronomy presents the teaching of Moses to the Israelites just before they enter the promised land.

- Isaiah 40–55 presents the teaching of the prophet to the exiles just before they return to Jerusalem.

In an analogous fashion, Luke 9:51–19:40 presents the teaching of Jesus just before he enters Jerusalem to die. Compare also in Acts the journeys of Paul to Jerusalem, where he will be arrested, and to Rome, where he will die.

The theological effect of the journey motif is to place the bulk of Jesus’s teachings under the “shadow of the cross.” Material that would not in itself be interpreted in this way is now read in light of the impending passion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus—the “departure” that he is said to accomplish in Jerusalem at the journey’s end (Luke 9:31).