

The Gospel of Luke - Introduction

New Testament Survey – Lesson 10

When I was in high school, one of the events at speech tournaments was called “extemporaneous speaking.” In this event, we would be grouped with six or seven other competitors into numerous speaking rounds. For each round, each competitor would draw three random topics from a container. The topics called for a persuasive speech typically about some current event. In today’s world, for example, a topic might be: “What should the United States policy be toward the civil war in Syria?” Out of the three topics drawn, each competitor would choose one and then have 30 minutes to prepare a seven-minute speech on that topic. Judges would then rank the speakers based on their content and delivery.

To do well in the event, one needed to keep “files.” These were massive plastic tubs containing folders for every conceivable current event. In the folders were articles from reputable sources that could be used in preparation of the speech. We were careful to select sources that were fair, that presented well-researched, reliable, unbiased, and balanced information. We regularly read and cut into our folders the weekly news magazines, U.S. News & World Report, Newsweek, and Time. In our experience, these sources each had a slightly different slant on issues, with the U.S. News most conservative. Time and Newsweek had a more liberal bent, but both were considered responsible news sources, fairly presenting multiple sides or facets of a subject.

After high school, I let my subscription to the magazines lapse. I rarely read them any more, occasionally buying one at airports when I saw an interesting article. 2012 marked the end to the print edition of Newsweek. The publication is now only an online news source. Before shutting the presses, Newsweek issued a December 17, 2012 edition that my sister Hollie brought to my attention. She held it up and asked, “Have you seen that Newsweek had Bart Ehrman write its cover story on Jesus?” The article was not a fair assessment of different views on “Who was Jesus?” It was instead a one-sided cobbling together of cynical opinions written as facts, showing little regard to any fair assessment of evidence. It was not a “news story.” It was religious propaganda (or “anti-religious” propaganda). It would not have made it into my “extemp tubs” as a reputable news source. It did not even measure up to the standards of a high school speech tournament.



If there was ever an arena that called for a fair discussion of the facts, or at least a disclaimer that one is presenting only one side of a hotly disputed issue, it is the matter of Biblical interpretation. Interpreting the Bible has been an ongoing process for thousands of years. Both scholars and lay people have made and continue to make important contributions. To the frustration of many, it is not a hard science, where a test tube can confirm whether one is right or wrong. It is filled with conjecture and opinion. Similarly, it is not something that people do with clinical detachment, like a lab technician determining whether a petri dish is growing a flu virus. Those involved in Biblical interpretation are most often moved by an evangelistic desire for their views to trump those of others. Along with that desire all too frequently comes an agenda backed by the motivation to denigrate opposing views, and trumpet one's own.

The academy is filled with scholars from many different camps who approach Scripture in this way. There are many who will blind themselves to facts to adhere to a predetermined interpretive path of Scripture. As is often pointed out by the cynics, this is true among some who are labeled conservative evangelicals. Importantly, although not always pointed out, it is equally true among many who carry simply the title of academic scholar. Unfortunately, there is a large nucleus of people like Ehrman who teach and write in the academic circles of Biblical interpretation whose life meaning can only be vindicated and fulfilled by trying to disprove a simple approach to believing in the Bible as a divine communication from a Holy God who loves humanity enough to not only speak to them, but to deliver them from the sin that has corrupted their nature and destiny. That is a long sentence, but it is an important point that needs to be made in a single sentence. Now let me break it down.

Most everyone who takes the time to think, research, write, and teach has a view on life and why it has meaning. For many, the meaning of life may simply be surviving through another day. But for those who are not fighting simply to find food, shelter, security, or health, for those who have reached a level where they contemplate morality, creativity, problem solving, and other aspects of self-actualization¹, they consider what makes life worthwhile. What gives it meaning? Why do we bother? Where is any cause for real joy, apart from momentary pleasure? These are hard questions that loom before many thinking people. To people of faith, the answers come readily through God's message and Jesus. But to those without faith, answers are still needed, and they do not come so readily. Add to this the fact that academics typically want to substantiate their views. That

¹ This language and idea is a basic tenet best expressed in Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. See, Maslow, Abraham, *Motivation and Personality*, (Harper 1954).

is a principal reason for writing and teaching. It is a forum to explain and share one's views, justifying them in the process. Now consider someone like Professor Bart Ehrman who admittedly does not believe in the divine revelation of Scripture, in the deity of Christ, or even in God. It should not be totally surprising that he would try and persuade others that his views, those that he has embraced and managed to live with, are correct. He has managed to find a reason to get up each morning and go about his day, in light of how he thinks and feels about ultimate issues. Is it shocking if he has an unspoken need to try and justify his perspective and thus validate his views and the meaning he is finding for his life?

He is but one example of many who come to the Bible intellectually and *without* faith as opposed to those who come to the Bible intellectually *with* faith. By the way, we should also be concerned about those who come to the Bible with faith but no intellect! Certainly they hold an advantage of embracing faith, and that can make an eternity's difference! But we should always encourage them to use the minds God gave them.

So the challenge of the contemporary believer is to use study the Bible both with faith and with intellect, and then live it with love. (All the faith and intellect possible to man is thoroughly deficient if found without love! 1 Cor. 13.) Using and growing the mind is transforming to the believer (Rom. 12:2). Knowledge is important to the people of God (Hos. 4:6) because God is a God of truth. Consider these passages:

- John 14:6 – “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the **truth**, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
- John 18:37 – “Jesus answered, ‘... For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world— to bear witness to the **truth**. Everyone who is of the **truth** listens to my voice.’”
- Rom. 1:25 – “they exchanged the **truth** about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!”
- Rom. 9:1 – “I am speaking the **truth** in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—”
- Col. 1:5-6 – “Of this you have heard before in the word of the **truth**, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in **truth**.”

- 1 Tim. 2:7 – “For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the **truth**, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and **truth**.”
- 1 Tim. 6:4-5 – “He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the **truth**, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.”

Knowledge is ultimately an embracing and understanding of greater degrees of truth. It is important to us today, it was no less important to the people in the New Testament church. This is a principal reason why we have the Gospel of Luke.

LUKE - INTRODUCTION

Some people say the computer age is bringing the age of books to a close, although I disagree. Our computers are now shaped like tablets, and the average one can hold thousands of books. That means we can haul around thousands of books in a small bag or briefcase, and they will weigh less than a pound and a half. But I doubt that computers will fully replace books. Books themselves were a marvelous invention that came about in the days of the early church. In fact, many scholars trace the book's rise in popularity to the early church's need for Scripture. In the first century, most writings of length were done on scrolls. Scrolls have limitations, however, notably one of size. You could buy scrolls for writing in various sizes, but the largest scrolls generally available and used were about 25 feet long. This dictated a limitation on the amount of material one could put on the scroll. Unlike a computer, where you can type until you wear your fingers off, or unlike a book where you can grab another sheet of paper and write until you run out of things to say, with a scroll, there was an endpoint. At that end point, you quit that scroll. If you had more to say, you got another scroll and started again. This is an important thing to realize as we begin our study of Luke.

The Gospel of Luke is one part of two writings in the New Testament that flow together. The second writing we call the Acts of the Apostles. Both were written by the same person, and together they flow through history from immediately before Christ's birth through his life, death, resurrection and ascension, and through the establishment and growth of the early church in Jerusalem, Judea, and a great deal of the Roman Empire. Both books were composed for the same reason and were dedicated or inscribed to the same person. These two books, Luke and Acts, are tied for being the longest books in the New Testament. Some might ask why there are two books rather than one, but the answer is simple. Each book, Luke and Acts, takes up an entire large scroll. The Gospel of Luke ends

where the writer ran out of scroll! The second scroll was used to continue the history, and the church has given it a separate name, Acts. As we examine Luke, therefore, we are really examining both Luke and Acts together. They are two volumes that make up a common work. We are remiss if we study one to the exclusion of the other. In this introductory lesson, we will focus on three main questions, all of which are important if we want to understand the truth of what is written in the gospel: (1) Who wrote Luke? (2) How was it written? (3) Why was it written?

Who wrote Luke?

This would be an easy question to answer if ancient Rome had America's copyright laws and writing conventions. We could look at the copyright entry and see who, more likely than not, wrote the book. But unfortunately the ancient world was not like today, and the author of a book usually was cited in a title that, while not a part of the work, was then affixed to the work.² In typical fashion, Luke's title sets out "Luke" as the author, but you do not find Luke as author within the verses of the book itself. Because there is no way to determine whether the title was affixed immediately after completion, or at some significantly later date, the title is not fully determinative. Clues to authorship can be gleaned from reading beyond the title and considering the material as written in the books. In addition to reading the text for answers, we can also look for authorship information from the records of church history.

Reading through the combined work of Luke and Acts gives evidence of Luke as the author. The gospel of Luke and much of Acts is written in third-person narrative, a "This happened to them..." type of writing. That changes at certain points in Acts. There are sections of Acts where the "they" and "them" third person writings become first person with words like "we" and "us." We find these sections mainly in Acts 16 and Acts 20ff.³ In Acts 16, Paul goes through Asia Minor adding to his travelling mission group along the way. Acts records in third-person Paul and his group finally arriving at Troas. There in Troas, near the

² In this way books were different from letters. Letters typically set out the author's name at the very beginning, similar to how today a letter is frequently on letterhead that gives the sender's name. We see this in Paul's letters where he immediately identifies himself and his co-authors.

³ There is no dispute among scholars that Acts 16 and 20 contain the "we" passages. Beyond those, there is another *possible* "we" passage. Among our early New Testament manuscripts are a group that scholars have labeled the "Western text." This text often has a bit more expansive material to the other ancient copies of Scripture. Among the additions of the Western text is a clause in Acts 11:28 that would also be a "we" clause. It occurs in the recounting of events at Antioch where a prophet named Agabus stood in an assembly of the church and foretold of a famine that would occur. The Western text adds a clause that includes the author. It reads, "when *we* were gathered together..."

modern city of Istanbul, Paul had a vision instructing him to cross over from Asia into Europe, going to Macedonia (modern northern and eastern Greece). At that point, the language changes from first person to third person. Instead of “they went down to Troas” (Acts 16:8), we read, “*we* sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called *us* to preach” (Acts 16:10). The narrator then becomes a fourth member of the mission group (joining Paul, Silas, and Timothy), for the journey to Samothrace, Neapolis, and Philippi. After Philippi, the narrative returns to third person.

The next “we” section begins in Acts 20, several years later where Paul is passing through Philippi on his way back to Jerusalem. The narrator rejoins Paul in Philippi and seems to stay with him for the rest of the journey recorded in Acts, ending with Paul in chains in Rome.⁴ It was from this Roman imprisonment that Paul wrote to the church at Colossae sending greetings from, among others, his companion “Luke the beloved physician” (Col. 4:14).⁵ Without a doubt Luke was “beloved” for his commitment to the gospel and the mission of the church. Certainly he also held a special warm place in the heart of Paul and others because of his training and vocation as a doctor! We should remember the frequency with which Paul and his co-missionaries had to endure beatings, assaults, snakebites, and many other maladies that would have benefited from a fulltime personal physician! Paul also sent similar greetings from Luke in another letter written from his Roman imprisonment to Philemon (Phile. 24).

In addition to the internal evidence, early church history readily identified the gospel with the pen of Luke. As mentioned earlier, the title affixed to the gospel accorded it to Luke. That title is so ancient, that no one can place its time of attachment. It is older than our earliest copies. Around 144 AD, an early church heretic named Marcion used as his Scriptures ten sections from the gospel of Luke, shunning the other gospels. In response, the early church produced a prologue to the gospels commonly termed “The Anti-Marcionite Prologues to the Gospels.” The prologue to Luke sets out:

⁴ The “we” pronouns are found in Acts 20:5-15; 21:1-18; and 27:1-28:16.

⁵ In 1882, William Hobart published *The Medical Language of St. Luke*, (reprinted in 2004 by Wipf & Stock). He pulled over 400 words and phrases fairly unique to Luke-Acts, and found in the stories with a medical connection (healings, etc.). These were terms that also occurred in medical writings close in time to the writing of Luke-Acts. From this study, Hobart concluded that the author of Luke-Acts was a physician, or at least intimately familiar with the vocabulary of a physician. The work and its conclusions became popular in academic and lay circles until the response of Harvard’s Henry J. Cadbury. “Lexical Notes on Luke-Acts: II Recent Arguments for Medical Language,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 45, No. 1/2 (1926), pp. 190-209. Cadbury showed fairly effectively that the “medical terms” were fairly frequently used in common everyday writing. His response showed that, unlike 21st century doctors, writing does not demonstrate that the ancient doctors had a distinct medical vocabulary.

Indeed Luke was an Antiochene Syrian, a doctor by profession, a disciple of the apostles: later however he followed Paul until his martyrdom, serving the Lord blamelessly. He never had a wife, he never fathered children, and died at the age of eighty-four, full of the Holy Spirit, in Boetia. Therefore -- although gospels had already been written ---- indeed by Matthew in Judaea but by Mark in Italy ---- moved by the Holy Spirit he wrote down this gospel in the parts of Achaia, signifying in the preface that the others were written before his, but also that it was of the greatest importance for him to expound with the greatest diligence the whole series of events in his narration for the Greek believers, so that they would not be led astray by the lure of Jewish fables, or, seduced by the fables of the heretics and stupid solicitations, fall away from the truth. And so at once at the start he took up the extremely necessary [story] from the birth of John, who is the beginning of the gospel, the forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ, and was a companion in the perfecting of the people, likewise in the introducing of baptism and a companion in martyrdom.... And indeed afterwards the same Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles.⁶

That Luke stayed with Paul until Paul's martyrdom is consistent with Paul's last known letter to Timothy where he stated,

Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry (2 Tim. 4:11).

The church father Irenaeus of Lyon (c.120 - c.200) often quoted from the Gospel of Luke citing it as Luke's writing. Irenaeus also confronted Marcion's dissection of Luke, writing, "he mutilates the Gospel which is according to Luke."⁷

In Eusebius' history of the church written in the early 300's, he repeatedly referenced or quoted from the Gospel of Luke and from Acts, consistently attributing them to Luke.⁸ Eusebius also set out additional biographical information about Luke:

But Luke, who was of Antiochian parentage and a physician by profession, and who was especially intimate with Paul and well acquainted with the rest of the apostles, has left us, in two inspired books, proofs of that

⁶ Scholars debate the dating of this anonymous prologue dating it anywhere from the 2d to the 4th centuries. There is also some measure of debate over whether it was written in response to Marcion's heresy.

⁷ See, e.g., Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, 1.27:2.

⁸ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.5:3; 1.7:1; 1.7:5; 1.7:10; 2.8:2; 2.11:1; 2.22:1, etc.

spiritual healing art which he learned from them. One of these books is the Gospel, which he testifies that he wrote as those who were from the beginning eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered to him, all of whom, as he says, he followed accurately from the first. The other book is the Acts of the Apostles, which he composed not from the accounts of others, but from what he had seen himself.⁹

Eusebius's information that Luke was from Antioch mirrors the western text's recording of Luke among those present in the church at Antioch in Acts 11:28 (see footnote 3 above). Many scholars also point to the way that Acts emphasizes Antioch. Of the 21 times Antioch is referenced in the Bible, 19 are in Acts. Acts also adds particular names of teachers at Antioch (e.g., Acts 13:1) as well as the trivia fact that the church members were first called "Christians" in Acts (Acts 11:26).

Those who argue against Luke's authorship rely principally on three arguments: (1) there is no reference in Paul's letters to the idea or fact that Luke was writing a gospel or history of the church, nor is there any reference in Luke-Acts to Paul writing his epistles; (2) alleged inconsistencies between the theology and biography of Paul found in his letters and that found in Acts, and (3) the "tone, perspective, and purposes of Luke-Acts better fit a later, 'second-generation' composition."¹⁰ None of these arguments seem to trump the historical claims of the early church and the internal considerations of Scripture.

(1) References between Paul and Luke-Acts

The argument is that if Luke was writing a gospel and history at the same time he was working with Paul, that there would be some reference, either in Paul's writings or in Luke's about it. This argument is always difficult to make and assess because it is based on an absence of evidence rather than affirmative evidence. The weakness of such an argument is that it relies on our perception of what *we* would expect from Paul and or Luke. Inherent in that is what *we* think and how *we* would do things if we were in their position. This is a serious limitation on the validity of any conclusions.

For example, if Paul was writing his epistles at the same time that Luke began his gospel, what exactly would one expect Paul to insert into his epistles? Perhaps, "Luke, the beloved physician, has started writing a gospel account of the life of Jesus and a history of the church. Who knows whether he will finish it or not, but if he does, I will try to get you an autographed first edition!"? Of course not!

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.4.6.

¹⁰ See, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (Doubleday 1992), Vol. 4 at 404, and cites therein.

Paul writes in his epistles forthright theology and practical instructions of living. The personal details are scant, and generally are nothing more than “X and Y send their greetings.”

So what might be a fair thing to expect in Paul’s letters if he was working with Luke and Luke was working on assimilating a history? First, we might expect to see Paul speaking of his companionship with Luke, which Paul certainly does in at least three places referenced earlier. Second, we might expect to see Paul using material that is also used by Luke. After all, if the two were together, Luke could easily be Paul’s source or at least Luke’s sources could be Paul’s sources. If we look at Paul’s instructions on the Lord’s Supper and compare them to Luke’s account, we have an almost word for word match.¹¹

The Lord’s Supper in Luke and Paul	
<p>τουτο εστιν το σωμα μου το υπερ υμων <i>διδομενον</i> τουτο ποιειτε εις την εμην αναμνησιν</p> <p>“This is my body, which is <i>given</i> for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19)</p> <p>.....</p> <p>μετα το δειπνησαι λεγων τουτο το ποτηριον η καινη διαθηκη εν τω αιματι μου Jesus took the cup “after they had eaten saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood’” (Luke 22:20)</p>	<p>τουτο μου εστιν το σωμα το υπερ υμων τουτο ποιειτε εις την εμην αναμνησιν</p> <p>“This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” (1 Cor. 11:23)</p> <p>.....</p> <p>μετα το δειπνησαι λεγων τουτο το ποτηριον η καινη διαθηκη εστιν εν τω εμω αιματι Jesus took the cup “after they had eaten saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood’” (1 Cor. 11:25)</p>

Paul using the same material as Luke is consistent with Paul’s companion Luke as an author of Luke-Acts. Cynics often raise a related question of why Luke’s

¹¹ Paul eliminates Luke’s word “given” *διδομενον* in speaking of the bread. This idea is inherent in the Greek as Paul was writing/dictating, so the idea is not missing. Paul also uses the adjective for “my” (εμω) while Luke uses the pronoun (μου) in reference to the cup as Jesus’ blood. These differences are no more than style differences. The otherwise exact wording is so precise that it must have a relationship.

history never references Paul writing to the churches. This illustrates a common danger in deducing conclusions from inadequate information. At a subconscious level, our brains figure out what *we* would do and expect others to do the same. This may work when finishing our spouse's sentences or placing their ideas and actions into context. We should add that this is a **VERY DANGEROUS THING TO DO**, and it does not work as often as we think! But when it does work, it is because we know them, we know the situation, we know the culture, we have a past working history, etc. But when we subconsciously project our own attitudes and habits into the writings of someone almost 2,000 years ago in an altogether different context and culture, we are open to some serious miscalculations and errors.¹² Consider that Luke was writing a grand sweeping history of the hand of God among men, showing his salvation power beyond the limitations of Judah's borders. Luke begins *before* the birth of John the Baptist and does not conclude until the gospel is preached in Rome, the capital of the empire. It is a saga that consumed two scrolls and, as we indicate later, was written at the instigation of, or in dedication to, a man named Theophilus. Luke was not purposed to write for 21st century cynics or scholars.

In fairness, the fact that Luke does not cite Paul's letters actually makes better sense with Luke *as an author* rather than an author pretending to be Luke. We know that Paul's letters were quickly accorded status as Scripture. Consider the text of 2 Peter, which the cynical scholars who dispute Luke as author of Luke-Acts categorically proclaim was written after Peter's death by someone else. By the time of 2 Peter, Paul's writings are already seen as Scripture:

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

If Luke-Acts were written after Paul's letters achieved this status, it is much more likely that a fake author would reference or cite Paul's writings in his history. That they are not cited actually works in concert with Luke writing and recording his history early!

¹² "The trouble is, when we do not know the context behind something, we project it ourselves, says Lisa Feldman Barrett, director of the Interdisciplinary Affective Science Laboratory at Northeastern University. 'Our brains do that automatically,' she says. 'When information is stripped away, we add it back. We fill in the information when it's not there.'" "Cerebral Circuitry," *Financial Times*, Jan 3, 2013.

(2) Alleged inconsistencies between Paul's letters and Acts

These alleged inconsistencies arise in two general areas, Paul's biographical activities and Paul's theology. One of the main biographical details cynics discuss concerns the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15, comparing it to Paul's recounting of his trip to Jerusalem in Galatians 2, along with the detailed confrontation with Peter in Antioch.

Acts 15 details a conference in Jerusalem that likely occurred around 48 or 49 AD. Paul and Barnabas had returned from their first missionary journey, and the influx of Gentiles into the church posed a theological quandary. The issue for the church was whether a Gentile had to convert to Judaism as a part of becoming a Christian. There was a great deal of debate and discussion before the church discerned that there was no need for conversion. Peter argued *against* Gentile conversion into Judaism. The church then sent a letter to the church at Antioch, having it taken by Paul, Barnabas and a few select others.

In Galatians 2, Paul speaks of a trip to Jerusalem where he met with influential leaders in the church and discussed issues of Jewish practice among Gentiles, including whether his Gentile friend Titus needed to be circumcised. Paul was sent out with the assurance his teaching was supported. Once Paul returned to Antioch, he told the Galatians that he had called out Peter for hypocrisy on Jewish dietary laws.

These two accounts are not inconsistent, depending upon how one dates them. One can read Galatians to place the Galatians account before the Jerusalem conference, or after. It does not seem to be the same conference, nor does it need to be. The issues are similar but not identical. It makes sense that such big issues would not have a one-day debate and resolution, never to rear their head again. It seems very reasonable that the issue of Gentiles adaptation or failure to adapt to Jewish culture would be an ongoing problem in a growing and evolving church membership. One would be remiss to assume that the Galatians account had to occur during the Jerusalem conference. It does seem likely that the Galatians visit preceded the Acts 15 conference, or Paul would have had an even stronger argument at his disposal that Peter was not living up to what Peter knew was right. Namely, Paul could have pointed to Peter's argument and conclusion at the Jerusalem conference.

These issues will be dealt with in more detail once these lessons reach the passages in Galatians and in Acts. For now, however, we note them only to explain that this is not a reason to reject the consensus opinion of the early church on Luke writing Luke-Acts.

(3) *The tone of Luke*

This third argument is, like the first, one that is fraught with the difficulties of a subjective argument. What do we see in the tone and perspective of Luke that necessitates a “second generation” author? Before answering, it is worth noting that Luke actually *is* a second-generation author. Luke does not claim to be an eyewitness of Jesus. Luke does not use “we” language at Pentecost when the church was established. Luke certainly would have a special perspective as a second-generation believer, perhaps brought to faith by one who was an eyewitness.

Looking at the tone, it seems entirely consistent with one who matches the Luke profile we glean from Scripture and from the early church. We are told Luke was a Christian doctor that hailed from Antioch and traveled extensively with Paul, Mark, Timothy and others in missionary efforts. Luke went to Jerusalem and a number of other places. He served Paul extensively, especially toward Paul’s later days. As we read Luke and Acts, we read material that reflects this type of person. By all accounts, Luke and Acts are written in excellent Greek, yet with portions that reflect a good understanding of Hebrew. Luke-Acts scholar L. T. Johnson wrote,

The text does reveal more important characteristics of the author: his stylistic ability, which enables him to use various Greek dictions; his Hellenistic education, shown by his facile use of rhetorical conventions; his wide reading in Torah, manifested in his dense textual allusions and in the structure of his story; his storytelling ability, demonstrated by his striking vignettes and parables.¹³

Johnson’s description fits nicely to the tone and traits one would expect from a man in Luke’s position and from Luke’s lineage. Add to the points made by Johnson, that Luke-Acts has a genuine Antioch focus, found nowhere else in Scripture, and one readily sees the hand of Luke behind the writing.

Luke is also the one gospel that sets the story of Jesus and the church into the larger fold of world history. Luke ties events into emperors, governors, rulers, and world events (famines, *etc.*). This was not simply to aid scholars 20 centuries later. It shows a conscious recognition and tie of the hand of God reaching through Israel and beyond Israel into the entire world. From Luke 1 through Acts 28, the redemptive story of Jesus is for all humanity.

¹³ Johnson, Luke Timothy, “Luke-Acts, Book of,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (Doubleday 1992), Vol. 4 at 404-405. This point is also made with slightly greater detail in Johnson’s commentary in the *Sacra Pagina* series, *The Gospel of Luke*, (Liturgical Press 1991), at 3.

Some might fairly ask, what difference does this make? As long as the early church recognized Luke and Acts as Scripture, does it matter who wrote it? Our response to this includes some of this next section on how Luke was written.

How was Luke written?

Whether Luke wrote Luke or not makes one of its biggest difference in assessing his access to information. This helps us understand *how* Luke wrote his gospel. Luke was not an apostle, and he did not have eyewitness encounters with Jesus in his earthly ministry. This second hand approach, however, actually allows Luke to give a fuller biography of both the Lord and the church. Luke explained his process early in the Gospel of Luke:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).

Other people had already compiled narratives of things “accomplished” among the believers. Luke does not tell us how many people¹⁴, but his word “compile” (ἀνατάσσειν) means that these accounts were not simply written from scratch, but rather were a putting in order of material that pre-existed. This fits handily with Goodspeed’s theory (and that of others) we set out in our lesson on Matthew’s authorship, namely that Matthew likely took the role of note taker during the ministry of Jesus. The notes were likely copied and used by the early church and its mission efforts, giving a sense to Paul’s request that Timothy retrieve Paul’s papyrus strips (translated “books”) and parchment sheets (2 Tim. 4:13). Luke begins noting that others had ordered or compiled these matters into a narrative, and that he was going to set out to write an “orderly account” of materials delivered from “eyewitnesses and ministers.”

These were things that Luke said he had “followed closely for some time.” In his Greek writing, Luke is doubly emphatic that these were things he followed carefully. Luke first says he followed carefully using the Greek *parakoloutho*

¹⁴ Luke does say that “many” had done this, but the word “many” in this type of reference does not necessarily refer to a large number. It is used for its rhetorical effect and might best be understood simply as “others.” See, similarly Acts 1:3; 24:2, 10; Green, Joel, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke*, (Eerdmans 1997), at 38; Marshall, I. Howard, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: Commentary on Luke*, (Eerdmans 1978), at 41.

(παρακολουθῶ) meaning “to follow closely,” and he then adds an adverb saying he did so “diligently,” “meticulously,” or “perfectly” (using the Greek *akribos* – ἀκριβῶς). There should be no question in the mind of his readers, that these were matters that Luke was extremely diligent to accurately learn and faithfully reproduce.

Marshall explained,

Luke means that he has thoroughly investigated all the facts in the light of the available evidence.¹⁵

God placed each gospel writer into his position, but we are remiss if we do not realize the distinction Luke brought to his work. Luke stands apart from Matthew, Mark, and John. Luke was no country fisherman. He was a very intellectual, highly educated individual who was trained to pursue evidence and diagnose illness.

As noted above, Luke did not pick up his information from street rumors. He found the information from “eyewitnesses and ministers.” This is an interesting choice of words. The word “eyewitnesses” is easily understood. It is those who saw the matters themselves (αὐτόπτης). British New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham makes the compelling argument that many names given by the various gospel writers in stories and accounts are there because those people were eyewitnesses who could still corroborate the story.¹⁶ So Luke lists names in various places to present his source material and to provide a reference point for validating the account. This becomes important and key in understanding what is a stumbling block to many who try to make sense of the different synoptic accounts of certain stories. For example, many struggle over details about the resurrection account and whether the four gospels tell differing stories. These are people who are thinking as 21st century westerners, and failing to understand the *very real nature and purpose* of these early accounts. Luke wrote from “eyewitnesses.” Luke was writing verifiable history. As such, Luke gave details and names that were *verifiable source* material. The names provided were those of people who could give authentic first hand accounts.

One example from the modern world might help. I have tried cases in courtrooms across America. There is a general rule in the American trial system that says trial should not be conducted by “ambush.” What this means is that in the search for

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, at 42-43.

¹⁶ Bauckham, Richard, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses – The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, (Eerdmans 2006), at 39ff.

truth, people are entitled to first *discover* what evidence there is, before being set to trial on that evidence. Part and parcel to this process is the listing of witnesses. As a trial lawyer, I am required to list those witnesses I may call to testify in court. Not only am I called to do so, but so are the other parties and lawyers to the case. Typically my set of designated witnesses will contain some of the same ones as the other parties. But they will also list those that they plan to call for testimony that I have no intention of calling. Our lists will align in places and differ in places. That is not because one side is lying. It is because different witnesses will serve different purposes.

Let us put this into a practical issue of Biblical inspection. Consider the accounts given by each gospel of the women at the resurrection tomb. Matthew says that “Mary Magdalene” and the “other Mary” were there. Mark says “Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome” went. Luke lists “Mary Magdalene, and Joanna and Mary the mother of James.” John gives simply “Mary Magdalene.” Each is writing for an audience. Each is writing and listing those witnesses that were source material, were verifiable, or were meaningful to their respective audiences. Many people struggle over “who was right” when the simple answer is “each one!” Cynical scholars think that a stretch, but these scholars need to spend some time in the legal system! You list the witnesses from which you get your evidence; you list the witnesses that mean something to the audience, and you list the witnesses that are alive and available or that you know have left some way to verify their stories. Mary Magdalene was clearly such a witness. At the time of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, so was Mary, the mother of James. Mark accorded for his audience the added testimony of Salome, likely the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matt. 27:56). There were, however, “many women” involved in following Jesus through this ordeal. Matt. 27:56 makes that clear. Luke gives as an additional witness to the account “Joanna,” the wife of Herod’s household manager Chuza and a well-known companion of Jesus in Galilee (Lk 8:3).

Luke’s word for “ministers” is a bit subtler than “eyewitnesses.” The word *hyperetes* (ὑπηρέτης) references literally an under-oarsman or rower. The word was used for ministers, officers, and servants. Luke himself uses the word twice in his gospel and four times in Acts. In the gospel it is used here and referencing a synagogue attendant in Luke 4:20. In Acts, Luke used it twice for prison officers (Acts 5:22, 26). His final two uses were for ministers of the gospel! In Acts 13:5 he refers to John Mark (of the Gospel of Mark) as such a minister. He also refers to Paul as such a minister in Acts 26:16.

In addressing the synoptic issues in an earlier lesson, we noted that Luke likely used the gospel of Mark in his preparation. Knowing Luke wrote Luke helps us understand how and why he did so. Luke recognized Mark as an “eyewitness”

and “minister.” Of course, Paul was as well. Who else *but* Paul could have related the stories of the Damascus Road experience and so many others Luke wrote up? As we accept that Luke wrote Luke-Acts, we see that the author was present throughout the Mediterranean world, spent a great deal of time in Antioch, and also journeyed and stayed in Jerusalem for a good period (Acts 21:17ff). It is not only reasonable to assume, but it is almost a necessary imperative that Luke would have used that time to discuss not only what Paul, and Peter knew, but many others as well. He would have had ample chance to visit with Mary, the mother of Jesus, with others in Jesus’ family, with many still living in the Jerusalem church that had followed Jesus’ ministry. It makes sense that he not only knew the accounts of John the Baptist’s birth, but those of the nativity of Christ as well. If you were at dinner with Mary the mother of Jesus, wouldn’t you ask about Jesus’ birth -- especially if you were compiling a history of Christ? As a doctor, would you not be especially interested in a *virgin* birth? It is from Luke’s pen that we have the story of John the Baptist’s mute father (Zachariah) using a small wooden tablet (a “writing tablet” - πίςακίδιος) to write שְׁמוֹ יוֹחָנָן – “his name is John!” This was a miraculous moment when Zachariah’s speech was restored. It was a time of song and prophecy. It seems extremely reasonable that the little wooden tablet itself was saved, and one can easily imagine it being shown to Luke as the story was recounted.

We also see this in Luke’s style of writing. Luke used the Greek literary approach of *prosopopoieia* (προσωποποιεῖα). This means that he wrote in a style that reflected the people and the situations. When writing his gospel, he used Greek, but used it in a very Hebrew style and tone. When he wrote of Paul speaking before the Greek elite on Mars Hill in Athens, Luke used a more formal Greek style.¹⁷

Luke had access to great accounts that doubtlessly enabled him to put things in his gospel that are not found elsewhere. Only in Luke do we read of the Shepherds heralding the birth of Christ, and of the baby in the manger. Luke gives us Mary’s song of praise, “The *Magnificat*.” Only Luke tells of Zaccheus, of Jesus’ parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. It is from Luke that we learn of the ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Luke investigated, used impeccable sources, and carefully followed each line of history to give an orderly account that people could trust. This leads to our final consideration this lesson.

Why was Luke written?

¹⁷ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, at 7.

In the prologue, Luke explained he was writing an orderly account for “Theophilus.” This was to give “certainty” about the matters taught. Luke was writing the real story that belonged on the cover of Newsweek! It was not conjecture of a 21st century non-believer. It was carefully researched and meticulously prepared to give information that one could rely upon confidently. It was solid reporting. This was information that, like Paul urged the Corinthians to do if necessary, could be investigated and confirmed (1 Cor. 15:1-11).

CONCLUSION

The believing Christian cares about knowledge and truth. This is important for ideas and theology, but it is also important for facts of history. As Paul bluntly told the church at Corinth, about the historical fact of Christ’s resurrection: if it happened, then how dare we live or believe otherwise. If it did not happen, then Paul was a liar who wasted his time and deceived innumerable people who similarly wasted their lives. It is foolish to think that Christianity is simply a nice set of guidelines for life that help people make it through their days finding meaning in some false reality. That, Paul says, is a pitiful idea:

If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

We should look at Luke and in deed at the whole Bible, with eyes of faith and with minds seeking truth. Are there passages difficult to understand? I should hope so! We are reading about events that happened in a far away land, in an alien culture, over two thousand years ago, written in now dead languages to people with a different upbringing and education level. The difficult passages and the harmony with other historical sources should be seen as opportunities for study and learning, to better help us understand the beauty not only of what has transpired on earth in Christ, but also of the way God has secured the historical facts for people spanning all time and all levels of understanding. With this approach in hand, we next turn to a core understanding of *what* Luke recorded.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Jesus answered, ‘... For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the **truth**.’” (John 18:37).*

The truth about Jesus is the most important issue in human history. If Luke was right, Jesus is the resurrected Son of God who will return in power and with eternity in his hands. If Matthew was right, Jesus is the resurrected Son of God who will return to claim his church. If Mark and Peter were right, Jesus is the resurrected Son of God who appeared to his followers with a charge for evangelism and a promise to return. If John was right, Jesus was the incarnate Word of God who laid down his life for the salvation of humanity, then resurrected power to charge his disciples with a promised return for an eternal kingdom. The truth about Jesus convicted so many eyewitnesses to trade in their lives of comfort and ease for distress and martyrdom, that the church grew in spite of centuries of persecution. The question I face is what difference does this truth make to me?

2. *“He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...” (Lk. 24:45).*

God is not hard to find. For those who seek him, for those who are willing to listen and learn, he still opens minds to understand the Scriptures. The Scriptures bear witness to the One who is God and Father of us all, to the One who is the obedient Son who gave himself as written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, and to the same One who as the Holy Spirit not only ensured Scriptures existence, but opens the eyes of the human spirit to understand it. This is the offer. My take home choice is to spend my time, prayers, and energies seeking His hand to open my mind to understand His Scriptures.

3. *“...they exchanged the **truth** about God for a **lie** and worshiped and served the **creature** rather than the **Creator**.” (Rom. 1:25).*

Paul wrote of those who made other choices. Rather than worship God as the God of life and as the God of the gospel of Christ, there were people who choose to worship the creation over the Creator. These are not simply people who spend time praying to some idol or enthroning some animal as a god. This includes those who find the logic of order, the beauty of nature, the elements of the world, the design of the cosmos, or anything that emanates forth from the Father more real or more intriguing than the Father himself. The people who do this are robbing themselves of the joy of life, the joy of salvation, and the meaning of life. Instead, they become useless in their thoughts, doing nothing for the ultimate good of God’s kingdom, but living instead in futility and darkness. Of course, they never see it, and

certainly do not admit it. They think themselves so smart and so wise, never realizing or seeing the utter foolishness of their thoughts and lives. Others see it though. It changes who they are. Paul said God gives these people up to their own impurities. When we fail to acknowledge God, we are left with our own thoughts and pursuits. And those bear their barren fruit just as readily as life in God bears the Spirit's fruit. Truth is so important. I pray for real truth of God in the lives of those I know, especially those in my family and circle of life. I pray for them by name, and seek God's truth in their hearts *and* minds. I request you join me!