

## **The Gospel of Luke - Content**

### *New Testament Survey – Lesson 10 (Part 2)*

I have a case coming up for trial. It involves the shipment of some hi-tech equipment overseas in a cargo vessel. The machines were packaged in Singapore in wooden crates in preparation for shipping. After the ocean voyage, the crates were unloaded in Houston and shipped by train to the final destination. On arrival, the crates were opened, and the machines examined. Almost half of the machines were ruined by water. They were rusted and moldy. There was also standing water inside the crates.

This entire shipping process was insured. The insurance policy was there to guarantee that the machines were delivered safely and in pristine condition. The company that was selling the machines made a claim on the insurance policy, but the insurer denied payment of the claim. The insurer believes that the water came from the wood used in crating (“wet wood”) while my client thinks the water was seawater from the voyage. In the lawsuit, a jury will decide whether the policy should cover the loss or not.

As part of the suit, we have identified witnesses, we have taken statements, we have examined the evidence, and we have researched the legal issues. My job, as the one who will ultimately present this evidence to the jury, is to process all that work and put it in the most compelling light to tell the story accurately and to help the jury find rightly (and hopefully for my client). I would be a poor lawyer if I misrepresented the evidence or distorted the evidence, for I would surely be found out. I would also be a poor lawyer if I failed to seek out the pertinent evidence or failed to research the issues properly. My job is to investigate the evidence and then marshal it accurately to explain the full factual story to the jury. The jury can then decide who wins and who loses. This is the beauty of the American court system, because it grows out of the common sense recognition that thorough and accurate investigation of the facts leads to the best understanding of truth.

This is no less true for Luke. As we move from our earlier considerations of Luke’s authorship and its ramifications on his gospel and history of the church (“Luke-Acts”), we now consider how he marshaled his evidence and the presentation he made. Luke made the point that he had first hand contacts with the sources for his writings. His history shows that he spent time with not only the other apostles, but undoubtedly many other believers and disciples from the time of Jesus on earth. He also had Mark’s writings and had spent extended personal

time on mission trips with Mark and Paul.<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that we see in Luke-Acts the fruits of this background. We see Luke using Mark's gospel in places, occasionally making valid and honest modifications that better sculpt his end product. We also find in his writings things that are not found in any of the other gospels. This is, of course, to be expected since his work stems from personal investigation, and not merely copying the works of others (Luke 1:1-4).

As we look at the content of Luke's gospel, rather than simply repeat the material found in the other gospels, we will focus on the things that make Luke unique among the gospels. In that light, let us consider the evidence that Luke marshaled to "give certainty" to his readers about the "things you have been taught" (Lk 1:4).

## **LUKE - CONTENT**

We noted in the lesson on the synoptic phenomenon that Luke has material found in Matthew, in Mark, in both Matthew and Mark, as well as material found nowhere else. Statistically, about 41 percent of Luke is found in Mark while 23 percent is found solely in Matthew. That leaves about 35 percent of Luke's content that is found nowhere else. Among the many unique features of Luke, several readily stand out and are featured here. First, we note that Luke inserts five songs and a number of stories and parables not found elsewhere. Luke also orders his material in general conformance with Matthew and Mark, but with important differences. This literary structure of Luke is something to behold in its beauty and balance.

### ***The Songs in Luke***

Luke gives us four songs that are not found elsewhere in the Bible. All of these are found in the first two chapters in the narratives surrounding the birth and infancy of Jesus. These songs are embedded in the narrative almost like songs in a modern musical. They seem to punctuate and often explain or underscore what has happened in the narrative. We will look at these songs in the flow of Luke chapters one and two. As we consider the narrative and songs, we are served well by thinking about the fun Luke likely had in learning these stories and songs firsthand. These are songs that date from the infancy of Christ. Doubtlessly, these songs would have been sung and recited in the early church, not unlike their usage in the church through the ages. These were songs that would have naturally surfaced in Luke's work and investigation in Jerusalem in the early days.

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<sup>1</sup> For this background, see the introductory lesson on Luke as well as the lesson on the Synoptic Phenomenon, both available for download at [www.Biblical-Literacy.com](http://www.Biblical-Literacy.com).

(1) *The Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55)

After introducing his work, Luke began his gospel with the angel Gabriel speaking to the priest Zechariah (a name meaning “YHWH remembered”) telling him that God was answering his prayers and that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son. The son was going to be special, with an endowment of the Holy Spirit and a calling on his life similar to that of the great Old Testament prophet Elijah. Zechariah thought this unlikely because he and Elizabeth seemed too old for such things! As a sign, Zechariah was struck deaf and mute, a condition set to last for a while. After his time of serving in the temple ended, Zechariah went home. Soon afterwards his wife conceived a child. For five months, Elizabeth hid her pregnancy.

With Elizabeth in her sixth month of pregnancy, the narrative shifts to Elizabeth’s cousin Mary, a virgin in the “betrothal” stage of marriage to Joseph.<sup>2</sup> The same angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, and, after calming her initial fears, informed her that in spite of her virginity, the Holy Spirit would cause her to conceive and give birth to a son. This stunned her, and still stuns many today. There is a group of scholars who see this as impossible, and beyond the scope of God’s powers! Of course, one must wonder what kind of God, if any, such people believe in, if they strip him of this ability. Similarly, those who find fault with Luke’s account of what happened because it does not happen today must be reckoned out of touch. Luke was not reporting the ordinary course of business. This was a one time in the history of the universe incarnation. It was, and still is, the most outrageous, bizarre, and mysterious thing possible. God becoming man! Mary was properly stunned and did not know *what* was going on, until she went to see her cousin Elizabeth.

When Mary came into Elizabeth and Zechariah’s house, the baby inside Elizabeth jumped for joy. Before being told what happened, Elizabeth prophetically proclaimed to Mary, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should

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<sup>2</sup> In New Testament times, a Jewish wedding was a two-stage process. First, the man paid a bride price (*mohar* – מֹהָר) as part of the formal agreement to marry. After this, the woman often continued to live at home, but she was publically considered a “wife” even though the marriage was not yet finalized or consummated. During this time, the “husband” had certain legal rights and the engagement or betrothal could not be dissolved except by divorce. Sexual activity by either party during this time period was considered adultery. There are a number of citations in the *Mishna* that help put this entire cultural picture together. See the references at Fitzmyer, Joseph, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*, (Doubleday 1981), at 343, 344.

come to me?” (Luke 1:43-44).<sup>3</sup> Here Luke punctuates the story with the first song in his narrative, *The Magnificat*.

My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.  
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
And his mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;  
he has brought down the mighty from their thrones  
and exalted those of humble estate;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

The word “*Magnificat*” is the Latin word that begins the song of Mary in the Latin translation of the Bible.<sup>4</sup> It means, “to make great” or “magnify.” The Greek word used by Luke was *μεγαλυνει* (*megalunein*) carrying the same idea of enlarging, magnifying, or boasting. The song is one where Mary is overcome with worship and praise for God, so in the Greek (and Latin) the first word is this “Magnifies.” It reads in Luke’s word order: “MAGNIFIES – my soul – the Lord;

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<sup>3</sup> Some scholars believe there are five songs in Luke. They note that Elizabeth’s praise is an elevated prose that should be considered and understood as a hymn or song. Others disagree and consider it simply articulate prose. In favor of a hymn see, Hendriksen, William, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, (Baker 1978), at 95; Plummer, Alfred, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, (T&T Clark 1896), at 27. Against this passage as a hymn see, Bock, Darrell, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke*, (Baker 1994) Vol 1 at 136; Fitzmyer, at 358. The middle ground is staked out in Marshall, I. Howard, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: Commentary on Luke*, (Eerdmans 1978), at 81.

<sup>4</sup> One of the most brilliant biblical scholars in the early church was Jerome (c. 346 -420). As a young man, Jerome studied under the preeminent Latin scholars/teachers of the first thousand years after Christ (“Donatus”). Jerome was well suited to the task of translating the Bible from its Hebrew and Greek into the Latin language of his day. His version of the Bible (called “The Vulgate,” after the Latin word for “common”) was the church’s main Bible for a thousand years. It is from Jerome’s translation that these Latin titles were garnered from the text.

and REJOICES – my spirit — in God my Savior.” From there the word order shifts. In the succeeding verses, the subject and verb are placed first in each clause to emphasize what *God* has done. The English shows this in its translation:

- *He* has looked on the humble estate of his servant
- *He* who is mighty has done great things
- *His* mercy is for those who fear him
- *He* has shown strength
- *He* has brought down the mighty
- *He* has filled the hungry
- *He* has helped his servant

Luke does not tell us that this song proceeded forth from Mary’s lips spontaneously. She could have written it that day, that week, or even in the coming months. Some object that an ordinary country girl of perhaps fourteen would not have been able to write such a marvelous hymn of praise and thanksgiving. Of course, Mary was no ordinary girl! Moreover, we can readily identify elements of this song from Old Testament passages likely well known to this young Jewess. The first clause echoes the Psalms that repeatedly speak in similar terminology of one rejoicing in God and his salvation (Ps. 9:14; 16:9; 31:7; *etc.*). A careful reading of *The Magnificat* also shows ready similarities to the song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel found in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. The idea of a relationship between the two seems to bother some scholars, as if it detracts from the originality or truth of the song. But it really should not. Anyone who has had a young teenage daughter (I have had four) would expect her to draw words from another similar song as she strove to express her own heart and feelings. Consider the bold printed phrases below, and see echoes of Hannah’s song in Mary’s:

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**Selections from Hannah's song  
(1 Samuel 2:1-10)**

**My heart exults in the Lord;**  
my horn is exalted in the Lord.  
My mouth derides my enemies,  
because I **rejoice in your salvation.**

...

**Talk no more so very proudly,**  
let not arrogance come from your mouth;

...

The **bows of the mighty are broken,**  
**but the feeble bind on strength.**

**Those who were full have hired themselves out  
for bread,**  
but **those who were hungry have ceased to  
hunger.**

...

The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;  
**he will give strength to his king**  
and exalt the horn of his anointed.

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**Selections from Mary's song  
(Luke 2:1-10)**

**My soul magnifies the Lord,**  
and **my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,**  
for he has looked on the humble estate of his  
servant.

...

He has shown strength with his arm;  
**he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of  
their hearts;**

**he has brought down the mighty** from their  
thrones

and **exalted those of humble estate;**

**he has filled the hungry with good things,**  
and **the rich he has sent away empty.**

**He has helped his servant Israel,**  
in remembrance of his mercy,

as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

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Luke used *The Magnificat* to punctuate the narrative, and one suspects that it was being sung in the early church. Luke does not, however, stop there. Luke resumed his unique historical account with the birth of John the Baptist.

(2) *Benedictus* (Luke 1:67-79)

Luke wrote of Elizabeth giving birth to her son. For nine months, Zechariah, the father, had remained deaf and mute (since his interaction with Gabriel). His communication with people was largely through hand signals and writing on a *pinakidion* (πινακιδιον) or a small wooden writing tablet. As accorded tradition, the son was circumcised on the eighth day, which was also the day to give him his assigned name. All involved wanted to call him Zechariah after his father, but Elizabeth was insisting the child be named

*Yochanan* (יהוחנן), or in English, "John." When the people signaled Zechariah to indicate his decision on naming, he took a *pinakidion* and wrote יהוחנן שמו, "His name is John." After this, another miracle occurred. Zechariah's speech and hearing were restored! Everyone was stunned to hear him begin praising God. The whole affair reflected on the child, and the friends and family all wondered what kind of a special child he would be!



A typical *pinakidion*  
found by  
archaeologists

Here again, almost like a modern musical, Luke's drama is punctuated by Zechariah breaking into song. We should again add that Luke did not say that the

final song was an impromptu composition. It might have been worked on in form as it filled out over Zechariah's reflection.<sup>5</sup> But the song was a prophetic one, given substance by the Holy Spirit as Zechariah publicly declared the handiwork of God:

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people  
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we should be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us;  
to show the mercy promised to our fathers  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us  
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him  
without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
in the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

This song is traditionally called “*Benedictus*,” which is the first word in the Latin version of the song. It translates the Greek “*eulogetos*” (εθλογητος) and the Hebrew *baruch* (ברוך). The song is a strong prophetic word. It begins blessing God for keeping his promise to Abraham and bringing redemption for his people. God's strong hand of mercy was moving, and the child John would play an integral role. He would prepare the way for YHWH. Here was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (“A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD.’” Is. 40:3). God's tender mercy was coming to give light to the world. Peace was coming to earth! Luke then made the tie to Isaiah clearer by pointing out that as John grew, he “became strong in spirit” and “was in the wilderness” until his public ministry began.

(3) *Gloria* (Luke 2:13-14)

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<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Bock at 174-175.

Luke shifted his narrative then to the birth of Jesus. He placed it chronologically to a decree of Caesar Augustus to register “all the world.”<sup>6</sup> Joseph and Mary left Nazareth to register in Bethlehem. On arrival, they found no room at the inn<sup>7</sup>, so they stayed in a manger (a feeding area for animals<sup>8</sup>) where Mary gave birth to Jesus. In that region, an angel visited some shepherds that were in a nearby field watching over their flocks. The glory of God shone brightly around the scene and the shepherds were scared. The angel urged the shepherds not to fear – God was at work, and a baby was born who would be Messiah and Savior to the people. At this, the shepherds saw a glimpse of the heavenly hosts who were singing a praise hymn to God:

“Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

Like the songs before, the centuries of the church using Latin as its core Scriptures have given this song a Latin name derived from its first word: *Gloria*. In this short refrain, the angelic host declared the scene from both a heavenly and earthly perspective. In heaven there was praise to God, while on earth, peace was coming. This “peace” was in the best sense of Hebrew *shalom* (שלום). It was not a cessation of wars among men. It was a restored relationship between man and God!

#### (4) *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:29-32)

Luke does not add the story of the wise men or Herod’s subsequent anger and the flight into Egypt.<sup>9</sup> Instead, Luke focused on the positive events of the good news.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke’s term “all the world” is a phrase that typically meant all of the Roman Empire (*pasan ten oikoumenen* – *πασαν την οικουμενην*). It might also be a hyperbolic expression meaning a great bit of the Roman Empire to the extent that the Greek “all” often means “a lot!” For example, when Luke wrote that John the Baptist went in “all” the region around the Jordan, he certainly did not mean every square inch (Lk. 3:3). Similarly when Luke wrote that “all” the people were questioning in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah, he certainly did not mean every single person (Lk. 3:15). We know of Augustus’s censuses in Gaul, Cyrene, and Egypt from Tacitus, *Annals* 1.11, 31, 33 and Dio Cassius, 53.30.2, but as of now there is no extra-biblical record that helps us date an Augustan census in Judea.

<sup>7</sup> The Greek *kataluma* (καταλυμα) ordinarily means a guest room, and was likely a reference to room at a relative’s house.

<sup>8</sup> The word for “manger” may mean a “feeding trough,” but it was also used as a reference to the area for the animals.

<sup>9</sup> We need to not think of Luke as writing to satisfy our questions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He wrote as others would have in his day. Toward that end, scholars frequently cite the rhetorician Lucian (c. 125 – 180AD) for his comments from his work, *How to Write History*: “You should pass quickly over the trivial and unnecessary, and develop the significant points at adequate length. Much



This was a time that Mary “treasured up” what was happening. She was “pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). Jesus was circumcised at the appropriate time (eight days) and given the name *Yeshua* (ישוע) meaning “YHWH is salvation.” 33 days later (before the trip to Egypt), it was time for Mary’s post-birth purification (Lev. 12). The family made the roughly five-mile journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem for the temple ritual. This was also the time to present Jesus as the first-born.

In Jerusalem, a holy and devout man named Simeon had received a prophetic revelation that he would live to see the Messiah. When Simeon saw the forty-day-old Jesus, Simeon “came into the spirit,” and took the baby in his arms blessing God in song:

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation  
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

In the Latin version, and in Luke’s Greek original, the word order is slightly different than reflected in our English translations. The original begins, “Now [you are] releasing your servant.” In Latin this is *Nunc* (“Now”) *dimittis* (“you are dismissing” or “releasing”), hence the traditional church name of this song. Simeon realizes he has hit the high point of his life! Now he is ready to die!

This song reflects Simeon was not only used by God to prophesy, but he was also a student of the Prophets (at least Isaiah). He has seen and held the “salvation” God had prepared not only for his people (the Jews), but also for the entire world. The Messiah was a light for revelation to the Gentiles, echoing Isaiah 42:7 and 49:6, as well as for glory to Israel, echoing Isaiah 46:13.

Simeon then turned his attention to Mary and Joseph and prophesied that Jesus would both bring down and lift up many in Israel. Jesus would live to be persecuted, and in his life there would be a devastating effect on Mary: “a sword will pierce through your own soul also” (Lk 2:35). This event was fulfilled when Mary watched her son die on the cross. Luke then noted that Jesus grew up with

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must be omitted. After all, if you are giving a dinner to your friends and everything is ready, you don’t put salt fish and porridge on the table in the midst of the cakes, poultry, entrees, wild boar, hare, and choice cuts of fish, simply because they are ready too! You forget the cheaper articles altogether” (at 56).

his family in Nazareth. Luke does add the story about Jesus' trip to the temple when he was around twelve years of age.

### *Unique Stories and Parables in Luke*

As noted earlier, one would naturally expect Luke's investigation to have uncovered many events and stories beyond those previously written in Mark's gospel. We see such stories in Luke's gospel. We also see many of Christ's teachings in Luke, some of which were undoubtedly in Matthew's notes, but others that were provided by other eyewitnesses.<sup>10</sup> We will not discuss all of the unique details provided by Luke, but will consider some of the more noteworthy material.

#### *The Infancy and Boyhood Material (Luke 1-2)*

All of the first two chapters of Luke are unique. The foretelling of the births of Jesus and John, the appearance of Gabriel, Mary's interactions with Elizabeth, the songs and birthing narratives, the circumcision and presentation at the temple, the return to Nazareth and the visit of Jesus to the temple at age 12, all of these events are found exclusively in Luke's narrative. No other gospel writer told stories of Jesus' boyhood days.

#### *The Woes (Luke 6:24-26)*

Luke recounted the beatitudes in the sermon excerpts of Jesus found in Luke 6:20-23. Unlike Matthew, however, Luke then inserted certain "woes" taught by Jesus. The woes are in a form like the beatitudes, but in substance convey the opposite. So while the beatitudes pronounce blessings to those who are poor, hungry, sorrowful, and hated, the woes pronounce the inverse to those who are rich, sated, condescending, and loved. This is a typical approach found in Luke's writings. Luke's writing style is inverted, as we will see below, and a key theme of Luke is the great reversal occurring in the world. The humble are going to be esteemed (Lk 1:48). The mighty are brought down and the humble exalted (Lk 1:52). The hungry are filled and the rich become empty (Lk 1:53). The first are becoming the last and the last the first (Lk 13:30). The exalted will be humbled and the humbled exalted (Lk 14:11; 18:14). Over and over in Luke we see God welcomes the outcasts of the world. It is not surprising then that Luke included these woes that

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<sup>10</sup> Some scholars give an initial "L" to the "source material" used by Luke that is outside the scope of Mark and Matthew, especially that which is not a "saying" of Jesus. This seems a bit fruitless if one believes that Luke truly searched out eyewitnesses as he claimed. The "L" sources are the eyewitnesses interviewed by Luke, not simply some regurgitation or remolding of some unknown prior collector of stories.

set up the opposite of the blessings. It also explains why Luke includes only a set of four blessings to complement the four woes rather than Matthew's fuller list:

## Blessings and Woes in Contrast

### Blessed:

- **Poor** => get kingdom of heaven
- **Hungry** => get satisfied
- **Weeping** => will laugh
- **Hated** => a great reward in heaven

### Woes:

- **Rich** => already got theirs
- **Full** => will be hungry
- **Laughing** => will mourn and weep
- **Spoken of highly** => treated like false prophets

*The Women Additions (Luke 7:11-8:3; 10:38-42; 11:28-28; 13:10-17; 23:27-31)*

Hand in hand with Luke's theme of "reversals" noted in the section above is his ready emphasis on God's love and concern for the outsiders of the world. Among those, in the culture of the New Testament era, were women. Culturally men had little to nothing to do with women outside of their family. But not so Jesus! Luke adds a number of stories to show the care and compassion Jesus had toward the women he came across. There are certainly stories to that effect in Matthew and Mark, but Luke adds a number not found in the other gospels.

In Luke 7:11-17, Jesus raises from the dead the only son of a widow in the town of Nain. As is typical of Luke, he provides the details that would allow one to check on the story. A church was built on that spot, likely quite early. Even into the 300's a Spanish pilgrim named Egeria visited the church at Nain built from the widow's house.<sup>11</sup> By identifying the location, Luke gave the necessary information for people to check out his story.

Following that story, Luke told of Jesus eating at the home of a Pharisee when a woman from the city (known to be a "sinner") came to the home with an alabaster flask of ointment for Jesus. She washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and anointed him with the ointment. The Pharisee thought to himself that if Jesus were truly a prophet, then he would know the reputation of the woman. Jesus then responded to the Pharisee, and in his response, Luke tells us the Pharisee's name:

"Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

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<sup>11</sup> Strange, James, "Nain," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (Doubleday 1992), Vol. 4, at 1001.

Jesus asked Simon who would have the greater appreciation for a lender, someone forgiven a small debt or someone forgiven a large one. Simon correctly answered the one forgiven much. Jesus then pointed out the difference in the way the woman treated him (tears, ointment, *etc.*) and that of Simon (nothing beyond the meal). Jesus then announced a forgiveness of the woman's sins, to the stunning amazement of the crowd. On the heels of this story, Luke gave the identity of a number of women who accompanied Jesus on his continued ministry (Luke 8:1-3).

Reading these accounts, it is easy to think through how Luke heard so many of these stories firsthand. As a physician, he would have a natural history of talking to women, something taboo to so many Jewish men of the day. But of course, women needed doctors just as much as men, and Luke would have plenty of history interacting with them. It would not be strange to him.

We can see another story unique to Luke's history in Luke 10:38-42. This somewhat humorous story taught a valid lesson, even as it made an important point. It is the story of Martha and Mary, two sisters who were active in Jesus' ministry. Jesus went to their home and Mary sat listening to Jesus' teaching while Martha was busy with service. Martha called on Jesus to make Mary do her share of the work, but Jesus instead gently teased Martha!

But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

There is a short insert in Luke 11:27-28 that also illustrated the recognition that Jesus had for women. As Jesus was teaching, a woman in the crowd shouted out a blessing on Jesus. Jesus did not ignore the woman, but used her blessing as a chance to urge people to hear the word of God and follow it.

In Luke 13:10-17 Luke told of Jesus healing a woman who had suffered a disabling disease. For 18 years this woman was not able to stand up straight. Jesus healed her while he was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. The synagogue leader was upset, considering that a violation of the Sabbath. Jesus was blunt in his response,

"You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

This truth shamed those in judgment of Jesus, even as it excited and brought rejoicing among the masses.

The final insert of Luke that highlighted Jesus' interaction with women occurred on the road to Calvary. The cross had been moved from the shoulders of Jesus to those of Simon the Cyrene (another whose identity was provided to allow for checking of the story). The fatigued, beaten, sleepless, bleeding, and humiliated Messiah still noticed the tearful women following him. He turned to them and warned them of times to come that would be harsh on them and their children. Jesus was walking his road and would endure. They had worse days coming. Of course, not even Luke knew the dreadful truth of that statement as it would come about in the Roman occupation of Jerusalem and the battle of Masada in just a few years.<sup>12</sup>

*The Additional Parables in Luke (Luke 10:25-37; 11:5-8; 12:13-21; 13:1-4; 14:7-11, 12-14; 15:8-10, 11-32; 16:1-9, 19-31; 18:1-8, 9-14)*

Luke inserted a number of Jesus' parables not found in Matthew or Mark. Several of these have become the most famous and instructive parables of Jesus' ministry. The first parable found only in Luke is the Parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37. A lawyer who believed himself a really good guy prompted the parable. The lawyer put Jesus to the test, but wound up registering his own failing grade! The lawyer quizzed Jesus on what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked the man what he understood the law said. The man rightly answered, to love God fully and to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus told the lawyer he got the question right, and if he would do that he would be in the kingdom. While the man should have contemplated the level of trust and faith involved in loving God fully and living out a life of faith in loving others, he chose another route instead. The man pushed Jesus further, trying to determine just how far he had to extend his love:

But he, desiring to justify himself [never a good idea!], said to Jesus, 'Who is my neighbor?'

In response Jesus told the story of a man beaten, robbed, and left for dead on the road to Jericho. A priest and a Levite passed the man offering no aid. It was a

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<sup>12</sup> There is a great deal of discussion among scholars about the dates of Luke-Acts. Generally the arguments are built on Luke's reliance on Mark. The more skeptical scholars date Mark *after* the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, forcing a date of Luke after as well. This is because of a refusal to accept that Jesus might have been able to prophesy accurately about the fall. I agree with the scholars that place Luke before 62 AD. Acts cuts off around 62 AD and as much interest as Luke put into Paul, it seems unlikely that he would not have finished the story on Paul if he was writing much later than Paul's death. Furthermore, we see Luke's ready expansion of material in the last few years before the end of Acts, as one might expect in one who was seeing that there was more room to fill a scroll. This is also consistent with anyone who finds the more recent events in life easier to write more fully than events decades earlier.

Samaritan who stopped and ministered to the wounded man. Jesus then asked the lawyer who was the neighbor to the hurt fellow. Of course, it was obviously the Samaritan who showed mercy. Jesus instructed the lawyer to live likewise. The cultural issue would not be lost on the lawyer, nor on any first century Jew. The hatred and disgust between Samaritans and Jews were replete. This was, like much of Luke, every-day reality turned upside down!

In Luke 11:5-8 Jesus asked a parable type fact question after Luke's rendition of Jesus teaching his disciples how to pray. In the question, Jesus asked the followers what they would do if they had a friend awaken them at midnight seeking bread to feed some unexpected guests. If for no other reason than the audacity of knocking at midnight<sup>13</sup>, most people would give the bread. Jesus then pointed out that God will much more readily meet the needs of his children!

In Luke 12:13-21 Jesus told the Parable of the Rich Fool. This parable came about when an anonymous crowd member asked Jesus to weigh in on a family dispute over money and inheritance. Jesus told the crowd about the foolish rich man who planned to store up increasing treasures in ever-larger barns, relaxing fully satisfied over his plans, yet not realizing he would die that very night. Jesus pointed the crowd to the importance of priorities in establishing life's values.

Luke 13:1-4 relates Jesus talking about those who were killed by Pilate and others who died in an accident when a tower fell on them. These current events were good reminders of the coming judgment on those who would not turn their heart to God. This plea came with a parable that taught that such opportunities to repent are available for a season. The parable concerned a man who planted a fig tree in his yard. The tree was barren for three years, and the man was going to have it cut down. His vinedresser urged waiting one more year, hoping that adding some fertilizer might make the tree give fruit.

In Luke 14, Jesus first heals a man with dropsy on the Sabbath. As on other such occasions, the fact he did so on the Sabbath upset many of the self-righteous. Luke tied to this story two parables about banquets. In the first, Jesus explained through a parable that when invited to a function, one should assume a seat in the lowest place allowing one to be moved to a place of higher honor should the occasion call for it. Jesus contrasted this to sitting in and assuming a place of honor and being asked to move further away. A similar contrast of opposites was drawn in the next parable where Jesus urged his followers to invite the outcasts,

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<sup>13</sup> Luke is famous for using Greek words that are found nowhere else in the Bible. His vocabulary is extensive. One of those words is used here. The English Standard Version translates Luke's word *anaideia* (αναιδεια) as "impudence." In ancient Greek literature, the word conveyed the idea of an action that was "insensitive to what was proper."

the poor, and those unable to repay the blessing. That is the right approach for the faithful who live for eternity rather than the moment.

Luke 15 has two parables not included in the other gospels. The first is the Parable of the Lost Coin. It centered on the efforts and reaction of a woman who had ten coins but lost one in her home. She worked diligently to find it and celebrated once she did. Jesus pointed out heaven's rejoicing over even one sinner who repents. The second parable may be the most famous of all Jesus' parables. It is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. A father of two sons had the younger seek out his inheritance early. The father gave it, and the younger son left home. Living off the inheritance, the son ruined his life. Once the money ran out, the young man had no income, no job, and no joy. He lived among the pigs he fed; soberly noticing the pigs had better food than he did. Finally coming to his senses, the son decided to return home and seek a job working for his father. His father treated his slaves better than the life the son had. As the son drew near to the house, his father recognized him. The father ran to the son and over the son's apology and repentance, blessed the son with full restoration to his place in the family. The older brother was disgruntled, giving the father a chance to lovingly explain the importance of love and restoration.

In Luke 16, we again have two parables unique to Luke. Verses one through nine give us the Parable of the Dishonest Manager, one of the most difficult parables to understand. It concerns a dishonest manager of a master's property. The master finds out the manager was cheating him and fires the manager. Before leaving, the manager calls in a number of people who owed money to the master and cut their bills in half. The manager was doing this to make friends with the debtors in hopes they would repay his friendship once he was kicked out. The master then commended his dishonest manager for such shrewd decisions. This parable is difficult, and perhaps this is a parable used to teach a sharply focused lesson.<sup>14</sup> One lesson Jesus draws from this parable was the praise to the manager for taking strong action. The coming of Christ forces decisions upon those confronted with his claims of truth. People need to make the right decisions. If even dishonest people of the world know how to make wise decisions taking decisive action, the followers of Jesus should even more.<sup>15</sup>

The second parable in chapter 16 concerns a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. The rich man had food aplenty, the latest fashions for clothing, and a fine gated home. In typical Lukan fashion, Lazarus was the antithesis. He was

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<sup>14</sup> See the lesson on Parables at [www.Biblical-Literacy.com](http://www.Biblical-Literacy.com).

<sup>15</sup> Morris, Leon, *Luke – An Introduction and Commentary* (IVP 1974), at 245. There is a plethora of interpretations of this difficult parable. For a full discussion, see, Marshall at 614ff.

poor, starving, clothed in sores, and homeless. Both died. The poor Lazarus went to Abraham's bosom, carried by angels. The rich man went to Hades in torment. The rich man in his misery called out for Abraham's mercy. The mercy was impossible. The rich man then asked for an angel to warn his brothers of the consequences of their lifestyles. Abraham said if the men would not listen to Moses or the prophets, they would not listen to even a man who rose from the dead.<sup>16</sup>

In Luke 18:1-8, Luke told the story of Jesus' Parable of the Persistent Widow. In the story, a widow went before an unrighteous judge seeking justice. The judge at first refused, but the widow continued to come, time after time. Finally the judge relented, just to stop the woman from coming any more. This parable was to instill in the disciples the need to pray continually and not lose heart over any delay in an answer.

The final parable unique to Luke is found in Luke 18:9-14. This parable was to counter those who thought of themselves as righteous on their own – those “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous.” In the parable, two men go into the temple to pray. The first was a self-righteous Pharisee who prayed,

God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.

The second man was a tax collector, which was a category of men considered as sinful as prostitutes in that day. The tax collector prayed in stark contrast to the first. He stood far away from the crowds, his head bowed in shame, and beating his chest in sorrow prayed,

God, be merciful to me, a sinner!

Jesus taught that God justified the tax collector, but not the Pharisee.

*The Mission of Jesus in Luke (Luke 9:51-56; 10:1-2, 17-20; 17:7-10; 19:1-10, 41-44)*

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<sup>16</sup> This parable was told by Christ and written by Luke before John wrote his gospel. One must wonder if this parable prompted John to record Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead – a feat that did not convince the masses! (John 11). Of course, if Jesus had already raised Lazarus from the dead at the time Jesus told this parable, naming the poor man in the parable has even more impact. This seems especially likely as this is the only parable where Jesus named one of the characters.



As we consider Luke and Acts as one project of Luke, we are not surprised to see in the gospel an emphasis from Jesus on the importance of missionary work. Of course this is seen in the other gospels as well (the “Great Commission” for starters), but Luke adds emphasis missing in the others.

In Luke 9:51-56 Jesus was not received in a Samaritan village. James and John were ready to call down heaven’s fire in judgment. Jesus rebuked them for such a reaction!

In Luke 10, we read of Jesus sending out 72 disciples in groups of two for mission work. He gave them authority to heal in his name. The disciples came back from the mission overjoyed and in awe,

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!”

Jesus commended their work, but added that what should overjoy them was not their authority over Satan, but their security in Christ! One wonders which of the 72 were still alive and able to visit with Luke in the decades after this when he was researching for his book.

In Luke 17:7-10 Luke recorded Jesus driving home the point that we are to be grateful to God rather than expectant. God does not *owe* us anything. He gives to us out of his love. Luke then recorded the story of Jesus healing ten lepers, and only one leper came back to express gratitude. The others accepted the healing and went away as if owed. Luke pointed out the one that was grateful was a Samaritan!

Among the mission-minded stories of Luke we might add the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10. This man so carefully named by Luke perhaps had the joyful opportunity of telling Luke the story firsthand. Zacchaeus was a rich man who was a chief tax collector (not like Matthew who was much lower on the tax collector totem pole!). Zacchaeus was a short fellow who heard that Jesus was coming by, but was concerned he would not be able to see Jesus through the crowd. So he climbed a tree to catch a glimpse. Jesus paused and called Zacchaeus down proclaiming, “I must stay at your house today!” Jesus did so, and it was a life changing experience for this short tax collector. He gave half of all he had to the poor, and he repaid all he had cheated with interest. He met Jesus, and it changed his life.

Jesus’ mission heart was not only for the outsiders; he had a heart for Jerusalem, too. In Luke 19:41-44, Luke records Jesus crying over Jerusalem and the coming cataclysm that would occur.

*Luke's Post-Resurrection Additions (Luke 24:12, 13-35, 36-43, 44-49, 50-53)*

Luke, as a missionary companion of Paul, certainly was aware of the crux of Paul's gospel – the physical resurrection of Jesus. It was what gave Paul's message meaning, and what gave Paul purpose and motivation in life. With it, every part of life is worthwhile and significant. Without it, Christians are the chiefs of fools who are wasting each breath (1 Cor. 15). It is not surprising that Luke gave further details about the resurrection of Jesus, giving names, locations and other verifiable data in the process. The first eleven verses of Luke 24 recount, in similar fashion to Matthew and Mark, the women at the empty tomb on Easter morning. Beginning with verse twelve and going to the end of his first volume, Luke adds fresh material to the resurrection.

In Luke 24:12, Luke added that Peter made it a point to go look in the tomb himself, verifying it was empty. Peter saw the linen clothes that had wrapped Jesus, but otherwise the tomb was vacant. Peter was not immediately convinced of the resurrection, but he did go home “marveling” at the whole affair. The Greek word Luke chose for “marveling” (*thaumazo* – θαυμιζω) means to have a strong internal reaction to something. It might mean you are disturbed, or it might mean you are impressed. The context must inform you about what the reaction is. Luke's context does not indicate firmly one way or another, so it is safe to assume that Peter was startled, and the thoughts of what might have happened were replaying in his head. This is a natural segue for the next appearance, one that was at first unclear but grew clearer in time.

The next appearance is often referenced by where it happened, on the “road to Emmaus.” It was still resurrection Sunday when two people, Luke names Cleopas as one of them giving us a reference point to verify the story, are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Scholars are uncertain on the location of Emmaus, but it was about seven miles from Jerusalem (Lk. 24:14). While walking, they were discussing the bizarre events of the weekend. Jesus drew near them on the road, but “their eyes were kept from recognizing him.” He began quizzing them about their conversation. Cleopas was stunned that someone had been in Jerusalem and was not aware of the recent events. The two began relating the story of “Jesus of Nazareth,” still seeing him as simply a “prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.” They then recounted how the leaders had Jesus crucified three days earlier, to the dismay of so many who had thought Jesus was the earthly redemption of Israel. The most riveting part of the affair they saved till last. They explained that some female disciples of Jesus had been to the tomb that very morning. They found the tomb empty, but there were angels who told them Jesus was alive! Others went and checked (Peter at least) and confirmed the empty tomb.

At this point, Jesus interrupted them. He began with Moses and walked through the prophets explaining the prophetic promises that were fulfilled in their midst. They were no doubt stunned, because as they reached their village, they implored Jesus to stop and stay with them the night. Jesus stopped and they had dinner together. As dinner began, in language harkening back to the Lord's Supper, Jesus "took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them." At this point, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him! He then vanished from their sight. They replayed the events over, amazed that they failed to understand it was him while he was teaching them. Even though it was late and dangerous, they put back on their traveling clothes and made the journey back to Jerusalem that very night. They found the apostles (minus Judas) gathered together and informed them of the events. The apostles said that it was true that Jesus was indeed raised from the grave. Jesus had also appeared to Peter at that point.

In the middle of this meeting, Jesus suddenly appeared before all of them. They were understandably startled and even frightened. They thought they were seeing an apparition or spirit until Jesus told them to touch him. He pointed out his hands and feet, which still bore the scars of the nails. He was indeed flesh and bones! Here again Luke uses the word translated "marveling" (*thaumazo* – θαυμάζω). Their internal reaction was one of joy mixed with disbelief. Jesus pressed the truth further by asking for something to eat! They gave him a piece of fish, which he then ate before their eyes. No apparition eats fish!

Jesus then spent time explaining to the entire group the prophetic truth of the Old Testament teaching about his life, ministry, death, and resurrection. He "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" and designated them his witnesses to the ends of the earth. But importantly, he told them to stay in the city until the coming of the Holy Spirit. They all went out to Bethany (on the east side of the Mount of Olives just outside the eastern gates of Jerusalem and across the Kidron ravine.) Jesus then blessed his disciples and "was carried up into heaven." Here Luke stopped his first volume as he ran out of scroll length, and the narrative continued in his volume two, "The Acts of the Apostles."

### ***The Literary Structure and Style of Luke***

To best understand this section, a short review of Greek is helpful.<sup>17</sup> Greek is one of the three oldest Indo-European languages (with Hittite and Sanskrit) dating in usage back to the third millennium BC. Amazingly, this language is still in use, although it has changed much over the last 4,000 plus years! We have Greek writings that date to 1400 BC. From these writings, we can easily trace the changes

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<sup>17</sup> Much of this material is found with appropriate footnotes in Caragounis, Chrys, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, (Baker 2004).

in Greek, and scholars have used these changes to divide Greek into “types” based on periods of time and location. The first is called “Mycenaean” or “Linear B” Greek. We have only a handful of inscriptions of this ancient phase of the language dated generally to the 15<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. Our next group of extant writings allows scholars to date a phase of Greek from roughly 800 – 500 BC. (There is a gap of 400 years where we have no Greek writings discovered yet). This is called “Archaic” or “Epic” Greek. It is the Greek that has utilized a new alphabet, inherited from the seagoing Phoenicians. The most famous writings from this era are Homer’s.<sup>18</sup> Scholars subdivide the Greek of Homer’s day into dialects, with different minor sounds and rules. We frequently find the different dialects used in different types of writing. Ionic was used in epic poetry like Homer. The Greek “Classical” period is generally dated from 500 to 300 BC. Scholars reckon this as the date of “highest perfection” of the ancient Greek language. I reckon it as the date of “the most complicated Greek!”<sup>19</sup>

After Alexander the Great conquered most of the known world, he took the Greek language and culture with him. This set up what scholars term the “Post-Classical” phase of Greek. It is commonly called “Hellenistic” or “Koine” Greek by scholars today. It was a much simpler form of Greek with less convoluted sentences, more akin to what was spoken. But good Greeks still used the more formal fashion of Attic (Classical) Greek in many of their literary works. Examples of this are found in the writings of Luke’s contemporary Plutarch (46-120 AD).

Understanding the history of the Greek language is important in Biblical studies, because historically some have tried to interpret the New Testament using Classical Greek, Jewish Greek, or what some have termed “Holy Ghost Greek.” In truth, it is Koine Greek, a type of Greek for which we have a great deal of material to aid us in our understanding. The New Testament Greek is, by and large, the common Greek of speaking at the time of the early church. It would be most easily read and understood by the masses. Luke, however, in places marks a bit of a divergence from other New Testament writers.

Much has been written about Luke’s literary structure. In our earlier lesson, we considered the literary style of Luke, noting scholars’ appreciation for Luke’s ability to write beautiful Greek, as well as Greek that reflected the occasions of the stories. (For example, writing Greek that maintained the Hebrew/Aramaic

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<sup>18</sup> Scholars subdivide the Greek of Homer’s day into dialects, with different minor sounds and rules. We frequently find the different dialects used in different types of writing. Ionic was used in epic poetry like Homer. Aiolic was used in lyrical poetry. Doric was used in choral poetry, while history, philosophy and oratory were written in Attic. See Caragounis, at 29.

<sup>19</sup> For example, there were 1,124 forms of verbs at this point. *Ibid.* at 33.

elements of a Hebrew/Aramaic speech). A great example of this is found in the very first chapter of Luke. The first sentence is long, consuming the entire introductory portion of Luke 1:1-4. This sentence is written in superb Greek, from the first word to the last. It sets the gospel apart as a “work of literature, worthy of an educated audience.”<sup>20</sup> Contrast that sentence with the portion of Luke that follows though, and the difference is great in the Greek. The following infancy narratives read like folksy Aramaic or Hebrew translated into Greek to carefully maintain the Semitic flavor.

We have also noted Luke’s extensive vocabulary. Luke stands in first place among the New Testament authors who used words found nowhere else in Scripture. While we must be cautious about drawing too many conclusions (there are *lots* of variables and possible explanations), there are some interesting statistics about Luke’s vocabulary. Seventy percent of Luke’s words are found in other New Testament writings; thirty percent are exclusive to Luke-Acts. In terms of vocabulary used, Luke has as much or more in common with the Ancient Greek writers Lucian and Plutarch as the rest of the New Testament. The closest New Testament writer in vocabulary to Luke is Paul. One of the most thorough investigators of Luke’s style and vocabulary in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Harvard’s most noteworthy Quaker Henry J. Cadbury (1883-1974). Cadbury readily identified Luke as “rather more elegant in diction than most of the other writings in the New Testament.”<sup>21</sup> Oxford Provost and famed biblical scholar Burnett Hillman Streeter termed Luke not an “ill-educated, clumsy, and careless compiler,” but instead “a consummate literary artist.”<sup>22</sup> Jesuit scholar Joseph Fitzmyer wrote,

[Luke] composed his narrative not merely as an ancient historian of the Hellenistic mode, nor merely as a theologian of the early church writing in a biblical mold, but also as a conscious litterateur of the Greco-Roman period.<sup>23</sup>

Why do we pause to cite these many accolades about Luke and his manner of writing? Because they help us appreciate many aspects of Luke and Acts, especially his literary structure. These works are not to be read like we might read

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<sup>20</sup> Marshall, at 39.

<sup>21</sup> Cadbury, Henry J., *The Style and Method of Luke*, (Wipf & Stock reprint 2001), at 5.

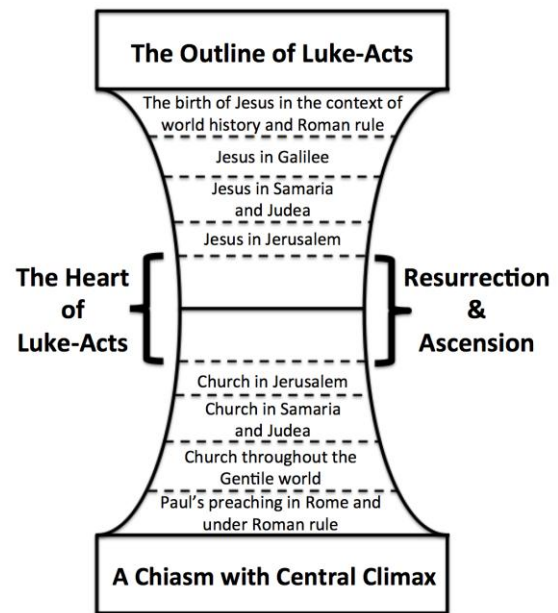
<sup>22</sup> Streeter, Burnett Hillman, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins, Treating of the Manuscript Tradition, Sources, Authorship, & Dates*, (Wipf&Stock reprint 2008), at 548.

<sup>23</sup> Fitzmyer, Joseph, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, (Doubleday 1981), at 92.

our modern history books, starting at one point on a time line and reading to the end. They are historical, but also are works of art.

Again, we see this early on, in the first word of the Gospel. Luke begins his first sentence with a word found nowhere else in the Bible, *epideper* (επειδερ) translated “Inasmuch as.” This is a classical Greek word that sets up a reference to facts already known as a cause for what he is about to do. The sentence then has two parts with three matching phrases in each. Careful architecture is not only present in Luke’s first sentence, but in his entire work. Failure to appreciate Luke’s artistic structure can cause many people to misinterpret his writings. It can also cause many strained theories about Luke allegedly following different histories than the other gospel writers, repeating episodes, making faulty copies of other records, or being overly influenced by poor information.<sup>24</sup>

Although scholars disagree on the extent of what Luke *planned* in his structure versus what scholars now *find* in his structure, there are several things that readily stand out. First, many scholars believe that Luke and Acts themselves form a basic chiasm.<sup>25</sup> This is formed not only in content but in more subtle ways as well. Craig Blomberg has diagrammed his analysis



<sup>24</sup> This makes stunning the assessments like that :

Lampe (1912-1980) who is given as reference for the phrase of Luke being “the dim wit among the evangelists.” See attribution by Fuller, Reginald, *The New Testament in Current Study* (Scribner’s 1962), at 89. It is unclear from Fuller’s attribution whether Lampe was of the opinion that Luke was a “dim wit” or whether Lampe was couching in common parlance the viewpoints of other scholars. I suspect the latter, for Fuller’s point was that the older more cynical views about Luke were dissolving in the face of more modern scholarship and appreciation of Luke as not only a historian, but a theologian. Furthermore, Lampe was no Greek slouch. He was the Cambridge man who edited Oxford’s Patristic Greek Lexicon.

<sup>25</sup> A “chiasm” is an ancient literary device that derives its name from the Greek letter *chi*, which looks for all practical purposes like a modern X. The X illustrates in a pictorial sense what we read in a chiasm. The chiasm structures a narrative to a point and then inverts the narrative and parallels the structure back. So for example, we would have a simple five-point chiasm saying, “(A) I read a book; (B) The book was captivating; (C) The book changed my life; (B) I found the book interesting; (A) I finished the book.” Here the points labeled (A) and (B) are parallel in content and inverse in order built around the central point (C). The emphasis in such a chiasm is on the central point.

of the overall chiasm, reproduced below with minor edits:

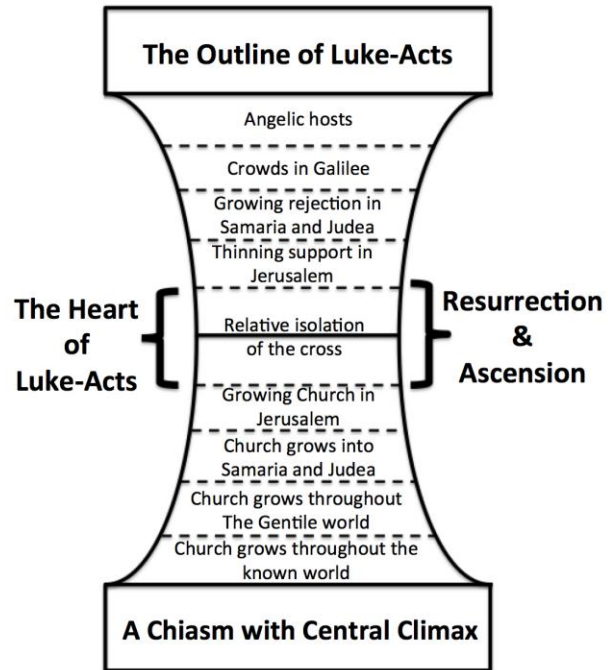
This is not the only way to consider the chiasm in the overall structure.<sup>26</sup> There are arguably additional chiasms in many of the smaller units and stories. Furthermore, some believe the crowds and public support of Jesus are also reflected in a type of chiastic structure. Luke records great crowds at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, starting with the innumerable hosts of heavenly angels heralding his birth. Throughout the early part of Luke we see repeated references to the crowd. Luke 5:1 explains the "crowd was pressing in on" Jesus. In Luke 5:15 we are told of the "great crowds" gathering to him. In Luke 5:19, the man in need can't get to Jesus readily "because of the crowd." Again in Luke 6:17 there is a "great crowd" and a "great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon." The crowds continue to "surround" and press in on Jesus as Luke notes over and over. In Luke 7 through 9, Luke makes fourteen distinct references to the crowds.

In chapter nine, things begin to change. Luke recounted that as the "days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." Jesus experiences rejection from a Samaritan village (9:51ff.) Jesus preached about the high cost of following him, and while the crowds still came, we see them thinning out with increased rejection. The crowds still come (Luke 11:29; 12:1), but the references to them are fewer and fewer as we begin to see growing rejections of Jesus. By chapter 13, the word is out that Herod wants to kill Jesus. Then in chapter 14, when Jesus healed the man with dropsy, the discontent of the power structure against Jesus is shown spreading. The great crowds that hear Jesus teach in Acts 14, get his message of the high cost of discipleship, and Luke transitions in the grumbling against Jesus by Pharisees and scribes. It is in this time that Luke tells of the ten healed lepers, with only one returning to be thankful to Jesus, and none becoming his disciple (Lk 17:11-19). There are still crowds, for example with Zacchaeus in Luke 19, but by the time Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, references to the crowds are gone. The followers of Jesus start to wither away as he is arrested. Peter kept his distance from Jesus, denying he even knew him. When Pilate set Jesus before the people, the crowd was anti-Jesus, shouting for Barabbas (Lk. 23:18). Jesus is followed on the road to Calvary by a large group, but nothing like the thousands attending him in the earlier part of Luke. Ultimately, Jesus is crucified between two criminals, with his acquaintances and women standing at a distance. Jesus alone is laid into the tomb, and then the reverse of thinning crowds begins!

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<sup>26</sup> A number of scholars point out the apparent chiasm in the ministry of Jesus in Luke paralleled the ministry of Jesus with that of Peter and Paul. (A) Jesus and Paul perform similar healings (Lk 5:17-26 // Acts 14:8-18); (B) Jesus and Peter raise the dead (Lk 7:11-17; 8:40-56 // Acts 9:36-43); (C)

Jesus is resurrected, and seen by a few women and acquaintances. He then appears to Peter and his other disciples. While Jesus ascends, and as Luke transitions into Acts, we see the crowds growing larger at first in Jerusalem. On Pentecost, 3,000 souls are added to the church. Then the church continues its expansion in Jerusalem and further into the countryside. The first Gentiles come into the church in Acts 10, and the numbers grow ever larger as the church spreads throughout the world. We can hour-glass the crowds in much the same fashion as the text:



As noted earlier, there are many smaller portions of Luke that also break easily into chiasms. One that scholars readily point out is the song of Zacharias. We can set out the actual verses and see the chiasm in the bolded words and phrases:

- (A) Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has **visited and redeemed** his people
- (B) and has **raised up a horn of salvation** for us  
in the house of his servant David,
- (C) as he spoke by **the mouth of his holy prophets** from of old,
- (D) that we should be **saved from our enemies**  
and from the hand of all who hate us;
- (E) to show the mercy **promised to our fathers**
- (F) **and to remember his holy covenant,**
- (E) the oath that he **swore to our father Abraham**, to  
grant us
- (D) that we, being **delivered from the hand of our enemies**, might serve him without fear, in holiness and  
righteousness before him all our days.
- (C) And you, child, will be **called the prophet of the Most High**;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
- (B) to **give knowledge of salvation** to his people in the forgiveness of their



sins, because of the tender mercy of our God,  
(A) whereby the sunrise shall **visit us from on high to give light** to those who sit  
in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

We can see in this chiasm the emphasis that the stories and deeds around the birth of John the Baptist emphasize God’s actions on behalf of his covenant loyalty. These are samples of the care and concern Luke put into the structure of his writings.

## CONCLUSION

As we close this review of Luke’s content, we note that we have left out a few minor additions.<sup>27</sup> It is also worthwhile to consider some of the apparent differences between Luke and the other gospel writers where their stories converge on certain subjects and events. That segment is forthcoming.

For now, though, we close this section considering the strength of Luke’s gospel as a carefully researched and reported source of authentic stories about Jesus. These were stories immediately verifiable by date, location, and named eyewitnesses. Luke had prepared his case well, and presented it in marvelous form. It leaves us with the personal questions of what we will do with the information Luke provided!

## POINTS FOR HOME

1. “*God, I thank you that I am not like other men.*” (Lk. 18:11).

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<sup>27</sup> In Luke 11:37-41 Jesus was dining with a Pharisee without first washing his hands. Jesus pointed out the greater importance of being clean in your heart, something the hypocritical Pharisee had missed.

In Luke 16:14-15 Jesus was ridiculed by the Pharisees who loved money. In reply, Jesus contrasted their lives with the truth of God. They justified themselves before men, but God knew their hearts. What they exalted was an abomination to God.

In Luke 21:37-38 Luke records that Jesus taught in the temple during the day but stayed on the Mount of Olives at night.

In Luke 22:35-38 Jesus instructed his disciples to hold to their possessions as they faced the coming events, even girding themselves with a sword. This was not to bring the kingdom by force, but was to put his disciples on alert that dangerous events were about to transpire rapidly.

In Luke 23:6-12 Luke inserts Pilate sending Jesus to Herod for Herod to deal with him. Herod was glad to finally meet Jesus. He and his soldiers mocked and abused Jesus before returning him to Herod.

In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the Pharisee prayed a prayer of thanks that he was not like the tax collector. I wonder how often we read that parable and think, Thank you God that we are not like the Pharisee! That, of course, puts us squarely into the shoes of *the Pharisee!* Why is it so easy for some to fall into the chair of thinking, “We are okay on our own!”? Why do some think that most folks are doing fine in life without God? Where do people get such an irrationally high assessment of themselves? What is it about humanity that wants so much to think that there is no real acute need for God?

Might I suggest that these are times where people are missing a vision for truth on who God really is. For anyone who thinks him or herself good enough, or even adequate, a trip to Isaiah 6 is in order! Let us align ourselves in this parable, not with the Pharisee, but with the tax collector, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

2. “...for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed” (Lk. 1:48).

God is the God of turnarounds! He takes the lowly and lifts them up. He takes the hungry and fills them. He takes the weak and makes them strong. He also takes the haughty and brings them down! He takes the powerful and makes them weak. He takes the wise and makes them foolish.

So, in light of that, what kind of posture will we take before God? Are we to be self-sufficient? Are we to be strong on our own? Are we to abandon any pretense of need or reliance upon God? I hope not!

Lord, may I daily lean on you for my bread, for forgiveness, for holiness, for strength, for wisdom, and for sustenance. For without you, I am nothing.

3. “...a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him.” (Lk. 11:27).

The outcast – they are all around us! They may even be us!!! Regardless, we need to see every person, as someone that God loves, someone that God believes is redeemable and important, someone that God wants showered with his love. We have a chance to do that to everyone we meet. Not only to those that are easily loved, but also to the ones that are not.

God, may we shine your love and your light into the dark places of this world. Teach us to find and love those that might slip by unnoticed. Teach us to care genuinely for all of your children.