

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 63: The Book of Luke

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF LUKE

Introduction:

Matthew, a Jew who was also a tax collector for the Roman Empire, wrote his Gospel with the purpose of convincing his primarily Jewish audience that Jesus was their long awaited Messiah. Therefore, he used a detailed genealogy, many references to Old Testament Scriptures, a discussion of the Law, and included a condemnation of their hypocritical religious leaders.

John Mark, a Jew and the son of a prominent and wealthy business woman in Jerusalem, was obviously educated in Roman schools as indicated by his Roman given name. He wrote to a primarily Roman audience and thus packed his Gospel with action rather than words, miracles rather than parables, the servant king rather than the sovereign or tyrannical ruler.

Luke, like Mark also wrote to the Gentiles, but to a different class of Gentile. His style and content make it clear that his audience was primarily Greek. The difference between Roman and Greek was considerable:

1. While the Romans were impressed by action and power the Greeks were interested in reason and culture.
2. The ideal of the Roman was military and governmental control, the Greek ideal was wisdom and beauty.
3. The Roman goal was to elevate man through peace and order, the Greek goal was to elevate man through education and art.
4. The Romans sought to advance their people as a race, the Greeks sought to raise the individual person.
5. The gods of Rome were gods of power borrowed from anywhere and everywhere and personified in their own emperor. The gods of Greece were made in the likeness of men, mingling virtue and vice.

The Greeks were noted for their great intellectual interest and physical training. Luke wrote in a classical, intellectual style much more literate, philosophical and polished than the other Gospels.

All you have to do to understand the Greek view of man is to study their art and literature. Man is presented as potentially perfect in wisdom and stature. Schools were founded for the development of the perfect mind and gymnasiums were built for the development of the perfect body.

They had developed wonderful athletes and magnificent scholars but had yet to see the perfect melding of the two . . . a god-man. Luke presents them with a perfect man--One who, being in reality both man and God, could fully fulfill the deepest aspirations of the Greeks.

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Author:

Paul tells us that Luke was a gentile physician (Col. 4:14) and we know he traveled extensively with the Apostle (see Acts 16, 20, 21, 27, and 28). He is mentioned by Paul in Col., 2 Tim., and Philemon and fits the requirements for the one who wrote both this Gospel and the church history in the book of Acts. This agrees with unanimous teaching of the early church fathers.

As a doctor in the Roman Empire, Luke was a man of science, and as a Greek, he was a man of logic, intellect, organization and detail. Being a close friend and associate of Paul, he had access to other disciples, various witnesses, and historical accounts on which to draw.

It makes sense that he would set about to research and accurately report the facts in "*an orderly account.*" **Read Luke 1:1-4**

Beyond this, very little is known about Luke. He was identified as being from Antioch, which explains how he met Paul and why much of the account in Acts is centered there. He was with Paul right through his final imprisonment in Rome and many believe that he wrote both the Gospel of Luke, and The Book of Acts during that time. This leads many to believe that they were written in AD. 60 or 61.

The book was clearly written to Theophilus, who was obviously a gentile man, perhaps even a Roman official since "most excellent" was a typical formal government address. Luke explains certain Jewish customs and names to him as he writes and it is likely that he was struggling with Christianity's Jewish origins (v. 1). This might fit into the struggle between the Judaizers and gentile believers in this period of the church.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF MARK

Introduction: (Chapter 1:1-4)

The Gospel of Luke is written in a narrative form, It is biographical, but more than a biography because it is selective in its material and has a theological message to share. It is history, but a selective history, as Luke carefully chooses the events which illustrate the significance and impact of Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection. Jesus is the perfect man long sought by the Greeks, and therefore, the one man who could be a "*ransom for many.*"

These first four verses are one sentence and are written in the familiar style of a formal prologue in ancient classic Greek literature. They explain what he is doing. He, with many written narratives at hand and having known and interviewed many eyewitnesses of what happened "*from the beginning*" is going to write "*an orderly account*" (NKJV) so that Theophilus and others may know the truth and accuracy of what they had been taught.

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I. THE SAVIOR'S COMING (Chapters 1:5-4:13)

In all the sources I studied the writers present this first portion of Luke as a typical presentation of Jesus and His incarnation in a very Jewish manner: Prophetic announcement to the priest Zacharias; Prophetic forerunner, John the Baptist; Angelic announcement to Jewish maiden; Jesus fulfilling several aspects of the Law; and yet another genealogy.

How then does this fit with Luke's commitment to reach the Greek Gentiles?

I see this whole section differently. I believe, in order to reach his Greek audience, Luke actually presented a logical way for God to become a man and live among us.

The Greeks were raised with mythological stories of the interaction between "the gods" and man. Their gods were always interacting with men, fighting them, helping them, having social and even intimate relationships with them.

Luke wants them to know that The God of the Universe was willing to send His own Son to become a perfect man in order to save them.

How does God become a man? By supernaturally impregnating a virgin, and even His stepfather's ancestry is carried back to the first perfectly created man, Adam (Chapter 3).

Further proof of Luke's intent seems evident in the use of poetry, song, and eloquent language and logic to drive points home.

So, trying to keep these things in mind lets plunge into the text.

A. Birth and Boyhood (1:5-2:52)

God needs a perfect man to be a substitutionary sacrifice for men and women, because "*there is none righteous, no, not one,*" so He sends his own son to earth, to become a man. That is the story of this first section.

Chapter two ends with the one quick glimpse of Jesus as a boy. *The Greeks have got to love this:* What is he like? (2:40) "*He continued to grow and become strong*"--He was developing well physically, and . . . "*increasing in wisdom*"--He was developing well mentally.

What is He doing? He is in a deep discussion with the teachers "*both listening to them and asking them questions*" (v 46). Jesus is participating in the Socratic method of teaching with the local Doctors of Theology.

B. Baptism and Battle (3:1-4:13)

Again, I believe, Luke is speaking to his primary audience. How do you know that Jesus is from God?

1. God Himself confirms it supernaturally. (3:22)
2. He wins in a battle of supernatural power and wits against the devil himself. (Chapter 4)

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II. THE SAVIOR'S CAREER (Chapters 4:14-9:50)

We move from a time of preparation and introduction of Jesus into the period of His public ministry. Here is a chart that will help you to keep His ministry in focus as you read and study the book of Luke. A map of Palestine in New Testament times will also help (Check the back of your Bible).

Refer to Life of Christ Chart

The fundamental question answered in this considerable section is, Who is Jesus? The answer to this is presented as the reader identifies with the disciples and the crowds as they follow, witness and discuss Jesus. We will see for ourselves that Jesus is God, and Jesus is Man.

A. Work Commenced (4:14-6:11)

One of the questions Theophilus must have had was, "How did this Messiah figure, obviously Jewish, turn out to be important to the Gentiles, and especially the Greeks?"

Answer one: He was rejected by the Jews. (4:14-30)

He presented Himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and was violently refused.

Answer two: He is the supernatural God/Man (4:31-5:10)

He has supernatural power, he must be the God/Man. Miracle after miracle shows that Jesus has power over sickness, nature, and even the supernatural world of demons.

Answer three: He has complete authority. (5:11-6:12)

He can call common men to be spiritual fishermen. He can raise the desperately ill and the despised to follow Him. He can use restricted days to do good works.

B. Work Climaxed (6:12-9:50)

As His popularity reached its peak, Jesus chose His close disciples (6:12-16), trained them in what is often called "The Great Sermon," and then lead them on a whirlwind adventure of ministry.

1. The Great Sermon includes the Beatitudes but does not have the teaching on the Law. It is teaching that applies to anyone. Luke is not directing this letter to Jews but to the Gentiles.

2. The following months are filled with activity, as Jesus leads his disciples on a non-stop training tour of healing, forgiving sin, gathering other followers, teaching in parables (many of which resemble the "teaching stories" used in Greek literature), raising the dead, and preparing them for His coming death.

III. THE SAVIOR'S CONFLICT (Chapters 9:51-21:38)

As you can see on the chart, the intensity of Jesus' ministry brought increasing opposition. This animosity would continue to build until He was no longer tolerable and was executed. This opposition was interesting and took the form of 13 distinct attacks:

A. Six Public Attacks (9:51-13:35)

The first six were carried out in the open public forum. Much of this material is unique to the book of Luke because the Greek audience would be eager to see how a perfect man would handle cunning opposition.

1. Scholastic (9:51-10:42)

A learned *"lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'"* (10:25) Obviously that lawyer and readers alike were convicted when Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan and drove His point home.

2. Slanderous (11:1-28)

In response to His disciples' request to teach them to pray, Jesus gave them a pattern prayer, and told two parables to illustrate God's eagerness to answer prayer and bless them.

This teaching and casting a demon out of a mute person caused some observers to say, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, prince of demons. Jesus' answer was pure Greek logic and He warned them not to commit the "unpardonable sin" of attributing the works of the Holy Spirit to Satan.

3. Sophisticated (11:29-52)

The next attack was more sophisticated and came from the Pharisees and experts in the Law. They invited Him to a dinner in order to catch Him in a breach of ceremonial tradition. He did not wash his hands.

The irony of His answer would thrill the Greek audience. They were clean on the outside but filthy, and vile, and hypocritical, and bloody inside.

4. Systematic (11:53-13:9)

". . . the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and question Him closely on many subjects, plotting against Him, to catch Him in something He might say." (11:53-54)

The following chapter covers some of those "many subjects" and provides a great study in truth and logic. **Great stuff!**

5. Sermonic (13:10-30)

To respond to the fact that Jesus healed a crippled woman on the Sabbath, the ruler of the synagogue preached a sermon on the subject. Don't you just hate that? Isn't it better when your elder or teacher just comes directly to you?

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Jesus pointed out to the entire world that this man was a hypocrite, who would rush to save his own animal if it fell into a pit, even on the Sabbath.

6. Scare (13:31-35)

Some Pharisees told Jesus, *"Go away,...for Herod wants to kill you.* "His response, *"Go and tell that fox"* I'm gonna do what I've got to do (Kemble paraphrase).

B. Seven Private Attacks (14:1-21:38)

The last seven attacks were done more in secret as the plot against Jesus became more intense. If they have their way, He will not get out alive.

1. Subtle (14:1-35)

" . . . He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to break bread, and they watched Him closely." (14:1)

They set Jesus up because they had a man there with dropsy.

Would He dare heal that man? He posed an impossible question to them first and they could not answer then blasted their uncaring attitudes. (Read it, it's cool.)

2. Sarcastic (15:1-31)

"This man receives sinners and eats with them." (15:1)--they sneer.

Their smugness only brought a further exposure of their hypocrisy. The parables of the lost sheep, coin, and son revealed God's attitude to people in need of saving.

3. Scoffing (16:1-17:10)

Jesus was teaching on wealth and coveting and the Pharisees *"scoffed at Him"* revealing the true condition of their hearts.

4. Selfish (17:11-19)

This approach was revealed by the nine lepers who did not return to give Jesus thanks for healing them. Only the gentile came back.

5. Snobbish (17:20-19:27)

The Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come. he told them, but they did not understand or believe.

6. Straightforward (19:28-20:19)

Finally, as Jesus was ushered into Jerusalem with pomp and glory, *"the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him, and they could not find anything they might do, for all the people were hanging on to His words."*

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7. Seductive (20:20-21:38)

Finally, the last recorded attempts to destroy Jesus were to pepper Him with questions that were politically and religiously loaded, and when that failed, they hired Judas to betray Him.

IV. THE SAVIOR'S CROSS (Chapters 22-24)

Of course, the climax of Luke, as with the other Gospels, is the cross. The perfect God/Man, who could fulfill all the hopes of a Greek reader for physical and mental perfection, became a man for one purpose, . . . to die.

A. Table to Trials (22:1-23:31)

The days before His death were bleak. Jesus sat with his disciples celebrating the Passover, a reminder of salvation, but predicting betrayal, denial, agony, and death. It is all bleak now:

1. The disciples argue over who would be greatest in the kingdom.
2. Peter's pride shows as he moves toward tragic denial.
3. Jesus prays in agony while the disciples sleep instead of praying.
4. The soldiers come and Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss.
5. Everyone deserts Jesus.
6. Peter denies even knowing Him.
7. Jesus is framed, beaten and tried against all rules of justice.
8. He is lead away to "the place of the skull." (Calvary to the Greeks)

B. Tree to Triumph (23:32-24:53)

Luke's description of the execution of Jesus is graphic and painful but he adds the great scene of salvation won and lost as the thieves make their choices and die along with Him. It reads like a Greek tragedy.

Then with continuing logic Luke give us evidence of the truth of the resurrection. Only logical, legal proof will satisfy his audience.

1. The tomb was empty.
2. The women saw him.
3. The two men walked, talked and ate with him.

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4. The disciples and others experience Him in the upper room.

But Luke also goes beyond the other gospels when

5. Many saw Him go into heaven.

He takes us to Bethany to experience the risen Jesus ascending into heaven. Of course he did. The perfect man the Greeks so long to see, returns back to God, His Father. The story is complete. Perfection of mind and body is possible because God sent His son to die for them. AMEN!

Lesson:

1. Jesus was the perfect man needed to provide a substitute sacrifice for each one of us.
2. Jesus came to save the rich and the poor, the men and the women, the sick and the well, the good and the bad, the accepted and the rejected.
3. The blessings of salvation are forgiveness, life, peace, kingdom citizenship, the Spirit, and much, much more, spiritual, not material wealth.
4. The life Jesus demands is supernatural but defensible. It makes ultimate sense to submit to the life Jesus demands.