

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS COMMENTARY

This commentary is written for serious students of the New Testament, including Bible class teachers, preachers, college students, and other motivated readers. The reader need not be acquainted with the Greek language or scholarly tools and methodology.¹ The single goal of the present commentary is to place modern readers into the shoes of the first readers of Luke's Gospel. Two questions have been constantly asked: What did Luke want his readers to grasp as he penned each section? And what did he want them to believe and to do after they had read the whole? My assumption is that the Gospel of Luke was written *for* us but not directly *to* us. Since it was originally written for a people of a different culture almost two thousand years ago, we must attempt to understand it as they understood it in order to be faithful to Luke's intent.

Luke wrote in order to encourage active faith in Jesus, and he did so through the use of narrative literature. To put it differently, Luke has written to tell his readers what to believe, what reasons there are for believing, and what it means to live as a believer. To

¹Readers interested in the intricacies of the Greek language, historical details, and references to scholarly literature will need to look to the commentaries by John Nolland, *Luke* (3 vols.), Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1989-1993); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (2 vols.), Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981-1985); Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (2 vols.), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995-1996); and Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991). I have avoided constant references to secondary scholarly literature, for which these same commentaries are more than adequate.

make his case he has chosen to tell a story, a literary form with few imperatives and exhortations directly to the reader. Since narratives teach indirectly, the reader must learn to “read between the lines” in order to grasp the message.

I have therefore taken a literary and theological approach in this commentary.² I believe that Luke has given many clues regarding his intent and that a proper reading will discover that intent. Put simply, his method is to tell the story of Jesus, highlighting those aspects of the story which his readers need most to hear. He has woven many themes into the plot which begins with the birth and ends with the death and resurrection of Jesus. To understand his message, then, the reader must read the whole, paying close attention to the plot and the characters and to the many repeated themes. Therefore I am more concerned with Luke’s message in any given story than I am with the attempt to discover how his source(s) told the story. Similarly, I am more concerned with the reasons for Luke’s references to various events than I am with our ability to confirm the historicity of those events.

For each episode or section in Luke’s Gospel, we will be concerned first with any terms, customs, institutions, places, and beliefs which might be unfamiliar to the modern reader. We will therefore offer brief introductions to Herod Antipas, first-century eating customs, messianic beliefs, and dozens of other matters with which Luke’s readers would already be familiar. Our second and most important concern will be to discover the function of each section in the larger story. Does it further the plot, teach a lesson on what it means to be a disciple, encourage deeper faith, or function in some other way?

A third feature of the present commentary is the attempt to summarize Luke’s teaching on a variety of topics. Luke had several areas of special concern, evidenced by his dealing with them again

²We will, of course, discuss the historical references in Luke’s Gospel enough to understand why Luke writes of them. However, this is not a “historical” commentary in the sense that it attempts to prove that the events Luke narrates actually happened. In the interests of space and the goals of this series, we will simply assume the historical trustworthiness of Luke and refer the interested reader to commentaries which are more apologetic in nature, such as that of Bock.

and again. The reader will find in the table of contents a list of one- or two-page treatments of special topics such as women, the poor, the Law, the Holy Spirit, prayer, the kingdom of God, and many others.

A final special interest (to be explained further in the introduction below) is the effort to relate the Gospel of Luke to its companion volume, the book of Acts. The reader gains inspired insight into what Luke thinks about the teachings of Jesus when he or she sees Jesus' disciples in Acts carrying out those teachings. We will regularly look ahead to Acts to understand what Jesus means in the Gospel of Luke.

I am greatly indebted to the fine commentaries on Luke's Gospel by Johnson, Nolland, Stein, and Tiede. These works, which have different purposes and perspectives, have been tremendously helpful in my writing. I have tried to footnote them when appropriate. However, having used them for several years, I am no longer sure whether many ideas are my own or borrowed from them. I recommend these four commentaries to the reader who wants more than I have provided herein. I have directed the reader to Stein's work more than the others, because his will prove easiest to understand for the nonspecialist.

AUTHORSHIP

The Gospel of Luke is anonymous. Like the other three Gospels, it makes no claim regarding authorship. However, from the late second century until the 19th, no one seems to have questioned that Luke the physician wrote Luke and Acts.³

The Third Gospel was known as "The Gospel of Luke" by at least the late second century in order to distinguish it from the other three.⁴ It is impossible to know just why the early church

³See Fitzmyer, pp. 37-41, for a thorough discussion of the early church evidence.

⁴Martin Hengel argues that the titles were attached to the Gospels very early, even by the time they began to be read and distributed, in his *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), pp. 64-84.

attributed the book to Luke. Some would argue that he indeed wrote the book, and that his name was therefore associated with it from the beginning. Others argue that early Christians derived its authorship from evidence within the book of Acts (to be discussed below).

Supporting this early tradition are the Muratorian Canon (A.D. 170-180), Irenaeus (late 2nd century), the earliest actual copy of the Gospel (Bodmer Papyrus XIV, 175-225), an ancient Prologue to the Gospel written against the heretic Marcion (late 2nd), Tertullian (207-208), and later Origen (254), Eusebius (303), and Jerome (398). Such is the external evidence for Lukan authorship, and it is quite strong.

The internal evidence is also strong, and it comes from volume two, the book of Acts.⁵ There the author uses the first person plural pronoun (“we”) in narrating the events in the life of Paul on three occasions (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16; often called the “we-passages” of Acts). These sections imply that the author was with Paul in Asia Minor, Macedonia, Judea, on the Mediterranean, and in Rome.

This of course does not point directly to Luke, but it does encourage some detective work on the part of the reader. Who was with Paul during these times? Paul’s letters and Acts suggest a number of traveling companions (see the relevant portions of Acts and especially Col 4, Phlm, and 2 Tim 4). When one eliminates those whom the author mentions by name in Acts, and if one assumes that the author of Luke-Acts was a Gentile (see below), Luke emerges as the most likely author, given the strong weight of tradition.

Given strong external and internal evidence for Lukan authorship, one may wonder why much of contemporary scholarship

⁵This assumes the common authorship of Luke and Acts, an opinion shared by virtually all. Tying the two volumes together are the prologues (both addressed to Theophilus), common themes, common vocabulary and style, and, primarily, to be seen below, common theological interests. See Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 26 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1982); and Robert F. O’Toole, *The Unity of Luke’s Theology: An Analysis of Luke-Acts* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984).

rejects the notion entirely.⁶ The answer is based on internal evidence which is said to disallow Lukan authorship. Quite simply, the book of Acts presents a view of Paul the Christian who appears to be quite different from the Paul who wrote the letters, especially Galatians. The book of Acts does not cite or even mention Paul's letters. More significantly, it is argued that the theological portrait of Paul in Acts could not have been painted by a companion of Paul. Luke's portrait is especially problematic with regard to Paul's stance on keeping the Law.⁷ We must admit that it is somewhat surprising when Paul, who wrote that, "All who rely on observing the Law are under a curse," (Gal 3:10), consistently upholds the Law in Acts. Most notably, James in Acts 21:24 encourages Paul to help the four men under a vow in order to show that "you yourself are living in obedience to the Law."⁸

At the risk of oversimplifying a very complex discussion, several points should be noted. First, we should admit and not apologize for the fact that Luke and Paul have very different agendas in writing their works. This has necessarily influenced which events they narrate and what they emphasize theologically. Paul is writing for churches in crises and tends to address only those areas where the church in question needs instruction. Luke on the other hand writes in order to show the unity within the early church and therefore stresses that which all churches shared. So Paul in Galatians writes against Judaizers (those who want Gentiles to keep the Law), whereas Luke writes to Gentiles who may not have enough understanding or appreciation of the Jewish heritage of Christianity. The difference may well be one of audience and perspective rather than theological position. One should remember that Paul in his letters does write that his policy is, "To the Jews I became like a Jew," and,

⁶For instance, Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), pp. 112-116.

⁷The topic is very complex, incapable of being handled here. The reader is referred to Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972); Fitzmyer, pp. 50-51; and Nolland, pp. xxxiv-xxxvi.

⁸Among those who contend that Luke knew very little about the real Paul, see Philip Vielhauer, "On the 'Paulinism' of Acts," *Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays Presented In Honor of Paul Schubert*, ed. Keck and Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), pp. 33-50, and Haenchen, pp. 112-116.

“To those under the Law I became like one under the Law” (1 Cor 9). In other words, Luke in Acts may be showing a side of Paul that the letters largely do not show: Paul customarily lived as a Jew, especially around Jews.⁹

Efforts to argue that the Third Gospel demonstrates that its author was a doctor have been abandoned today. Hobart argued that the sheer number of healing stories and the vocabulary demonstrated that Luke was a physician.¹⁰ However, Cadbury later refuted these claims by proving that Luke showed no more “medical” language than other educated writers of his day.¹¹ Of course, the healing stories and “medical” vocabulary are consistent with authorship by a physician. They simply do not prove it.

While it can never be proven absolutely, I have taken the view that Luke, the companion of Paul, wrote Luke and Acts. This is largely because I accept the “we-sections” at face value. The author intended to represent himself as a companion of Paul, and the best candidate is Luke. However, we still know very little about our author, because the New Testament says little about Luke. What can be known about this author other than that he was a companion of Paul (Acts 16-28), a physician (Col 4:14), and a Gentile (Col 4:11)?

We actually learn more about Luke from his writing than from other sources. First, he was not an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus (1:1-4). He got his information from “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.” Second, he was a man of some education, as is clearly evidenced by his learned Greek (see esp. 1:1-4) and his ability to imitate the style of the Greek Old Testament. Third, he does appear to have been a Gentile. While this cannot be proven with certainty, his references to “the Jews” probably imply that he

⁹See Jacob Jervell, *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), pp. 52-67. On the author being Luke, see Fitzmyer, pp. 35-53; and F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd rev. and enl. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 1-9.

¹⁰W.K. Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, and Co., 1882).

¹¹H.J. Cadbury, *The Style and Literary Method of Luke* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920).

was not one of them, especially the reference to “their language” in Acts 1:19. This is, of course, consistent with the statement of Colossians 4:14 (which implies that Luke was a Gentile). Fourth, he was thoroughly conversant with the Scriptures. Although he has been called a Gentile writing to Gentiles, we must not overlook his constant references to every section of the Old Testament (esp. Psalms), his overriding fulfillment theme, and his great concern to show that all of his Jewish characters continue to observe the Law of Moses (even those who become Christians). This Gentile, for example, is the only Gospel writer who tells us of Jesus’ circumcision on the eighth day, of Mary’s purification on the fortieth day, of the disciples’ observance of the Sabbath “according to the commandment” after the death of Jesus (24:1), and of Paul’s taking vows (18:18) and participating in the sacrificial system long after becoming a Christian (Acts 21). Perhaps Luke had for some time been a “God-fearer,” a Gentile who worshiped God, appreciated Judaism, and attended the synagogue.¹² God-fearers are an important group in Acts who very often become Christians (see 13:16; 16:14; 18:7).

Fortunately, we need not know the author’s name to interpret his narrative. In fact, the narrative tells us much more about the author than any theory about the author tells us about the narrative.

DATE

It is fortunate also that the interpreter need not know the date of Luke’s writing, because no one knows exactly when it was written. Though some argue that Luke wrote his Gospel long before he wrote Acts, there are many reasons to think the two volumes were written at the same time.¹³ If so, the Gospel was written after A.D. 60-62, the date of Paul’s imprisonment in Acts 28. Thus the earliest possible date for Luke’s Gospel is 62. A few scholars argue that Luke must have written at that time, and that

¹²See Nolland, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

¹³Most importantly, Acts 1 looks directly back to Luke 24, which in turn anticipates Acts 1.

this accounts for the abrupt and frustrating (did Paul live or die?) ending of Acts. Most, however, believe that Luke had other reasons than lack of information for ending Acts as he did. I concur with those who think Luke had simply accomplished his purpose in Acts 28. He wrote to give an account of the spread of the gospel from Jews (only) in Jerusalem to Gentiles (predominantly) in Rome. He did not intend to give a biography of Paul.

Most argue that Luke had to have been written after Mark, because, in their opinions, Luke used Mark's Gospel in writing his own. However, this opinion is not universally accepted; and even if it were, one then has to answer the equally difficult question, When was Mark written? On the other hand, Luke 1:1 does suggest that Luke was probably written relatively late among early Gospels.

Many would argue that the earliest date of writing must be at least A.D. 70 on the basis of likely allusions to the destruction of Jerusalem. Of course, Jesus alludes to the *coming* destruction of Jerusalem in the first two Gospels as well as in Luke. However, in Luke Jesus says, "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies," (21:20) instead of, "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong," (Mark 13:14). Many believe that this more specific language suggests that Luke was looking back at the destruction and interpreting for his audience the meaning of Jesus' statement.¹⁴ This is likely, but it is far from certain.

The *latest possible* date for the writing of Luke's Gospel would be the first allusion to it in other literature. But even that is difficult to determine because allusions are notoriously difficult to ascertain. It could be 1 Clement (95-96), Ignatius (110), Polycarp (135), or 2 Clement (clear allusion but uncertain date, anywhere from 120-170).¹⁵

The evidence tends to point to the period of A.D. 65-85 for the composition of the Gospel of Luke. Some might like to be more exact, but it matters little for the interpretation of Luke's work.

¹⁴Similarly, note the language of 19:43-44.

¹⁵See Stein, p. 24.

AUDIENCE

As suggested above, the Gospel of Luke appears to be addressed to Gentile Christians. Though Theophilus is the named recipient and was certainly an intended reader, Luke undoubtedly wrote for a much larger audience. Just as modern “letters to the editor” are meant for the larger public, so was Luke’s work. Numerous hints within the work point to a larger audience which is predominantly Gentile. The most important are these: (1) He relates his work to a Greco-Roman literary tradition (1:1-4). (2) He dedicates the work to Theophilus, most likely a Gentile. (3) He is profoundly interested in the Gentile mission. (4) He uses Greek and Roman terms when other Gospel writers use Hebrew (“teacher” for “rabbi;” “lawyer” for “scribe;” “Skull” for “Golgotha”). (5) He refers to the Jews in the third person.¹⁶

Most agree that the original readers were Christian and that Luke-Acts is intended to build up faith rather than help create it. This is perhaps more difficult to prove, but two factors seem to lead in this direction. First, it appears that the named reader, Theophilus, had already heard the story (1:4). Second, there are simply too many matters left unexplained which would have been far too confusing for the non-Christian. Almost every episode assumes that Luke’s readers had a basic knowledge about Jesus and that Luke writes to provide certainty and various additional details.

PURPOSE

Luke tells us his purpose in Luke 1:4: he wants Theophilus to have “certainty” regarding the things he has been taught. This statement is at the same time helpful and ambiguous. On the one hand, it suggests that Luke is written with a quasi-apologetic motive. What it does not tell us, on the other hand, is in what area(s) his readers needed certainty. Did they simply need to be assured of the historicity of the events narrated? Or is it possible that they needed certainty regarding their own position before God? Or could it be

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 26-27.

that they needed certainty that God was behind all of the events they had heard about and witnessed? Might it even mean that they needed certainty about the proper response to the gospel message?

Luke's purpose has been called apologetic (to defend Christianity to Rome, or, in another sense, to defend God's actions), evangelistic (to engender faith among non-Christians), anti-heretical (to combat Gnosticism), and didactic (to teach Christians what to believe and how to act), to name only the most commonly suggested. In light of the many credible suggestions offered by scholars, we should be very careful about settling upon one purpose. The question of Luke's purpose must be answered by looking not only at Luke's Gospel but also at the Acts of the Apostles, and it can only be answered with reference to the themes which keep recurring throughout both volumes.

Perhaps it is best to suggest that Luke-Acts was written primarily for Gentiles who needed "assurance" in a number of areas, both historical and theological. Perhaps they did need the account of a careful and educated historian to give them confidence that events they heard about had actually occurred. There also may have been some among them who had not yet decided to become Christians. Most likely those who were Christians needed Luke to explain how God had kept his promises to the Jews in light of the fact that there seemed to be fewer and fewer Jews among those being converted. Probably these same Gentile Christians simply needed to understand better their own place in God's plan. And surely these readers, whoever they were, needed to be reminded that being Christian meant sharing possessions, undergoing persecution, welcoming the outcast, serving one another, and generally walking as Jesus walked.

LUKE AND ACTS

Eighteen hundred fifty years ago it was apparent that Luke's first volume was very much like the works of Matthew and Mark. At that time the Gospel was placed beside its peers in the New Testament. John, assumed to be the last Gospel written, was placed between Luke and Acts, and the two works by Luke have been sep-

arated ever since. While everyone acknowledges that one author wrote both, few have truly noted the import of that fact. Luke wrote not two independent documents, but a two-volume story, as he well explains.

When Luke is read along with Acts, Acts reads quite differently. No longer do we have the self-contained story of the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem Jews to Roman Gentiles. We have nothing less than the story of Jesus, from his ministry in Galilee to his death and resurrection in Jerusalem to his continuing ministry in the Mediterranean world.

In the tradition of the Restoration Movement it has long been argued that the book of Acts provides a pattern for the later church. My thesis is that there is indeed an intended pattern in Acts, but the pattern is not rooted primarily in the practice of the early church. The pattern is that established by Jesus. Quite simply, the early church does what Jesus did and what Jesus commanded it to do. In fact, Luke insists that it is still Jesus who is carrying out his ministry through the church. In Acts 1:1 when Luke writes of the former book in which he “wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach,” what he implies is that Acts will narrate what Jesus *continues* to do and to teach.

This is especially clear in certain passages: it is Jesus himself who calls Paul on the road to Damascus in Acts 9. Later in that chapter Peter says, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you.” In Acts 16:7 Paul and his companions attempt to enter Bithynia, “but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them.” And in 18:9 Jesus himself speaks to Paul, encouraging him to have no fear. It should also be noted that Jesus had already said in Luke 21:15, “I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand.” It is clear, of course, that in Acts Jesus is at the right hand of God, but he is active and very much in control as he directs the new movement through his Spirit. Jesus is so bound up with his church that he can tell Paul in 9:5, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.”¹⁷

Consider the following parallels or “patterns” in the ministry of Jesus and that of the early church:

- (1) Luke shows Jesus praying at nearly every major event

¹⁷See especially O’Toole, pp. 62-96.

(baptism, choosing disciples, confession, transfiguration, Gethsemane, and on the cross). The early church does the same (waiting before Pentecost, choosing Matthias, Peter before going to Cornelius, sending Paul, healing, and many others).

(2) In Luke Jesus is empowered when the Holy Spirit descends upon him at his baptism. Only then does he begin his ministry of preaching and healing (3:22; see 1:35; 4:1). In Acts the apostles are told to wait until they are baptized with the Holy Spirit (1:5, 8). After the Spirit descends upon them (2:4), they also do signs and wonders and preach, just as did Jesus. All the major characters in Acts, like Jesus, are said to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Peter — 4:8; Stephen — 6:5; Paul — 13:9, and dozens of other references to the guidance of the Spirit).

(3) In Luke Jesus performs various miracles as part of his ministry. The church leaders in Acts not only perform miracles — they perform miracles which are remarkably similar to those of Jesus. For example, just as Jesus heals the mother-in-law of Peter who had a fever (Luke 4:38), Paul heals the father of Publius, who also had a fever (Acts 28:8). Just as Jesus casts out unclean spirits (Luke 4:36; 6:18, etc.), so do Peter (Acts 5:16), Philip (8:7), and Paul (16:18; 19:13). Jesus heals the lame (Luke 7:22), as do Peter and John (Acts 3:2), Philip (8:7), and Paul (14:8-10).

(4) The message of Jesus and that of the leaders in Acts is the same, emphasizing the kingdom of God (30 times in Luke; see Acts 1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23), repentance, and forgiveness of sins. Jesus and the apostles on occasion even use the same Old Testament texts, such as Psalm 110 (Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34).

(5) Jesus suffers at the hands of his own people and the Gentiles, and so do the disciples. Of course, Jesus predicted that they would (12:11-12; 21:12-14). Jesus teaches in the synagogue at Nazareth and is rejected and almost killed. The same will happen on numerous occasions in Acts, as Paul enters synagogue after synagogue, only to be eventually rejected. Suffering is especially the lot of Paul, whose story Luke parallels in detail with that of Jesus. The journeys to Jerusalem and treatment there of both Jesus and Paul occupy the large final sections of Luke and Acts. In 18:32 Jesus announces that he “will be delivered to the Gentiles.” In Acts 21:11, speaking of Paul the prophet Agabus predicts that the Jews will

“deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.” Of Jesus, Luke later records that the people “all cried out together, ‘Away with this man,’” and of Paul Luke writes, “for the mob of the people followed, crying, ‘Away with him!’” Both Jesus and Paul face Jewish accusers, including the High Priest; both appear before Herodian princes as well as Roman procurators; and both are said to be innocent by the Roman leaders.

The Jesus/Stephen parallels are even more obvious. Both are full of the Holy Spirit; both are recipients of wisdom, grace and power; both do signs and wonders; both are led to the council, the eyes of whose members are fixed on them; both are cast outside the city; both pray that God will forgive their accusers; both commit their spirits to God; both are killed; and both are buried by devout persons.¹⁸

(6) There are also many examples of the apostles obeying the directives of Jesus (Luke 6:22-23: “rejoice [when people persecute you] in that day and leap for joy”— see Acts 5:41; Luke 9:5: “shake the dust off your feet . . . as a testimony against them”— see Acts 13:51; 18:6). In fact, the entire plan of Acts was commanded by the risen Jesus in Acts 1:8, where he says, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

One of the most important areas in which the church in Acts carries out the teaching of Jesus is that related to wealth and poverty. In Luke as in no other Gospel Jesus encourages the sharing of possessions and condemns the greedy and selfish. Many of these stories and sayings appear only in Luke: Zacchaeus; the rich man and Lazarus; “blessed are you poor;” the parables about inviting the poor, lame, maimed, and blind; the dishonest steward; and the command to all of the disciples, “sell your possessions and give alms.” It is not surprising, then, that Acts contains many examples, both positive and negative, of the use of possessions in the early church: the selling of possessions for the needy in chapters 2 and 4; the generosity of Barnabas, Dorcas, Paul, and the Antioch church; and the negative examples of Ananias and Sapphira, Simon the Sorcerer, Felix, and Judas (who bought a field with his money

¹⁸Ibid.

(1:18), over against Barnabas, who sold a field in Acts 4:36).

Having argued this case, it would be a mistake to suggest that Luke had no notion of the church of his day being like the church which he writes about — he surely did. But the goal is not to replicate the church of the earliest decades; it is rather to be like Jesus, and the picture of a church that looked like Jesus could only further that goal. The intent may be very much like that of Paul, who tells the churches, “Imitate me as I imitate Christ.” Paul knows the advantage of giving his readers an example which is easily grasped and will lead them toward the goal. Yet he also knows quite well that he has not yet reached the goal (Phil 3:12-13), and he never makes the imitation of himself the primary goal. Luke seems to have the same intent in Acts: the early church is well worthy of imitation, insofar as its members imitate Christ.

This commentary will be written from this perspective. The best commentary on Acts is the Gospel of Luke. And conversely, Luke has made clear what Jesus’ statements mean in a later generation. Therefore, to read Acts is to read an inspired commentary on the Gospel of Luke. We will refer to Luke’s two-volume work as “Luke-Acts.”

HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

Luke has been accused often of being careless as a historian, at least by modern standards. His treatment of the census under Quirinius (Luke 2), the rebellion under Theudas (Acts 5), and several other matters have led many to argue that Luke is a better theologian than historian.¹⁹ While the present commentary cannot look in detail at these matters (there will be brief comments in the appropriate sections), one should keep in mind several things. First, there are many matters about which we will never have enough information to make a final judgment. However, the silence of extrabiblical sources should never be taken as proof that an event never occurred. Secondly, each passage must be evaluated independently. The number of cases in which Luke is clearly out of

¹⁹See Haenchen, pp. 90-132; and Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. H. Greeven (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1956).

step with other ancient sources is very small, and those sources always had their own agenda, just as did Luke. Thirdly, most would concede that Luke proves to be accurate when there is sufficient evidence with which to compare his writing. Luke has obviously gone to great lengths in order to have accurate information on John the Baptist and on rulers in Judea and Galilee. Considering the large number of events and people in his narrative, the surprising thing is that there are not more alleged historical inaccuracies. There can be little doubt that Luke went to much trouble to ensure accuracy. Luke is both historian and theologian.²⁰

SOURCES

Luke got his information from various sources, as he tells us in 1:1-4. However, we do not know for certain the identity of any of these. Most scholars think that Luke (and Matthew) are somehow dependent on the Gospel of Mark. I have made no such assumption in this commentary. While there is undoubtedly some advantage in knowing any writer's sources, there is no final proof for any theory regarding the relationships between the Gospels. I have, however, made two assumptions about Luke's Gospel. First, I believe it to be inspired and thus completely reliable. Second, I believe that Luke had a great deal of information about Jesus from which to choose and that we gain a great deal by simply comparing what Luke wrote to what other Gospel writers wrote. In other words, Luke has selected and adapted his material, and while we do not have access to all the information he had at his disposal, we will learn a great deal through a comparative reading.

THEMES

There may be no clearer insight into Luke's purpose than that gained by examining those themes which recur with some frequency in Luke-Acts. Narrative writers express what their readers

²⁰See I.H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); and Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

need most by returning to a point again and again. When looked at from this perspective, Luke has many concerns. It is clear that he has much to tell his readers, and there can be no more effective way for them to hear it than from the lips of Jesus. The following list is far from exhaustive, but it at least will steer the reader into some of those areas which apparently were close to Luke's heart. The following topics receive special attention in the commentary at the place where Luke first mentions them (see p. 11 for page numbers). They are listed here in order to give the reader a preview of some of Luke's major themes and in order to show the reader where to look in the commentary for more information.

Anti-Semitism	Parables
Baptism	Pharisees
Destruction of Jerusalem and End of Time	Poor and Rich
Forgiveness and Grace	Prayer
Fulfillment of Scripture	Prophet Theme
Holy Spirit	Repentance
Kingdom of God	Sadducees
Law	Samaritans
Messiah	Son of Man
Miracles and Sign-Seeking	Table Fellowship
Outcasts and Untouchables	Tax Collectors
	Women

A FINAL WORD ABOUT INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

Traditional introductory questions are being given less attention today than they were a generation ago. The reason is twofold. First, it is very difficult to give "sure" answers to many questions of introduction. The evidence is often insufficient to offer more than probabilities, and what is "probable" is evaluated differently by every scholar. Second, the interpretation of many New Testament works and especially the Gospels is not significantly aided by having answers to most of these questions. For example, knowing that the author of Luke was the companion of Paul does not change the

understanding of any passage in the Gospel. Similarly, knowing the date aids interpretation very little. The following commentary does not assume sure answers to any of these questions for its interpretation.

OUTLINE

There is general agreement among serious students of Luke's Gospel regarding its structure.

- I. Prologue 1:1-4
- II. Infancy Narrative 1:5-2:52
- III. The Preparation for Jesus' Ministry 3:1-4:13
- IV. Jesus' Ministry in Galilee 4:14-9:50
- V. Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem 9:51-19:27
- VI. Jesus' Ministry in Jerusalem 19:28-21:38
- VII. Jesus' Suffering and Death 22:1-23:56
- VIII. Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension 24:1-53

(The Book of Acts)

- IX. From Easter to Pentecost (Acts 1)
- X. From Jerusalem to Samaria (Acts 2-9)
- XI. From Judea to Rome (Acts 10-28)

Those who are familiar with the other Gospels notice immediately several similarities and differences. Like Matthew, Luke begins with birth stories (although Luke's are very different than Matthew's). Like Matthew and Mark, Luke includes Jesus' temptation and baptism and has a large section in which Jesus teaches and heals in Galilee. And like all three other Gospels, Luke has Jesus go to Jerusalem for the final week and ends the Gospel with the trial, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

What is most distinctive about the Gospel of Luke, however, is section V in the above outline, the journey to Jerusalem. It is the largest section in Luke's Gospel and contains a great number of stories found only in Luke. Luke uses this long journey to Jerusalem primarily to teach what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

It means doing what Jesus does: teaching, healing, serving, suffering, and dying to self. In other words, it means following Jesus – all the way to Jerusalem.

Finally, the greatest difference between Luke’s writing and that of Matthew, Mark, and John is that Luke continues the story. The book of Acts tells how Jesus continues to teach and heal as he leads the growing kingdom throughout the Mediterranean world.

DETAILED OUTLINE

(Episode Titles Based on NIV Headings)

- I. Prologue – 1:1-4**
- II. Infancy Narrative – 1:5-2:52**
 - A. The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold – 1:5-25**
 - B. The Birth of Jesus Foretold – 1:26-38**
 - C. Mary Visits Elizabeth – 1:39-45**
 - D. Mary’s Song – 1:46-56**
 - E. The Birth of John the Baptist – 1:57-66**
 - F. Zechariah’s Song – 1:67-80**
 - G. The Birth of Jesus – 2:1-7**
 - H. The Shepherds and the Angels – 2:8-20**
 - I. Jesus Presented in the Temple – 2:21-40**
 - J. The Boy Jesus at the Temple – 2:41-52**
- III. The Preparation for Jesus’ Ministry – 3:1-4:13**
 - A. John the Baptist Prepares the Way – 3:1-20**
 - B. The Baptism and Genealogy of Jesus – 3:21-38**
 - C. The Temptation of Jesus – 4:1-13**
- IV. Jesus’ Ministry in Galilee – 4:14-9:50**
 - A. Jesus Rejected at Nazareth – 4:14-30**
 - B. Jesus’ Ministry in Capernaum – 4:31-44**
 - 1. Jesus Drives Out an Evil Spirit – 4:31-37
 - 2. Jesus Heals Many – 4:38-44
 - C. The Calling of the First Disciples – 5:1-11**
 - D. The Man with Leprosy – 5:12-16**
 - E. The Beginning of Conflict – 5:17-6:11**
 - 1. Jesus Heals a Paralytic – 5:17-26

2. The Calling of Levi – 5:27-32
3. Jesus Questioned About Fasting – 5:33-39
4. Lord of the Sabbath – 6:1-11
- F. The Sermon on the Plain – 6:12-49**
 1. The Twelve Apostles – 6:12-16
 2. Blessings and Woes – 6:17-26
 3. Love for Enemies – 6:27-36
 4. Judging Others – 6:37-42
 5. A Tree and Its Fruit – 6:43-45
 6. The Wise and Foolish Builders – 6:46-49
- G. Jesus the Prophet – 7:1-50**
 1. The Faith of the Centurion – 7:1-10
 2. Jesus Raises a Widow's Son – 7:11-17
 3. Jesus and John the Baptist – 7:18-35
 4. Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman – 7:36-50
- H. Jesus Teaches in Parables – 8:1-21**
 1. The Parable of the Sower – 8:1-15
 2. A Lamp on a Stand – 8:16-18
 3. Jesus' Mother and Brothers – 8:19-21
- I. Jesus Shows His Divine Power – 8:22-56**
 1. Jesus Calms a Storm – 8:22-25
 2. The Healing of a Demoniac – 8:26-39
 3. A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman – 8:40-56
- J. Jesus and His Apostles – 9:1-50**
 1. Jesus Sends Out the Twelve – 9:1-6
 2. Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand – 9:7-17
 3. Peter's Confession of Christ – 9:18-27
 4. The Transfiguration – 9:28-36
 5. The Healing of a Boy with a Demon – 9:37-45
 6. Who Will Be the Greatest? – 9:46-50
- V. Jesus' Journey to Jerusalem – 9:51-19:27**
 - A. Jesus Faces Toward Jerusalem – 9:51-13:21**
 1. Samaritan Opposition – 9:51-56
 2. The Cost of Following Jesus – 9:57-62
 3. Jesus Sends Out the Seventy-Two – 10:1-24
 4. The Parable of the Good Samaritan – 10:25-37
 5. At the Home of Mary and Martha – 10:38-42
 6. Jesus' Teaching on Prayer – 11:1-13

7. Jesus and Beelzebul – 11:14-28
8. The Sign of Jonah – 11:29-32
9. The Lamp of the Body – 11:33-36
10. Six Woes – 11:37-54
11. Warnings and Encouragements – 12:1-12
12. The Parable of the Rich Fool – 12:13-21
13. Do Not Worry – 12:22-34
14. Watchfulness – 12:35-48
15. Not Peace but Division – 12:49-53
16. Interpreting the Times – 12:54-59
17. Repent or Perish – 13:1-9
18. A Crippled Woman Healed – 13:10-17
19. Parables of Mustard Seed and Yeast – 13:18-21
- B. Jesus Journeys Toward Jerusalem – 13:22-17:10**
 1. The Narrow Door – 13:22-30
 2. Jesus' Sorrow for Jerusalem – 13:31-35
 3. Jesus at a Pharisee's House – 14:1-14
 4. The Parable of the Great Banquet – 14:15-24
 5. The Cost of Being a Disciple – 14:25-35
 6. The Parable of the Lost Sheep – 15:1-7
 7. The Parable of the Lost Coin – 15:8-10
 8. The Parable of the Lost Son – 15:11-32
 9. The Parable of the Shrewd Manager – 16:1-15
 10. Teachings on the Law and Divorce – 16:16-18
 11. The Rich Man and Lazarus – 16:19-31
 12. Sin, Faith, Duty – 17:1-10
- C. Jesus Approaches Jerusalem – 17:11-19:27**
 1. Ten Healed of Leprosy – 17:11-19
 2. The Coming of the Kingdom of God – 17:20-37
 3. The Parable of the Persistent Widow – 18:1-8
 4. The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector – 18:9-14
 5. The Little Children and Jesus – 18:15-17
 6. The Rich Ruler – 18:18-30
 7. Jesus Again Predicts His Death – 18:31-34
 8. A Blind Beggar Receives His Sight – 18:35-43
 9. Zacchaeus the Tax Collector – 19:1-10
 10. The Parable of the Ten Minas – 19:11-27

- VI. Jesus' Ministry in Jerusalem – 19:28-21:38**
 - A. The Triumphal Entry – 19:28-34**
 - B. Jesus at the Temple – 19:45-48**
 - C. The Authority of Jesus Questioned – 20:1-8**
 - D. The Parable of the Tenants – 20:9-19**
 - E. Paying Taxes to Caesar – 20:20-26**
 - F. The Resurrection and Marriage – 20:27-40**
 - G. Whose Son Is the Christ? – 20:41-47**
 - H. The Widow's Offering – 21:1-4**
 - I. Signs of the End of the Age – 21:5-38**
- VII. Jesus' Suffering and Death – 22:1-23:56**
 - A. Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus – 22:1-6**
 - B. The Last Supper – 22:7-38**
 - C. Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives – 22:39-46**
 - D. Jesus Arrested – 22:47-53**
 - E. Peter Disowns Jesus – 22:54-62**
 - F. The Guards Mock Jesus – 22:63-65**
 - G. Jesus Before Pilate and Herod – 22:66-23:25**
 - H. The Crucifixion – 23:26-43**
 - I. Jesus' Death – 23:44-49**
 - J. Jesus' Burial – 23:50-56**
- VIII. Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension – 24:1-53**
 - A. The Resurrection – 24:1-12**
 - B. On the Road to Emmaus – 24:13-35**
 - C. Jesus Appears to the Disciples – 24:36-49**
 - D. The Ascension – 24:50-53**