

GOSPEL OF LUKE

Approximate date: late 50s to early 60s; or late 70s to early 80s

Time period: establishment of a more definitive history of the ministry and teachings of Yeshua

Author: Luke the doctor

Location of author: Rome or Achaia

Target audience and their location: Theophilus, and broad groups of Jews, Greeks, and Romans

People:

Yeshua the Messiah, King Herod, Zechariah, Elizabeth, John the Immerser/the Baptist, the Twelve Disciples: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas son of James, Judas Iscariot (6:14-16), Gabriel, Joseph, Mary, Simeon, Anna, Pontius Pilate, Annas, Caiphas, Peter's mother-in-law, Pharisees, centurion (at Capernaum), Legion, Jairus, Samaritans, Martha and Mary, Bezebul, Lazarus, Zacchaeus, Barnabas, Simon from Cyrene, centurion (at the cross), Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magadelene, Joanna, Cleopas

People mentioned:

Theophilus, (division of) Abijah, Aaron, David, Jacob, Caesar Augustus, Quirinius, Moses, Phanuel, Asher (tribe), Tiberius Caesar, Herod the tetrarch, Philip the tetrarch, Lysanius, Isaiah, Abraham, Herodias, Yeshua's ancestors (3:23-37),¹ Elijah, Elisha, Naaman, Zebedee, Jonah, Solomon, Abel, Zechariah, Lot

Places:

the Temple, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Galilee, Judea, Syria, Bethlehem, Jordan, Capernaum, Lake Gennesaret, Tyre, Sidon, Nain, region of the Gerasenes, the Abyss, Samaria, Bethphage, Bethany, Mount of Olives, place of the Skull, Emmaus

Places mentioned:

Iturea, Tracoonitus, Abilene, Zaraphath, Korazin, Bethsaida, Jericho, Nineveh, Sodom, Cyrene

Key Themes and Events:

stated need to write an orderly account of Yeshua's life / announcement by Gabriel to Zechariah about the conception of John the Immerser / announcement by Gabriel to Mary about the conception of Yeshua / Mary visits Elizabeth and tells her about her encounter with the angel and her pregnancy / Mary sings a song of rejoicing / John the Immerser is born and circumcised / Zechariah sings a song of rejoicing / Roman census is enacted / Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem to register / Yeshua is born / angels announce Yeshua's birth to shepherds / Yeshua is circumcised and presented in the Temple before God / Simeon and Anna recognize that the Messiah has been born / Yeshua as a child converses with the teachers in the Temple (at Passover) / John the Immerser begins his ministry by calling for the repentance of the people / John the Immerser rebukes Herod / Luke compiles a listing of Yeshua's genealogy / Yeshua is tempted for forty days by Satan in the desert / Yeshua proclaims His fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy at the Nazareth synagogue / people attempt to throw Yeshua off a cliff / a demon recognizes Yeshua as Messiah, and is cast out of a man by Him / Yeshua heals Simon's

¹ Please note that there is disagreement among interpreters as to what genealogy of Yeshua's is recorded in this passage. Some think that it is a modified form of the patrilineal genealogy seen in Matthew 1, where instead of Yeshua being emphasized as a descendant of David, He is now emphasized as the Second Adam. Others think this ancestry is to be traced through Mary, and not through His adoptive father Joseph.

A SURVEY OF THE APOSTOLIC SCRIPTURES FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

mother-in-law / Yeshua casts demons out of those in Capernaum / Yeshua begins a ministry of preaching / Yeshua calls Simon, James, and John to be fishers of people / Yeshua heals a man with leprosy / Yeshua heals a paralytic and forgives him of his sins / Yeshua is declared a blasphemer / Yeshua calls Levi (Matthew), a tax collector, to follow Him / John the Immerser's disciples ask Yeshua about fasting / Yeshua declares Himself Lord of the Sabbath / Yeshua designates Twelve as Apostles / Yeshua delivers His Sermon on the Mount (6:20-49) / Yeshua heals a centurion's servant with only a word / Yeshua resurrects a young man from the dead at Nain at his funeral / John the Immerser's disciples ask Yeshua if He is the Messiah / Yeshua gives John's disciples a list of the signs He has performed / Yeshua is anointed by a sinful woman while dining at a Pharisee's house, then forgiving her sins / Yeshua delivers His parable of the sower / Yeshua calls His followers the light of the world / Yeshua says that His true family are those who practice God's Word / Yeshua calms a storm on the Sea of Galilee / Yeshua casts Legion out of a man and into a herd of pigs / a bleeding woman touches Yeshua's garment and is healed / Yeshua raises Jairus' daughter from the dead / Yeshua feeds the five thousand / Peter confesses Yeshua to be the Messiah / Yeshua is transfigured before Peter, James, and John / Yeshua heals a boy convulsing from a demon / Yeshua teaches that one must have the faith of a child to enter into God's Kingdom / Yeshua rebukes James and John for wanting to call down fire on a Samaritan village / Yeshua discusses the great cost of following Him / Yeshua proclaims judgments on cities that rejected Him / Yeshua delivers His parable of the Good Samaritan / Yeshua delivers a prayer for His Disciples to use / Yeshua is accused of casting out demons by the power of Satan / Yeshua says that His generation will receive the sign of Jonah / Yeshua proclaims some judgments against the Pharisees because of their abuses / Yeshua issues some severe warnings and admonitions to His Disciples / Yeshua heals a crippled woman on the Sabbath / Yeshua compares the Kingdom of God to mustard seed and yeast / Yeshua admonishes the people that entering into the Kingdom is difficult / Yeshua converses at a Pharisee's house about the Kingdom of God / Yeshua speaks again about the difficulty of entering the Kingdom of God / Yeshua teaches several parables about those who enter into God's Kingdom (lost sheep, lost coin, lost son) / Yeshua warns against the abuses of money / Yeshua warns about the fate of the unrighteous / Yeshua admonishes His followers on the need to be forgiving / Yeshua heals ten of leprosy, but only the Samaritan thanks Him / Yeshua compares His return to the days of Noah and Lot / Yeshua teaches about a widow who desires God's justice / Yeshua teaches about a self-righteous Pharisee and repentant tax-collector / Yeshua speaks on the need to enter God's Kingdom like a small child / Yeshua speaks on the difficulty for the rich to enter into God's Kingdom / Yeshua predicts His death / Yeshua heals a blind man near Jericho / Yeshua calls Zacchaeus the tax-collector to follow Him / Yeshua delivers His parable on the ten minas or talents / Yeshua enters triumphantly into Jerusalem on a donkey / Yeshua overturns the merchants in the Temple complex / the religious leaders question Yeshua's authority / Yeshua issues His parable of the tenants to the religious leaders / some try to trick Yeshua into committing treason against Caesar / some Sadducees ask Yeshua about the resurrection / Yeshua speaks to the religious leaders about whose Son the Messiah truly is / Yeshua admires the small offering of the poor widow / Yeshua teaches His Disciples on the End of the Age / Judas Iscariot agrees to betray Yeshua / Yeshua and His Disciples have their last Passover together / Yeshua tells Peter he will deny Him / Yeshua prays on the Mount of Olives with His Disciples / Yeshua is arrested with a betraying kiss by Judas / Peter denies Yeshua / Yeshua is beaten and mocked by the Roman soldiers / Yeshua is summoned before Pontius Pilate and Herod / Simon of Cyrene is impressed to carry Yeshua's cross / Yeshua is taken to the place of the Skull and crucified painfully / Yeshua dies and an eclipse occurs, the veil in the Temple is torn in two / the Roman centurion at the cross proclaims Yeshua the Son of God / Yeshua is buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea / Yeshua is resurrected from the dead / Yeshua reveals Himself to two of His followers on the road to Emmaus / Yeshua reveals Himself to the Eleven Disciples, claiming that what has occurred is in fulfillment of prophecy / Yeshua ascends into Heaven

Key Scriptures: Luke 19:9-10 / **The Prologue** (1:1-4); **The Infancy Narratives** (1:5-2:52); **The Preparation for Ministry** (3:1-4:13); **The Galilean Ministry** (4:14-9:50); **From Galilee to Jerusalem** (9:51-19:27); **In Jerusalem** (19:28-21:38); **The Passion and Resurrection Narratives** (22:1-24:53)²

² Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 132-135.

Theological Summary: The Gospel of Luke is the longest of the four Gospels, and is also the largest text within the Apostolic Scriptures. The Third Gospel is extremely thorough in its scope and appeal, as the author is very knowledgeable of First Century Judaism and the larger Greco-Roman world of the Mediterranean basin. The Gospel of Luke is the first in what turned out to be a two-volume series (Acts 1:1). The author's appeal is to a broad audience of Jews, Greeks, and Romans, which has led some interpreters in the direction of thinking that he is trying to validate the growing Messianic sect to its Jewish and Roman critics. As Luke 1:4 prefaces much of the contents of this Gospel, "so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught."

There is a large quantity of ancient evidence that Luke the physician was the author of this Gospel and the Book of Acts, and that this appeared rather early. An entire array of ancient Christian leaders acknowledged Lukan authorship of this Gospel, including: Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian. The Muratorian Canon and the anti-Mariconite Prologue to Luke also identify Luke as the author.³ Irenaeus attests in *Against Heresies*, "Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him" (3.1.1).⁴ A wide variety of not only conservative, but also some liberal theologians, accept genuine Lukan authorship of this Gospel.⁵ Acceptance of the Gospel of Luke as Scripture, or perhaps an early draft of it, is something possibly seen in the thought of 1 Timothy 5:18,⁶ where Luke 10:7 is quoted alongside of Deuteronomy 25:4.

The Apostle Paul refers to his companion Luke as "the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14). While various theories are espoused as to Luke's place of birth, it is largely agreed that Luke was certainly raised a Greek and later may have become a proselyte to Judaism, or at least a God-fearer who was attracted to the Diaspora Synagogue. Luke being heavily exposed to Judaism would have been required, given the extensive knowledge of the Tanach Scriptures that the author of the Third Gospel demonstrates.⁷ The text of Luke's Gospel "reveal[s] more important characteristics of its author: his stylistic ability, which enables him to use various Greek dictions; his Hellenistic education, shown by his facile use of rhetorical conventions...his wide reading in Torah, manifested in his dense textual allusions and in the structure of his story; his storytelling ability, demonstrated by his striking vignettes and parables" (*ABD*).⁸ Luke was without any doubt, both learned and rather cultural, and he demonstrates an affinity for Philippi, which boasted a medical school in ancient times where he may have been trained (Acts 16:12). Luke likely had some firsthand contact with Mary, as he spends an inordinate amount of time writing about the particulars of Yeshua's birth (ch. 2).

Neither conservative nor liberal scholars are agreed as to the exact dating of Luke's Gospel, favoring either an early date of 59-63 C.E., sometime in the late 60s C.E., or a later date sometime in the late 70s to early 80s C.E.⁹ As Luke ends the Book of Acts abruptly, it is assumed by some that he did not survive long after the martyrdom of Paul in Rome, or at least could have been arrested prior to completing it. The dating of Luke for many interpreters depends on one's approach toward how Yeshua says, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near" (Luke 21:20). Many interpret this as a reference to Jerusalem's destruction at the hands of Titus. Luke is likely adapting Matthew's phraseology of "abomination of desolation" (Matthew 24:15) to a non-Jewish audience, but 21:21, "Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains," is not realized as the Jewish Believers in 70 C.E. fled to Pella, which is not mountainous.¹⁰ The reference in Luke 21:20 should be viewed as largely futuristic in nature, which allows for a

³ E.E. Ellis, "Luke, Gospel According to," in *ISBE*, 3:180; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 114; D.L. Bock, "Luke, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 496; Carson and Moo, pp 205-206.

⁴ *BibleWorks 8.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers*.

⁵ V. Taylor, "Luke, Gospel of," in *IDB*, 3:180; Ellis, "Luke, Gospel According to," in *ISBE*, 3:185.

⁶ "For the Scripture says, 'YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'"

⁷ Cf. Bock, "Luke, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 496; Carson and Moo, 206.

⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, "Luke-Acts, Book of," in *ABD*, 4:404-405.

⁹ Taylor, "Luke, Gospel of," in *IDB*, 3:185-186; Ellis, "Luke, Gospel According to," in *ISBE*, 3:183; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 128-131; Bock, "Luke, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 498-500; Joel B. Green, "Luke, Gospel of," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 828; Carson and Moo, pp 207-210.

¹⁰ Robert H. Gundry, "Luke: A Promotion of Christianity in the Greco-Roman World at Large," in *A Survey of the New Testament*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 209.

post-70 C.E. composition date, although it is not required by it. It is quite possible that the author of Luke had access to at least Mark's Gospel, and perhaps even Matthew's Gospel, and/or the hypothetical "Q" source document.¹¹

Luke's Gospel was written to the "most excellent Theophilus" (1:3), to whom he also directs Acts (1:1). There is not uniform agreement as to who or what "Theophilus" was, as the name *Theophilos* (Θεόφιλος) in Greek means "one who loves God." Some think that the Gospel of Luke is directed to all lovers of God, but it is employed as a proper name. It is safe to assume that Theophilus was an actual person, possibly a recent Believer when Luke was writing, and most likely even Luke's patron.¹² It has been speculated that the terminology "most excellent" is an indication that Theophilus was a Roman official or aristocrat,¹³ and there is evidence in the Apostolic Scriptures that those in the Imperial Roman hierarchy did receive Yeshua (i.e., Philippians 4:22). Certainly, Luke's Gospel was not exclusively written to the individual Theophilus, but a broad audience, perhaps including God-fearers in the Synagogue who were reluctant about the emerging group of Messiah followers.¹⁴ Luke's composition is certainly of a more Jewish character than Mark's Gospel, but less so than Matthew's Gospel.

The Gospel of Luke demonstrates some of the highest competency in Greek within the Apostolic Scriptures. This does not mean, though, that there are not any Semitic influences, as the style of Greek composition is largely similar to that witnessed in the Septuagint: "Luke's Greek is remarkable for its adaptability. The preface is modeled on classical patterns, which gives some insight into his cultural background. But after writing 1:1-4, he drops the literary style for a type of Greek strongly flavoured with Semitisms, which he uses for the infancy narratives. Subsequent to this he generally uses what may be described as good literary *Koiné* Greek...The strongly Hebraistic character of Luke's Greek in this section is admirably adapted to link the incarnation of Jesus with the Old Testament history and that may well be the effect that Luke wished to create. By his obvious familiarity with the Septuagint, which he often cites throughout his gospel, Luke's Greek has become strongly coloured with Hebraisms" (Guthrie).¹⁵

While some of today's Messianics might dispute it, without a doubt Luke's "readers were Greek-speaking, and sufficiently acquainted with scriptural traditions to grasp at least the gist of his allusions" (ABD).¹⁶ Luke's own name of *Loukas* (Λουκάς) is of Greek origin, and modern Hebrew New Testament translations employ the form of *Louqas* (לוקָאס) for this Gospel's title. There have just been too many detailed, scholastic studies into the Gospel of Luke that demonstrate consistencies between the Third Gospel and other ancient classical works, histories, or biographies.¹⁷ Luke's Gospel was intended to be appreciated by a broad audience of people, not exclusively by Jews who spoke Hebrew or Aramaic.

The place of Luke's composition is not agreed upon by all expositors, although there are various suggestions that are made. Rome is the first possible place of Luke's composition, as Luke was a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. It is suggested that Luke traveled with Paul to Rome, and while in Rome read Mark's Gospel, which he used for the basis of his own Gospel.¹⁸ Another likely possibility is Achaia, as indicated in the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to Luke. Other suggested cities include Ephesus or Caesarea, but it is all dependent on where Theophilus was from.¹⁹

When compared to the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, Luke noticeably arranges the events in a slightly different order, likely because the priority he places on the events for his intended audience is different. This would have been especially true if Luke had been written to validate the growing Messianic sect as being

¹¹ Cf. Bock, "Luke, Gospel of," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 496-497; Carson and Moo, pp 212-214.

¹² Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 108-109.

¹³ Carson and Moo, 210.

¹⁴ Gundry, in *A Survey of the New Testament*, 206.

¹⁵ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 131-132; cf. Taylor, "Luke, Gospel of," in *IDB*, 3:181-182; Johnson, "Luke-Acts, Book of," in *ABD*, 4:405.

¹⁶ Johnson, "Luke-Acts, Book of," in *ABD*, 4:405.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4:406.

¹⁸ Taylor, "Luke, Gospel of," in *IDB*, 3:186.

¹⁹ Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 110.

legitimate in the eyes of the Jewish community and Rome. His emphasis is summed up in the statement, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (19:20). Luke describes the universal nature of the good news. He relies on eyewitness testimony; he describes the historicity of the narrative; and Luke makes aims to adequately address Yeshua’s Messianic claims.

Theologically, Luke’s Gospel is largely focused around three groups of narrative: events in Galilee (4:14-9:50), events in Judea and Perea (9:51-19:27), and Yeshua’s final week in Jerusalem (19:28-24:53). Unlike Matthew’s Gospel, which largely focuses on the Kingdom of God, Luke focuses much more on individuals, making strides by addressing the situation of women, children, and outsiders to the Jewish community like Samaritans. Those who are oppressed and downtrodden, and generally despised, are given a place in Luke.²⁰

In much of contemporary evangelical Christian examination of the Gospel of Luke, it should be obvious that the broad-sweeping narratives of the life and ministry of Yeshua are most important to your average Believers, as well as the call of Yeshua for people to become His disciples.²¹ Theological conservatives treat Luke as a work that enables them to treat the message of the good news as historically reliable and trustworthy.²²

Additional thoughts, joined with the Book of Acts, often relate to how Luke’s two compositions seemingly have a salvation history theme to them, meaning that history was “a course of events following a schedule of times set by God and directed by God toward all people” (*IDBSup*).²³ Everything occurs at its proper moment. With this in mind, if Bible readers *only* read the Gospel of Luke, their understanding of its overall theology can be a bit incomplete, especially as it concerns the good news going out into the nations (2:32). There is a definite growing trend in theological studies to treat Luke and Acts together, because of issues of thematic unity.²⁴ Regardless of whether one is a conservative or a liberal, the need to read Luke-Acts simultaneously is important, even with the canonical order being Luke, John, and then Acts. Even with the advantages, though, of reading Luke as volume I and Acts as volume II, Carson and Moo advise, “we should probably respect the canonical status of the two and consider each on its own when it comes to the question of genre, structure, purpose, and, to some extent, theology.”²⁵ The Gospel of Luke was written before the Book of Acts, but neither work can be radically separated from the other.

For Messianic Believers encountering the Gospel of Luke, questions are undeniably asked of us by various interpreters and theologians, such as how Luke “explains how Jews and Gentiles could become equals in a community planted by God, even though that community was rooted in a promise to Israel” (Bock).²⁶ There are discussions about Luke’s approach to the Torah²⁷ and ecclesiology.²⁸ Messianic difficulties with the Gospel of Luke are not likely going to be seen from the text of Luke, as much as they are going to be seen with varied theological approaches to Luke. That the Gospel of Luke has a very inclusive message for all people cannot be denied, but whether this inclusive message represents the emergence of a new assembly of elect *or* an Israel entering into its fullness in the Messiah, can surely be debated. Luke 24:44 presents a definite mission for all Messianic Believers, as they approach the Tanach Scriptures: “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

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²⁰ Taylor, “Luke, Gospel of,” in *IDB*, 3:183; Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 102-104; Bock, “Luke, Gospel of,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 506; cf. Johnson, “Luke-Acts, Book of,” in *ABD*, 4:415-417.

²¹ Green, “Luke, Gospel of,” in *EDB*, 830.

²² Cf. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, pp 105-107.

²³ W.C. Robinson, Jr., “Luke, Gospel of,” in *IDBSup*, 560.

²⁴ Johnson, “Luke-Acts, Book of,” in *ABD*, 4:404; Carson and Moo, pp 201-203, 211-212.

²⁵ Carson and Moo, 203.

²⁶ Bock, “Luke, Gospel of,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 506, 495.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 507-508.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 508-509.

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON LUKE:

1. When comparing Mark and Matthew to Luke, what are some noticeable similarities between these texts? What are some noticeable differences?

2. Which do you think Luke focuses on the most: Yeshua's actions or His teachings?

3. How does Luke's Gospel supplement our understanding of the other two Synoptic Gospels of Mark and Matthew? What makes Luke's Gospel unique when compared to the other two Synoptics?

4. Did you notice how thorough Luke handles the different stratas of First Century society? How important is it for us to understand not only the place of Jews, Greeks, Romans, and Samaritans in the First Century – but also his mentioning of the infirm, the poor, and women?

5. What sector of First Century society do you believe Luke was written for, based on what you have surveyed?

REFLECTION ON LUKE'S PLACEMENT IN THE CANON

Write two short paragraphs about what struck you about reading the Gospel of Luke: