

The Gospel of Luke – an overview

Earliest Christians unanimously attribute the work of the third gospel to Luke, a gentile physician and companion of St Paul. Several Church fathers including Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria also assert Luke's authorship.

Luke is the only evangelist who is a gentile. In Col4:14 Paul lists 'Luke the physician' among his uncircumcised companions. Luke is also the only evangelist to write a sequel to his gospel – the 'Acts of the apostles'. It shows how the Holy Spirit's work in the life of Jesus operates now in the Church.

DATE

The weight of evidence is that Luke wrote his gospel in early 60's. Acts ends for instance with Paul under house arrest in AD 62. There is no mention by Luke of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 or persecution of Christians in the Mid 60's under Nero.

DESTINATION

The gospel is addressed to Theophilus, a Roman official who may have financed his work. His main audience included gentile Christians throughout the Mediterranean world as well as Israelites and Samaritans living among them in the Diaspora.

STRUCTURE

Luke writes an orderly account of the life of Jesus. The gospel starts with a prologue (1:1-4) and continues with the infancy narratives, then follows the Galilean ministry (4:14-9:50), then the journey to Jerusalem: (9:51 – 19:27). Then the Passion Narratives (19:28 – 23:56). Finally the Gospel climaxes with the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus as Victor over Sin and Death.

THEMES

The one theme above all others is Jesus's Universal message of Salvation. His mission to gather all the people and nations into one family. Luke first sees Jesus as the Saviour of God's Old Testament people. He fulfils what the OT

prophets foretold. Jesus is the Royal Messiah inheriting the legacy of King David (1:33, 68, 22:28-30). The Samaritans (half Jews) are portrayed in a particularly good light. The salvation of Christ is also intended for the gentiles. Jesus is a 'light for revelation to the gentiles' (2:32). All flesh can now look to Christ for salvation (3:6). Before He ascends into Heaven, Jesus sends out his apostles to preach to all the nations (24:47)

Salvation is predominantly relevant for the outcasts, the poor and disreputable among them. The mercy of God is particularly underscored for the lowly and oppressed (1:52-53, 4:18, 6:20-26, 14:7-11).

Women in particular are showcased throughout the gospel – the Virgin Mary, Elizabeth, Anna (2:36-38), the widow of Nain (7:11-17). The sinful woman, Mary Magdalene, Johanna, Suzanna, Mary and Martha of Bethany, women with the spirit of infirmity. Women are mentioned in the parables of the lost coin and unrighteous judge, the widow's mite. Luke alone has the parables of the Prodigal son and Good Samaritan.

We can also thank Luke for bequeathing to us the Church's most beautiful prayers, the 'Magnificat', the 'Benedictus', the 'Nunc Dimittis' and the 'Gloria' which the angels sang when Christ was born.

Luke, in his gospel has bequeathed us an artistic and spiritual masterpiece and this is no less true of his sequel, the Acts of the Apostles which is sometimes called the gospel of the Holy Spirit.