

Why study Luke or why did I choose to preach through the Gospel According to Luke? Well, there are several reasons. When I began praying where the Lord would have us go after Hosea - Luke kept coming to my mind. As I kept praying a number of reasons came to mind; Luke wrote the most thorough account of Christ and of the early church history in his two volumes of Luke and Acts. In fact, Luke's writing accounts for more of the New Testament than any other writer including Paul. Luke's 2 volumes make up over 1/3 of the New Testament. More than 40% of Luke's gospel account is not found in the other 3 gospels of Matthew, Mark and John. Only Paul equals Luke's impact and importance in the New Testament. The difference is we know a great deal about Paul and almost nothing about Luke. Yet, Luke's historical account spans over 60 years from the birth of John the Baptist, who God called to heralded Jesus as the Messiah, to the end of the Book of Acts with the Gospel of Christ being preached in Rome and taken out from Israel to the world. Luke never refers to himself in his writings, not in the 24 chapters of Luke or in the 28 chapters of Acts. Luke is fully content in staying in the background and making the focus the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We will study Luke as a great adventure by working through it verse by verse and chapter by chapter. However, I want to make clear that I will allow the Holy Spirit to interrupt and make changes. We will not be able to study Luke without bringing in the other gospel accounts and a number of books found in Scripture. We will also take some breaks along the way to examine topics that the Lord and his Spirit place upon my heart. We begin with the discipline of digging into the verses to find what God would have us see and use in our lives and the liberty to be open to the Spirit's leading.

It would appear from my research that Luke finished his gospel account and Acts prior to 62 A.D. because his historical narrative is detailed and accurate, and the fact that he does not deal with the death of James in 62 A.D. or of Paul's death in Rome that took place no later than 68 A.D. or the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Luke was too detailed oriented to omit these important events had they occurred by the time of his writing. Luke began his account of Christ after James was written as early as 48 A.D., the Gospel According to Matthew written between 50 and 60 A.D. and possibly the Gospel According to Mark written between 60 and 70 A.D.

In Paul's final greeting and the closing of his letter to the believers in Colossi he wrote, "Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas." (Colossians 4:14) From this we know Luke was a physician and from historical accounts of this time, we learn there were commonly 2 types of physicians. First, there was the well-educated and trained physician who often served the wealthy as their private physician. Second, there were those who would heal with spells, charms and elixirs and preyed on the common peoples fears. We can tell Luke was from the first category of physician because his writing is of a well-educated man. Luke is mentioned only 3 times in Scripture and the verse in Colossians is the only one that gives an obvious clue about who Luke was.

### **Luke: The Author**

Let's begin exploring who Luke was and why we give credence to his gospel account and that he is the author by reading from the beginning at verse 1, and I am reading from the English Standard Version translation, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us,<sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,<sup>3</sup> it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent

Theophilus (theh·of·il·os), <sup>4</sup> that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:1-4)

What was just read is what is called the prologue and sets the stage for the story, which follows beginning in verse 5. This prologue is written in classical Greek style for the time. All philosophers and writers who wanted creditability began their writings with a prologue. This prologue is one sentence comprised of 74 words written in classical Greek, while the rest of the gospel account that follows is written in common Greek. Luke may have done this to establish that this is a work to be trusted and a work of quality. With the language and structure used especially here and throughout the gospel account it can be determined that Luke was well educated and a detail oriented person. It is in this prologue that Luke states his purpose for writing his gospel account and Acts – it is his desire “to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.” In order to give this assurance Luke says he is acting as a careful historian interviewing eyewitnesses and reading a number of written accounts. As we work our way through Luke we will see him as a physician, historian, theologian and pastor. Luke’s purpose is to present an orderly account to convince people of the truth of Jesus Christ as the Messiah so that they may believe. By the way there are many theories as to who Theophilus was, but no one knows for sure. So we will leave him in obscurity and keep our focus on Christ by the writings of Luke.

As we begin to mine the truths of Luke’s gospel account I hope you see things that will bring to life the fullest meaning of what God desires we see. The writer says in verse 3, “...it seemed good to me...” This is all we know about the writer from this opening. One can rightly ask who is “me”?

By tradition the only author of this 3<sup>rd</sup> gospel account has been Luke and it has never been attributed to anyone else. If a tradition begins shortly after the event it is

more likely to be true than if the tradition begins after considerable time has passed. In the case of Luke all accounts quickly attributed this gospel account to him. Even enemies of the gospel agreed. In 135 A.D., only 70 years after it was written the heretic Marcion who decided the gospel of Luke needed to be edited to make it consistent with his theology said Luke was the author of the 3<sup>rd</sup> gospel account. Marcion also wanted to make a number of others changes to the gospel message found throughout the New Testament. Marcion's heretically writings were the reason for the early Church Fathers to excommunicate him from the church. I praise God for this heretic because of the actions of Marcion the early Church Fathers begin the process of codifying the New Testament, which gives of the complete New Testament canon inspired by the Holy Spirit. Also it is interesting that the earliest surviving list of New Testament books known as the Muratorian Canon from 170 to 180 A.D. calls the 3<sup>rd</sup> gospel account the Gospel According to Luke.

Returning to the prologue of Luke in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of verse 3 we read, [“to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus \(theh·of·il·os\).”](#) This writing is addressed to Theophilus. Now go to Luke's 2<sup>nd</sup> volume, the Book of Acts, chapter 1, verse 1, [“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.”](#) (Acts 1:1-2) Luke is saying he wrote the 3<sup>rd</sup> gospel by saying, [“In the first book”](#) and he is following it up with his writing the Book of Acts to continue the teaching so that Theophilus will know what to believe and why.

Again focusing on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gospel account we know the writer is not an apostle because he refers to them in verse 2 saying, [“those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses.”](#) We know from the scriptures that to be an apostle of Jesus you had to be an eyewitness to his life, death and resurrection. Therefore, Luke is not an eyewitness, but some who were eyewitnesses for his gospel research were apostles.

Additionally, Luke says he used “[ministers of the word have delivered them to us.](#)” In other words he also used their writings.

We also know from Acts and 2 Timothy chapter 4 that Luke joined Paul’s missionary group sometime before or during the 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey in Philippi. Luke was a long-term companion of Paul. While Luke was not an eyewitness to the gospel of Christ that he wrote, he was an eyewitness to much of what he wrote in Acts.

Of the 4 gospels Matthew and John were apostles, but neither Mark nor Luke were. However, both Mark and Luke were companions of the apostles. Mark was Peter’s companion and Luke was Paul’s. It is all of these 4 gospels, each give details that combined together give the fullest account of Jesus’ life and his teachings.

### **Luke: The Physician**

In Paul’s letter to Colossi Christians we read, “[Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.](#)” (Colossians 4:14) This is where we discover Luke’s profession, but if we go back to verse 11 we discover something else. In the verses prior to 11 Paul lists a number of men who make up his band of brothers in his mission endeavors. Then in verse 11 we read, “[These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.](#)” All of these men are “[of the circumcision](#)” meaning these men were Jewish and Luke is the only gentile. His actual name is Loukas (**loo·kas**), which is Greek. This explains Luke’s ability to write in both classical and common Greek. We do not know where Luke was from, but early tradition says he was from Antioch. The first church plant outside of Jerusalem was in Antioch and may have been where Luke was converted. Paul came to pastor this church and this might have been where the two met.

Considering the trials Paul suffered, “with countless beatings, and often near death. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received ... forty lashes less one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked ...” (2 Corinthians 11:23-25) what a blessing Luke must have been to Paul in his ability to care for him as a physician. This among other things would have lead Paul to call Luke “beloved physician.” As I already mentioned Luke is only found 3 times in the scriptures; Colossians chapter 4, 2 Timothy chapter 4 and Philemon 24 where Paul again lists Luke as one of his fellow workers in the gospel of Christ. Both Colossians and Philemon were written during Paul’s 1<sup>st</sup> imprisonment in Rome, which Luke writes of at the end of Acts. Luke joined Paul around the 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey and stayed with Paul to the very end of his life. Paul had a number of men who belonged to his missionary band of brothers and he had equipped a number for ministries of their own. But of all these men, Luke is the only one who remains with Paul to the very end. Luke was with Paul except for a 6-year break when Paul left Luke in Philippi to minister to the new church there. Luke then returned to Paul on the 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey. He was with Paul when they journeyed to Jerusalem where Paul was arrested. Luke was with Paul when they took him to Caesarea and imprisoned him at the Roman garrison. Caesarea was on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea just northwest of present day Tel Aviv. This is important to know because it gave Luke access to Jerusalem and the leaders there including Matthew and James. This would have given Luke a chance to bring communications back and forth between Paul and Jerusalem, and remember Luke said he interviewed many witnesses and studied the writings of the eyewitnesses to Christ. This would have included James, Matthew, Paul and a number of others in Jerusalem.

### **Luke: The Historian**

This brings us to Luke the historian. Luke writes in beginning in verse 1, “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have

been accomplished among us, <sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us.” Luke is telling Theophilus and all who read this gospel that he is acting as a historian. He is interviewing the eyewitnesses who knew Jesus and he is reading their writings. Paul had a scribe write his epistles as he dictated, but Luke is taking notes and organizing them and then he writes his gospel account. Luke says from the beginning others have written accounts of Jesus and he is verifying if they are accurate. We do not have these writings Luke researched for they have long ago disappeared. We do not know all the sources Luke read, but we do know he would have had access to James the brother Jesus and Matthew the apostle. The stories James could have shared from growing up as the brother of Jesus. Then there was the gospel accounts of Matthew and possibly Mark. Even if Luke did not have access to Mark’s gospel he had access to Mark himself. Then there was also Barnabas and Matthias as we learn from Acts these two kind of vied to replace Judas’s spot as the 12<sup>th</sup> apostle. These two men would have much to share with Luke. So, Luke both in his travels and while in Caesarea for about 2 years with the prisoner Paul had access to both core leadership in Jerusalem and hundreds of other witnesses of Jesus. Luke was personally acquainted with many of the first-hand eyewitnesses to Jesus and their writings about Jesus. One other note, Luke would have met Mary, mother of Jesus and just think of the things she was able to share with him. Luke establishes himself as a creditable historian by his careful research of numerous sources.

Now just because Luke did research and was not himself an eyewitness of Jesus does not mean he was not inspired by the Holy Spirit to write his gospel account. The Holy Spirit inspired the writings of the New Testament just as he had the Old. The Holy Spirit used each writer’s personality, experiences and language to deliver the exact message from God to humanity without error. The Holy Spirit controlled each writer’s experiences of life as God the Father planned from before Creation and

revealed to them what God wanted to communicate. The Holy Spirit guided each writer through their experiences, research and study of Scripture to the exact point they needed to be in order to write the inerrant testimony and message of God and this includes Luke.

Some might wonder why did Luke think he needed to write another gospel account since there were already two and 60% of what Luke wrote could be found in the other gospels. The answer is that God called Luke to write his gospel account. God desired Luke to write a comprehensive and mostly chronological account of the life of Jesus and then the history of the early church – from the birth of John the Baptist, the one who heralded the coming of the Messiah to the preaching of the gospel in Rome. Luke’s writing stands alone as the one comprehensive flowing story in 2 volumes with the purpose of instructing people step by step of what to believe and why believing in Jesus is a crucial decision with eternal consequences. Luke’s narrative is the story of God’s plan of salvation. It could be called, like the movie from 1965 starring Charlton Heston, “The Greatest Story Ever Told.”

Luke writes about Jesus and the greatest story ever told and is satisfied with not mentioning his name or taking any credit or shifting any of the focus from Jesus. This is something I want to take to heart. My role as a pastor is to help people see, understand and believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, it has nothing to do with me. Like John the Baptist I am but a messenger. Being a messenger of the wonderful life saving gospel of Christ is not just for John the Baptist and Luke but for all believers. God has given us the tools needed in His inspired Word to share the gospel of Christ with the lost. The question is will you use these tools for the glory of Christ? Will you be obedient to the calling of Christ in your life to share his gospel with the lost?

I close with a prayer not only for me but also for each of you. A pray taken from Philippians, “*For to me and I pray for you to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*”<sup>22</sup> If

I am *and we are* to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me *and you*. Yet which *we* shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup> *We are to be* hard pressed between the two. *We* desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. <sup>24</sup> But to remain in the flesh is more necessary *for the account of all who God brings into our lives*. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all *and I hope you desire to do the same, for our mutual* progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> *so that in us all brothers and sisters in Christ may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus...*” (Philippians 1:21-26) Amen!