

Luke

Historian Of The Early Church

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Overview

LUKE WAS THE HISTORIAN OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Luke includes himself in sections of Acts 16-28. He is also mentioned in Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1; Colossians 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24.

One of the essential qualities of a good doctor is compassion. People need to know that their doctor cares. Even if he or she doesn't know what is wrong or isn't sure what to do, real concern is always a doctor's good medicine. Doctor Luke was a person of compassion.

Although we know few facts of his life, Luke has left us a strong impression of himself by what he wrote. In his Gospel, he emphasizes Jesus Christ's compassion. He vividly recorded both the power demonstrated by Christ's life and the care with which Christ treated people. Luke highlighted the relationships Jesus had with women. His writing in Acts is full of sharp verbal pictures of real people caught up in the greatest events of history.

Luke was also a doctor. He had a traveling medical practice as Paul's companion. Since the gospel was often welcomed with whips and stones, the doctor was undoubtedly seldom without patients. It is even possible that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was some kind of physical ailment that needed Luke's regular attention. Paul deeply appreciated Luke's skills and faithfulness.

God also made special use of Luke as the historian of the early church. Repeatedly, the details of Luke's descriptions have been proven accurate. The first words in his Gospel indicate his interest in the truth.

Luke's compassion reflected his Lord's. Luke's skill as a doctor helped Paul. His passion for the facts as he recorded the life of Christ, the spread of the early church, and the lives of Christianity's missionaries gives us dependable sources for the basis of our faith. He accomplished all this while staying out of the spotlight. Perhaps his greatest example is the challenge to greatness even when we are not the center of attention.

Luke was a careful and exact historian. He was the writer of both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts

A disciple

A physician

Col 4:14

Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.

Luke spent much time with Paul, not only accompanying him on most of his third missionary journey, but sitting with him in the prison at Rome. Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

Wrote to Theophilus

Luke 1:1-4

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,

Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;

It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,

That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

Luke gives us the most detailed account of Jesus' birth. In describing Jesus' birth, childhood, and development, Luke lifts up the humanity of Jesus. Our Savior was the ideal human. Fully prepared, the ideal human was now ready to live the perfect life.

Luke tells Jesus' story from Luke's unique perspective of a Gentile, a physician, and the first historian of the early church. Though not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry, Luke nevertheless is concerned that eyewitness accounts be preserved accurately and that the foundations of Christian belief be transmitted intact to the next generation.

In Luke's Gospel are many of Jesus' parables. In addition, more than any other Gospel, it gives specific instances of Jesus' concern for women.

Here was a lot of interest in Jesus, and many people had written firsthand accounts about him. Luke may have used these accounts and all other available resources as material for an accurate and complete account of Jesus' life, teachings, and ministry.

Because truth was important to Luke, he relied heavily on eyewitness accounts. Christianity doesn't say, "Close your eyes and believe," but rather, "Check it out for yourself." The Bible encourages you to investigate its claims thoroughly (John 1:46; John 21:24; Acts 17:11-12), because your conclusion about Jesus is a life-and-death matter.

Luke gives an account of Jesus ministry.

Acts 1:1-2

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

The book of Acts continues the story Luke began in his Gospel, covering the 30 years after Jesus was taken up into heaven. During that short time the church was established, and the gospel of salvation was taken throughout the world, even to the capital of the Roman Empire.

Those preaching the gospel, though ordinary people with human frailties and limitations, were empowered by the Holy Spirit to take the Good News "all over the world" (Acts 17:6). Throughout the book of Acts we learn about the nature of the church and how we today are also to go about turning our world upside down.

Luke's former book was the Gospel of Luke; that book was also addressed to Theophilus, whose name means "one who loves God." (See note on +Luke 1:3.)

are the bridge between the events recorded in the Gospels and the events marking the beginning of the church. Jesus spent 40 days teaching his disciples, and they were changed drastically. Before, they had argued with each other, deserted their Lord, and one (Peter) even lied about knowing Jesus.

Here, in a series of meetings with the living, resurrected Christ, the disciples had many questions answered. They became convinced about the resurrection, learned about the kingdom of God, and learned about their power source—the Holy Spirit. By reading the Bible, we can sit with the resurrected Christ in his school of discipleship.

By believing in him, we can receive his power through the Holy Spirit to be new people. By joining with other Christians in Christ's church, we can take part in doing his work on earth.

Luke says that the disciples were eyewitnesses to all that had happened to Jesus Christ—his life before his crucifixion (“suffering”), and the 40 days after his resurrection as he taught them more about the kingdom of God. Today there are still people who doubt Jesus' resurrection. But Jesus appeared to the disciples on many occasions after his resurrection, proving that he was alive.

Look at the change the resurrection made in the disciples' lives. At Jesus' death, they scattered—they were disillusioned, and they feared for their lives. After seeing the resurrected Christ, they were fearless and risked everything to spread the Good News about him around the world.

They faced imprisonment, beatings, rejection, and martyrdom, yet they never compromised their mission.

These men would not have risked their lives for something they knew was a fraud. They knew Jesus was raised from the dead, and the early church was fired with their enthusiasm to tell others. It is important to know this so we can have confidence in their testimony. Twenty centuries later we can still be confident that our faith is based on fact.

Jesus explained that with his coming, the kingdom of God was inaugurated. When he returned to heaven, God's kingdom would remain in the hearts of all believers through the presence of the Holy Spirit. But the kingdom of God will not be fully realized until Jesus Christ comes again to judge all people and remove all evil from

the world. Before that time, believers are to work to spread God's kingdom across the world.

The book of Acts records how this work was begun. What the early church started, we must continue.

Luke accompanies Paul in his tour of Asia and Macedonia

Acts 16:10-13

And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;

And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

The use of the pronoun *we* indicates that Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke and of this book, joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy on their journey. He was an eyewitness to most of the remaining incidents in this book.

Philippi was the key city in the region of Macedonia (northern Greece today). Paul founded a church during this visit (A.D. 50-51). Later Paul wrote a letter to the church, the book of Philippians, probably from a prison in Rome (A.D. 61).

The letter was personal and tender, showing Paul's deep love for and friendship with the believers there. In it he thanked them for a gift they had sent, alerted them to a coming visit by Timothy and Epaphroditus, urged the church to clear up any disunity, and encouraged the believers not to give in to persecution.

Inscribed on the arches outside the city of Philippi was a prohibition against bringing an unrecognized religion into the city; therefore, this prayer meeting was held outside the city, beside the river.

After following the Holy Spirit's leading into Macedonia, Paul made his first evangelistic contact with a small group of women. Paul never allowed gender or cultural boundaries to keep him from preaching the gospel.

He preached to these women, and Lydia, an influential merchant, believed. This opened the way for ministry in that region. God often worked in and through women in the early church.

Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth, so she was probably wealthy. Purple cloth was valuable and expensive. It was often worn as a sign of nobility or royalty.

Luke highlights the stories of three individuals who became believers through Paul's ministry in Philippi: Lydia, the influential businesswoman (Acts 16:14), the demon-possessed slave girl (Acts 16:16-18), and the jailer (Acts 16:27-30). The gospel was affecting all strata of society, just as it does today

They travel to Troas

Acts 20:5-6

These going before tarried for us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

The use of *us* and *we*, shows that this is where Luke again joins the group. The last *we* was in Acts 16.

Jewish believers celebrated the Passover (which was immediately followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread) according to Moses' instructions (see Exodus 12:43-51) even if they couldn't be at Jerusalem for the occasion.

To Jerusalem

Acts 21:1-18

And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara:

And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.

And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.

And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.

And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemaist, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.

And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Then Paul answered, what mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, the will of the Lord be done.

And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Manson of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.

And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

Did Paul disobey the Holy Spirit by going to Jerusalem? No. More likely, the Holy Spirit warned these believers about the suffering that Paul would face in Jerusalem. They drew the conclusion that he should not go there because of that danger. This is supported by Acts 21:10-12 where the local believers, after hearing that Paul would be turned over to the Romans, begged him to turn back.

Paul knew he would be imprisoned in Jerusalem. Although his friends pleaded with him to not go there, he knew that he had to because God wanted him to. No one enjoys pain, but a faithful disciple wants above all else to please God. Our desire to please God should overshadow our desire to avoid hardship and suffering. When we really want to do God's will, we must accept all that comes with it—even the pain. Then we can say with Paul, "The Lord's will be done."

James, Jesus' brother, was the leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13-21; Galatians 1:19; Galatians 2:9). He was called an apostle even though he wasn't one of the original 12 who followed Jesus.

To Rome

Luke records Paul's Voyage towards Rome

Acts 27:1-11

It was determined by the counsel of God, before it was determined by the counsel of Festus that Paul should go to Rome; for God had work for him to do there. The course they steered, and the places they touched at, are here set down. And God here encourages those who suffer for him, to trust in him; for he can put it into the hearts of those to befriend them, from whom they least expect it.

Use of the pronoun *we* indicates that Luke accompanied Paul on this journey. Aristarchus is the man who was dragged into the theater at the beginning of the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4; Philemon 1:24).

Julius, a hardened Roman centurion, was assigned to guard Paul. Obviously he had to remain close to Paul at all times. Through this contact, Julius developed a respect for Paul. He gave Paul a certain amount of freedom (Acts 27:3) and later spared his life (Acts 27:43).

The “Fast” was the Day of Atonement. Ships in ancient times had no compasses and navigated by the stars. Overcast weather made sailing almost impossible and very dangerous. Sailing was doubtful in September and impossible by November. This event occurred in October (A.D. 59)

Luke records Paul’s ministry as a prisoner in Jerusalem.

Acts 28

Paul persuaded the Jews concerning Jesus. Some were wrought upon by the word, and others hardened; some received the light, and others shut their eyes against it. And the same has always been the effect of the gospel. Paul parted with them, observing that the Holy Ghost had well described their state.

God had promised safe passage to Paul (Acts 27:23-25), and he would let nothing stop his servant. The poisonous viper that bit Paul was unable to harm him. Our lives are in God’s hands, to continue on or to come to an end in his good timing. God still had work for Paul to do.

Where did the Roman believers come from? The gospel message had spread to Rome by various methods. Many Jews who lived in Rome visited Jerusalem for religious festivals. Some were present at Pentecost (Acts 2:10), believed in Jesus, and brought the message back to Rome. Also, Paul had written his letter to the Romans before he visited there.

The Forum of Appius was a town about 43 miles south of Rome; Three Taverns was located about 35 miles south of Rome. A *tavern* was a shop, or a place that provided food and lodging for travelers. The Christians openly went to meet Paul and encourage him.

Luke was helpful to Paul's ministry.

2 Tim. 4:11

Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

Crescens and Titus had left, but not for the same reasons as Demas. Paul did not criticize or condemn them.

Mentioning Demas reminded Paul of more faithful co-workers. Only Luke was with Paul, and Paul was feeling lonely. Tychicus, one of his most trusted companions (Acts 20:4; Ephes. 6:21; Col. 4:7; Titus 3:12), had already left for Ephesus.

Paul missed his young helpers Timothy and Mark. Mark had left Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey, and this had greatly upset Paul (Acts 13:13; Acts 15:36-41). But later Mark proved to be a worthy helper, and Paul recognized him as a good friend and trusted Christian leader (Col. 4:10; Philemon 1:24). Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark.

Luke was a fellow worker with Paul

Philemon 1:24

Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow labourers.

Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke are also mentioned in Col. 4:10, 14. Mark had accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25ff). Mark also wrote the Gospel of Mark. Luke had accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey and was the writer of the Gospel of Luke and the book of

Acts. Demas had been faithful to Paul for a while but then deserted him (see 2 Tim. 4:10).

Strengths and accomplishments:

A humble, faithful, and useful companion of Paul
A well-educated and trained physician
A careful and exact historian
Writer of both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts

Vital statistics:

Where: Probably met Paul in Troas
Occupations: Doctor, historian, traveling companion
Contemporaries: Paul, Timothy, Silas, Peter

Key verses:

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

eTherefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:1-4).

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

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