

~THE BOOK OF LUKE~
~AN OVERVIEW~

Book: Of the three Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Luke provides the greatest amount of information regarding its beginning as seen in **Lk. 1:1-4**. This book has many of the same stories, miracles, etc. as found in Matthew and Mark.

As far as what is meant by the word “synoptic” note the following,

“...the first 3 Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke)—ordinarily named "the Synoptic Gospels," because, in contrast with the Fourth Gospel, they present, as embodying a common tradition, the same general view of the life and teaching of Jesus during His earthly ministry, and of His death and resurrection.” – The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.

Since Luke traveled with Paul, some have called it the Gospel of Paul and to some the writings within the pages of Luke reflect Paul’s teachings. But we will call it the Gospel of Luke.

Author: The book never gives the author’s name. Before looking at the internal and external evidence that supports Luke as the author, we need to note **Lk. 1:1-4**. Here the writer gives us his intentions for writing, his methods of research that he used and his relationship to those of his day who were attempting to write about Christ.

Merrill Tenney, in his book **“The New Testament – A Survey,”** on **pgs. 181-183**, mentions some things that can be inferred from the opening of the book that are worth noting. He writes (edited for our purposes),

- 1. In the time of the writer a number of works were extant which contained only a partial, or possibly a garbled account of Jesus’ life and work.**
- 2. These accounts had attempted some systematic arrangement of available facts (“to draw up a narrative” – 1:1).**
- 3. These facts were well known to the Christian world and were accepted independently of the narratives. Luke says that they “have been fulfilled among us” (1:1).**
- 4. The author felt himself at least as well informed as the others and capable of writing an account on his own responsibility (“it seemed good to me also”).**
- 5. His information came from competent sources (“who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” – 1:2).**
- 6. He was conversant with the facts, either by observation or by inquiry, and he was certainly a contemporary of the main course of action in the sense that he lived in the generation of those who had witnessed it.**
- 7. Luke’s knowledge covered all of the major facts. His Gospel contains many particulars that do not appear in the others and is the most generally representative life of Christ.**
- 8. He professed to write accurately and in logical order.**
- 9. Luke’s addressee was probably a man of the upper class who may be called here by his baptismal name, Theophilus, which means “lover of God” or “loved of God.”**

10. This addressee had already been informed orally concerning Christ, perhaps through the preaching he had heard.

11. Luke's obvious purpose was to give his friend complete knowledge of the truth.

Now to look at the internal evidence. The identity of Luke as the author is tied in with the relation of Luke to the Book of Acts. If one person wrote both books, then the information supporting one of the books works for the other also. **One**, the author was a companion of Paul (**Acts 16:10; Acts 16:17; Acts 20:6** – note the words “we” and “us”). **Two**, Timothy and Mark are referred to in the third person (**Acts 20:5 – Timothy**) so neither of them wrote the book. **Three**, Luke fits the accepted view as the author as seen by his use of medical terms. **Four**, both books are addressed to Theophilus (**Lk. 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3**).

Next, we look at the external evidence. **First**, the earliest manuscripts of the book have his name on them. **Second**, the early church Fathers believed Luke wrote it (Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, Jerome). **Three**, the great archaeologist Sir William Ramsey supported Luke's authorship based on archaeology.

When It Was Written: The date is most likely around 60 A.D when Paul was imprisoned at Caesarea (**Acts 23:31-35**). The reasons for this as a possible date are as follows. **One**, it was before 70 A.D. since the destruction of Jerusalem is still future (**Lk. 21:5-38**). **Two**, it was written before the Book of Acts according to Acts 1:1 and Acts was written around 61 or 62 A.D. **Three**, it was written after Matthew and Mark (see Lk. 1:1) who wrote in the 50-60 A.D. range.

Who Was It Written To: It was addressed specifically to Theophilus, a cultured Greek who was either a seeker or had come to faith in Christ. But in general, the Gentile world would have been an audience in mind.

Why Was It Written: **One**, it set Christ forward as the “ideal man” to the Greeks. **Two**, it was written either to confirm or challenge Theophilus regarding his faith (**Lk. 1:3-4**). **Three**, it was a defense of Christianity to the Greek (Gentile) world in general.

Breaking Down Luke – The **Birth and Beginning of the Son of Man** is seen in **Lk. 1:1-4:13**. The next section is the **The Ministry of the Son of Man** in **Lk. 4:14-23:56**. The last section would be the **Ascension of the Son of Man** in **Lk. 24:1-24:53**.

1. Passages And Information Found In Luke And Not In Matthew Or Mark

A) **Lk. 1:5-25** is the birth of John the Baptist foretold. He was a cousin to Jesus. John's father, Zechariah, was a priest in the Temple. Note what we read about John's future ministry (**vss. 11-17**). Regarding Zechariah's ministry note the following,

“A Jewish priest was a minister of God who worked at the Temple managing its upkeep, teaching the people the Scriptures, and directing the worship services. At this time there were about 20,000 priests throughout the country—far too many to minister in the Temple at one time. Therefore the priests were divided into 24 separate groups of about 1,000 each, according to David's instructions (1 Chronicles 24:3-19).

Zechariah was a member of the order of Abijah, on duty this particular week. Each morning a priest was to enter the Holy Place in the Temple and burn incense. The priests would cast lots to decide who would enter the inner sanctuary, and one day the lot fell to Zechariah. But it was not by chance that Zechariah was on duty and that he was chosen that day to enter the Holy Place—perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. God was guiding the events of history to prepare the way for Jesus to come to earth.” – Life Application Study Bible.

B) Lk. 1:26-38 is Gabriel appearing to Mary and telling her about the coming Savior she would give birth to. **Vss. 30-33** tells us about what would happen and what Jesus would do. **Vss. 34-35** tell us that the Virgin Birth will be a miracle wrought by God. Note Mary’s response in **vs. 38**.

Note what one study Bible says about the Virgin Birth,

“(1) Luke was a medical doctor, and he knew perfectly well how babies are made. It would have been just as hard for him to believe in a virgin birth as it is for us, yet he reports it as fact.

(2) Luke was a painstaking researcher who based his Gospel on eyewitness accounts. Tradition holds that he talked with Mary about the events he recorded in the first two chapters. This is Mary's story, not a fictional invention. (3) Christians and Jews, who worship God as the Creator of the universe, should have no doubts that God has the power to create a child in a virgin's womb.” – Life Application Study Bible

Regarding the necessity of the Virgin Birth,

“The virgin birth was the *means* whereby the incarnation took place and guaranteed the sinlessness of the Son of God. For this reason the virgin birth was essential.” – The Moody Handbook of Theology.

J.I. Packer, in his **“Concise Theology,”** writes regarding the Virgin Birth,

“Also, while we cannot affirm that God could not have produced sinless humanity apart from virgin birth, Jesus' humanity was sinless, and the circumstances of his birth call attention to the miracle that was involved when Mary, a sinner (Luke 1:47), gave birth to one who was not "in Adam" as she was, nor therefore needed a Savior as she did. Rather, Jesus was destined through the maintained sinlessness of his unflawed human nature to become the perfect sacrifice for human sins, and so the Savior of his mother and of the rest of the church with her.” – Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs.

C) Lk. 1:39-56 records Mary’s visit to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Note in what is known as “Mary’s Song” (**vss. 46-55**) that she also needed a Savior (**vs. 47**). Mary was not sinless, either before or after the birth of Christ.