

Luke Chapter 1

The book of Luke was written by the beloved physician Luke. In Luke, we see the "face of a man".

Luke in his gospel honors women. We see the Lord Jesus dealing with main stream people, the working people, the poor, and especially the lost. About one half of the Scriptures in Luke are not in the other gospels.

Many of the hymns are based upon events in Luke. "Ave Maria" is a very good example. Luke was a close companion of Paul and we see similar thoughts in Luke to Paul's writings. Luke shows Jesus in His manhood.

Verses 1-4: These 4 verses make a single sentence, written in the polished style of a Greek literary classic. It was common for Greek historical works to begin with such a prologue. After this formal prologue, however, Luke shifted into a simpler style of narrative, probably patterned after the familiar style of the LXX.

Luke 1:1 "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,"

Here, Luke is telling us that he is not the only one writing about Jesus. Many of the disciples and Paul wrote of Jesus. A "declaration" is something you know that you tell. We see here, that they all believe. There is no question about their belief, most surely.

“Many”: Although Luke wrote direct divine revelation inspired by the Holy Spirit; he acknowledged the works of others who had set down in writing events from Christ’s life. All those sources have been long lost, except for the inspired gospels.

Since Matthew and Mark were most likely written before Luke, it has been suggested that either one of both of those may have been among Luke’s sources when he did his research. It is also known that he was personally acquainted with many firsthand witnesses to the events of Christ’s life.

And it is possible that some of his sources were word-of-mouth reports. About 60% of the material in Mark is repeated in Luke, and Luke seems to follow Mark’s order of events closely.

“Set forth in order”: Luke proposed to narrate the ministry of Christ in an authoritative, logical and factual order (though not always strictly chronological, verse 3).

“Things which are most surely believed”: I.e., the Old Testament messianic promises fulfilled in Christ.

“Among us”: I.e., in our generation. This phrase does not mean Luke was personally an eyewitness to the life of Christ.

Luke 1:2 "Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;"

“Eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word”: Luke’s primary sources were the apostles themselves, who delivered facts about Jesus’ life and teaching, both orally and by means of recorded memoirs in written documents made available to Luke. In any case, Luke made no pretense of being an eyewitness himself, but explained that these were facts supported by careful research.

Luke 1:3 "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,"

“Having had perfect understanding”: Literally “having traced out carefully.” Luke’s gospel was the result of painstaking investigation. Luke, more than anyone else in the early church, had the abilities and the opportunity to consult with eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry and consolidate their accounts.

He spent more than two years during Paul’s imprisonment at Caesarea (Acts 24:26-27, during which time he would have been able to meet and interview many of the apostles and other eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry. We know for example, that he met Philip (Acts 21:8), who was undoubtedly one of Luke’s sources.

In his travels, he may also have encountered the Apostle John. Joanna, wife of Herod’s steward, is mentioned only in Luke’s gospel, so she must have been a personal acquaintance of his. Luke also related details about Herod’s dealings with Christ not found in the other gospels (13:31-33; 23:7-12).

No doubt it was from Joanna (or someone in a similar position), that Luke learned those facts. However, his understanding was perfect because of the divine revelation he received from the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21).

“From the very first”: This could mean from the beginning of Christ’s earthly life. However the word can mean from above (John 3:31; 19:11; James 3:15). From the first (in verse 2), makes a different Greek word so it is best to understand that Luke was saying he used earthly sources for his material, but was given heavenly guidance as he did his research and writing. It is clear that he regarded his account as authoritative.

“Write unto thee in order”: Luke’s account is predominantly ordered chronologically, but he does not follow such an arrangement slavishly.

“Most excellent”: This was a title used to address governors (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25). This sort of language was reserved for the highest dignitaries, suggesting that “Theophilus” was such a person.

The Acts of the Apostles was written to this unknown "Theophilus", as well as Luke. Many believe that Luke and Acts were both written by Luke for this very reason. "Theophilus", many believe is just all Gentile believers.

We see also from this above, that Luke perhaps was there when Jesus explained the parables, because it says he had "perfect understanding". We see also that Luke was a very early convert because he says "from the very first".

The reason he decides to write is because he has firsthand knowledge. Many believe that Luke himself was a Gentile but there is no Bible Scripture which explicitly says that. Perhaps Luke was in the multitude which followed Jesus. We cannot guess at what time he was converted except from this Scripture which says "from the very first".

Luke 1:4 "That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed."

“The certainty of those things”: Note the implicit claim of authority. Though Luke drew from other sources (verse 3), he regarded the reliability and authority of his gospel as superior to uninspired sources.

“Instructed”: Theophilus had been schooled in the apostolic tradition, possibly even by the Apostle Paul himself. Yet the written Scripture by means of this gospel sealed the certainty of what he had heard.

It seems whoever "Theophilus" is, he is someone who has heard the gospel and is kind of on the fence. This letter to him is to convince him beyond a shadow of doubt that all that has been preached to him is true. Perhaps Theophilus had great respect for Luke and would believe when Luke tells him that he was an eye witness and knows this to be true.

Luke 1:5 "There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zachariah, of the course of Abia: and his wife [was] of the daughters of Aaron, and her name [was] Elisabeth."

“Herod”: Herod the Great.

Zachariah meaning: “Jehovah has remembered.”

Luke is the only one of the four gospels that tells of this event with Elisabeth and Zachariah. Perhaps he knew them; the Scripture is not definite how he knew this.

“The course of Abia” (or Abijah). The temple priesthood was organized into 24 divisions, with each division serving twice a year for one week (1 Chron. 24:4-19); Abijah’s was the 8th division (1 Chron. 24:10).

"Abia" was a priest in the time of David. He was in the ancestry of Zachariah. It seems as though Zachariah and Elisabeth were both of priestly ancestry. Luke places the time here as during the time of Herod. We see here a family who are in close contact with God.

“Daughters of Aaron”: I.e., both husband and wife were from the priestly tribe.

Luke 1:6 "And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

“Both righteous before God”: I.e., they were believers, justified in God’s sight. There is a clear echo of Pauline theology in this expression.

We see here, two people who have been raised in the way of the Lord. Their parents being godly people have raised them to have great respect for God and His commandments. From their mouth, they had been followers of God and they had not strayed from their early teaching. They are esteemed very highly by the Lord because their desire is to please Him.

Luke 1:7 "And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were [now] well stricken in years."

“Barren ... stricken in years”: This was seen by many as a sign of divine disfavor.

For a Hebrew woman to be barren was thought of as a curse from God. We see two people very devoted to God, people who the community is looking down on because they don't have children. They are past the time of bearing children.

Luke 1:8 "And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,"

“In the order of his course”: I.e., his division was on duty for one of their two annual stints.

Luke 1:9 "According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord."

The priesthood remained in a certain family who were called of God to tend to the affairs of the temple. Zachariah was of a priestly family and his job was to burn incense twice a day in the temple.

“His lot ... burn incense”: A high honor (Exodus 30:7-8; 2 Chron. 29:11). Because of the large number of priests, most would never be chosen for such a duty, and no one was permitted to serve in this capacity twice. Zachariah no doubt regarded this as the supreme moment in a lifetime of priestly service.

The incense was kept burning perpetually, just in front of the veil that divided the holy place from the most holy place. The lone priest would offer the incense every morning and every

evening, while the rest of the priests and worshipers stood outside the holy place in prayer (verse 10).

We learned in the book of Exodus that the smoke of incense burned twice a day in the temple is symbolic of the prayers of the saints. This was a sweet smelling savor before the Lord. Special perfume was to be burned. And it must be burned in the morning and in the evening, this was Zachariah's job. This altar was before the Lord.

Luke 1:10 "And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense."

The people were not allowed to come into the holy place so they were in the outer court. This burning of the incense, as I said above, was associated with prayer. This shows us how important it is to pray at least twice a day.

Luke 1:11 "And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense."

We see in this angel (ministering spirit), a messenger from God to Zachariah. Zachariah and his wife have undoubtedly been praying to have a child. God has heard their prayer. God has purpose for this baby at this time.

Luke 1:12 "And when Zachariah saw [him], he was troubled, and fear fell upon him."

"Fear": The normal response – and an appropriate one (12:5), when someone is confronted by a divine visitation or a mighty work of God (Judges 6:22; 13:22; Mark 16:5). Luke seems especially to take note of this; he often reports fear in the presence of God and His works (30, 65; 2:9-10; 5:10, 26; 7:16; 8:25, 37, 50; 9:34, 45; 23:40).

Sometimes when the high priest went into the Holy of Holies with sin in his life, God would strike him dead. I am sure that is what flashed in Zachariah's head when he saw this angel. Probably terror would be closer to what he felt.

Luke 1:13 "But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zachariah: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John."

"Thy prayer": Probably a prayer for children to be in his home.

"John": Jehovah has shown grace.

The message of God to His own has always been "fear not". This angel immediately reassures Zachariah that good and not bad has come to him from God. God has heard his prayer. He will have the son that he has longed for. The angel tells him that he is not to name him in the tradition of his people by the father's name, but is to name him John.

Luke 1:14 "And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth."

“Joy and gladness”: The hallmarks of the messianic kingdom (Isa. 25:9; Psalms 14:7; 48:11). The motif of joy runs through Luke’s gospel (verses 44, 47, 58; 2:10; 6:23; 8:13; 10:17-21; 13:17; 15:5-10, 22-32; 19:6, 37; 24:52).

Luke 1:15 "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb."

We see here, a statement that might cause you to believe in predestination, but you must understand that is not what happens to everyone. This is a chosen vessel, born into the world for a purpose. God allowed John to come into this family because of their great devotion to God.

“Drink neither wine nor strong drink”: This was a key element of the Nazirite vow (Num. 6:1-21), and would probably have been understood as such by Zachariah. Usually such a vow was temporary, but Samson (Judges 16:17), and Samuel (1 Sam. 1:11), were subject to it from birth.

The language here is reminiscent of the angel’s instructions to Samson’s parents (Judges 13:4-7). However, no mention is made here of any restriction on the cutting of John’s hair. Luke may have simply omitted that detail to avoid weighing his Gentile audience down with the details of Jewish law.

“From his mother’s womb”: Reminiscent of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5). This illustrates God’s sovereignty in salvation.

John is to walk uprightly all of his life. God has a job for him to do. He is not to get involved with the world at all (not to drink strong drink). He is anointed of God even while he is yet in his mother's womb. We will see this baptism when Mary comes to see Elisabeth while they are both expecting. The Holy Ghost will cause the baby John to leap in the mother's womb.

Luke 1:16 "And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God."

When John goes through the country preaching, "repent and be baptized", many of the children of Israel do just that. John will be a voice crying in the wilderness that the Lord is coming. Many will believe and be baptized.

Luke 1:17 "And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

“In the spirit and power of Elijah”: Elijah, like John the Baptist, was known for his bold, uncompromising stand for the Word of God, even in the face of a ruthless monarch (1 Kings 18:17-24; Mark 6:15). The final two verses of the Old Testament (Mal. 4:5-6), had promised the return of Elijah before the Day of the Lord.

“To turn the hearts” (Quoted from Mal. 4:6), showing that John the Baptist fulfilled that prophecy.

“Mark ready”: Possibly an allusion to (Isaiah 40:3-5) A voice of one calling:

Isaiah 40:3-5 “In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it.”

John would be a voice proclaiming the coming of the Lord. His message was simple, "repent and be baptized". John in this was showing their great need for a Savior. In (Malachi 4:5-6), in the Old Testament, there is a promise of Elijah.

Malachi 4:6 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:" "And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

You can easily see this is speaking of John. If you need more proof, Jesus says John is Elijah. In Matthew, this is in Jesus' own words.

Matthew 11:13-14 "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John." "And if ye will receive [it], this is Elijah, which was for to come."

You see there is no doubt at all that John was in the spirit of Elijah. He was called Elijah in the Old Testament and Elias in the new. This is the difference in Hebrew and Greek. Just as John was a voice crying, preparing for His coming now, we must be crying "The Lord is Coming".

Luke 1:18 "And Zachariah said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years."

“Whereby shall I know this”: Abraham also asked for a sign under similar circumstances (Genesis 15:8). The sign given Zachariah was also a mild rebuke for doubting (verse 20).

How in the world could Zachariah doubt a message that was brought from God by an angel? Nothing is impossible to God. Zachariah should have remembered what happened to Abraham and Sarah. How they had a child in their old age.

Luke 1:19 "And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings."

“Gabriel”: Literally “strong man of God.” Gabriel also appears (in Daniel 8:16; 9:21). He is one of only two holy angels whose names are given in Scripture, the other being Michael (Dan. 10:13, 21; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7).

I have stated in the lessons before that I believe personally that Gabriel is the angel God the Father sends messages by to His people. Gabriel stands by the Father to be always available to carry out God the Father's missions. There is absolutely no question that this message is from God and it is very good news for this old man with no heir.

Luke 1:20 "And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season."

We see here, that God will not allow unbelief to spread. He strikes Zachariah dumb, unable to speak until the time of the birth. He will not be able to spread his doubt.

Luke Chapter 1 Questions

1. Who wrote the book of Luke?
2. What worldly work did Luke do?
3. Which of the three faces of the beast of Revelation do we see Jesus as in Luke?
4. About how many of Luke's Scriptures are not in the other gospels?
5. Name one hymn that was based on Luke.
6. Who was a close companion of Luke?
7. What is a "declaration"?
8. Why did Luke feel he had perfect understanding of the Word?
9. Who is this letter addressed to?
10. What other book of the New Testament is supposedly written by Luke?
11. Who do some people believe Theophilus symbolizes?
12. What indicates that Luke heard the interpretation of the parables by Jesus?
13. Why did Luke write this?
14. Who was king in Judaea when Zachariah was priest?
15. Who was Abia?
16. What priestly family was Elisabeth of?
17. What kind of life were Elisabeth and Zachariah living?
18. Why were they considered righteous before God?

19. How many children did they have?
20. For a Hebrew woman to be barren was thought to be what?
21. What job did Zachariah have in the temple?
22. What did we learn in the book of Exodus about the incense burning?
23. How often was the incense burned?
24. Where was the multitude praying?
25. When Zachariah went in to burn the incense, who was standing at the right of the incense altar?
26. When Zachariah saw him, what effect did it have on him and why?
27. What was the first thing he said to Zachariah?
28. What message did he bring that Zachariah did not believe?
29. What break with tradition does he tell Zachariah to do?
30. What two things shall this son not touch?
31. What unusual thing shall happen to him in his mother's womb?
32. What will John's message to the people be?
33. Who will John be in the spirit and power of?
34. In Malachi 4:5-6, who is promised to come?
35. Who did Jesus say this is in Matthew 11:13-14?
36. Why does Zachariah not believe the angel?
37. What is this angel's name?
38. Who does the author believe the angel is?
39. What will happen to Zachariah because he does not believe?
40. What will God not allow from His people?