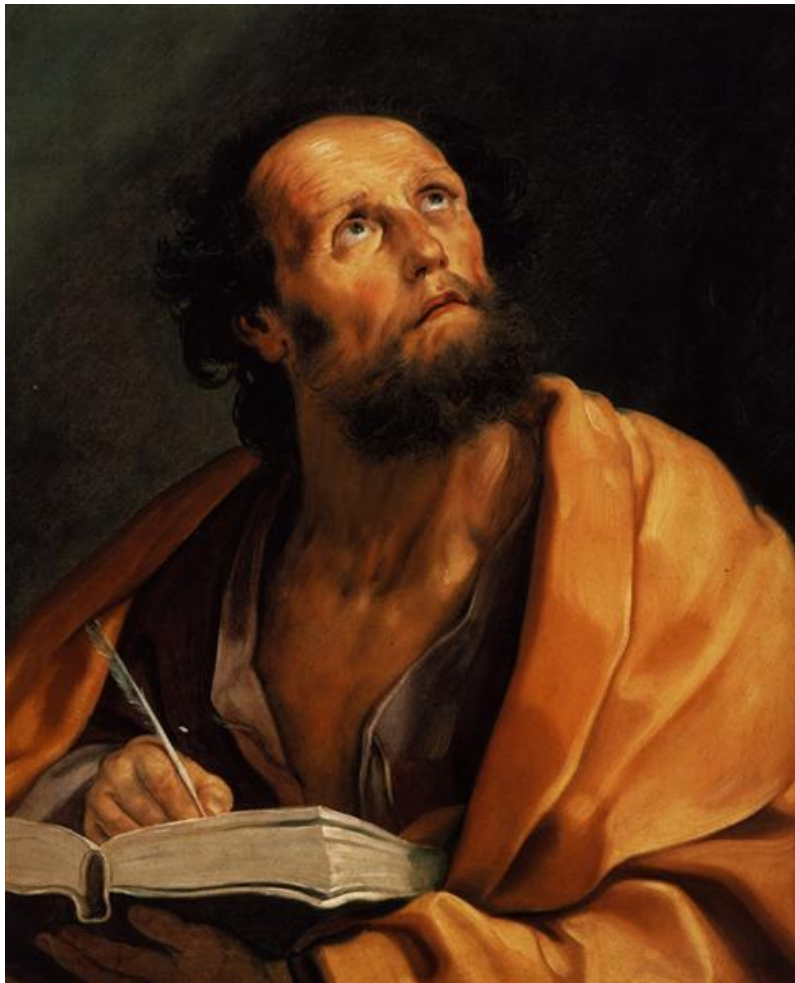


2025 MBC Preaching Conference

The Gospel of Luke: Background and Contextual Issues

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Guido Reni (1575-1642) "Saint Luke," 1621.

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Introduction

Our conviction as Southern Baptists is that Scripture “is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter.”¹ As preachers, we are inheritors of the Word of God and have the unique privilege of teaching and preaching it.

Since the Spirit of God inspired every verse, every text is worthy of study and fitting for Christian preaching. That being said, some sections of Scripture seem uniquely precious to the people of God. The Gospels are one such portion of Scripture. They are so highly treasured because they contain the story of our Lord’s life, ministry, teaching, passion, and resurrection. In my Christian experience, I never find myself far from the Gospels. It seems that as soon as I read them, I desire to study them again.

For all these reasons, I am delighted to study the Gospel of Luke together. The Gospel contains so many beautiful texts that we and our people need to be reminded of again and again—not least of which is the saving power of Christ and the Gospel he brought to us. Frank Stagg reminds his readers of the supreme place of Christ’s saving work in Luke’s Gospel when he writes, “At the heart of Luke’s Gospel is the picture of a shepherd rejoicing over the recovery of a lost sheep, a woman rejoicing over the recovery of a lost coin, and a father rejoicing over the recovery of one son and pleading with another son to join the family in joyous reunion (chap. 15).”² The heart of Luke’s Gospel displays our Lord’s own heart. “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”³ The great news for us is that He is still seeking and saving people.

The burden to save souls does not fall on our shoulders. Instead, we are called to proclaim the good news and let the Spirit of God do what only He can—save souls and transform lives. In his masterful work on doctrinal preaching, Robert Smith Jr. encourages us with these words, “Exegetical escorts (preachers) are to escort people into the presence of God for the purpose of transformation.”⁴ Smith’s words remind us that we are merely escorts who lead people to the King, knowing that true transformation can occur only in His presence.

I pray that this conference helps you prepare to preach faithfully the Gospel of Luke, and I trust that the Spirit of God will transform your people into the image of the Son.

¹“Baptist Faith & Message 2000,” available from <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/>.

² Frank Stagg, *Studies in Luke’s Gospel* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1967), 1.

³ Luke 19:10, ESV. All citations come from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Michael Duduit, “Preaching Doctrine That Dances: An Interview with Robert Smith,” available from <https://www.preaching.com/articles/preaching-doctrine-that-dances-an-interview-with-robert-smith/>. For a fuller treatment of Smith’s understanding of doctrinal preaching, see Robert Smith, Jr., *Doctrine that Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008).

The Third Gospel's Connection to Acts

The Third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles are clearly linked to each other. Tolbert states, "Luke and Acts were written by the same man. This opinion is so widely held and is so incontrovertible that it is unnecessary to defend it.... Style, vocabulary, characteristic motifs, and development according to a unifying plan are signs of a common authorship to be detected in every section of both books."⁵

Stein asserts that "the common authorship of Luke-Acts is accepted by almost all. The Gospel of Luke was written with Acts in mind, for without Acts the plan of the Gospel would be incomplete. And Acts was plainly written in light of and to complete the Gospel of Luke."⁶ Stein also offers the following comparison of Luke and Acts:

Both begin with a similar preface (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-15); Both are addressed to the same person, Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1); Acts 1:1 serves as a recapitulation of the material found in Luke; Acts begins where Luke leaves off temporarily, i.e. at Jesus' ascension (Luke 24:52-53; Acts 1:9-10); Acts begins where Luke leaves off geographically, i.e. in Jerusalem (Luke 24:52-53; Acts 1:9-10); Acts begins with the same situation with which Luke ends, i.e. the disciples waiting for the coming of the Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5, 8); There is a clear parallelism between the arrangement of Luke and that of Acts: an introductory period typified by prayer (Luke 1:5-2:32; Acts 1:6-26), followed by the coming of the Spirit in fulfillment of prophecy (Luke 3; Acts 2), followed by a thematic sermon (Luke 4:14-30; Acts 2:14-40); Both share a common vocabulary, style structure, and theological concern.⁷

Bock contends that Luke "is the only Gospel with a sequel.... The two volumes and their message are virtually inseparable despite the canonical division. Luke's Gospel often lays the foundation for many of the issues whose answers come in Acts."⁸

As preachers, we need to remember the connection between Luke and Acts as we prepare sermons. Luke's narrative does not end in Luke 24 but in Acts 28. While two books, they tell one story.

⁵ Malcolm O. Tolbert, "Luke," in Luke-John, vol. 9 of *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 1.

⁶ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 21-22.

⁷ Stein, 21-22.

⁸ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, in the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 1.

Authorship

The Third Gospel is one of nine New Testament books whose authorship is anonymous.⁹ Joel Green rightly contends that “our ability or inability to identify the author of the Third Gospel is unimportant to its interpretation.”¹⁰ Yet, we and our people may benefit from examining the internal and external evidence suggesting that Luke is the likely author of the Third Gospel.

Internal Evidence

The internal evidence for Lukan authorship centers on two points. First, the author was not an eyewitness to most of the events in the Third Gospel and Acts. Instead, the author depended on the testimony of those who were eyewitnesses of what occurred. The author composed the Third Gospel by researching and compiling what he learned. This is clear when the author writes,

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 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, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.¹¹

Second, Luke was connected to Paul in what is commonly referred to as the “we” sections of Acts. The author of Acts used the first-person plural, “we,” in certain sections of that book (e.g., 16:10, 17; 20:6; 27:1). In these passages, the author claimed to have been a companion of Paul during some periods of the apostle’s ministry.

If the author of Acts was Paul’s companion, he quite likely was one of those Paul listed in his letters, especially in the letters written during the “we” periods of his ministry. Eliminating those companions of Paul mentioned in the third person in the “we” sections of Acts (and thus distinguished from the author, cf. Acts 20:4-5), we arrive at a number of possibilities. Among these is Luke (cf. Col. 4:14; Phil 24; 2 Tim 4:11).¹²

External Evidence

Besides internal evidence, considerable external evidence exists which supports Lukan authorship of the Third Gospel and Acts. Some of the most compelling evidence includes,

- ❖ “The tradition of the church gives attention to only one name as the author of these volumes—Luke. This tradition was firmly fixed by A.D. 200 and remained so without any

⁹ The other books include Matthew, Mark, John, Acts, Hebrews, and 1, 2, 3 John.

¹⁰ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke in The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 20.

¹¹ Luke 1:1-4, ESV.

¹² Stein, 23.

hint of contrary opinion. The absence of any dispute about this detail is a strong reason to take the tradition seriously.”¹³

- ❖ The oldest Greek manuscript of the Third Gospel (P⁷⁵, The Bodmer Papyrus) dates to the end of the 2nd century and includes the title “The Gospel According to Luke.”¹⁴
- ❖ In *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr mentions Luke writing a memoir of Jesus and further states that Luke was a follower of Paul.¹⁵
- ❖ The Muratorian Fragment, sometimes called the Muratorian Canon, is dated to the second century and contains the title “The Third Book of the Gospel: According to Luke.”¹⁶
- ❖ Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, and other early fathers all attest to Lukan authorship.¹⁷

Who was Luke?

The following New Testament texts explicitly mention Luke:

- ❖ Colossians 4:14 “Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.”
- ❖ Philemon 24 “And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.”
- ❖ 2 Timothy 4:11 “Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.”

While these texts offer little in the way of comprehensive details about Luke’s life, they do offer some clues.

1. Luke was a Gentile. While this is not universally accepted, “Most commentators identify Luke as a Gentile without any further detail.”¹⁸
2. Luke was a physician. Scholarship on Luke’s profession is divided; however, the biblical witness (Colossians 4:14) and early testimony (such as Eusebius) clearly identify Luke as a physician.¹⁹
3. Luke was an associate of Paul. The aforementioned biblical texts place Luke and Paul together, yet they do not detail the extent of their relationship. Tolbert contends that “Luke was

¹³ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 5.

¹⁴ Stein, 21.

¹⁵ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 5.

¹⁶ Stein, 21.

¹⁷ For more information, see the following: Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 5; Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke*, vol. III in the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, New Testament, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, Intervarsity Press, 2003), xvii-2; John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, vol. 35A in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Book Publisher, 1989), xxxiv-xxvii; Stein, 21; Tolbert, 1-4.

¹⁸ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 6. One reason for this assertion is the fact that Luke was not mentioned among the men of the circumcision in Colossians 4:10-11.

¹⁹ See Just Jr. for more information on Eusebius’ description of Luke as a physician, 2.

not with Paul during the great crises reflected in the Galatian and Corinthian correspondence. He probably did not even know Paul until sometime after the Jerusalem Council....²⁰ Bock simply states, “Luke is Paul’s ‘sometime’ companion.”²¹

In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius (b. A.D. 260/65) offers a brief biography of Luke, which agrees with the aforementioned information. He writes,

But Luke, who was of Antiochian parentage and a physician by profession, and who was especially intimate with Paul and well acquainted with the rest of the apostles, has left us, in two inspired books, proofs of that spiritual healing art which he learned from them. One of these books is the Gospel, which he testifies that he wrote as those who were from the beginning eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered unto him, all of whom, as he says, he followed accurately from the first (Luke 1:2-3). The other book is the Acts of the Apostles which he composed not from the accounts of others, but from what he had seen himself.

And they say that Paul meant to refer to Luke’s Gospel wherever, as if speaking of some gospel of his own, he used the words, according to my Gospel.²²

Extant homilies exist from Origen (A.D. 185-254), Ambrose (b. A.D. 339), Cyril of Alexandria (A.D. 375-444), and Bede (A.D. 673-735). The homilies include almost no information about Luke himself.²³

Douglas and Tenney offer a concise and helpful analysis of biographical details that can be deduced from Luke’s writings.

It appears from Luke’s own writings that he was a man of education and culture. He begins his Gospel with an elaborate paragraph, showing that he could write in the sophisticated transition of the Hellenistic historians and then lapses into a polished vernacular. He uses this speech with vigor and effectiveness. He is an accurate and able historian and has left some of the most powerful descriptive writings in the NT. His medical knowledge and his interest in seafaring are apparent from his writings. Whatever is said beyond this is tradition and conjecture.²⁴

²⁰ Tolbert, 4.

²¹ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 7.

²² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.4, available from <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm>.

²³ Just Jr. briefly discusses the homilies in his introduction, *Luke*, vol. III in the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, xvii-xxiv.

²⁴ J. D. Douglas, and Merrill C. Tenney, eds., “LUKE,” in *The New International Dictionary of the Bible: Pictorial Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 604.

Date and Location

Keeping in mind the connection between Luke and Acts, the earliest possible date for the Third Gospel's writing would be immediately after the events recorded at the end of Acts. Those events include Paul's arrest and two-year stay in Rome, which took place in the early A.D. 60s, likely A.D. 62. Conversely, the latest possible date would be around A.D. 170 because of some definite citations in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*. For example, he writes,

If then, anyone shall, from the Acts of the Apostles, carefully scrutinize the time concerning which it is written that he went up to Jerusalem on account of the aforementioned question, he will find those years mentioned by Paul coinciding with it. Thus, the statement of Paul harmonizes with, and is, as it were, identical with, the testimony of Luke regarding the apostles.²⁵

A couple chapters later, he continues,

But again, we allege the same against those who do not recognize (*sic*) Paul as an apostle: that they should either reject the other words of the Gospel which we have come to know through Luke alone, and not make use of them; or else, if they do receive all these, they must necessarily admit also that testimony concerning Paul, when he (Luke) tells us that the Lord spoke at first to him from heaven: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? I am Jesus Christ, whom you persecute, Acts 22:8, Acts 26:15 and then to Ananias, saying regarding him: Go your way; for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name among the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him, from this time, how great things he must suffer for My name's sake. Acts 9:15-16.²⁶

Stein limits the scope of the date range based on two factors. The first involves the ending of Acts. "The simplest explanation about why Acts ends where it does is that Luke could not write anything more. He had brought his readers completely up to date."²⁷ If that is the case, then Luke was likely written sometime in the early A.D. 60s. The second factor Stein mentions is the relationship between Luke's Gospel and Mark's Gospel. Stein asserts that "it seems reasonably certain that Luke used Mark in the writing of his Gospel."²⁸ If that is true, then Luke-Acts would have been written after A.D. 65-67. A date range from A.D. 70-90 would be likely.

Bock's assessment is similar to Stein's findings. Bock asserts that the most commonly accepted date is sometime after the fall of Jerusalem, usually A.D. 80-90. Still, another possibility is a date somewhere in the A.D. 60s. Arguments for the early date include the following: (1) The picture in Acts that Rome is still deciding where Christianity fits; (2) the failure to note either the deaths

²⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (3.13.3), available from <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103313.htm>.

²⁶ Irenaeus, (3.15.1).

²⁷ Stein, 25.

²⁸ Stein, 25. For a detailed argument of Markan priority, see Stein's *The Synoptic Problem* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 45-88.

of James or Paul; (3) the silence about Jerusalem's destruction; and (4) the amount of uncertainty expressed about internal Gentile-Jewish relations, which fits a setting that parallels the Pauline Letters that deal with similar tensions.²⁹

No discussion of date is complete without at least some consideration of the eschatological discourses which deal with Jerusalem's destruction (A.D. 70).³⁰ Stein voices one view which understands "Jerusalem's destruction in Luke... to look back at the events of A.D. 70. Therefore, the Lukan texts that deal with Jerusalem's destruction probably are best understood as having been written after the event."³¹

Bock is not convinced that these eschatological texts in Luke require a post- 70 date. He writes,

To sum it up: the prediction of Jerusalem's fall is one that Jesus was capable of making solely on the basis of his knowledge of how God acts to judge covenant unfaithfulness. Luke makes no effort to "update" remarks here; he only clarifies that in the temple's collapse, the city is not spared either. Thus, a major argument for a date in the 80s-90s does not work. Although a date in the 80s might seem possible and is popular, it is not the most likely.³²

In summary, the dating of the Third Gospel is disputed. Commentators generally assert that Luke's Gospel was written between the early 60s and the 170s. A first-century composition is the most common view, typically between 80-90. Some push the dating of the Third Gospel back further into the 60s.

As to where the Third Gospel was written, we simply do not know. Bock states, "Where one fixes the place of Luke's writing depends on the date one fixes for the work."³³ Or as Fitzmyer writes, it is "anyone's guess."³⁴ However, our lack of clarity on the place of composition does not affect our ability to interpret the content of the Third Gospel.

²⁹ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 17-18.

³⁰ For examples, see Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24; 23:28-31.

³¹ Stein, 25. Stein is not dogmatic on this point. He admits that the Lukan texts do not require a post-70 date, only that they likely were written after A.D. 70.

³² Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 17-18.

³³ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 18.

³⁴ J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (i-ix)*, vol. 28a in *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 57.

Audience

A unique element concerning Luke's audience is the inclusion of the person named Theophilus.³⁵ Some have argued that because *Theo-philus* means "friend of God," the name does not refer to an actual person but is used in a metaphorical sense. This seems unlikely. Luke's use of "most excellent" as a descriptor of Theophilus seems to ground Theophilus in history as a real person, though the details of who he was and what he was like are unknown. Perhaps Theophilus was a Gentile Christian of some means, but even that is speculative.³⁶

In a more general sense, the longstanding tradition is that Luke was a Gentile Christian who wrote his Gospel for a Gentile audience.³⁷ Stein offers a helpful list of reasons why Luke's audience was Gentile:

(1) Luke's avoidance of Semitic expressions (6:14; 8:54; 22:42; 23:45); (2) The substitution of non-Palestinian architecture (5:19; 8:16), weather, or geography (6:48-49) for Palestinians; (3) the substitution of the term "lawyer" for the more Jewish "scribe" (10:25; 11:52); (4) the use of Judea to describe Palestine in general (1:5; 4:44; 6:17; 7:17; etc.); (5) the explanation of Jewish customs (22:17); (6) the omission of accounts dealing with specifically Jewish traditions or customs (23:18-20); (7) the extension of Jesus' genealogy back past Abraham to Adam (3:38); (8) the reference to the Jews in the third person (7:3, 23:51; Acts 10:39; 13:5; 14:1; 17:1; 21:11); and (9) the concern for the Gentile mission (Acts 10-11; 13:46-48; 18:6; 28:24-28).³⁸

Luke was writing to Gentiles, but was the Gentile audience Christian? Stein argues they were Christians, "For Luke did not seek to explain difficult or confusing issues as he would have done if writing to non-Christians."³⁹ Others, such as Nolland, contend that Luke's target audience focused on God-fearers rather than Gentile Christians.

A God-fearer was one whose birth is not Jewish and whose background culture is Hellenistic, but who had been attracted to Judaism, drawn to the God of Israel and the worship of the synagogue; one who had taken on from his Jewish mentors many of the ethical and religious values of the faith on whose threshold he stood; but one who had not yet taken the final step of circumcision and full incorporation into the national and cultural life of the Jews.⁴⁰

³⁵ Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1.

³⁶ Stein, 26.

³⁷ Some have noted the "Jewishness" in Luke's works. For a brief overview, see Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, xxxii-xxxiii.

³⁸ Stein, 26-27.

³⁹ Stein, 27.

⁴⁰ Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, xxxii.

Even so, Nolland concedes that “it is not unlikely that Luke’s agenda is wider than the God-fearer focus which I propose....”⁴¹ While nuances clearly exist in discussions of Luke’s audience, the traditional consensus that Luke primarily wrote to a Gentile audience, whether Christian or God-fearers, is helpful to preachers as we seek to interpret and preach Luke’s Gospel properly.

Purpose

Stagg reminds readers of the general purposes of the Gospels, writing,

Each Gospel was written to tell the story of Christ in such a way as to bring people to faith in him and to nurture those who believe. The writers of the Gospels used sources, written and oral, but they were not mere compilers or ordinary chroniclers. Each was an author concerned about interpreting the words and deeds which he recorded. And he related them to his own generation and life situation, as he was guided by the Holy Spirit. Each Gospel is to be studied as a whole, a literary unit with a theological purpose. While all the Gospels have a common purpose, there is a purpose that is peculiar to each.⁴²

The challenge with the Third Gospel is that Luke appears not to have a single purpose or theme for his two-volume work; rather, “It may be more accurate to speak of the various purposes Luke had in writing Luke-Acts.”⁴³ Yet, we should keep in mind that Luke does begin his Gospel with a preface, which may be considered a purpose statement, writing,

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 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, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.⁴⁴

The preface makes it clear that, at the very least, Luke was writing to offer certainty to Theophilus and to his wider audience. Luke clearly writes as a historian who labors to offer reliable information to his readers.

What other purposes may Luke have had when composing Luke-Acts? Stagg extrapolates three purposes: (1) To give certainty, (2) To present an orderly account, and (3) To trace the emergence of a worldwide fellowship.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, xxxiii.

⁴² Stagg, 4-5.

⁴³ Stein, 35.

⁴⁴ Luke 1:1-14, ESV.

⁴⁵ Stagg, 5-7.

Green writes that Luke-Acts “highlighted the certainty of God’s purpose to bring salvation to all.” More specifically, “The purpose of Luke-Acts would have been to strengthen the Christian movement in the face of opposition by (1) ensuring them in their interpretation and experience of the redemptive purpose and faithfulness of God and by (2) calling them to continued faithfulness and witness in God’s salvific project.” Therefore, “The purpose of Luke-Acts, then, would be ecclesiological—concerned with the practices that define and the criteria for legitimizing the community of God’s people, and centered on the invitation to participate in God’s project.”⁴⁶

Stein contends for a fourfold purpose: (1) To help convince his readers of the truthfulness of what they had been taught; (2) To clarify the Christian self-understanding of his readers; (3) To clarify Jesus’ teachings concerning the end times; and (4) To assure his readers that Rome was not a threat to them.⁴⁷

All of the aforementioned purposes can help us as we navigate the Third Gospel. What we must keep in mind is that Luke and the other Gospel writers were not simply historians or reporters but evangelists who wanted to ensure that their readers knew the truth of Christ and his Gospel.

Structure

The Third Gospel can easily be broken down into largely geographical divisions. They are as follows:

- I. Luke’s preface and introduction of John and Jesus (1:1-2:52)
- II. Preparation for ministry: anointed by God (3:1-4:13)
- III. Galilean ministry: revelation of Jesus (4:19-9:50)
- IV. Jerusalem journey: Jewish rejection and the new way (9:51-19:44)
- V. Jerusalem: the Innocent One slain and raised (19:45-25:53)⁴⁸

Stein offers a fuller outline, which may be helpful for preaching through the book.

- I. The Prologue (1:1-4)
- II. The Infancy Narrative (1:5-2:52)
- III. The Preparation of Jesus’ Ministry (3:1-4:15)
- IV. Jesus’ Ministry in Galilee (4:16-5:16)
- V. Jesus’ Journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27)
- VI. Jesus’ Ministry in Jerusalem (19:28-21:38)
- VII. Jesus’ Passion (22:1-23:56)
- VIII. The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus (24:1-53)⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Green, 21-22.

⁴⁷ Stein, 35-44.

⁴⁸ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 20.

⁴⁹ I have only included the major headings here. For the full outline see Stein, 31-35.

Selected Background Issues for Each Chapter

Luke 1

1:1-4 Prologue The Third Gospel began with a *period*, which was a literary prologue that set the stage for the Gospel.⁵⁰ In antiquity, the first paragraph of a document “performed much the same purpose as the modern-day book jacket, table of contents, and title page.”⁵¹ In that respect, Luke’s inclusion of a prologue is not surprising as it fits the style of other Hellenistic literary prologues. What is surprising is just how excellent his prologue is. Though only a single sentence in Greek, Stein writes that Luke’s prologue “ranks among the best Greek literature of the first century.”⁵²

1:5 “In the days of Herod, king of Judea” For a brief overview of the Herods in the New Testament, see Appendix 4 of this document.

1:9 “According to the custom of the priesthood” Zechariah was one of the 18,000 priests who served the temple. Priests were divided into twenty-four courses; as such, this was likely the only time in his life that Zechariah went into the holy place to clean the altar and offer incense.⁵³

John’s Character and Ministry The angel clearly told Zechariah that John would be set apart for the Lord. The passage seems to parallel 1 Samuel 1:11, where Israel’s first prophet, Samuel, was consecrated for God. Some argue that John was meant to be a Nazirite, while others understand his calling to be that of an ascetic. Luke likely meant to highlight John’s consecration as a prophet of God. Unlike the prophets of the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit would not come and go in John’s life; instead, the Spirit would fill John even from the womb.⁵⁴ John’s ministry was in the spirit and power of Elijah, which relates back to Malachi 4:5-6.⁵⁵

John’s Connection to the Essenes of Qumran The Essenes appeared sometime after the Maccabean revolt in 167-160 B.C. Evidence exists to show that they fought in the revolt against Rome from A.D. 66-70. They lived communally in villages and cities in and around Palestine and Syria. Some of their documents were hidden in caves located around the site called Khirbet

⁵⁰ Scholarship is divided on whether the prologue introduces only the Third Gospel or was meant to introduce Acts as well. For more, see Stein, 62.

⁵¹ Green, 33.

⁵² Stein, 62. For more general information about the prologue, see Stein, 62-65. If you want to go deeper into the language of the prologue, see Nolland’s masterful treatment of the Greek, Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, 3-12. For a comprehensive and scholarly analysis of the prologue, see Green 33-46.

⁵³ Stein, 74.

⁵⁴ Since the Holy Spirit was critical to John’s ministry and the Spirit is critical to the Apostle’s ministry (see Acts 1-2), we are foolish if we neglect the role of the Spirit in our own lives and ministries.

⁵⁵ For a detailed discussion of vv.13-17, see Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 82-91. For more information about John’s connection to Elijah, see Bock’s “Excuses 1: John the Baptist and Elijah (1:17)”, 901-902.

Qumran. These documents were discovered in the 1940s-50s and came to be called the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Essenes shared their possessions, took care of the poor, and had great concern for the elderly. They generally did not marry, valued purity, and held to a high view of God's actions in the world. Interestingly, the New Testament does not explicitly mention this group. While some try to connect John, and even Jesus, to the Essenes, "This is unlikely, especially in the case of Jesus. If there is a connection between John or Jesus and Qumran, it is certainly not a substantive one. There is no concrete evidence that either of them ever lived in or visited the community."⁵⁶

1:26 "a city of Galilee named Nazareth" Nazareth was not mentioned in the Old Testament, the Talmud, the Midrash, or Josephus.⁵⁷ However, in 1962, an inscription bearing the name of Nazareth was found at Caesarea Maritima. The inscription listed the twenty-four priestly courses and told which towns they resided in. The eighteenth course, Hapizzetz (1 Chronicles 24:15), was identified with Nazareth.⁵⁸

1:27 "to a virgin betrothed" Luke clearly stated that Mary was a virgin before and after conception (see 1:34-35).⁵⁹ He also explained that Mary was engaged (betrothed) to Joseph. However, modern readers need to understand that engagement practices in this period differed significantly from those today. Typically, the girl would be considered ready for engagement when she was around 12 years old. The engagement included a legal contract that could only be broken by death or a divorce. The engagement process generally lasted around a year, during which the girl generally continued living with her parents.⁶⁰

1:33 "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever" In 2 Samuel 7:16, God told David, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." Jesus ultimately fulfilled God's promise to David and confirmed once again that God always fulfills His Word.

1:35 "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" The verb *eperchomai*, translated as "come upon," was also used in Isaiah 32:15 in the LXX,

⁵⁶ Walter A., Elwell, and Robert W. Yarbrough. *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 39-40. For more information about Qumran, see Michael D. Coogan, "Qumran," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 636.

⁵⁷ D.C. Pellett, "NAZARETH," vol. 3 in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 524.

⁵⁸ Mark L. Strauss, *Luke in the Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. Clifton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 70.

⁵⁹ Stein, 82.

⁶⁰ Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 364-368.

where it referred to the Spirit's coming upon the land to make it fertile. Luke used the same verb in Acts 1:8, referring to the Spirit's coming upon the believers at Pentecost."⁶¹

The verb *episkiazō*, "overshadow" was also used in Exodus 40:35 in the LXX with reference to God's presence or Shekinah "overshadowing" the tabernacle in a cloud (Numbers 10:34), and a similar reference to God's overshadowing presence appeared in the transfiguration account (Luke 9:34)."⁶²

1:46-55; 67-80 Songs Luke included four songs in the birth narrative.⁶³ The name of the first song, *The Magnificat*, is derived from the opening verb of the Vulgate's translation of Mary's song in 1:46. Hannah offered a similar song of praise to God in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Zechariah's song, 1:67-80, is sometimes called *The Benedictus* again because of the first word of the song in the Latin Vulgate.

The Protoevangelium of James This apocryphal story circulated in the Patristic period. Its contents seem to have influenced Catholic theology of the infancy narrative, especially Mary's perpetual virginity.⁶⁴

Luke 2

2:1-2 The Census of Quirinius A significant historical issue relates to the census by Quirinius in relation to Christ's birth. In fact, Bock writes, "It could well be regarded as the most significant historical problem in the entire Gospel."⁶⁵

The difficulties are multifaceted, yet the date of the census causes the most difficulty. According to Josephus, Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., and since Jesus was born during Herod's governorship (Matthew 2:1-18), Christ must have been born in 4 B.C. at the latest. Yet, Quirinius did not govern Syria until A.D. 6.⁶⁶ However, "This does not mean that Luke wrote fiction or mistaken history."⁶⁷

According to Butler,

Augustus periodically called for a census in different parts of the Roman Empire and established a cycle for censuses to be held in some parts of the empire. Extensive

⁶¹ Strauss, 72.

⁶² Strauss, 73.

⁶³ See Luke 1:46-55; 1:67-80; 2:14; 2:29-32.

⁶⁴ *The Protoevangelium of James*, available from <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0847.htm>.

⁶⁵ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 903.

⁶⁶ Stein, 105.

⁶⁷ Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, vol. 4 of the *Holman New Testament Commentary*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000), 38.

chronological, literary, and lexical studies have sought to solve the problem. Quirinius may have served in an administrative position in Palestine in relationship to the census and may have assisted more than one Syrian legate or Judean governor in establishing and carrying out the census....

We must conclude that no clear solution is possible to the chronological problem, but that it is not outside the realm of Roman custom to posit a census in Palestine about 6 B.C. led by Herod and the Roman government. The major problem is not whether such a census occurred but how Quirinius related to it.⁶⁸

Stein writes,

The heart of the problem, as has already been stated, is the dating of the census within the rule of Quirinius. It is the date, not the existence of the census, that is problematic. Several attempts have been made to reconcile this biblical statement with the historical materials. Some of these involve the discrediting of Josephus, who stated that the census under Quirinius took place in A.D. 6-7. Another attempt is to argue that the appearance of the name "Quirinius" in 2:2 is a textual error and that the name C. Sentius Saturnius should be read instead. There is, however, no textual evidence that the name "Quirinius" is a scribal error. Another attempt is to divide the census into two parts. The first part, or ordering of a census, took place during the time of Caesar Augustus; and the second part, the census itself, was completed under Quirinius in A.D. 6-7 (cf. Acts 5:37). But why then would Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem during the ordering of the census in the time of Herod when the actual census did not take place until later? Another attempt is to understand Quirinius, who was placed in charge of putting down the Homodensian revolt in northwestern Syria, i.e., southeastern Turkey today (see Strabo, *Geography* 12.6.5), as being a kind of second governor at the time. He was the governor of external affairs, whereas Saturnius was governor of internal affairs. Still another explanation is that the term "first," or "first census," should be understood not as "first" but should be translated, "This was the census 'before' Quirinius was governor." The genitive absolute "while Quirinius was governor of Syria," however, makes this unlikely. It must be confessed that there is no easy explanation at the present time for this historical problem of the census date, but some new evidence might in the future vindicate the historical accuracy of Luke on this point.⁶⁹

Bock also contends that many possible solutions to the Quirinius problem exist. He writes, "No candidate is so manifestly superior that it can be regarded as the solution. What one faces is a variety of solutions, any of which could be correct."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Butler, 38-39.

⁶⁹ Stein, 105-106.

⁷⁰ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 909. Bock offers a helpful excursus on "The Census of Quirinius (2:1-2)," 903-909.

Messianic Expectations Even a cursory reading of the Gospels reveals that the Jewish expectation for the Messiah differed substantially from who Jesus actually was and what His actual kingdom was about. While these expectations were varied, a common belief was that when the Messiah came, He would deliver the Jewish people from Roman rule. This sentiment was clearly seen in the apocryphal work from the first century B.C., entitled *The Psalms of Solomon*.

See, O Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David (*sic*), at the time which you chose (*sic*), O God, to rule over Israel your servant. And gird him with strength to shatter in pieces unrighteous rulers, to purify Ierousalem (*sic*) from nations that trample her down in destruction, in wisdom of righteousness to drive out sinners from the inheritance, to smash the arrogance of the sinner like a potter's vessel, to shatter all their substance with an iron rod, to destroy the lawless nations by the word of his mouth, that, by his threat, nations flee from his presence, and to reprove sinners with the thoughts of their hearts.⁷¹

Strauss offers helpful commentary, writing, “The Gentiles who “trample [Jerusalem] to destruction” are the Romans. We can easily see why such excitement surrounded Jesus and even John the Baptist (Luke 3:15) when people suspected either might be the Messiah, the Son of David.”⁷²

2:10 “great joy that will be for all the people” Does “all the people” refer to the Jews only or to the Gentiles as well? Luke was here referring to Israel. “The singular ‘people’ refers everywhere else in Luke to the people of Israel.”⁷³ In other places, Luke uses the plural “peoples” and often does have Jews and Gentiles in mind (see Luke 2:31).

2:22 “purification according to the Law of Moses” The purification rights were for the mother (Lev. 12:6). She was unclean for seven days, and then the son was circumcised on the eighth day. She was to remain home until the 40th day when she could offer a sacrifice at the Nicanor Gate on the east side of the Court of Women in the temple.⁷⁴

2:24 “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons” According to Nolland, “While the fact receives no emphasis in Luke’s text, the use of pigeons in sacrifice as an alternative to the usual sacrificial animals was a specific concession to the poor.”⁷⁵ Luke clearly references Leviticus 12:8, “And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one

⁷¹ *Psalms of Solomon* 17:20-25, available from <https://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/31-pssal-nets.pdf>.

⁷² Strauss, 75.

⁷³ Stein, 108. Luke used the Greek term *laos*, which is translated as “people.” Strong's G2992.

⁷⁴ Butler, 39.

⁷⁵ Nolland, *Luke* 1-9:20, 118.

for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.”

2:41-52 Jesus in the Temple Along with Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles, Passover was one of three pilgrim feasts that Jewish males were required to attend. Luke highlighted that Jesus was twelve years old and, therefore, not quite at the age where he would have been considered responsible for observing the law—this occurred on a boy’s thirteenth birthday. This makes Jesus’ wisdom even more extraordinary.

The journey from Jerusalem to Nazareth was approximately eighty miles and would have taken three days. Undoubtedly, they would have been traveling in a caravan. “After three days” (2:46) likely refers to the total time from their departure after the feast—one day traveling, one day returning, and one day searching.

Jesus sat at the feet of his teachers, which was the typical position for a disciple. Furthermore, Jesus exemplifies the Rabbinic style of a question-and-answer teaching format. Interestingly, “This is the only place Luke uses the term “teacher” (*didaskalos*) for the rabbinic experts in the law. Elsewhere, they are usually “lawyers” (*nomikos*) or “scribes” (*grammateus*). Luke probably seeks to retain a positive portrait here since the other terms carry negative connotations in the Gospel.”⁷⁶

Luke 2:52 parallels 1 Samuel 2:26, “Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and also with man.”

Luke 3

3:1-2 History, not Myth Luke mentions numerous rulers and locations in chapter three’s first couple of verses. While much can be said about each of the rulers and locals, one of the substantial benefits for our church members is for them to realize that Luke’s account is founded on historical certainty, not myth. Giesler sums up the historical benefit of Luke 3:1-2 when he writes, “An exact date is given (“the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius” [i.e., AD 29]). All eight people are known from history. All were known to live at this exact time. This is not a “once upon a time” story (myth).”⁷⁷

3:2 Two High Priests? How were Annas and Caiaphas both high priests at the same time? Caiaphas was the actual high priest, but Annas had been the high priest from A.D. 6-15. “It was customary to attribute the title to former living high priests since the high priest was a ‘life office.’ (A contemporary practice can be found in addressing former presidents of the United States as ‘Mr. President.’)”⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Strauss, 114.

⁷⁷ Norman L Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 23. In fairness, Giesler is simplifying things. For a more scholarly discussion surrounding this text, see Stein, 127. For a brief overview of the Herods in the New Testament, see Appendix 4 of this document.

⁷⁸ Stein, 127.

3:3-21 John's Baptism According to Strauss, John's baptism may best be viewed as "a unique eschatological (i.e., end times) application, drawing conceptually from the cleansing and initiatory rites of first-century Judaism."⁷⁹ He continues,

At Qumran a close connection is drawn between ceremonial washings and turning from sin. 1QS 3:8–9 reads, "By the spirit of uprightness and of humility his sin is atoned. And by the compliance of his soul with all the laws of God his flesh is cleansed by being sprinkled with cleansing waters and being made holy with the waters of repentance." It is not the act of washing, but the repentance itself that results in forgiveness, "for they have not been cleansed unless they turn away from their wickedness." In John's baptism too it is not the act of immersion but the repentant heart that results in forgiveness. Josephus notes that John's baptism itself did not accomplish remission of sins, but was rather "as a consecration of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behavior."⁸⁰

3:16 "the strap of whose sandals" Slaves were expected to untie the sandals of their masters. Hebrew slaves were exempt from this task, as it was seen as too degrading for a Hebrew—even one who was a slave.⁸¹

3:23 "about thirty years of age" Men were considered ready for public service at the age of 30.⁸² Furthermore, priests began their service at 30 (Numbers 4:3), and David began to rule at the same age (2 Samuel 5:4). Fittingly, the Great High Priest, the Son of David, began His public ministry at 30 years old.

Luke 4

4:5 "all the kingdoms of the world" In the parallel account (Matthew 4:8), Matthew uses the term *kosmos* for "the world." Here, Luke uses a different word, *oikoumenes*, which can be translated as "inhabitants of the world." Some commentators, such as Bock and Strauss, posit that this is likely a reference to the Roman Empire.⁸³ *Oikoumenes* "gives this temptation a stronger political flavor and so stresses Satan's offer of messianic rule over the nations (cf. Ps. 2:8)."⁸⁴

4:6 "for it has been delivered to me, and I give it" The text does not seem to convey that Satan was lying here. Scripture speaks of him as the prince of this world (John 12:31), the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), and that the entire world is under his control (1 John 5:19). Of course, Satan's power is temporary. He only has power that "has been given" (passive)—i.e.,

⁷⁹ Stauss, 123.

⁸⁰ Strauss, 124.

⁸¹ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 320-321.

⁸² Green, 188.

⁸³ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 374.

⁸⁴ Strauss, 140.

“God has placed this world’s kingdoms under the devil’s temporary rule.... The devil offered Jesus a cross-less path of messiahship, and Luke assumed that the devil had in fact the authority to offer the world’s kingdoms to Jesus.”⁸⁵

4:16-30 Synagogue practices Strauss offers a helpful overview of the common synagogue practices of the time, writing,

Luke’s description here and in Acts 13:14–48 represent the oldest written accounts of Jewish synagogue services. Agreements with later rabbinic sources suggest a relatively fixed order of service. This would include the recitation of the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4–9), various prayers (especially the *Shemoneh Esreh*, “Eighteen Benedictions,” also known as the *Tephillah*, “the Prayer”), readings from the Law and (generally) the Prophets, an oral targum (an Aramaic paraphrase for those who could not understand Hebrew), a homily or sermon on the text or texts for the day, and a closing benediction. Psalms may also have been sung (cf. Mark 14:26). Any qualified male might be invited to read the Scripture and give instruction. Tasks were assigned and the service overseen by the synagogue ruler (*archisynagōgos*, Luke 8:49; 13:14; Acts 13:15; 18:8, 17), who would be assisted by an attendant (*hypēretēs*; see 4:20).⁸⁶

4:31 “Capernaum, a city of Galilee” Capernaum was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus did many miracles at Capernaum and taught in the synagogue there, yet Jesus denounced Capernaum in Luke 10:13-15. The city’s location was identified as Tell Hum and has been extensively excavated. Findings include a synagogue from the fourth century A.D., a church, and even a house church that Franciscan archeologists identify as Peter’s house (Mark 1:29).⁸⁷

Luke 5

5:1 “the lake of Gennesaret” Gennesaret was a three-mile stretch of rich, well-watered soil on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. The lake was the same as the Sea of Galilee. Elsewhere, Luke simply refers to it as “the lake.”⁸⁸ Josephus also uses the term “lake” instead of “sea” when referencing Gennesaret.⁸⁹

5:12 Leprosy In Scripture, leprosy was a term used for multiple skin diseases, which differ from the modern disease of the same name. The latter disease, called Hansen’s disease, is a serious

⁸⁵ Stein, 147.

⁸⁶ Strauss, 140-141.

⁸⁷ Sherman Elbridge Johnson, “Capernaum,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 104.

⁸⁸ J. D. Douglas, and Merrill C. Tenney, eds. “GENNESARET,” in *The New International Dictionary of the Bible: Pictorial Edition*, 382.

⁸⁹ Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.2.1, trans. by William Whiston, available from <https://gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm#link182HCH0002>.

skin disease that develops over a long period of time. The scriptural use of the term is much broader than its modern namesake.⁹⁰

5:17 Pharisees The Pharisees were the best-known religious group at this time. Approximately 6,000 men of the 500,000 Jews in Jesus' day were Pharisees. The Pharisees, literally "Separated Ones," arose from the Hasideans ("the Pious"). The Pharisees adhered to the oral, legalistic traditions based on the law. In the New Testament, they are often seen at odds with John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Apostles. The Pharisees were something of a mixed bag. The Jewish Talmud itself acknowledged this by offering seven varieties of Pharisees: (1) The wait-a-little Pharisee (always had an excuse for putting off doing a good deed). (2) The bruised Pharisee (in order to avoid looking at a woman, he would close his eyes and walk into walls). (3) The shoulder Pharisee (wore his good deeds on his sleeve). (4) The stooped Pharisee (walked around hunched over in order to look humble). (5) The ever-reckoning Pharisee (always counting his good deeds up and weighing them against his bad deeds). (6) The God-fearing Pharisee (in perpetual state of dread because of his fear of God). (7) The God-loving Pharisee (a genuine lover of God).⁹¹

In light of this, we can see why Jesus had such strong words for many of the Pharisees. They were so obsessed with looking the part, but so often, their hearts were far from God. This seems to be what Jesus was getting at in Matthew 5:20; 23:1-39.

Interestingly, Jesus did get along with some of the Pharisees. For example, he went to a banquet at Simon the Pharisees' home (Luke 7:37), and he was warned by some of the Pharisees when Herod wanted to take His life (Luke 13:31).

5:33-35 Fasting See the note on Luke 18:12.

Luke 6

6:3-4 "what David did when he was hungry" Jesus here referenced 1 Samuel 21 when David and his men requested bread from the priests at the sanctuary at Nob. "This bread was set out weekly as a sacrifice to the Lord and was consumed by the priests when new bread was set out.... Jesus treats it as a real violation of the law but points out that the meeting of human needs constitutes a higher law, overriding the ceremonial requirement."⁹²

Nob was a town of Benjamin. The town can be found in a list of post-exilic cities in Nehemiah 11:31-32 and was also mentioned in Isaiah 10:27-32. Ahimelech had overseen the sanctuary at

⁹⁰ George Wesley Buchanan, "Leprosy" in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 432.

⁹¹ Mark Woods, "7 Familiar Types of Pharisees," available from <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/7.familiar.types.of.pharisee/77087.htm>.

⁹² Strauss, 173.

Shiloh (1 Samuel 14:3), but the sanctuary was apparently moved to Nob after Shiloh's destruction (Jeremiah 7:14).⁹³

6:20-49 The Sermon on the Plain The sermon parallels yet differs from Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:29). According to Stagg, "The concern of both was to present Jesus in terms of his origin, identity, gifts, and demands. Maintaining the exact sequence or order of events and sayings was not essential to their purpose."⁹⁴ Even so, theologians have attempted to explain the obvious differences in the sermons. For example, Augustine understood the sermons as distinct sermons given at separate times and locations. Calvin argued that they are essentially two versions of the same basic sermonic material. In essence, Matthew and Luke offer collections of sayings that Jesus spoke at various times and places, which they brought together primarily due to topical considerations.⁹⁵

However one understands the background issues related to these sermons, we must not lose sight of the teachings themselves. They offer us "a close-up look at the teaching of Jesus as it sets forth the nature, privileges, and demands of Christian discipleship."⁹⁶ Yet, these demands can seem overwhelming. Stagg encourages us with these words,

The sermon is heavy in its demands, so heavy that one feels overwhelmed by it. It is to be observed that the sermon is in a setting of mercy. Before and following the sermon, Luke (as did Matthew) told of merciful acts of healing. God's gifts come before his demands. The deliverance from Egypt proceeded the law of Sinai. Salvation is both God's gift and his demand. Christians dare not forget either truth.⁹⁷

Luke 7

7:2 "a centurion" A century in the Roman army was around 100 men, though in practice, the number was usually closer to 80. A Roman legion (5,500 men) generally had sixty centurions who were of officer rank.⁹⁸ "As veteran soldiers, centurions maintained discipline and commanded great respect. They were paid about fifteen times as much as an ordinary soldier."⁹⁹

⁹³ O. R. Sellers., "NOB," vol. 3 in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 556-557.

⁹⁴ Stagg, 55-56.

⁹⁵ Stein, 197. For a more in-dept discussion of the similarities and differences of the Sermon on the Plain and the Sermon on the Mount see Stein, 197-199.

⁹⁶ Stagg, 56.

⁹⁷ Stagg, 56.

⁹⁸ Denis Bain Saddington, "Centurion," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 105.

⁹⁹ Stauss, 191.

7:6 “I am not worthy to have you come under my roof” The Mishnah (the written collection of the oral Jewish traditions) clearly stated that “the dwelling-places of non-Jews are unclean.”¹⁰⁰ Undoubtedly, the centurion was showing respect for Jewish sensibilities here.¹⁰¹

7:11 “a town called Nain” This text was the only mention of the city in all of Scripture. “The location of the Nain of the gospel is hardly in doubt, for the name survives in the modern Arab village of Nein....”¹⁰² The village was approximately five miles southeast of Nazareth and twenty-five miles from Capernaum. The modern village of Nein only has around 200 inhabitants, though archeological evidence suggests that the town was “of some importance.”¹⁰³

7:37 “an alabaster flask of ointment” Mark 14:5 and John 12:5 record the cost of the jar of perfume, around three hundred *denarii*, which was approximately one year’s wages.

7:38 “she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head” Letting down one’s hair in public was shameful and even grounds for divorce, but in her deep gratitude toward Jesus, the woman forgot her social propriety and used what was available to wipe Jesus’ feet—her hair.”¹⁰⁴

Luke 8

8:2-3 “also some women...who provided for them out of their means.” The text literally reads, “They were serving them from their possessions.” The practice of women helping traveling teachers was not unique in the Greco-Roman world. What was unique here was that the women traveled with Jesus and were treated as disciples. “Rabbis of this day did not have women disciples.”¹⁰⁵

8:26, 33 “Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee...and the herd rushed down the steep peak into the lake and drowned.” According to Stein, “There is a major textual problem involving this geographical designation. He continues,

The three main readings are: (1) Gerasenes—Gerasa (modern Jerash), which lies thirty miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee; (2) Gergesenes—Gergese (modern Kersa), which lies on the Sea of Galilee; (3) Gadarenes—Gadara (modern Umm Qeis), which lies five

¹⁰⁰ “English Explanation of Mishnah Oholot 18:7,” available from https://www.sefaria.org/English_Explanation_of_Mishnah_Oholot.18.7.1?lang=bi&with=all&lang=en.

¹⁰¹ Strauss, 191.

¹⁰² D. C. Pellett, “NAIN,” vol. 3 of the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 500.

¹⁰³ Pellet, “NAIN,” 500.

¹⁰⁴ Stein, 236.

¹⁰⁵ Strauss, 211.

miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee and possess lands extending to the lake; but Gadara has no steep slope leading to the lake.¹⁰⁶

While the exact location is unclear, “For Luke, the key issue was not the question of ‘where’ this took place but ‘what’ took place and its significance for understanding who Jesus is.”¹⁰⁷

Luke 9

9:7 Herod the Tetrarch For information on the Herod the Tetrarch, and other Herods related to the New Testament, see Appendix 4 of this document.

9:10 Bethsaida Bethsaida was located on the Sea of Galilee, a short distance from Capernaum. Jesus rebuked Bethsaida for their unbelief (see Matthew 11:20-23). Peter, Philip, and Andrew all lived there as well.

9:51 Jesus’ Journey to Jerusalem Luke 9:51 begins a new section. According to Stein, “This ‘travel section’ consists for the most part of material not found in Mark and continues into either chap. 18 or 19.”¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, the decision depends on whether Luke’s structure was controlled by geography (going to Jerusalem) or by his use of sources.¹⁰⁹

Luke 10

10:1 “appointed seventy-two others” The wording here implies that the twelve remained with Jesus, and others were sent out to minister. A textual issue exists regarding the number—some manuscripts read seventy while others read seventy-two. One theory posits that a scribe may have wanted the number in Luke 10:1 to mirror the seventy names listed in the table of nations in Genesis 10.¹¹⁰

10:11 “Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you.” Dust held a symbolic place for God’s people. Throwing dust on the head was a sign of mourning or repentance. Shaking off the dust from one’s feet symbolized that the person had no further responsibility for the area where the dust was picked up, “Thus leaving that area to God’s judgment.”¹¹¹

10:13-15 “Woe to you, Chorazin...Bethsaida...Capernaum” These Galilean towns were places where Jesus had preached and done miracles. “With the close of the Galilean segment of Jesus’

¹⁰⁶ Stein, 255.

¹⁰⁷ Stein, 256.

¹⁰⁸ Stein, 296.

¹⁰⁹ For more information, see Stein, 296.

¹¹⁰ Strauss, 256.

¹¹¹ J. D. Douglas, and Merrill C. Tenney, eds. “DUST,” in *The New International Dictionary of the Bible: Pictorial Edition*, 287.

ministry, Jesus provides a retrospective summary in which these towns are indicted for their overall failure to respond genuinely to the message of salvation.... Luke had recorded initial responses of wonderment, even praise, but apparently, genuine faith (hearing and doing the word) had not emerged.”¹¹²

10:18 “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” Two translations of “from heaven” are possible: adjectivally (“fall as lightning-from-heaven”) or adverbially (“fall from heaven like lightning”). According to Stein, the second is more likely. The lightning indicates the suddenness of the fall, not the brightness it brings.¹¹³ “Jesus may be referring to an original fall of Satan, which he saw in his preincarnate state. More likely, he is drawing on the traditional image of Satan’s fall to describe his defeat in the present exorcisms of the disciples.”¹¹⁴

10:38 “Jesus entered a village.” John 11 clarified that the village where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived was a village called Bethany. Bethany was located about two miles east of Jerusalem, on the road to Jericho. Bethany was situated on the east side of the Mount of Olives. The town was relatively small, some even considering it more of a subdivision than a village. Nevertheless, Bethany held an essential place in the New Testament. Jesus’ ascension took place near Bethany.

Luke 11

11:4 “for we ourselves forgive everyone.” Stagg offers some helpful insight, writing,

Being forgivable is related to being forgiving (v. 4). Unwillingness to forgive betrays the very spirit which shuts one off from forgiveness. If a door is blocked, it prevents passage from either direction. It is not that God is unwilling to forgive anyone, but forgiveness cannot be received by one who is unwilling to give it.¹¹⁵

11:5-8 Insights into the Parable

- ❖ This parable was steeped in ancient Middle Eastern hospitality. As Strauss states, “As in Middle Eastern culture today, hospitality was of critical importance in first-century Palestine and involved the whole community. Both the host who received a late-night guest and the man already in bed would have been obligated to provide the best for the traveler. Jesus’ hearers would have considered the ‘hassles’ of getting up and unbolting the door a minor inconvenience compared to the scandal of not providing adequate hospitality.”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Green, 416-417.

¹¹³ Stein, 310.

¹¹⁴ Strauss, 262.

¹¹⁵ Stagg, 82.

¹¹⁶ Strauss, 275.

- ❖ “The ancient house was basically a one-room affair, so waking the master of the house was likely to wake everyone else.”¹¹⁷
- ❖ “The request for three loaves of bread has no symbolic value but is the appropriate number of loaves for an evening meal; ... The hypothetical reply of the householder, a claim of inconvenience that presumes the possession of extra bread that could be shared, is laughable in its absurdity.”¹¹⁸
- ❖ In regard to “because of his impudence” in v. 8., Stein states, “The term *anaideian* is best translated ‘persistence.’”¹¹⁹

11:15 Beelzebul The title was rendered *beelzebul* in some Greek manuscripts and *beezeboul* in others. Several theories exist regarding the origin of the name.¹²⁰ The prefix “beel” was connected to the Canaanite god Baal, whose name means “lord.” According to Strauss, “The Israelites seem to have mocked this name, changing it to Baal-Zebub (Gk. *Beelzeboub*), meaning “lord of the flies” (see Judg. 10:6; 2 Kings 1:2, 3, 6). Whatever its origin, the name Beelzeboul eventually came to be used in Judaism for the “prince of demons,” the highest-ranking angel in heaven prior to his fall.”¹²¹

11:31 The Queen of the South Here, Jesus was referring to the Queen of Sheba. For more information, see 1 Kings 10:1-13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1-12.¹²²

11:42 “But woe to you Pharisees!” See the note on Luke 5:17.

11:46 “Woe to you lawyers also!” The term “lawyers” was essentially a synonym for “scribes.”¹²³ The scribes were associated with the Sanhedrin, which was “a court made up of local elite, probably with some sort of Roman oversight, that handled census, tax, and other administrative and military responsibilities.”¹²⁴

The scribes worked with the Sanhedrin “as clerks, legal counselors for participants in trials, and judges.”¹²⁵ Interestingly, the authority of the scribes was delegated, so they could interpret existing law but not add to it. This was one reason the scribes and Jesus were often seen at odds

¹¹⁷ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1057.

¹¹⁸ Green, 447-448.

¹¹⁹ Stein, 327.

¹²⁰ Bock offers a helpful overview of several of the proposed theories about the origin of the title Beelzebub. See Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1074.

¹²¹ Strauss, 277.

¹²² Stein, 335.

¹²³ Stein, 231.

¹²⁴ J. Andrew Overman, “Sanhedrin,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 678.

¹²⁵ George Wesley Buchanan, “Scribes,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 684.

in the New Testament. “When Jesus was distinguished from the scribes as one who had authority (Matt. 7:29; Mark 1:22), the implication was that, as the Messiah, he had authority to make law, just as David and other kings did. This gave him authority over the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8) and all other national laws. He also had authority to pardon (Matt. 9:6), as other kings did.”¹²⁶

Luke 12

12:5 “has authority to cast into hell.” Strauss offers helpful commentary,

The word “hell” was the Greek term *geenna*, a transliteration of the Hebrew *gehenna*. It means “the Valley of (the son[s] of) Hinnom,” a ravine running along the southwestern edge of Jerusalem (also called Topheth in the Old Testament). The valley became notorious as a place where the sons and daughters of Judah were offered as burnt sacrifices to the god Baal Molech. Later it was used as a place to burn rubbish (Jer. 19:2, 10–13). The continually burning fire and stench provided an appropriate metaphor for the place of fiery judgment prepared for the wicked.¹²⁷

12:6 “sold for two pennies?” The *assarion* was a Roman copper coin worth only 1/16 of a *denarius*. So the pennies together were worth about one hour (assuming an eight-hour workday) of a day’s wage each.¹²⁸

12:11 “bring you before the synagogues” Synagogues were not just centers for worship; they also functioned as administrative centers where trials were held.¹²⁹

12:28 “is thrown into the oven” “Oven,” rather than “fire,” is the best translation here because wood was scarce in Israel, and grass was often used for fuel to bake breads and cakes.¹³⁰

12:59 “the very last penny” Jesus used a different word here than in v. 6. The term he used was *lepta*, which was the smallest coin available at the time. A *lepta* was worth 1/28 of a *denarius*. Therefore, a *lepta* was worth about 25 minutes of work.¹³¹

Luke 13

13:1 “whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.” Scholars are unsure of precisely what event Luke was referring to in this text. Numerous events, including at least five recorded by Josephus, have been proposed; yet it appears that Luke preserved an incident that was not

¹²⁶ Buchanan, 684.

¹²⁷ Strauss, 293.

¹²⁸ Stein, 347.

¹²⁹ Strauss, 294.

¹³⁰ Stein, 355.

¹³¹ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1199-1200.

recorded by Josephus or the other contemporary writers.”¹³² While the exact event is unknown outside of this Lukan account, the many events that are known “show that the region often experienced such violence.”¹³³

13:4 “those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell” According to Strauss, “This incident is otherwise unattested. The pool of Siloam was a reservoir in the southeastern corner of Jerusalem. This tower may have been part of the fortifications of the southern or eastern walls of Jerusalem, or perhaps was part of an aqueduct that Pilate built to improve Jerusalem’s water supply.”¹³⁴

13:15 “Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox” Jesus clearly pointed out their hypocrisy. The religious leaders devised a plethora of ways to get around the rules, many of which they made themselves, in order to take care of their own animals and property. For example,

They would build a crude structure around a public well, converting it into a private residence. Since the well was now a “home,” animals could be taken there for watering, provided “the greater part of a cow shall be within [the enclosure] when it drinks.” Jesus points out the hypocrisy of taking such measures to protect one’s property while objecting to an act of human compassion.¹³⁵

Jesus compared the woman’s restriction to an animal being restricted from access to the water it needed. “The animal is not left tethered for *one day*; the woman has been restricted in this way for *eighteen years!*”¹³⁶

13:17 “All his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.” Nolland points out that “there is undoubtedly an allusion to the LXX of Isa 45:16, which is seen as having a fulfillment here.”¹³⁷

13:32 “Go and tell that fox” The Greek word *alopex* (fox) can refer to (1) a person of no significance, (2) a deceiver—a person of cunning, or (3) a destroyer. “Considering how the Synoptics portray the way Herod removed the Baptist; the meaning of deceiver or destroyer is

¹³² Stein, 371. For more information on the events related to Josephus, see Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1205.

¹³³ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1205.

¹³⁴ Strauss, 310.

¹³⁵ Strauss, 313-314. For more information about the structures, see *Mishnah Eruvin* 2:1-4, available from https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Eruvin.2.1?lang=bi.

¹³⁶ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, vol. 35B in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, edited by David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker. Dallas: Word Book Publisher, 1993, 724.

¹³⁷ Nolland, *9:21-18:34*, 725. Isaiah 46:15, “All of them are put to shame and confounded; the makers of idols go in confusion together.”

possible. Luke's emphasis seems to be destructiveness since Herod murdered 'the greatest born of woman' (Luke 7:28) and later stands opposed to Jesus (Acts 4:26-28)."¹³⁸

Luke 14

14:7 "the places of honor" At banquets, certain seats were reserved for distinguished persons. Robertson sheds light on this when he writes, "On a couch holding three, the middle place was the chief one. The place next to the host on the right was then, as now, the post of honor."¹³⁹

14:23 "Go out to the highways and hedges" According to Nolland, "Highways and hedgerows refer probably not to separate places but to the situation outside of the town where the rural roads are abutted by the hedges or fences surrounding the fields."¹⁴⁰

14:26 "does not hate" In order to understand the meaning of this pericope, we must first understand something of *miseō*, the Greek word translated here as "hate." The term literally means "to hate, pursue with hatred, detest."¹⁴¹

Butler offers insight, writing, "Our modern-day understanding of the word *hate* pigeonholes it as the opposite of love. It is the language of exaggerated contrast. In the context of Jesus' story, however, hate had the meaning of 'loving less,' not the absence of love."¹⁴²

In a similar vein, Stein writes,

Over the centuries, this verse has caused great despair and confusion. Clearly, Jesus, who summarized all God's commandments as loving God and one's neighbor (10:27-28), could not here have been demanding blind, raging hatred of one's family. The confusion is due to Jesus' use of a Semitic idiom. To love one person more than another is described in the OT language as "loving one and hating another." (cf. Gen 29:30-31, RSV). In contrast to Luke's "word-for-word translation of Jesus' words, Matthew gave a "thought-for-thought" translation in Matt 10:37, revealing that Jesus' demand is for his followers to love/obey him more than anyone else, even their own families.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1247.

¹³⁹ A. T. Robertson, *The Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 2 of *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 195.

¹⁴⁰ Nolland, *9:21-18:34*, 757.

¹⁴¹ See Strong's, G304, available from <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3404/esv/mgnt/0-1/>.

¹⁴² Butler, 242.

¹⁴³ Stein, 396.

Green further clarifies the text, writing, “So here Jesus is calling for the reconstruction of one’s identity, not along ancestral lines or on the basis of social status, but within the new community oriented toward God’s purpose and characterized by faithfulness to the message of Jesus.”¹⁴⁴

14:34 “if salt has lost its taste” Most of the salt in this period came from the Dead Sea. The salt contained carnallite and gypsum and needed to be processed before it could be consumed.¹⁴⁵ If the processing was done poorly the salt became insipid or poor tasting. The salt then was worthless and, in fact, became “a kind of environmental hazard, for it would ruin soil or even a manure pile. Sowing the earth with salt was the ultimate punishment for a defeated enemy.”¹⁴⁶

Luke 15

15:5 “he lays it on his shoulders” The imagery of the shepherd carrying his sheep harkened back to Psalm 28:9, “Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever,” and Isaiah 40:11, “He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young.”

Commonly, a shepherd would carry a weak or slow sheep on his shoulders if the sheep was unable to keep up with the flock.¹⁴⁷

15:8 “ten silver coins” The coins were Greek *drachmas*, similar to Roman *denarii*, which equaled about a day’s wage. So, the silver coins were worth about 10 days’ wages.

15:11 “two sons” Often times, the emphasis of this parable is on only the younger son. The parable is often referred to as the parable of the prodigal son, which is incorrect. The parable is about two sons, and the story is not complete until v. 32.

15:12 “give me the share of property that is coming to me.” According to Deuteronomy 21:17, the younger son would receive around one-third of the inheritance, while the oldest son would receive two-thirds. Butler offers further insight,

The Greek text shows the anguish involved. It says literally, ‘He dived to them the life.’ Everything the father had lived for, that which had consumed all his time and energy, now came into the hands of his sons. The younger son took his part and departed.... But

¹⁴⁴ Green, 565.

¹⁴⁵ Carnallite is a soft, white halide mineral that contains hydrated potassium and magnesium chloride and is used to make fertilizers. The mineral can be found mostly in salt deposits. More information is available from <https://www.vedantu.com/geography/carnallite>. Gypsum is a soft sulfate mineral composed of calcium sulfate dihydrate (CaSO₄·2H₂O). It is often used in fertilizer and plaster, including drywall. More information is available from <https://geologyscience.com/minerals/gypsum/>.

¹⁴⁶ Stein, 398.

¹⁴⁷ Stein, 403.

the elder son did not exercise control over his share.... The father maintained control of his older son's inheritance during his lifetime.¹⁴⁸

15:13 “gathered all he had” The Greek word used here, *synago*, carried a sense of liquidating the assets or turning the inheritance into cash. According to Strauss, “The son callously sells off the family inheritance.”¹⁴⁹

15:15 “to feed pigs” The younger son was so desperate that he hired himself out to a Gentile pig farmer. “People of God's covenant could not touch swine, since this made them impure and unfit for worship of God (Lev. 11:7; Deut. 14:8; Isa. 65:4; 66:17). His was the most disgraceful job a Jewish citizen could possibly take. Every time he performed his duties, he carried himself further away from his Jewish heritage and his God.”¹⁵⁰

15:16 “longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate” According to Bock, the pigs' food “may have been a sweet bean from a carob or locust tree or a bitter, thorny berry. The son wants the meal of unclean animals and cannot have it.”¹⁵¹

15:20 “his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.” The father's actions were exceedingly unusual. According to Strauss,

The scene is striking since even today, a distinguished Middle Eastern patriarch in robes does not run, but always walks in a slow and dignified manner. Running was viewed as humiliating and degrading. The man's unrestrained joy and affection—even to the point of humiliation before others—reveals God's overwhelming love and grace for the lost sinner and the joy experienced when a person repents.¹⁵²

15:22 “Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.” The items represented full reinstatement into the family. The robe here was formal attire and displayed the father's desire for him to have the best clothing to wear. The ring may have been a signet ring and further represented the son's return as a full family member. The sandals were a further display of wealth.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Butler, 255.

¹⁴⁹ Strauss, 341.

¹⁵⁰ Butler, 255.

¹⁵¹ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1313.

¹⁵² Strauss, 342.

¹⁵³ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1314-1315.

15:28 “he was angry” Strauss clarifies the situation when he writes, “According to Middle Eastern custom, the oldest son should have been the key reconciler between the father and his rebellious sibling.”¹⁵⁴

15:31 “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.” The father addressed the older son tenderly as *tekon*, meaning child. “The father’s reply is as gentle as the son’s complaint was harsh.”¹⁵⁵ Bock continues, “He affirms the faithfulness of the elder brother and his special place in his heart. He accepts that this son has always been at his side. He reminds the son that all he owns belongs to him; neither the father’s activity nor the brother’s return in any way diminishes the elder’s status.”¹⁵⁶

Luke 16

16:1-9 Interpretation The opening parable of chapter 16 is notoriously difficult to interpret. While interpreters have sought to understand the parable in a myriad of ways, it seems best to interpret the manager’s actions as being dishonest. This traditional view takes the parable at face value but raises the question of how Jesus would commend dishonesty.

According to Stein, “The manager is not commended for his dishonesty but for his shrewdness.”¹⁵⁷ That is to say that Jesus commended the manager because he was prepared for the judgment that he knew was coming (i.e., that he was going to lose his job). Though the man was a crook, he still had the sense to prepare for his future. Stein continues, “Luke found no difficulty in urging his readers to prepare themselves for the coming judgment, as the dishonest manager did, by acting ‘shrewdly.’ How that shrewdness is to be manifested is, of course, quite different. It is not through dishonesty but in the wise stewardship of possessions (16:9-13).”¹⁵⁸

16:1 “who had a manager” The term used here for manager was *oikonomos* and may be best understood as an “estate agent;” therefore, the rich man was likely an absentee landowner and the servant his estate manager. “This situation was common in Galilee, with its large, landed estates and many peasant tenant farmers. Managers of this kind had significant financial and administrative authority.”¹⁵⁹

16:16 Interpretive challenges The first challenge is how to interpret “until.” The possibilities are as follows: (1) “up to but not including” or (2) “up to and including.” Was John part of the Law and prophets or part of the realized kingdom? Stein makes a compelling argument that John was a bridge between the old age and the new age and that he should be considered as part of the

¹⁵⁴ Strauss, 343.

¹⁵⁵ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1319.

¹⁵⁶ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1319.

¹⁵⁷ Stein, 412.

¹⁵⁸ Stein, 412.

¹⁵⁹ Strauss, 346.

realized kingdom.¹⁶⁰ The second challenge centers on “everyone forces his way into it.” Butler succinctly sums up the problems and the mainstream interpretive positions when he writes,

The Greek verb here may be interpreted as a passive, “Everyone is forced into it,” or as a middle voice as the NIV translates it. Some scholars see the meaning to be, “Everyone is invited into it.” Most agree with the NIV but then interpret the meaning differently. Is this a positive or a negative action? Are people using good means or evil means to try to get into the kingdom? Were good people doing the action, or was it Jesus’ opponents—either Pharisees or evil spirits? Do legitimate followers of Christ use their zeal and stubborn determination to get into the kingdom?

Nolland (WBC 35b, 813) translates, “Everyone takes vigorous steps to enter it,” noting that he had to supply “to enter.” For Luke, entering God’s kingdom was not a passive event that just happens to a person. To enter the kingdom, we must take the initiative. We must make the hard choice to serve the right master and then do that which shows we are trustworthy so that we will be entrusted with genuine riches.

Recent commentators like Fitzmyer, Schweizer, Culpepper, and Bock return to the passive meaning of the verb, interpreting its meaning as, “Everyone is strongly urged to enter it.” (HCSB) Jesus’ proclamation and efforts to persuade the Pharisees and scribes to show how valiantly he urged people to enter the kingdom. Sadly, many rejected his urging.¹⁶¹

16:19-31 More interpretive challenges Is this story a parable or a historical account? It seems best to understand the story as a parable because Luke began this section with the term “a certain man,” which Luke “used only when introducing a parable.”¹⁶² That said, the parable was unique because it included a proper name, Lazarus. Once again, Butler offers succinct and helpful commentary when he writes,

The problem in interpreting the passage and then incorporating it into a doctrinal system of heaven and hell lies in the nature of the section as a parable, a story Jesus told. Were the elements of the story intended to set forth the precise description of heaven and hell, or were they simply elements taken up from common Jewish tradition and used in order to communicate with the audience? Against the latter possibility stands verse 26, which appears to be an intentional claim to teach something new.

The New Testament represents a wide advance over the Old Testament's hints, clues, and implications about the afterlife. This passage shows an instant awareness of distinct experiences immediately after death (cf. 23:43; Acts 7:59; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23). It also speaks of Hades as a place of torment and fire, though Acts 2:27, 31 (cf. Matt. 12:40) places Jesus in the heart of the earth in Hades after his death. Is that simply an attempt to

¹⁶⁰ Stein, 418.

¹⁶¹ Butler, 271.

¹⁶² Stein, 317. Stein is here commenting on Luke 10:30, but the exact same term is used in 16:19.

say Jesus suffered everything? Death and judgment are consistently connected to Hades (Matt. 16:18; 11:23; Luke 10:15). Some see Hades as the place of the dead parallel to Sheol in the Old Testament. This makes it the intermediate state before final judgment.

This view would say that Hades has compartments, some for the wicked and others for the righteous. Our passage appears to make a greater distinction than that, seeing Hades as the place of punishment and torment shut off from the place of comfort, although admittedly no name is given the heavenly place.

The New Testament seems to make two points standing in tension with one another: The dead are immediately conscious of their eternal reward or punishment, and the dead face a final judgment with eternal separation and gradations of rewards and punishments. No matter how this tension is resolved, the doctrine motivates us to press into the kingdom, let God be our Master, and make sure that kingdom living has started here, so that it will last eternally.¹⁶³

Luke 17

17:2 “little ones to sin” Who are these little ones? According to Nolland, “Jesus probably means the weak, the lowly, the vulnerable (see at 7:28). Though otherwise unmentioned, in the context, we are to understand that they are present as those drawn to Jesus.”¹⁶⁴

17:6 “say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea’ According to Bock, “This tree... is probably the black mulberry, with a vast root system that enabled it to live up to six hundred years.”¹⁶⁵

17:7 “a servant” The word servant was *doulos*, a bondservant or slave. A master would never think of eating with his slaves.¹⁶⁶

17:12 “lepers” See the note on Luke 5:12.

17:20-37 Context Stein offers helpful commentary on the setting of this material. He writes,

The setting of this material is unspecified, and as the introductory seam reveals, there is no necessary tie with the preceding material. Luke wove this section from various traditional materials and placed it here for reasons other than chronology. Why he placed this material at this point, however, is unclear. The account consists of two different sets of material. The first speaks of the “already now” or realized aspect of God’s kingdom (17:20-21). The second speaks of the “not yet” or future aspect of the kingdom (17:22-37). The two sets of teachings are connected by catchwords: “come” (17:20)—“is

¹⁶³ Butler, 273.

¹⁶⁴ Nolland, 9:21-18:34, 837.

¹⁶⁵ Bock, 9:51-24:53, 1391.

¹⁶⁶ Strauss, 357.

coming” (17:22); “here it is” or “there it is” (17:21)—“there he is!” or “here he is!” (17:23).¹⁶⁷

Luke 18

18:1-8 Parable of the Persistent Widow At times, this parable is misinterpreted because some readers think that God is the judge in the story. A result is that some assume God does not want to help them and that they must beg Him in order to receive anything from Him. This is absolutely incorrect. In fact, Jesus used a rabbinic teaching method that highlighted the goodness of God for His listeners. Strauss explains, “The theme develops through a rabbinic style ‘lesser to greater’ (*qal wāḥômer*) argument. If this woman’s persistence resulted in justice from an evil judge, how much more will our persistent prayers be answered by our loving heavenly Father.”¹⁶⁸

18:10 “two men went up into the temple to pray” The temple was open for private prayer at any time, but set times of public prayer occurred each day at 9 a.m. (Acts 2:15) and 3:00 p.m. (Acts 3:1).¹⁶⁹

18:12 “I fast twice a week” *The Didache* also mentioned this Jewish practice of fasting twice each week. The writer of *The Didache* instructed Christians to fast on different days than “the hypocrites” (Jews). “But as for your fasts, let them not be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and fifth days of the week, but do ye fast on the fourth and sixth days.”¹⁷⁰

18:25 “For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle” Clearly, Jesus used a hyperbolic comparison to make His point. The camel represented the largest animal in Palestine, while a needle was the smallest item a person might interact with on a daily basis. Some have offered up other possible alternatives, such as a theoretical gate called the Eye of the Needle, but a plain-faced reading of the text seems best here. The point was that rich people cannot gain entry into the kingdom with their money or through their own strength.¹⁷¹

18:38 “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” The title “Son of David” was often used by Jews in reference to the coming Messiah. He “would defeat Israel’s enemies and reign forever in justice and righteousness on David’s throne.”¹⁷² The background for this title comes from 2 Samuel 7:12-16.

¹⁶⁷ Stein, 436.

¹⁶⁸ Strauss, 365.

¹⁶⁹ Stein, 449.

¹⁷⁰ *The Didache* 8:1, trans. by Charles H. Hoole, available from <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-hoole.html>.

¹⁷¹ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1485-1486.

¹⁷² Strauss, 373.

Luke 19

19:2 “there was a man named Zacchaeus” This was the only information we have about Zaccheus from the New Testament; however, “Later Christian legend claimed that he became the first Bishop of Caesarea (*Apostolic Constitutions* 7:46). He was elevated to sainthood by both the Eastern Orthodox and Western traditions.”¹⁷³

19:2 “a chief tax collector” According to Strauss, “Tax collectors were despised in Israel because they were viewed as extortionists and Roman collaborators. The Jewish Mishnah goes so far as to say it is permissible to lie to tax collectors to protect one’s property!”¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, Luke used the term *architelōnēs* (chief tax collector). The term was only used here, but “it probably indicates that Zacchaeus is responsible for a broader region—perhaps the custom on goods passing between Perea and Judea—with subordinates working for him.”¹⁷⁵

19:13 “ten minas” The ESV includes a footnote that states, “A *mina* was about three months’ wages for a laborer.”¹⁷⁶ A *mina* was about 100 *drachmas*. This was a much smaller amount than Matthew’s talents, as a *mina* was worth only 1/16 of a talent.¹⁷⁷

19:28 Jerusalem Narrative This text marks a new section in Luke’s Gospel. From 9:51-19:27, the narrative focuses on Jesus’ travels. From 19:28-21:38, we see Jesus in Jerusalem. Then, in 22:1-23:56, the passion narrative occurs, followed by the resurrection account in 24:1-53.¹⁷⁸

19:28- 40 The Triumphal Entry While Luke did not directly quote from Zechariah, the narrative clearly related to Zechariah 9:9–10.

19:44 “And they will not leave one stone upon another in you” Jesus prophesied concerning the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans in A.D. 70. According to Strauss,

Josephus portrays in great detail the terrible and gruesome suffering of the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the three-year siege of the city. Many died by a terrible famine. Others were killed by desperate bandits within the city. Thousands were slaughtered by the Romans when they breached the walls. Josephus claims that eleven hundred thousand perished during the siege and ninety-seven thousand were taken captive. Though the number is almost certainly grossly exaggerated (it may have been between one-quarter

¹⁷³ Rebeca Denova, “Zacchaeus” in the *World History Encyclopedia*, available from <https://www.worldhistory.org/Zacchaeus/>.

¹⁷⁴ Strauss, 378.

¹⁷⁵ Strauss, 378.

¹⁷⁶ ESV footnote on Luke 19:13.

¹⁷⁷ Stein, 473.

¹⁷⁸ Stein, 476.

and one-half million), these numbers reveal the horrible sufferings the city will experience.¹⁷⁹

19:46 “My house shall be a house of prayer” Here Jesus seemed to be citing from Isaiah 56:7, “These I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples,” and from Jeremiah 7:11, “Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord.”

Luke 20

20:14 “This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.” Luke did not elaborate on this point in the text; however, “In the situation of first-century Galilee with absentee landlords, the death of the heir in the parable could have been understood as resulting in such a situation.”¹⁸⁰

20:25 “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” The coin Jesus mentions is likely a *denarius* with Tiberius Caesar’s inscription.¹⁸¹

20:27 “There came to him some Sadducees” The Sadducees were comprised of men from wealthy, priestly families. (Their exact number is unknown, but they were a small group.) They were politically powerful but seen as unfriendly and cruel in their judgments. As a result, they were unpopular with the people. They held the Old Testament as the sole authority for faith and opposed the Pharisees, who also held to oral tradition. They also opposed the supernatural, including the resurrection of the dead. Sadducees also held the majority in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court. Caiaphas ruled over the court for the 18 years he was a high priest. He presided over Jesus’ second trial.¹⁸²

Luke 21

21:2 “put in two small copper coins” The Greek term Luke used was *lepta*, which was the smallest coin available at the time. For more information, see the note on Luke 12:59.

The Destruction of Jerusalem and Eschatological Issues Clearly, it is beyond the scope of my assignment here to delve into eschatological issues. However, both Stein and Strauss offer helpful contextual information, parts of which are below.

Jesus’ teaching in the temple, which began in Luke 19:45, concludes with a long eschatological discourse involving the destruction of the temple, Jerusalem and the end of

¹⁷⁹ Strauss, 390-391.

¹⁸⁰ Stein, 492.

¹⁸¹ Jay Grande, “Whose Image is on the Coin?,” available from <https://biblereadingarcheology.com/2017/08/23/whose-image-is-on-the-coin/>.

¹⁸² Joseph Bird, “CHAPTER 3: Key Background and Contextual Issues for Each Chapter of John,” in *Holding the Ropes: John* (Hattiesburg, MS: Whitehead Press, 2023), 27.

the world. Although Luke already has presented various teachings of Jesus on this subject (12:35-48; 13:35; 17:20-37; 19:41-44), he, like Mark and Matthew, included these additional teachings on the subject because of their importance. He used this opportunity to clarify several misconceptions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world. As the disciples called attention to the magnificent stones and offerings that adorned the temple, Jesus replied that the day would come when the temple would experience destruction, and that destruction would be so great that not one of these magnificent stones would remain standing upon another. What follows is the third and largest pronouncement of Jerusalem's destruction found in the Gospel (cf. 13:34-35; 19:41-44).¹⁸³

With the time of his departure rapidly approaching, Jesus instructs his disciples on the cataclysmic events to come for Jerusalem and the signs that will accompany his return. In the first part of the discourse, Jesus speaks of signs that, though often interpreted eschatologically, are not indications of the imminent end (21:8–24). These include the appearance of false christs (21:8), catastrophic events like wars, earthquakes, and famines (21:9–11), widespread persecution of believers (21:12–19), and the horrific destruction of Jerusalem (21:20–24). For Luke, Jerusalem's destruction serves as a preview and "type" of the final day of God's judgment; but it must be distinguished from it. A key transition occurs in 21:24, when Jesus predicts that "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles *until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*" (italics added). The discourse then turns to the events that will follow the "times of the Gentiles" and will herald the end.¹⁸⁴

21:32 "this generation will not pass away until all has taken place." The Greek word used here, *gena*, usually means "generation," that is, people living at a specific time. Some have interpreted this expression as (1) Jesus' own generation, (2) the Jewish people, (3) humanity in general, (4) the last generation in history, and (5) Luke's generation. According to Stein, the third option seems best because "elsewhere in Luke, this expression is used to describe sinful humanity unresponsive to God and oblivious to the possibility of immediately encountering Him.... Thus, 'this generation' of 21:32 stands in continuity and solidarity with 'this generation' of Jesus' day."¹⁸⁵

Luke 22

22:1 "Now the feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover." The Passover celebration was meant to commemorate the Exodus. Passover was celebrated on the

¹⁸³ Stein, 510.

¹⁸⁴ Strauss, 409.

¹⁸⁵ Stein, 527. For a more detailed analysis of Luke's use of *gena* in v. 32, see Bock, 1688-1692.

fifteenth of Nisan (March/April) and was followed by the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread.¹⁸⁶

22:14-23 The Lord's Supper See Appendix 7.

22:31-32 "to have you... but I have prayed for you." The ESV includes a helpful footnote, "The Greek word for *you* (twice in this verse) is plural; in verse 32, all four instances are singular."¹⁸⁷

22:37 "And he was numbered with the transgressors." Jesus quoted from Isaiah 53:12, "Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors."

22:38 "It is enough." Likely, Jesus did not mean that two swords were enough; instead, He meant something like, "Enough of this talk." Likely, "he is dismissing this topic."¹⁸⁸

22:39 Mount of Olives The mount was located east of Jerusalem and included the Garden of Gethsemane (an olive grove on the southwest slope of the mountain). The Brook Kidron ran between it and Jerusalem. David stood atop this mount and wept (2 Samuel 15:30), as did Jesus (Luke 13:34). Jesus also ascended to heaven from this location.¹⁸⁹

22:44 "his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Luke included the word *hosei* (like) in describing Jesus' sweat. The idea here was that He sweated profusely.¹⁹⁰

22:47 "He drew near to Jesus to kiss him" This was in no way unusual at this time. Friends often greeted each other with a kiss. Judas was not doing something strange; he was likely greeting Jesus the way he normally would have, though clearly his motives were satanic.¹⁹¹ Interestingly, a kiss was also used as an act of treachery in 2 Samuel 20:9 when Joab kissed Amasa.

22:66 "the assembly of the elders" This phrase refers to the Sanhedrin. See note on Luke 20:27.

Luke 23

23:1 Pilate He received his appointment from Emperor Tiberius in A.D. 26. Pilate's usual headquarters was in Caesarea in the palace of Herod the Great, but his custom was to be present

¹⁸⁶Strauss, 419. For a more detailed description, see Baruch A. Levine, "Feasts and Festivals," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 226-227.

¹⁸⁷ ESV footnote on Luke 22:31.

¹⁸⁸ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1749.

¹⁸⁹ Bird, 17.

¹⁹⁰ Strauss, 427.

¹⁹¹ Stein, 561.

during Jewish holidays to quell any issues that might arise. He was deposed in A.D. 36 by Vitellius, the governor of Syria.¹⁹²

Carson summarizes Pilate's character when he writes,

From both biblical and extrabiblical sources, historians have come to know him as a morally weak and vacillating man who, like many of the same breed, tried to hide his flaws under shows of stubbornness and brutality. His rule earned him the loathing of the Jewish people, small groups of whom violently protested and were put down with savage ferocity (*cf* Lk. 13:1).¹⁹³

23:18 Barabbas The New Testament did not give many details regarding Barabbas. He seemed to have been a terrorist, from Rome's perspective, who had taken part in bloody insurrections. The people preferred a known murderer over the Son of God.¹⁹⁴

23:26-43 The Crucifixion According to Strauss,

The earliest extant Roman record of Pilate's crucifixion of Jesus is from the historian Tacitus. Writing about the persecution of Christians by Nero, he describes their founder as a certain Christus, who "suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus." In his famous *Testimonium*, Josephus also mentions Jesus' crucifixion by Pilate. Although this passage has clearly been embellished by later Christians, a recently discovered Arabic version of the *Testimonium* appears to be closer to Josephus' original: "At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good, and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders."¹⁹⁵

23:33 The place that is called The Skull. Here Luke used the Greek word *Kranion*. Matthew and Mark both use the Aramaic, *Golgotha*. The Latin *Calvarius* was where the English term *Calvary* originated.

¹⁹² Bird, 23.

¹⁹³ D. A. Carson, *Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 590.

¹⁹⁴ Bird, 24.

¹⁹⁵ Strauss, 441.

23:36 “offering him sour wine” “This sour wine (*oxos*) was a favorite beverage of the lower classes and especially soldiers. It was cheaper than regular wine and relieved thirst better than water. An allusion to the righteous sufferer of Psalm 69:21 may be present.”¹⁹⁶

23:43 “Today you will be with me in paradise.” The word translated “paradise” literally meant “a garden.” The LXX used the same term in reference to the Garden of Eden. The term can also be found in 2 Corinthians 12:4 and Revelation 2:7.¹⁹⁷

23:50 “Now there was a man named Joseph.” Joseph asked Pilate for Jesus’ body, and he also gave his tomb for Christ’s burial. He was a member of the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:43), the Jewish High Court. He was also quite wealthy, as evidenced by Matthew 27:57, where he was called a “rich man from Arimathea.”¹⁹⁸

Luke 24

24:13 “a village named Emmaus” According to Bock, “The location of Emmaus has never been decisively pinned down, and the discussion has changed little in the last thirty years.”¹⁹⁹ Of course, the location of the village was not the most important part of the narrative. Strauss states, “The account of two disciples on the road to Emmaus occurs only in Luke and represents his most theologically significant contribution to the resurrection narratives.... School is in session as Jesus takes them through the Old Testament, showing them that all the Scriptures point to the coming of the Christ. He is the center-point of salvation history.”²⁰⁰

24:32 “They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?’” Stagg states, “It is significant that Jesus opened the Scriptures to the men’s minds (24:32), and he opened their minds to the Scriptures (24:45). An open Bible and open minds resulted in “burning hearts” (24:32).²⁰¹ He continues, “Precious book though it be, it is not an end in itself. It points beyond itself to Christ and to the world which he came to save.”²⁰²

24:50-53 The Ascension According to Stein,

The Gospel ends as it has begun with God's people praising and blessing him in the temple (cf. 1:5-23). Luke has carefully prepared his readers for Jesus' ascension. At the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah spoke of Jesus' future “departure/exodus” (9:31). Jesus’

¹⁹⁶ Strauss, 446-447.

¹⁹⁷ Stein, 593.

¹⁹⁸ Bird, 26.

¹⁹⁹ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1908.

²⁰⁰ Strauss, 459-460.

²⁰¹ Stagg, 136.

²⁰² Stagg, 136.

trip to Jerusalem had as its goal his being “taken up” (9:51). At his trial, Jesus refers to his being seated soon at God's right hand (22:69), and his death is seen as necessary for his entering into his glory (24:26). With Jesus' ascension, Luke concludes his Gospel, and at this place he will begin his second work.²⁰³

²⁰³ Stein, 623.

Appendix 1

Understanding the Gospels

Before looking specifically at Luke's Gospel, we should take a step back and look more generally at the Gospels. A good starting point is to attempt to answer the question, what is a Gospel? On the surface, this question seems simple enough; however, according to John Drane, "Discussion of this question dominated scholarship throughout the twentieth century."²⁰⁴

In order to answer this question, we need first to understand, or at least attempt to understand, what genre the Gospels represent. Understanding the genre is not just a scholarly issue; understanding the genre will help us correctly interpret the text.

The following example will help illustrate the vital place of genre in reading and understanding texts.

Let's say I am planning a trip to Eastern Europe. In order to prepare for my trip, I visit the local bookstore and meander down the historical studies aisle. Here I would generally expect to find researched, reasoned, and factual works related to the history of Eastern Europe. I would feel that these books could help me factually understand what has transpired in that part of the world.

I will have different expectations if I go over to the guidebook section. I will not expect to find lengthy, academic treatises that focus on researching the past; instead, I expect to find shorter, picture-driven books that concisely point out significant museums, restaurants, and other attractions I may find in Eastern Europe.

If I go to the fiction section, I may find a book like *The Historian* by Elizabeth Kostova. This novel is classified as historical fiction because she gives many facts related to the history of Eastern Europe; however, the book is not a trustworthy source of factual history because—well, because it is a novel and many facts are left out, altered, or wholly falsified for the sake of the narrative.

All of these types of books are valid, and one is not better than the other. However, our expectations of the genres impact how we interact with and understand each text. The same applies to reading and understanding all texts, including the Gospels.

²⁰⁴ John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 161.

Appendix 2

The Gospels as *Lives*

Scholars have sought to place the Gospels into numerous genres through the years. One of the most logical, especially from our 21st-century perspective, is to consider them biographies. Technically, calling the Gospels biographies is anachronistic because biographies, as we understand them, did not exist until the AD 400s.

One of the earliest descriptions of the Gospels comes from Justin Martyr (AD 155), who calls them *memoirs*.²⁰⁵ Martyr's "readers would have understood this to mean that the Gospels were essentially biographical accounts of Jesus similar to the *Memorabilia* that Xenophon had written about Socrates."²⁰⁶

While the Gospels share characteristics of memoirs and modern biographies, the Gospels specifically share a great deal with the ancient Hellenistic literature called *Lives*. Famous figures such as Plutarch, Philo, and Tacitus wrote *Lives*.

Instead of documenting full chronological accounts of a person's life (as our modern biographies generally do), *Lives* differed in several ways.

- *Lives* were generally shorter than modern biographies (15-20,000 words).
- *Lives* included relatively little about a person's birth, rise to prominence, or details of all stages of their life. Instead, *Lives* included selected stories of the person's discourses and deeds before describing their death.
- Interestingly, the death was generally the story's climax as it showed the person's true character.
- The author's aim centered on revealing who a person truly was and not necessarily on all the person did.

According to Drane, "This is exactly the pattern found in all four Gospels, where the main emphasis is on the events of the last week or so of Jesus's life, preceded by reports of Jesus' teaching, and accounts of a few incidents from the three years immediately preceding his death, with virtually no mention at all of his childhood and adolescence."²⁰⁷

Bloomberg also sees a link between the Gospels and ancient, much more so than modern, biographical works. He writes,

Ancient writers were more highly selective, ideological, and artistic in narrating the great events of their day or the lives of key individuals. They arranged material thematically as well as chronologically.... They focused disproportionately on the last days of people's

²⁰⁵ Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 66, available from <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm>.

²⁰⁶ Walter A. Elwell, and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 56.

²⁰⁷ Drane, 163.

lives and on how they died, believing this to be one of the best indicators of their true character. There are many unique features of the Gospels, to be sure, generally related to the unique events they narrate and the distinctive nature of the person of Jesus of Nazareth. But this makes them no less historical or biographical by the conventions of their own day.²⁰⁸

While the Gospels share similarities with *Lives* and other Greco-Roman biographical works, we cannot make a 1:1 comparison. The Gospel writers seem to be aware of the style of *Lives*, which would have been quite common in their day, but at the same time, they are doing something different.

The Gospels are biographical, but they are more than that. They are theological, and they are evangelistic. The Gospel writers are not only writing historical facts, but they are also writing theological truths. Moreover, the Gospel writers are writing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospels were not just written to convey information. They were written to bring people to faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. We must remember this when we teach, preach, and even do research on the Gospels. Looming above them, we must see the Son of God and His Gospel as we endeavor to study the Gospels.

For these reasons, the Gospels can be considered *theological biographies*.²⁰⁹ Or, even more specifically, *expanded biographical sermons*.²¹⁰

As we preach the Gospels, we must remember that we are dealing with accurate, historically sound texts, but we must not stop there. The Gospels are also sermonic and theological in nature. They are a gift from God to His people, and we have the privilege of seeing God transform lives as we faithfully preach from them.

²⁰⁸ Craig L. Bloomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 2nd edition (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 121-122.

²⁰⁹ Bloomberg, 122.

²¹⁰ Elwell and Yarbrough, 57.

Appendix 3

The Synoptic Gospels and the Autoptic Gospel

The first three Gospels take a similar view of the life of Christ. Because of their similarity, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels (Greek *syn*= “together” and *optanomai* “to see”).

The question is, why are the first three Gospels so similar to each other? “If the three Synoptic Gospels are independent of each other in origin and development, then why do they resemble one another so closely, even to exact verbal agreement in some instances?”²¹¹ This issue is known as the Synoptic Problem.

Here is an example:

Matt. 8:1-4 When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. ² And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, **if you will, you can make me clean.**” ³ And **Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.”** And **immediately his leprosy was cleansed.** ⁴ And Jesus said to him, “**See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.**”

Mark 1:40-45 ⁴⁰ And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “**If you will, you can make me clean.**” ⁴¹ Moved with pity, **he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.”** ⁴² And **immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.** ⁴³ And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, ⁴⁴ and said to him, “**See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.**” ⁴⁵ But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.

Luke 5:12-16 ¹² While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, “Lord, **if you will, you can make me clean.**”

¹³ And **Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.”** And **immediately the leprosy left him.** ¹⁴ And **he charged him to tell no one, but “go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”** ¹⁵ But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. ¹⁶ But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

Numerous theories exist which try to make sense of the Synoptic Problem. However, we will briefly examine only two of them, the **Oral Tradition View** and the **Documentary Hypothesis View**.

²¹¹ Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, rev. by Walter M. Dunnnett (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 139.

Oral Tradition Some of the Patristic Fathers affirmed this ancient theory. For example, Papias (d. AD 130) and Irenaeus (d. AD 202) exemplify this view.

Papias says that Matthew wrote the sayings of Jesus in Aramaic notes and that the other writers interpreted those notes. Furthermore, he states that Mark served as Peter's scribe. Interestingly, he adds that Mark was not concerned with the chronology of the events. Irenaeus says that Luke's Gospel was a reproduction of Pauline sermons. He also attributes the Fourth Gospel to the disciple who leaned on Christ's breast at the Last Supper.

Documentary Hypothesis The most popular theory is the documentary hypothesis. This view generally places Mark as writing first and assumes that Matthew and Luke use Mark's Gospel plus another source, often called *Q*. (*Q* comes from the German *Quelle*, which means *source*.)

Q is thought to contain the sayings of Jesus. However, to date, no hard evidence for *Q* exists.

If no proof for *Q* exists, why is this view still prominent?

While Matthew and Luke diverge greatly from each other in content and order, the content of Mark is reproduced almost wholly in the other two. Although Matthew and Mark may occasionally agree against Luke, and while Luke and Mark may agree against Matthew, Matthew and Luke do not agree against Mark. The phenomena are what one might expect if they had used Mark directly.²¹²

While the debate continues regarding the Synoptic Problem, John is left out of the discussion. Why? Because it is clear that John's Gospel is Autoptic, that is to say, it has a view unto itself.

Syn/optics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke)

public ministry

Galilean ministry

parables

human side

earthly aspect

official

Aut/optic (John) "viewed by itself."

private ministry

Judean ministry

no parables

divine side

heavenly aspect

personal

²¹² Tenney, 141.

Appendix 4

Herods of the New Testament

In 40 B.C., Antony and Octavius placed **Herod the Great** in charge of the Jews. It took Herod 3 years to totally take control of Judea, but he did so in 37 B.C. when he captured Jerusalem. Interestingly, Herod had been a powerful Idumean chieftain (so, he was a descendent of the Idumeans who were conquered by John Hyrcanus and forced into Judaism). Unsurprisingly, Herod considered the Idumeans to be much more loyal to him and never really trusted the Jews.

Herod was an able ruler and at times even helped the Jewish people. (For example, he renovated their Temple on a much grander scale by enlarging it to twice its former dimensions and embellishing it with magnificent carved masonry.) That being said, he was also cruel and almost universally disliked. He killed three of his sons, two of his ten wives, a brother-in-law, and a wife's grandfather. He was so cruel that Matt. 2 records his edict that all the male children under two years old be killed.

He even arrested some high-ranking Jewish leaders around the time of his death (4 B.C.) He wanted them to be slaughtered when he died so that the people would actually cry (not because of his death but because of their leaders, and it would appear that people loved him). Thankfully, the leaders were released when Herod died, but as he suspected no one really mourned his passing.

Herod the Great's Sons (After his death, Herod's kingdom was split between three of his sons).

1. **Archelaus** reigned over southern Palestine, which included Samaria, Judea, and Idumea.

Emperor Augustus did not allow him to use the title *king*. Instead, he had to use the much less prestigious title *ethnarch*, a leader over an ethnic group.

He immediately gained a reputation for being a **wicked ruler** because when his father died, a rebellion broke out in Jerusalem, and his army killed 3,000 persons, many of whom were pilgrims visiting the city for the Passover.

In light of this, Matt. 2:22 makes perfect sense, "But when he (Joseph) heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee."

About nine years into Archelaus' reign, some leaders of Judea and Samaria sent representatives to the Emperor at Rome to complain of Archelaus' tyrannical behavior.

The Emperor agreed with them, banished Archelaus to Gaul, and confiscated all of his wealth.

Judea, Samaria, and Idumea were then put under the leadership of Roman governors, one of whom was Pontius Pilate (the man who condemned Jesus to be crucified).

2. **Philip** controlled the northern and northeastern parts of Palestine.

His title, *tetrarch* (literally “ruler of a fourth part,” i.e., a lowly prince), was even less prestigious than that of *ethnarch*.

His rule was **peaceful**. His main contribution was that he rebuilt an ancient city and renamed it Caesarea in honor of Caesar Augustus. (To differentiate this city from others of the same name, it was often called Caesarea Philippi.)

There is only one account, Matt. 16:13, of Jesus ever entering Philip’s territory.

3. **Herod Antipas** was *tetrarch* of Galilee and Perea.

This Herod figures most prominently in the New Testament because Jesus spent most of his time in the area ruled by Herod Antipas.

Herod Antipas was simply referred to as **Herod** in the New Testament. This often confuses readers, as they think that this Herod was Herod the Great (but this can’t be because Herod the Great died around 4 B.C.).

A significant event happened when Herod Antipas fell in love with his half-brother’s wife, **Herodias**.

Herod decided to divorce his wife and take Herodias instead. His wife’s dad, who happened to be a king, was not impressed with Herod’s treatment of his daughter. So, he went to war with him and eventually defeated his army in A.D. 36.

John the Baptist fearlessly rebuked Herod for his unlawful marriage to Herodias. Eventually, it cost John his head. Herod was in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’ trial and crucifixion. Pilate sent Jesus to Herod. Herod hoped to see Jesus perform a miracle. When this did not happen, he allowed his men to mistreat and mock Jesus (Luke 23:6-12).

Herod eventually goes to Rome to ask for a promotion from *tetrarch* to king. Instead of a promotion, **Caligula** banished him to Gaul (A.D. 39) and gave his territory to Herod Agrippa I.

Herod Agrippa I was a grandson of Herod the Great. In time, the Emperor Claudius gave him dominion over all of Palestine. At that point, Herod Agrippa I’s territory equaled that of his grandfather.

Herod Agrippa I was mentioned several times in Acts. He was responsible for **persecuting the early church**. He arrested Peter and killed James the brother of John. In A.D. 44, he died as punishment for his pride (see Acts 12:1-3; 21-23).

Herod Agrippa II was only 17 years old at the time of his father’s death. At that point, his father’s territory was ruled by governors. In A.D. 53, he acquired the tetrarchy of Philip and was later (A.D. 56) given Galilee and Perea by **Nero**. Eventually, Paul pled his case before Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice while they were visiting the governor Festus (Acts 25:13-26:32).

Appendix 5

The Gospel of Luke Handout

Authorship Luke and Acts were clearly written by the same author since both begin with dedications to Theophilus (Lk. 1:3; Acts 1:1), display common interests, and have a common style of writing. Moreover, Acts refers back to the “first book” (Acts 1:1).

Another hint is given by the fact that the author of Acts uses the **first person** in certain sections of that book (i.e. 16:10, 17; 20:6; 27:1). So, he must have been a companion of Paul. Both **Timothy** and **Mark** are referenced in the third person (20:5). Therefore, Luke is a logical option for authorship.

Furthermore, the earlier manuscripts attribute the third Gospel to Luke, and the consensus of the church fathers further confirmed Lukan authorship.

Who was Luke? Luke was a doctor (Col. 4:14), a companion of Paul (2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24), and likely a Gentile.

Date We can date Luke to the early A.D. 60s to around A.D. 90. I personally think the Third Gospel was written in the 60s.

Evidence for date The reasoning is straightforward. Acts was likely written around A.D. 62-63 because the book ends with Paul’s first stay in prison, with no date yet set for his trial. Furthermore, Acts does not even hint at the destruction of the Temple (A.D. 70), nor the widespread persecutions under Nero (A.D. 64). Therefore, if Acts was written in the early A.D. 60s, and the Gospel of Luke proceeded it (Acts 1:1), then a late-50s early 60s date makes sense.

Audience The Gospel of Luke was addressed to a **single person, Theophilus**. While we do not know details about who Theophilus was, likely he was a Greek convert and possibly the benefactor who paid for the circulation of Luke’s Gospel. More generally, Luke seems to have been written to a Gentile audience.

Purposes Luke clearly states that he is writing so that Theophilus “**may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.**” (1:4) Luke wants him to know that faith in Jesus rests on historical facts that stand up under the most severe scrutiny since they are founded on firsthand testimony.

What is Luke about? Luke is definitely the most comprehensive Gospel.

1. Jesus’ childhood Luke is the only Gospel that details Jesus’ childhood (he discusses many more details than Matthew). Luke details what happened before Jesus’ birth (Luke traces Jesus’ ancestry back to Adam), Jesus’ birth, Jesus’ circumcision, Jesus’ dedication at 40 days, and his early youth.

2. The importance of women in Jesus’ ministry There are 43 mentions of women in the book of Luke. Luke clearly shows that Jesus treated women with respect and dignity.

3. Compassion for the poor Eight of Luke’s parables center on the poor.

Discussion: Does God expect Christians today to take care of the poor? If so, what does that look like?

4. Prayer Luke includes many instances of people praying, as well as Jesus' teachings on prayer.

5. The Holy Spirit Luke clearly shows the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of John, Jesus, Mary, Elizabeth, and others.

6. Angels Luke includes more about angels than any other Gospel.

7. Jesus as Savior of the World Ultimately, Luke's Gospel is about Jesus and how He came to save the world—both Jews and Greeks.

Keys to remember when reading Luke

1. **Important Doctrine** Christ is the Savior for the Gentiles and not the Jews only.
2. **Key Verse** "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (19:10)

Other interesting information

1. Luke has around 100 allusions or quotations from the OT (only Matt. has more).
2. Luke includes twenty miracles, six of which are unique to his Gospel. Luke includes thirty-five parables, nineteen of which are unique to his Gospel.
3. Luke is the most musical Gospel. The Gospel includes the following: Zechariah's song, the angel's song to Mary, the Magnificat (the song of Mary), Gloria in Excelsis (the angels' song), and the song of Simeon.
4. Luke alone includes the story of the Good Samaritan, the parable of the prodigal sons, and the story of Zacchaeus.

Appendix 6

A Walk Through the Synoptic Gospels Handout

Jesus' Ancestry (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38)

Jesus' Birth (Matt. 1:18-25; Much more detail about Christ's birth and the events that proceeded it are found in Luke 1-2)

Jesus' Childhood (Luke 2:41-52)

John the Baptist Prepares the Way (Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-20)

Jesus' Baptism (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22)

Jesus Tempted by the Devil (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-12)

Jesus Calls the First Disciples (Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11)

Example of Jesus' Teaching

The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7; Luke 6:20-49)

The Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46)

Examples of Jesus' Miracles

Feeding of the Five Thousand (Matt. 14:13-21)

Walking on Water (Matt. 14:22-36)

Healing the Lepers (Luke 17:11-19)

Healing a Child and a Woman (Mark 5:21-43)

Freeing a Man from Demons (Luke 8:26-39)

Resurrecting a Boy (Luke 7:11-17)

Examples of Jesus' Parables

The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20)

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matt. 13:24-30; Explanation 36-43)

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Luke 13:18-19)

The Parable of the Great Supper (Matt. 22:1-14)

Jesus Founds the Church (Matt. 16:13-19)

Jesus' Second Coming Foretold (Matt. 24:1-51)

The Last Supper (Matt. 26:26-29)

Jesus' Prayer in the Garden (Luke 22:39-46)

Judas Betrays Jesus/Jesus Arrested (Mark 14:43-50)

Jesus Before Pilate (Luke 23:1-5)

Jesus Condemned to Die (Luke 23:18-25)

Jesus' Crucifixion, Death, and Burial (Matt. 27:32-61)

Jesus' Resurrection (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12)

Jesus' Interactions after His Resurrection (Matt. 28:16-20; Mark 16:12-18; Luke 24:13-49; Also see 1 Cor. 15:3-8)

Jesus' Ascension (Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53)

Appendix 7

Christ in the Passover Handout

Passover	Christ
Ex. 12:1-2 said that the Passover was to mark a new year, a fresh start for the people of Israel.	In Christ, we are new creations. 2 Cor. 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
Ex. 12:5 instructed the Israelites to take a male lamb without any blemish or defect and use it as the sacrificial lamb.	Christ was inspected by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilate (Matt. 27:11-26, Lk. 23:1-6; 13-25, Jn. 18:12-13; 19-24) • Herod (Lk. 23:8-12) • The High Priest Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57; Jn. 18:19-24) They could find no fault in Him. According to Peter, Jesus is the “lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet. 1:19).
Ex. 12:6 required the “whole assembly” to participate in the sacrifice.	We must accept Jesus’ sacrifice if we want to be a part of the community of God (Rom. 3:21-26).
Ex. 12:7, 12, 22 instructed the Israelites to take the blood from the spotless lamb and apply it to the lintel and the side posts of the doorframe. The blood would cause the household to be spared from the death plague.	Jesus Christ is the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Only the blood of Jesus Christ can justify us before God (Rom. 3:25).
Ex. 12:14 commanded the Israelites to keep the Passover as a remembrance forever.	In Lk. 22:19 , Jesus tells us to take the Lord’s Supper in “remembrance of Me.” When we take the Lord’s Supper, we remember the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord.

For more information, see Benjamin Galan, “Christ in the Passover,” Pamphlet, Rose Publishing, 2008.

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