

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

October 24, 2018

That Thou Mightest Know the Certainty

Topics – Introduction to Luke’s Gospel

Text – Luke 1:1 - 4

Introduction to Series of Studies from Luke’s Gospel

In a previous Bible Study Series, I examined all four of the Gospel accounts – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – synoptically, viewing all of the recorded events involving the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ chronologically. In other words, I attempted to compare the four Gospels and chronicle each event in the probable order in which they occurred. When a particular event was covered by more than one of the writers we compared each of the accounts and brought each perspective into our examination. In this study, however, our focus will be on Luke’s perspective. We will set aside occurrences that may be included in the other Gospels, but are not discussed in Luke; and, where an event is discussed by Luke and one or more of the other writers, we will consider what all of them have to say but the weight of our examination will be from what is included by Luke.

I Comparing and Contrasting The Gospels

Before we study the Gospel of Luke, we will first compare and contrast it with the other three Gospel Accounts. The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels because they tell us the good news regarding the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, including the accounts of his death, burial, and resurrection for our sins. These four Gospels are both historical as well as doctrinal. The fact that there are four Gospels, and not just one complete record may be accounted for by the intention of the Holy Spirit to reach four representative groups. Matthew wrote to the Jews presenting Jesus as the promised King; Mark wrote to the Romans and portrayed Jesus as the servant of the Lord; Luke wrote to Theophilus (for the Greeks) picturing Jesus as the perfect man; and John wrote for the world with his portrait of Jesus as God. Three of the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – are referred to corporately as “the Synoptic Gospels”, because they are very similar to one another. John’s Gospel is excluded from that particular classification because it has many characteristics that distinguish it from the other three.

II Considering the Period Before the Birth of Christ

A The Foundation of the Old Testament

There could be no New Testament, had there not first been an Old Testament. It has been often said that the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament. That means that all of the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament find their fulfillment in the New Testament. For instance, the prophecies concerning the birth of Christ in Isaiah 7:14 and Micah 5:2 are fulfilled in the New Testament Gospels. Also, the prophetic descriptions of the death of Christ in places like Psalms 22 and 51 were fully revealed in the New Testament. We cannot separate the New from the Old: The Old gave birth to the New.

We also need to have a good understanding of the Old Testament because many of the doctrines and traditions of the New Testament have their root in the Old. As we survey the New Testament, we will constantly be looking back to the Old. A good prerequisite to any study of the New Testament would be a survey of the Old Testament.

B The Framework of the Intertestamental Period

The period of time between the Old and New Testaments, known as “the silent years”, lasted from approximately 400 BC, when Malachi was written, until the announcement from the angel to Zacharias that his

son, John the Baptist, would be born. Though there was no direct revelation from God during these 400 years, God was anything but silent. In this period of time there were many events that took place culturally and politically that would be important factors contributing to New Testament life.

Notice these statements by James Catron:

Many things mentioned in the New Testament, especially the Gospels and the book of Acts, find their roots in the 400 years between the Testaments. For instance, (1) the family of king Herod (Matthew 2:1, 22); (2) the Jewish Sanhedrin—Jewish Supreme Court (Luke 22:66); (3) the religious sectarian groups such as the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 2:4; 3:7) along with their religious ideas, traditions and practices (Matthew 25:1-2; 23; Acts 23:8). Then there were (4) political and militaristic groups such as the Herodians (Matthew 22:16) and the Zealots (one of Jesus' apostles had formerly been a Zealot—"Simon called the Zealot" (Luke 6:15). Of course (5) the Roman Empire which took over Palestine during Intertestament times (63 B.C.) was still in power throughout the New Testament era (Luke 2:1; 3:1; John 11:48).

The Intertestamental Period was in a sense a period of preparation for the coming of Jesus, the Christ. He came, says Paul, "when the fullness of the time had come . . ." (Galatians 4:4-5). During the 400 years between the Testaments God was at work preparing for that time when His Son, Jesus Christ, would step out of eternity into time. ¹

John Phillips paints a tremendous picture of this period as well:

Between Malachi and Matthew are about four hundred "silent years," during which God had no further revelations to make to His people. The broad outline of these years is given in Daniel 11, but much that meets us when we first turn from the Old Testament to the New Testament is new indeed. We read of sects and parties unknown in Old Testament times: scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. We find Hebrew a dead language, and Aramaic and Greek the languages of intercourse, culture, and commerce. We find Palestinian cities bearing Greek names, and Persia long replaced by Rome as the power dominating the Land of Promise. We read of "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1), otherwise known as the dispersion. We discover that a Greek version of the Scriptures is in common use among the Jews, and that idolatry, the great snare of Israel in the Old Testament, is completely rooted out of the nation. We read of an Idumean reigning as king in Jerusalem and of an official Jewish council known as the Sanhedrin holding some form of religious and political power in the land. Even the temple in Jerusalem is not identical with the one we left in the Old Testament. Far and wide among the Jews, synagogues have come into existence as places of worship. We are curious about all these different things. Indeed, if we are to properly understand the New Testament, we need some information about them. ²

Three important factors from the Intertestamental Period need to be considered:

1 The Greek Language

Alexander the Great conquered most of the known world between 340 and 320 BC, and brought with him the Greek language. Greek became the predominate language spoken throughout the Mediterranean area, including Israel. The Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament) was also written during the period of the silent years. Many Jews were becoming less familiar with Hebrew, but were fluent in Greek.

2 The Roman Empire

¹ James L. R. Catron, *New Testament Survey* (ECS Ministries, Dubuque 1996)

² John Phillips. *Exploring the New Testament Book by Book: An Expository Survey* (Kindle Locations 68-76). Kindle Edition.

Eventually Rome took over and expanded the Greek territory, and built its vast and powerful Roman Empire. Rome was in complete control of the New Testament world politically. Although there were many negatives associated with submitting to the sovereignty of a foreign government, there were also some benefits. Rome was famous for building and improving roads. These roads would be used by the Lord, and later the Apostle Paul in the spreading of the gospel. The *Pax Romana*, or Roman Peace, provided a stability and also enabled the gospel to travel freely throughout the Empire without much hindrance.

3 The Hebrew Religion

During the Intertestamental Period we see the development of local worship in synagogues. Judaism developed into a highly legalistic system during this time period, with the advent of the Sanhedrin, the ruling religious and political body, which included within it the Sadducees and Pharisees. These people would become bitter enemies to the Lord Jesus, and later to the Apostles. Their legalistic doctrines would be the greatest obstacles to the doctrines of grace. The influence of these religious leaders would be a hindrance to Christianity throughout most of the New Testament Period.

Introduction to the Gospel of Luke

A The Writer - Luke (Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24)

- 1 He was most likely a Gentile physician, but it is possible that he was a Hellenistic Jew.
- 2 He may have been the brother of Titus.
- 3 He was a companion to the Apostle Paul through portions of his missionary journeys. ("we" and "us" - Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16)
- 4 He was with the Apostle Paul when he died. (2 Timothy 4:11)
- 5 Luke's gospel (the third in chronological order) may have been written around 60 A.D.
- 6 He is the least known of all of the gospel writers.
- 7 He was not an eyewitness.
- 8 His primary audience was also the Gentiles, particularly the Greeks; and he presents Christ in His Humanity.
- 9 His gospel has been considered by many including unbelievers as a literary masterpiece.
- 10 He is also the writer of the Book of Acts. Luke and Acts seem to have been written about the same time.

Though Luke is the human instrument used of God to pen this Book, it does not mean that this Book was not divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. McArthur states:

Luke was not disclaiming divine inspiration for his work. The process of inspiration never bypasses or overrides the personalities, vocabularies, and styles of the human authors of Scripture. The unique traits of the human authors are always indelibly stamped on all the books of Scripture. Luke's research is no exception to this rule. The research itself was orchestrated by divine Providence. And in his writing, Luke was moved by the Spirit of God (2 Peter 1:21). Therefore, his account is infallibly true.³

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

³ MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed., p. 1505). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.

"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1:21)

B The Recipient - Theophilus

There are many theories as to who Theophilus was. It is believed by many that he was a Gentile, but that he was also acquainted with Judaism.⁴ Various theories regarding Theophilus include that he was a Roman official, a literary sponsor⁵, Paul's defense attorney at Caesarea, the nephew of Emperor Vespasian, and even that he was Herod Agrippa II.⁶ Some have even speculated that "Theophilus", which means "lover or friend of God" was merely a pseudonym for anyone that desired to be certain about Christ.⁷ Still others, including one of my professors at West Coast, believe that this Theophilus was actually the high priest, as Josephus mentions a Theophilus in the priestly line during this period.⁸ Whoever Theophilus actually was, he was someone that Luke cared enough about to give a detailed and accurate account of the life of the Lord Jesus, sufficient enough that Theophilus could be certain that Jesus is the Christ.

As we mentioned in Sunday morning's message, Luke may have had one man in mind primarily as the recipient of this Book, but the Holy Spirit of God intended this great work to reach a much broader audience.

C The Research of Luke's Gospel

Though Luke's Gospel is one of the three synoptic Books, it is unique in many ways:

- 1 Luke gives us the most extensive account of the Birth of Christ.
- 2 There are six miracles that are unique to Luke.
- 3 Eighteen of the parables in Luke's Gospel are found nowhere else.
- 4 According to Ryrie, "Luke shows an uncommon interest in individuals, as seen in his accounts of Zacchaeus (19:1–10) and the penitent thief (23:39–43) and in the parables of the prodigal son (15:11–32) and the penitent publican (18:9–14). It is Luke who gives us the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37) and the one thankful ex-leper (Luke 17:11–19)."⁹
- 5 The Road to Emmaus account after the resurrection is unique to Luke.
- 6 Luke places a greater emphasis on women. (chaps. 1, 2; 7:11–13; 8:1–3; 10:38–42; 21:1–4; 23:27–31, 49)
- 7 According to Ryrie, The book preserves four beautiful hymns: the *Magnificat* of Mary (1:46–55), the *Benedictus* of Zacharias (1:67–79), the *Gloria in Excelsis* of the angels (2:14), and the *Nunc Dimittis* of Simeon (2:29–32).¹⁰
- 8 According to McGee, "Dr. Luke uses more medical terms than Hippocrates, the father of medicine."¹¹

⁴ Miller, J. E. (2016). *Theophilus*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁵ Köstenberger, Andreas J.; Kellum, L. Scott; Quarles, Charles L. *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Kindle Locations 10866-10868). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Huffman, D. S. (2016). *Luke, Gospel of*. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁸ Josephus, Flavius. *The Antiquities of the Jews by Josephus [Annotated Edition]* (Halcyon Classics) (Kindle Locations 15656-15657). Halcyon Press Ltd.. Kindle Edition.

⁹ Ryrie, C. C. (1994). *Ryrie study Bible: King James Version* (Expanded ed., p. 1520). Chicago: Moody Press.

¹⁰ *ibid*.

¹¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 4, p. 240). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.