

HOURLASS BIBLE STUDY

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Background for Luke

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Biblical scholars generally believe that this book and Acts were written by the same person, and that it is the most well written book in the New Testament. Most scholars accept that the author was Luke, the Gentile doctor who travelled with Paul and was with him during his imprisonment in Caesarea. He is mentioned in Col. 4:14, 2 Tim. 4:11, and Phil. 24. Luke was probably identified as the author when the book was originally included in the early Christian collection of the gospels. Educated Greeks were sometimes taken as slaves to Rome, so Luke could have been a slave. The Romans valued Greek doctors because Greece had a more advanced study of medicine, but also distrusted them. At least one scholar believes Luke was a native of Macedonia because women had more rights in that country, and Luke has a more egalitarian attitude toward women. Luke's writing shows that he was well educated, yet he respected people who did manual labor, which was unusual at the time.

It was probably written between 80 and 90 CE, but there is no sure date. The writer had access to Mark and probably Matthew, which were written before this time, and there seem to be some allusions to the destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE). While scholars in the past suggested access to Mark and a source they called Q, increasingly scholars posit that Matthew was also a source. Luke's language suggests that this account was based on eyewitness statements. There is no clear indication of where this was written, although some scholars suggest that it was written in Antioch.

Originally Luke and Acts were written as one book. Some scholars even suggest that Acts may have been written first, basing their speculation on the fact that Luke foreshadows many events in Acts in the book of Luke. More generally, however, Luke uses foreshadowing often within the book of Luke itself. Luke uses a pattern of promise and fulfillment extensively throughout both books, so themes echo throughout the gospel. For example, Mary's song says that the mighty are humbled and the humble raised up, John the Baptist preaches this, and Jesus refers to this idea. The gospel of Luke shows us the larger view of the history of Jesus's life by telling us stories about His life and also showing the larger significance of the stories and the recurring themes of His life.

No originals exist of Luke. The earliest documents we have are third generation copies, and they are not identical.

The earliest surviving manuscript of the Gospel of Luke fall into two "families" with considerable differences between them, the Western and the Alexandrian text-type, and the dominant view is that the Western text represents a process of deliberate revision in the second century, as the variations seem to form specific patterns.

"The Gospel of Luke," Wikipedia entry. 8/5/2026.

The book tells the story of Jesus in conflict with other Jews of his day and also communicates that Gentiles can attain salvation, so it has at times been used to stir up anti-Jewish sentiment. In it you can see how a conquered people were divided by the powers and even pitted against each other. Luke includes more episodes in Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem, and also includes more stories than the other three gospels. It is the only gospel containing the parable of the rich man and the poor man, the story of the woman anointing Jesus' feet, the story of Zacchaeus, the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer, and the parable of the prodigal son.

Luke's phrasing has some unique attributes. The phrase "praising God" occurs more often in Luke than in all the rest of the New Testament combined. In Luke's version of the Beatitudes, he uses blessed are "the poor" rather than "poor in spirit," as used in Matthew. The dedication of the book to "Theophilus" is worded in the way often used in documents to address Roman officials of high rank.

It can be useful to consider Luke in comparison to the other three gospels. The gospel of Mark was written to tell of Jesus' teachings and life and was the first gospel circulated. Matthew, the next gospel written and circulated, added information to show how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Jewish scripture, our Old Testament. Luke, the third gospel written, contributed a more organized account of Jesus' life and teachings and included more detail. John, the final gospel written, focused not on details of Jesus' life but on his spiritual identity and meaning. Of the four, Luke is written in a narrative form, so it is the most like a story of a person's life, rather than an argument about the significance of that life. However, Luke does clearly believe that Jesus was the fulfillment of previous scripture.

The gospel of Luke shares some interesting similarities with the gospel of John, which was written after Luke, that are not shared with Matthew and Mark.

Luke uses the terms "Jews" and "Israelites" in a way unlike Mark, but like John. Both gospels have characters named Mary of Bethany, Martha, and Lazarus, although John's Lazarus is portrayed as a real person, while Luke's is a figure in a parable. There are several points where Luke's passion narrative resembles that of John.. At Jesus' arrest, only Luke and John state that the servant's right ear was cut off.

"The Gospel of Luke," Wikipedia entry. 8/5/2026.

Luke also shares similarities with other writers of his era.

Balch compares Luke with the works of the Classical authors Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who wrote a history of Rome (*Roman Antiquities*), and the Jewish historian Josephus, author of a history of the Jews (*Antiquities of the Jews*). Most scholars do not see a literary relationship with the latter. All three authors anchor the histories of their peoples by dating and narrating the stories of the births of the founders (Romulus, Moses, and Jesus). Each founder taught authoritatively, appeared after death, and ascended to heaven. Crucial aspects of the teaching of all three concerned the relationship between rich and poor and the question of whether "foreigners" were to be received into the people.

Balch, David L. (2003). "Luke". In Dunn, James D. G.; Rogerson, John William (eds.). Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible, quoted in Wikipedia entry on Gospel of Luke.

Often scholars say that this book is written to Gentiles because it does not directly refer to the Old Testament. However many of the stories repeat patterns and phrases from the Old Testament, so the author must have been very familiar with the Jewish scriptures.

For example, Luke includes many references to the Old Testament, so the writer must have had an extensive knowledge of the Jewish scripture. Luke even echoes the language of that Jewish scripture. "For example, Mary's song is Hannah's song (1 Sam. 2:1-10); the boy Jesus in the temple is the boy Samuel in the temple at Shiloh (1Sam. 2-3; note especially 2:26). Some will read Luke 9:51-56 and recall II Kings 1:9-16, or Acts 5:1-11 and recall Joshua 7:10-26. These stories are not simply distant cousins; often words and phrases are the same.

Luke in the series *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, by Fred. B. Craddock, p. 8.

The book emphasizes Jesus as being the fulfillment of Jewish scriptures. It may be that Luke just used more subtle references than other gospel authors. Many aspects of this gospel reflect patterns of other writings of the time. For example, the opening sentences reflect the common structures used by historians of the time. So Luke may be good news for Gentiles in that they are included in the offer of salvation, but it is also good news for the Jews who could see Jesus as the fulfillment of their scripture.

Sources include notes from James Evans' research; Balch, David L., "Luke". in Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible, quoted in Wikipedia entry on Gospel of Luke; *The Harper Collins Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version*; *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, An Ecumenical Study Bible*; *The Literary Guide to the Bible*; *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Luke* by Fred B. Craddock; the Wikipedia entries on "Gospel of Luke," 8/5/2026.

Structure of Luke

Adapted from *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Luke*
by Fred B. Craddock

Preface	1:1-4
Infancy and childhood	1:5-2:52
Preparation for the ministry of Jesus	3:1-4:13
Ministry of Jesus in Galilee	4:14-9:50
Journey to Jerusalem	9:51-19:28
Ministry in Jerusalem	19:29-21:38
Passion narrative	22:1-23:56
Resurrection narrative	24:1-53