

Luke (March 5)

Reading Luke

During the 23-mile journey up to Jerusalem, a rise of more than 3300 feet, the people fall silent. After leaving Jericho, the melodies of joyful ascent toward Zion give way to the somber percussion of sandals on stones. Dry throats pant as weary feet plod and ache. Yet, when they reach the crest of the Mount of Olives, joy springs anew. They shout “Hosanna!” as the temple mount comes into view across the Kidron Valley.

Luke presents the story of Jesus’ life as a journey. The story begins at the Jerusalem temple, climaxes with Jesus teaching at the temple some 30 years later, and ends at the temple after Jesus is crucified, buried, resurrected, and ascended outside the city.

Author and Date

The author’s name does not appear in the book, but much unmistakable evidence points to Luke. This Gospel is a companion to the book of Acts, and the language and structure of these two books indicate that both were written by the same person. They are addressed to the same individual, Theophilus, and the second volume references the first. Certain sections in Acts use the pronouns “we”, indicating that the author was with Paul when the events described in these passages took place. By process of elimination, Paul’s “dear friend Luke, the doctor” and “fellow worker” becomes the most likely candidate. Luke was probably a Gentile by birth, well educated in Greek culture, a physician by profession, a companion of Paul at various times from his second missionary journey to his first imprisonment in Rome, and a loyal friend who remained with the apostle after others had deserted.

The two most commonly suggested periods for dating the Gospel of Luke are AD 59-63 and the 70s or 80s.

Recipients and Purpose

The Gospel is specifically directed to Theophilus, whose name means “one who loves God,” and almost certainly refers to a particular person rather than to lovers of God in general. He was possibly Luke’s patron, responsible for seeing that the writings were copied and distributed. Theophilus, however, was more than a publisher. The message of this Gospel was intended for his own instruction as well as the instruction of those among whom the book would be circulated. The book was written to strengthen the faith of all believers and to answer the attacks of unbelievers.

Characteristics

The third Gospel presents the works and teachings of Jesus that are especially important for understanding the way of salvation. Its scope is complete from the birth of Christ to his ascension, its arrangement is orderly, and it appeals to both Jews and Gentiles. The writing is characterized by literary excellence, historical details, and warm, sensitive understanding of Jesus and of those around him.

Since the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) report many of the same episodes in Jesus’ life, one would expect much similarity in their accounts. The dissimilarities reveal the distinctive emphases of the separate writers. The main theme of this Gospel is the nature of Jesus’ Messiahship and mission.

Blessings for Readers

As you read Luke’s carefully researched account of Jesus’ life, consider yourself on a journey with Luke to learn more about Jesus of Nazareth, whose body, crucified for the forgiveness of our sins, becomes the temple of the living God.