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The Gospel According to Luke (Greek: Ἐὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Λουκᾶν, ἡ τρίτη εὐαγγέλιον, ἡ μακρὰ εὐαγγέλιον, to kata Loukan euangelion), commonly shortened to the Gospel of Luke or simply Luke, is the third and longest of the four Gospels. This synoptic gospel is an account of the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. It details his story from the events of his birth to his Ascension.

According to the preface,[1] the purpose of Luke is to write a historical account,[2] while bringing out the theological significance of the history.[3] The writer divides history into three stages: The first ends with John the Baptist, the second consists of Jesus' earthly ministry, and the third is the life of the church after Jesus' resurrection.[4] The author attests that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This is consistent with all the authors of the New Testament writings. Here, Jesus' compassion extends to all mankind. The Gospel of Luke is written as a historical narrative. Certain popular stories, such as the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, are found only in this gospel. This account also has a special emphasis on prayer, the activity of the Holy Spirit, women, and joyfulness.[5] Jesus is presented as the Son of God, but attention is especially paid to the humanity of Jesus, featuring his compassion for the weak, the suffering, and the outcast.

The author is traditionally identified as Luke the Evangelist.[6] Modern scholarship generally rejects the view that Luke was the original author,[7] with the most that could be said being that Lukan authorship is "not impossible".[8] While the traditional view that Luke authored the gospel is still often put forward, a number of possible contradictions between Acts and Paul's letters lead many scholars to dispute this account.[9][10] and for some the author remains unknown.[4] Biblical Scholars are in wide agreement that the author of the Gospel of Luke also wrote the Acts of the Apostles.[11] Many believe that these two books originally constituted a two-volume work,[12][13][14] which scholars refer to as Luke-Acts.[15]

Most modern critical scholarship concludes that Luke used the Gospel of Mark for his chronology and a hypothetical sayings source Q document for many of Jesus' teachings. Luke may also have drawn from independent written records.[16] Traditional Christian scholarship has dated the composition of the gospel to the early 60s,[17][18] while other critics date it to the later decades of the 1st century.[19][20]

The date of the Gospel of Luke is traditionally fixed to some time before the end of the final events of Luke's second volume to Theophilus, Acts, so as early as 59 or 60.[21] The author of the Gospel of Luke acknowledges familiarity with earlier gospels (1:1). Although semitisms exist throughout the Gospel of Luke, it was composed in Koine Greek.[22] Like Mark (but unlike Matthew), the intended audience is the Greek-speaking populations of the region; it assures readers that Christianity is an

international religion, not an exclusively Jewish sect.[6]

The Gospels of Luke, Matthew and Mark (known as the Synoptic Gospels) include many of the same stories, often in the same sequence, and sometimes exactly the same wording. One hypothesis for this similarity is the two-source hypothesis. It hypothesizes that Matthew and Luke each borrowed from both Mark and a hypothetical sayings collection, called Q. For some 20th-century scholars, the Q collection accounts for what the gospels of Luke and Matthew share but are not found in Mark. Because history has failed to produce a shred of evidence that source Q actually existed, most modern scholars reject the hypothesis.[23]

The traditional view is that Luke, who was not an eye-witness of Jesus' ministry, wrote his gospel after gathering the best sources of information within his reach (Luke 1:1-4).[26] Some critical scholarship suggests the two-source hypothesis as probable, which argues that the author used the Gospel of Mark and the hypothetical Q document in addition to unique material, as sources for the gospel.

Mark's gospel is quite short, and written in Koine Greek (that is, common Greek). It provides a general chronology from Jesus' baptism to the empty tomb. Luke, however, sometimes presented events in a different order to more clearly support his emphases. For example, Mark has Jesus recruit his first disciples before he has performed any miracles, and Luke moves the recruitment scene to a point after Jesus' first miracles.[27]

A majority of scholars believe that Luke used Q as his second source. Q (for "Quelle," German for "source") is a hypothetical collection of Jesus' sayings. In the "two-source hypothesis," Q explains where the authors of Matthew and Luke got the material that they have in common with each other but that is not found in Mark, such as the Lord's prayer. The existence of a highly treasured dominical sayings document in circulation going totally unmentioned by the Fathers of the Early Church, remains one of the great conundrums of Modern Biblical Scholarship.[28][29][30]

Although the Gospel survives in anonymous form, it is considered that the name was known to the addressee, Theophilus.[35] The author was probably a Gentile Christian.[19] Whoever the author was, he was highly educated, well traveled, well connected, and extremely widely read. By the time he composed the Gospel, he must have been a highly practiced and competent author "able to compose in a wide variety of literary forms according to the demands of the moment.[36]

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles were both written by the same author.[43] The most direct evidence comes from the prefaces of each book. Both prefaces were addressed to Theophilus, and the preface of Acts explicitly references "my former book" about the life of Jesus. Furthermore, there are linguistic and theological similarities between the two works, suggesting that they have a common author.[44] Both books also contain common interests.[45] Linguistic and theological agreements and cross-references between the books indicate that they are from the same author.[46] Those biblical scholars who consider the two books a single, two-volume work often refer to both together as Luke-Acts.[47]

The Church Fathers, witnessed by the Muratorian Canon, Irenaeus (c. 170), Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian, held that the Gospel of Luke was written by Luke.[49] The oldest manuscript of the gospel P75 (circa 200) carries the attribution "the Gospel according to Luke".[50][51] however another manuscript P4 from about the same time period[52][53] has no such (surviving) attribution.

According to the majority view, the evidence against Luke's being the author is strong enough that the author is unknown.[54][55][56] The Book of Acts contradicts the letters of Paul on many points, such as Paul's second trip to Jerusalem for an apostolic council.[57][58] Paul placed an emphasis on Jesus' death while the author of Luke instead emphasizes Jesus' suffering, and there are other differences regarding eschatology and the Law.[4] Paul described Luke as "the beloved physician", leading Hobart to claim in 1882 that the vocabulary used in Luke-Acts suggests its author may have had medical training. However, this assertion was contradicted by an influential

study by Cadbury in 1926, and has since been abandoned; instead it is now believed this language reflects merely a common Greek education.[59][60][61][62][63]

The traditional view on Lukan authorship, however, is held by many scholars,[64] and according to some scholars it is "not impossible" that they are right.[8] Since Luke was not prominent, there is no obvious reason that this gospel and Acts would have been attributed to him if he did not write them.[65] If Luke was only a sometime companion of Paul who admired and acknowledged his work long after his death, that could explain the differences between Acts and Paul's letter.[66] Even though the evangelist as depicted in the New Testament doesn't match the patristic description of Luke, the traditional view is still argued today.[36]

Traditionally Luke has been regarded as written by Luke the Evangelist some time between the "we" passages in Acts 16 onwards[67] and the imprisonment of Paul in Rome in Acts 28, leading as with some modern scholars to argue for a date c. 60â€“65.[68] However many critical scholars consider the "we" passages spurious or inserted and place the date c 80â€“90,[69][70]

Most contemporary scholars regard Mark as a source used by Luke (see Markan Priority).[71] If it is true that Mark was written around the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, around 70,[72] they theorize that Luke would not have been written before 70. Those who take this view believe that Luke's prediction of the destruction of the temple could not be a result of Jesus predicting the future but was written with the benefit of hindsight regarding specific details. They believe that the discussion in Luke 21:5â€“30 is specific enough (more specific than Mark's or Matthew's) that a date after 70 seems likely.[73][74] These scholars have suggested dates for Luke from 75 to 100. Support for a later date comes from a number of factors. Differences of chronology, "style", and theology suggest that the author of Luke-Acts was not familiar with Paul's distinctive theology but instead was writing a decade or more after his death, by which point significant harmonization between different traditions within Early Christianity had occurred.[75] Furthermore, Luke-Acts has views on Jesus' divine nature, the end times, and salvation that are similar to those found in Pastoral epistles, which are often seen as pseudonymous and of a later date than the undisputed Pauline Epistles.[76]

Some scholars from the Jesus Seminar argue that the birth narratives of Luke and Matthew are a late development in gospel writing about Jesus.[31] In this view, Luke might have originally started at 3:1,[31] with John the Baptist. However, given that the birth narrative of Luke contains several 'tropes' that would indicate to a Roman audience that Jesus was special (the virgin birth, wise teaching at twelve, c.f. The Life of Flavius Josephus, "Moreover, when I was...of the law."), it would likely have been included in the original manuscript.

The terminus ad quem, or latest possible date, for Luke is bound by the earliest papyri manuscripts that contain portions of Luke (late 2nd/early 3rd century)[77] and the mid to late 2nd-century writings that quote or reference Luke. The work is reflected in the Didache, the Gnostic writings of Basilides and Valentinus, and the apologetics of the Church Father Justin Martyr, and was used by Marcion.[78] Christian scholar Donald Guthrie claims that the Gospel was likely widely known before the end of the 1st century, and was fully recognized by the early part of the second,[79] while Helmut Koester states that aside from Marcion, "there is no certain evidence for its usage," prior to ca. 150.[80] In the middle of the 2nd century, an edited version of the Gospel of Luke was the only gospel accepted by Marcion, a heretic who rejected Christianity's connection to Jewish scripture.[81]

Christian scholar Donald Guthrie reports that some think Luke collected much of his unique material during the imprisonment of Paul in Caesarea, when Luke attended to him.[83] Paul mentions Luke, in passing, several times as traveling with Paul. Guthrie notes that much of the evidence for dating the Gospel at any point is based upon conjecture.

The Gospel is addressed to the author's patron, Theophilus, which in Greek simply means friend of God[84] or (be)loved by God or loving God,[85] and may not be a name but a generic term for a Christian. However, as the patron is described as 'Most Excellent Theophilus', this would indicate that the patron is in fact a governor or other highly ranked Roman official, as 'most excellent' is also

used in other texts as a title for highly ranked officials.

Luke is the only gospel with a formal introduction, in which the author explains his methodology and purpose. It states that many others have already "undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word."^[89] The author adds that he too wishes to compose an orderly account for Theophilus, so that Theophilus "may know the certainty of the things [he has] been taught".

Like Matthew, Luke recounts a royal genealogy and a virgin birth for Jesus. Unlike Matthew, who traces Jesus' birth back through the line of David to Abraham in order to appeal to his Jewish audience,^[90] in Luke the evangelist traces Jesus' lineage back to Adam, indicating a universal sense of salvation.^[90] Luke's birth narrative features the Christmas story,^[91] in which Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem for a census, the newborn Jesus is laid in a feeding trough (or manger), angels proclaim him the savior for all people, and shepherds come to adore him. Also unique to Luke is John the Baptist's birth story and three canticles (including the Magnificat) as well as the only story from Jesus' boyhood.

Luke emphasizes Jesus' miracles, recounting 20, four of which are unique. Like Matthew, it includes important sayings from the Q source, such as the Beatitudes. Luke's version of the Beatitudes differs from Matthew's, and Luke's seems closer to the source in Q.^[92] More than a dozen of Jesus' most memorable parables are unique to Luke, including the Good Samaritan, the Corrupt Steward and the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Luke is the only gospel that treats the Last Supper the way Paul does, as the institution of a liturgy to be repeated by his followers.^[93] According to Geza Vermes, Paul is to be considered the primary source for this interpretation because he says he received this insight from direct revelation rather than from the other apostles.^[93] The verses in question are not found in certain older manuscripts,^[94] and Bart Ehrman concludes that they were added in order to support the theme of Jesus' atoning death, a theme found in Mark but that the evangelist excluded from the original Luke.^[95]

Luke emphasizes that Jesus had committed no crime against Rome, as confirmed by Herod, Pilate, and the thief crucified with Jesus. It is possible that the author of Luke was trying to gain the respect of the Roman authorities for the benefit of the church by stressing Jesus' innocence.^[96] In addition, it is also noted that Luke downplays Roman involvement in Jesus' execution and places responsibility more on the Jews.^{[97][98]} In Luke's Passion narrative, Jesus prays that God forgive those who crucify him and his assurance to a crucified thief that they will be together in Paradise.

Luke's accounts differ from those in Mark and Matthew. Luke tells the story of two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and (as in John) Jesus appears to the Eleven and demonstrates that he is "flesh and bones" Luke 24:39, not a spirit. Some scholars suggest that by writing of the "flesh and bones" properties of the resurrected Jesus, the author was making an apologetic response to docetic or gnostic views about Jesus' body, or to views that the disciples had merely seen his ghost.^[citation needed] However, scholar Daniel A. Smith writes that the author was more likely concerned with those in Christian circles who may have believed that the resurrection as merely "spiritual" and that it could have occurred without the transformation of the natural body.^[99] In comparing Luke's account with other narratives of post-mortem apparitions in the Greco-Roman world, scholar Deborah Thompson Prince notes the similarities between them but concludes that Luke is unique in incorporating properties of all of them.^[100]

Jesus' commission (the Great Commission), to the disciples to carry his message to all the nations, affirms Christianity as a universal religion. The Book of Acts, also written by Luke to the same Theophilus, declares about Jesus that "he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days..." Acts 2:3 The detailed narration of the Road to Emmaus appearance in Luke 24:13–32 is at times considered one of the best sketches of a biblical scene in the Gospel of Luke.^[101]

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