

# **The Book of Luke**

## **The Coming of Jesus**

Lesson #1 for April 4, 2015

Scriptures: Luke 1:2-3,5-22; 2 Timothy 3:16; Deuteronomy 18:15; Luke 2:9-12,25-32.

1. The books of Luke and Acts in the New Testament are a two-volume account of the origin and history of the early Christian church. Luke was a Greek physician—not a Jew. He wrote to a friend called Theophilus in both of these books. The name Theophilus means “Lover of God,” and there is the possibility that these books are addressed to all of God’s faithful people. But, the personal way in which Theophilus was addressed suggests that Theophilus was a real person.
2. Read Luke 1:1-3. It seems clear that Mark was the first Gospel written. Toward the end of Paul’s life, Mark and Luke traveled with him to a considerable extent. No doubt, Luke had access to Mark’s Gospel which has been called the Gospel from Peter’s view. But, why did Luke say, “Many people have done their best to write a report”? Surely, he did not mean that the one Gospel written by Mark was “many.” Were there others who had attempted to write out a history of Christ’s life? We know about a number of apocryphal “gospels” that have wild stories in them about Jesus’s childhood, etc. Had some of them been written even before the book of Luke was written? Would that be why Luke called his account an “orderly” account? Luke traveled with Paul when Paul returned to Jerusalem in A.D. 58. Shortly thereafter, Paul was arrested and put in a Roman prison. Paul spent most of the next 2 years or so imprisoned in Caesarea. During that time, Luke traveled up and down Judea and Galilee talking to people who had seen and known Jesus. Thus, his Gospel was written on the basis of many different eyewitness accounts even though Luke himself was not an eyewitness.
3. Clearly, the Gospel of Matthew was written for a Jewish audience. It focuses on how Jesus fulfilled prophecies from the Old Testament. When he traced the genealogy of Jesus, he traced it back to Abraham. Mark wrote to a Roman audience and did not mention genealogies or long speeches. The Romans were more interested in action. Luke, a Gentile and a trained physician, wanted to write a careful account that was historically accurate. He wanted his Greek audience—in fact, all of his readers—to understand that Jesus came and lived and died not just for Jews but for all of mankind and for the rest of the universe as well.

**By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels.** He was the Word of God,—God’s thought made audible. . . **But not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. Our little world is the lesson book of the universe. [1 Corinthians 4:9] God’s wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which “angels desire to look,” [1 Peter 1:12] and it will be their study throughout endless ages. Both the redeemed [20] and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song.** It will be seen that . . . in the meek and lowly One is manifested the character of Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 19.2. [Content in brackets and bold type are added.]

4. Since Luke did not observe any of the events of the life of Jesus personally, should we consider his Gospel as less reliable and maybe less inspired? Can a person get information from other people and write it down and it still be considered inspired? Does that say something important to us about inspiration? Did the Holy Spirit inspire this book?
5. It took a while for the early church to accept the writings of Luke. He was not a disciple. He was not a Jew. His writings showed much too favorable an attitude toward non-Jews, women, and marriage. What would you think about your pastor traveling around with a prostitute and other women? (Luke 8:1-3)
6. Luke’s Gospel is about 30% longer than any of the other Gospels. Almost all of the Gospel

of Mark is repeated in either Matthew or Luke. But, without the book of Luke, we would be missing many important parts of the story of Jesus. Only Luke gives us universally loved stories like the story of the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the rich man and Lazarus, the rich fool, the Pharisee and the tax collector, and a lengthy section about the ministry of Jesus in Samaria and Perea shortly before His crucifixion. Look at the two very different genealogies in Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38? How do you explain these wide differences?

7. Luke also gave us the only account of the birth story of John the Baptist and the visit of Joseph and Mary to the temple in Jerusalem for Jesus to be circumcised and dedicated. (Luke 2:22-24) There, they met Simeon who had been promised that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. (Luke 2:25-32) Once again, Luke reiterated Simeon's message that the gospel is for everyone. It is, in fact, an everlasting gospel (Revelation 14:6-7) which has been planned and prepared for by God Himself, and it is to bring salvation and make it available to all. But, Simeon went on to say that this baby was to be destined "for the fall and rise of many in Israel." (Luke 2:34) To Mary he said, "A sword will pierce through your own soul also." (Luke 2:35)

Luke, the writer of the Gospel that bears his name, was a medical missionary. In the Scriptures he is called "the beloved physician." Colossians 4:14. The apostle Paul heard of his skill as a physician, and sought him out as one to whom the Lord had entrusted a special work. He secured his co-operation, and for some time Luke accompanied him in his travels from place to place. After a time, Paul left Luke at Philippi, in Macedonia. Here he continued to labor for several years, both as a physician and as a teacher of the gospel. In his work as a physician he ministered to the sick, and then prayed for the healing power of God to rest upon the afflicted ones. Thus the way was opened for the gospel message. Luke's success as a physician gained for him many opportunities for preaching Christ among the heathen. It is the divine plan that we shall work as the disciples worked. Physical healing is bound up with the gospel commission. In the work of the gospel, teaching and healing are never to be separated.—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 140.1-141.0.

8. The Jews had not had an inspired prophet in their midst for about 400 years. At the end of his writing, Malachi had promised that a prophet like Elijah was coming. We do not know where Luke got his information about Zacharias and Elizabeth and the birth of John. Clearly, that was a miraculous birth also. Was it like the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah in their old age? It was announced by the Angel Gabriel himself. Read Luke 1:5-25. What kind of people were Zacharias and Elizabeth? Why does the *King James Version* describe them as "blameless"?

The birth of a son to Zacharias, like the birth of the child of Abraham, and that of Mary, was to teach a great spiritual truth, a truth that we are slow to learn and ready to forget. In ourselves we are incapable of doing any good thing; but that which we cannot do will be wrought by the power of God in every submissive and believing soul. It was through faith that the child of promise was given. It is through faith that spiritual life is begotten, and we are enabled to do the works of righteousness.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 98.3.

9. Six months after Elizabeth became pregnant, the angel Gabriel was sent to a virgin in Nazareth by the name of Mary. Her actual name in Aramaic was Miriam.
10. The birth of Jesus had been prophesied in a number of different ways. Galatians 4:4 summarizes by saying, "When the fulness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman."
11. Read Genesis 3:15; Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22-24; **Isaiah 7:14; 9:6**; Matthew 1:22-23; Micah 5:2; and Luke 2:4-7. What do these verses tell us about the coming Messiah? Moses said He was to be a prophet like him. The Hebrews were to obey Him. All the prophets from Samuel on had carried the same message. And they were warned that if they did not believe this message, they would be separated from God's people. Isaiah mentioned that a young

woman was to give birth to Immanuel and said that He would be called “Wonderful Counselor,” “Mighty God,” “Eternal Father,” and “Prince of peace.” (Isaiah 9:6) Both Matthew and Luke affirmed that Mary was a virgin. Micah tells us that He was to be born in Bethlehem; but, “Whose goings forth have been from of old, from ancient days (eternity)” (*Amplified*), indicating that He had lived in eternity past.

12. The virgin birth of Jesus is a completely unique event. There is no way to explain it humanistically or naturalistically. Even Mary asked, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” (Luke 1:34) Gabriel assured Mary that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her; and thus, the child to be born to her would be called the Son of God.
13. As ordinary human beings, we struggle with the idea that Jesus could have been fully human and fully divine at the same time. Thomas Aquinas struggled with that idea as well. He said, **“In order that the body of Christ might be shown to be a real body, he was born of a woman; but in order that his Godhead might be made clear he was born of a virgin.”** Would you agree with him?
14. What do you think about the virgin birth of Jesus? Do you have any lingering doubts about its authenticity? Why do so many people question it? It was certainly impossible apart from the supernatural intervention of God. Is that really important to our understanding of the gospel? Since the questions in the great controversy were/are about God and His character and how He runs His government, only God can answer those questions. Thus, it is essential that we understand that this baby was not the Son of any human father. From the beginning, we are to recognize that the story of Jesus is one miracle after another.
15. What do you think about Gabriel’s assurance to Mary that “there is nothing that God cannot do”? (Luke 1:37)
16. Do you think Mary was aware of the time when the Holy Spirit “overshadowed” her? In our day, there are a number of people who want to give a humanistic or natural explanation for every event that takes place. The virgin birth of Jesus makes that impossible.
17. Read Luke 2:1-7. Try to imagine Mary who was in her ninth month of pregnancy traveling by donkey all the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem so that they could pay their Roman taxes. Once again, Luke was doing his best to place the birth of Jesus in its historical context. But, when they arrived in Bethlehem, there was no room for them in the inn. Mary’s perfect baby, the Son of God, was laid in a feeding trough in a small enclosure designed for animals. What does that say to us about God? Read Philippians 2:5-8. From this very humble beginning, Jesus lived a life of poverty and hard work. Despite His wild popularity at times, when He died, the only piece of property He owned that we know about was His coat, and they gambled over it. And He died as a traitor to the Roman government—accused of being a common criminal.
18. The first visitors to see and proclaim the arrival of this new King were a group of shepherds. Shepherds were the lowest of the low on the social scale of Judea. Why do you think the angels approached the shepherds instead of the leadership in Jerusalem or some other person of high authority?

An angel visits the earth to see who are prepared to welcome Jesus. But he can discern no tokens of expectancy. He hears no voice of praise and triumph that the period of the Messiah’s coming is at hand. The angel hovers for a time over the chosen city and the temple where the divine presence was manifested for ages; but even here is the same indifference. . . There is no evidence that Christ is expected, and no preparation for the Prince of life.

**In amazement the celestial messenger is about to return to Heaven with the shameful tidings, when he discovers a group of shepherds who are watching their flocks by night, and, as they gaze into the starry heavens, are contemplating the prophecy of a Messiah to come to earth, and longing for the advent of the world’s Redeemer.** Here is a company that can be trusted with the heavenly message. And suddenly the angel of the Lord

appeared, declaring the good tidings of great joy. Celestial [199] glory flooded all the plain, an innumerable company of angels were revealed, and as if the joy were too great for one messenger to bring from Heaven, a multitude of voices broke forth in the anthem which all the nations of the saved shall one day sing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Oh, what a lesson is this wonderful story of Bethlehem! How it rebukes our unbelief, our pride and self-sufficiency. How it warns us to beware, lest by our criminal indifference we also fail to discern the signs of the times, and therefore know not the day of our visitation. It is “unto them that look for him” that Christ is to “appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” [Hebrews 9:28.]—Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 4, 198.1-199.1 (1884); compare *Great Controversy* 314.1. [Content in brackets and bold type are added.]

Will the angels find us prepared for the second coming?

19. Read Luke’s account in Luke 2:9-12 of the angel announcing to the shepherds the birth of Jesus. At the very beginning of the story, Luke tells us that the Gospel is for all people, Jew and Gentile alike. More than that, Jesus is the only Savior—there is no other. And this Jesus is the Messiah for whom the Jews had been waiting for hundreds of years. Luke said that He was the Lord of all creation.
20. Try to imagine what Satan thought when Jesus entered this world as a helpless baby boy. Don’t you suppose that he and his angels had thought of many ways in which they could get rid of Jesus? We know about the attempt by Herod—likely inspired by Satan—to destroy all the baby boys in Bethlehem. (Luke 2:13-14)
21. The ministry of John the Baptist stirred up the people of Judea and Galilee as they had not been stirred for many years. He suggested that they needed to repent of their sins!
22. John the Baptist was sent as a forerunner of Jesus. Read Luke 1:15-17. Don’t you think God needs some forerunners to prepare for His second coming like John the Baptist prepared for His first coming? (Malachi 4:5) What kind of people would God choose for that work?
23. Ellen White said: “Like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God’s purposes know no haste and no delay. . . . When the great clock of time pointed to that hour, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 32.1.
24. Why do you think that Luke used so many historical details in these first three chapters? Wasn’t he doing his best to help us recognize that Jesus was real and not just some mythical or Gnostic apparition?
25. Luke made a concerted effort to place the story of Jesus in its historical context. It is only because of the information which he gave us in Luke 2:1-3 and 3:1-2 that we are able to date the birth of Jesus. He wanted us to recognize that Jesus was a *real Person* at a *real time* in history. Luke wanted us to recognize that God invaded human history.
26. Try to place yourself in the context of these first three chapters of Luke. If you were Theophilus, what would it take to convince you to believe Luke’s story? How do you think Gabriel felt about announcing the coming of the Messiah who was ultimately to lead to the destruction of Gabriel’s forerunner, Lucifer/Satan? If you were Elizabeth, would you find it easy to believe your husband’s story about Gabriel appearing to him at the temple? If you were Mary, how would you respond to the criticisms, the accusations, and the scandalous looks of your neighbors and friends when it became obvious that you were pregnant? What did Joseph say? We are just beginning the study of the book of Luke. It will prove to be a wonderful experience.

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