

ENCOUNTERING JESUS

An Introduction to the Gospel of Luke

The Author

If you asked the average church attendee, “Who wrote most of the New Testament?” you’d usually hear, “The apostle Paul.” That’s partly true—Paul wrote the most books. But in terms of sheer volume, the person who wrote the most words in our New Testament was Luke. His two documents—the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles—account for roughly 28 percent of the entire New Testament.

Luke was almost certainly a Gentile (possibly even a slave)—someone without a Jewish background—which makes him the only non-Jewish author in the New Testament. Professionally, he was a physician; Paul calls him “the beloved doctor” in Colossians 4:14. He wasn’t a firsthand witness to Jesus’ ministry, but he was a careful researcher. In his own words, he “investigated everything carefully from the beginning” (1:3) and compiled his account from eyewitness testimony and earlier written sources. And he brought a doctor’s precision and an investigator’s discipline to the task of telling the story of Jesus.

Where Luke Got His Information

One of Luke’s primary sources was the Gospel of Mark—the same Mark who documented much of what the apostle Peter told him about Jesus. If you ever notice that parts of Luke’s Gospel look a lot like Mark’s, that’s why. Luke also drew from a collection of Jesus’ sayings that scholars call “Q” (shared with Matthew but not found in Mark), and from his own unique sources—interviews, oral traditions, and eyewitness accounts that only he preserves. Roughly **35 percent of Luke’s Gospel** is material found nowhere else, including some of the most beloved stories in the Bible: the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, Zacchaeus, and the Road to Emmaus.

Four Gospels, Four Portraits

We have four Gospels because one portrait of Jesus isn’t enough. Each author writes for a different audience with a different emphasis, giving us a richer, more complete picture

of who Jesus is than any single account could provide. Think of each as a unique camera angle capturing Jesus.

Gospel	Audience	Jesus As...	Key Idea
Mark	Roman Christians	The Suffering Servant	Fast-paced, action-driven; races toward the cross. Jesus conquers through sacrifice.
Matthew	Jewish Christians	The Messianic King	Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. The new Moses who teaches with authority.
Luke	Gentile / everyone	The Savior of All	Compassionate, boundary-breaking. Seeks the lost, lifts the lowly, welcomes everyone.
John	All believers	The Eternal Word	Theological and cosmic. Jesus is God in the flesh—the great “I AM.”

What Makes Luke Different

Luke’s Jesus is for everyone. Matthew traces Jesus’ genealogy back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. Luke traces it all the way back to Adam—the father of the human race. From the start, Luke is saying: this isn’t just Israel’s story. This is everyone’s story.

Luke’s Jesus seeks the overlooked. No Gospel gives more attention to the poor, the outcast, women, Samaritans, tax collectors, and sinners. Jesus’ first public words in Luke are from Isaiah 61:1 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor” (4:18). The people the world dismisses are the people Luke’s Jesus pursues.

Luke’s Jesus is a man of prayer. Luke records Jesus praying more than any other Gospel—at His baptism, before choosing the Twelve, before Peter’s confession, at the Transfiguration, in Gethsemane, and on the cross. Every major turning point in Luke begins on Jesus’ knees.

Luke’s Jesus eats with everyone. There are at least ten major meal scenes in Luke—more than any other Gospel. Jesus eats with Pharisees and sinners, rich and poor. In Luke, the dinner table is where barriers come down and the kingdom of God is made visible.

Luke is the Gospel of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit fills John in the womb, overshadows Mary, empowers Elizabeth and Zechariah to prophesy, descends on Jesus at His baptism, and drives His entire ministry. Luke’s Gospel prepares the reader for Acts, where the same Spirit empowers the church.

Luke is the Gospel of joy. From the angel’s announcement of “great joy” to the disciples returning to Jerusalem “with great joy” after the Ascension, Luke overflows with celebration. This isn’t naive optimism—it’s the deep gladness of people who have discovered that God is keeping His promises.

Luke’s Portrait of Jesus

If Mark shows us a Jesus who *acts* with power, and Matthew shows us a Jesus who *teaches* with authority, and John shows us a Jesus who *is* God in the flesh—Luke shows us a Jesus who *feels*.

Luke’s Jesus is moved with compassion at the funeral of a widow’s only son (7:13). He tells a story about a father who *runs* to embrace a wayward child (15:20). He weeps over Jerusalem (19:41). He looks at Peter after the denial—not with anger, but with a gaze that breaks Peter’s heart (22:61). He promises paradise to a dying criminal (23:43). He walks alongside two confused disciples on the road to Emmaus and opens their eyes over a meal (24:13–35).

Luke’s one-sentence summary of Jesus’ entire ministry comes in chapter 19, verse 10: **“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”** That’s Luke’s thesis. Every story, every parable, every encounter in this Gospel is a variation on that theme. Jesus is not waiting for the lost to find Him. He is actively, relentlessly, tenderly searching for them.

Luke is the only Gospel writer to call Jesus “Savior” (2:11). In the Roman world, that title belonged to Caesar. Luke gives it to a baby in a feeding trough. The true Savior of the world doesn’t come with armies. He comes with mercy.

The Shape of Luke’s Story

Luke’s Gospel moves geographically from the margins to the center—from a hill-country village in Judea to the cross and empty tomb in Jerusalem:

Chapters	What Happens
1–2	The births of John and Jesus; the songs of Mary, Zechariah, the angels, and Simeon
3–4	John’s ministry, Jesus’ baptism and temptation, the Nazareth sermon that launches everything
5–9	Galilean ministry: healings, the Twelve called, Sermon on the Plain, parables, Peter’s confession, Transfiguration
9–19	The long journey to Jerusalem: most of Luke’s unique parables and encounters are here. Jesus “sets his face” toward the cross.
19–21	Jerusalem: triumphal entry, temple confrontations, teaching about the future
22–23	The Passion: Last Supper, betrayal, trials, crucifixion. Unique to Luke: “Father, forgive them,” the repentant thief, Jesus’ trial before Herod
24	Resurrection and Ascension: the empty tomb, the Emmaus Road, the Great Commission

The largest section—chapters 9 through 19, the “travel narrative”—is where Luke places most of his unique material. This is the stretch of road where Jesus is walking toward the cross, and every teaching and encounter along the way is shaped by that destination. It’s also where we’ll spend a significant portion of our time in this series.

Why Luke? Why Now? Why Us?

We chose Luke for our eighteen-month journey because Luke wrote for people like us. He wrote for people who didn’t grow up in the religious establishment. He wrote for people who need to know that Jesus came for *them*—not just for the insiders, the scholars, or the spiritually elite.

Luke’s Jesus is the one who sees the widow nobody else notices. The one who stops for the beggar everyone else walks past. The one who invites Himself to dinner at the house of the most hated man in town. The one who promises paradise to a criminal dying next to Him.

And Luke wrote with and for a purpose. He states it in his very first sentence: so that you may have **certainty** about the things you’ve been taught (1:4). Not just belief. Certainty. Solid ground. Over the next eighteen months, we’re going to walk through

this Gospel verse by verse, encounter by encounter. And as we do, we're going to find what Luke promised Theophilus we'd find: a Jesus who is real, who is trustworthy, and who came looking for us.