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Lesson 1

Background and Survey

Luke and John are the two gospel writers who state in the gospel text something of their purpose in writing.¹ Luke, writing to his friend Theophilus, put it this way: “I thought it good to write an orderly account for you . . . so that you will know the full truth of all those matters which you have been taught.”² So as Dr. Luke was inspired to write his account, the *content* he had in mind was the “full truth,” and the *form* he had in mind was an “orderly account.”

All survey and analytical study of the Bible text involves (1) what the Bible says (this is *content*) and (2) how it says it (this is *form*). Our analytical studies of Luke begin with Lesson 2. Survey, or a skyscraper view of the gospel, appears in the second half of this lesson. Before we make a survey, however, it will enrich our study if we first learn some of the interesting background of the book’s actual writing. This study guide follows the standard order of procedure, which is

BACKGROUND	(Lesson 1)
SURVEY	(Lesson 1)
ANALYSIS	(Lessons 2ff.)

I. BACKGROUND

A. The Man Luke

To know the writer of this gospel is to appreciate more fully the book he has written. From the sparse biographical data about

1. Luke 1:1-4; John 20:30-31; 21:24-25.
2. Luke 1:3-4, *Good News for Modern Man*.

Luke contained in the gospels and Acts, an unusually full portrait of the man can be composed.

1. *Birth and early life.* Luke was born of Greek parents, a heritage that made him probably the only Gentile writer of the New Testament. He was born at about the same time as Jesus and Paul. Two possible birthplaces are Antioch of Syria and Philippi of Macedonia. His parents gave him the name *Lucas*, a shortened form of the Roman name *Lucanus*.³ His advanced education may have been received at Athens or Tarsus, where he studied for the medical profession. From the content and style of his books, we may speculate that history and literature were two of his favorite subjects.

2. *Conversion.* Luke was not a disciple of Jesus during Jesus' earthly ministry. He may have been converted under the ministry of Paul while living in Antioch, such as is referred to in Acts 11:25-26.

3. *Profession and ministry.* Luke was a man of various talents and callings:

(a) *Physician.* "Luke, the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14).⁴

(b) *Historian.* His interest in history is shown by the many historical datelines cited in his gospel (e.g., 1:5, 26, 56; 2:1, 2, 21-22, 36-37, 42; 3:1-2).

(c) *Writer.* His gospel is considered by many to be a literary masterpiece.

(d) *Evangelist and pastor.* He was Paul's collaborator on the apostle's missionary journeys, remaining with him till Paul's death (read Col.4:14; Philem. 24; 2 Tim.4:11). Apparently Luke never married.

4. *Luke's character.* Luke's writings serve as character prints. What he included and emphasized in his gospel and Acts reveals much about what kind of man he was. Luke was kind, humble, joyful, bright, pious, and gentle. He had a keen sense of the might, justice, and holiness of God. He was surely a man of prayer, reporting praise and intercession often in his writings. For example, read the songs recorded at 1:46-55 (Mary); 1:67-79 (Zacharias);

3. Actually, the name *Luke* appears only three times in the New Testament, once in each of three of Paul's prison epistles: Col. 4:14; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11. More is known of Luke from his other book, Acts, where he is one of Paul's companions in the "we" sections.

4. Note the medical terms and descriptions in these passages: Luke 4:38-39; 8:43-44; 13:11; 16:20-21. Also it is significant that of the six miracles recorded by Luke not found in the other gospels, five are miracles of healing: 7:11-18 (widow's son); 13:11-17 (18-year infirmity); 14:1-6 (man with dropsy); 17:11-19 (10 lepers); 22:50-51 (ear healed).

2:13-14 (angels); 2:25, 29-32 (Simeon); also, Luke refers to the prayers of Jesus more than do Matthew and Mark, and his gospel contains three parables on prayer not found in the other gospels. Luke was a man of love and sympathy for the underprivileged, such as women, children, and the poor, and for outcasts such as the Samaritans. He was truly a saint who identified with needy humankind and thus was the appropriate divine choice as the writer of the gospel of "The Son of Man Among Men."

5. *Death*. One tradition says Luke died as a martyr in Greece. According to the anti-Marcionite "Prologue to Luke," written around A.D. 170, "at the age of eighty-four he fell asleep in Boeotia."

B. The Book of Luke

This gospel was inspired and written according to divine design and schedule.

1. *Place and date of writing*. The place of writing is unknown; it could have been Caesarea or Rome. Uniform testimony of the church, supported by internal evidence, identifies Luke as the author. He wrote his gospel around A.D. 60, not much earlier than writing Acts (about A.D. 61). Read Acts 1:1 for Dr. Luke's reference to his gospel as "the former treatise."

2. *Sources of information*. Luke had access to other early written records of the life and ministry of Jesus (cf. Luke 1:1-2), and he also interviewed many people who had been eyewitnesses of the events of Jesus' life (Luke 1:2). While Paul was imprisoned at Caesarea before his voyage to Rome, Luke had ample opportunity for such interviewing in the cities of Palestine. Paul himself, though not an eye-witness, must have had some influence on Luke's production of this gospel, even as Peter influenced Mark. Direct disclosure of some parts of the gospel came by the Holy Spirit. *All* of the gospel was divinely inspired, or God-breathed.

3. *Addressee*. Luke wrote this gospel especially for his friend Theophilus ("lover [or loved] of God"; cf. Acts 1:1; Luke 1:3). Theophilus may have been an influential Christian layman of Greece, possibly even a convert of Luke. When Luke's gospel began to circulate throughout the Roman Empire in the first century, the readers particularly attracted to it were people of Greek culture, which glorified wisdom, beauty, and the ideal man. The excellent literary style of this third gospel must have afforded a special attraction to such readers.

4. *Purpose and theme*. As noted earlier, Luke states his purpose in 1:1-4: to write an orderly account of the full truth of Jesus' ministry. Also, in view of the fact that there are *four* gospels in-

stead of *one*, we may conclude that the gospel of Luke is intended to complement the other three gospels by telling the story of Jesus from a different angle and for a different viewer. When the four gospels are compared, differences of the following kind are seen:

COMPARISON OF FOUR GOSPELS

Chart A

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
Jesus as:	King of Israel	Servant of the Lord	Son of Man	Son of God
Reader:	Jew	Roman	Greek	World
Prominent ideas:	Law	Power	Grace	Glory

The theme of Luke concerns “Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Luke 24:19). Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man among men (19:10), the perfect God-Man (cf. Luke 1:35) who alone offers to all nations (24:47) the salvation of God (3:6). A key verse for Luke is 19:10: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” A key phrase is “Son of Man,” found twenty-five times in the gospel.

We will become more aware of the purposes and theme of Luke as we proceed with our study of the actual text.

II. SURVEY

Now that we are ready to study the actual *text* of Luke, where do we begin? The answer is, Begin with the large whole, and then proceed to the small parts. The large, overall view is known by various names: skyscraper view, bird’s-eye view, overview, survey. Survey study should always precede analytical study, as stated by the rule “Image the whole, then execute the parts.”

There are three main stages of survey study: (1) making the initial acquaintance, (2) scanning the prominent individual items, and (3) searching for the integrating relationships. Throughout your survey study avoid getting bogged down in any particular details. Study of details comes later in analysis. In survey the purpose is to see the larger things, such as general movements, turning points, and highlights.

A. Stage One: Making Initial Acquaintance

Scan the book of Luke in one sitting if possible. It is not necessary to read every word or line at this time. If your Bible has paragraph divisions, reading the first sentence of each paragraph will suffice. If your Bible has chapter or paragraph headings, note these as you scan the book.

The purpose of this initial scanning is to get the feel and atmosphere of the book and to catch its major purposes. Write down your first impressions and any key words and phrases that stand out as of this reading.

B. Stage Two: Scanning Individual Items

1. Go through the book once again (still in cursory fashion) and assign a title to each chapter. (A chapter title is a strong word or short phrase, preferably taken from the text, intended to serve as a clue to at least one main part of the chapter. Some Bible students like to memorize the chapter titles as an aid in recalling the movement of the entire book.) Record your titles on a chart similar to Chart B. Note that 4:14; 6:12; 9:51; 19:28; and 21:5 replace 4:1; 6:1; 9:1; 19:1; and 21:1.

CHAPTER TITLES

Chart B

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
		VIRGIN MARY	SWADDLING CLOTHES	JOHN ... WILDERNESS				9:51										19:28		21:5			

2. What have you noticed so far about these subjects?
the various groups Jesus spoke to and worked with

the constant action in the book—Jesus moving from place to place

how much speaking Jesus did, compared to working

3. Compare the first and last chapters of the gospel. For example, note the references to praise.

C. Stage Three: Seeking Integrating Relationships

The gospels are not unorganized collections of the recorded words and deeds of Jesus. Each gospel is a unified story of selected parts of His life. A general chronology is followed, with some parts written mainly with a topical organization in mind.

Let us now look at the organization of Luke.

1. Observe from survey Chart D that main divisions are made at 4:14; 9:51; and 19:28. In order to understand the reasons for these divisions, we need to know the overall plan of Jesus' life; Chart C shows this. The shaded area indicates how much of Jesus' life is reported by Luke.⁵ Observe the locations of 4:14; 9:51; 19:28.

Read 4:14-15. Is Jesus engaged in public ministry here? Scan all that happens before 4:14, and the reason for a main division at 4:14 will become evident. Make a brief outline for these sections:

1:1-2:20

2:21-52

3:1-20

3:21-38

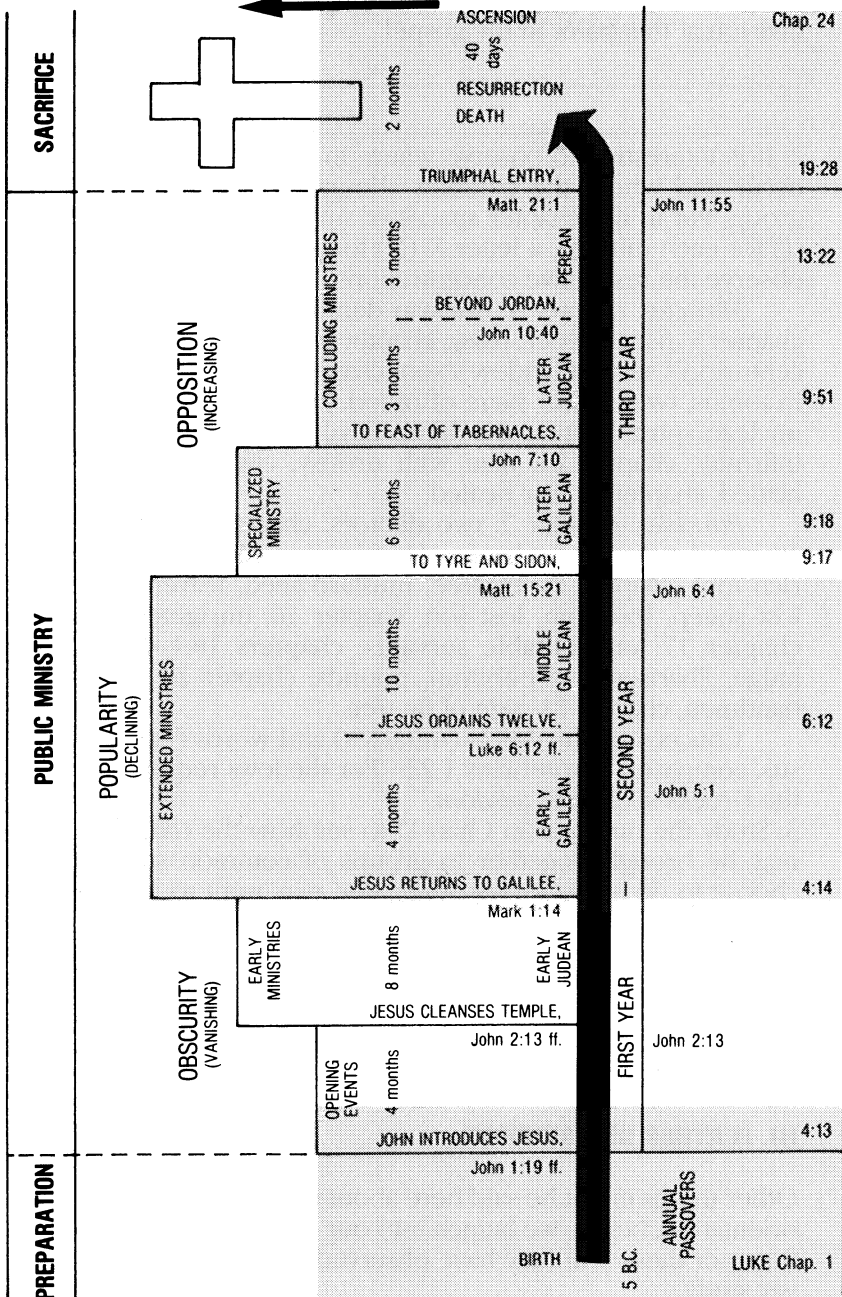
4:1-13

Now read 9:51. Note the geographical reference. It is at this point in Luke that Jesus enters the later Judean and Perean ministries

5. The full biographical context of the chart is arrived at by comparing all four gospels. No one gospel includes all the events, but Luke's is regarded as the most generally representative biography. About half of its material is not found in the other gospels.

LIFE OF CHRIST SHOWING COVERAGE BY LUKE (Shaded Area)

Chart C



(see chart) on His way to Jerusalem. Read 19:28, and justify a main division at this point in the gospel.

2. It is interesting to observe where in Luke most of the miracles occur and where the parables abound. Below is a list of each group. Put in the chapter spaces of survey Chart D a check mark (J) for each miracle, a letter X (X) for each parable, and you will observe the respective concentrations.

Miracles: chapter 4: unclean demon, Simon's mother-in-law; chapter 5: fishes, leper, palsy; chapter 6: withered hand; chapter 7: centurion's servant, widow's son; chapter 8:1–9:50: sea calm, man in tombs, twelve-year issue of blood, Jairus's daughter, 5,000 fed, unclean spirit; chapter 11: dumb devil; chapter 13: eighteen-year infirmity; chapter 14: man with dropsy; chapter 17: ten lepers healed; chapter 21: ear healed.

Parables: chapter 7: two debtors; chapter 8: sower; chapter 10: good Samaritan; chapter 11: friend at midnight; chapter 12: rich fool; chapter 13: fig tree, mustard seed, leaven; chapter 15: lost sheep, lost coin, lost son; chapter 16: unrighteous steward; chapter 17: unprofitable servants; chapters 18:1–19:27: unjust judge, Pharisee and publican, pounds; chapter 20: wicked husbandmen; chapter 21: sign of fig tree.

Concerning the deeds (miracles) and words (parables) of Jesus, compare 1 Corinthians 1:22: "For the Jews require a *sign*, and the Greeks seek after *wisdom*."

3. Study the outlines on Chart D to see how the chapters of Luke may be brought together in groups of common subject. If you choose to do more survey study, you may want to add your own outlines to this chart.

Observe from the bottom of the chart the time duration of each division of Luke. Note that the largest division (9:51–19:27) is of only six months' duration, that this division concerns Jesus' transient ministry on the way to Jerusalem, and that much of these chapters is found only in Luke.

III. FURTHER DESCRIPTIONS

Other things might be said here about the book of Luke, by way of orientation, before we launch into our analytical studies of its text. Some of these you may have observed in the course of your survey study.

LUKE BOOK OF THE SON OF MAN AMONG MEN

Chart D

PRAISE Chap. 1		mainly peculiar to Luke		about 60% peculiar to Luke												PRAISE 24:50-53															
1	Elizabeth—Mary	3		4:14	5	6:12	7	8	9:51	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19:28	20	21:5	22	23	24							
PREPARATION				IDENTIFICATION				INSTRUCTION				SACRIFICE																			
				GALILEE				later Judean and Perean ministries TO JERUSALEM				AT JERUSALEM				the Great Sacrifice & the Grand Miracle				MISSION ACCOMPLISHED				50 days							
				MIRACLES Around Here				PARABLES Around Here																							
30 years				↑ "mighty in DEED"				and WORD" (24:19)								LAST MESSAGES				8 days											
				1½ years				6 months																							
																								KEY VERSES: 19:10; 24:19				KEY PHRASE: "Son of man"			

A. Prominent Subjects

The following subjects, because of their prominence in Luke, reveal something of the gospel's theme.

1. *The Person of Christ*. Luke presents Jesus as Son of God (1:35) but especially as Son of man.

2. *The work of Christ in redemption*. References to grace and the glad tidings occur throughout the book. Christ is the gracious Saviour of mankind (19:10).

3. *The work of the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit is referred to more in Luke than in Matthew and Mark combined. Read 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25-26; 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18; 10:21; 24:49.

4. *Christ's ministry to Gentiles*. For example, read 2:32.

5. *The needs of the humble estate*. Women, children, and outcasts appear often in Luke's story. For example, women are mentioned in all but five of the chapters.

6. *Enemies of Jesus*. Luke shows Jesus as One who did not spurn His many enemies but shared the truth with them.

7. *Historical perspective*. The *factual* basis of the gospel is underscored by the inclusion of many references to dates and secular rulers.

8. *Prayers of Jesus*. As mentioned earlier, the prayers of Jesus are prominent throughout the book, emphasizing His humanity.

B. Special Passages

Among other things, Luke is known for its inclusion of these three stories:

1. The "Infancy Narrative" of Jesus and John (chaps.1-2)
2. The "Journey of Travel," also known as the "Great Insertion" (9:51-18:14)
3. The Emmaus story (chap.24)

A list of shorter passages found only in Luke includes such accounts as:

1. Christ's weeping over Jerusalem (19:41-44; cf. 13:34-35)
2. The sweat at Gethsemane (22:44)
3. Mercy to the thief on the cross (23:40-43)

Some Review Questions

1. What interesting facts have you learned in this lesson about Luke's background, profession, and character? How does this knowledge help you to appreciate the gospel more fully?

2. Why was this gospel written?

How appropriate is it for the present time?

3. Compare the four gospels.

4. What is the theme of Luke's gospel?

5. How much of the chart of Christ's life (Chart C) do you remember? What parts of His life are covered by Luke?

6. Try to reproduce the survey chart (Chart D), especially its major parts. Continue studying this chart until you know it thoroughly. It will be of much help to you for context orientation in the analytical studies.

7. What is a key phrase of Luke?

8. List some of the main subjects appearing in this gospel.

9. As you conclude this study, think of some of the spiritual lessons you have learned from your introduction to Luke.