

Introducing Luke: who was he, and why did he write a Gospel?

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Our first meeting will be a little different from the others, because it will focus mainly on Luke's background and purpose rather than studying the Gospel itself.

Please prepare for the meeting by thinking about the ideas and questions on this sheet. As you go through it you will be asked to dip into **Acts 16**, **Acts 20-21** and **Acts 27-28** and to read **Luke 1:1-4** carefully. This is a lot to ask, but if you haven't time for everything, just do whatever you can – no one will check up on you. If possible, please bring a Bible with you to the meeting.

1. What do we know about the writer of the Gospel?

There are some things that we can learn from the Gospel itself.

- He wrote fluent and stylish Greek. But that doesn't mean that he was Greek or spoke only Greek. At that time it was quite normal for people living around the Mediterranean to be fluent in two or more languages. Many prosperous people studied elegant Greek literature, while a simple, direct kind of Greek was the common language of ports and markets and was spoken even by very poor people.
- He was very familiar with a Greek translation of the Old Testament (the 'Septuagint') which was used by many Jewish communities outside Palestine, e.g. in Egypt.
- We will learn more about his priorities and sympathies as we study his Gospel.

There is also wide agreement that:

- This Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles were written by the same person.
- He travelled with Paul on some of Paul's missionary journeys, particularly in the area of Macedonia, and then accompanied Paul to Jerusalem and to his imprisonment in Rome. We know this because some passages in Acts speak of Paul and his fellow-travellers as "we" rather than "they" [Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:19; 27:1-28:16]. He would also have been present during subsequent activities of Paul and other leading Christians, although he was not taking an active part and so does not use "we". He seems to have had only a background role at this time, perhaps as a kind of student-helper.
- He is the fellow-worker whom St Paul mentions in three of the letters which he wrote while he was imprisoned in Rome:
 - "Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas" [Colossians 4:14].
 - "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers" [Philemon 23-24].
 - "Luke alone is with me" [2 Timothy 4:11].

Please skim quickly through Acts 16, Acts 20-21 and Acts 27-28. If you would like to find the places mentioned, there are some useful maps (4-6) at <https://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/bj-paul-maps/>

- i) How do you think Luke felt about (a) Paul? (b) the good news of Jesus? (c) the dangers he encountered? Does he give any indication of how he responded?
- ii) What can we learn from Luke's example?

2. Why did St Luke write a Gospel?

Please read Luke 1:1-4.

- i) What does the passage tell us about the information available to Luke?
- ii) What can we learn from Luke about how best to tell people about Jesus?

3. What is special about Luke's Gospel?

Each year the lectionary focuses on one of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark or Luke. These are sometimes called the 'synoptic' (i.e. 'overview') Gospels, because each of them tries to give a reasonably complete account of Jesus's life and teaching. This year (C) we are focusing on Luke.

- i) Have you ever noticed any differences of approach between Matthew, Mark and Luke? For instance, do any of them seem *particularly* interested in things like fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, social justice, personal behaviour, obedience to authority, mercy, women, non-Jews....?
- ii) Have you ever noticed any of Jesus's actions or teachings which are recorded in Luke's Gospel but not the others? Do they seem to have any particular themes?

Don't worry if you can't think of any answers for these questions yet – this is just the beginning of our journey with Luke.

4. Luke and you

What are you personally hoping to get out of studying Luke's Gospel?