

# Luke's Gospel: Context and Themes

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## *Context*

- AUTHOR: by tradition, "Luke the healer" (Col 4:14; cf. Philemon 1.24; 2 Tim 4:11); otherwise unknown, but someone well-educated in both the Bible (Septuagint) and Greco-Roman culture
- NARRATIVE: First of a two-part story, continued in Acts of the Apostles
- RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER GOSPELS: Written with conscious awareness of existence of other "account[s] of the events that have been fulfilled among us" (in contrast with, e.g., Mark's Gospel or perhaps John's Gospel)
- LANGUAGE: sophisticated writing with large vocabulary; many echoes of Septuagint phrasing
- AUDIENCE: educated, urban (young?) members of Greco-Roman society throughout the Mediterranean region

## *Themes*

- GOD'S ANCIENT "PLAN" (Greek, *boule*), the coming of the Messianic Era, is being fulfilled in the events of Jesus' ministry and passion and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
- GOD'S PLAN EXPRESSED IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES IS COMING TO FRUITION through God's work being done not in places of worldly power and authority but amongst the *anawim*, the faithful poor.
- JERUSALEM, FOR ALL ITS SINS, REMAINS THE *OMPHALOS*, the "navel" of the world, from which God's plan emerges.
- THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO INSPIRED THE PROPHETS CONTINUES TO GUIDE THE FAITHFUL ALONG THE WAY, in both word and deed.
- JESUS' MINISTRY OF "RELEASE" (JUBILEE) (see Luke 4:18ff) is all-encompassing of everything that holds God's people "captive," including sins, debts, illness, demonic possession, and social exclusion.
- TABLE FELLOWSHIP is one of the central means by which one makes manifest one's commitment to following Jesus' Way.
- JESUS' "PASSION" was the ultimate expression of God's love for humanity, and a transformation of what it means to be "messiah" (Christ).
- PEOPLE MUST MAKE A CHOICE FOR OR AGAINST GOD'S "WAY," and having made a choice for it, must stick to it no matter what the cost or consequences.
- DISCIPLESHIP WILL GENERATE CONFLICT AND DIVISION as a means of "sifting wheat" or "bearing fruit."
- PRAYER IS THE MEANS FOR DISCERNING GOD'S WAY amidst many other competing messages presented to Jesus and his disciples and also the means of empowerment to "walk" on the Way.
- WEALTH OR POSSESSIONS ARE OFTEN ONE OF THE MAJOR OBSTACLES to a life of discipleship.
- JOY, NOT FEAR, is the consequence of following God's Way.
- NO ONE IS TO BE EXCLUDED FROM PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S REIGN, whether on the basis of ethnicity (Jew vs. gentile), gender (male vs. female), or economic or social status (Pharisees, scribes and the rich vs. the poor, the sick, the possessed, tax collectors, and "sinners").

- JESUS' MINISTRY AND MISSION ARE TO BE CONTINUED by those empowered to serve in his name.