

Introduction to the Bible [series 11]

The Gospel of Luke

According to scholars Luke used the gospel of Mark as one of his main sources. Luke had his own unique perspective in his narratives on the life of Jesus and his ministry. Luke had at his disposal already existing written and oral traditions about Jesus. Luke is also the author of Acts of the Apostles that tells the story of the early church. For Luke, Jesus was the Jewish Messiah but his good news is meant for the whole world; Jesus is universal savior.

Authorship of the Gospel: Luke's prologue 1:1-4 identifies the author as a Christian. He did research to find out 'eyewitnesses and ministers of the word for events that have been fulfilled among us' [life of Jesus]. He investigated everything accurately. In Acts of the Apostles, Luke is a travelling companion of Paul in some of his journeys. Luke had considerable knowledge of the geography of Roman empire. Luke opens his gospel in Jerusalem and in Acts his narrative ends in Rome [Jerusalem to the ends of the earth-Acts 1:8]. Writings of Paul mention Luke as Paul's companion/coworker: Philemon 23-24; Colossians 4:14; 2Timothy 4:9-11. 2nd century Justin the Martyr and 3rd century Tertullian identify the author of the gospel as Paul's companion Luke.

- **Patron-client relationship in Greco-Roman world:** Patrons were socially high-ranking people who had the means to fund literary or art works. It was not uncommon for authors to dedicate literary/art works to patrons who sponsored them. This may be the case with Luke-Acts, with Theophilus being the patron and Luke his client. In both gospel of Luke [1:4] and Acts [1:1], Luke refers to Theophilus in the introduction as 'most excellent Theophilus'. We see similar patron-client relationship between 1st century Jewish historian Josephus and his patron Epaphroditus. In his work '*Against Apion*' 1:1-3 Josephus wrote: 'in the history of antiquities, most excellent Epaphroditus, I believe that I made clear...'

Date of Composition and Audience: Luke was writing his gospel and Acts of the Apostles sometime in the second half of 1st century AD. Luke is writing after Paul's arrival in Rome [Acts 27-28], which happened in the early 60s AD. Most scholars believe Luke used Mark gospel as a source [written around 70 AD] and therefore, Luke-Acts were written sometime between 80-85 AD. Luke's audience was largely gentile Christians. Luke's inclusion of gentile male converts in Christian community without requiring circumcision strongly suggests that his main audience was gentile Christians. There is also evidence from the gospel: when Jesus was rejected by his native people in Nazareth [Luke 4:16-30], he tells the crowd, 'just like prophet Elijah and Elisha, the good-news will be taken to the gentiles [non-Israelites]. Peter's vision in Acts 10:9-16 gives another evidence, Peter says: 'in truth, I see that God shows no partiality'.

To be continued...

Father Jose