

January 7, 2010

THO 4114

Gospel Interpretation: Luke

Overview

Gospel of Luke

Luke Volume 1: The Gospel according to Luke

A story detailing the beginning of a profound revolution in the existing landscape of economic and religious stinginess (created by “limited good”) and conflict (created by the struggle for honour).

It all begins to happen in the person of Jesus, who proclaims the good news of the action of the God of Israel toward all who are in need, whether they are Jewish or not.

Lk 1 – 2: The Lukan Infancy Accounts

- It begins in the Temple
- Two annunciations and Two Birth Stories (John and Jesus)
 - John: from priestly family, a miraculous birth (cf. Samuel, Samson), with family
 - Jesus: from family of no significance, a suspicious pregnancy, no extended family
- “Great Expectations”: Apocalyptic Victory of Israel over the Gentiles in the “mother of all battles”
 - The hymns of Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Simeon and the words of Anna reveal Israelite hopes

Lk 3.1 – 9.50: The Galilean Ministry of Jesus

- Baptism (the prophetic preparation) and Temptation (spiritual exercises designed to prepare the “athlete” for the tough job ahead)
- The big day arrives (the sermon in Nazareth: 4.16-30) and so does disappointment
- The gathering of “troops” for the apocalyptic battle (Lk 5.1-6.16: Peter, other fishermen, Levi)
- The sermon “on the plain” (6.17-49): God cares for those in need
 - Just as God had through Elijah and Elishah (Lk 7: Centurion and widow of Nain: cf. Naaman and the widow mentioned in Lk 4)
- The disappointment extends to John (7.18-35)
- God’s action in Christ (the gospel) extends to all in need
 - A sinful woman (7.36-50), a demon possessed woman (8.2), the Gerasene demoniac (8.26-39), a woman with a flow of blood and a dying little girl (8.42-56)
 - He makes them all his family members! (“daughter” (8.48), “these are my mother and my brothers” 8.21)
- A first-taste of what is to come: Empowering the followers (9.1-50)

Lk 9.51 – 19.40: On the road

- Life on the road, in the shadow of the cross (9.52-10.24)
- Stories about how to live life “on the road”:
 - Good Samaritan 10.25-37 (what it means to love your neighbour)
 - Lord’s Prayer and Friends 11.1-13 (the Father provides graciously to all)
 - Cautions against legal scrupulosity 11.37- 14.34; 19.39 (parsimonious grace which is the antithesis of God’s gracious generosity)
 - God’s generosity: delighting in the restoration of what was lost (15.1- 19.27, incl. Prodigal Son, Two men who go up to the Temple to pray)

Lk 19.41 – 24.52: Jerusalem

- The pursuit of Jesus by the scribes and High Priests (19.41-21.4)
- The apocalyptic end of the Temple (21.5-36)
- Final words to Jesus' fellow travelers on the road: lead as servants (22.1-46)
- The death and resurrection of Jesus, followed by his appearance "on the road" (22.47-24.49)
- Back to the Temple where it all began (24.50-53)

A title for the “Gospel of Luke”?

How Luke wants the reader to read this text.

Luke 1.1-4 (Literal translation)

- “Since many have put their hand time and again to setting forth in an orderly fashion a narrative concerning the actions that have come to fulfilment among us, just as eyewitnesses who were there from the beginning, and who had become ministers of the word (or “matter”), have delivered (them) to us,
- it seemed (right) to me, too, as someone who had tracked everything accurately from the very beginning to write down in order (or “immediately”?) for you, most noble Theophilus, so that you might know the assuredness concerning the words (or “matters”) of which you were taught.”

Some questions to ask

- How do we know what words mean? (e.g., setting hand to, orderly fashion, narrative, etc.) How can we find out? What if the word is never again used by Luke? What does that mean?
- What kind of fulfilment is the author talking about in the phrase “the actions that have come to fulfilment among us”?
- Does the author include himself among “eyewitnesses” and/or “ministers”?
- Does the word “delivered” mean anything specific? (cf. 1 Cor 11 and 15)
- Is Luke also composing a “narrative”? Does he say so?
- What does the phrase “tracked everything accurately” imply?
- What is the goal of Luke’s writing?
- Is Theophilus historical (i.e., real)? Why do we ask this question? If he is real, is he the audience, Luke’s *patron*, or something else? How much does Theophilus know? Why does Luke think that he needs to write what he is writing for Theophilus?

What can we learn from this?

- It is absolutely crucial that you ask as many questions as possible of the text (rather than just looking for answers in a commentary).
 - This raises the question: How should we use a commentary?
- It is important that you make some tentative answers to your questions (rather than just asking questions), and that you do so in an intellectually acceptable way.
 - Like a commentary writer, you should set forth the options that are possible as answers to your question.
 - You should adopt the most probable option as a tentative answer.
 - You should have good evidence that allows you to adopt that option.
 - The evidence must be supported by logic that connects the evidence to the answer, and to other answers to other questions. (For example, it is logical to think that what the author writes in Lk 1.1-4 is probably support by material elsewhere in his writings, e.g., whether he is an eyewitness or not, or always.)