

The Gospel of Luke and Redaction Criticism

1. Introduction

It is almost universally accepted that the same author wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Both are addressed to 'Theophilus' (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1) and the Book of Acts refers back to the 'first book' (1:1). This means that although Luke can be interpreted alongside the other gospels, the fact that it forms a unity with Acts affects the way it is interpreted. The Gospel of Luke uses some of the material from Mark, but it also has a great deal of unique material (L) including some of the most well-known infancy narratives and parables.

2. Authorship – Origin – Date

The gospel is traditionally linked to Luke, the travelling companion of Paul (cf. Philemon 24; Col. 4:14; II Tim. 4:11). There is evidence in the texts that the author was well educated (Luke is referred to in Col 4:10-14 as 'Luke the beloved physician'), and the change from 'they' to 'we' in Acts is frequently interpreted as relating to eyewitness testimony (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16). But since nothing in either writing suggests specialist medical knowledge (and details in Acts do not always match those of Paul's letters), most scholars leave the question of authorship open.

Luke used sections of Mark (although less so than Matthew) and Q. Concern for non-Jews is evident, and traditionally Luke has been taken as a gospel written by a Gentile for Gentiles. However, this ignores a great deal of positive attitude toward, and concern for, Judaism and the sense of Jesus as fulfilling Jewish hopes. The most likely readership would be God-fearers – Gentiles immersed in a Hellenistic culture and interested in Judaism, but not fully converted. The most likely location would be one of the Mediterranean cities, possibly in Greece or Syria.

The prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24) is taken as evidence of a date post 70 CE. Like Matthew, it is generally dated around 80-100 CE, but no real clues are given as to the date of the gospel. Jewish concerns would place it in the earlier part of these two decades (since conflicts between Judaism and Jewish/Gentile Christianity faded during the second century).

3. Content

Like Matthew, Luke has added new sections: an infancy narrative, teachings,

and post-resurrection appearances. However, the infancy narrative, like the structure of the Gospel, is completely different in Luke. Jesus' teaching falls within an extended travel narrative (9:51-18:14).

- 1. Infancy Narratives (chapters 1-2)** These begin with announcements of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. The latter centres on Mary (rather than on Joseph, as in Matthew). Nazareth was Mary's hometown, but the birth of Jesus takes place in Bethlehem ('City of David'). They remain in the area and take Jesus to the temple when Mary is due for ritual purification (40 days after birth). Luke has the only reference to Jesus' boyhood in canonical gospels (2:41-42)
- 2. Preparation for Public Ministry (3:1-4:13)** Luke refers to the ministry of Jesus, his baptism and temptation. Luke's genealogy, however, comes at the start of Jesus' ministry. It tells us Jesus' age (only source for this) and traces him to Joseph who was father to Jesus 'as was thought' (3:23). The genealogy ultimately goes back to Adam (the father of the human race) rather than the Jewish patriarchs. The Holy Spirit is a key theme through out the early part of the gospel, inspiring those involved in the birth and Jesus himself (4:1, 14, 18).
- 3. Ministry in Galilee (4:14-9:50)** Luke moves the visit to Nazareth to the start of Jesus' ministry. Here he reads from the scroll in the synagogue, and Luke interprets Isaiah 61 as applied to Jesus' ministry. The Nazareth 'mission statement' thus functions as a programme for Jesus' ministry: the anointed prophet brings 'good news to the poor... proclaims release of the captives'. The remaining Galilean ministry mirrors Mark (but with some Q material) in that it contains miracles, conflicts and questions of Jesus' identity, culminating in Peter's confession and the transfiguration.
- 4. Journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27)** Jesus 'sets his face to Jerusalem' (9:51) but takes a while to arrive in the city. The goal is repeated several times (13:22, 17:11) suggesting that this is a deliberate motif. This section contains parables unique to Luke (Good Samaritan (10:25-37) and Lost Sheep, Coin and Son (Luke 15)).
- 5. Ministry in Jerusalem (19:28-21:38)** As in Mark, Jesus' conflicts in the Temple area are both occasions for teaching and for the eschatological discourse (Luke 21).
- 6. Last supper, Death and Burial (22:1-23:56)** Luke draws on the Markan account, but includes his own material (e.g., Pilate sends Jesus to Herod Antipas; the penitent thief is crucified with Jesus).

- 7. Resurrection Appearances (24:1-53)** Jesus' appearances are confined to the Jerusalem area, including Luke's unique story of the road to Emmaus (Acts continues with disciples waiting in Jerusalem).

4. Luke's Special Emphases

- **Salvation** Luke's emphasis on Gentiles is found in the context of a wider concern on who is now the 'true' Israel'. Jesus' rejection by the Jews does not thwart God's purpose, which extends salvation beyond the original boundaries.
- **Concern for the Poor and the Oppressed** Luke stresses that Jesus includes the marginalized (those outside the religious establishment) in the Kingdom, including gentiles and 'sinners' and the poor.
- **Women** Luke gives a great deal of prominence to women. Within the social world of the author, this represented a significant change in attitude.
- **Holy Spirit** Along with Acts, Luke gives a key role to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is present from the beginning of the infancy narratives and at key moments of God's action for salvation.
- **True Discipleship** Jesus is the model of true discipleship, exemplified by humility, right use of possessions. and prayer.

5. Redaction Criticism: Luke Shapes his Sources

Redaction criticism arose in biblical studies in the mid to late 20th century with pioneering works by Günther Bornkamm (on Matthew), Hans Conzelmann (on Luke) and Willi Marxsen (on Mark). This was a reaction against source and form critics who seemed to assign no significant role to the gospel writers, other than as gathering existing written or oral sources. Redaction critics stressed the shaping of the material by the editors (redactors) and thus looked for clues within the text that point to the author's particular intent or theology.

Gospel redaction is based on a comparison of the way that different writers use the same material, and focuses especially on summaries, modifications, insertions and omissions, as well as the general arrangement and structuring of the material. Redaction criticism has more recently given way to literary and ideological readings, although it continues to influence NT scholarship. Few scholars today seriously doubt that all the gospel writers had a particular 'agenda' that directed the way that they shaped their narrative.

Redaction criticism of Luke was dominated by Hans Conzelmann's study (1961), which stresses Luke's eschatology. He sees this as written in response to the 'delayed parousia'; Luke recasts the end times to a more indefinite future. The Holy Spirit is the substitute for the delayed eschatological fulfilment. This view is not now widely accepted, although Luke does stress the present fulfilment of salvation in the activity of Jesus, the embodiment of salvation for God's people. This activity is seen in the actions of the Holy Spirit, who points to the universal salvation through Jesus.

Like many critical methods, Redaction criticism is accused of circularity in method. The text is used to identify theological intent, but this in turn is used to decide whether a particular change in the text might have been due to the redactor. Furthermore, theological intent might lead a redactor to alter source material or to leave it unchanged. There is, however, some evidence of a revival in Redaction criticism of Luke, or at least an interest in the theology of Luke-Acts. This has focussed on Christology: the picture of Jesus painted by Luke. More than mere titles, the whole narrative portrays Jesus in various lights: Prophet, Royal Messiah, Righteous One, Saviour.

Redaction Criticism: A Test Case

What do these two accounts of Jesus being anointed disclose about the purpose behind their use in Luke and Mark?

Luke 7:36-50

³⁶ One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷ And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸ She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak." ⁴¹ "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus said to him, "You have judged rightly." ⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." ⁴⁸ Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Mark 14:3-9

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴ But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."