

**Following Jesus With Luke**  
***One Author, Two Volumes, and***  
***an Expanding Kingdom Purpose***  
***(session 1 of 9)***

by Claire R. Pfann

University of the Holy Land, Jerusalem

---

*The following is a professionally produced transcription  
of the author's audio message. It is a full and accurate transcript,  
formalized and lightly edited for readability and clarity by JC Studies.  
We apologize to the author and reader for any edits that were missed.*

---



**Claire:** Welcome. We're so excited and delighted to have you here joining us today for the first session on our study of the Gospel of Luke. It's not fair to choose favorite gospels, but I love Luke a whole lot. When I teach John, I love John a whole lot and they're all good, but there is something extraordinary about Luke and I hope that through these sessions today, you are going to get as excited about Luke as I am.

I don't know that most Christians realize it, but Luke has written more of the New Testament than any single author

because the Gospel of Luke is only the first part of a two-volume work he has written. We don't think about it because, of course, the Gospel of Luke is separated from the Acts of the Apostles, which is part two of his composition. It's separated by the gospel of John, but if Luke was standing here today, he might want to rearrange that bookshelf and put John here and put Luke and Acts of the Apostles because these two works are meant to be read together.

The Acts of the Apostles is Luke's commentary on his gospel. The gospel is his preparation for the Acts of the Apostles. We're going to take a few minutes as we begin our study to examine how these two volumes are interrelated. They compliment each other.

In writing these two volumes, Luke has taken the good news of Jesus, which is the Gospel, and brought it into the telling of the good news of the church and the good news of the church and the Acts of the Apostles is the continuation of the ministry of Jesus in the world through his disciples. This author is a man with an overarching perspective on God's salvation activity in human history and through his extremely wonderful, creative literary skill, he will take us from a small village in the Galilee to an apartment in Rome. In doing that, he'll link us back all the way to Adam and he'll look forward to the second coming. He is a literary master.

As we begin our study, I want to point out some of the ways that we see these two volumes, the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, some ways that we see them interconnected because it's a very purposeful structure that Luke has given to the two volumes.

The first thing that we notice is that both the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel of Luke are addressed to the same person. In the Acts of the Apostles 1:1, Luke writes, "In the first book, oh, Theophilus I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day when He was taken up after He had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen." Where's that first volume? Of course, it is Luke's Gospel.

In Luke 1:1-4, he writes, "In as much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who, from the beginning, were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also having followed all things closely for some time past to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed." Aha, our two books are connected by the recipient of this writing, Theophilus.

Now, we don't really know who Theophilus is historically. We can assume that he is already a believer because these books are written to Christians and Theophilus has been instructed. Things are being accomplished. Things are happening in Theophilus' world and in the world of Luke. That means he's been, I think we would say mentored and disciplined in today's language. In the mid-20th century, we would have said catechized because catechism is learning what it is you believe.

He has become a disciple of Jesus. It may be that Theophilus is even a patron, a patron of Luke who commissions him to give some type of instruction about the life of Jesus and about the

history of the church, the early generations, the early decades of the church because oftentimes, works were commissioned like this.

In our other courses on Mark and Matthew, we've talked about how the process of writing a gospel is not an isolated task. The process of writing a gospel, as Luke especially makes clear here, involves research, interviews, collecting written sources such as exist, talking to eyewitnesses. Luke says in 1:1-4, "Many have undertaken to write a narrative of the things that have been accomplished."

As a gospel writer, Luke is aware that there is all kinds of writing activity going on out there, and it's not all of equal value or equal worth. Some of these gospels might be quite imaginative in a negative sense, suggesting things about Jesus that are not historically verifiable or that were not actually true.

We realized that when the Canon of the New Testament was put together by the church fathers and the councils, they could look at all those dozen gospels or so. Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter, and the four gospels that they felt were historically credible, that reflected genuinely the teaching and the works of Jesus and his passion, death, and resurrection, that reflected the true context in which his historic ministry emerged were the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

We look to them for our historical core of identifying the good news of Jesus and about Jesus in His words, in His works, and the important core of Christian belief in His passion, His salvific death, and His resurrection. But this little comment by Luke in Luke 1:1-4 really shows us that there's writing activity going on all over, it's happening in Antioch of Syria. It's happening in Alexandria in Egypt. It could be happening in Corinth. It could be happening in Rome. Where Christians gathered, they always want to know more, and people are actively involved trying to find out more.

Luke says, I stand here as a reliable historian and a good biographer. Of course, he's working by the rules of writing that apply in the 1st century. He's not writing for a 21st-century audience. He's not telling us things in exactly the way we would like to have. We'd like to know all the details, we'd like to know all the dates, all the places, but he is writing according to the tenets of history, how you write history in the 1st century, and that includes, in particular, in his gospel working with the events of Jesus' life in a way that shows their bigger meaning.

We're going to see that Luke has a freedom to group events, which may not have happened in that chronological sequence, but to group events together that share a common conclusion, a common understanding, a common focus. We'll look at examples of that as we go through the gospel.

He wants to write a good gospel, a credible gospel, a gospel that is trustworthy. He tells Theophilus, "I've talked to the eyewitnesses and the ministers of the word." It means that he's talked to the first generation, the apostolic generation, and he's talked to the sub-apostolic

generation. Now, of course, eyewitnesses would be people like Peter, James the brother of Jesus, ministers of the word would be people like Paul.

Paul had not been an eyewitness of Jesus, but Paul was a full-fledged minister of the word. He had a visionary experience of Jesus and probably more than once. He could talk to John Mark who accompanied Paul, Barnabas, and Peter at various points and who was the son of a woman who had a house church in Jerusalem.

The network work goes out from there. He could go to Cesarea Maritima and talk to the four daughters of Philip, the evangelist. Luke will describe for his readers, the ministry of Philip in Samaria. And then he makes a note towards the end of the Acts of the Apostles, as they are coming on their return trip to Jerusalem, that Paul meets the four daughters of Philip.

Well, think about them. These four young women live in Cesarea Maritima where there is a Christian gathering, a house church I think we would call it. It is host to both Jewish believers and Gentile believers at this major port city. Imagine all the people who would have had dinner at their table. All the conversations they would have been able to have, talking about the early evangelism of the Samaritans, for example. Luke, who travels extensively with Paul, has been to the church in Antioch, has been in Asia Minor and in Europe, and has access to these resources.

Luke is so interested in gathering the data and making it be as verifiable, real, and true, and then he thinks about what he hears and he looks for the God meaning of it all. He has followed all things closely for some time past he says, and he's going to write an orderly account. When he says in order, as I mentioned, he doesn't necessarily mean chronological order, but in order which puts together the importance of certain understandings about Jesus.

He connects things thematically, so that Theophilus, a believer (perhaps his patron) will have assurance, will know the truth concerning the things about which he's been informed. Why would Theophilus need assurance? Why would he need certainty? Why would he need to know the truth? This is the big question of Luke-Acts because it's these two volumes together, which are supposed to answer some burning question, which is the issue of this gospel and the Acts of the Apostles.

What is the burning question for Theophilus?

When we look at the gospel of Mark, we know that that community in crisis has a burning question of persecution, martyrdom, and no apparent second coming. When we look at the gospel of Matthew we see a community which had such strong Jewish roots, and this community has been separated, rejected by parent Judaism, by the synagogue and the synagogue authorities, and is trying to redefine as a whole the experience in Jesus; looking forward to expanding that mission to the Gentiles. They, too, experienced in that gospel a sense of loss.

There are debates over how to interpret Scripture. But I'm asking, what is the crisis for the Gospel of Luke that the Gospel of Luke is trying to address? As we read this gospel we're going to become sensitive to it.

What has been accomplished in the time of Luke and Theophilus is both unexpected and surprising. We'll become aware of that as we look at who the audience is as well. This lies ahead of us, it's part of our journey, but for now we're talking about how these two volumes are connected and we want to give a few more points.

We see that in both the Gospel and in the Acts, we have a prologue to Theophilus. It's two volumes written for a single recipient and of course, which will be published. We find that both open with the presence of the Holy Spirit coming sovereignly. In the Gospel of Luke with our first two chapters of infancy narrative, the Spirit comes upon Mary. The Spirit comes upon Elizabeth. The Spirit is present at the baptism. The Spirit is present from the opening pages of the gospel.

Then of course in the Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit comes on the day of Pentecost in an even greater way. Jesus, in chapter one says, "Wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Spirit," and in chapter two of the Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit comes. Theophilus, the Spirit coming, both gospels have baptism as a big feature in the very opening pages of the book. Of course, the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist is the point at which God proclaims, "This is my son, my chosen one listen to him."

In the Acts of the Apostles, right after the Spirit comes and Peter gives his sermon. We have the baptism of thousands of new believers, which takes place in Jerusalem, probably in all of the ritual immersion pools surrounding the Temple Mount and at the pool of Siloam. You realize that the pool of Siloam, the actual pool of Siloam where Jesus sent the blind man in John chapter nine has been excavated at the far South Eastern tip of what had been the city in the time of Jesus and that immersion pool, which was for public use for people coming up to the temple. It could accommodate hundreds of people at a time.

How do we envision this baptism on the day of Pentecost with 3000 people at least getting baptized. We can picture them just walking down the hill to the pool of Siloam and having the immersions there. It's very, very exciting archeology. You should all come to Jerusalem someday. We have Theophilus, we have the Holy Spirit, we have baptism. Then in the Gospel of Luke, we begin a geographical sequence. In the Gospel of Luke Jesus goes up to the Galilee and he begins his ministry in the Galilee.

When that Galilee ministry concludes, the Galilee ministry is concluding in chapter nine, verse 50. In chapter nine, verse 51 to 19:44, we have the most dramatic feature in this gospel. Which is this long trip that Jesus takes from the Galilee to Jerusalem going down the Jordan valley coming up through Jericho and over the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. In the gospel of Luke, he spends 11 chapters getting there. In the gospel of Matthew and the gospel of Mark it's much, much shorter journey, but Luke uses this narrative of travel. This narrative of motion, this way of a cross a pilgrimage journey to bring Jesus from the Galilee to Jerusalem.

He arrives in Jerusalem in chapter 19, and the rest of the gospel from chapter 19 through chapter 24 takes place in Jerusalem. We have a very simple geographical movement, the gospel moves this story of Jesus from the Galilee to Jerusalem and ends there and leaves us there. In the Gospel of Luke, the angels tell the ladies at the tomb to remain in Jerusalem. They tell the disciples remain in Jerusalem, don't go to the Galilee. Don't go anywhere else but the Holy Spirit is going to come, remain in Jerusalem to receive that promise of the Father.

Galilee to Jerusalem and the Acts of the Apostles pickup in Jerusalem and the next seven chapters, Acts chapter one to chapter seven is all in Jerusalem. That is 14 chapters between the gospel and the Acts of the Apostles in Jerusalem with the focal point being the temple. It's not just about the city, but it's really about the temple because the temple is where the presence of God is.

Then from Acts chapter eight, movement happens again. People are on the move. The persecution begins in Acts chapter eight, the Jewish Christians who come from the diaspora, the Hellenistic Jewish Christians, we call them are sent out and slowly but surely this gospel is taken from Jerusalem, the heart of the Jewish world and makes its way by Acts chapter 28 to Rome, the heart of the Gentile world.

Luke is using geography as a structure to reflect what has transpired historically and theologically, because this brings us back to what might be the crisis that Theophilus faces or that Luke and the community of faith faces towards the end of the first century. By the time the gospel is written, the number of Jews who are coming to faith in Jesus as the Messiah is diminishing. By the time the gospel is written, Jerusalem has been destroyed.

The leadership of the church has shifted away from Jerusalem to places like Antioch of Syria and shockingly, as we see in the pages of the Acts of the Apostles, the number of Gentiles who come to faith in Jesus, the number of Gentiles who become Christians is growing, increasing, expanding and nobody anticipated that. The Second Coming has been delayed. People may have thought, when the Second Coming happens, then all the nations of the world will recognize that Jesus is the Messiah.

Instead, the Second Coming is delayed and more and more Gentiles throughout the world are coming to faith. This poses a crisis for the early leadership to decide whether or not those Gentiles would have to convert to Judaism in order to believe or whether they would be allowed to follow Jesus without converting. That question is resolved in Acts Chapter 15.

The big question that Luke wants to answer is he tackles the same issue. The question is, if the Jewish people have an eternal covenant with God and so few Jewish people are coming to faith in Jesus, did something go wrong? Has God abandoned His people? If the God of Israel, who sent His Son Jesus to be the Messiah and savior of the world, if that God would abandon the Jewish people who had received the covenant promises, how can we Gentile Christians who are the new kids on the block, how can we put our trust in him that he won't one day abandon us when we fail when we are hard-hearted when we don't live up?



Does God keep covenant? Does God keep his promises?

Throughout Luke-Acts, Luke wants to reassure his readers that the coming in of the Gentiles as followers of the God of Israel, a way opened through Jesus, that was something that was prophesied in the Old Testament in the Hebrew Bible from of old and that it was directed by the Holy Spirit. This movement among the Gentiles was not something that Paul thought up or somebody else thought up. It was something that the Holy Spirit sovereignly made happen. It is in full harmony with what the tenor, what the thrust of Scripture had been, from the beginning. God had always intended for the Gentiles to come in.

God had always prophesied this and he will go to great lengths to show us how this fulfilled Scripture and how the Holy Spirit is the director of the program, not humankind. This then gives us reassurance as Gentile Christians, that yes, we're on the right road and God has kept covenant and he will keep covenant with us. Of course, that brings up the other issue. Did God keep covenant with the Jews or were they abandoned? This is, of course, a question that Paul deals with in Romans 9-11. It shows you how they struggled to understand why more Jews did not come to faith in Jesus at the time that Jesus walked the earth. That was a puzzle.

What Paul calls the mystery of the Gentiles, the fact that all of us here 2000 years later are still talking about this and are still following Jesus. That was a puzzle. Luke wants to reassure us which he does in the opening pages of his gospel, that God has kept His promises to Israel, that the pious of Israel, who were waiting on the Lord, recognize the fulfillment of his promises as they came. As we look at the infancy narrative, we're going to see those people. Zechariah and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna, the disciples, the men disciples, the women disciples, the apostles.

Where hearts were looking for the blessing of God and the hope of Israel and the promises of God, they saw it, they realized it and God did not abandon Israel. He has fulfilled his promises and he will continue to fulfill. This is an amazing two-volume work and we'll not look lots at Acts but we'll look a little bit at Acts because it's always in dialogue with the gospel. We see that the trajectory of Luke is much bigger than just telling the story of Jesus. He wants to continue by telling the story of Jesus in the church today. He wants to reassure his Gentile readership, people like Theophilus that, indeed, God has kept covenant and will keep covenant there's nothing to worry about.

That does give us a little sense of things that we should watch for. As we look at this gospel we realize that the gospel is addressed to Greek readers. Luke is a literary genius. He is the kind of writer who can adjust his style of writing to fit the material that he's talking about. When he begins in his gospel describing the stories of Zechariah and Elizabeth and Mary and Joseph and Simeon and Anna, he writes in a kind of Greek that sounds like the Septuagint. The Septuagint is the Old Testament in Greek. He writes in a way that just echoes the Septuagint and just makes the Jewish readers and those who know the Septuagint in the diaspora, it makes them very comfortable.

As he takes the Gospel story from Nazareth to Bethlehem to Galilee to Jerusalem and then in the Acts of the Apostles starts to make that move from Jerusalem to Asia Minor and to Europe, the style changes. He starts to write like Hellenistic writers, like the people who would write the lives of the Caesars or the history of Thucydides. He starts to write like a Hellenistic historian and he shows the mastery of his genre by suiting the voice of his writing to the place where he's writing.

What we know then is that his readers also are astute readers of Greek and yet they are familiar with the Hebrew scriptures. They're familiar with the Old Testament in Greek because his book is so rich in allusions to the Old Testament. It's so deeply grounded in the Bible stories that the Jewish world would be familiar with and those who would have been around synagogues would have been familiar with that clearly, he's writing to Gentile Christians who have familiarity with the Old Testament in Greek, the Septuagint.

We often talk about who is Luke. This is one of the better-known figures from the New Testament, of course, because Luke is a beloved physician, Colossians 4:10, who accompanies Paul on his travels in Asia Minor in places like Ephesus, who goes to Philippi with Paul who comes down to Corinth and then is sent back to Macedonia, who goes to Troas. He's the kind of guy that Paul can leave in charge of a congregation while Paul moves on.

He's not a Jew, though, because when Paul talks about the people who are with him at the prison, in Colossians 4, first, he gives a list of those who are his brothers from the circumcision, that means his Jewish, fellow Jewish Christians. Then he gives the list of the other people and Luke is in the list of the other people. Luke does not seem to be a Jew by birth or by conversion, because he's not included. Whereas Mark is with Paul and Mark is listed in the group of Jewish believers who are with him. Luke is listed in the second line of the people who are not from the circumcision.

Yet he knows so much about the Scripture, that we would want to suggest that he's a God-fearer. You remember that God-fearers are a category of Gentiles in the first century who were drawn to Judaism. They would attend the synagogue, they would read the Scripture, they would listen to the Torah portion, they would listen to the sermons.

People like Cornelius in Acts 10, he's a God-fearer. He hasn't taken the final step of converting but he prays the prayers, he gives alms to help the poor. He's immersing himself in the Scripture, or Lydia, the woman who Paul meets at the river in a city of Philippi. Not again, conversions, but God-fearers people who are just drawn to the truth of the God of Israel. The type of knowledge that he has, the type of depth of understanding of Scripture that Luke has would indicate that perhaps he is from that group of God-fearers.

Which he highlights so much in his Acts of the Apostles and which would account for this wonderful blend of tremendous Greek writing style, but also tremendous sensitivity to the narratives of Scripture, to the language of the Septuagint and his ability to take those things and create out of them an overarching story of Jesus and His Church.



We're going to pick up in our next session, we'll look a little bit more at the ties that bind Luke and Acts and then we'll move into the outline of the book and the infancy narratives. I hope you'll join us. Luke is one of my favorite gospels. I say that unashamedly. It has a wonderful message to tell to all of us.

**[00:30:04] [END OF AUDIO]**

=====

For more great teaching resources, go to our online store [www.jcstudies.store](http://www.jcstudies.store)

Copyright © Center for Judaic-Christian Studies (JC Studies)

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the Center for Judaic Christian Studies (JC Studies), email: [thecenter@jcstudies.com](mailto:thecenter@jcstudies.com).*