



## Week 1: Background and Introduction

### Introduction:

#### About the Gospel of Luke

Like other Gospels, Luke's Gospel recounts the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God, who fulfills all of his Father's saving promises. Unlike other Gospels, Luke has a companion volume—Acts—in which salvation advances, in Jesus' name, to "the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Luke's Gospel invites us to be part of this worldwide spread of the Christian message by showing how Jesus brings salvation to the last, the lost, and the least.

Luke's Gospel describes a world turned upside down. Sinners are saved while religious leaders are exposed as frauds. "Outsiders" embrace Jesus while "insiders" reject him. The poor rejoice while the rich are "sent away empty" (Luke 1:53). Because such paradoxes can create doubt, Luke writes to assure us that Jesus represents the fulfillment of God's saving purposes.

The most glaring paradox Luke presents is that of Jesus himself. No person has ever lived more faithfully than Jesus, yet no person has ever endured more suffering. As it points us to Jesus' cross and resurrection, Luke's Gospel prepares us to follow Jesus through hardship and humiliation, strengthened by faith in the God who exalts the lowly.

## **Date and Historical Background**

Luke was likely written in the early 60s, sometime after the events described in Acts 28 but before two major events that are not mentioned in Luke or Acts—Paul’s martyrdom in AD 64/65, and the destruction of the temple in AD 70. This means that Luke wrote within decades of Jesus’ ministry and death.

In Luke’s day, the Christian message had spread throughout Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome. The stability of the Roman empire enabled Paul and other Christian missionaries to travel extensively, preaching to Jews and Gentiles alike. Both groups had difficulty accepting the possibility that a crucified man could be the Savior of the world—Jews because crucifixion represented a divine curse, and Gentiles because crucifixion represented weakness and humiliation. Other questions were raised by the fact that many Gentile “outsiders” were embracing Jesus, while many Jewish “insiders” continued to reject him and his followers. Luke wrote, at least in part, to reassure readers that the message about Jesus is true, despite such paradoxes. Today, Luke’s Gospel continues to offer assurance to anyone who wrestles with the challenges of trusting and following Jesus.

## Setting the stage: Prophecies of the coming savior

Take a moment to read through these prophecies and reflect on/discuss which parts sound familiar to you. Think of the history of humanity and, in particular, the people of God and reflect on/discuss the anticipation of God's people as they await this savior.

### Genesis 3:14–15

So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

### Genesis 49:10

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.

### Micah 5:2

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

### Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

### Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

### Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

### Isaiah 11:1–5

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist

## Questions:

*Read Luke 1:1-4*

1. Theophilus (Luke 1:3) is likely a Gentile convert to Christianity. The themes of Luke and Acts suggest that such converts were experiencing a crisis of faith. How does Luke's prologue offer reassurance to those whose beliefs are being challenged and undermined?

Answer:

*Read Luke 1:5–38*

2. The story of Jesus, and of John as his forerunner, is a continuation of the story of the Old Testament. What features of Luke 1:5–38 as a whole make this clear, especially in light of Malachi 4:5–6?

### **Malachi 4:5–6**

“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”

Answer:

3. How do Gabriel's words to Mary (Luke 1:30–37) indicate that God is doing something profoundly new in the birth of Jesus?

Answer:

*Read Luke 1:39-80*

4. In this section, Mary and Zechariah offer poetic songs of praise to God. What do the opening verses of their songs teach us concerning the proper response to the good news about Jesus? What Old Testament promises do these songs present as fulfilled in Jesus?

Answer:

5. Salvation is a key concept in Luke—and a complex one. What aspect of salvation is emphasized in Luke 1:77? In verses 74–75?

Answer: