



SoulShare

October 10 2020 9:00—10:30 am Bible Study Discussion

Luke

I am Doctor Luke. I was trained in Greek Medicine. That training included history, literature, philosophy and art; thus, I was privileged to have the finest education available. It was at Antioch in Syria that I became acquainted with the great apostle, Paul of Tarsus, and the Jesus whom he preached. I became a believer in Jesus and a supporter of Paul.

Paul had some medical conditions and experienced the consequences of both a hard life and the high demands he put on himself, physically and mentally, not to mention spiritually. To have a physician on his team seemed to be wise, especially as he got older.

I am a systematic person and that skill was refined in my study of the history and philosophy of medicine, beginning with the Egyptians. Under Hippocrates, medicine had been separated from magic and united with ethics. But Greek philosophy and religion found no explanation for the intrinsic value of each individual human life. This discrepancy persists, even though care for people invariably becomes the underlying motivation of the medical profession. That value is understood only in the truth that people are created in the image of God.

When becoming a Christian, I naturally wanted to learn all I could about the history of Jesus and His teachings. I realized that the apostles, who were the repository of all that we knew, could not live forever. Clearly the history needed to be recorded. And so, I began to interview everyone I could to gather all the available facts. My first draft began as a letter a friend, Theophilus, but that became the final form of the book – I should say, the first book.

I think my action also stimulated John Mark to record everything taught by Simon Peter. Then Matthew, who had kept copious notes, being a tax collector used to making records, wrote his experiences, including many direct quotations of Jesus. John said that he was waiting to record his memories until after he understood everything better. John was like that – and he remembered everything.

But I spent a lot of time with Mary, mother of Jesus, who told in detail of the visit by the angel Gabriel, who announced that she would be the mother of the Christ. She also related the details of Zechariah's experience with an angel and miracle birth of John to Elisabeth, his wife, who was Mary's cousin. John was marked from birth as a prophet and became known as John the Baptizer. She also told everything about the visit of the shepherds and their amazing experience of angels in the sky. The account of Jesus as a 12-year-old staying in the Temple talking to the scholars and the anxiety of Mary and Joseph because they had apparently lost him, was fascinating.

I interviewed the twelve, except Judas, but John filled in many details about him. I was able to talk to the Bethany family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. I even found Zacchaeus open to speaking with me. John the Baptizer was gone, but Andrew had followed him before becoming a disciple of Jesus. Temple servants recalled the inner workings of the Sanhedrin at the time of Caiaphas. Pilate was gone by the time I began researching, but the experience of trying Jesus was something he never got over, according to Claudia Procula, his widow. She had become a believer and was quite candid. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus provided details of the burial. Mary Magdalene gave testimony to unique information and so did Cleopas.

The Apostles filled in the days between the resurrection and the ascension and explained Jesus' promise that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. This seemed to complete the record and I concluded the book and sent a copy to Theophilus.

When I went on with Paul, however, it became clear to me that the story was not done, and I needed to document the spread of the new faith. I sought out Peter and John regarding the choosing of a successor to Judas. Then I was awed when they detailed the dramatic experience of Pentecost. The account of Peter's sermon and the 3000 conversions on that first day were thrilling. I recorded the amazing healings, miracles, imprisonments and escapes as well as the Apostles' bold refusal to be cowed by Temple authorities. Gamaliel was very helpful and extremely interested in my work.

Peter explained the social conditions of those early days. Because of poverty, resources were shared. This was greatly helped by the generous gift of Joseph "Barnabas," which led to his nickname, meaning "Son of Encouragement." I learned of the dramatic judgement exacted by God on Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit – sudden death! Peter trembled when he told me about it and reminded me, with tears, of the mercy Jesus had shown him after denying three times that he even knew his Lord.

I learned from Peter and Philip how Deacons were appointed to oversee the distribution of food. Stephen, of course, was gone by the time I was on the scene, but Paul filled in emotional details of Stephen's amazing message, delivered prior to and during his stoning. Paul recalled the event with deep sorrow, reminding me of his murderous rampage against followers of the Way in his former life. Paul tearfully praised the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ for turning him completely around on the road to Damascus. He related in detail how he had to see and hear directly from the Lord, seated in the heavens, before he could realize that he had been attempting to persecute God Himself! Paul had to be struck blind and healed by the prayer of a believer he had come to imprison, in order to be converted. Ever after, he could empathize with those who resisted the gospel.

Peter told of how the Centurion, Cornelius and his family accepted the gospel. The Lord affirmed the inclusion of Gentiles by giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul told me of many events in his ministry and those things he was too humble to reveal were filled in by Barnabas, then Silas and Timothy. I eventually joined Paul, partly as a medical consultant, but also as a historian and fellow worker. Apollos, Aquila and Priscilla graciously answered my questions about their ministries. James, Jesus' half-brother, gave details of the Jerusalem council but declined to tell about growing up in the same home as the Son of God. The Roman commander of the Jerusalem garrison gave valuable insight regarding Paul's conflict with the Jewish officials and the plot against Paul's life, foiled by a tip from Paul's nephew. My information on Felix, Festus and Agrippa came from young servants who had seen much and spoke freely. Some had even become believers.

Paul related the story of the journey to Rome. The Centurion, Julius, was very willing to fill in many of the details that Paul skipped over. For example, there was Paul's prophecy that the ship would be lost but all aboard spared. And there was the miracle of not being harmed by a deadly snake bite, a fact that caused the people of Malta to attempt worshipping him as a god. Julius was extremely impressed not only with Paul, but with Jesus whom Paul served.

After some time in Rome, I had to leave the group, intending to return later to continue assisting Paul and completing my research. That door unexpectedly closed. My incomplete record of the growth of the church had to be sent, as it was, to Theophilus, with copies eventually shared all over the Roman world.

Now, by the grace of our wonderful Savior in Whose presence I eternally dwell, I have been shown that my book was stopped because it could not be finished by me. The message of salvation continues to spread to the ends of the earth. And it is still happening in your day. John eventually did write his book. And his final work was a vision of the end times, which must be extremely near for you. The same Jesus who ascended into the clouds at the end of His first earthy visit, will gloriously return in the clouds. Paul thought it would be in his own lifetime. It was not, but it could be any time. Perhaps in yours?

Luke, Acts, Colossians 4, 2 Timothy 4, Philemon 1

Discussion Questions

Remember that these monologues are essentially historical fiction, based on the Scripture but filling in plausible subjective details, both emotional responses and motivations. Your first task is to decide if they are reasonable.

Do you think God was preparing Luke for his ministry long before he became a believer?

In your own life do you see how God put influences and opportunities into your past to prepare you for your present life?

Might there be future things you are already prepared for?

The profession of medicine has valued human life since Hippocrates but seems to be losing the underlying justification for that view. What have been the results of that shift in world view?

Paul describes an ailment he calls “a thorn in the flesh” but it is never named. Is there a reason God may not want to identify this problem?

Some critics say that because the Gospels came later than the epistles, they were not real history. Does it make sense that they were recorded because the apostles were getting older?

Luke says that he carefully investigated everything from the beginning (of Jesus’ ministry) so it makes sense that he interviewed many people and the things he records that are not in the other gospels were from his own reporting. Details of Gabriel’s visit to Mary and Zechariah must have come from Mary.

In the case of officials not available for interview might servants have filled in details about their masters and certain events?

There is a tradition that Pilate’s wife became a believer. If true, what would this have meant to the spread of the gospel?

There are also several varying accounts of Pilate, one that he committed suicide and another that he retired disgraced. How would these outcomes affect the general public and the believers?

How does a historical account based on primary sources distinguish itself from traditions?

Does God’s judgement on Ananias and Saphira surprise you? What was their sin? Why might it be important to deal harshly at that time? Are you glad church discipline has become rare?

How do you think the early accounts affected Luke and all the believers who had come to faith later?

What insight into the workings of the Holy Spirit were revealed by the martyrdom of Steven?

Conversion stories are always powerful evangelistic tools, whether coming out of a life of sin or simply being born again. Compare Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor, dramatically becoming Paul the Apostle with Cornelius the Gentile seeker, who was basically a good man, seeking the Lord with his whole family.

The canonical Scriptures do not contain detailed accounts of the childhood of Jesus. Why do you suppose the Holy Spirit chose to omit those stories?

It seems that the book of Acts ends abruptly and is actually incomplete. Are there things in your life that you wish could have continued longer? Is God likely to have been hindered by human decisions?

Will the spread of the gospel come to a conclusion some day? What should be our response to that possibility?