
Introduction

If asked who the major theologians of the New Testament are, most Christians would probably mention Jesus, John, and Paul. Few would think of Luke; and yet his two-volume work, *Luke-Acts*, amounts to approximately one fourth of the entire New Testament! No other contributor to the New Testament wrote as much. No doubt because they primarily view Luke as a historian, readers of the New Testament are not inclined to view Luke as a significant theologian. Nevertheless, the last few decades have seen a marked increase in scholarly interest in *Luke-Acts*, and although interest in Luke's trustworthiness as a historian continues to be a topic of debate (note the recent work of Martin Hengel), more and more emphasis has been placed on the evangelist's theology. The recent commentaries of I. Howard Marshall, Joseph Fitzmyer, and David Tiede provide ample evidence of this trend. This new commentary intends to take into account some of this recent discussion and to present it in a way that is both understandable and exciting to the student of Scripture.

1. Authorship, Occasion for Writing, and Recipients

Tradition holds that the author of the anonymous two-volume work, *Luke-Acts*, was the physician Luke, traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. This position receives support from a few references in the New Testament (see Philem. 24; Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; and the so-called we sections of Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16) and from a fairly early and unanimous tradition among the church fathers. The ancient title, the "Gospel according to Luke," appears at the end of the Gospel in the oldest surviving Greek manuscript (*P⁷⁵*), which is dated ca. A.D. 175-225. Although this tradition is not certain (nor is it vital to our understanding of the Gospel of Luke) and has been challenged by several scholars in modern times, it will serve the purposes of this commentary to give it provisional acceptance. Of even less certainty is the tradition that the evangelist Luke was a native of Syrian Antioch, although it remains a possibility. From a careful study of *Luke-Acts* certain other details may be deduced, some

of which are corroborated by early church traditions. Luke was almost certainly a Gentile, though not necessarily a Greek. That he had a keen interest in, and probably was a former member of, the Jewish synagogue is apparent; and that he was quite at home with the Greek Bible (i.e., the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures called the Septuagint and abbreviated LXX) can be seen by his numerous quotations from and allusions to it. Luke's biblical interests, however, appear more concerned with the historical and prophetic elements than with the legal. Therefore, unlike Matthew, Luke does not often address Pharisaic issues. (For more on Luke's biblical views see section 5 below.)

Luke's occasion for writing his two-volume work was probably the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. This catastrophe was naturally of immense significance for Jews (both in Palestine and abroad), but it was of great import for Christians as well. Such a destruction would readily lead to questions asking why it had happened; and the Christians as much as the Jews were interested in finding an answer. A major reason for writing, it is contended, was to answer this question. For most of the faithful (whether Jewish or Christian) the answer was to be found in the ancient Scriptures. Luke saw a correlation between the first destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (586 B.C.) and the second destruction (A.D. 70). It is no coincidence that in the two passages of his Gospel in which he gives his readers Jesus' words on the subject, the language and vocabulary are drawn heavily from the LXX's account of the first destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadrezzar (see Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24; and Jer. 6:6; Ezek. 4:4; 26:8). For Luke, Jerusalem was destroyed a second time because of its failure, like the first time, to heed the prophetic voice and to recognize the presence of God's salvation, or, in biblical parlance, God's "visitation." This idea is unmistakably expressed in Luke 19:41-45, parts of which read: "And when He [Jesus] approached, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you when your enemies . . . will level you to the ground and your children within you. . . . because you did not recognize the time of your visitation' " (NASB). It is important to observe that this lamentation immediately follows the account of the Triumphal Entry where Jesus had been greeted

as “king” (19:29–40). As king (see v. 38) Jesus presents himself to Jerusalem; but knowing that he would not be received, he weeps for the doomed city. The Prince of Peace had been turned away, and in his place a few years later a militant messianic pretender would lead Israel in a disastrous war with Rome.¹

In all likelihood, Luke’s readers were Gentile Christians. This is seen principally in Luke’s omission of items that would be chiefly of interest to Jews and in his avoidance of terminology that presupposes knowledge of Hebrew and/or Aramaic. (That is not to say, however, that Luke’s writing style betrays no Semitic influence; see section 4 below.) That he intended his two-volume work for such an audience also seems apparent because of his basic theological concern to show how Gentiles figure in God’s plan of salvation, as revealed in the Scriptures and as seen in the missionary outreach of the apostles. To this latter aspect the second volume, the Book of Acts, addresses itself quite specifically. (For more on Luke’s views of the Gentiles see section 5 below.)

2. Luke and the Other Gospels

There are four Gospels among the 27 writings of the New Testament. Three of them (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are called the “Synoptic” Gospels because they parallel each other so closely they can be “seen together” (*syn* means “together”; *optic* means “see”). Books that put these three Gospels in parallel columns are called harmonies or synopses. The Fourth Gospel, John, although bearing a few similarities to the Synoptics, is quite distinct.

No one who has carefully read the three Synoptic Gospels can fail to recognize the numerous parallels. One episode after another appears in all three Gospels. The “Synoptic Problem” is the attempt to explain the relationship between these parallels (which in the Greek text are often verbatim). Most scholars today believe that Mark was the earliest Gospel written (ca. A.D. 70), while Matthew and Luke, independently utilizing copies of Mark and another source that consists primarily of Jesus’ sayings, were written some years later (ca. A.D. 75–85). Other scholars, however, have argued that Matthew, and not Mark, was the first written Gospel. This debate continues in full force.

This commentary assumes that Mark is indeed prior. This assumption is held for two primary reasons. First, the differences

almost always are best explained in terms of Matthean and/or Lucan redaction (or editing) of Mark, and not vice versa. Second, where Mark offers no narrative (such as no nativity or resurrection appearances), and hence cannot be followed, Matthean and Lucan divergence is its greatest. If Mark had followed Matthew and/or Luke, one must wonder why the evangelist chose to omit these narratives (and other materials, such as the Sermon on the Mount). For these reasons, and for others, Marcan priority is accepted. If this conclusion is correct, then the study of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke is greatly facilitated by a comparison with Mark, since such a comparison reveals more vividly the distinct emphases and concerns of the later Gospel writers (or “evangelists”). Whereas Mark may only allude to an Old Testament verse, Matthew, who is apparently quite concerned to show how Jesus as Messiah has fulfilled Old Testament messianic prophecy, will often provide a formal quotation (cf. Mark 4:12 with Matt. 13:13–15). In the commentary that follows there will be frequent mention of how a comparison with Mark reveals how the evangelist Luke has attempted to tell the story of Jesus in his own unique way.

Besides Mark, there is another source common to Matthew and Luke, which originally was a collection of Jesus’ sayings. This sayings source (called “Q” from the German word *Quelle*, “source”) provides yet another opportunity for comparison. Whereas Matthew may wish to convey a certain idea with a saying from Q, Luke is able to convey quite another thought with the same saying. When this editorial tendency is compared with the respective ways in which Mark has been edited, the interpreter is able to perceive the overall emphases of these two evangelists. Matthew and Luke utilized most of Mark (between them approximately 95% of Mark’s contents), which provided them with a basic narrative framework, and supplemented this framework with the contents of Q, which apparently contained no narrative. Although some scholars have maintained that Q was a written document, much like Mark, others suspect that the material common to Matthew and Luke may derive from a variety of written and oral sources, and not necessarily from a single document. This commentary assumes the latter view.²

Outside of the canonical Gospels there is a host of apocryphal Gospels that are, for the most part, of little historical value.

Often these Gospels appear to be motivated by a desire to fill in the gaps of Jesus and his parents' lives left by the canonical Gospels. They purport, for example, to give us information about Mary's own supposed miraculous birth and childhood before her betrothal to Joseph. Other accounts tell us of amazing experiences in Egypt while hiding from the wrath of Herod, of Jesus' boyhood in Nazareth, and of his and Joseph's skills as carpenters. Although quite often particular views and beliefs are championed by these fanciful events, underlying all of them is a desire to know more about Jesus.³

3. *Luke and the Old Testament*

For the evangelist Luke the Old Testament (i.e., the LXX) was as much a vital source as Mark and Q. This is true not simply because it is often quoted, for the other three evangelists frequently quote or allude to the Old Testament; but it would appear that it provided Luke with information as to what happened in the life of Jesus, what it means, and how it should be told. Two major portions of the Old Testament have played central roles in the composition of the Gospel. Large sections of Luke (chaps. 7-10, 22-24) and Acts (chaps. 1-9) draw in various ways upon the Elijah/Elisha narratives of 1 Kings (chaps. 17-21) and 2 Kings (chaps. 1-8).⁴ Another large section of Luke, which is sometimes called the "Central Section" (9:51-18:14), parallels Deuteronomy (chaps. 1-26).⁵ Why the evangelist has done this will be addressed throughout the commentary, but in section 5 below a general explanation will be offered. Suffice it to say that in reality Luke has made use of at least three major literary works in composing his Gospel: Mark, Q, and the Septuagint.

4. *Luke's Literary Style*

Of all the Gospels, Luke's literary style comes closest to the style of the ancient Greek classical writers. The most obvious example of this style occurs in the opening four verses of his Gospel, known as the Prologue (or Preface, see commentary on 1:1-4 below). However, another important feature in Luke's writing style is his frequent use of the vocabulary of the LXX. Semitic features often appear because Luke found them in his sources; but many

times Luke consciously and deliberately utilizes the language and vocabulary of the LXX in order to present his account in what may be called "biblical Greek." For example, Luke describes Jesus in 9:51 as having "set his face to go to Jerusalem," an expression which is probably meant to recall the prophet Ezekiel whom God commanded: "Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuaries; prophesy against the land of Israel" (Ezek. 21:2, RSV).⁶

There are also traces of a very subtle sense of humor, seen especially in the Book of Acts. One is reminded of Rhoda the agitated servant-girl who left Peter locked outside in the street (Acts 12:13-16). Luke is also fond of understatement, as can be seen in the reference to the Ephesian riot as "no small disturbance" (Acts 19:23; see also Acts 12:18; 26:26). Luke is a powerful writer who is able to blend sobering theological truths with a dramatic and exciting story. Anyone reading his Gospel can scarcely fail to enjoy this writer who is both, as Howard Marshall has put it, historian and theologian.⁷

5. Major Themes and Emphases in Luke

In the aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem and the second temple (A.D. 70) Luke and his community had begun to sense some of the questions and problems that were being raised by Jewish and Gentile Christians and non-Christian Jews. No doubt the burning question concerned the destruction. Why had the revolt of the militant messianic figure Simon bar Giora met with total defeat? Did this disaster indicate that the promises of Scripture were not to be fulfilled? Or, was the disaster a judgment upon Jerusalem for some particular sin? As discussed in section 1 above, Luke, and probably most Christians of his time, saw in the destruction of Jerusalem a fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy. Moreover, they surely believed that it was a consequence of Jesus' having been rejected (see Luke 19:41-45; 21:20-25; 23:27-31). But there were other, and often related, questions that were being raised as well. Why had Jesus not yet returned as promised? What was the church's task while it waited for the Lord? Why were the Jews continuing to reject the gospel? How do the Gentiles relate to Israel and its promises? Luke attempts to answer these questions in his two-volume work.

The reader should quickly recognize that Luke has placed his account squarely into the framework of history, both secular and sacred. The speeches found in the first two chapters of the Gospel attest that in the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, God has begun a work that continues the dramatic story of Israel's sacred history. In various ways these speeches express the confidence that in the birth of Jesus and his forerunner God has set the stage for the era of salvation.

But Luke's account is not detached from secular history, as can be seen by its numerous references to various leaders and events, many of which can be dated with precision. Luke notes that John the Baptist was conceived in the days of Herod, king of Judea (Luke 1:5), with Jesus' own conception six months later (Luke 1:26–31). The evangelist tells us of a census decreed by Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1), when Quirinius was governor of Syria (Luke 2:2). We are told that John's preaching began in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (A.D. 28), when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea (A.D. 26–36), and when Herod, Philip, and Lysanius were tetrarchs of surrounding regions (Luke 3:1). This was the time of the high priests Annas and Caiaphas (Luke 3:2). Eventually Jesus himself would encounter most of these people, following his arrest (Luke 22–23). In his second volume Luke tells us of the failure of three previous messianic claimants, Theudas, Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:36–37), and the Egyptian (Acts 21:38). The evangelist mentions the famine in the days of Emperor Claudius (Acts 11:28), as well as the emperor's decree that all Jews leave the city of Rome (A.D. 49; Acts 18:2). Luke also refers to the Proconsul Gallio (A.D. 52; Acts 18:12) and to Paul's later appearances before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa (A.D. 60; Acts 24–26).

The Third Evangelist seems to have at least two reasons for emphasizing the historical context of his accounts of Jesus and the early church. First, Luke is trying to show that the story of Jesus, for all its freshness and newness, is in reality in continuity with the long history of God's dealings with his covenant people Israel. Luke wants the reader to realize that the life of Jesus represents a major event in what scholars sometimes call Israel's "salvation history." Second, Luke's historical references include secular persons and events in order to underscore the relevance of Jesus for the world at large. Jesus is not merely one more prophet sent to Israel for Israel's sake. Rather, Jesus is God's Son

(see Luke's genealogy of Jesus and compare it with that found in Matthew) sent to the world. Jesus is portrayed, as one commentator has put it, as Benefactor of humankind.⁸ Thus, through his historical references and orientation Luke is able to bind together the sacred history of Israel with secular world history. He is able to make the particular, exclusive religion of Israel available and applicable to humankind in general. This movement away from the narrower context of Palestine and Judaism to the world and to all races and tribes of humankind is worked out in the Book of Acts.

Luke's historical emphasis has led scholars to conclude that he views history as consisting of three major epochs. According to Joseph Fitzmyer,⁹ the first epoch may be described as the "Period of Israel," which begins with Genesis and concludes with the appearance of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-3:1). Luke designates this period as the time of "the law and the prophets" (Luke 16:16a). The second epoch is the "Period of Jesus," which begins with his baptism and concludes with his ascension (Luke 3:2-24:51). This is the period of Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection, during which time "the kingdom of God is preached" (Luke 16:16b). The third epoch is the "Period of the Church," which begins with Jesus' ascension and will conclude with his return (Luke 24:52-Acts 1:3-28:31). During this period of time it is the duty of the church to proclaim the Word of God throughout the world (see Acts 1:8).

As the gospel spreads, the question of how the Gentiles fit into God's plan of redemption becomes acute. Because many Gentiles did indeed believe and joined the rapidly growing church, the question naturally arose: What did a predominantly Gentile movement have to do with Israel and the promises of the Jewish Scriptures? For Luke the answer had positive and negative aspects. Positively, the gospel of the kingdom was to be offered to everyone. The Book of Acts chronicles the spread of the gospel first to the Jews (Acts 2:5-7:60), then to the Samaritans, who were "half" Jewish (Acts 8:2-24), next to "God-fearing" Gentiles who had received prior instruction in the Jewish faith (Acts 10:1-11:18), and finally to Gentiles who had never had any contact with Judaism (Acts 13:2-28:31). Paul's habit during his missionary journeys of first entering the synagogue in order to preach to his fellow Jews (see Acts 13:16-41; 14:1-3; 17:1-3, 10-12; 18:2-

4) reflects this pattern and is expressed by his well-known philosophy of evangelism: "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16; 2:10). Another positive evidence of the legitimacy of Gentile membership and participation in this Jewish messianic movement was the Gentile reception of the Holy Spirit. Like the Jewish apostles (Acts 2:2-4), the Samaritans and Gentiles also received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17; 10:44-47; 11:15-18). The first Christians, regardless of ethnic identity, were, in the words of Paul, "baptized into one body . . . and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor. 12:13).

Luke also offers a negative answer to the Gentile question. An explicit reason for the missionaries' turning to the Gentiles was Jewish unbelief and rejection of the gospel. That the Jewish religious leadership was opposed to the apostolic preaching is evident early in the Acts account (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-42). Such opposition represents only a continuation of the unbelief that Jesus had encountered earlier (Luke 19:47-48; 20:1-8, 19-20; 22:47-23:25) and that was characteristic of stubborn Israel (Luke 13:34). Indeed, Luke traces the unbelief of the Pharisees directly to the ministry of John the Baptist: "But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John" (Luke 7:30). The formal shift from evangelism directed primarily toward Jews to evangelism directed toward Gentiles, however, is seen in Paul's thematic sermon in Acts 13:16-47. Paul warns his fellow Jews not to be hard-hearted in response to the gospel and cites the ominous prophecy of Habakkuk: "Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you" (Hab. 1:5, cited in Acts 13:41). As Paul had feared, the Jews began "contradicting the things spoken . . . and were blaspheming" (Acts 13:45, NASB). Thus Paul declares: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). For justification of this new strategy Paul cites Isa. 49:6, a portion of which had been cited by Simeon (Luke 2:32), who upon seeing the infant Jesus recognizes the significance of Jesus for the world: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47). Unlike the unbelieving and rebellious Jews, the Gentiles rejoice and respond in faith (Acts 13:42-43, 48).

This shift from Jews to Gentiles can be traced back to the very heart of Jesus' teaching concerning membership in the kingdom of God and really does not represent an ad hoc solution to an unexpected development. In numerous passages, some of which are found only in Luke's Gospel, Jesus declares, on the one hand, that those who by outward appearances and according to human standards are judged most likely to enjoy God's favor are not always receptive to God's presence. Many who are "confident" of their salvation and reward will some day find themselves judged. On the other hand, many of those who appear to be less religious or who have apparently received few of life's blessings will some day be rewarded and blessed. The classic example of this idea is to be seen in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man had every good thing that life could offer. He was well dressed and well fed and lived in a mansion. Outside his gate, however, was poor Lazarus, who was ill-clad, undernourished, sick, and without shelter. Contrary to views popular in first-century Palestine, Lazarus went to heaven and the rich man went to hell. Why was there such an outcome and why was this outcome contrary to popular expectation? We are not told that Lazarus was virtuous; neither are we told that the rich man was particularly evil (though by inference he seems to be quite insensitive to the needs of his poor neighbor). The rich man goes to hell but not because he was rich or because he ignored Lazarus; likewise, Lazarus goes to heaven but not because he was poor and sick. The point that the Lucan Jesus makes with this parable is that outward appearances, social standings, and standards of living provide no certain indication of one's standing before God.

Such a parable would surprise, if not shock, some first-century Palestinian Jews who assumed that health and wealth were sure signs of God's blessing, while illness and poverty were certain signs of God's wrath. Such a theology, it has been argued by at least one scholar, is derived from the Old Testament promise (and warning), especially as it can be seen in Deuteronomy, that if Israel were obedient to the covenant it would be blessed, but if disobedient it would be cursed.¹⁰ Blessings and cursings were thought of primarily in terms of material items. "Blessings" manifest themselves as good crops, large herds of cattle and sheep, gold and silver, and peace, while "cursings" could include

drought, famine, pestilence, and war. In Jesus' day this idea was inverted (i.e., reverse sequence of logic) and applied to the individual: If you are blessed (i.e., healthy and wealthy), then you must have been obedient and righteous (like Pharisees, Sadducees, and priests), but if you are cursed (i.e., sick and poor), then you must be disobedient and wicked (like harlots, tax collectors, and other "sinners"). Jesus challenges these unfounded assumptions and teaches that, on the contrary, it is the poor, the sick, and the needy who are often most aware of their spiritual needs and are therefore more receptive to God's word of mercy and forgiveness. (Indeed, has it not often been the case, according to biblical history, that when Israel is poor and humble before the nations that God delivers in mighty ways?) This misunderstanding of the teaching of Deuteronomy concerning God's standards of evaluation has led Luke to order his Central Section (10:1-18:14) to correspond with Deuteronomy 1-26. The parable of the self-righteous Pharisee and the contrite tax-collector (Luke 18:9-14) exemplifies the need to reassess one's assumptions about God's standards of evaluation. Whereas the "certain ruler" (Luke 18:18-30) cannot do God's will and follow Jesus because of his wealth, in stark contrast Zacchaeus the tax-collector is willing to repay those whom he has cheated and to give to the poor (Luke 19:1-9). Perhaps the most poignant illustration takes place in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50), where the harlot washes and dries the feet of Jesus with her tears and hair. Jesus declares that it is the one who owes much and is forgiven who loves the most (see v. 47). The self-righteous person is incapable of recognizing his or her need and hence has little gratitude for God's loving mercy.

For Luke the community of believers is composed of Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles—all who hear and obey the gospel, the Word of God. Because of the presence of non-Jews in this community the question naturally arises as to the church's relationship to historic, biblical Israel. It is incorrect to think that Luke sees Israel as no longer part of God's plan. This is certainly not the sentiment throughout his Gospel (see especially the speeches of Luke 1-2). When Zacchaeus declared his generosity, Jesus said: "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham" (Luke 19:9). The idea of referring to a repentant, righteous one as a true son of Abraham is quite similar

to Paul's argument that God regards everyone as righteous who responds to the promise of the gospel in faith, as Abraham, father of Israel, had responded to God's promise in Gen. 15:6 (see Rom. 4:1-25). But Luke is not saying, though, that the people of God, the church, make up a new or "spiritual" Israel. What I think Luke is trying to show, and here I follow the insights of Jacob Jervell, is that there has been always only one people of God.¹¹ Before the time of Jesus, this people of God was identified exclusively with Israel. But with the advent of Jesus and the ingathering of Gentiles from all nations, by which the promises given to Abraham concerning the blessing of the Gentiles (Gen. 12:3; 17:4; 22:18) are now fulfilled (see Acts 3:25 where Gen. 22:18 is quoted), the people of God consist of ethnic Israel and Gentiles. The people of God, however, are only those who have believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not all have believed. This unbelief has led, as Jervell has concluded, to ethnic Israel's division. Some of ethnic Israel believe in Jesus (indeed, thousands believe according to Acts 2-3) and so are part of the people of God, but others reject Jesus and so are considered in a state of disobedience and blindness. This disobedience may be traced from Jesus' first recorded sermon (Luke 4:16-30) to the last recorded exchange between Paul and unbelieving Jews (Acts 28:13-29). It is, of course, Paul's conviction that "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved . . ." (Rom. 11:25-26). I believe that the evangelist Luke also shared in this hope (see section 6 below).

Finally, Luke's Gospel is in a very real sense the Gospel of the Good News to the poor.¹² Throughout this Gospel we are provided many examples of Jesus' compassion for the poor and the powerless, for the downcast and the disenfranchised. The reader will be moved by the tender scenes in which Jesus extends God's love and forgiveness to those for whom, it would seem, all hope had been lost. But then that is what Jesus' mission is all about, "for the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10; cf. also Luke 15:1-32).

6. *Was the Evangelist Luke Anti-Semitic?*

Recently one scholar has argued at length that Luke was thoroughly anti-Semitic. The evangelist, Jack T. Sanders believes,

does not merely polemicize against Judaism that rejects Christianity, but hates all Jews, whether they have become Christians or not.¹³ Is this assessment of Luke accurate? I do not think so. This assessment is completely erroneous for the following four reasons.

First, J. T. Sanders misinterprets several passages in Luke-Acts. For example, he thinks that Jesus' Nazareth sermon in Luke 4:16-30 foreshadows the rejection of the Jews. The episode seems, rather, to foreshadow Jesus' rejection. Jesus is rejected because his ministry will open the kingdom to Gentiles and others whom many religious Jews felt were unworthy. Another example is Sanders's interpretation of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35). He concludes that this parable teaches that salvation can be obtained only by behaving in a non-Jewish manner. Again, this misses the point. The parable actually teaches that anyone, even a Samaritan, can fulfill the highest ethical demands of the law. Throughout this commentary other examples will be discussed.

Second, J. T. Sanders tends to ignore or minimize the significance of passages in Luke that reflect a favorable attitude toward Jews and Judaism. In his infancy narrative Luke offers speech after speech that proclaims God's fulfillment of Israel's deepest hopes and aspirations. For example, the angel tells Mary that her expected son "will reign over the house of Jacob [i.e., Israel] forever" (Luke 1:33a). Likewise, in the Magnificat, Mary praises God for having "helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever" (1:54-55a). Similarly in the Benedictus, Zechariah blesses the "God of Israel" for having "come [lit. "visited"] and redeemed his people" (1:68). Finally, we are told of righteous Simeon, who looked for the "consolation of Israel" (2:25) and who in the Nunc Dimittis blesses God for preparing a salvation that is "a light for revelation to the Gentiles," a salvation that will redound "for glory to [God's] people Israel" (2:30-32). It is difficult to imagine that these words were penned by one who hated the Jews and longed for their destruction. If these words are taken at face value, it seems clear that the evangelist understands the Christian gospel to be of benefit to the Jews.

Third, J. T. Sanders fails to compare Luke's polemical statements against explicit expressions of religiously inspired hatred

(whether racial or not) that derive from the first century or thereabouts. Pharisees hate Sadducees and the common "people of the land." Sadducees hate the Pharisees. Qumranian Jews hate all other Jews, especially those who oppose them. And, of course, there are numerous expressions of hatred directed against Samaritans and Gentiles. These polemical statements typically assert that such-and-such a group is ignorant, immoral, and damned. But some of these groups even go so far as to pray that their enemies not be saved from the error of their way. Luke's polemic bears no resemblance to these expressions. His polemic is closer to what is found in the Jewish Scriptures (i.e., the Old Testament). The Old Testament contains numerous passages that condemn Israel for its sin. Israel is described as persistently turning its back on God (1 Sam. 8:7-8; 2 Kings 17:7-23; 2 Chron. 36:11-16; cf. Luke 13:33-35; Acts 7:51-53). The prophet Isaiah is so incensed at his own countrymen that he asks God not to forgive them (2:6, 9). In stark contrast to this prophetic petition, Jesus and the martyred Stephen pray that their persecutors be forgiven (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60).

This leads to the fourth and final error in J. T. Sanders's assessment of Luke. Sanders holds that Luke is an "outsider" who views the entire Jewish people as completely separate from the Lucan community. Because of this perspective, Sanders takes Luke's critical statements as sweeping condemnations of the Jewish people. I think, however, that this approach is wrong. Luke does not regard himself as an outsider. He views himself as part of Israel (though not necessarily a Jewish-born person), that part of Israel that has come to have faith in Jesus as Messiah. Therefore, Luke's critical statements should be seen as prophetic in-house criticism. As an "insider" Luke is enjoining Israel to change its attitude toward Jesus and the "Way." Seen in this light, Luke's criticisms of non-Christian Israel are hardly more severe than what recurs throughout the writings of Israel's prophets.¹⁴

It is simplistic and misleading to label Luke's criticism of Jewish religious leaders and various Jewish beliefs and practices as "anti-Semitic." Anything critical of something Jewish should not automatically be construed as anti-Semitism. The logic of this kind of uncritical analysis would result in finding anti-Semitism in Jesus, Paul, Jewish sects, and most of the Old Testament. Luke emphasizes Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death, not because of

anti-Semitic hatred, but because of his desire to place the Messiah's death firmly within the framework of biblical (i.e., Israelite) history. Jesus' rejection and death are prophesied in the Scriptures and are in keeping with Israel's "historic" (biblical) habit of persecuting the prophets. Jesus' rejection and death at the hands of Israel's religious leaders gives Jesus' death its meaning. For this reason, too, Luke portrays Jews as the leading antagonists of the apostles in Acts. The struggling emergence of the Christian faith, which finds its way to the capital of the Roman Empire, is ultimately a Jewish affair.¹⁵

7. Basic Outline of the Gospel of Luke

Preface	1:1-4
The Births of John the Baptist and Jesus	1:5-2:52
Jesus' Preparation for Ministry	3:1-4:13
The Galilean Ministry	4:14-9:50
The Journey to Jerusalem	9:51-19:27
The Jerusalem Ministry	19:28-21:38
The Passion of Jesus	22:1-23:56
The Exaltation of Jesus	24:1-53

Notes

1. Many of my ideas have been shaped by David L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

2. For a recent scholarly assessment of Q, see John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*, *Studies in Antiquity & Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

3. The standard English translation of many of these apocryphal gospels is found in E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols., trans. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963). For additional bibliography see J. H. Charlesworth, *The New Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: A Guide to Publications, with Excurses on Apocalypses*, with J. R. Mueller; ATLA 17 (Metuchen, N. J. and London: American Theological Library Association, 1987). Some one hundred of these writings are noted. For most of the gnostic apocryphal gospels and writings see J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 2nd. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

4. For this insight I am indebted to T. L. Brodie, *Luke the Literary Interpreter: Luke-Acts as a Systematic Rewriting and Updating of the Elijah-Elisha Narrative in 1 and 2 Kings* (Rome: Angelicum University, 1987).

5. These parallels were first pointed out by C. F. Evans, "The Central Section of St. Luke's Gospel," in D. E. Nineham, ed., *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), pp. 37-53.

6. For more discussion see J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, AB 28 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), pp. 113-25.

7. I. H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970).

8. The idea comes from F. W. Danker, *Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

9. Fitzmyer, *Luke I-IX*, p. 185, modifying H. Conzelmann, *Theology of St. Luke* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

10. J. A. Sanders, "The Ethic of Election in Luke's Great Banquet Parable," in J. L. Crenshaw and J. T. Willis, eds., *Old Testament Ethics* (New York: Ktav, 1974), pp. 247-71.

11. J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God: A New Look at Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), pp. 41-74.

12. On Luke's view of wealth see L. T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 39 (Missoula: Scholars, 1977).

13. J. T. Sanders, "The Parable of the Pounds and Lucan Anti-Semitism," *TS* 42 (1981), pp. 660-68; idem, "The Prophetic Use of the Scriptures in Luke-Acts," in C. A. Evans and W. F. Stinespring, eds., *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis*, W. H. Brownlee Festschrift; *Homage 10* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), pp. 191-98; idem, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). Note: Throughout the commentary there are references to J. T. Sanders. He is not to be confused with J. A. Sanders.

14. For a very helpful essay on this aspect of the problem see M. Salmon, "Insider or Outsider? Luke's Relationship with Judaism," in J. B. Tyson, ed., *Luke-Acts and the Jewish People* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), pp. 76-82, 149-50.

15. For a better assessment of Luke's attitude toward the Jews see Robert L. Brawley, *Luke-Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology, and Conciliation*, SBLMS 33 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987).