

Having A Good Luke

My thoughts on the Gospel of Luke by C A Carlyle

Introduction

Well, these are my thoughts on the Gospel of Luke. I'm not a scholar or academic, neither am I a reverend or a preacher. Not even an historian, I'm afraid. All the same, I recently picked up the Gospel of Luke with a mind to read it as a narrative work, since I have read several non-canonical christian books recently and thought I should go for a few canonical ones as well. While I was reading that book I very quickly realised that I was noticing quite a lot of different things about it. With the gospels of Philip, Thomas et cetera, it is normal to get these in a book, with copius translation notes, interpretational and contextual comments and so on. With the canonical gospels, you just get the gospels and that's it! As a result, to me it was very different from usual, reading the Gospel of Luke without a guide. As such, I've sort of put down the things I noticed about the gospel. There were other things, but there's a limit to how long something like this should be!

In my opinion, you wouldn't really want to read this without reading the Gospel of Luke. Go on, read it! It's a fairly short book, tells a good story and raises many interesting philosophical points. It'll take you a few hours in total at most to read it, despite being the longest canonical gospel. You'll find it in any copy of the Holy Bible or the New Testament. Get a modern translation though, the authorised (King James) version is not readable or, reportedly, accurate so read a decent modern translation. While you're at it, read these thoughts along with it, or after it, and see if you notice anything else that I've not mentioned. I'd encourage you to read the articles I've referred to at the end of this document too, interesting reading.

A Note on Parallels

Note: Where there is a parallel in the reconstructed book of Q, I have not quoted it, since the reconstructed book of Q is simply drawn from the existing gospels of Luke and Matthew. As such, the corresponding Luke, Matthew and Q parallels will be virtually identical, and the translation from Greek to English (and implicitly from Aramaic to Greek, not to mention an unknown amount of retouching by early christian scribes) will mean that quoting Q (or indeed Matthew) to illustrate minor differences would be, in my opinion, redundant.

The Precip

In Luke 1:1-4 the author has “*decided to write a connected narrative*” because “*many writers have undertaken to draw up an account of the events that happened among us*”. This is to give “*authentic knowledge*” to Theophilus about the things of which [he has] been informed”.

This suggests a couple of things to me. Firstly, that the author is aware of many other writings concerning Jesus, or the events surrounding him, and secondly that this connected narrative is a literary creation of the author. I realise that this second point is contentious. I think it probable that the author is genuinely trying to create a continuous narrative of events in Jesus' ministry from various sources, which is as accurate as possible. The author, I think, is not trying to mislead the reader, but to form a cohesive story out of disparate inputs. On the other hand, if the author is not a companion of Jesus, then “*events that happened among us*” is a fiction. Having said that, the gospel of Luke mentions 72 disciples (not by name) and many other followers, so perhaps the author infers that he is one of those. It could also be the case that “*events which happened among us*” refers to a more general moving of the Holy Spirit. Since the gospel begins before Jesus or John the Baptist are even conceived, it is unlikely that we are expected to believe that whole gospel is an eyewitness account.

The author is not explicitly named. It is generally accepted nowadays that the author of “*According to Luke*”, as the gospel is titled, was not actually Luke the physician, companion of Paul, as mentioned in Colossians 4:14, however it is often cited that the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles share the same author.

The Gospel of Luke is generally accepted to have been written towards the end of the first century, which was after the First Jewish-Roman war, including the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD70. It is generally accepted that the author of the Gospel of Luke had access to either the Gospel of Mark (according to the two source hypothesis) or the Gospel of Matthew (according to the Augustinian hypothesis). In this document I will assume that the Gospel of Luke had the Gospel of Mark as a source, and not the Gospel of Matthew. The only effect this will really have is on the verses quoted from parallel gospels. If you choose, you could look up for yourself the parallels of the Luke, Mark and Thomas verses which I will quote below.

John The Baptist

A good part of the first chapter is about John the Baptist, or at any rate about his parents, and specifically the divine intervention of God through the angel Gabriel which resulted in John being conceived and named according to God's will. Part of the first chapter, and the second chapter cover Jesus' youth in a similar fashion. The third chapter then goes immediately back to John's ministry. John is called by Lord to preach to everyone in the Jordan valley about God, so he sets off to baptise them all according to the instructions he's received in the desert (where he has lived all his life) from God. In Luke 3:16-17 (QS5), he comments that one greater than himself is coming after him, and adds a graphic comment about unquenchable fire, in quite an apocalyptic fashion.

To me, the Gospel of Luke seems to cover John the Baptist a great deal in chapters one and three, even with a neat little handover in verses 19-22 where John is put in jail by Herod in 19-20 and in 21-22 Jesus is being baptised, presumably by John the Baptist, in a sort of flashback. These four verses appear to be taken from the Gospel of Mark. After this John the Baptist is mentioned several times in the gospel of Luke but doesn't have any further parts to play directly.

It seems to me that the Gospel of Luke was written for an audience who were very supportive of John the Baptist. Perhaps the author was writing in a region where many people had been baptised by John. In any case in my opinion the book appears at first to be about John, and it may be using some smaller document, or simply verbal testimony, to give the information about John, but very quickly the focus is handed to Jesus in a fairly smooth way, and the rest of the book is then about Jesus. Was this book intending to replace an existing book of John's sayings and movements I wonder? It's generally supposed that the first chapter of Luke is material added by the author of Luke, and that the chapter three material about John is from the reconstructed book of Q. This may be the case, but it's also possible that there was a book of John which included the John material from both of these chapters and possibly more about John besides.

Maybe not, after all there's no evidence for it, just a thought. In any case, John the Baptist is mentioned several more times throughout the gospel, not taking part in the action but by being mentioned by the main cast of characters, John remains in the reader's minds as they read about Jesus' ministry.

Hiding your Light under a Bushel Basket

Luke 8:16-17 says this: *"No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hid that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light."*

Luke 12:2-3 says: *"Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. And what you hear as a whisper, proclaim on the housetops."*

Luke 11:33-35 says this: *"No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a bushel, but on a stand, that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness."*

Luke 11:33-35 is considered to be Q2 material and is found in QS33. Interestingly, the saying from Luke 8:16-17, is not to be found in Q, however the saying from Luke 12:2-3 is to be found in Q1 as QS35.

Further, Thomas 33 says this: *"Jesus said, What you will hear in your ear, in the other ear proclaim from your rooftops. After all, no one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, nor does one put it in a hidden place. Rather, one puts it on a lampstand so that all who come and go will see its light."*

What I find interesting here is that Luke has a parallel within itself! Why should the author of Luke say the same thing twice? I can think of a couple of reasons. Firstly, the author may believe that he is reporting two instances of Jesus saying similar things, possibly because he has come into possession of two similar but different accounts of this saying from two sources. In this case, it is possible that Jesus did say this more than once, or that two differing accounts of the same saying reached the author and were included at different parts of the narrative.

Another interesting thing which I noticed is that the Thomas saying contains the housetops phrase, as well as the lamp and bushel phrase. Luke 8:16-17 has the lamp and bushel, but concludes with the nothing is hidden phrase, while Luke 11:33-35 also has the lamp and bushel, but concludes with a message about light and darkness, on the other hand, the nothing is hidden phrase is found in Luke 12:2-3, immediately followed by the housetops phrase!

It seems to me that this material has been freely moved around not only by one or the other author of Thomas or Luke, but by both, possibly, or by the sources that both are working from. Since these elements only occur once in Thomas, it's possible that Thomas has the more accurate version, on the other hand, this part of Thomas is from the Coptic version, and so is three languages and roughly 400 years removed from Jesus. I also find it interesting that Luke 11:33-35 has a conclusion about the body being filled with light or darkness, since this sort of imagery is not too common in the Gospel of Luke and is more characteristic of the Gospel of Thomas.

Revealing the Divine

Now still on the subject of hiding and revealing, have a look at Luke 10:21-24. It has this to say: *"In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."*

Now in the Gospel of Luke, this takes place after Jesus has been ministering for some time and in context, he has just appointed seventy men as disciples to go and spread his good news round the area. This is part of what he tells them. Historically of course, I would question whether this was the exact setting that Jesus said this in, this seems more characteristic of something Jesus tends to be reported as saying to only a small group of people.

Regardless, notice how Jesus seems to be saying it is good for the truth to be hidden, in this case from prophets and kings, and from the wise and understanding. In the context of Luke's gospel, which often seems to make a point of upholding the position of the underdog, women, foreigners, lepers et cetera, I might guess that the original quote refers to the wise and understanding as having the truth hidden from them, and that the reference to the prophets and kings is a Lukan addition, however this entire passage is found in the Gospel of Matthew also (though with "*prophets and righteous men*" instead) so that hypothesis is knocked on the head. Incidentally, this passage is termed to be Q24 and Q25 in the book of Q, this is undoubtedly because the first two verses are separated from the second two in the Gospel of Matthew. You can see however that these four verses flow together very well in the Gospel of Luke to reinforce a point, and this is a clear example, in my opinion, of one of the gospels reorganising material to give a certain trend to the material contained within. Who can say the original context or order of these words?

Anyway, I find it very interesting that Jesus on many occasions throughout the Gospel of Luke tells the disciples not to disclose his miraculous status to anyone else, even though he reportedly travels throughout Galilee, Samaria and Judea healing the sick, preaching and performing miracles, and having this quite well publicised, as in Luke 4:37. Why would Jesus ask those closest to him to conceal his true identity and yet recruit seventy men to go about preaching about him?

Here's an example of what I mean from the Gospel of Luke. In Luke 8:22-35 Jesus travels across a lake and arrives in Gerasenes where a homeless man is possessed by demons and is living naked in a graveyard. He casts the demons out, of course, and then in verses 34 and 36 the local people see this and immediately go telling everyone else what has happened, including that Jesus is the Son of God, then the man asks to become one of Jesus' disciples, but Jesus refuses and instead tells him to *"Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you."*

So far so good, Jesus has continued his mission of travelling, healing the sick, casting out demons and performing miracles, and he has thoroughly promoted himself in this instance, encouraging everyone to talk about his deeds. In verse 40 he returns to Gerasenes and the people welcome him because they have already heard about these deeds, that's how famous he has become. The next thing that happens in Luke 8:41-55 is that Jesus is brought by a man, Jairus, to his home to try to heal his daughter who is ill. By the time Jesus arrives, she has died. He excludes everyone from the room

except, Peter, John, James and the girl's parents and then he causes her to sit up, alive, and calls for something for her to eat. Then in verse 56, he tells the parents not to relate these events to anyone! A similar thing happens in Luke 9:18-21, in verse 21 Jesus tells his disciples not to disclose his identity to anyone. Doesn't this seem at odds with his previous policy of publicising his miracles?

An example of this policy is in Luke 7:1-10 where Jesus arrives in Capernaum where a Roman (a foreigner, many foreigners feature in the Gospel of Luke) begs Jesus to heal one of his slaves. He tells Jesus that he need not come back to his house because he believes so strongly in Jesus' healing power that he is sure Jesus need only say the word from afar and his slave would be healed. Jesus responds by addressing an entire multitude of people who are following him saying how great the roman man's faith is! This is hardly keeping a low profile.

In fact Jesus doesn't seem to have a clear policy on disclosure, in Luke 5:12-15 he cures a man of leprosy and then tells him to keep it to himself but to go to the priest and give thanks to God for his healing. Despite this the people become aware and this causes Jesus so much distress that he withdraws from the unnamed city and goes to pray in the desert.

Interestingly these passages I have mentioned are all seemingly drawn from the Gospel of Mark (except for the incident in Capernaum which is allegedly from Q, as QS15), not only the ones where Jesus asks for nondisclosure, but the ones where he asks people to spread the news also. It is clear that the Gospel of Luke does not mind spreading the news too much about Jesus miracles, secret or not, but I can't help wondering what would motivate Jesus these things. The general supposition is that Jesus didn't want the full truth about him to get out until he'd been crucified, as this was the time when the new deal between God and humanity would be officially sealed. This is pure conjecture however and I think it is healthy to consider other reasons too. For instance, was Jesus happy to publicise himself in rural areas but not cities? Could this have been a tactic to amass a large amount of supporters over a large area while causing the least amount of disruption in the cities? There isn't much mention in the Gospel of Luke about where Jesus is for some specific events, though I think what references there are do support this theory. I wonder if Jesus was indeed planning his big finale in Jerusalem (as orthodox christianity agrees), then he would not want to risk becoming persecuted or perhaps imprisoned in some other city than the Judean capital, as this would surely mean obscurity rather than ultimate glory, if indeed a big finale is what Jesus was aiming for.

I should mention that there is at least one event in the Gospel of Luke which flies in the face of this last hypothesis, however this example is not taken from the Gospel of Mark, as are, evidently, most of the others. In Luke 7:11-15 Jesus is just outside the city gates of Nain, about to enter it, when a funeral procession emerges from the city gates. Jesus then heals the dead man in front of the whole entourage who then start exalting God and proclaiming Jesus to be a great prophet. That's not all though, the news spreads throughout the entire country of Judea and those around about it! That's an interesting turn of phrase, by the way, since Capernaum is in Galilee, which is bordered on the South by Samaria, which is bordered on the South, in turn, by Judea. If these events happened in Galilee, two kingdoms North of Judea, then why should news of this event spread from Judea rather than Galilee? It's clear the author means to simply emphasize the extent to which the news traveled, but it does indicate, in my opinion, that the author may not have been very familiar with Middle Eastern geography (and hoped that his readers didn't either, no doubt!). Anyway, you'd think Jesus'd be none too happy about this publicity, given his other comments on the dissemination of information about his deeds, but nothing is mentioned about this. Instead, we find that there is a considerable plot twist depending on this publicity. In Luke 7:18-23 This very news reaches the ears of John the Baptist, a commandingly important figure in the Gospel of Luke, who sends messengers to confirm whether Jesus is "*the one who is to come*". They are instructed by Jesus to return and tell John about all the miracles they have just witnessed in reply.

Effectively, this passage transfers the importance of John onto Jesus, in the minds of the reader. In Luke 7:24-28 (QS17) Jesus goes on to say a few more interesting things to the assemblage about John which should also help to prepare the reader for the idea that John's part in this story is now finished, and that we should now be treating Jesus as the main character in this narrative. In fact the only other development about John after this is in Luke 9:9 where Herod states that he had had John the Baptist beheaded. Still, John is mentioned a few more times by Jesus and his disciples, nodding the head to him as it were throughout the narrative. He is even used in a statement by Jesus in Luke 20:1-8 to make a very forceful point, interestingly Jesus' point is that he will not disclose the authority upon which he acts, another interesting twist on the theme of nondisclosure? By this time Jesus is preaching within the capital city of Judea, Jerusalem, in the Temple. On the other hand, in this case it was necessary for Jesus not to claim authority from God in this case or he would have been convicted of blasphemy, a crime commanding the death penalty by stoning.

Jesus' Mother and Brothers

There is generally a lot of focus on Jesus' mother as portrayed in Luke chapters 1 and 2, which includes the virgin birth, but that's not what I'm going to mention here. Firstly, have a look at these verses:

Luke 8:19-21 says *"Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him for the crowd. And he was told, 'Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.' But he said to them, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.'"* and this is also in the Gospel of Thomas as saying 99, and it is also in Mark 3:31-35. It's pretty clear here that Jesus is saying that those who *"hear the word of God and do it"* are closer to him than his natural family. This passage is related to Mark 7:10-1

Luke 14:26 on the other hand (which is thought to be from the book of Q (as QS52), not from Mark) says this: *"If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."* and this also seems to appear not once, but twice in the Gospel of Thomas as saying 55: *"Jesus said, 'Whoever does not hate father and mother cannot be my disciple, and whoever does not hate brothers and sisters, and carry the cross as I do, will not be worthy of me.'"* and as saying 101: *"Whoever does not hate [father] and mother as I do cannot be my [disciple], and whoever does [not] love [father and] mother as I do cannot be my [disciple]. For my mother [...], but my true [mother] gave me life."*, though it should be noted that these sayings both survive only in the later, Coptic, Nag Hammadi version of the text and cannot be verified by comparison with surviving Greek fragments. It is possible that these two sayings were intended to be separate messages, or it is possible that the same saying has been transferred differently as it travels by different routes.

The main thing I notice here is that Jesus advocates hating your parents! This is a little bit stronger than the previous remark about those who act on the word of God! Notice however that in the non-canon Thomas saying 101, Jesus also says we should love our parents as well as hating them. The gospel of Luke however prefers to simply dilute the ruthless connotations of the word *"hate"* by adding a segment about hating oneself, since this would imply that your hatred for your parents should not exceed your own self hatred.

Furthermore, elsewhere in Luke 18:20, Jesus says this: *"You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'"*, clearly advocating honourable treatment of one's parents. This is in line with the Hebrew law. In Exodus 20:12, one of Moses' ten commandments reads: *"Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."* thus giving clear instructions to honour your parents, and offering a long life as an incentive. Jesus reminds the *"Pharisees and scribes"* of this in Mark 7:10-13: *"For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother;' and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban, that is to say, given to God;'" then you no longer allow him to do anything for his father or his mother, making void the word of God by your tradition, which you have handed down. You do many things like this."* It is assumed that the author of the Gospel of Luke had access to the Gospel of Mark at the time of writing.

Not only that, but in Deuteronomy 21:18-21 we find out what will happen to someone who does not honour their parents: *"If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto*

them, then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard." so on this basis, I'd question whether Jesus is literally advising people to hate their parents.

Wombs and Breasts

In Luke 11:27, Jesus has just exorcised several demons. *"As he said this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!"* Now this is quite a simple line on its own. Jesus performs miracles, the woman responds by praising the very mother's body that nurtured him. This is not a passage reckoned to be from the book of Q, neither is it to be found in the other canonical gospels, and yet it is also found in the Gospel of Thomas as saying 79. In Thomas, however Jesus responds thus: *"He said to [her], "Lucky are those who have heard the word of the Father and have truly kept it. For there will be days when you will say, 'Lucky are the womb that has not conceived and the breasts that have not given milk."*

So, I notice here that those who keep the word of the Father are those same ones who are closer to Jesus than his mother and brothers, as above, but also, Thomas saying 79 is not just an example of a canonical passage with an additional part, since the additional part is also found in the gospel of Luke. *"Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.'" in Luke 23:28-30, which, in the context of the later part of the Gospel of Luke can be tentatively taken to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD70, an event which happened after Jesus' death but before the gospel of Luke was written or compiled.*

Does the Gospel of Thomas version preserve an earlier form of this saying, or is it a clever (and later) composite of these two passages in Luke, connected by a part of the saying about mother and brothers?

The Kingdom of Heaven

In this section, I'll quote, more or less in order, the places in the Gospel of Luke where the Kingdom is actively referred to, and I'll add my own comments after each quote. Assuming Markan priority, if the material quoted is original to the Gospel of Luke, it is marked as Lk, if it appears to originate in Matthew and/or the hypothetical book of Q, it is marked as Q/Mt and if material appears to originate from the Gospel of Mark, it is marked Mk. Here we go!

Luke 1:33 - *And he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.*" (Lk) The angel Gabriel says this to Mary, mother of Jesus, before Jesus is born. It does imply that the Kingdom is endless in both time and space.

Luke 4:42-43 - *And when it was day he departed and went into a lonely place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them; but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose."* (Mk) Here, Jesus states that his mission is to tell many people in different cities the good news of the Kingdom. This is interesting to me since Christianity tends to maintain that Jesus' mission was one of salvation, and yet this quote seems to indicate that education is his mission. This may not have been such an eye opener for me if I hadn't then realised that Christianity doesn't really specify a great deal about the Kingdom, it is something that will come in the future, and we will find out the specifics when that happens. In this quote, Jesus' actual mission is to spread the news about the Kingdom! Is this a different purpose than the one the church has? You decide.

Luke 6:20-23 - *And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.* (Q/Mt) This also has a parallel in the Gospel of Thomas 54, 68 and 69 though those sayings contain only part of Luke 6:20-23 and in a different order, also they contain one comment about being hated and another about being persecuted. Does this mean that the Gospel of Thomas came by these quotes separately? If so, then this little monologue may be a composite of different sayings, the possible alternative is that the Gospel of Thomas rearranged the Luke material to suit its own message. One thing I notice about this passage is that it is written mainly in the present tense, suggesting that the Kingdom of heaven is tangible now, and that the people mentioned are alive in it now. Here the Kingdom is not portrayed as a future event.

Luke 7:28 - *"I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."* (Q/Mt) This is spoken by Jesus to "people and tax collectors" while disciples of John are present. This is paralleled in Gospel of Thomas 46. This may be a tip of the hat to John, to encourage the followers of John to also follow Jesus, and to regard Jesus as John's successor.

Luke 8:9-10 - *And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but for others they are in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand."* (Mk) When Jesus says this, he has just related the famous parable of the sower, and after verses 9-10 he goes on to interpret the parable for them. The parable is in Gospel of Thomas 9, however the interpretation is not in that gospel. Does this mean that the Mark and resultantly Luke gospels added the interpretation? If so, was this to illuminate

the mystery of the parable, or was it to direct policy amongst the followers of Jesus? Taken without the explanation, the parable of the sower has at least one other interpretation than the one given in the gospels. To me, it seems very unusual that Jesus would tell the disciples that most people need to receive the secrets of the Kingdom in parables, and then to immediately demystify the parable of the sower by explaining it. Is he explaining it because those present, the disciples, do understand these secrets? If so, then why do they ask him the meaning of the parable? In my opinion the argument above, that the explanation of the parable was added later, seems compelling.

Luke 8:1 and Luke 9:2 – In these verses Jesus and the apostles, respectively, “*preach the Kingdom of God.*” In Luke 9:11, Jesus speaks to “*the people*” about the Kingdom. It is clear that Jesus is here carrying out his primary mission. It is nowadays assumed that Jesus is doing what any modern day christian does, ie: evangelising that repentance is necessary to enter heaven, but is this what he was preaching? We are not told the specifics about his teachings of the Kingdom, except in several parables, which tend to be about feasts, banquets, houses or estates. If these are examples of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom, then his teachings were mainly about how to live and how to treat other people. Jesus' parables describe situations of justice and tolerance, often being apparently quite contrary to the sorts of teachings you might expect from a messiah of any type. Nowadays it is assumed that these guidelines of how to live are useful additions to Jesus' main message of salvation through the crucifixion, but remember that spreading these parables is Jesus' self stated life mission.

Luke 9:23-27 - *And he said to all, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."* (Mk) Immediately prior to this quote Jesus has prophesied various details about his future death and so it is natural to assume, in hindsight, that Jesus is talking about his future crucifixion and second coming, to be followed by the arrival of the Kingdom of God. To Jesus' listeners, these events are in the future, but to the readers of the Gospel of Luke, remember Jesus' death by crucifixion is in the past, so they may be suitably impressed by Jesus' accurate predictions, and therefore also convinced by his prophecy of the coming of the Kingdom. I find the last comment most interesting however because it says that some alive and present at that time would experience the Kingdom, before they taste death! This has a few possible meanings. Firstly, I can't see any reason for Jesus to say this or the author of the Gospel of Luke to include it, that fits in with standard Christianity. It could mean that the Kingdom is literally still to come and that some of Jesus' audience of the time are literally still alive two thousand years later, and will be when the Kingdom finally comes. Alternatively, it could mean that the Kingdom is not a thing placed in space and time at all. It may be that the Kingdom of God is a spiritual outlook. This would fit well with the various parables, which describe a way of being, a way of reacting to certain types of circumstances. Perhaps the Kingdom of God is a virtual Kingdom, made up of those who follow Jesus' teachings, about the Kingdom. Perhaps Jesus' evangelism was an attempt to build up a groundswell of people, with similar outlooks, to create a virtual Kingdom within a kingdom or people's attitudes rather than physical territory.

Luke 9:59-62 - *To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But he said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."* (Q/Mt) Here Jesus emphasises the importance of the Kingdom. Those in the Kingdom do not bury the dead, even heir dead parents. We know that Jesus and his disciples left their families to embark on this mission of evangelism, and perhaps this is related. It also tells us that death is not

relevant to the people of the Kingdom, representing either a particular attitude to death, or as is asserted by Christianity, a literal abolishment of death in some future Kingdom.

Luke 10:8-11 - *‘Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off against you; nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’* (Q/Mt) This passage is part of a pep talk Jesus gives to seventy new disciples he has recruited, which he will then send out to evangelise in pairs. It is clearly included in the gospel as a form of guidance to readers, and not just to illuminate Jesus' instructions to those particular disciples. Jesus advocates a mobile lifestyle for his disciples, spreading news of the Kingdom. The fact that he recruits a large collection of disciples and then organises them over a wide area in small teams to disseminate the good news about the Kingdom does support the idea that the purpose of his ministry is to raise a large and distributed number of like minded followers. In my opinion, if the main purpose was to save humanity by dying, then the main work of Christianity would have begun after his death, which Christianity generally asserts that it did. Why then does Jesus make so much effort over, presumably, quite a long time to spread news about the Kingdom? This makes little sense if the Kingdom is some distant future hope, a tempting prize to encourage people to believe in the mystical significance of a death that had, at this point, not yet occurred. It makes more sense if we assume that the Kingdom was actually an end in itself, and a very real one, promising benefits in the here and now if followers adopt a lifestyle consistent with Jesus' teachings. This ethos is supported by Luke 6:31, for example, which says *“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”* which is part of the *“Blessed be you poor”* speech. This is advice that many wouldn't naturally follow, but if many people started to follow it, then it would be conceivable that these people might find themselves living in a different kind of world, more tolerant, more honest. Perhaps this is the Kingdom that Jesus had in mind.

Luke 11:2 - *And he said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come...”* (Q/Mt) This is the beginning of the Lord's Prayer. Notable here is the fact that the Kingdom is to come. This is the second real solid reference to a Kingdom that will come literally in the future. This would contradict what I just said about the Kingdom being a way of life of course.

Luke 11:15-20 - *But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Be-el'zebul, the prince of demons”; while others, to test him, sought from him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Be-el'zebul. And if I cast out demons by Be-el'zebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”* (Q/Mt) In this case, Jesus says that the Kingdom has already come! He asserts that if, indeed, his power to cast demons out stems from God, then the Kingdom has come “on you.” Has the Kingdom already come? It is possible that these Kingdom sayings originally stem from different schools of thought, ie: different hearings of Jesus, understood, remembered and rephrased differently by those who had heard them before being eventually immortalised in the gospels. By the way, Be-el'zebul is not specifically identified as Lucifer or Satan. Be-el'zebul was another middle eastern god of the time, like Mammon, also mentioned in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 12:29-33 - *And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be of anxious mind. For all the nations of the world seek these things; and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.”* (Q/Mt) except 32 (Lk) This is more spontaneous advice to

the followers of Jesus. According to the gospel, this is part of a speech of advice addressed to several thousand followers. To me, this seems to advocate the adoption of a radical selfless and rootless lifestyle. This would seem to be the sort of preaching Jesus was doing, trying to change people's lifestyles to bring about a new type of Kingdom. Perhaps he envisioned this happening within a few decades, the real reason for his "*some of you here today...*" comment. It is possible that had he continued to relentlessly gather followers across Israel, that he could have changed the national character in this way and made his Kingdom come.

In Luke 13:18 and 20 Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to metaphorical situations. 18 is (Mk) and 20 is (Q/Mt) however in both cases Jesus appears to be answering a question which no one has actually asked (in the text anyway) suggesting that these are fragments of a longer conversation, edited into Jesus' speech here. I think it's quite clear that the surviving sayings of Jesus are an "edited highlights" rather than actual transcripts of particular sermons.

Luke 13:28-30 - "*There you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out. And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.*" (Q/Mt) Jesus is here addressing the "*many*" who do not enter "*by the narrow gate*" in answer to a question from a member of the crowd. He is quite violent in his pronouncements against those who seek entrance through the front gate of the Kingdom and this may reflect the difficulty in attaining a condition to enter the Kingdom. This interpretation would apply without problems to either the 'Kingdom of Heaven in the future' or the 'Kingdom as a way of life' interpretations.

Luke 14:15 - "*When one of those who sat at table with him heard this, he said to him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"*" (Lk) This is inserted between two parables describing a marriage and a banquet feast, respectively. Interestingly, the parables themselves are Q/Mt material, though the link is pure Lk. Also, there is a parallel in Gospel of Thomas 64 for 14:16-24, however the Gospel of Thomas and Luke have different interpretations of this parable, neither of which are to be found in the other gospels! Thomas says "*Buyers and merchants [will] not enter the places of my Father.*" while Luke prefers, in 14:7-14, to explain in detail that generosity to the poor is worthy while generosity to the rich is not beneficial. This is in keeping with the Gospel of Luke's general motif of glorifying the underdog, implying that the 'Lucan Jesus' has a similar attitude.

Luke 16:16-17 - "*The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one dot of the law to become void.*" (Q/Mt) This one is quite cryptic for me, is Jesus saying the law has become void since John? If so, why does he say it would be easier to demolish heaven and earth than to abolish law? Perhaps he means the news of the Kingdom replaces the law and is the new law. This could be interpreted in a classic 'new covenant' way, from the point of view of orthodox Christianity. I still don't see why the Kingdom is entered into violently, though there is no shortage of conflict and reference to conflict in the gospel, it seems to me that Jesus' message is not one of riot or revolution, but of a change of state. Is that violent?

Luke 17:20-22 - "*Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."* And he said to the disciples, "*The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and you will not see it.*" (Lk) This appears to be an added Lucan introduction to a Q/Mt section, which follows immediately after and includes, in 17:26: "*As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of man.*" Does this suggest a physical coming in of the Kingdom, initiated by God in rapturous fashion, or is it

an assertion that the people, by their attitude, can make Israel a positive place to live once again?

Interestingly, 17:20-21 are paralleled in Gospel of Thomas 113, its last saying, bar 114 which is generally thought to be a late addition. This gospel also includes this in saying 3: '*Jesus said, "If your leaders say to you, 'Look, the (Father's) kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is within you and it is outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty."*' Now, remember this isn't in the Gospel of Luke, but it may cast a slightly new angle of light on Luke 17:20-22. Knowing oneself is not a new philosophy of course, but if it is part of the good news about the Kingdom, then that is important, since orthodox Christianity generally denies the importance of self knowledge, preferring to emphasise knowledge of Jesus.

Luke 18:16-17 - *But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."* (Mk) the message here is pretty clear, more advice on the sort of person to be if one wants to inherit the Kingdom.

Luke 18:24-26 - *Jesus looking at him said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"* (Mk) The imagery here is odd, since richness is used by Jesus elsewhere to refer to spiritual richness. Here it fits with the Lucan denouncement of the rich and powerful in favour of the glorification of minorities and the downtrodden and impoverished.

Luke 18:28-30 - *And Peter said, "Lo, we have left our homes and followed you." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."* (Mk) One thing I notice here is that Peter has no reason to say this to Jesus, in Luke or Mark. Why should he complain spontaneously about having to leave his family. It's a big deal, for sure, but why mention it now rather than at the time? This is clearly part of a larger interchange. Here and in Mark, Jesus promises eternal life in the age to come. This appears to state concretely that the Kingdom contains eternal life (which is distinctly divine, and is not just a change of attitude within Israel) and that the Kingdom will come in a future age.

On the subject of dividing families, there are a few other references to this in the gospel. In 12:51-53 (also Q saying 43), Jesus says fathers will be set against sons, in 11:16-20 (Q saying 28), quoted above also, Jesus says that divided kingdoms fall! Clearly he does not view the familial bond as a "kingdom," preferring to promote his own Kingdom of God. In 12:13-14 (also Gospel of Thomas saying 72), Jesus asks "*Am I a divider?*" referring to material possessions, and the implied answer is "no". So Jesus does not divide material wealth between men. Why? Perhaps it is irrelevant to him, when the division of loyalties and doctrines is more important than the pursuit of wealth. There is more in the Gospel of Thomas about division of opinion between people, but that's for another essay.

In Luke 19:11-27, Jesus tells quite a mysterious parable about the Kingdom, which is mainly Q/Mt material, except for 11, 14 and 27 which appear to have been added to flesh out the parable. Only the conclusion from 18:26 is paralleled in Gospel of Thomas 41: '*Jesus said, "Whoever has something in hand will be given more, and whoever has nothing will be deprived of even the little they have."*' The interesting thing is that the message seems to be the opposite of the '*last shall be first*' message in Luke 14, and this does portray quite a violent, and at first glance unjust, view of the Kingdom.

In Luke 21:7-31, Jesus describes many signs which will alert people of the coming of the Kingdom. This is Mk material, except for 24, and it is clear from the text that this is an event which is to happen in the future.

Luke 22:15-16 - *And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."* (Lk) Jesus says this at the beginning of the last supper, there is another similar comment in 22:18 which is Mark material. Has the Lk material been added to fill out the story of this important meal? These sayings also suggest that the Kingdom will come in the future, as most of the Mk material in Luke tends to.

Luke 22:28-30 - *"You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* This is Q/Mt material though it follows a Mk section which is also themed around those who sit at a table. In the Mk section, Jesus asks if it is better to sit at or serve at a table. The answer is not completely clear, especially since Jesus is promising the opportunity to sit at a table in the Kingdom, rather than to serve.

Luke 23:42-43 - *And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."* (Lk) This is an interchange between Jesus and another man who is being crucified at the same time. It is difficult to imagine that this is a verbatim account, since it's unlikely any witnesses would have noted this conversation, in my opinion. As with many of the shorter Luke only sections, this seems to be another smoothing and filling out section, designed to ease in the construction of a narrative gospel, as stated in the gospel's precis.

Luke 23:51, which is Mk material, tells us that Joseph of Arimathea, who had donated the tomb for Jesus' body, was *"looking for the kingdom of God"* This is the last mention of the Kingdom in the Gospel of Luke. I suspect we are told this so that we are in no doubt that Jesus' tomb is not in the hands of his enemies, but by someone who is within the fold. We know he is rich, necessarily to be able to donate a tomb on a whim, so perhaps this is why he is only looking for the Kingdom, since the rich have trouble finding it.

As I see it, the Kingdom is never defined properly in the Gospel of Luke, though it is referred to a great number of times. It seems that the Kingdom of God can be interpreted in a few ways, and that many of the passages referring to it are open enough to be taken more than one way. This may result in many schools of thought shaping the various sources before they were collated within the gospel, and it may also reflect the obvious intention of the gospel to make a readable and coherent storyline out of Jesus' life, gently smoothing the various doctrines attributed to Jesus into a more cohesive direction, by means of extra connecting phrases and thoughtful choice of ordering. Whether the gospel has a specific position on the Kingdom is unclear. I suspect the intention is to suggest a divine Kingdom in a future age, much like orthodox Christianity now believes in, but to leave the definition open enough not to alienate readers who, at the time, may have understood the concept of the Kingdom differently. If this is true, then it does suggest that there were groups who had different definitions of the Kingdom from each other, and who may have shared some, or a lot, of the same literature and therefore doctrine nevertheless.

The Final Furlong

In chapter 16, the Gospel of Luke takes an interesting turn, in my opinion. I might just mention that the chapter and verse numbers were added later, but it seems to me they have been to some extent placed at points where the theme or direction may be said to alter, and certainly this is the case here. Chapter 16 begins with a parable not to be found in the other canonical gospels. The parable appears to reward dishonesty in verse 8, yet then goes on in 11 and 12 to say that someone dishonest with money is also dishonest with "*true riches*," ie: the riches of the spirit. This puzzling parable is immediately followed in verse 13 by a Q/Mt passage which tells us we cannot serve God and Mammon (a god of money). Mixed messages for sure. Then follows a section about the pharisees, lovers of money, and then a story, also uniquely Lucan, about Lazarus. In my opinion the whole content of chapter 16 is sudden and brutal, and also apparently unjust, although the ambiguity of what is being said, compared with the jarring apparent change of direction makes me wonder if there isn't some other more mysterious reason for this change of attitude. As I said, this is mainly Lucan material, unlike much of the gospel which is apparently derived from the other canonical gospels. Is the author making a point unique to this gospel?

This brings me to another jarring change in direction. Towards the end of chapter 19, and carrying on into the first few verses of chapter 24, the gospel starts using Markan material almost exclusively. This is a set of apocalyptic pronouncements made by Jesus, which are generally thought to predict the forthcoming sacking of Jerusalem in AD70 by the Romans, as well as the section of the gospel story known as the Passion. Mark's gospel tells this story, up to the point of Jesus' death and the Gospel of Luke appears to stick very closely to this account, although the author is not shy about adding sections to aid the narrative flow. Much of chapter 22 and 23 is actually original Lucan material, adding extra dialogue and description which gives the characters more comprehensible motives and explains the course of events more fluidly than the Gospel of Mark.

Most of chapter 24, the final chapter, and quite a long one, is Lucan material describing the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb and his subsequent appearance to the apostles on the road to Bethany. It is mentioned more than once that those who discovered Jesus' empty tomb and saw the risen Jesus first were, indeed, women. This is mentioned in the Gospel of Mark, of course, but the Gospel of Luke makes it quite clear that women saw Jesus first after the resurrection, and that the apostles, all men, disbelieve the women on more than one occasion. Nevertheless, Jesus opens their minds and they understand that he is the Messiah, because he has risen on the third day as prophesied, despite the fact that no actual prophesy about this appears to exist in the Old Testament scriptures.

My Final Thought

Well, in my opinion, which is all this document is, really, I don't claim to be a scholar, I can't read Greek or Coptic, and I'm not qualified or authorised to make doctrinal statements or to interpret scripture, but in my opinion, the gospel of Luke is a well written book. It tells a story very well, using quite disparate sources, it seems, to create a 'connected narrative.' I think the author has succeeded in doing that. The pacing is right, there is a variety of content, the characters and also the ideological position of Jesus is kept mysterious enough to stay interesting, while accessible enough to connect with. In short, Luke is a good introduction to christianity.

It seems the Gospel of Luke agrees broadly with the gospel of Mark, in terms of the "type" of christianity it advocates. There were, have been and are quite a few different understandings of Jesus' teachings, but I would say that the gospels of Mark and Luke agree quite closely in terms of the message Jesus has for humanity. Mainly, I would say, the Gospel of Luke uses additional sources, possibly also creative imperative, to expand on the Gospel of Mark, usually in a way that includes everyday people, women, children, foreigners, specifically the wide range of normal working people that the gospel was intended to appeal to.

Those are my thoughts anyway.

Sources and Further Reading

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