

Fort Bend Christian Academy – Honors Apologetics

Chris Henderson

The Book of Luke

An Analysis By Hutson Burg

May 3, 2014

Because Legitimate Literature Corresponds to Its Context

Introduction

This thesis seeks to defend the authenticity of the Book of Luke in four ways: historically, politically, geographically, and idiomatically. If a text lines up with its context, it can be accepted as truth more readily. In this thesis, it will be shown that Luke accurately accounts for the culture, idioms, and political messages being transported at the time. Historically, secular (usually Roman) records validate the Book of Luke. Politically, Luke's internal messages are consistent with its reception among the Jews and the general public. Luke lines up with geographical and historical events it describes, which are also documented in non-biblical sources. Finally, Luke employs more idioms and cultural references than any of the other four gospels. With such a correlation to its setting in first century Palestine, the Book of Luke instantly becomes a more legitimate, reliable source. This understanding of Luke can seriously impact a skeptic's view of Christianity as a whole, for when a book lines up with fact in nearly all of its aspects, the less "provable" aspects, such as the resurrection and miracles, become easier to believe.

Table of Contents

First Century History

- 4... The Mention of “Jesus” in the First Century
- 6... A Definite Audience & Jeanne-Pierre Isbouts on Secular (Lay) Historical Accounts
- 8... Robert J. Dean on Historical Context (Temple)
- 9... The Spread of Christianity – Robert J. Dean and Roman Scribe Pliny
- 11... Robert J. Dean on Historical Context (Christianity)

The Political Landscape

- 13... The Good Samaritan
- 14... Internal Political Evidence: Predictions
- 15... N. T. Wright on a Political Reference: “Son of God”
- 17... Cultural Appeals

The Geographical Arena

- 19... The Nature of Writing in the First Century
- 20... Geographical Inconsistency – *Intentional?*
- 21... The Problematic Subjects: Quirinius, The Census, and Jesus’s Aramaic
- 22... Jean-Pierre Isbouts on Galilee
- 23... Geographical Landmarks

Idioms and Appeals

- 25... The Authorship of Luke
- 26... Idioms of a Well Researched Writer
- 28... Appeals of a Thoughtful Author

Concluding Statements ... 31

Historical Section

First Century History

To prove the authenticity of the Book of Luke, it is necessary to demonstrate that it is not a literature made up later than it internally claims. If it was in fact published at a certain time, then it would have both an impact in history and be written to an audience specific to its time. According to historical and political evidence, the book of Luke must have been published during a specific time interval. This time interval happens to agree with the time interval that the book of Luke internally claims to have been written.

The Mention of “Jesus” in the First Century

The first non-biblical mention of “Jesus” comes after his death, but this is no reason to disbelieve the gospels. Before trying to prove the historicity of Luke, it is necessary to briefly address the criticism that “if Luke is legitimate, why are there not other accounts of this “Jesus” that date to his lifetime?” Luke must be verified as a credible source first by explaining how documentation was in the first century. People were not written about unless they (a) could afford a scribe, (b) did something drastic and radical (i.e. murder the King) or (c) were publicly executed and instigated a new religious movement. In the first century, records were not kept of every person, so the lack of *other* early first century accounts of Jesus is not a legitimate criticism of the Book of Luke, nor is it of any other gospel for that matter.

No historical document *from Jesus’s lifetime* attests to his historicity. “His name does not appear in any cuneiform tablets, papyrus rolls, cylinders, prisms, or ostraca.”¹ This is obviously a huge problem for those who wish to believe that the evidence of his life from non-biblical

¹ Jean-Pierre Isbouts, *The Biblical World an illustrated atlas* (National Geographic Society, 2007), 267.

sources is plentiful. Sadly, this is a deception brought on by a modern worldview. In 2014, it is hard to imagine life without documentation such as birth certificates, school records, Facebook timelines, social security numbers, or the Internet. Documentation surrounds the modern world. Thousands of years from now, proof of a person's existence in 2014 will be conclusive, but it must not be assumed mistakenly that this was the case during Jesus's lifetime.

There are several reasons why the historical evidence for the life of Jesus before his crucifixion is so scarce. First of all, in his hometown of Galilee, few knew how to write. Galileans were known for "their simple ways."² Because Galilee was mainly agricultural, and because Bethlehem/ Nazareth was such a small town, there was little writing.³ Looking at another aspect, the apostles were not educated men or wealthy people who owned scribes. Parchment and ink was expensive, more expensive than it is today, and if someone was going to spend the money on a piece of paper, keeping in mind that they had to be in a wealthy enough family to have learned how to write, even then they wouldn't waste the parchment writing about some odd-looking Jewish prophet and teacher who spent time with tax collectors (Peter), murderers (Paul), and prostitutes. Furthermore, Jesus himself lacked the wealth to afford a scribe such as the famous sixth century scribe Baruch, who wrote about the prophet Jeremiah, and whose brother was the chamberlain to King Zedekiah of Judah.⁴ Alas, Jesus grew up to be a village rabbi, far from the status and wealth that came from Judea. The fact that his name doesn't pop up until after his death is not in the least bit surprising, and considering these factors, the vacuum of documentation aside from the other gospels that dates to before the crucifixion is absolutely understandable - to be expected, even.

² Josephus, *War Chronology*, Part 3.

³ Jean-Pierre Isbouts, *The Biblical World an illustrated atlas* (National Geographic Society, 2007) 276

⁴ Ibid. 268

A Definite Audience

As a piece of history, Luke corresponds to a certain audience. The waves of the Christian movement that followed the publication of the gospels historically line up with the message implied in Luke. In other words, the Christian movement took place in such a way that it is evident that the book of Luke instigated it (with help from the other gospels). It must have therefore been published legitimately before the movement (or perhaps during its early beginnings), but either way it was not fictitiously published after the Christian movement. In other ways, certain events like the fall of the Temple and The spread of Christianity to the Gentiles show can be used as historical landmarks to establish Luke's context as a work of writing. By proving that historical events foreshadowed in Luke line up with what actually happened in this way, one instantly adds credibility to this otherwise historically rootless piece of literature.

Jeanne-Pierre Isbouts on Secular (Lay) Historical Accounts

There are bits and pieces of “lay” evidence supporting the testimony of Jesus outside of the Gospel of Luke. The Roman Historian Suetonius was charged with the task of writing about the life of Roman Emperor Claudius until C.E. 119.⁵ In about C.E. 49, he writes “as the Jews are making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [*sic*], he expelled them from Rome.”⁶ If this decree was given in C.E. 49, there must have been a flourishing community of Christians that began around C.E. 29 and 33. These Christians would have still considered themselves observant Jews at the time. This account of Suetonius's also confirms biblical account. Acts 18:2

⁵ Jean-Pierre Isbouts, *The Biblical World an illustrated atlas* (National Geographic Society, 2007), 268.

⁶ Suetonius, *On the rule of Emperor Chrestus*, C.E. 119.

states that “[A] Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus ... had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome”⁷ In another writing, Suetonius also confirms that Christianity was a “new” entity in Nero’s rein, which occurred during first century A.D.. He writes “Punishment by Nero was inflicted on the Christians (Christos), a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.”⁸ Now, these are not “during-the-lifetime-of-Jesus-eye-witness-accounts,” but they are still valuable. Even though these reports come after the death of Christ, they evidence the expected response to a Jewish man named Jesus. Nevertheless, Suetonius is not the only Roman historian who adds support to the accuracy of the scriptures.

Tacitus is another Roman historian who mentions Jesus’s impact. In his work, *Analys*, Tacitus describes how Nero burned the Christians. “Nero created a diversion and subjected those hated for their abomination (the Christians) to the most extraordinary tortures. [They are] known by the common people to be called Christians (Christanos).” The originator of the sect, as Tacitus adds, “[was] Christ (Christus) who, during the rein of Tiberius had been executed by the sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus”⁹ Indeed, this torturing of the Christians was a scapegoat for the great fire of C.E. 64, which adds another piece of confirming information. Also, the word “Christos” is the Greek translation of the word “moshiach” or “anointed one,”¹⁰ a name that was commonly used to refer to Jesus after his death. This confirms that the eschatological murmurs surrounding this infamous Jewish man were legitimately circulating at the time; this is confirmed by a non-Jewish, non-Christian man, a Roman scribe, who would

⁷ Luke (by far the most likely author), *The Holy Bible*, Acts 18:2

⁸ Suetonius, *On the Rule of Nero*,

⁹ Tacitus, trans. from Greek by unknown, *Annals* 15, 44. C.E. 117

¹⁰ Jean-Pierre Isbouts, *The Biblical World an illustrated atlas* (National Geographic Society, 2007), 269.

have no religious obligation or other reason to make up the fact that this man Jesus was being talked about like he was some sort of messiah.

Robert J. Dean on Historical Context (Temple)

Robert J. Dean has some things to say about the Book of Luke and how it lines up (or does not line up) with history. Historically, the book of Luke can be linked to events through the message it sends, Dean claims. In one instance, Luke can be linked to political messages that coincide with events in Israel's history. Robert J. Dean writes in his book, *Layman's Bible Book Commentary* "Luke probably wrote during the decade after 70 AD. The events of that period match Luke's distinctive emphases. The Jewish roman war ended in AD 70 with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple."¹¹ Robert Dean here points out that there are several "distinct emphases" in Luke that tie it to its appropriate time frame.

One example, the event of the fall of the temple, is tied to Luke's emphasis on the acceptance of Jesus by "true heirs of the Old testament." It is disputed whether or not Luke was written before or after this event, so in the interest of presenting a solid argument, It should be pointed out that whether or not the text was written in response to the event, the message relates to it culturally and arguably foreshadows it. A major theme of Luke is acceptance of the rejected.¹² In this statement, Luke is entreating the Jews to embrace Jesus: "Luke also stressed Jesus and Christianity as the true fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. Jesus came into the bosom of true Judaism. The people associated with his birth – Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna – were the true heirs of the Law and the Prophets"¹³ Dean points out that Luke is making a plea to the Jews to accept and follow Jesus. Whether this foreshadows the

¹¹ Dean, Robert 1983 *Layman's book commentary volume 17: Luke* Bradman press, Nashville. page 12

¹² The Good Samaritan, Lazarus the poor man, Prostitute washing feet, Tax collectors and women.

¹³ Dean, Robert 1983 *Layman's book commentary volume 17: Luke* Bradman press, Nashville. page 13

temple fall or responds to it, it is connected to the event in history. If responding: in the Jews' time of turmoil, when it seemed that God had forsaken them, their temple destroyed, and their link to Yhwh severed, the book of Luke urges acceptance of a new link: Jesus. If foreshadowing: the book's warnings link themselves to the creeping threat of the Roman Empire, which was still a growing entity at the time, and if before the fall of the temple, the book's publication necessarily occurs before a solid historical date. In this scenario, Luke's internal message makes it evident that Yhwh is preparing the way for his people to be preserved during the "grafting in" of the Gentiles. Throughout his writing, Luke undisputedly emphasizes that (as Robert Dean puts it) "These true heirs of the Old Testament recognized and welcomed Jesus as the promised messiah (Luke 2:29-38 9:20),"¹⁴ a political and historically relevant plea. In the view of the events around AD 70, this message makes more sense than during another time period.

Is this really accurate? The implication of this message is that the *Jews* should have become the Christians. They are the ones being called to embrace Jesus. Dean explains: "during the period after Pentecost, all Jesus's followers were Jews... Paul... took the gospel to non-Jews... as a result, after AD 70, the Christian movement was predominantly Gentile."¹⁵ The reason for this shift has to do with a rub between Jewish tradition and the new "kingdom ideology" of evangelism to "all peoples." The author's social awareness (and therefore further his existential legitimacy) is supported by his discussion of this cultural dissonance implicitly discussed in Luke and Acts.

The Spread of Christianity – Robert J. Dean and Roman Scribe Pliny

¹⁴ Dean, Robert 1983 *Layman's Bible book commentary* introduction "date and purpose" 13.

¹⁵ Ibid. 12.

As the crucifixion and subsequent literature began the movement of Christianity, this movement itself ties Luke and Acts to concrete historical record. There are letters and Roman commentary of the fact that Christianity became a gentile movement. Several things identify the Christians described in Pliny's letter to Trajan as non-Jews around AD 111. Roman citizenship, worship of Roman Gods and the Emperor in addition to worship of Jesus, the fact that they are "spreading around" (Jews are seldom evangelistic-oriented; one is born into Judaism), the use of the term "deaconess" (a non-Jewish religious title), and finally the fact that "from all sexes, classes, ages...villages, countryside" came Christians shows that it is not a restricted community as the Jews would have it, but a spreading, all-including (and therefore by definition: gentile) movement. A quote from Pliny's letter contains the aspects just described: *"I asked them directly if they were Christians...answered affirmatively... worshiped both your image and the images of the gods.... There were others ... I noted down to be sent to the City, because they were Roman citizens. They ... spread themselves abroad... I... hastened to consult you...on account of the number of people endangered. For many of all ages, all classes, and both sexes already are brought into danger And not only the cities; the contagion of this superstition is spread throughout the villages and the countryside... [we tortured] two servant maids, which were called deaconesses "*¹⁶ In other words, the word "Christian" <Christos> (The word "Christos" is the Greek translation of the word "moshiach" or "anointed one,"¹⁷ a name that was commonly used to refer to Jesus after his death.) If the name Christos was mentioned on a document dated ~AD 111 and if it was demonstrated that this movement lacked certain Semitic qualities while taking on some Gentile properties, then it can be reasonably concluded that at the latest, by this time the movement was no longer just Jewish. This makes Luke a reliable text because it can be

¹⁶ Pliny, *in a letter to emperor Trajan* Epistulae, Vol X, No. 96

¹⁷ Jean-Pierre Isbouts, *The Biblical World an illustrated atlas* (National Geographic Society, 2007), 269.

seen clearly that Luke and Acts line up with a concrete fact: Christianity became a gentile movement, as the implied messages tell in Luke. This also supports the fact that Luke and the gospels helped instigate the Christian movement proving that they had a visible historical impact. This shows their legitimacy of publication in the mid first century and helps one to disregard the fictitious accusation that the gospels were “obviously false works of men because there is no proof to show they weren’t simply published later.”

Robert J. Dean on Historical Context (Christianity)

Christianity transitioned, but why? Answering this question supports Luke and Acts because Acts deals with this transition directly, and Luke instigated this transition (rather, it can be demonstrated that some of the implicit messages in Luke instigate a transition, or hint at the direction that Jesus’s followers took after his death, giving reason to believe that Luke was a factor in causing the movement.) Both books address this question, as Robert Dean explains: “*How did a Jewish movement become predominantly Gentile?* This was a crucial question during the years immediately after AD 70.”¹⁸ Dean explains that this paramount inquiry was rooted at a controversy. Dean clarifies: “the Jews who rejected Jesus also rejected the noblest and the best of their own heritage.” As “Acts explains,” the Jews expressed major hostility toward Paul because he tried to include the Gentiles on equal footing with the Jews (Acts 22:21:22)” This happened because Paul believed he was to evangelize to the Gentiles.

Why the Jews did not “take in” the Gentiles, but rather preferred to remain as separate is another informative matter of investigation. The movement was expanded to the Gentiles. Knowing Jewish culture, this answers the question; the Jews rejected Jesus because to accept him would be to admit equal footing with the Gentiles, something unthinkable for any orthodox

¹⁸ Dean, Robert 1983 *Layman’s book commentary volume 17: Luke* Bradman press, Nashville. page 12.

Jew. Jews value tradition, purity, and remaining God's chosen people. One of the several reasons for Jewish culture and practice is to keep them separate from Gentiles. So, to finally assimilate goes against centuries of Jewish tradition. Therefore, they rejected Paul and Jesus and the Christian movement, and it quickly became a Gentile movement. Luke has countless messages that imply this very contrary-to-Jewish-tradition action of incorporating the Gentiles. Not only is Luke filled with parables about poor men, tax collectors, and Samaritans, and accounts of Jesus disagreeing with the Pharisees, accepting prostitute foot baths, violating the laws of the Sabbath, and touching sick or diseased people, but this rubs Jewish values of keeping the law, purity, and respecting the Pharisees as mediators with God. These messages in Luke line up with a theme of disagreement with Jewish tradition in the first century, and fit perfectly with the transition of Christianity to a Gentile movement evidenced in Acts. The fact that this literature had a visible effect on history makes it (Luke) more credible. Additionally, the time of this historical transition to Gentile-ism coincides with the time the book was supposedly published, and the response a book like Luke would elicit from the Jews actually was elicited from them.

Political Section

The Political Landscape

In this thesis, “politics” is defined as the discussion of the rulership, or any statements that deal with a specific culture and/or depict how two or more cultures relate. As far as politics goes, the book of Luke makes particular appeals to the Gentiles, namely the Greeks, and depicts specifically the “outcast” such as prostitutes, lepers, and tax collectors. Jesus himself makes some political references, and a number of his titles are political in nature, as well. Because Christianity reportedly spread “to all peoples” (as has been demonstrated) and because Luke maintains a theme of “including the traditionally unincluded,” it is easier to see that Luke lines up with political history.

The Good Samaritan

The parable of the Good Samaritan makes sense in this historical context and draws ties to the political struggles that did actually take place in this setting. By looking at the parable of the Good Samaritan, one can prove that without a first-century perspective on the story, there is lost a great sense of the message. This is significant because, once again, it lines Luke up with its setting, and if a book repeatedly demonstrates that it lines up with its setting, there is less reason to doubt its legitimacy. Here, Luke lines up with the political sentiment of the Jews toward the Samaritans. About the parable of the Good Samaritan, N. T. Wright writes: *“Often this parable is taken in a general moral sense: if you see someone in a ditch, go and help them. Sometimes, where people remember that in Jesus’s day the Samaritans and the Jews hated each other like poison, this is expanded into a further moral lesson about the wickedness of racial and religious*

prejudice.”¹⁹ This parable takes for granted a complex distain between the Jews and the Samaritans: “*Both sides claimed to be the true inheritors of the promises to Abraham and Moses... few Israelites today will travel from Galilee to Jerusalem by the direct route*”²⁰ Like Jesus did, many would travel through Jericho because it was safer. “*The dessert road from Jericho to Jerusalem had many turns and twists... a lonely traveler was an easy target... couldn’t tell whether he was alive or dead, so since for temple officials it was important for the two in the story not to contract impurity by touching a corpse, it was better they remain aloof*”²¹ The cultural references and social code minutiae are evident here. They are interwoven throughout the parable, giving it a sense of cohesion with a understanding of first century Palestinian politics. Once again, scripture’s political statements and keen cultural appeals bare the precision that would be expected of a legitimate text.

Internal Political Evidence: Predictions

Jesus makes several predictions about his rejection and the fall of the temple. Jesus actually adds credibility to Luke because he accurately foreshadows the previously discussed political movement of “toward the Gentiles” in his ministry. Some claim that this “predicting” is actually a reason to disbelieve Luke’s pre-movement publishing. These individuals see prophesy as an indication of after-the-fact writing because it supports the idea of inserting known data after something happens, claiming it is written earlier, all in the effort to make it *seem* like prophesy. By this point, that possibility²² has been disproven rigorously enough that if the reader has not been convinced yet, it is dubious that the rest of this paragraph will be convincing either.

¹⁹ N.T. Write, *Luke For Everyone* Ch: “Luke 10:25-37 The Parable of the Good Samaritan”

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² the possibility of a false *time* of publication- the main aspect that the history section sought to disprove

Robert Dean²³ writes about Jesus's statements: "Jesus predicted a coming rejection of the gospel by many Jews and its acceptance by the Gentiles (Luke 13:28-33; 14:23-24 20:16)."²⁴ Luke 13:33-34 says "...I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.' O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!..." Luke 14:23-24 says "And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. 24 For I tell you,[d] none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'" Also, an ongoing theme in the gospels is that Jesus represents Israel and the temple. When Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple, he also predicts his own destruction. Luke 21:5-6 states "And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." As Luke documents Jesus's words, and as Jesus's words foreshadow events that actually happened, Luke's words indirectly validate themselves through political synchronization.

N. T. Wright on a Political Reference: "Son of God"

The title "Son of God" along with a some other terms prescribed to Jesus in Luke actually allude to the politics of the time, and therefore tie Luke to History and politics. "Luke, therefore, set the gospel story within the context of what was going on in the Roman empire. He presented Jesus as Savior, Lord, Son of God – all titles ascribed to the deified Roman emperors."²⁵ N. T. Wright explains exactly how politically, Jesus's birth time is made legitimate by his later titles.

"...in 31 BC. Augustus turned the great roman republic into an empire, with himself at the dead;

²³ who was also the one who discussed how one reason the Jews rejected Christianity was for its appeal to Gentiles

²⁴ Dean, Robert 1983 *Layman's book commentary volume 17: Luke* Bradman press, Nashville. page 13

²⁵ Ibid.

he proclaimed that he had brought justice and peace to the whole world; and, declaring his dead adoptive father [Julius Caesar] to be divine, styled himself as 'son of god'” The titles that appear in Luke are actually allusion to politics, wherein Jesus supplants Augustus, becoming the true “King of kings.”

In several ways, Augustus became famous for his titles, so by the time Jesus was a grown man, the titles would have their due political significance. *“Poets wrote songs...Historians told the story of Rome... Augustus, people said, was the ‘savior’ of the world. He was the king, its ‘lord’. Increasingly, in the eastern part of his empire, people worshiped him, too, as a god.”* Augustus, in other words, was undoubtedly established as the ruler of Rome and the ruler of the world.

N. T. Wright explains how Luke makes a point that may be hidden to modern readers. *“But the point Luke is making is clear. The birth of this little boy is the beginning of a confrontation between the kingdom of God – in all its apparent weaknesses, insignificance and vulnerability – and the kingdoms of the world. Augustus never heard of Jesus of Nazareth. But within a century or so his successors in Rome had not only heard of him; they were taking steps to obliterate his followers. Within just over three centuries the Emperor himself became a Christian.”*²⁶ The Reason why a political reference supports the authenticity of Luke is because it proves that the underlying message really did have roots in the politics of the time, something hard to synthesize hundreds of years after the era has passed. To address the title itself, ‘the son of god’ and ‘lord’ should be recognized as political and historical references to the opposing rulership, Rome, specifically Augustus.

Another point to hit on is what message this makes to the Jews. The Jews have a History of vacillating from being under rulership to being free throughout the whole of the Old

²⁶ Tom (N. T.) Wright *Luke for Everyone* Ch 2.1-20 (“Birth”)

Testament. Ongoing with this theme, by the first century, Rome was firmly established as the “oppressors” of the Jews for that era. To further to point made earlier that Luke sought to urge the Jews to accept Jesus, It makes sense that Luke would prescribe him with the titles of their oppressors, implying symbolically that Jesus will deliver them, and thus is the Messiah and that he will replace their ruler as the rightful King.

Cultural Appeals

Several things in Luke line up with first century Palestinian culture surprisingly well. By looking at Luke, It is clear that the author strove to “put Jesus’s life and ministry into a Palestinian and Roman historical framework.”²⁷ Luke 1:5 depicts a “vision of Zacharias in reign of Herod, King of Judea,” tying the story to historical and cultural figures like Zacharias and Herod. The birth of Jesus is surrounded by “a decree of Caesar Augustus” and “Quirinius’ presence in Syria”²⁸ The preaching of John included Tiberious Caesar’s fifteenth year of reign, Pontius Pilate as governor of Judea, Herod as the tetrarch of Galilee, Philip as tetrarch of Ituraca, Lysanias as tetrarch of Abelene, and Annas and Caiaphas as high priests.²⁹ These references again tie Luke to culture and politics of the time, displaying how much care Luke the author took in including the details. Luke appeals to Judaism by describing a funeral accurately. In Luke 7:11-12, it says "a sizeable crowd from the city was with her..." the passage goes on to describe a funeral that very accurately lines up as tradition stands, “Jewish funerals involved the entire community and were remarkably noisy and emotional.”³⁰ Finally, Luke evidences how the sentiment of Jewish was on Gentile or Roman homes in one passage. A centurion states "Lord,

²⁷ Bible Lessons International *Study Guide Commentary Series, New Testament*, Vol. 3A

²⁸ Luke *Luke* 2:1-2

²⁹ Bible Lessons international *Study Guide Commentary Series, New Testament*, Vol. 3A, Luke 3:1-2

³⁰ Ibid. Luke 7:11-12

do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof... I am not worthy for You to come under my roof.”³¹ This contrasts strongly with an earlier verse describing a message that an elder gave “for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue.”³² As the study guide puts it, “There is an obvious contrast between Luke 7:5 (the message of the elders) and this man's own sense of his unworthiness (cf. Luke 7:7).”³³ These political internal evidences and appeals to culture help to show how not only does Luke line up with history, but there is a special sensitivity to the politics and cultures that is unique to Luke’s setting and political context.

³¹ Luke *Luke* 7:6

³² Ibid. 7:5

³³ Bible Lessons International. *Study Guide Commentary Series, New Testament*, Vol. 3A, Luke 7:5-7

Geographical Section

The Geographical Arena

Geography is the most problematic topic with the most inconsistencies. Inquiry surrounds the topics of Quirinius, Jesus's sudden knowledge of Aramaic, and Augustus's Census. Some of these issues remain unresolved to this day. This is understandable though- some even argue that a number of the inconsistencies are intentional, meant to serve a greater theological purpose. In another view, many of these inquiries might be an issue when viewed from a "modern understanding of precision," but for the most part, if viewed from a first-century understanding of precision, the geographical errors are negligible. The fact is, they mention the right people; even if in the wrong times and places by a couple years, on the whole there are no huge gaps. Looking at another aspect: a proper, geographically consistent knowledge is present in the book of Luke. For example, an appropriate knowledge of agriculture is displayed by those from Galilee. Important geographical landmarks like the Jordan River and Herod's Temple are treated appropriately; their importance among the culture is accurately represented by how they are treated in Luke. Overall, the Book of Luke's correlation to the Geography of the time helps to support its accuracy and display that it fits cohesively into its supposed setting.

The Nature of Writing in the First Century

A bit of inaccuracy is actually expected from Luke; it lines up with Greek writing. The nature of Greek history happens to be very selective, and embellishment and interpretation was expected. This is because propaganda and entertainment were the main two purposes for writing in that era. "Luke uses Hellenistic terms to describe his methods, but records Jesus' life in a Hebrew historical fashion. The best historians in the Ancient Near East (i.e., most accurate) were

Hittites and Hebrews.”³⁴ Secondly, the four gospels were written for the purpose of evangelism. They are not necessarily chronological, but ordered for maximum impact. This kind of writing is very eastern in nature, but that does not make it false or a fabrication. Thirdly, Luke is not supposed to be a history book. Its purpose was to convert Gentiles and it did; it impacted Paul’s ministry.³⁵ Luke used the best geographical methods he could to portray Jesus as a messiah and a redeemer, for the sake of the Gentiles.

Geographical Inconsistency – *Intentional?*

Luke was written in the first century. Some buy into the misconception (brought on by a modern standpoint) that the inaccuracies detract from Luke’s reliability as a text. However, these inconsistencies and omissions may seek to prove Luke’s reliability further. Back in the first century, writing was not intended to be perfectly accurate. In fact, according to literary history, Luke actually fits the mold of theological texts: “Luke’s Gospel is as much theology as chronological, sequential history. True historical events are selected, adapted, and arranged for theological impact”³⁶ for example, “The Gospel of John’s recording of an early Judean ministry (cf. John 1:19-4:42) does not fit Luke’s theological pattern.” Luke instead wants the climax of the journey to be Jesus’ visit to Jerusalem. As the study points out, “The majority of Luke’s presentation of Jesus is “on the way/road to Jerusalem,” which characterizes 9:51 (i.e., “He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem,” cf. Luke 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11,28).” Going further, this may explain other inconsistencies with John. When Jesus is in the desert, “Luke rearranges the order of Satan’s temptations so that Jerusalem is last,” once again this is because Luke’s purpose is to minister and appeal to a certain audience. This understanding that “Luke is

³⁴Bible Lessons International. *Study Guide Commentary Series, New Testament*, Vol. 3A

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

writing long after Jesus' death, resurrection, and the spread of the gospel”³⁷ and how that has an impact may help to excuse other inconsistencies in Luke to a degree.

The Problematic Subjects: Quirinius, The Census, and Jesus's Aramaic

Two events in Jesus's life are often subject to criticism: the census taken around C.E. 4 and Jesus's reading of Isaiah in Aramaic. Luke 2:1 accounts for the census: “in those days a decree went out from emperor Augustus that all the world would be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria” This lines up in that there was a man named Quirinius who was a governor around that time, and censuses were a thing that was taken in Rome around that time. However, as Jean-Pierre Isbouts points out: “this official has been identified as Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, who was governor of Syria. But Quirinius held office from C.E. 6 to 12, well after Herod's death. Moreover, there is no official record of Sulpicius Quirinius ordering a census.”³⁸ Further in the topic of the census, Luke explains that Joseph and Mary went to Nazareth because Joseph was a descendant of David, which was a tribe based in Bethlehem. (Luke 2:3-4) The problem, however is that “the purpose of the census was to update the Roman taxation system.”³⁹ It would make more sense, therefore, that Joseph appear in the place of his residence, not “birth or tribal association.” Looking at context though, this can be explained by Micah 5:2. It states that “he who is to rule in Israel” shall come from Bethlehem. Finally, Luke 4:16-20 depicts one of Jesus's first public acts, a reading from Isaiah. All in attendance “were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth” (Luke 4:22). He did this reportedly in the synagogue of Nazareth. The issue lies in the following question: “where did Jesus receive an education on how to read Aramaic?” It is known that Galileans do not usually

³⁷ Author not Stated. *Study Guide Commentary Series, New Testament*, Vol. 3A

³⁸ Jean-Pierre Isbouts, *The Biblical World an illustrated atlas* (National Geographic Society, 2007) 273

³⁹ Ibid.

read Hebrew, and it is known that Jesus must have been taught at some point to read Aramaic; Jesus became a rabbi, so he had to develop his knowledge through learning. No teacher who did not speak his first language would be able to teach him a second language, though. He must have been taught from another source.”⁴⁰ This is largely unresolved, but there is internal consistency in this, at the least: (John 7:15) lines up with this: “Saying, ‘how does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?’” In general, most errors and inconsistencies are not blatant or a reason in and of themselves to disregard an entire text.

Jean-Pierre Isbouts on Galilee

Luke accounts that “In the last years of Herod the Great, Miriam (mary) had a son”⁴¹ Reportedly, this son was born in Bethlehem or Nazareth, south of Galilee. However, Jesus grew up in Galilee and came to Galilee several times in his life. Josephus reported the following geography bordered Galilee in his day⁴²: it is the northernmost part of Israel. To its west is Akko (Acre) and Mount Carmel. To its east is the Jordan River. In the south is the Valley of Jezreel and Samaria, and north is Baca (modern day Bezet). This does not contradict Luke. Furthermore, Josephus reported the following lay within its borders: The Sea of Galilee- the most prominent body of water, fed by Jordan River, (the Sea of Galilee) provided a thriving fishing industry. Fishing is referenced in Luke as well as technology that would have been present in such a “thriving fishing economy”⁴³ Plain of Gennesaret: surrounds sea of Galilee on the North and North West side. Throughout Luke, Galilee is accurately described. Galilee was a bounteous

⁴⁰ Jean-Pierre Isbouts, *The Biblical World an illustrated atlas* (National Geographic Society, 2007), 278.

⁴¹ Ibid. 265.

⁴² Ibid. 266.

⁴³ Luke. *Luke* 5:1-11

land: Josephus wrote himself about Galilee⁴⁴: “Its soil is so universally rich and fruitful” that all of its land “is cultivated by its inhabitants, and no part of it lies idle.” This gave way to a thriving agricultural economy in Galilee. Furthermore, Galilee’s history and the description of the Romans closing in on them at the time of Jesus is supported by fact. “For a time, Galilee was a Jewish area surrounded by a progressively Hellenistic Middle East.... Herod the great ruled after the Hasmonean conquest of Pompey in 142 B.C.E.”⁴⁵ Throughout, Galilee is a great reference point from which to base a geographical proof of accuracy.

Geographical Landmarks

Geography is covered and accounted for in Luke. For example: Galilee was agricultural. Jesus displays his knowledge of farming and agriculture in Luke 13:8-9 and Luke 6:44. The verses read: “let it (fig trees) alone for one more year until I dig around it and put manure in it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down” ... “[figs] are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.” This sounds like a Galilean, and would line up with what has been found by historian Josephus and Franciscan archeologist Bellarmino Bagatti.⁴⁶ Isbouts discusses that in 1955, Franciscan archeologist Bellarmino Bagatti led several excavation campaigns. In one of them, “Bagatti found granaries, olive presses, and wells, which attest to the existence of an agricultural village as early as the first or second century C.E.” also, Josephus wrote that nearly everyone at that time in Nazareth was “knowledgeable about how to farm the land in some way or another.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, Luke treats the river Jordan, a meaningful landmark in that culture, very appropriately. Luke identifies that in “the fifteenth year of the

⁴⁴ Josephus, *On the Jewish War*, Book 3 Chapter 3 (37- 93 AD).

⁴⁵ Josephus, *The wars of the Jews* 1:141

⁴⁶ Jean-Pierre Isbouts, *The Biblical World an illustrated atlas* (National Geographic Society, 2007), 275-276

⁴⁷ Ibid. 276

reign of Tiberius Cesar,” (about C.E. 28 or 29) Jesus was “about 30 years of age “ (Luke 3:1, 23) when he was baptized in the Jordan river by John the Baptist.⁴⁸ It makes sense for Jesus to go to John, and not someone else, because John was charismatic. First century C.E. historian Flavius Josephus writes in *Jewish Antiquities* “John was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism.”⁴⁹ But why baptism? John the Baptist explains that God’s wrath would be more intense than ever before this time, and that the messiah would come, whose “winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff will burn with unquenching fire,” (Luke 3:17) the only way out was to break ties with sin through full emersion in water. The action of baptism lines up politically with the fears of the Jews at the time, and it therefore makes sense that Jesus would seek to be baptized. The fact that the baptism takes place in the Jordan river shows appropriate geographical reference. Furthermore, Luke 21 discusses a temple “adorned with noble stones and jewels” while Jesus is in Jerusalem. This is undoubtedly Herod’s temple. The passage explains that “the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” which is met with surprise and shock. Truly, Herod’s temple is intact when it should be and furthermore is treated with the concern and importance it had and still has in that culture.

⁴⁸ Jean-Pierre Isbouts, *The Biblical World an illustrated atlas* (National Geographic Society, 2007)

⁴⁹ Josephus, 1st century C.E. *Jewish Antiquities*

Idiomatic Section

Idioms and Appeals

Another topic that ties Luke to its setting is its accurate use of idioms. The use of idioms makes Luke a more reliable text because it demonstrates the cultural context in which Luke was written. The fact that out of the four gospels, “Luke writes the most grammatically correct and polished *Koine* Greek”⁵⁰ makes it more than clear that from a literary perspective, Luke absolutely lines up with a first century Palestinian context. Furthermore, Luke’s careful writing and consideration of his audience causes him to word things in a way that his audience can understand. This is useful because it reveals how much Luke’s contents accurately account for the culture.

The Authorship of Luke

To verify the authenticity of the writing in Luke, it is necessary to identify Luke the man as a legitimate, non-fictional person. There is a fair amount of historical evidence that demonstrates that Luke was an actual man who spoke Greek and reportedly wrote a Gospel. In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus says “Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him.” And “If anyone sets Luke aside... he rejects the Gospel... For through [Luke] we have become acquainted with very many and important parts of the Gospel;”⁵¹ The Anti-Marcionite Prologue for Luke states more about Luke: “Luke is a Syrian of Antioch, a Syrian by race, a physician by profession. He had become a disciple of the apostles and later followed Paul until his (Paul's) martyrdom.”⁵² Tertullian also attests to Luke’s authorship of a gospel and of Acts. “Luke, a physician, whom Paul had taken as one zealous for the law, wrote

⁵⁰ Bible Lessons International *Study Guide Commentary Series, New Testament, Vol. 3A*

⁵¹ A.D. 175-195 Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.1.1;3.14.4

⁵² AD 175 Author not found *Anti-Marcionite Prologue for Luke* op. cit., p.335.

the third Gospel and Acts of the Apostles”⁵³ Also, there was discovered a Muratorian fragment that read “Luke, a physician, whom Paul had taken as one zealous for the law, wrote the third Gospel and Acts of the Apostles.”⁵⁴ As a piece of literature, the book of Luke is quoted and alluded to in later works, like I Clement.⁵⁵ After that, both Origen, the respected third century Greek theologian, and Eusebius who quoted *him*, give account in a work, *Church History*⁵⁶ of Luke’s authorship. Jerome, or Eusebius Hieronymus a Latin translator of the Bible, says that Luke was “a physician from Antioch, and was highly literate in Greek. He traveled with Paul in all his journeys.”⁵⁷ These sources agree on several facts about Luke, namely that he was from Antioch, was a physician, a follower of Paul, and wrote Luke and Acts. A majority mention that he was conversant in Greek and literate, and a multiplicity explain that he died in Boeotia. Because of the consistency and quantity of accounts on Luke’s authorship, it can be reasonably concluded that this first century Greek-speaking man “Luke” wrote a gospel, was literate, was from Antioch, and actually existed.

Idioms of a Well Researched Writer

There is a selection of words and phrases that Luke uses which are Greek or Semitic Idioms. The fact that these idioms are used shows that Luke was a careful writer. Maintaining the occasional error and uncertainty, the fruits of this are still evident: these idioms are consistent with the Idioms used in the cultures and the time that Luke was supposedly published. The first idiom is found in Luke 1:1. “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us...” The word “inasmuch” here is the Greek word

⁵³ AD 150/240 Tertullian *Against Marcion* 4.2,3 and *Against Heresies* 5.1

⁵⁴ AD 180-200 Unknown author. *Unknown work*.

⁵⁵ AD 95 I Clement 18:1, 2:1

⁵⁶ ~AD 325 Origen, Eusebius *Church History* 6.25.6

⁵⁷ AD 246-420 Jerome *Magna XXVI. 18* and *Illustrious Men* 7

epeidē per. Also used in a Koine papyri in the garbage dumps in Egypt, it means “since indeed” of “considering that.”⁵⁸ This is its only use in the New Testament, showing that Luke strove to incorporate a level of idiomatic appeal that other biblical writers did not. The second idiom is Jewish⁵⁹ and found in Luke 4:25: “when the sky was shut for three years and six months.” According to rabbinical tradition, “three years and six months” is an apocalyptic idiom for “a set time of persecution.”⁶⁰ Not all other mentions of this time include the idiomatically necessary six months. Another Semitic (Jewish) Idiom is used when Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem, as Luke says “set his face to Jerusalem” As the study puts it, “He metaphorically looked straight ahead. He let nothing distract Him to the right or to the left. God's will was in Jerusalem (cf. Mark 10:32). This may be an allusion to Isa. 50:7 or Jer. 42:15,17 (cf. Dan. 9:3).”⁶¹ Luke also uses Greek Idioms. In 9:44, “Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.” The verb *tithēmi* used here means “to set,” “to place,” or “to lay,” drawing attention to the importance of permanently remembering the following statement.

There is a level of interpretation that also goes with reading such an idiomatically colorful text. When Greek and Semitic idioms are in conflict, a verse may be interpreted more than one way. Also, some errors in translation have occurred because of this. In Luke 11:3, a section of the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us each day our daily bread” employs the Greek word “daily” (*epiousios*) which is only found here and in Matthew. According to the Koine papyri found in Egypt, this refers to a master giving his servant food, but only enough to accomplish the daily task.⁶² This is the meaning of the verse when interpreted with the Greek idiom, but when seen from the Semitic background, “*This word may also carry the eschatological emphasis of "bread*

⁵⁸ Bible Studies International. *Study Guide Commentary Series, New Testament, Vol. 3A*

⁵⁹ (this section does not outline every single idiom in Luke, only some)

⁶⁰ Author not Stated. *Study Guide Commentary Series, New Testament, Vol. 3A*

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

*of the future or new age." This would imply that the kingdom is present now in believers (analogous to "eternal life" now). This is the "already-yet-future" tension of Jesus' preaching"*⁶³

Furthermore, in Luke 11:11, "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent," an error in translation was made by the Greek scribes because of the ambiguity. The Arimaic version of "instead of a fish" reads "and instead," leaving the passage thus: "...and instead will give min a serpent." However, some of the Greek scribes did not understand. For the passage to retain its meaning, a special Greek idiom is required: "not instead," which was not included.⁶⁴ Instead, the common Koine Greek form was employed. This can serve as a reminder that the Bible was written and translated by mortal men, but it can also be an example of the minimal impact such errors like this really have.

Appeals of a Thoughtful Author

Luke was a smart writer. He seriously considered whether or not his writings would be understood by his audience. This drove him to alter texts that he quotes from the Old Testament such that he uses Greek sayings that are equivalent to the Jewish sayings he replaces. In other ways, he makes a visible effort to connect with the Gentiles in a way that encompasses their history and the things they knew about, all in the effort to appeal to them. In Luke 1:1-4, the passage reads: "In as much as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us..." Specifically, the phrase "undertaken to compile" (*diē gēsis*) is a Greek term that refers to a scribe recording something.⁶⁵ As the study puts it, *"In Greek literature it has the connotation of a full and complete narrative. Luke is describing the careful,*

⁶³ Author not Stated. *Study Guide Commentary Series, New Testament, Vol. 3A*

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

historical research of Jesus' life that preceded his own writing."⁶⁶ In the entire New Testament, this careful description is only used here. In Luke 1:3-4, The author carefully inserts a known first century title of honor and respect: "most excellent." The passage is "it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus..." Another interesting mention in this section is the use of the name "Theophilus." This was a common name, both for Jews and Gentiles, used in the Mediterranean area.⁶⁷ Moving on to Luke 18:9, "He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt" (following is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.) Luke uses the Greek word "hypocrite" here, though. As *"This compound word came from the theatrical world and was used for an actor performing behind a mask. It came from two Greek words: "to judge" (krinō) and "under" (hupo). It described a person acting in one way, but being another.*"⁶⁸ Luke appeals to his Greek audience by recording snippets from their history. Luke 13:4 is a great example. "Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem?" The correlation to real events intensifies the authenticity of Jesus's statement to his audience, and Luke is sure to include this. Throughout his text, Luke repeatedly inserts cultural references and appeals.

⁶⁶ Author not Stated *Study Guide Commentary Series, New Testament, Vol. 3A*

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Luke also carefully considered whether or not his audience would understand his messages, and altered them accordingly. In Luke 11:4, Luke avoids the confusing Jewish idiom “debts” and uses “sin” (or in Greek, “miss the mark”) to describe the idea of disobedience against God.⁶⁹ The Greeks would also have not understood his meaning had he not corrected the same issue in 11:2-4. Finally, Luke displays sensitivity to his audience in 18:7. “...who cry to Him day and night.” A way of expressing continual action (i.e., always), the order of “day and night” reflects a Gentile idiom. However, 2:37, “night and day,” reflects a Hebrew idiom. While Luke was indeed a researcher, he used his source’s idioms, and at times created his own. (i.e. Acts 9:24; 20:31; 26:7)⁷⁰ Overall, Luke shows a special sensitivity to his audience and consideration to their comprehension. This supports the notion that Luke truly lived in this culture to be able to account for it so well. The idioms and references evidence a culturally adept author who employed thoughtful cultural precision.

⁶⁹ Author not Stated *Study Guide Commentary Series, New Testament, Vol. 3A*

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Concluding Statements

The book of Luke has proven to line up with historical evidence and cultural context. The fact that so many aspects of Luke function as if it were a genuine text makes one wonder if it really is. There is enough evidence to point out Luke as a book that can reliably account for history and serve as an accurate analysis of culture. The use of idioms and cultural appeals, as well as the appropriate reference to geographical landmarks supports the notion that Luke was written during the early first century. All of these factors have been outlined in an effort alter the skeptic's opinion of the Gospel of Luke. It is not a made-up book; the stories have, at the very least, some tangible grasp on reality – a root in the right culture. When this fact is accepted, it is easier for one to trust the accounts of the life of Jesus as accurate depictions of what the writer witnessed and believed.

Works Cited

Author not found AD 175 *Anti-Marcionite Prologue for Luke* op. cit.

Bible Lessons International, Author not Stated. *Study Guide Commentary Series, New Testament*, Vol. 3A

Dean, Robert 1983 *Layman's book commentary volume 17: Luke* Bradman press, Nashville.

I Clement 18:1, 2:1 AD 95

Irenaeus A.D. 175-195 *Against Heresies*

Jean-Pierre Isbouts, *The Biblical World an illustrated atlas* (National Geographic Society, 2007)

Jerome *Migna XXVI*. AD 246-420 *18 and Illustrious Men*

Josephus, 1st century C.E. *Jewish Antiquities*

Josephus, *On the Jewish War*, Book 3 Chapter 3 (37- 93 AD).

Josephus, *The wars of the Jews*

Josephus, *War Chronology*, Part 3

N.T. Wright, *Luke For Everyone*

Origen, Eusebius ~AD 325 *Church History*

Pliny, *in a letter to emperor Trajan* Epistulae, Vol X, No. 96

Suetonius, *On the Rule of Emperor Chrestus*, C.E. 119.

Suetonius, *On the Rule of Nero*

Tertullian AD 150/240 *Against Marcion and Against Heresies*