

Adult Sunday School Lesson

Nassau Bay Baptist Church

December 6, 2020

In this beginning of the *Gospel According to Luke*, we learn why Luke wrote this account and to whom it was written. Then we learn about the birth of John the Baptist and the experience of his parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth.

Read Luke 1:1-4

Luke tells us that many have tried to write a narrative of Jesus' redemptive life, called a gospel. Attached to these notes is a list of gospels written.¹ The dates of these gospels span from ancient to modern, and this list only includes those about which we know or which have survived the millennia.

Canon

The Canon of Scripture is the list of books that have been received as the text that was inspired by the Holy Spirit and given to the church by God. The New Testament canon was not "closed" officially until about A.D. 400, but the churches already long had focused on books that are now included in our New Testament. Time has proven the value of the Canon.

Only four gospels made it into the New Testament Canon, but as Luke tells us, many others were written. Twenty-seven books total were "canonized" and became "canonical" in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, thirty-nine books are included as canonical.

Canonical Standards

Generally, three standards were held up for inclusion in the Canon.

- Apostolicity—Written by an Apostle or very close associate to an Apostle. Luke was a close associate of Paul.
- Orthodoxy—Does not contradict previously revealed Scripture, such as the Old Testament.
- Catholicity—Widespread usage and acceptance by the churches.²

Narrative

Luke set about to write the story of "those things which have been fulfilled among us." Luke was not an eyewitness, but he learned from eyewitnesses and "had perfect understanding of all things from the very first." Better, Luke states in Greek that he was "acquainted with, learned, or investigated" "carefully" from the beginning.

Eyewitnesses (Plural)

This is the mark of research. Luke had heard and spoken with a number of people who had been with Jesus.

¹ List taken from Wikipedia. I cannot vouch for this list, but it does give you some idea that many more gospels were written than that made it into the NT Canon.

² For a brief description of canonization and a short list of sources, see <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/resource/the-new-testament-canon/>.

Certainty

Evidently, Luke, or perhaps Paul or others, such as Peter, had taught Theophilus all that had gone on in Jesus' life and ministry. Luke wanted Theophilus to have it all written down, so that Theophilus could be certain of what he knew.

Theophilus

Who was Theophilus? is a big question. But it is one that does not really matter. Could have been a man? Or, since Theophilus means "one who loves God," it could have been a title. I think it was a man we will meet in Heaven.

Read Luke 1:5-25

Zachariah

A priest of the division of Abijah. Name means "Yahweh Remembers." Jewish priesthood was divided into 24 courses that included 4-9 families. The priests would serve twice a year at the temple.

Elizabeth

Her name likely means either "God has sworn" or "God is my fortune" in Hebrew. It could mean "my God is fortune." She was the daughter of a priest. She was barren and aged. See Sarah, Rachel, Samson's parents, etc.

They were righteous and blameless, but not sinless.

Angel of the Lord—Gabriel

Your prayer is heard. v.13

Gabriel. See v. 19

John

1. Great in the sight of the Lord.
2. Drink neither wine nor strong drink.
3. Filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.
4. But not sinless and not omniscient. (Not God.)

Nazarite? No. "Three guidelines are given to the Nazirite. Numbers 6:3-7 tells us that he/she was to abstain from wine or any fermented drink, nor was the Nazirite to drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins, not even the seeds or skins. Next, the Nazirite was not to cut his hair for the length of the vow. Last, he was not to go near a dead body, because that would make him ceremonially unclean. Even if a member of his immediate family died, he was not to go near the corpse."³

Elijah

In the spirit and power . . . v. 17

Turn! Repentance. To the Lord. v. 16

³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Nazirite-vow.html>

Make ready people prepared for the Lord. v. 17

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet

Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Malachi 4:5

Question: Was the coming of Jesus a “great and dreadful day?”

Sign

Zechariah asks for a sign. Gabriel gives him one, muteness. For over nine months, Zechariah could not give verbal testimony to what he experienced in the temple.

Reproach

In those days, a woman was considered to be less than a whole woman if she did not have children. Such was Elizabeth’s reproach. God took away that reproach in a powerful way. Now, forever, she will be known as the one who bore John the Baptist who prepared the way on earth for Jesus.

Gnostic gospels

- [Gospel of Thomas](#) – The Gospel of Thomas (also known as the Coptic Gospel of Thomas) is a non-canonical sayings gospel.
- [Gospel of Marcion](#) – second century, potentially an edited version of the Gospel of Luke or a document that antedates Luke (see: [Marcionism](#))
- [Gospel of Basilides](#) – composed in Egypt around 120 to 140 AD, thought to be a gnostic [gospel harmony](#) of the canonical gospels
- [Gospel of Truth \(Valentinian\)](#) – mid-second century, departed from earlier gnostic works by admitting and defending the physicality of Christ and his resurrection
- [Gospel of the Four Heavenly Realms](#) – mid-second century, thought to be a gnostic cosmology, most likely in the form of a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples
- [Gospel of Mary](#) – second century
- [Gospel of Judas](#) – second century
- [Greek Gospel of the Egyptians](#) – second quarter of the second century
- [Gospel of Philip](#)
- Pseudo-Gospel of the Twelve – a [Syriac language](#) gospel titled the Gospel of the Twelve, this work is shorter than the regular gospels and seems to be different from the lost Gospel of the Twelve.^[4]
- [Gospel of Perfection](#) – fourth century, an [Ophite](#) poem that is only mentioned once by a single [patristic](#) source, [Epiphanius](#),^[5] and is referred to once in the sixth-century [Syriac Infancy Gospel](#)
- [Coptic Gospel of the Egyptians](#) – also called Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit

Jewish-Christian gospels

- [Gospel of the Hebrews](#)
- [Gospel of the Nazarenes](#)
- [Gospel of the Ebionites](#)
- [Gospel of the Twelve](#)

Infancy gospels

- Armenian Infancy Gospel^[citation needed]
- [Protoevangelium of James](#)
- [Libellus de Nativitate Sanctae Mariae](#) (Gospel of the Nativity of Mary)
- [Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew](#)
- [History of Joseph the Carpenter](#)
- [Infancy Gospel of Thomas](#)
- Latin Infancy Gospel (Arundel 404)^[citation needed]
- [Syriac Infancy Gospel](#)

Other gospels

- [Gospel of the Lots of Mary](#) (Coptic collection of 37 oracles; around 500 AD)^[6]

Partially preserved gospels

- [Gospel of Peter](#)

Fragmentary preserved gospels

- [Gospel of Eve](#) – mentioned only once by [Epiphanius](#) around 400, who preserves a single brief passage in quotation
- [Gospel of Mani](#) – third century – attributed to the Persian [Mani](#), the founder of [Manichaeism](#)
- [Gospel of the Saviour](#) (also known as the Unknown Berlin gospel) – highly fragmentary 6th-century manuscript based on a late second- or early third-century original, a dialogue rather than a narrative, heavily Gnostic in character in that salvation is dependent upon possessing secret knowledge
- Coptic Gospel of the Twelve – late second-century [Coptic language](#) work – although often equated with the Gospel of the Ebionites, it appears to be an attempt to retell the Gospel of John in the pattern of the Synoptics; it quotes extensively from John's Gospel.

Reconstructed gospels

- [Secret Gospel of Mark](#) – suspect: the single source mentioning it is considered by many to be a modern forgery, and it disappeared before it could be independently authenticated.
- [Gospel of Matthias](#)

Lost gospels

- [Gospel of Cerinthus](#) – around 90–120 AD – according to Epiphanius,^[7] this is a Jewish gospel identical to the Gospel of the Ebionites, and apparently, a truncated version of Matthew's Gospel according to the Hebrews.
- Gospel of [Apelles](#) – mid- to late second century, a further edited version of Marcion's edited version of Luke
- Gospel of [Valentinus](#)^[8]
- Gospel of the [Encratites](#)^[9]
- [Gospel of Andrew](#) – mentioned by only two fifth-century sources ([Augustine](#) and [Pope Innocent I](#)) who list it as apocryphal^[10]
- Gospel of Barnabas – this work is mentioned only once, in the fifth-century [Decree of Gelasius](#), which lists it as apocrypha.
- [Gospel of Bartholomew](#) – mentioned by only two fifth-century sources, which list it as apocryphal,^[11]
- Gospel of Hesychius – mentioned only by Jerome and the Decree of Gelasius that list it as apocryphal.^[12]

- Gospel of Lucius^[12] – mentioned only by Jerome and the Decree of Gelasius that list it as apocryphal.
- Gospel of Merinthus^[13] – mentioned only by Epiphanius; probably the Gospel of Cerinthus, and the confusion due to a scribal error.
- An unknown number of other [Gnostic](#) gospels not cited by name.^[14]
- Gospel of the Adversary of the Law and the Prophets^[15]
- [Memoirs of the Apostles](#) – lost narrative of the life of Jesus, mentioned by [Justin Martyr](#), the passages quoted by Justin may have originated from a [gospel harmony](#) of the [Synoptic Gospels](#) composed by Justin or his school.

Fragments of possibly unknown or lost (or existing) gospels^[a][\[edit\]](#)

- [Papyrus Egerton 2](#) – late second-century manuscript of possibly earlier original; contents parallel John 5:39–47, 10:31–39; Matt 1:40–45, 8:1–4, 22:15–22; Mark 1:40–45, 12:13–17; and Luke 5:12–16, 17:11–14, 20:20–26, but differ textually; also contains incomplete miracle account with no equivalent in canonical Gospels
- [Fayyum Fragment](#) – a fragment of about 100 Greek letters in third-century script; the text seems to parallel Mark 14:26–31
- [Oxyrhynchus Papyri](#) – fragments #1, 654, and 655 appear to be fragments of Thomas; #210 is related to MT 7:17–19 and LK 6:43–44 but not identical to them; #840 contains a short vignette about Jesus and a Pharisee not found in any known gospel, the source text is probably mid 2nd century; #1224 consists of paraphrases of Mark 2:17 and Luke 9:50
- [Gospel of Jesus' Wife](#) – modern hoax based on Gospel of Thomas^{[16][17]}
- Papyrus Berolinensis 11710 – sixth-century Greek fragment, possibly from an apocryphal gospel or amulet based on John.
- Papyrus Cairensis 10735 – sixth- or seventh-century Greek fragment, possibly from a lost gospel, may be a homily or commentary
- Papyrus Merton 51 – fragment from apocryphal gospel or a homily on Luke 6:7
- Strasbourg Fragment – fragment of a lost gospel, probably related to [Acts of John](#)

Medieval gospels

- [Gospel of the Seventy](#) – a lost eighth- or 9th-century Manichean work
- [Gospel of Nicodemus](#) – a post-10th-century Christian devotional work (or works) in many variants, the first section is highly dependent upon the fifth-century "Acts of Pilate"
- [Gospel of Barnabas](#) – a 16th-century harmony of the four canonical gospels, probably of Spanish ([Morisco](#)) origin, or possibly Italian
- [Gospel of the Secret Supper](#) – a 12th-century Cathar scripture

Modern gospels

- [The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ](#) (1908)
- [Book of Mormon](#) (Another Testament of Jesus Christ) (1830)
- [Crucifixion of Jesus, by an Eyewitness](#) (1907)^[18]

- [Essene Gospel of Peace](#) (1937; 1974)
- [The Fifth Gospel](#) (1908, Steiner)^[19]
- [The Fifth Gospel](#) (1956, Naber)^[20]
- [The Fifth Gospel](#) (1993, Vandenberg), Novel
- [The Gospel Given at Ares](#) (1974)
- [Gospel of Jesus According to Gabriele Wittek](#) (1977)^[21]
- [Gospel of Josephus](#) (1927)
- [Gospel of the Childhood of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to St. Peter](#) (1904)^[22]
- [The Gospel of the Holy Twelve](#) (1881)
- [Life and Morals of Jesus](#) (1820)
- [Jehoshua the Nazir](#) (1917)^[23]
- [The Mystical Life of Jesus](#) (1929)^[24]
- [The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ](#) (1894)
- [The Urantia Book](#) (1955)
- [Ur-Gospel](#) of the Essenes (1848)^[25]
- [Great Gospel of John](#) (1851–1864)
- [The Jesus Scroll](#) (1972)
- [The Poem of the Man-God](#) (1956)