

Introduction

Luke's two-volume work comprises over twenty-five percent of the material found in the New Testament. Yet despite his prominence we know little about the man. Luke was a second generation believer, not Jewish, a doctor, and was, at least some of the time, a traveling companion of Paul—engaged with the apostle in holistic, cross-cultural ministry and mission in the Hellenistic world (Geldenuys 1951:15-22). What does Luke's record of holistic, cross-cultural ministry and mission in the first century suggest to us as a community of faith today? The purpose of this study is to: 1) examine the holistic nature of ministry in the context of cross-cultural mission as it is described in Luke-Acts, and 2) discuss the implications of those factors for the church today.

There are several assumptions that need to be clarified before proceeding. Since this study does not involve a detailed analysis of the complete text of Luke-Acts, it is not necessary to include a thorough discussion of background considerations such as authorship, date, sources, purpose, audience, and so forth. Modern scholars have discussed those issues at length for well over one hundred years and duplicating them here would serve no useful purpose. Norval Geldenuys has an excellent discussion of background issues related to Luke-Acts, as does Joseph Fitzmyer, F. F. Bruce, I. Howard Marshall, and Timothy Luke Johnson.

One foundational assumption in this work is that Paul's occasional traveling companion and fellow laborer in the kingdom, identified as Luke, is the author of Luke-Acts and probably wrote his two-volume work in the mid to late first century, sometime between 60 and 85 AD.

Another assumption is that Luke was doing a good deal more than merely recording history. Hans Conzelmann observes that "one of the main insights of Form Criticism was that the Gospels are in their nature and purpose not a historical record or a biography of Jesus; their purpose is the proclamation of saving events, though, it is true, of such as in the author's view have taken place in history" (1961:10). One of the foundational assumptions of this study is the historicity of Luke's information. However, detailing history for the sake of history is not Luke's purpose. While the historical framework in which the events he details took place is important for Luke, his *multi-layered* purpose is far more theological than historical.

One of Luke's many theological goals was to demonstrate that the community of faith (which had become largely non-Jewish in ethnic makeup by the time he wrote his books) traced its roots to the Jewish people and the promises God had made to them centuries before. As his story unfolds, it is clear that while the roots of Christianity are Jewish, the branches are multicultural.

Luke's intention was that Luke-Acts be read and studied together so that the progression of events as they occurred could be linked to the historical contexts in which they took place, thus lending credibility to the account. Luke informs his readers of his purpose or goal in his prolog, Lk. 1:1-4. He describes his work as a *narrative* which he intends to write in order, or sequence (Johnson 2000:Vol. 4, 405). His reason for doing

this is so Theophilus, to whom Luke addresses both his books, will have complete confidence in the things he has been taught regarding faith in Jesus. Whether Theophilus was a new believer being instructed and strengthened by Luke, or whether he had only recently heard the gospel and was contemplating a faith response and needed additional teaching and reassurance before making a commitment is open to discussion (Larkin 1998:152-155). Either way, Luke's goal is to place the events he records in his two books in a historical framework with which Theophilus and other readers will be familiar—the sociopolitical environment of the first century Roman world. Though Luke's purpose is more theological than historical, it is fair to say that he is concerned about history. His work is theological/historical in nature.

To accomplish this dual theological/historical purpose, Luke selected a narrative methodology. Luke expects his readers to be impacted by the story as it unfolds before them (Johnson 2000:Vol. 4, 405). His ultimate goals can only be realized as he is allowed to speak through the complete narrative of both his books. The Gospel and Acts taken together represent the story Luke intended to tell. Only when they are read, interpreted and applied together can Luke's intention for his work be realized.

What then, was Luke's intention or purpose for writing? Marshall suggests that it is "fairly certain" that Luke wrote for an "urban church community in the Hellenistic world" (1978:33). Fitzmyer suggests that Luke wanted to convey to a non-Jewish church community that the faith they had embraced had its roots in Jewish history. Further, he wanted them to understand that what God did in the life and ministry of Jesus and in the early days of the community of Jewish believers was according to God's promises (1970:9). God had fulfilled his promises to Israel, and he will keep his promises to all who trust him (Johnson 2000:Vol.4, 407-408). Israel was given the first opportunity to hear and respond to the message of mercy, grace and forgiveness through faith in Jesus. Many Israelites believed. Unfortunately, many of them did not. God then made the same mercy, grace and forgiveness available to all people, which, as it turns out, was his plan all along. One of Luke's goals is to demonstrate over the course of his two-volume narrative how the story began in the *particular* context of Judaism and spread to the *universal* context of all people (Dollar 1990:264-266).

Another of Luke's goals, revealed as his narrative unfolds, is the inclusive nature of the community of faith. Not only are the respectable of society welcome to respond to God's offer of grace and mercy, so are the marginalized—the poor, the oppressed, the sick, women, children, tax collectors and sinners (Harms 1999:70-75).

The inclusion of socially unacceptable people, along with non-Jewish people—regardless of their social standing—into the community of faith required the crossing of social and cultural boundaries, the ultimate of which involved table fellowship. To sit down with a person (or recline at table) and eat together implied equality and acceptance. One of Luke's purposes in his two-volume work was to demonstrate that not only was God interested in the socially unacceptable within Israel, but also in those who had always be considered culturally unacceptable—non-Jewish people. That such was God's intention, and that a faithful community of believers could and would transverse those social and cultural boundaries is demonstrated in Luke's historical/theological narrative (Sweetland 1990:126-140).

Related to the inclusive spirit of the community of faith in Jesus is the holistic nature of their outreach. Those who were previously excluded will now be included.

They may be hungry. They may be harassed and tormented by demons. They may be destitute. They may be sick. Perhaps they are orphaned or widowed. Perhaps they are old. Regardless of their condition, to be included in the community of faith requires that the community minister to their needs—whatever those needs may be. Only the kind of holistic approach to ministry that Luke reveals in the course of his two-volume narrative will accomplish God’s purpose for loving and saving all people (Maynard-Reid 1997).

Another of Luke’s narrative goals was to demonstrate the role of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus and in the community of faith. Luke does not attempt to accomplish this by declaring a formal or systematic pneumatology. Rather, over the course of his narrative, Luke reveals a Holy Spirit who is active in inspiring and empowering Jesus and his followers (Shelton 1991). It is the Spirit who directs ministry and mission and empowers people—even Jesus—to accomplish God’s work. The same Spirit who guided and empowered Jesus guides and empowers his followers. They, therefore, are fully prepared for ministry and mission.

Yet another of Luke’s goals in writing is his concern to communicate what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. What does it mean to be a member of a Spirit guided, Spirit empowered community of faith, practicing holistic evangelism and ministry among all people, including the marginalized of society? Throughout his narrative, Luke demonstrates what it means to be a disciple in such a community of people. His story illustrates several important features of discipleship including: 1) one’s attitude towards oneself, expressed in an attitude of submissive servanthood, 2) one’s attitude toward others, expressed in a willingness to love one’s neighbors as much as oneself—even if those neighbors are the socially or culturally untouchable, and 3) one’s attitude toward wealth and the material world in general, expressed in a willingness to reprioritize and sacrifice, putting spiritual things ahead of material things.

Undoubtedly, one could find additional “goals” in Luke’s narrative, but these are sufficient to illustrate the point: Luke’s purpose for writing is fully revealed as one reads and studies both his books, allowing him to demonstrate his intentions in recording specific the events in the ministry and mission of Jesus and his followers.

To this point, I have described and discussed Luke’s work as *history* with a decided *theological* purpose or focus. This is an accurate description, but not as thorough as it might be. In addition to its historical/theological perspective, Luke’s work must also be understood from a *missiological* perspective. Missiology is the study of mission—God’s mission in the world (the *missio Dei*), and the church’s participation with him in that mission. The themes that emerge in Luke’s two-volume work make it distinctively missiological in focus and application. This is not to say that Luke consciously wrote from a missiological perspective. The development of missiology as an academic discipline is relatively new, originating in the mid-eighteen hundreds (Neely 2000:633-635). Obviously, Luke did not intend to address specific areas of missiological concern as a missiologist. As it happens, however, the areas of concern which interest missiologists are significant considerations in Luke’s narrative. So whether he meant to or not, Luke produced a document which has significant missiological implications for the church today. The implications of the missiological themes present in Luke’s writing are the focus of this study.

Chapter 1 focuses on the theological/missiological progression of Luke’s narrative as it moves from a particular Palestinian Jewish context to a worldwide

universal context including peoples of all ethnic groups. Luke's story begins with a Levite named Zechariah serving his priestly duty rotation at the temple in Jerusalem and ends with Paul in prison in Rome. A lot of theological/missiological ground is covered as the story unfolds, moving not only across time, but also across social and cultural boundaries as a community of Jewish believers is formed and eventually expands to include non-Jewish believers as well. The theological ground that is broken and the missiological precedents that are set in Luke's narrative challenge the church today to reexamine existing theological/missiological assumptions.

Chapter 2 focuses on Luke's presentation of the Holy Spirit. What was the Spirit's role related to witness about Jesus? What was the Spirit's role in the life and ministry of Jesus? What was his role in the life and ministry of Jesus' followers? Though Luke does not present a formal pneumatology, his focus on the Spirit's role in mission and ministry becomes a crucial factor for consideration today. Does the church today seek the Spirit's guidance in mission and ministry? To what extent? If the same Spirit that lived in and worked through Jesus and his early followers still lives in and works through believers today, can we expect the same kind of leadership and empowerment today the church experienced centuries ago? The theological/missiological implications of the Spirit's role in mission and ministry are staggering. If we deny the Spirit his rightful place in mission and ministry the consequences will be staggering. Likewise, if we give the Spirit his rightful place in mission and ministry the results will be completely different but just as staggering.

Chapter 3 focuses on the issue of table fellowship in Luke's story. Luke's narrative progresses from the socially acceptable Jewish priest, Zechariah, to his fiery son, John, who lives an isolated life, to a young rabbi named Jesus who associates with the socially unacceptable (tax collectors and sinners of all sorts). As Jews who become followers of Jesus preach to Samaritans, and ultimately to the non-Jewish people of the Hellenistic world, the issue of table fellowship, that is, of Jewish people eating with non-Jewish people—a practice that had always been forbidden—becomes a crucial issue. Has that which has always been unacceptable now become acceptable? What has changed? Why has it changed? How does the church of the first century cope with the change? What are the implications for the church today?

Chapter 4 focuses on the nature of discipleship in Luke's narrative. When Jesus invited people to follow him, what did he expect of them? What kinds of things do disciples do in Luke's story? What kinds of lives do they live? One of Luke's purposes for writing is to demonstrate the distinctive, holistic nature of Christian discipleship. But in Luke's narrative, that distinctive, holistic discipleship can be lived out in different cultural settings. Christian discipleship is not a cookie-cutter kind of conformity to a specific cultural form. It is a process of living out one's faith in a way that is consistent with God's expectations for individuals in the cultural context in which he or she lives—especially in light of the outward mission orientation that characterizes Jesus' followers. What are the implications of this for God's people? How does the community of faith nurture a sound, biblical faith in new believers and at the same time allow that faith to be contextualized and expressed in ways that are culturally appropriate for those new believers?

Chapter 5 focuses on the spiritual and social dynamics of holistic evangelism in Luke-Acts. Who did Jesus spend time with in his ministry? What did his ministry

among those people include? In Luke's narrative, the marginalized of society—the poor, the sick, women, children, Samaritans, and other outcasts or untouchables—were the focus of ministry. In the Gospel, the *outcasts* are the marginalized of Jewish society and Samaritans. In Acts, the *outcasts* are Gentiles. In each context, these marginalized people experience holistic ministry. Hungry people are fed. Sick people are healed. Rejected people are accepted. All are welcomed into a community of faith that provides opportunities to receive and to give. With the overwhelming social challenges that exist today, how can the church maintain a proper balance between the spiritual and the social dynamics of the holistic outreach?

Chapter 6 focuses on the missiological implications of Luke-Acts for the church today. Any one of the areas discussed in chapters 1 through 5 presents a challenge for the church today. How does the church today find ways to acknowledge, analyze and *respond* to all five of those challenges? James warned against the danger of looking at oneself in a mirror and then turning away, forgetting what was apparent, doing nothing to remedy the deficiencies (Jas. 1:22-25). The challenges God's people face today are too great for us to neglect a single biblical consideration regarding ministry and mission in the world today.