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# LUKE

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12 13 14 15 16 17 18      7 6 5 4 3 2 1



# CONTENTS

*Series Preface ix*

*Author's Preface xv*

*Abbreviations xix*

*Introduction 1*

## **Luke's Prologue and Two Nativities**

Luke 1 15

Luke 2 36

## **Old and New Adam**

Luke 3 55

Luke 4 66

## **Discipline and Discipleship**

Luke 5 77

Luke 6 86

Luke 7 104

## **Evangelism and Its Enemies**

Luke 8 119

Luke 9 131

Luke 10 145

Luke 11 154

**Discernment of Spirits**

- Luke 12 167
- Luke 13 176
- Luke 14 183
- Luke 15 191
- Luke 16 198
- Luke 17 206
- Luke 18 214

**Expectation and Reversal**

- Luke 19 227
- Luke 20 235
- Luke 21 242

**Passover and Atonement**

- Luke 22 255
- Luke 23 266

**Resurrection and Recognition**

- Luke 24 281

*Epilogue 291*

*Bibliography 295*

*Subject Index 299*

*Index of Scripture and Other Ancient  
Writings 307*

## SERIES PREFACE

Near the beginning of his treatise against Gnostic interpretations of the Bible, *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus observes that scripture is like a great mosaic depicting a handsome king. It is as if we were owners of a villa in Gaul who had ordered a mosaic from Rome. It arrives, and the beautifully colored tiles need to be taken out of their packaging and put into proper order according to the plan of the artist. The difficulty, of course, is that scripture provides us with the individual pieces, but the order and sequence of various elements are not obvious. The Bible does not come with instructions that would allow interpreters to simply place verses, episodes, images, and parables in order as a worker might follow a schematic drawing in assembling the pieces to depict the handsome king. The mosaic must be puzzled out. This is precisely the work of scriptural interpretation.

Origen has his own image to express the difficulty of working out the proper approach to reading the Bible. When preparing to offer a commentary on the Psalms he tells of a tradition handed down to him by his Hebrew teacher:

The Hebrew said that the whole divinely inspired scripture may be likened, because of its obscurity, to many locked rooms in our house. By each room is placed a key, but not the one that corresponds to it, so that the keys are scattered about beside the rooms, none of them matching the room by which it is placed. It is a difficult task to find the keys and match them to the rooms that they can open. We therefore know the scriptures that are obscure only by taking the points of departure for understanding them from another place because they have their interpretive principle scattered among them.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Fragment from the preface to *Commentary on Psalms 1–25*, preserved in the *Philokalia*, trans. Joseph W. Trigg (London: Routledge, 1998), 70–71.

As is the case for Irenaeus, scriptural interpretation is not purely local. The key in Genesis may best fit the door of Isaiah, which in turn opens up the meaning of Matthew. The mosaic must be put together with an eye toward the overall plan.

Irenaeus, Origen, and the great cloud of premodern biblical interpreters assumed that puzzling out the mosaic of scripture must be a communal project. The Bible is vast, heterogeneous, full of confusing passages and obscure words, and difficult to understand. Only a fool would imagine that he or she could work out solutions alone. The way forward must rely upon a tradition of reading that Irenaeus reports has been passed on as the rule or canon of truth that functions as a confession of faith. “Anyone,” he says, “who keeps unchangeable in himself the rule of truth received through baptism will recognize the names and sayings and parables of the scriptures.”<sup>2</sup> Modern scholars debate the content of the rule on which Irenaeus relies and commends, not the least because the terms and formulations Irenaeus himself uses shift and slide. Nonetheless, Irenaeus assumes that there is a body of apostolic doctrine sustained by a tradition of teaching in the church. This doctrine provides the clarifying principles that guide exegetical judgment toward a coherent overall reading of scripture as a unified witness. Doctrine, then, is the schematic drawing that will allow the reader to organize the vast heterogeneity of the words, images, and stories of the Bible into a readable, coherent whole. It is the rule that guides us toward the proper matching of keys to doors.

If self-consciousness about the role of history in shaping human consciousness makes modern historical-critical study critical, then what makes modern study of the Bible modern is the consensus that classical Christian doctrine distorts interpretive understanding. Benjamin Jowett, the influential nineteenth-century English classical scholar, is representative. In his programmatic essay “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” he exhorts the biblical reader to disengage from doctrine and break its hold over the interpretive imagination. “The simple words of that book,” writes Jowett of the modern reader, “he tries to preserve absolutely pure from the refinements or distinctions of later times.” The modern interpreter wishes to “clear away the remains of dogmas, systems, controversies, which are encrusted upon” the words of scripture. The disciplines of close philological analysis “would enable us to separate the elements of doctrine and tradition with which the meaning of scripture is encumbered in our own day.”<sup>3</sup> The lens of understanding must be wiped clear of the hazy and distorting film of doctrine.

Postmodernity, in turn, has encouraged us to criticize the critics. Jowett imagined that when he wiped away doctrine he would encounter the biblical text in its purity and uncover what he called “the original spirit and intention of the authors.”<sup>4</sup> We are not now so sanguine, and the postmodern mind thinks

2. *Against Heresies* 9.4.

3. Benjamin Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” in *Essays and Reviews* (London: Parker, 1860), 338–39.

4. *Ibid.*, 340.

interpretive frameworks inevitable. Nonetheless, we tend to remain modern in at least one sense. We read Athanasius and think him stage-managing the diversity of scripture to support his positions against the Arians. We read Bernard of Clairvaux and assume that his monastic ideals structure his reading of the Song of Songs. In the wake of the Reformation, we can see how the doctrinal divisions of the time shaped biblical interpretation. Luther famously described the Epistle of James as a “strawy letter,” for, as he said, “it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it.”<sup>5</sup> In these and many other instances, often written in the heat of ecclesiastical controversy or out of the passion of ascetic commitment, we tend to think Jowett correct: doctrine is a distorting film on the lens of understanding.

However, is what we commonly think actually the case? Are readers naturally perceptive? Do we have an unblemished, reliable aptitude for the divine? Have we no need for disciplines of vision? Do our attention and judgment need to be trained, especially as we seek to read scripture as the living word of God? According to Augustine, we all struggle to journey toward God, who is our rest and peace. Yet our vision is darkened and the fetters of worldly habit corrupt our judgment. We need training and instruction in order to cleanse our minds so that we might find our way toward God.<sup>6</sup> To this end, “the whole temporal dispensation was made by divine Providence for our salvation.”<sup>7</sup> The covenant with Israel, the coming of Christ, the gathering of the nations into the church—all these things are gathered up into the rule of faith, and they guide the vision and form of the soul toward the end of fellowship with God. In Augustine’s view, the reading of scripture both contributes to and benefits from this divine pedagogy. With countless variations in both exegetical conclusions and theological frameworks, the same pedagogy of a doctrinally ruled reading of scripture characterizes the broad sweep of the Christian tradition from Gregory the Great through Bernard and Bonaventure, continuing across Reformation differences in both John Calvin and Cornelius Lapse, Patrick Henry and Bishop Bossuet, and on to more recent figures such as Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Is doctrine, then, not a moldering scrim of antique prejudice obscuring the Bible, but instead a clarifying agent, an enduring tradition of theological judgments that amplifies the living voice of scripture? And what of the scholarly dispassion advocated by Jowett? Is a noncommitted reading, an interpretation unprejudiced, the way toward objectivity, or does it simply invite the languid intellectual apathy that stands aside to make room for the false truism and easy answers of the age?

This series of biblical commentaries was born out of the conviction that dogma clarifies rather than obscures. The Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible advances upon the assumption that the Nicene tradition, in all its diversity and controversy, provides the proper basis for the interpretation of the Bible as Christian

5. *Luther’s Works*, vol. 35, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 362.

6. *On Christian Doctrine* 1.10.

7. *On Christian Doctrine* 1.35.

scripture. God the Father Almighty, who sends his only begotten Son to die for us and for our salvation and who raises the crucified Son in the power of the Holy Spirit so that the baptized may be joined in one body—faith in *this* God with *this* vocation of love for the world is the lens through which to view the heterogeneity and particularity of the biblical texts. Doctrine, then, is not a moldering scrim of antique prejudice obscuring the meaning of the Bible. It is a crucial aspect of the divine pedagogy, a clarifying agent for our minds fogged by self-deceptions, a challenge to our languid intellectual apathy that will too often rest in false truisms and the easy spiritual nostrums of the present age rather than search more deeply and widely for the dispersed keys to the many doors of scripture.

For this reason, the commentators in this series have not been chosen because of their historical or philological expertise. In the main, they are not biblical scholars in the conventional, modern sense of the term. Instead, the commentators were chosen because of their knowledge of and expertise in using the Christian doctrinal tradition. They are qualified by virtue of the doctrinal formation of their mental habits, for it is the conceit of this series of biblical commentaries that theological training in the Nicene tradition prepares one for biblical interpretation, and thus it is to theologians and not biblical scholars that we have turned. “War is too important,” it has been said, “to leave to the generals.”

We do hope, however, that readers do not draw the wrong impression. The Nicene tradition does not provide a set formula for the solution of exegetical problems. The great tradition of Christian doctrine was not transcribed, bound in folio, and issued in an official, critical edition. We have the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, used for centuries in many traditions of Christian worship. We have ancient baptismal affirmations of faith. The Chalcedonian definition and the creeds and canons of other church councils have their places in official church documents. Yet the rule of faith cannot be limited to a specific set of words, sentences, and creeds. It is instead a pervasive habit of thought, the animating culture of the church in its intellectual aspect. As Augustine observed, commenting on Jer. 31:33, “The creed is learned by listening; it is written, not on stone tablets nor on any material, but on the heart.”<sup>8</sup> This is why Irenaeus is able to appeal to the rule of faith more than a century before the first ecumenical council, and this is why we need not itemize the contents of the Nicene tradition in order to appeal to its potency and role in the work of interpretation.

Because doctrine is intrinsically fluid on the margins and most powerful as a habit of mind rather than a list of propositions, this commentary series cannot settle difficult questions of method and content at the outset. The editors of the series impose no particular method of doctrinal interpretation. We cannot say in advance how doctrine helps the Christian reader assemble the mosaic of scripture. We have no clear answer to the question of whether exegesis guided by doctrine is antithetical to or compatible with the now-old modern methods of

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8. *Sermon* 212.2.

historical-critical inquiry. Truth—historical, mathematical, or doctrinal—knows no contradiction. But method is a discipline of vision and judgment, and we cannot know in advance what aspects of historical-critical inquiry are functions of modernism that shape the soul to be at odds with Christian discipline. Still further, the editors do not hold the commentators to any particular hermeneutical theory that specifies how to define the plain sense of scripture—or the role this plain sense should play in interpretation. Here the commentary series is tentative and exploratory.

Can we proceed in any other way? European and North American intellectual culture has been de-Christianized. The effect has not been a cessation of Christian activity. Theological work continues. Sermons are preached. Biblical scholars turn out monographs. Church leaders have meetings. But each dimension of a formerly unified Christian practice now tends to function independently. It is as if a weakened army had been fragmented, and various corps had retreated to isolated fortresses in order to survive. Theology has lost its competence in exegesis. Scripture scholars function with minimal theological training. Each decade finds new theories of preaching to cover the nakedness of seminary training that provides theology without exegesis and exegesis without theology.

Not the least of the causes of the fragmentation of Christian intellectual practice has been the divisions of the church. Since the Reformation, the role of the rule of faith in interpretation has been obscured by polemics and counterpolemics about *sola scriptura* and the necessity of a magisterial teaching authority. The Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible series is deliberately ecumenical in scope, because the editors are convinced that early church fathers were correct: church doctrine does not compete with scripture in a limited economy of epistemic authority. We wish to encourage unashamedly dogmatic interpretation of scripture, confident that the concrete consequences of such a reading will cast far more light on the great divisive questions of the Reformation than either reengaging in old theological polemics or chasing the fantasy of a pure exegesis that will somehow adjudicate between competing theological positions. You shall know the truth of doctrine by its interpretive fruits, and therefore in hopes of contributing to the unity of the church, we have deliberately chosen a wide range of theologians whose commitment to doctrine will allow readers to see real interpretive consequences rather than the shadow boxing of theological concepts.

The Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible has no dog in the current translation fights, and we endorse a textual ecumenism that parallels our diversity of ecclesial backgrounds. We do not impose the thankfully modest inclusive-language agenda of the New Revised Standard Version, nor do we insist upon the glories of the Authorized Version, nor do we require our commentators to create a new translation. In our communal worship, in our private devotions, in our theological scholarship, we use a range of scriptural translations. Precisely as scripture—a living, functioning text in the present life of faith—the Bible is not semantically fixed. Only a modernist, literalist hermeneutic could imagine that this

modest fluidity is a liability. Philological precision and stability is a consequence of, not a basis for, exegesis. Judgments about the meaning of a text fix its literal sense, not the other way around. As a result, readers should expect an eclectic use of biblical translations, both across the different volumes of the series and within individual commentaries.

We cannot speak for contemporary biblical scholars, but as theologians we know that we have long been trained to defend our fortresses of theological concepts and formulations. And we have forgotten the skills of interpretation. Like stroke victims, we must rehabilitate our exegetical imaginations, and there are likely to be different strategies of recovery. Readers should expect this reconstructive—not reactionary—series to provide them with experiments in postcritical doctrinal interpretation, not commentaries written according to the settled principles of a well-functioning tradition. Some commentators will follow classical typological and allegorical readings from the premodern tradition; others will draw on contemporary historical study. Some will comment verse by verse; others will highlight passages, even single words that trigger theological analysis of scripture. No reading strategies are proscribed, no interpretive methods foresworn. The central premise in this commentary series is that doctrine provides structure and cogency to scriptural interpretation. We trust in this premise with the hope that the Nicene tradition can guide us, however imperfectly, diversely, and haltingly, toward a reading of scripture in which the right keys open the right doors.

R. R. Reno

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This is not a form-critical or closely argued philological commentary for the professional biblical scholar. I seek here to represent Luke's Gospel as, by faithful men and women for more than nineteen centuries, it has been normatively read—namely, as a faithful report of the life, ministry, and person of Jesus the Christ—and to do so with an eye to providing insights from those who would read it in “the company of the saints and faithful of all ages.” It will thus be clear that, far from seeking to be original, my effort here has been, in the spirit of our author himself, “to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us” (Luke 1:1–2 KJV). Luke here refers, of course, to the immediate eyewitnesses and “living voices” he consulted, as well as, perhaps, to already transcribed narratives of which he could approve, while I will be drawing on the preachers, teachers, and commentators who, following Luke in apostolic succession and purpose, have been regarded and may still be regarded as one with him in his desire that all Christian readers “may know the certainty of those things in which [we] were instructed” (1:4). The 2003 volume of extracts from earlier commentators compiled by Arthur A. Just has been a welcome index, while the 2009 *Catena Aurea* of Thomas Aquinas, a more extensive anthology, has been indispensable. I have, of course, delved still farther into the riches of past commentary, and I am grateful to be able to share some of this treasury with my readers. I have dared to assume that a love of learning and a desire for God comparable to that of these earlier readers of Luke will have prompted a majority of those who take up this book.

In format, taking advantage of the latitude afforded by our general editors, I have not reprinted the text of Luke in discreet pericopes immediately above the pertinent section of commentary, as is often the practice, nor have I done it verse by verse, as did Jaroslav Pelikan in the Acts volume for this series. Because of the rhetorical power, historical resonance, and continuing presence of the (Authorized) King James Version and the Coverdale Bible in many English liturgical, literary,

and musical settings, I have used their nearest modern equivalent, the New King James Version, as my normative English translation, supplementing with Revised Standard Version, King James Version, and (very rarely) my own translation when clarity seemed to require it. In all biblical citations I have modernized capitalization; divine pronouns are thus lowercased. It will thus be desirable for the reader to have a favorite Bible on hand when using this commentary. I recommend reading a chapter in Luke before consulting the relevant chapter in this commentary. Then again, my method of exegesis and exposition are here, in literary fashion, interwoven and varied according to the Lukan material immediately in hand. I quote Luke's text in my own text discursively, which I hope will provide for some approximate sense of the natural intimacy that for centuries has characterized the dialogue between Christian readers as they have corporately pondered the scriptures. This method permits also some notice of the larger narrative structure and argument in Luke.

By profession I am first a literary scholar, having spent much of my life studying the influence upon literature and art of scripture and its historical interpretation. All the more so then, I come to the challenge of direct interpretation with no little caution and much prayerfulness, for the accountability of an expositor of the biblical text far exceeds that of the literary scholar expounding his own more secular texts. What Jesus says in Luke 12 is more than enough to make one's examination of conscience on this point a serious and daily business. Nevertheless, I confess, with the famous teacher of Paul, that it is a wonderful privilege to be able to turn my mind to the place my heart has been so many years; as Gamaliel observed: "How beautiful to study scripture [Torah], and how happy along our earthly journey" (*yafeh talmud torah k'asher imah derech erez*). My own tent-making, if a loose analogy is permissible, has had the happy benefit of letting me pitch my tent for five decades not far from those for whom Torah (in the sense of all scripture) was their primary lifework; I have watched with keen interest and much affectionate admiration their labors. It is to what has seemed to me the best of their work more than my own insight that I would bear witness. There are, just so, limitations upon my ingathering. An effort even to represent faithful readers down through the ages (one could not hope to be inclusive, needless to say) constitutes a considerable challenge. The constraints of appropriate focus and orderly exposition require many omissions, even of work that remains worthy in whole or in part. For the attenuations and exclusions that have seemed to me necessary I ask in advance the forbearance of my fellow scholars and, when an omission on my part may prove rather than merely seem a *lapsus calumni*, above all the forgiveness of God. But it is my prayer and earnest hope that what follows in these pages will not only make some "rough places plain" for others but also, by attunement to the sheer symphony of the gifted appreciation of great Christian readers of all ages, provide added reason to rejoice in the beauty and truth of the gospel, and so with shared thanksgiving, subtended by the Holy Spirit, to enter into a deeper fullness of the joy of the Lord and the knowledge of his Christ.

I am grateful to several whose comments have been helpful to me at various points in the writing of this commentary. These include Jeff Fish, Mikeal Parsons, David Garland, Daniel H. Williams, Phil Donnelly, Barry Harvey, Julia Dyson Hejduk, Eleonore Stump, Michael O'Brien, Anthony Thistleton, Robert Wilken, and Rusty Reno, the latter two editors for the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Bill and Mary Jo Robbins, by their remarkable and largely invisible generosity to so many of the poor and underprivileged, have been an encouraging reminder to me whilst I was working on this commentary that taking one of the central messages of Luke's Gospel to heart is now as ever a hallmark of authentic devotion to Jesus Christ. Finally, Katherine Jeffrey has been of unmatched assistance to me by her generosity of critical intelligence, her thoughtfulness as a fellow reader of scripture, and her unswerving love for truth.



# ABBREVIATIONS

## General

KJV King James Version

NKJV New King James Version

RSV Revised Standard Version

*TDNT* *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by G. Kittel and J. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76.

## Biblical Books

Acts	Acts	Gen.	Genesis
Amos	Amos	Hab.	Habakkuk
1 Chr.	1 Chronicles	Hag.	Haggai
2 Chr.	2 Chronicles	Heb.	Hebrews
Col.	Colossians	Hos.	Hosea
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	Isa.	Isaiah
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	Jas.	James
Dan.	Daniel	Jer.	Jeremiah
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Job	Job
Eccl.	Ecclesiastes	Joel	Joel
Eph.	Ephesians	John	John
Esth.	Esther	1 John	1 John
Exod.	Exodus	2 John	2 John
Ezek.	Ezekiel	3 John	3 John
Ezra	Ezra	Jonah	Jonah
Gal.	Galatians	Josh.	Joshua

Jude	Jude	Phil.	Philippians
Judg.	Judges	Phlm.	Philemon
1 Kgs.	1 Kings	Prov.	Proverbs
2 Kgs.	2 Kings	Ps.	Psalms
Lam.	Lamentations	Rev.	Revelation
Lev.	Leviticus	Rom.	Romans
Luke	Luke	Ruth	Ruth
Mal.	Malachi	1 Sam.	1 Samuel
Mark	Mark	2 Sam.	2 Samuel
Matt.	Matthew	Song	Song of Songs
Mic.	Micah	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians
Nah.	Nahum	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians
Neh.	Nehemiah	1 Tim.	1 Timothy
Num.	Numbers	2 Tim.	2 Timothy
Obad.	Obadiah	Titus	Titus
1 Pet.	1 Peter	Zech.	Zechariah
2 Pet.	2 Peter	Zeph.	Zephaniah

# INTRODUCTION

## Luke as Author

Luke does not identify himself as the author either in this Gospel or in the second work attributed to him, the Acts of the Apostles. What he does tell us is that he was not himself an “eyewitness” (*autoptēs*) of Jesus’s ministry; these are the people he has consulted (1:2–4). He also tells us, however, that he was a traveling companion of Paul (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15). Paul, correspondingly, so identifies Luke (Phlm. 24; Col. 4:14). It is early church writers who name him as author of both Luke and Acts (e.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.13.1; other early attributions come from Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Eusebius); their verdict is virtually unanimous. Another witness is the Muratorian Fragment, a second-century Christian document written in Latin, which identifies Luke with the “third book of the gospel” and describes him as a “physician” who “wrote down what he had heard” since he “had not known the Lord in the flesh, and having obtained such information as he could he began his account [*narratio*] with the birth of John.”<sup>1</sup> The uncontested identification persists, with Jerome in the fourth century adding that Luke’s place of origin was Antioch, that Luke was fluent in Greek, and that he wrote his Gospel while in Achaia and died in Boeotia (Patrologia latina 23.650; 26.17).<sup>2</sup> Paul had already confirmed that Luke was a physician and a Gentile (Col. 4:10–14), which would make him the only identified author of a canonical New Testament work who was not Jewish by birth. To this remarkable fact we should add that Luke’s is by far the longest of

1. Cited in the *Navarre Bible: St. Luke’s Gospel* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1988; New York: Scepter, 2005), 11.

2. This was the same region that produced his younger contemporary Plutarch, who died there around AD 120.

the Gospels and that together with his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, his work comprises about 28 percent of the New Testament canon.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps Eusebius (late-third-century bishop of Caesarea and father of church history) has done more than any early commentator to suggest that Luke's profession as a physician added a special dimension to his writing. In a nice rhetorical turn, Eusebius offers insight into the particular spiritual character of Luke's writing: "Luke has left us concerning that medicine which he had received from the Apostles . . . two medical books, whereby not our bodies but our souls may be healed" (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.4). The analogy suggested to later commentators, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas among them, that Luke's secondary concern was the spiritual health of his readers, as of the church in general, and that his Gospel, when read rightly, is what medieval pastors and humanist scholars would have called a *psychopharmacoon* ("therapy for the soul"). Meanwhile, Ambrose, fourth-century bishop of Milan and the teacher of Augustine of Hippo, judged the measured thoughtfulness of Luke's narration to reveal a concern for both historicity and spiritual significance: "Truly, St. Luke kept . . . a certain historical order and revealed to us more miracles of the Lord's deeds," Ambrose writes, "so that the history of his gospel embraced the virtue of all wisdom" (*Exposition of Luke* 12). On this account, Luke was understood to have preserved both the truth of the events themselves and their spiritual meaning. In Luke more than the other Synoptics or John, theology does not so much order narrative as arise from it.

All commentators equipped to read the text in Greek, from Jerome in the fourth century (*Epistle* 20.4) to Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth (*Catena Aurea* 3.2), attributed to Luke both polish and a tone of secular eloquence. Down to the present, commentators have agreed that if Luke was not quite a Hellenistic *belle-lettrist*, his Greek was at the least formal and precise, exhibiting a "balanced Greek periodic style" (Bock 1994–96: 1.51). It is clear to me that in his vocabulary (at almost every turn in his text there are instances of New Testament *hapax legomena*—words occurring in his texts alone in the biblical canon), Luke reveals a command of Greek literature and vocabulary unmatched by the other Gospel writers, and even Paul. He uses several hundred words found in no other New Testament writer, though most may be found in Hellenic secular texts.<sup>4</sup> This range of classical vocabulary permits him a richness and verbal nuance not so readily available to the other evangelists, for whom Greek is not their first language.

3. Charles H. H. Scobie, "A Canonical Approach to Interpreting Luke," in *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Joel B. Green, and Anthony Thiselton, Scripture and Hermeneutics 6 (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 331.

4. R. Morgenthaler, *Statistik des Neutestamentenlichen Wortschatzes* (Zurich: Gotthelf, 1958), notes 266 words peculiar to Luke, 60 found in Luke and Acts only, and 415 found in Acts alone. There remains important work to be done in exploring Luke's use of a richer Hellenistic vocabulary, but it is not appropriate to the present volume. The otherwise excellent guide, *Luke: A Handbook on the Greek Text* by Martin C. Culy, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Joshua J. Stigall (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), does not identify or source these distinctive items in Luke's vocabulary.

Luke's textured literary fluency comes through to attuned ears; for contemporary American Catholic novelist Ron Hansen, for example, "Luke is the most writerly of the evangelists."<sup>5</sup> The virtues of this stylistic advantage are perhaps less visible in some English translations (except perhaps KJV and NKJV, which I have used preponderantly in this work), but the characteristic compositional features of educated Hellenistic narrative style, as we shall see, show through well enough in most translations. Yet—and the importance of this point can scarcely be overemphasized—even so carefully historical a Gospel narrative as Luke's has not been received by the church primarily as a resource for historical, philological, or archival purposes. Nor, as with post-Enlightenment academic study of the Bible generally, was the Gospel imagined for nineteen centuries as a text-critical laboratory for posing a set of problems in the verification of historical details.

### Luke in Ecclesiastical Tradition

The early church saw the four Gospels, taken together, as enacting a perpetual worship of God in their presentation of Christ. Symbolically, they were identified with the "four living creatures" of Rev. 4:6–8: the first like a lion, the second a calf, the third with a human face, and the fourth "like a flying eagle." Irenaeus, second-century bishop of Lyons (died 200), was among the earliest to suggest Luke's connection with "a calf, signifying the Son of God's sacrificial and sacerdotal office" (*Against Heresies* 14.1–4; 3.11.8), partly on account of his own spiritual reading of the parable of the prodigal son and the feast of restoration in Luke 15. The ox or calf symbol became useful for iconographic purposes in early church liturgy and art, and so stuck. Ambrose repeats it, linking Ezekiel's vision (1:5–12; 10:14) with John's vision of the throne of God, seeing the calf as "the priestly victim" (*Exposition of Luke* prol. 7–8). Aquinas will later summarize these connections typologically, saying that the sacrifice of the calf in Old Testament worship prefigures Christ, "sacrificed for the life of the whole world" (*Catena Aurea* 3.1, following Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels* 1.2.6). But by then the associations had long been established. Illuminated medieval title pages for manuscripts of the Gospel of Luke, such as in the early eighth-century Lindisfarne Gospels, typically show Luke writing his Gospel in the company of a winged ox bearing a book symbolic of the word, pointing thus to its ultimate revelatory purpose, an adoring, exclusive, worshipful focus on Christ, the Living Word, eternal God incarnate.

Manuscript illustrations from this time through the fifteenth century often place the evangelist anachronistically in a scholar's study, surrounded by books, writing at a desk. This too is consciously symbolic, though it is particularly appropriate in the case of Luke, who is unique in telling his reader that he has, in

5. Ronald Hansen, *A Stay against Confusion: Essays on Faith and Fiction* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 19.

the manner of a careful scholar, consulted a variety of sources before setting pen to paper.<sup>6</sup>

Yet another traditional association for Luke should be mentioned, likewise highly symbolic but, as we shall see, richly suggestive for generations of Christian artists. Very early painted representations of Jesus as a child in the arms of the Virgin Mary were alleged to have been done by Luke (Hornik and Parsons 2003–7: 1.17–21, 26nn29–33), and, however implausible this may seem at the literal level, it is certainly understandable that Luke’s particular focus on Mary, the annunciation, and the nativity and childhood scenes of the life of Christ, along with his considerable literary skill in depicting the events in Jesus’s ministry and teaching throughout, should have together suggested portraiture of a detailed, artistically satisfying character. In one fanciful but genuinely moving private Renaissance devotional painting by Botticelli, Mary holds the child Jesus and simultaneously writes upon the page of Luke’s text. The imagined composition is, of course, her beautiful poem, the Magnificat.<sup>7</sup> Such images have served to remind Christian readers of the distinctive inclusions in Luke’s Gospel, the great beauty of his depictions, and his distinctive attention to the psalmlike poems of Mary and Zacharias, the beloved Magnificat and Benedictus respectively, of Christian liturgy since the sixth century.<sup>8</sup> In this way we may say that, esthetically, Luke’s Gospel not only responds to some of the most beautiful poetry of the Old Testament (particularly from Isaiah and the Psalms), but that in the canon of the New Testament Luke’s Gospel corresponds to the stylistic virtues of those Old Testament books particularly in pointing his reader consonantly to the beauty or “glory” (*doxa*) of the Lord.<sup>9</sup> It achieves this particular New Testament register of the theological transcendental in something like the way in which the Epistle to the Hebrews corresponds to Exodus, revealing the beauty of the Lord’s holiness foreshadowed there, now in his one-for-all sacrifice.

## Prayer and the Holy Spirit

About half the content of Luke is not found in the other Gospels. Some of this matter is new and some elaboration, but other elements are matters of distinctive

6. An illustration of this sort is found in Wolfram von den Steinem, *Homo Caelisticus: Das Wort der Kunst im Mittelalter*, 2 vols. (Munich: Franke, 1965), 1. pl. 83a. See also Hornik and Parsons 2003–7: 1.1–5.

7. For a discussion of this painting see Ronald Lightbrown, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work* (New York: Abbeville, 1989).

8. The Benedictus (Luke 1:68–79) has been sung in the Western church since early times, at lauds. Anglican usage in the Book of Common Prayer preserved it for morning prayer. The Magnificat (1:46–55) is so named, in the manner of the Benedictus, from its opening word in Latin. Since the time of Benedict (early sixth century) it has been the canticle sung at vespers in the Western church (evensong in the Book of Common Prayer).

9. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 7 vols., trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius; New York: Crossroad, 1982–90).

detail. For example, few readers will have failed to recognize the greater frequency of situations in which Jesus is shown praying in Luke's account. This not only sets a certain tone but also reveals an important dimension of Jesus's relationship with God the Father and models this means of relationship for his followers. In Luke, prayer precedes decision: while Matthew and Mark also show Jesus withdrawing to pray from time to time during his public ministry (Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35; cf. Luke 5:16), only Luke tells us that Jesus prays at the time of his baptism and that he "continued all night in prayer to God" (6:12) before choosing the Twelve; likewise, only Luke shows Jesus "alone praying" before the transfiguration (9:18–36). But the emphasis is pervasive: there are also distinctive parables about prayer unique to Luke (11:5–8; 18:1–8; 18:9–14). In Luke, the exemplary prayer given by Jesus to his disciples follows in response to the example of Jesus's own prayer, and only Luke reports the last words of Jesus as prayer (23:34, 46). The theme of prayer and answered prayer is evident from the beginning in the annunciation and nativity narratives peculiar to Luke: Zacharias's prayer is answered (1:13), Simeon's prayer is a prominent prayer of grateful benediction (2:22–28), and the poems of both Mary and Zacharias (her Magnificat and his Benedictus) are highlights of Luke 1.<sup>10</sup> When at his baptism Jesus prays, the heavens open and the dove of the Holy Spirit descends (3:21–22); when Jesus prays from the cross, the temple veil is rent from top to bottom (23:44–46).

The connection of prayer to a powerful presence of the Holy Spirit is thus especially prominent in Luke's writing. We may think, of course, of Acts 2. But the promise of the infilling of the Holy Spirit is already there in the words of the angel Gabriel to Zacharias as he serves at the altar (Luke 1:15), and the Spirit is promised to Mary on her prayerful acquiescence (1:35–38) and then comes to Elizabeth and the babe in her womb simply at Mary's greeting (1:41); Simeon is filled with the Holy Spirit as he prays (2:26–32). These connections are not all unique to Luke (e.g., Matt. 18:20), but they are certainly prominent enough when taken together that we may regard the prayer of the Lord, the prayer of his disciples, and the presence of the Holy Spirit as among the major themes Luke chose to emphasize.

## Date and Canonical Placement

A variety of early Christian sources concur that the Gospels of Mark and Matthew were written before Luke began to write, and this accounted for the placement as third Gospel, despite the obvious fact that Luke's is the first of a two-volume work. The second, his Acts of the Apostles, is likewise dedicated to Theophilus,

10. A close study of this motif by Craig Bartholomew and Robby Holt is too rich to recount here in further detail; see "Prayer in/and the Drama of Redemption in Luke," in *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Joel B. Green, and Anthony Thiselton, Scripture and Hermeneutics 6 (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 350–78, esp. 352–58.

and it refers back to this Gospel. We might well have expected the church to have paired them together rather than having John's Gospel intervene, and much speculation about the placement of Luke can be found in the annals of biblical scholarship down through the centuries. It is clear enough, however, that Luke's intention in his first volume was to focus on Christ in an ordered chronological fashion and in his second volume to chronicle the first years of the life of the church. For the first task he had to resort to the reports of eyewitnesses and the written accounts of others; in the second instance he was an intimate participant in much of what he records.

Though a wide range of dates has been proposed at various times by Luke-Acts scholars,<sup>11</sup> the reader can be comfortable with imagining composition taking place somewhere between AD 62–63, just prior to the release of Paul from prison in 63 (Acts 28:16), and, at the latest, about AD 80 (Bauckham 2006: 14). A brief summary of the various arguments made for dates along this spectrum may be found in Bock's detailed study (1994–96: 1.16–18).<sup>12</sup> I have come to think a date in the early to mid-60s is probable, all obvious factors considered (including Luke's omission of any mention of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70).

Luke's Gospel links the fourfold Gospel of the evangelists to Acts, and, as noted, Acts in turn introduces the writing of the four main authors of the rest of the New Testament, namely Paul and the apostles Peter, James, and John. This makes his work, as one modern scholar observes, "in effect, the lynchpin of the New Testament canon."<sup>13</sup> It is perhaps noteworthy in this regard that even the heretic Marcion, unwilling either to preserve the Old Testament or to read it figuratively as pointing to Christ, and divorcing thus the two Testaments, kept Luke in his shrunken canon—albeit a bowdlerized version, with what he took to be "judaizing" passages excised.<sup>14</sup> This was a nugatory effort: though he was almost certainly indeed a Gentile, Luke's literary methods reflect the characteristic Jewish mode of exegesis known as "peshet," by which, as Jean Daniélou, A. Laurentin, and others observe, "the events of the life of Jesus . . . are brought into line with the Old Testament prophecies which they fulfill."<sup>15</sup> As we shall see, this is nowhere clearer than in the way Luke highlights the covenantal and sacramental theme of the broken marriage between God and his increasingly adulterous chosen and the restoration of that marriage through God's reestablishment of that divine union through a virgin's consent and the fruitfulness of Christ's sacrifice. In

11. For a review of the immense scholarship on this question, see François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian*, trans. K. MacKinney, 2nd ed. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 631–36.

12. For text-critical analysis Bock is both reliable and extensive, perhaps the best of recent commentaries of this type.

13. Scobie, "Canonical Approach to Interpreting Luke," 331.

14. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperCollins, 1960; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 57.

15. Jean Daniélou, *Christ and Us*, trans. Walter Roberts (London: Mowbray, 1961), 8; citing R. Laurentin, *Structure et théologie de Luc* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1964), 1.25–51.

this light the divine purpose seems primarily ordered so as to redeem his bride. Here, in a fashion distinctive among the evangelists, Luke shows himself to be an extraordinarily sensitive reader of the Jewish scriptures, keenly attuned to their dominant symbols and metanarrative argument. On any number of counts, and for any number of historical reasons, then, Luke's Gospel has proven to be a text of rich theological synthesis; though written by a Gentile, it is acutely attuned to the full Jewish canon of biblical revelation as preserved in the Septuagint text.

## The Historian's Task

This is not at all to say that the writerly talents of Luke are insignificant to the theological value of the text as we have it. Quite the contrary: Luke's evident consciousness of literary form has been a great asset to his readers in every age. He calls the genre of his text *diēgēsis*, a term that the great disciple of Calvin, Theodore Beza, rightly associates with the method also announced in Acts 1:1: "Nothing other is meant except that he intends to write in the manner of a historian" (*nihil aliud declarat quam historiam conscribere*) (1642: 150). This alert to the reader, as I have suggested, shows Luke to be advertising his approach as that of a scholar. But it is additionally clear that he understands himself to be a scholar working in a recognizable Hellenistic form of narrative history or historiography. That is, he employs a literary genre and method highly recognizable to his hellenized contemporaries and widely respected among educated readers in his time. This genre should not be taken to be identical to *historia*, strictly a matter of information or for-the-record overview (Bock 1994–96: 1.52–53). Rather, in the first century it was understood to be a narrative account, a digest, we might say, organized so as to reveal design and ultimate significance in the events recollected. Luke's prologue remarks are thus paralleled in works such as 2 Maccabees 2.19–31, Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* 1.1–4, and the *Letter of Aristeas* 1–8, as well as perhaps the prologue to the apocryphal wisdom book Sirach. Bauckham shows that similar Hellenistic texts make explicit their reliance on testimony and construe the narrator's task as assembling the witness of firsthand observers, drawing them collectively into a well-ordered account (2006: 5–7). In the case of Luke, there is ample reason to believe, on his declaration of genre alone, that his reportage is much closer to the form in which the eyewitnesses told their stories than would be the case for *historia* normatively.

In the genre *diēgēsis*, or ordered narrative account, an established practice in Hellenistic historical writing of the time was to prefer eyewitness accounts orally delivered over written reports. This conforms to the ancient tendency in general to trust verbal testimony given in a face-to-face encounter. Because the verbal bond was still the practice and preference for formal covenants as late as the medieval era, it may be that this aspect of Luke's intention in announcing his genre was better appreciated by pre-Reformation readers than by our own contemporaries, even in the absence of any full command of early Hellenistic comparative texts

that would confirm its normative character. Aquinas, for example, responding to 1:2, says “the term ‘handed down’ (‘they delivered’) seems to show that the eyewitnesses regarded themselves as having a commission to transmit the truth” (*Catena Aurea* 3.1.9). Bonaventure reinforces this understanding by citing the Jewish tradition of responsible witnesses, and he quotes John 1:1 and 19:35 to say “because they had seen, therefore they gave witness” (2001–4: 1.26).

In one of the most useful of recent scholarly books on the Gospels, Bauckham draws convincing parallels from the early second-century writer Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, to show precisely how evidentiary and authoritative such a work of *diēgēsis* might be (2006: 12–38). Here, consultation with the “living voices” (*para zōēs phōnēs*), especially of those who were eyewitnesses (*autoptēs*), adds authority no mere third-person overview could hope to obtain.<sup>16</sup> In Luke 6:13–16 and Acts 1:13, the listing of “the Twelve” indicates clearly that these were the most privileged of such “living voices” consulted. They are those who, as Luke indicates, have been with Jesus “from the beginning” (Bauckham 2006: 116). This term in Luke 1:2 (*ap’ archēs*), Bauckham convincingly shows (2006: 119), is a necessary qualification for obtaining prime authority in the genre as Luke understands it. Additionally, Luke features in his narrative “a much wider group of itinerant disciples than the Twelve” (2006: 129). In passages such as 6:14–16; 8:1–3; 10:1–20; 19:37; 23:49; 24:9, 33; and Acts 1:23, Luke not only gives us Matthias, Joseph, Barsabbas, and Cleopas but also names three of the women: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna (Luke 8:2–3), the latter two of whom, like Cleopas, are named only in his Gospel. It seems likely that the named women were both among Jesus’s disciples (24:6–7) and among Luke’s eyewitness informants (9:18, 43).<sup>17</sup> As Moessner ventures, all these considerations “indicate Luke’s intent to write proper Hellenistic narrative, inclusive of Hellenistic auditors’ expectations cultivated in the atmosphere of Graeco-Roman rhetoric.”<sup>18</sup> What this means for a modern reader in English translation is that the genre of Luke’s Gospel is parallel neither to modern biography (Luke’s own authorial insight into the life of Jesus is of comparatively little consequence compared to his ability to compile, collate, and accurately reflect the communal view of the Twelve and other eyewitnesses) nor to the official quasi-omniscient overview of an ancient historian such as Tacitus or Julius Caesar. Luke’s account is closer to the literary equivalent of a documentary film, in which the narrative method is to arrange and elucidate with clarity the views of others on a topic or event.

In this context it may be helpful for the reader to reflect on an implication of much importance for one who would compare all four Gospels; they are not of

16. Daniélou, *Christ and Us*, 11.

17. Bauckham 2006: 131–32; Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 186–94.

18. David P. Moessner, “Reading Luke’s Gospel as Ancient Hellenistic Narrative,” in *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Joel B. Green, and Anthony Thiselton, *Scripture and Hermeneutics* 6 (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 133; cf. Bauckham 2006: 310.

identical genre or form, and even the other two Synoptic Gospels thus should not be assumed to represent a type of *diēgēsis*. Mark's brief Gospel is an almost breathless account of the events of the life of Jesus as ordered to indispensable redemptive significance, a kind of bare-bones Gospel. Matthew's account is not like this, nor is it so chronologically ordered as Luke. Instead, Matthew moves in and out of the teaching of Jesus, turning his attention with laser-light intensity upon the character of Jesus's language, revealing his disposition to indirect speech, enigmatic wisdom sayings, and figurative suggestion concerning Jesus's interpretation of Torah and liturgical tradition. We might consider the precise detail with which Matthew recounts the Sermon the Mount, which is only summarized by Luke for his different purposes. We might also reflect on the fascinating seminar Jesus gives to his disciples in Matt. 13 regarding his pedagogical purposes in rejecting declarative, propositional discourse in favor of poetic, indirect language in his teaching—a discourse severely truncated in Luke, perhaps because parables seem to Luke to be so overwhelmingly normative to Jesus's literary teaching method that providing a more extended defense of the method seemed to him unnecessary.

John is different again: his primary focus is the interpenetration of word and flesh, spirit and sign, so that in some ways his is the most overtly sacramental of the four accounts; in his Gospel deliberately, word and deed are both signs of spiritual reality and participate immediately in that reality. John is likewise attuned to the significance of the ministry of Jesus, but in a distinctive, philosophically imagined way: consider the sacramental incarnationalism of his prologue (John 1:1–14), Jesus's tutorial encounter with Nicodemus (3:1–21), the changing of water into wine at Cana (John 2)—all of which prepare us for the sacramental understanding of love and coinherence emphasized in that part of Jesus's teaching on which John's understanding turns, the unparalleled discourse on love (John 14–17), expressed climactically in Jesus's great high priestly prayer (John 17) before his atoning death on the cross. And when, after his resurrection, Jesus in John's account reveals himself first to Mary Magdalene and she mistakes him for the gardener (*o felix culpa!*), we sense John's enraptured, almost mystical focus on the deep mystery of God's abiding love for the fallen, revealed so transparently, as John is at pains to show us, in Jesus's relationships to the unlikely chosen, including Peter.

Luke's narrative purpose is not quite parallel to any of these others, in that by genre none of the others is *diēgēsis*, an attempt at ordered chronology. Attempts to treat the four Gospels as if they were of the same species—either by believers so as to force a conformity to “save the appearances” or by those who wish to discredit the Gospel accounts because they are inconsistent in their narrative inclusions—are an example of what philosophers call a “category mistake” and literary scholars think of as an insensitivity to genre. Luke's specific genre and purpose, simply put, are the only ones that could begin to oblige a more narrowly historical reflection on the reader's part, and even here we must be cautious, for ancient historical method and our modern sense of the obligations of a chronicler are far apart.

It is doubtless the case that Luke's distinctive task was made more possible than most modern Westerners can easily imagine by the prodigiously more refined practices of memorization that obtained widely until the advent of printing. Teachers like Socrates could depend on pupils such as Plato to preserve an exact verbal memory of his teaching;<sup>19</sup> there is wide attestation to precise verbal recall all through the annals of medieval European literature. The "word hid in the heart" would have been particularly apropos for the sayings of Jesus. Indeed, when Jesus said to his disciples, "Let these words sink down into your ears" (Luke 9:44), he was instructing his disciples to employ a habit widely practiced in both the Jewish and Gentile cultures of his time. Luke could count on a precision of memory no modern Western writer could hope for after the invention of moveable type made memory less essential.

For these reasons, among others, the work of the *Formgeschichte* critics that largely dominated the latter nineteenth and twentieth centuries in academic biblical studies is a historically bounded phenomenon that has become largely now of tertiary importance to a theological and literary commentary such as this. For those seeking further warrant for largely setting most of it aside in a context such as this one, I am happy to recommend Goulder's work as an example from within that field of sensible skepticism about spectral, hypothetical *Urtexs* such as Q (supposedly influential in varying degrees on the Synoptic Gospels).<sup>20</sup> Though there has been a dominating preoccupation with such matters for more than a century, now, in the pursuit of literary and theological engagement of Luke's text, we may here leave it to others to debate the merits of the hypotheses typically offered and to argue with the Jesus Seminar. To some readers, perhaps, an exclusion of so much scholarly endeavor will seem jarring, for even though "nearly all the contentions of the early form critics have been convincingly refuted," the training of most New Testament scholars has to the present still largely depended on their dominant paradigms (Bauckham 2006: 242). Certainly many excellent insights have resulted from the labors of these scholars, and in my own preparation and pursuit of this study I remain gratefully indebted to many whose labors have been primarily in this type of endeavor: Darrell L. Bock, François Bovon, F. W. Danker, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, I. Howard Marshall, David P. Moessner, John Nolland, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Charles H. Talbert among them. Yet in a work such as the present volume, intended rather for the serious layperson and pastoral teacher, I think my readers will be better served by reading the canonical text, first, in the light of Luke's own guidance in his prologue, hence in the light of an understanding of the genre in which he was writing; second, in the light of Old

19. Francis Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); and Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

20. Michael D. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*, 2 vols., Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement 20 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989). See the review by John Nolland in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990): 269–72.

Testament scriptures and first-century Jewish thought; and, third, in the light of evidently empathetic and, as we might well say, “Spirit-directed” exposition of faithful readers of scripture down through the centuries. Not only will this help us keep our focus just where Luke would have it, namely on the person, sayings, and deeds of Jesus the Christ, but it will have the happy second-order benefit that we will become much more appreciative of the literary craftsmanship and rich detail for which Luke’s Gospel has become so beloved among the New Testament writings by the church in all ages.