A LEVEL

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

And Themes in the Synoptic Gospels

FOR CCEA A LEVEL

REVISED SPECIFICATION

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COLOURPOINT EDUCATIONAL

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Bold text is used to indicate terms that appear in the glossary.

Preface

This text has been written specifically to assist both teachers and students meet the requirements of CCEA's GCE Religious Studies course: *An Introduction to the Gospel of Luke* and *Themes in the Synoptic Gospels*. The first section of the book addresses the AS course (*An Introduction to the Gospel of Luke*) and the second section addresses the A2 course (*Themes in the Synoptic Gospels*). The order and material included follows the CCEA specification closely. The concluding chapter deals specifically with the requirements of the Synoptic Question of the A2 course as prescribed by CCEA. Various suggestions relating to 'other aspects of human experience' have been made throughout the book. None of these suggestions are meant to be prescriptive and it is recommended that students also investigate other examples which are relevant to their own experiences.

This book is a collation of a wide range of scholarship and every effort has been made to acknowledge the sources used in the Bibliography. The Bibliography gives students references to the many quotations used throughout the book. Scholarly opinion is an important requirement of A2 study. Students should endeavour to use the views of scholars to support or elaborate on their arguments rather than simply quoting what a scholar may have said without context. The views of scholars included are not exhaustive and both teachers and students are free to use their own material.

Sincere thanks to Wesley Johnston at Colourpoint for giving me this wonderful opportunity and for his support throughout the process. To Amber Hamill who has taught me so much, her guidance and many suggestions have added to this book.

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Mary Nethercott
August 2018

For Chris, Seán and Orla with love.

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UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter explores the following topics:

The background to the gospel

- Political background
- Jewish religious background

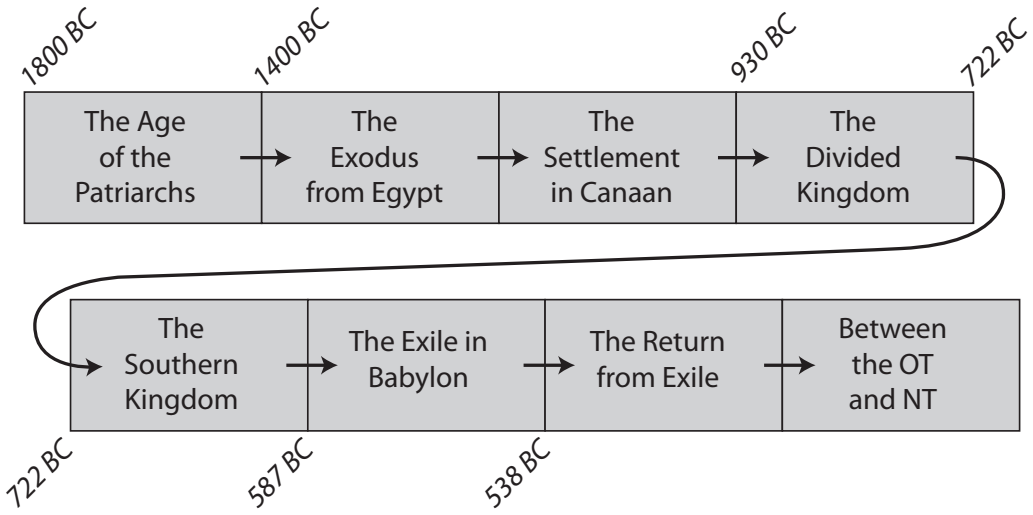
The making of Luke's Gospel

- Why were the gospels written?
- How was Luke's Gospel written?
- Dating Luke's Gospel
- The purposes of Luke's Gospel
- The characteristics of Luke's Gospel
- Historical accuracy and reliability of Luke's Gospel

Luke's Gospel narrates the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. This chapter looks at the Jewish religious background into which Jesus was born and the political situation in which he lived. It explores the background to the production of this gospel, considering the context in which it was produced. Jesus was a Jew and lived at a time when Jews were ruled by the Roman Empire. Throughout history Jews were subject to the rule of one empire or another, partly due to the geographic location of Palestine, the Jewish homeland. Palestine was conquered by Rome in 63 BC. This conquest allowed Rome to link Syria and Egypt, which were both already under Roman control. It shaped Jewish beliefs and attitudes: instilling hope for a Messiah who would save them from their oppressors and restore them to power.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Guy (1961) identified nine stages in the history of Judaism:



In 587 BC, during the Babylonian exile, Jews were scattered all over the Mediterranean. The Jewish people found themselves in a world that was becoming homogenised by great empire builders such as Alexander the Great. Alexander cultivated a uniformity of culture, language and ethos that became known as the Hellenistic (meaning Greek) Empire. The Jewish people did not integrate into this Hellenistic society – they wanted to keep themselves separate and preserve the Jewish faith from foreign influences. Jews did not join in public festivities, which often involved making sacrifices to the Greek gods and offended their morals. This non-participation meant they stood out. Jewish society became isolated and Jews were often the subject of ridicule because of their beliefs. Many non-Jews admired their strict moral and religious code that was in direct opposition of the more liberal Greek culture practiced by many. Wansborough aptly described the Jews as "an alien race in a unified world" (Wansbrough, 1996, p. 3). What made the Jews unique was their complete monotheistic belief in a single god in a Greek world that promoted polytheism. In Greek society there were many gods, for instance Demeter, goddess of agriculture, harvest and growth; Hades, god of the dead and king of the underworld; Morpheus, god of sleep and dreams. They were all presided over by Zeus, king of the gods.

As the Greek Empire declined, Alexander's generals fought for power and divided his empire among themselves after his death. This resulted in the creation of Macedonian, Syrian and Ptolemaic (Egyptian) kingdoms. For the next 125 years, the Egyptian and Syrian leaders fought over Palestine, which

lay between the two countries. In 198 BC, Syria triumphed over Egypt and incorporated Judea into its domain. In 167 BC the Syrian King, Antiochus IV Epiphanes tried to suppress Judaism. He failed, largely due to the Maccabees who were the first great dynasty of Jewish rulers. The Maccabees rose to power because of their refusal to adopt Hellenistic culture. This is recounted in 1 Maccabees 2 which tells of how Antiochus tried to compel the inhabitants of Modein to sacrifice to the Greek gods. Mattathias (whose family became known as the Maccabees) was instructed to offer a sacrifice as an example for the rest of the people to follow. He refused, instead making a powerful speech, which moved others to resist too. Another Jew, fearing reprisals for Mattathias' refusal, offered to make the sacrifice on Mattathias' behalf, but Mattathias killed him as well as the officials of the king. The Jews rose behind Mattathias and his five sons and revolted against Antiochus and his regime. The Maccabees, or "Hammers", went on to defeat Antiochus and the Jews regained their independence. The Hasmoneans followed and the Jews enjoyed a sustained period of independence from invading armies. The appearance of another powerful empire, led by Pompey the Great, put an end to this independence in 66 BC. It is against this background of Roman occupation that Jesus was born, lived and died.

Palestine under Roman rule

When the Roman Empire had conquered a particular province, it ensured the peace of Rome (*Pax Romana*) was kept. Rome recognised that the existing rulers knew their own people best and were happy to allow relatively independent rule if taxation was paid. Taxation was perhaps one of the disadvantages of occupation, although there are varied opinions as to how heavy a burden it really was. There is no doubt, however, that it was unpopular, and as well as paying for the Roman army it also furnished Roman officials with lavish lifestyles. Roman occupation brought with it many advantages. Travel was easy and there was an economic system and government. The famed Roman roads made travel expeditious. Sea travel was also common though often treacherous. This ease of travel between provinces of the empire meant that trade flourished. Intellectuals, too, could travel freely and expand their horizons and share their ideas easily with other like-minded individuals. There was a good system of justice and this meant protection for civilians in the Roman Empire. This gave people security and a sense of vindication as punishment was swift and severe for those who broke the law. There is little doubt that the peace and stability brought by Rome also led to the relative ease with which Christianity spread.

In Palestine, Roman occupation was disliked by the majority who saw Rome as just another empire that had taken their freedom by force. Most Jews hated taxation, and Luke's Gospel has numerous accounts of this dislike being shown to tax collectors, the agents of taxation, in Palestine. Some groups took this dislike further and were prepared to fight their oppressors. The Zealots were Jewish freedom fighters who supported armed resistance against Rome. They were by no means the only Jews opposed to Rome: many agreed with their message but not their method. Some scholars believe that Jesus may have been a Zealot sympathiser and that the gospel writers have tried to paint a picture of a pacifist Jesus post AD 70 to hide the fact (Stanton, 2002). There is little in the way of evidence to back this up, but one of the suggestions to support this argument is that Jesus had Zealots in his group of twelve Apostles. We know that at least one of the disciples, Simon, was a Zealot (Luke 6:15) and there is speculation that Judas was also a Zealot as Iscariot can be translated as "dagger man". There is irony in Jesus' choice of disciples as he grouped tax collectors and Zealots together. These individuals would normally be at odds and yet were called to work together to be Jesus' disciples.

Not all Jews were unhappy being under Roman rule. The influential Sadducees were content to cooperate with Rome as it meant they could keep their positions of power and affluence. In other parts of the Mediterranean, Jews did not suffer the same fate and Judaism flourished in communities in Alexandria and Cyrene. Jews were often unpopular; however, this unpopularity led to a strange dichotomy as they relied on the Roman emperors for protection. This reliance on the emperor often made them more unpopular as the emperor then used this position of reliance to extort support (Wansbrough, 1996).

Herod the Great

Herod the Great was appointed by the Romans as King of Judea in 40 BC. He is described by Grätz as "the evil genius of the Judean nation" (cited in Schürer, 2015). Herod and his family were builders, and a feature of his reign was the many cities, temples and amphitheatres built all over his kingdom. He developed a water supply for Jerusalem, built great palaces at Masada and Herodium and founded cities such as Caesarea Maritima. He extracted asphalt from the Dead Sea, which was used in shipbuilding, and had copper mines in Cyprus. His greatest achievement was to be the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem to gain favour with the people; however, this lavish gesture did nothing to increase his popularity among the Jews. Herod's family's rise to

power was opportunistic, a testament to their ability to bet on the right side to further their own ends, rather than the will of the people. This luck was recognised by Herod's contemporaries as Josephus (*The Jewish War* 1. 21. 13) said of Herod, "fortune was also very favourable to him". Herod's father Antipater, an Idumaean, had facilitated the Romans in the Orient and as a reward for his loyalty was appointed a leader by the Romans. The Idumaeans were forced to be Jews under the rule of John Hyrcanus and therefore were not considered by the broader Jewish community to be authentically Jewish. Herod was often called "half-Jew" by the Jewish people, reflecting his background.

Herod was given the rule of Judea by Emperor Augustus. It was Roman practice to allow colonies they had defeated to rule themselves if they were peaceable. If they adhered to the rule of Rome and paid their taxes accordingly, then the status quo could be maintained. The Romans were very aware that peace and stability brought prosperity and ease of rule for them as conquerors. This practice worked well in many provinces of the empire, though some of the more rebellious provinces were subject to direct rule from Rome. The Jews were also allowed religious freedom and tolerance by Rome, which recognised that if this concession kept the Jewish populous from revolting against them, it was a small price to pay.

The appointment of Herod, notionally a Jew, was part of this strategy. Rome believed the Jewish people would accept him as their leader but he was an unpopular choice, particularly with the Jewish religious authorities. Herod showed little interest in Jewish laws and customs except when it suited him to further his ambitions. This angered the religious leaders in Judea. His job was to integrate Roman customs into the Jewish population, which was met with opposition by many, but in general, "He was a clever man who brought an uneasy peace and stability to Palestine" (Cooper, 1989, p. 1).

His personal life was dramatic and often scandalous. He divorced his first wife, Doris, to make a more advantageous alliance. He married his second wife, Mariamne, who was descended from the Hasmonean line, in a bid to make himself popular with the Jews. Mariamne was well-documented as being his favourite wife despite his initial motivation for marrying her. He was devoted to Mariamne but this did not free her from his cruelty. Herod handed out death sentences to her grandfather, mother and seventeen-year-old brother, Aristobulus, whom he had appointed high priest. Eventually, in 29 BC, Mariamne was executed by Herod in a fit of jealousy after he accused her of being unfaithful. Even after her death Herod mourned her greatly, but his impetuous and irrational nature was illustrated by his decision to

execute those he loved. Herod is said to have had ten wives in his lifetime and many children. Infighting was rife and, as Herod grew older and more paranoid, he was susceptible to gossip and insinuations purported by his own family members who were ambitious to inherit power after his death. Herod maintained power to the end: five days before he died he executed his son, Antipater, whom he accused of plotting to poison him. In a final flourish of tyranny before his death, he ordered all the notable men in the country to be confined in the hippodrome at Jericho and massacred as soon as he died so that the country would mourn. Thankfully his order was not carried out, and when he did die the Jews celebrated their freedom from his despotic rule.

When Herod died in 4 BC his kingdom was divided among three of his sons by Emperor Augustus:

- Judea and Samaria were allotted to Archelaus who was such a bad leader that he was eventually replaced by a Roman governor in AD 6. Archelaus married his sister-in-law, Glaphyra, and the Pharisees regarded this union as incestuous. He was not popular and some New Testament scholars believe Luke 19:12–27, the parable of the gold coins, is about Archelaus. He went to Rome to have the title "king" conferred on him but was opposed by the Jewish people who did not want him as their king, so instead he was given the title of "**ethnarch**" instead. Augustus banished Archelaus to Vienne in Gaul in AD 6. Bond believes that Augustus could have chosen to divide the provinces of Judea and Samaria among the other family members after Archelaus' banishment, but instead infighting among the Herodians gave Augustus the opportunity to impose direct rule which was more lucrative for Rome (Bond, 1998).
- Ituraea and Trachonitis were allotted to Philip. Philip fared better as a ruler than Archelaus, perhaps because Jews were a minority among his subjects. He successfully ruled his provinces for thirty-seven years and was described as a moderate leader who was respected by his subjects.
- Herod Antipas was allotted Galilee.