

Lesson 4: Luke's Purpose and Style Part 2

Acts Intro

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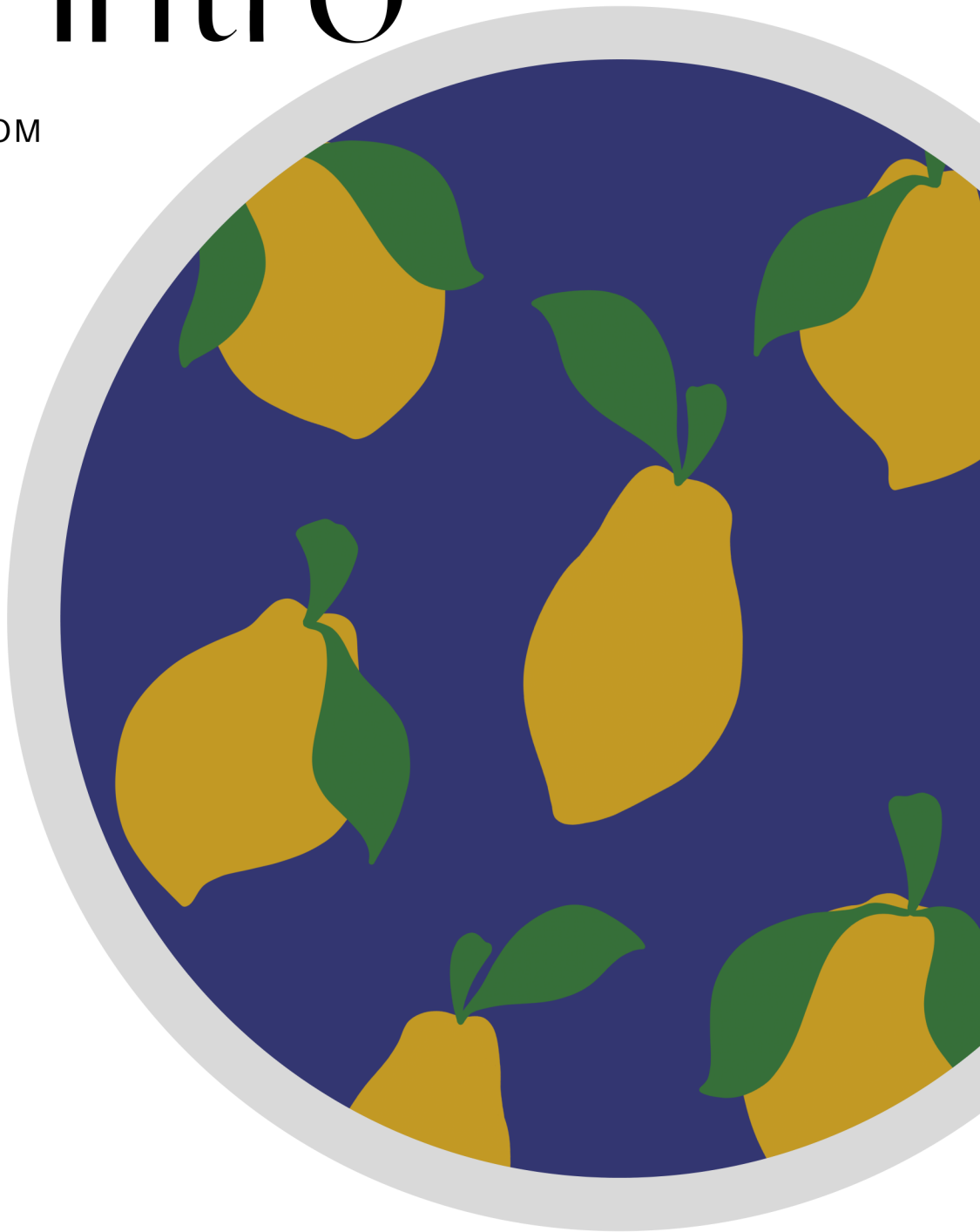


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Luke's Style *part 2*

Can we trust Luke as a historian?



"Beginning in the nineteenth century and then making its way to France and the United States, there was an attempt to position history under the branches of the sciences. As such, history was to be entirely objective and austere in presentation. This resulted in the disapproval of the aesthetic (read: narrative features) in the writing of history. . . It came to be, therefore that Acts was viewed as a flawed piece of history" (Padilla, 17).

Have you ever wondered if the Bible is legitimate history? Maybe this is not something you have personally struggled with but many have doubted and questioned not only the legitimate historical authenticity of the Bible, but the idea that traditional Christianity claims it represents the very words of God.

A biblical explanation for such doubt can be found in **2 Tim. 3:16-17**, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

I learned to trust scripture at a young age, but I must also admit that I have encountered some **valid questions from many who doubt**; many who wonder how and why we should trust the words of ancient writers. **How can we be sure that Luke was a legitimate researcher and historian; one who could write without bias?** Craig Keener answers this question well, "Although it should go without saying, we must be careful to distinguish ancient historiography from modern historiography. . . It is anachronistic to claim that ancient and modern histories share all the same generic features merely because we employ the same term (historiography) to describe them" (Keener, 100).

Many modern believers struggle to accept scripture's legitimacy because we compare the historical narrative styles of the NT writers with how histories are written in modern times. There is a logical explanation for such hesitancy. In the



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seventeenth century, the spirit of the Renaissance gave birth to the Enlightenment and the important intellectual movement called rationalism. Rationalism regarded the human mind as an independent authority capable of determining truth. . . Rationalism 'was not a system of beliefs antagonistic to Christianity, but an attitude of the mind which assumed that **in all matters of religion reason is supreme**' (Klein, 98)

One by-product of the age of rationalism was the application of the scientific method and historical criticism which to biblical scholarship; these "severely undermined the historical reliability of the Bible, and hence, its authority as a document of divine revelation" (101), and historical criticism negatively influenced Biblical scholarship and "severely undermined the historical reliability historical reliability of the Bible, and hence, its authority as a document of divine revelation" (101).

*Rationalism "Rationalism 'was not a system of beliefs antagonistic to Christianity, but an attitude of the mind which assumed that in all matters of religion reason is supreme"
-Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard*

Fast-forwarding to the twentieth century, historians shifted their manner of interpreting history. Today, historians and scholars recognize all writings contain bias because all writers (ancient and modern) are influenced by their time period, culture, ethnicity, etc. As a result, modern biblical scholars are incorporating interpretive methods which seek to understand and incorporate these presuppositions into their interpretations of scripture.

How does this help us determine if Luke can be trusted as a historian? Well, when Luke's writings are compared with his contemporaries, biblical scholars have decided that the writings of Luke-Acts are of the same caliber as historians of his day. In addition, they have categorized the Gospels as being biographical and Acts as a form of historiography with theological leanings modeled after the OT Jewish writings. Many claim Acts has the same qualities as the Hellenistic historical monographs - a history focusing on a certain audience within a culture. On the next page, I have provided you with some scholarly opinions of Luke's style.

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1 Osvaldo Padilla

Luke saw himself as a historian "describing events as they actually happened," but in the style of a theocracy (a history of God's interaction with humanity) (15). It is my suggestion that Acts is a Hellenistic historical monograph in the Jewish tradition. . . These monographs are limited in subject and the length of period they cover. . . The Greco-Roman historical monograph is decidedly focused on the affairs of state such as war and politics," but Acts "is unashamedly theocentric" which supports it being modeled after the Jewish OT (Padilla, 62-64).

3 Levine and Witherington

Levine and Witherington offer this opinion about The Gospel. "Luke's purpose is hermeneutical. He is not hoping to prove that something happened, but rather what these things signify" (12).

2 Powell & Pinter

Many Scholars Place Luke-Acts in the Genre of Historiography: "Luke- in both parts of his two-volume account- intends his account to be a reliable source of history. It is important, however, that Luke not be judged as a 'historian' against modern categories of historiography. Nonetheless, a number of recent studies have demonstrated that even in this regard, Luke can be viewed as a reliable historian" (Pinter, 26). Recent scholars have noted that Luke's writing is on the level of his contemporaries, "Josephus, Herodotus, and other reporters of ancient history" (Powell, 161).

Summary

I know this lesson has been history and concept heavy, but I do hope it has given you a perspective you haven't considered. We can trust Luke as a historian when we understand:

1. The style of "history" he authored is not synonymous with our style of "history."
2. Luke-Acts is theocentric historiography (perhaps a historical monograph).
3. Luke-Acts has its own perspective- to provide a history of the fulfillment of God's covenantal promises.

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Study Time *instructions*

I believe I have given you enough to read and ponder in this lesson. However, if you want a challenge, here is a question to ponder.

Do you believe Luke can be trusted? Do you believe he is a valid historian? Answer your questions by looking back over your notes from Luke 22 (Lesson 3). Search specifically for clues (phrases, words or ideas) that provide evidence that Luke sees himself as a legitimate historian. Here are some possible clues:

- References to an eyewitness (whether human or supernatural).
- References to dates, times, places in history.
- Phrases like: it was necessary, so that, in order that, to fulfill.
- Quotes or intertextual references to the OT
- Phrases which address authority (Jesus', the disciples, Pharisees, etc.)



Congratulations!

You have completed Lesson 4 of the Acts Study! I am so proud of you and would love to hear from you. Please share what you are learning with me so I can share it with others on the Overcoming Monday Podcast!



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Credits



Caylee Collins
Editor and Creator

Caylee has been a huge help in helping me gather, consolidate, brainstorm and create this study.



Joseph Pope
Podcast Producer

Joseph records and uploads the podcasts for this study and deserved a big mention.



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