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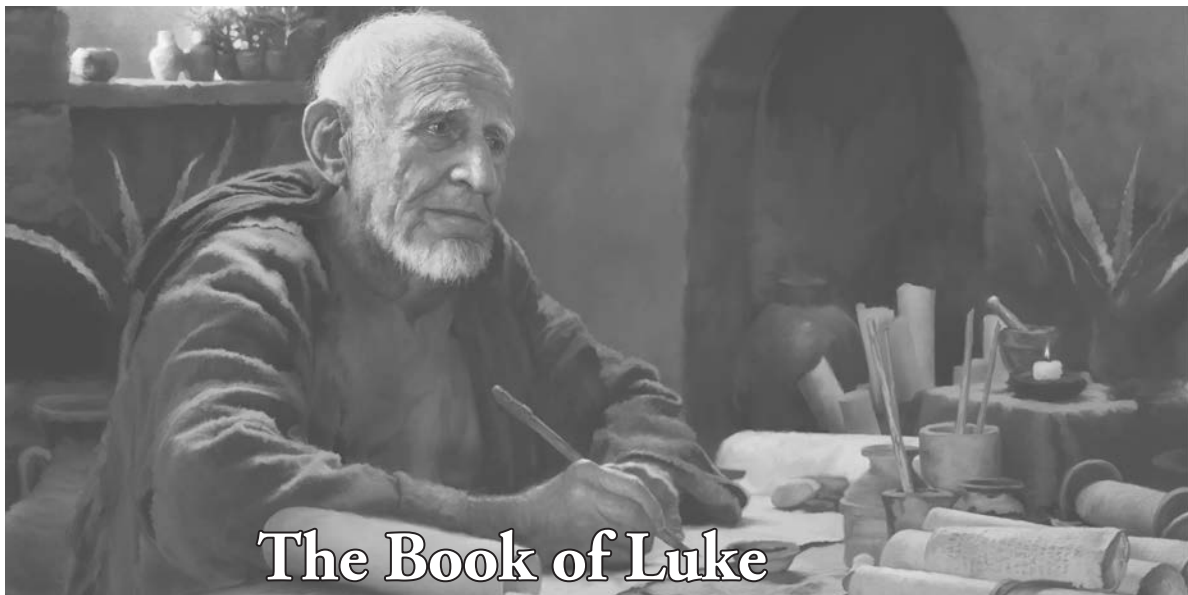
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The Book of Luke

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (*Luke 15:20*).

We know that verse. It comes from one of the most well-known and beloved stories in all literature, sacred or mundane. Astonishingly enough, we would never have heard it but for a simple missionary doctor who embedded that precious gem in a letter he wrote to his learned friend Theophilus.

The doctor’s name is Luke, a Gentile convert, and the letter is The Gospel According to Luke. In addition to the Gospel, Luke also wrote the book of Acts. Having been a travel companion of Paul, Luke was a keen observer of, and participant in, the great Jesus movement sweeping the Roman Empire. This close association with Paul led Luke not only to grasp the profound meaning of the Christian church—which stood its ground against Caesar’s demand to be honored as divine—but also to learn more deeply from credible sources about the Man behind it all: Jesus Christ. So, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke wrote a two-volume work on what could be called “Origin and History of the Christian Church.”

Part 1 of this work is the Gospel, written and delivered to Theophilus before Acts was written (*Acts 1:1*). Many conservative scholars date Luke’s Gospel to about A.D. 61–63.

Theophilus was a Greek convert, and in addressing the letter to him, Luke was

especially conscious of directing his Gospel to the Greek and Gentile members of the community of faith, while not disregarding Jesus' Jewish roots. Matthew wrote primarily to the Jews, and so he emphasizes Jesus as the Messiah. Mark wrote to the Romans, and we see Jesus marching across the land with the news about the kingdom. John was a deep thinker, and in his Gospel emerges Jesus the Word, the Creator, the Son of God. But Luke writes with an eye on the Gentiles. To them, he presents Jesus, the Son of man, as the Savior of the world and Friend of humanity. The universality of salvation is the underlying theme of his Gospel, so his genealogy traces Jesus all the way to Adam and links him to God, while Matthew's genealogy stops with Abraham, the father of the Jews (*Luke 3:23–38; compare with Matt. 1:1–17*).

Luke's Gospel is the longest in the New Testament. Some miracles appear only in Luke, such as the raising of the widow of Nain's son (*Luke 7:11–17*) and the healing of Malchus (*Luke 22:50, 51*). (For other miracles, see *Luke 5:4–11, 13:10–17, 14:1–6, 17:11–19*.) Many parables are peculiar to Luke, including several famous ones: the good Samaritan (*Luke 10:30–37*), the rich foolish man (*Luke 12:16–21*), the prodigal son (*Luke 15:11–32*), the rich man and Lazarus (*Luke 16:19–31*), and the Pharisee and the publican (*Luke 18:10–14*). The Zacchaeus story (*Luke 19:1–10*) is also unique to Luke.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Luke surveyed the historical materials, interviewed the eyewitnesses (*Luke 1:2*), and then, with "perfect understanding of all things," wrote "an orderly account" that readers "may know the certainty" of Jesus and His good news (*vss. 3, 4, NKJV*).

When asked if he would recommend a good biography of Jesus, the great theologian James Denney replied, "Have you tried the one that Luke wrote?"

Good idea. Let's try it together, as a world church, this quarter.

Luke writes with an eye on the Gentiles. To them he presents Jesus, the Son of man, as the Savior of the world and Friend of humanity.

John M. Fowler has served the church for 53 years as pastor, theology and philosophy teacher, editor, and educational administrator. As author of numerous articles and books, he has written two other Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guides: The Cosmic Conflict Between Christ and Satan (2002) and Ephesians: The Gospel of Relationships (2005).

How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Create).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Apply: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Create: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.