Background to a study of the Gospel according to Luke
Luke and the Synoptic Problem

- Gospel of Luke is one of the “synoptic” gospels
  - Others are Mark and Matthew
  - Synoptic = “same or similar view”
    - Stories and often language are closely related
- “The Synoptic Problem”
  - Why are the three gospels so similar?
  - What are their relationship to one another?
The “Two-Source” Solution

- Traditional view – Matthew was first gospel
- Modern scholarly view – Mark was first gospel (65-70 CE)
- “Q” (for Quelle – “source”) is an early lost document or oral tradition carrying forth the sayings and deeds of Jesus
The “Two-Source” Solution

M: source material unique to Matthew
L: source material unique to Luke
Dating the Gospels

- Crucifixion of Jesus – 33 CE
- Earliest Christian literature are Paul’s (authentic) letters
  - Galatians, Romans, Philippians, Philemon, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians (51-58 CE)
- Mark (65-70 CE)
- Luke (approx. 80 CE)
- Matthew (approx. 80 CE)
- John (90-120 CE)
  - Those who date John later favor an earlier dating for the Coptic Gospel of Thomas
What kind of book is Luke?

- **Biography**
  - Luke is first part of a two-volume “book”
  - Acts of the Apostles is the second volume

- **History**
  - Fits both categories as known in Greco-Roman culture during this time
    - Biographers and historians free to make up speeches and arrange events to suit thematic theme

- **Formal Preface of Luke**
  - Addressed to “most excellent Theophilus”
  - Luke uses “most excellent” elsewhere to refer to Roman administrators
  - Was Luke-Acts an apology?
What kind of book is Luke?

- **Apology (Apologetics)**
  - Reasoned defense of a person’s actions
  - Was Luke-Acts a defense of Christianity addressed to Roman administrator?
    - No record of Roman administrator by name of Theophilus
  - Theophilus = “beloved of God”
  - Apology addressed to fellow Christians to answer questions of outsiders?

- **Prophecy**
  - Prophecy and prophecy fulfilled
  - Christian church as fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation
Christology of Luke

- Though Synoptics share similar stories must remember to read each Gospel as a stand-alone effort
- Each Gospel author has their own view of who Jesus was
  - Don’t conflate the views
- Who was Jesus for Luke?
  - Question that Luke himself consistently raises in the Gospel
Pay attention to the frequency and importance of the titles Christians typically use to understand who Jesus was...

1. Son of God
2. Prophet
3. Lord
4. Messiah/Christ
5. Son of Man
6. Savior
Luke’s Narrative

  - Importance of Temple and Jerusalem
  - Importance of Gentile Mission (more prominent in Acts)
  - End Times - Eschatology
    - Luke-Acts doesn’t take the view that the end times are coming soon
  - Social Agenda
    - Since history is not close to ending, important to minister to sick, poor and marginalized with society
    - Prominence of women
Who wrote Luke?

- Internally anonymous
- Connection to Luke in 2nd century
- Traditionally ascribed to traveling companion of Paul
  - Colossians describes Luke as “a doctor”
  - Four passages in Acts where wording changes from “they” to “we” (all in connection with Paul’s travels)
  - Luke identified as last companion of Paul in 2 Timothy

- Problems
  - 2 Timothy and Colossians likely written by someone other than Paul
  - Change from “we” to “they” in middle of story