

# Notes to accompany Podcast 20

## Jesus Journeys to Jerusalem with his Disciples

### Engaging Lk 9.51-19.27

In the previous podcasts we saw how Luke presented Jesus' public ministry in Galilee and around the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Now we turn to a major section of the gospel, over ten chapters (almost half) given to the journey which Jesus undertakes with his disciples as they move towards Jerusalem, the place of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection—the climax of Luke's gospel.



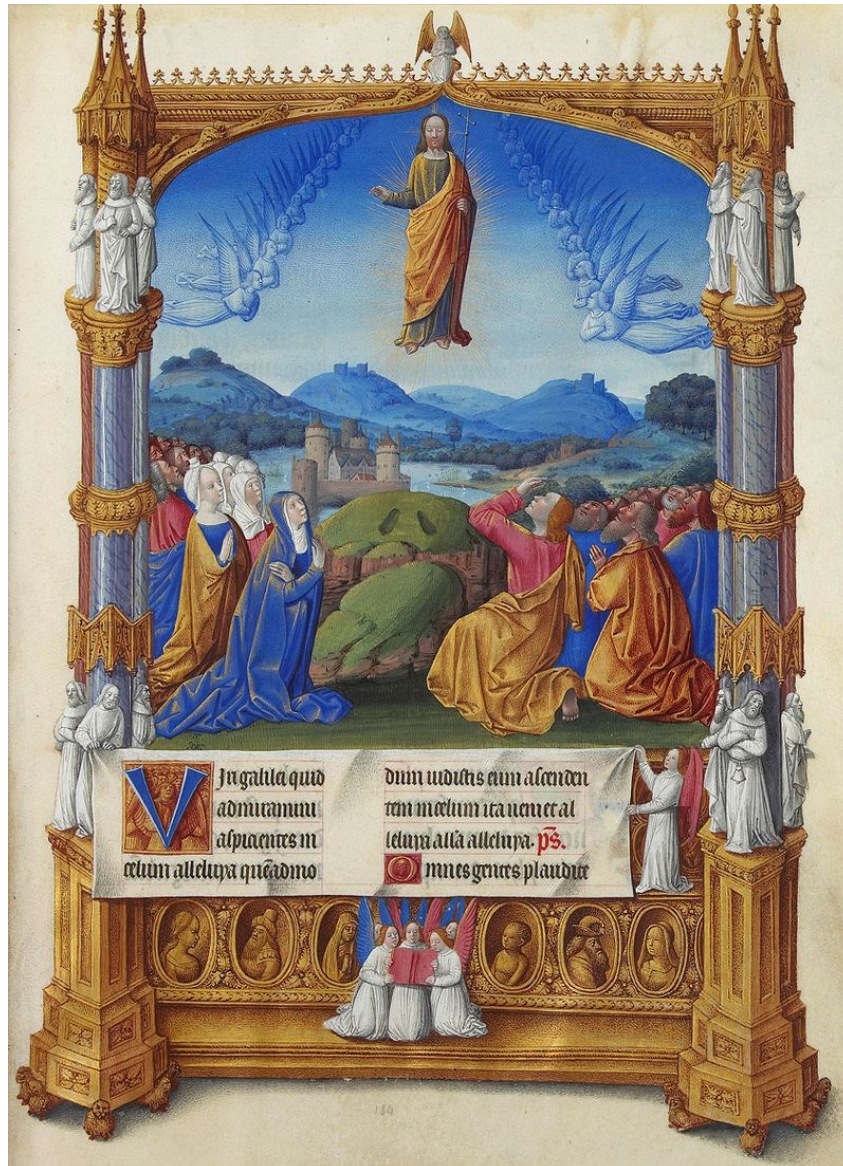
A section of the ancient Roman road that linked Jericho to Jerusalem.

*Photo: Michael Trainor, used with permission.*

## The Division of Luke's Journey Narrative

Luke's statement in Lk 9.51 indicates that a new moment has arrived in the gospel story:

As it happened, when the days of his *being taken up* drew near, he turned his face to journey to Jerusalem. (My translation)



Luke's refers to the completion of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem as his 'days of being taken up' drawing near. This 'taking up' is a reference to Jesus' ascension, Luke's final gospel story (Lk 24.50-53), depicted in this scene of the ascension from *Les Très Riches Heures du duc de Berry*, Folio 184r, 1410, Musée Condé, Chantilly.

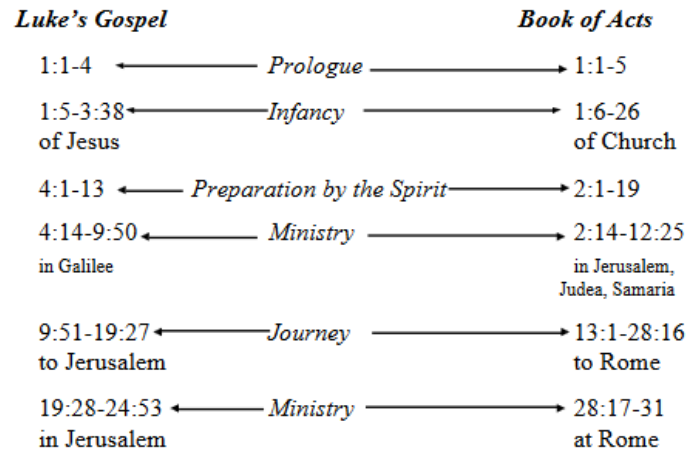
Attribution: Public domain: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Folio\\_184r\\_-\\_The\\_Ascension.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Folio_184r_-_The_Ascension.jpg).

These ten chapters are about the journey. This is not about a physical journey, the mechanics of going from one place (Galilee) to another (Jerusalem). It is about the journey of the disciple with the master, about the meaning of true discipleship and the concerns which Luke has for the gospel audience as it journeys in the Greco-Roman world and seeks to be authentic in its following of Jesus in a new time and place. We also see how Jesus' antagonists feature. They are against Jesus and resistant to what he teaches.

There are two aspects to the way Luke constructs this 'artificial' journey.

First, in comparison to the second volume, Acts, Jesus' journey in the gospel parallels Paul's journey in Acts:

## Structure



The structural parallels between Luke and Acts  
from Michael Trainor, *Jesus in Luke's Gospel*  
(Homebush, NSW: St Paul's Publications, 1995), 26.  
Used with permission.

Second, there are two occasions when Luke mentions Jesus journeying to Jerusalem: Lk 13.22 and 17.11. These mentions suggest a three-fold way of dividing up this long and complex section of the gospel: (1) Lk 9.51-13.22; (2) 13.23-17.10; (3) 17.11-19.27. Our approach will be to look at the journey with this two-fold division in mind.

## Engaging Lk 9.51-13.22

As the journey to Jerusalem begins, *four* main themes surface in the teaching from Luke's Jesus. These concern:

- Discipleship (Lk 9.51-11.13; 12.54-13.5)
- Opposition to Jesus' mission and ministry (Lk 11.14-12.12; 12.49-53)
- Use of possessions (Lk 12.13-34)
- The imminence of God's 'reign' (*basileia*) (Lk 12.35-48; 13.6-20)

Each theme teaches Jesus' disciples (and Luke's householders) how to live in the present while temptation to comprise attachment to Jesus and care of others is strong. Materialism and prestige need constant reflection.

Luke wants to speak to those in the gospel household who have power and status. This is clear in the opening chapters of the journey narrative, especially in Lk 12. Discipleship is not unconcerned about what goes on in society or the wider environment. It is linked to treatment of Earth and people who live in it.



Lk 10.38-42: Jesus is welcomed by Martha and Mary. Johannes (Jan) Vermeer - Christ in the House of Martha and Mary.

*Attribution:* Johannes Vermeer [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

Jesus invites his disciples to be reflective about covetousness and any temptation to greed and preoccupation with appearance, dress and accumulated wealth. The parable of the unproductive fig tree is most instructive (Lk 13.6-9)

These are challenging words, especially for us today.

## **Engaging 13.23-17.10**

As we move further into Luke's journey narrative concerns over possessiveness and greed begin to surface more prominently. This is Luke's Jesus addressing a later Greco-Roman elite gospel household.



Jesus instructs his disciples before he takes leave of them.

*Attribution:* Duccio di Buoninsegna [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Four themes are noteworthy.

- The first is the setting for Jesus' instruction. This is the 'symposium' of Luke's day—a meal gathering for (usually) males accompanied by a 'drinking party' a philosophical conversation that would edify. The only women present, if any, were *hetairai* ('prostitutes'). Jesus is portrayed as involved in a 'symposium'. He instructs for edification.
- A second theme concerns possessiveness. Jesus' healing of a man with 'dropsy' (Lk 14.1-6) was more than a physical healing. It concerned the deeper healing from a disease that results from greed. A sixth century Greek writer quotes Diogenes (412-33 BCE):

Diogenes compared money-lovers to dropsies: as dropsies, though filled with fluid crave drink, so money-lovers, though loaded with money, crave more of it, yet both to their demise

- A third theme revolves around the style of meal in which Jesus participated and encouraged the host to expand the guest list to include 'the poor, the lame, the blind'

(Lk 14.13). This openness to a new guest list would have been unheard of in Luke's day amongst the social climbers.

- A fourth theme is found in Lk 15. For some scholars this sums up the heart of the gospel: the revelation of a God of compassion who seeks the lost to rejoice with them. Rather than Lk 15.11-32 being called the parable of the 'prodigal son', it is actually the parable of *two* lost sons....as we shall see.

## Engaging 17.11-19.23

As we near the completion of Jesus' long journey (in terms of Luke's chapters!) to Jerusalem, the gospel writer explores the meaning of God's 'reign' (*Basileia*) revealed through Jesus' ministry and especially his preaching.

This *basileia* is also an 'ecotopia', that is, it involves the whole of creation, not only human beings. This focus encourages disciples to act with ecological respect and a spirit of asceticism as Jesus teaches about wealth, possessions and the importance of divesting oneself from material attachment. Clearly, avarice is a temptation in the Lukan household.

The auditor also notices that the disciples do not appear to be totally in harmony with Jesus' teaching. They appear confused and their discipleship seems challenged.

- The final parable of this journey narrative (Lk 19.11-27) becomes a snapshot of the realities that Luke's household faces: the greedy seem to remain greedy and continue to accumulate wealth, while the poor become poorer.



Lk 15.11-32. Rembrandt's version of Luke's story.  
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## Session Summary

From our engagement with Lk 9-19, we see how Luke:

- Reveals a Jesus concerned about the weak and the poor;
- Shows how God's central virtue is compassion and joy, especially in Lk 15, what might be considered the central chapter of the whole of the gospel;
- Address the issue of status and wealth prominent in the Greco-Roman world of Luke's day;
- Offers encouragement for disciples to be ascetic and free from over attachment to wealth and avariciousness;
- Reminds auditors that God's 'reign', the *basileia*, is present and an 'ecotopia', that is, it embraces not only human beings but the whole of creation;
- Offers a realistic social-snapshot (Lk 19.11-27) that the rich will become wealthier and the poor, poorer.



Luke Paints the Icon of the Mother of God Hodegetria.

*Attribution:* By Unknown Icon Painter, Russian (early 15th century)

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