


7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

KRISTI MCLELLAND

VIDEO  
ACCESS  
INCLUDED

Luke  
IN THE  
Land

Walking with Jesus in  
His First-Century World

The background is a landscape photograph showing a hillside with a town in the distance. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The foreground is a field of dry, golden-brown grass. The title 'Luke IN THE Land' is overlaid in white. 'Luke' and 'Land' are in a large, elegant cursive font, while 'IN THE' is in a smaller, all-caps sans-serif font centered between them.

# Luke IN THE Land

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LAND

## About the Author

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**KRISTI MCLELLAND** is a speaker, teacher, and college professor. Since completing her Master of Arts in Christian Education at Dallas Theological Seminary, she has dedicated her life to discipleship, to teaching people how to study the Bible for themselves, and to writing about how God is better than we ever knew by explaining the Bible through a Middle Eastern lens. She has written two other Bible studies: *Jesus and Women* focuses on Jesus's earthly ministry and His interactions with first-century women, while *The Gospel on the Ground* follows the early church through the book of Acts. Her great desire for people to truly experience the love of God birthed a ministry in which she leads biblical study trips to Israel, Turkey, Greece, and Italy.

For more information about Kristi and what she's up to, visit: [newlensbiblicalstudies.com](http://newlensbiblicalstudies.com).

## From the Author

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On October 7, 2023, I was sitting in a restaurant in the Newark airport, enjoying a cheese plate and waiting for my flight to Tel Aviv, Israel. I anticipated joining up with over three hundred people for our biblical study trip together with Lifeway. As I waited, my phone lit up, notifying me that my flight to Tel Aviv had been canceled due to “unrest in the region.” My heart seized. I knew something had gone terribly wrong. I will never forget that helpless, heartbroken, and gutted feeling as I sat in the airport—now waiting for my flight to take me back to Tennessee.

News outlets have reported that October 7, 2023 was the bloodiest day for Jewish people since the Holocaust. It has been referred to as “Israel’s 9/11.” In the days following October 7, I felt such deep grief and lament, shock and disbelief—a profound sadness I could feel in my very bones.

I started thinking about the fact that one month earlier, in September of 2023, I was IN Israel with the Lifeway video team as we filmed all of the teachings you will experience in this 7-session series. That filming project was a stretch for me in so many ways. It was a hard *yes* to give because my heart is to take people to Israel.

But the Lord has been impressing upon my heart over the last few years (since COVID-19) that I need to bring Israel here more and more. This has been a hard thing for me to submit to as I love being in Israel more than anything else.

I submitted to the adventure of writing *Luke in the Land*, and I reluctantly submitted to filming the teachings in Israel. But the true surrender to it has come since October 7. With COVID and now the events of October 7 and following, I’m surrendered to this adventure of trying my best to bring Israel here more and more. My heart feels both agreement and yielding to be more open to these things.

Tragedy sometimes works in strange ways as it changes us, diverts us, and often moves us into new creative and innovative adventures. Pain in the hands of God will be turned into beautiful things if we will let it. I had some surprising and absolutely beautiful moments while we were filming these teachings in Israel.

We started with a sunrise filming on the Arbel Cliffs, overlooking the Sea of Galilee. While I was filming on the Mount of Olives at sunset, a guy kept yelling “Shakira!” at me. I visited the ancient Emmaus Road for the very first time and walked on it as we filmed. It’s a portion of that ancient road that Jesus walked with two disappointed disciples after His resurrection (Luke 24). I have sat in many places where Jesus would’ve sat, but walking a road that resurrected Jesus walked just about did me in.

I could go on and on, but delight and joy and wonder found me during this filming project. I would not have experienced these things without first giving a submitted *yes* to it.

Sitting here writing this, I can actually say that this *Luke in the Land* study is given with my fully submitted and surrendered heart to you and yours. I hope you love getting to know Jesus better not only in His first-century Jewish world, but in the land of Israel where He lived, ministered, died, resurrected, and ascended.



*Kristi McLelland*



## *How to Use This Study*

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In our time together, we are going to glimpse some snapshots of the story of Jesus in the land where He walked. We are going to study God's Word in a way that might seem a bit different from what you've experienced in the past. The Gospel of Luke is written in a way similar to how you might scrapbook or pick out photos for an album—one snapshot at a time. We'll be looking at four snapshots in the life of Jesus each session.

### ▶ **LEADING A GROUP?**

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A free leader guide PDF is available for download at [lifeway.com/lukeintheland](http://lifeway.com/lukeintheland). The leader guide offers several tips and helps, along with discussion guides for each week.

Resources are available to help you promote the study in your church or neighborhood, including: invitation card, promotional poster, bulletin insert, and PowerPoint® template. You'll find these and more at [lifeway.com/lukeintheland](http://lifeway.com/lukeintheland).



←  
*Scan  
me*

## ▶ WHAT'S INSIDE

The **SNAPSHOT** sections are for your personal study time. Instead of labeling them by days of study, we've labeled them as snapshots, taking from the structure of the Gospel of Luke itself. Feel free to complete each between our weekly group times as you see fit throughout the week.



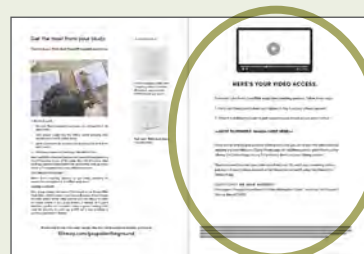
The **WATCH AND DISCUSS** times are meant to be completed with your small group. In the Middle Eastern way, the original context of the Gospel of Luke, learning is very communal. Here's what I mean: in a Middle Eastern context, it would be common to see rabbis teaching students as they walked down the road. This teaching tradition places significant value on students discussing an issue with one another.



You'll notice group discussion guides crafted especially for you to use as you yeshiva, or discuss biblical text together, after you've studied them throughout the week. You'll also find a place for you to take notes as you watch the week's teaching video.

**VIDEO ACCESS:** You'll find detailed information for how to access the video teaching sessions that accompany this study on the card inserted in the back of your Bible study book.

**LOOKING FOR MORE?** Watch the optional bonus video from Kristi, "The Making of Luke in the Land," available on the Lifeway On Demand app or [lifeway.com/lukeintheland](http://lifeway.com/lukeintheland). In the video, Kristi shares a bit more of her heart behind the study and how God used the teaching in Israel in her own life.





*Introduction to*  
**LUKE**







## ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

Before you start this study, I've provided some prompts for reflection and discussion to help ready you for our journey together over the next several weeks.

1. I'm here because my heart needs . . .

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2. Where would you want to visit in Israel? Why?

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3. With whom in Luke's Gospel would you want to have coffee? What would you want to discuss?

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4. If you could go back in a time machine and witness any story or event that takes place in the Gospels, which one would it be? Why?

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## *Introduction to Luke*

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Jerome (AD 347–420), an early church father from Croatia, moved to Bethlehem and gave almost forty decades of his life to translating the biblical texts from the original languages of Hebrew and Greek into Latin. He contributed to a translation called the Latin Vulgate, which the church used for about a thousand years as a primary translation of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> St. Jerome is commonly believed to have said that there is a “fifth Gospel.”

Five Gospels record the life of Jesus. Four you will find in books and the one you will find in the land they call Holy. Read the fifth Gospel and the world of the four will open to you.

### **COMMONLY ATTRIBUTED TO ST. JEROME**

In other words, the land of Israel is the “fifth Gospel” accompanying the four we read. The land is the “Gospel” we walk. We take in the biblical four by reading, but we experience the “fifth” with our five senses.

**READ LUKE 1:1-4.** What wording does Luke use to describe the life of Jesus in verse 1?

**In verse 4, why does he say he is writing the Gospel account?**

As the author of the third Gospel, Luke had lived and walked the “fifth Gospel.” He interviewed eyewitnesses to the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus and sat down to write his Gospel—the Gospel of Luke from these accounts. Luke’s Gospel reminds me of a photo album full of snapshots.

We don’t take and collect photos of every single moment of our lives (such as shopping on aisle three at Target®, taking out the trash, picking up kids from school, sitting in a doctor’s office, packing for a trip, etc.). But we do take photos

to remember significant moments—important moments lived with the people we lived them alongside (school, holidays, babies, birthday parties, graduations, weddings, vacations, beautiful sunsets that made us cry, etc.)

I could get a really good sense of who you are, whom you love, what you care about, and the world that has shaped you and your worldview simply by looking at your photo albums and your snapshots—the snapshots you chose to keep along the way.

**What are some of your favorite snapshots or stories in your own life?**

**Who's in your photo albums?**

**What places are in your photo albums?**

Similar to our photo albums, in the Gospel of Luke every single moment is not recorded. Every single story is not told. Every miracle, or teaching, or city visited by Jesus is not recorded. Rather, Luke told the stories he learned and heard from others. He provides gospel-gorgeous snapshots of the gospel story. The full testimony of Jesus could never be fully captured in human words in any one Gospel account. The very last verse of the very last Gospel, John's Gospel, ends with this truth.

Jesus did many other things as well.  
If every one of them were written down,  
I suppose that even the whole world would  
not have room for the books that would be written.

**JOHN 21:25**

**Have you ever thought of the Bible and the Gospels in this way?  
What are some of your favorite “snapshots” from Scripture? From  
Jesus’s life?**

Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Luke recorded the exact stories the living God wanted us to have. This makes me want to EAT my Bible and carry it around inside me. I want to see the snapshots He wants me to have, to hold, to carry within me as I live, move, and have my being in this life.

We are a people who are meant to experience Jesus. The four written Gospels and the “fifth Gospel” of the land of Israel invite us to experience Jesus and to understand Him in His first-century world—His life, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection—so that we might follow Him, being like Him in our own world.

### **LUKE: BACKGROUND & STORY-TELLING**

Luke’s Gospel is the third of four Gospels located in the canon of the New Testament. However, originally it was seen as part one of a two-volume work that included the book of Acts.<sup>2</sup> We can easily forget this point because the placement of John’s Gospel as the fourth separates Luke’s Gospel account from his further writings that follow in Acts. The earliest readers of the text would have read Luke and Acts as one continuous story. What began in Luke would see fulfillment throughout Acts and on and on until this very moment you and I find ourselves in. We too are part of this story.

The original work, known as Luke-Acts, makes up approximately one-fourth of the entire New Testament!<sup>3</sup> We don’t often think of Luke as one of the most prolific contributors to the New Testament writings, but with 24 chapters in Luke and 28 chapters in Acts, his literary contribution is a substantial gift to us who feast on the life, ministry, stories, and kingdom work of Jesus and His earliest disciples.

The Gospels and Acts are first-century teaching documents, rather than personal correspondence like much of the rest of the New Testament. As such, these texts do not provide Luke’s name as the author. However, reliable early Christian sources, such as the M. Canon (AD 170) and writings from Iranaeus (AD 180), confirm Luke as the writer of Luke-Acts.<sup>4</sup>

## What do you know about Luke, the person?

**READ COLOSSIANS 4:14; 2 TIMOTHY 4:9-11; AND PHILEMON 23-24. What do you learn about Luke?**

Luke was most likely a Gentile physician, well-versed in Greek culture and language, a follower of Jesus, and a companion of Paul on some of his missionary journeys and adventures. Paul refers to him as “dear friend Luke, the doctor” (Col. 4:14) and as a “fellow worker” (Philem. 24).

While Luke is not specifically mentioned as the author of Luke-Acts, one unique feature of Luke’s Gospel is that it is the only one that names its recipient—“most excellent Theophilus,” and “Theophilus” (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). Theophilus means “beloved by God.” The phrase “most excellent” indicates that he was most likely a person of high social rank and financial status. We see this term used of other upper echelon people in the book of Acts (23:26; 24:3; 26:25). Theophilus was most likely the literary patron who financially provided for the copying of these Luke-Acts scrolls for himself and others.<sup>5</sup>

LUKE 1:1-4	Josephus’s similar introduction in <i>Against Apion</i>
“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.”	“In the former book, most excellent Epaphroditus, I have demonstrated our antiquity, and confirmed the truth of what I have said, from the writings of the Phoenicians, and Chaldeans, and Egyptians. I have, moreover, produced many of the Grecian writers as witnesses thereto.” <sup>6</sup>

We often do not think of Luke as the one who wrote one-fourth of the New Testament, and we certainly don't think of Theophilus as being the financier of one-fourth of the New Testament! The partnership between these two men giving what they had to further the story of the gospel being written and shared moves me deeply. Luke was educated and fluent in the Greek language, while Theophilus was a Jesus-follower with bank! One gave his reed pen or metal stylus to write it. One gave his money to pay for it.

And here we are, two thousand years later, *still* reading the gospel-gorgeous story of Jesus and His followers that those two wrote and financed. This reminds me of a simple principle I try to live by as a follower of Jesus:

### **GIVE WHAT YOU GOT!**

**When have you seen fellow believers “giving what they got” to further the message of Jesus?**

**How might you be called to “give what you got” (use your talents and treasures) to share the story of Jesus with others?**

It is beautiful to imagine Luke, some two thousand years ago, writing the third Gospel as he walked the “fifth Gospel,” interviewing eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus and the early church and scribing these stories as the Holy Spirit led him (Luke 1:1-4). In Acts 27:1 and Acts 28:1, Luke used the word *we*, indicating that he was with Paul in Jerusalem and Caesarea during that two-and-a-half-year time frame. This would have most likely been the time Luke interviewed his eyewitnesses and wrote his Gospel account, even as he was walking, embodying, seeing, and experiencing the land of Israel for himself.<sup>7</sup>



## *Historical Context*

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In the time of Herod the king of Judea . . .

**LUKE 1:5a**

In those days Caesar Augustus . . .

**LUKE 2:1a**

Have you ever thought about the timing of Jesus's birth into the world? Every Christmas season we celebrate His birth, the beautiful story told in Matthew 1–2 and Luke 2—when the living God took on flesh and broke into human history, changing it forever. What was the world Jesus was born into like, and what can we learn about Him from both the timing and the context of His incarnational arrival?

### **CONTEXT**

The Bible tells an ongoing story about the people of Israel and the people groups and nations they interacted with. The Israelites were often subjected to foreign rule and oppression—empires that came and went, taking everything they could along the way. The list goes something like this: Egypt (Ex.), Assyria (2 Kings 17), Babylon (Dan.), Persia (Esth., Neh.), Greece (Intertestamental Period), and Rome (New Testament).

Within these difficult stories of harsh domination by cruel pharaohs, kings, and caesars, there are stories of light in the darkness, hope in the midst of despair, and of salvation and deliverance. These biblical stories teach us to look for light in our own darkness, to reach for hope in our own despair, and to courageously cry out for salvation and deliverance in our own lives.

The overarching narrative of the Bible is localized among those who are on the bottom of society's hierarchies and structures. Jesus, the King of kings, came all the way to the lowest circle of humanity, found the lost, the sick, and the marginalized, and prioritized them.

**LOOK UP LUKE 4:18-21 AND LUKE 19:10. What does this tell you about Jesus's mission on earth?**

No "king" had ever done this in human history.

Between the Old Testament and New Testament, there was a time period called the Intertestamental Period. It covered approximately four hundred years between Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, and Matthew, the first book of the New Testament. Significant changes impacted the whole world during this time. Those changes came when the Greeks, through Alexander the Great, emerged as the ruling superpower in the earth. *Koine* or "common" Greek became the *lingua franca*, and Greek culture (Hellenism) was systematically spread through the kingdoms conquered by the Greeks. Alexander wanted the whole world to be Greek, and he was well on his way to achieving his goals when he died in his early thirties.<sup>8</sup>

As we move closer to the world at the time of Jesus's birth, we come to a very important date during the Intertestamental Period, one that set the stage for the context of the Gospels in the New Testament. In 63 BC a Roman general named Pompey conquered Judea and Jerusalem, like others who had come before him. He laid siege to Jerusalem and eventually broke into the city. Twelve thousand Jewish people died in Jerusalem that day.

\* The Alexander Mosaic is a Roman floor mosaic originally from the House of the Faun in Pompeii.



\* Tetradrachm of Alexander the Great

But Pompey took it one step further. Ancient Jewish historian Josephus reported that Pompey entered the temple, even entered as far as the Holy of Holies—something the high priest of Israel did only once a year on the Day of Atonement.<sup>9</sup>

Pompey looked around but did not touch the temple furnishings or treasures. His disregard for temple order and sacredness was the ultimate sacrilege for the Jewish people. His actions served as a sign of what life under Roman rule would look like for years to come, as the Roman Empire exerted its dominance from 63 BC, through the New Testament era, and beyond. The Jewish people likely recognized Rome as the new enemy.

**READ ABOUT THE DAY OF ATONEMENT IN LEVITICUS 16:2-4. How does this passage inform on the inappropriateness of Pompey’s actions?**

### TIMING

Julius Caesar, another formidable Roman general and statesman, defeated Pompey in 48 BC, and declared himself as the dictator of Rome for life.<sup>10</sup> Before he was famously assassinated in 44 BC, he was deified as a god. Later, as Rome transitioned from a republic to an empire in 27 BC, Caesar’s adopted son, Gaius Octavian, secured sole rulership as the first true emperor, or Caesar, of the Roman Empire. The Senate conferred the name “Augustus” or “revered one” on him and he was known as Caesar Augustus.<sup>11</sup>

Believed to have divine origins, Augustus was identified by the Latin phrase *divi filius*, or “son of god.”<sup>12</sup> It was this Caesar who was enthroned in imperial Rome when Jesus, the true Son of God, was birthed in lowly Bethlehem. These names and events start to bring the timing of Jesus’s earthly arrival into focus. When man became a god, God became a man.

Caesar Augustus ruthlessly squashed civil wars within the empire and inaugurated the *Pax Romana*—“Roman peace.” This “peace” lasted for approximately two hundred



\* Caesar Augustus