

Nico Riemersma

# The Gospel of Luke as Masterpiece

Structure, Genre and Way of Telling



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Gospel of Luke has had my attention for a long time. Until now, I have always published in Dutch. This has the disadvantage that your work does not get the range of readership that you would like. As I was told several times, if I want to get that response from a broader spectrum of the Lukan readership, I would have to publish in English.

I am therefore very grateful to Alice Deken for taking on the translation of this book – a collection of my published and unpublished work. I look back on our collaboration with great pleasure and thank her not only for the translation, but also for the fact that I never had to wait long for the next chapter.

Previously unpublished is chapter 2, on the meaning of *καθεξις* in Luke 1,3. I had read an earlier version to Dr. Sam Janse and Dr. Jaap-Jan Flinterman. They not only provided me with critical commentary, but they were also particularly helpful with the research that was necessary for the section ‘The Meaning of *καθεξις* in Contemporary Greek Literature’. Sam Janse was extremely helpful in the selection of texts in TLG. Jaap-Jan Flinterman assisted greatly with the translation and interpretation of the most difficult texts. My sincere thanks to them both.

I have to thank Prof. Dr. Bart Koet for alerting me to LIT VERLAG as a possible publisher. This publisher issues the publications known as Tilburger Theological Studies/Tilburger Theologische Studien. The editors of this series are Prof. Dr. Jan Loffeld, Prof. Dr. Caroline Vander Stichele and Prof. Dr. Henk Schoot. I thank them for their permission to include this book in the series. I also quickly received a positive response from the publisher, in the person of Michael Rainer. The cooperation with LIT VERLAG was always pleasant.

I thank my wife, Mirjam, for the loving support I have received from her during this process, over the last six months.

## A WORD IN ADVANCE

It is with great pleasure that I present this collection of studies on the Gospel of Luke. This Gospel is a book of the Bible that has become very dear to me over the past twenty-five years. The research that I have done on this gospel during that period leads me to the conviction that the Gospel of Luke is an absolute masterpiece. Many agree that we are dealing in him, with an extraordinarily gifted writer. My supervisor Prof. Dr. Adelbert Denaux, a great expert on Luke-Acts, speaks of ‘a masterful storyteller and a refined stylist’, who has ‘een zeer wendbare stijl’, as evidenced by his ability to write a beautiful sentence in refined Hellenistic Greek, as can be seen in the prologue (Luke 1,1-4), and immediately afterwards, in the overture of the Gospel of Luke (1,5-2,52), to pass into semitizing Greek, which is so very reminiscent of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup>

Luke’s extraordinary stylistic skills excite a lot of discussion among exegetes and commentators about many things, because one researcher believes that the solution of a problem should be sought in one direction, while the other researcher claims that the solution lies in a different direction. However, both researchers might be right. Thanks to his stylistic skill, Lucas knows how to evoke both the one and the other image. One of the big issues of Lukan research is that of genre. What are we dealing with in Luke’s Gospel? Is it a description of Jesus’ life (*vita*) or is it historiography, a record of the beginning of the Jesus movement (*historia*)? If the latter is the case, what kind of historiography is involved? Finally, you can also make a distinction between the kinds of historiography. The scholars would like to make a definite choice, but that is not possible with Luke. He is the master of many genres: also that of the *vitae parallellae*, in order to be able to position John and Jesus in relation to each other, and at the same time to show the reader that Jesus is the greater of the two, by devoting the second part to the end of the *vitae parallellae* entirely to Jesus, which is not strange when you consider their relationship: John as messenger of the Lord, Jesus. If you have an eye for the constant travelling, in the Gospel of Luke, but also and certainly no less, in Acts, you will not be surprised to hear that people speak of the Gospel of Luke as a travelogue, as one of my teachers Prof. Dr. Niek Schuman (1936-2018) does.<sup>2</sup> In short, Lucas has mastered so many genres, that you cannot hope to pin him down by means of genre.

He is a great writer. You can see this in his beautiful, scenic storytelling, but especially in the way in which he connects scenes to each other, and especially how he does so over great distances, as can be seen in the John pericopes. It is this way of telling stories that has fascinated me more and more. Consider the way in which his Luke-Acts ‘plays’ with the Old Testament in all kinds of ways, you could almost say. But he also shows that he knows the Hellenistic-Roman world well. This is apparent in the travel stories that he tells, but also in the way he gives shape to the symposia in his story.

I suspect that the reader will not be surprised if I say that I fully endorse Renan’s statement about the Gospel of Luke, which is often said to be ‘the most beautiful gospel’.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Denaux, ‘Het Evangelie volgens Lucas: Een kleine inleiding’, *Vrienden van Bijbelhuis Zevenkerken* 23/1 (2016), 13-21, esp. 13: ‘een meesterlijk verteller en een verfijnd stilist’, met ‘een zeer wendbare stijl’.

<sup>2</sup> N.A. Schuman, *Een reisverhaal: Lees oefeningen in Lucas*, ‘s-Gravenhage 1981.

When I cast a backward look on my way in the Lukan research, the germ of that love for this gospel lies in the liturgy, in which no more beautiful stories are discussed than those of:

- the meeting between the two expectant mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, who speak hymnically to each other, and do so with a keen eye for the social contradictions that prevail (1,39-56);
- the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple who speaks such enigmatic words to his parents, indicating that he is the son of another father (2,40-52);
- the story of what may be called 'Jesus' baptism', but this is minimal, since most of the narrative is about the Spirit with which he is baptized (3,21-22);
- the three temptations by the devil, in which he, as the son of God, is tempted to choose another way, in contrast to a life of obedience to Scripture (4,1b-14a);
- the centurion from Capernaum as the prototype of one who has heard the Sermon on the Plain and is practising what the speaker called for (7,1-10);
- the raising of a widow's son in Nain as a metaphor for the people in which prophecy has come to life (7,11-17);
- John's question, with which he hoped to gain clarity regarding his own earlier announcement at the beginning of his public ministry, and thus also the visit by Jesus in the prison in which John is held (7,18-23).

To show the type of research that I have always been interested in, I can identify the most with the classical definition of 'exegesis', which another teacher of mine, Prof. Henk Leene (1937-2014), presented to me. 'Exegesis is the bringing home of the parts of a text into the whole. How to understand this word in such a way that it fits into the sentence, how to interpret this sentence in such a way that it fits into the pericope, the pericope so that it fits into ever broader contexts, etc.'<sup>3</sup> It is a definition that has always appealed to me, because the exegete must have both an eye for and pay unrelenting attention to the detail, which can often be so important for understanding the text, as well as for the bigger picture: the macrostructure of the gospel, and also for structures of smaller story units, allowing the reader to discover the larger connections, but also come to an understanding of individual, difficult passages.

For me, the exegetical method best suited to this is that of 'close reading'. Close reading – in which every element, small or large, of the text matters – yields a lot: it leads the reader to a deeper understanding of the text. In addition to precise reading at the level of word and sentence, I consider the structure of the text, both of the pericope and of larger story units, and carefully map out the structure of each story and its coherence. When small or larger problems of interpretation arise, I am particularly challenged as an exegete, especially when many in the Lukan research have struggled with the text and all manner of possible solution have already been put forward. The literary structure of the text, I have discovered, often turns out to be an excellent tool for finding a solution.

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<sup>3</sup> I borrow this definition from Henk Leene, 'שמרעה ורוח' in Jesaja 37,7: Een kwestie van vertaalhorizon', *ACEBT 4* (1983), 49-62, esp. 49: 'Een eenvoudige maar bruikbare definitie van exegese is: het thuisbrengen van de delen van een tekst in het geheel. Hoe versta ik dit woord zo dat het past in de zin, hoe vat ik deze zin zo op dat hij zich voegt in de pericoop, de pericoop in nog weer wijdere verbanden, enzovoort'.

The reader of this volume of collected essays will find four articles in which I focus on a detail – a word or a phrase: καθεξῆς in 1,3 (chapter 2), ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου in 2,49 (chapter 6), ἐγέρθητι in 7,14 (chapter 10) and ὁ ἐρχόμενος in 7,19.20 (chapter 12).

But I also like to explore the larger connections and structures, as can be seen from chapters 3 and 4. And perhaps the last three, more thematic chapters 13, 14 and 15 should also be included. Because of the request to give a lecture on ‘Luke as a historiographer’ at the *Didachè Studiedagen Bijbel* 2018 at Leuven, Belgium the prologue had to be shown on a screen. This led me to understand that in Luke-Acts we are dealing with a form of apologetic historiography. I thought it would be a good idea to open this collection with that lecture.

I haven’t abandoned the tradition of writing articles about specific scenes. Above I mentioned a number of stories that touched me. The reader will find them in chapters 5 (1,39-56) and 6 (2,40-52) and in chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12, in which I discuss three consecutive scenes (7,1-10; 7,11-17; 7,18-23).

Most of the chapters in this book are edited versions of the first twelve chapters of *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Structuur, stijl en theologie* (Middelburg: Skandalon 2018). Even earlier they have appeared in various Dutch theological journals. At the end of the book, the reader will find the justification in a complete overview. Chapter 2 ‘The meaning of καθεξῆς in Luke 1,3’ is new, in that this chapter has not been previously published. Chapters 11 on the raising of the dead as a metaphor, and 15 on the five journeys of Jesus are a combination of two chapters from the book mentioned above, and a combination of a chapter from it and a lecture, respectively. Both chapters contain new conclusions. Personally, I count them among the new chapters.

My wish for this book? That the reader may receive a deeper understanding of Luke’s Gospel through this study.

Feast of St. Luke  
18 October 2023  
*Nico Riemersma*

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## MY WAY IN THE LUKAN RESEARCH

The beginning of my research lies in my early days as a student while working on my thesis NT (1978), with Sijbolt Noorda as supervisor. He conveyed his love for Luke-Acts to me. I wrote the thesis on the raising of the dead young man of Nain, and then thought that everything had now been said about that text! The thesis was 35 pages long!

Love continued to blossom – during my ministry– in the C- year, when in the church liturgy it was mainly the *Sondergut* of the Gospel of Luke that came under discussion.

For a Biblical Theology conference at Hydepark in Driebergen (NL) in 2004, which was about ‘the resurrection of the dead’, I was asked to respond to a lecture by Barend Drewes on the resurrection in Acts 2,14-40. My reaction subsequently appeared, together with his lecture in the Dutch-language, biblical-theological magazine *Interpretatie* 13/3 (2005), 24-26 under the title ‘Petrus met Pinksteren over Pasen’.

A few years later, I proposed to Dr. Bart Koet, later professor of NT at the *Tilburg School of Catholic Theology*, to set up a Lucaswerkplaats (tr. Luke Workshop) for Dutch and Flemish scholars from church and university who work on Luke-Acts. This was accepted, and so it happened in 2010.

I asked the editors of *Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Bijbel en zijn Tradities*, who until then had always devoted cahiers to Old Testament Bible books, if they could not also dedicate a cahier to Luke-Acts, which is after all part of the same Bible. I received a positive answer with the question ‘Do you want to become a guest editor?’ A task that I took on with pleasure. This cahier, in which several members of the Lucaswerkplaats participated, was published in 2016, under the title ‘Lucas & Handelingen’ (ACEBT 29).

In 2018 I obtained my PhD on *Aan de dode een wonder gedaan: Een exegetisch-hermeneutische studie naar de dodenopwekking in Lucas 7,11-17 in relatie tot 1 Koningen 17,17-24 en Vita Apollonii IV,45* (ACEBT.SS, 14; Bergambacht 2018) at Tilburg University with Prof. Dr. Adelbert Denaux and Prof. Dr. Maarten Menken as supervisors. In the meantime, I had become increasingly fascinated by the miracle stories, in the NT and the OT, raising the dead in particular. It is considered to be the most difficult type of miracle story.

I had gradually lost my fear of writing and publishing. I also dared to send my articles to journals other than the popular-scientific magazine *Interpretatie*.

When I started working part-time as a pastor, I got more time for my research, especially in the field of Luke-Acts, but my old love for the OT did not entirely disappear. In my student days (1974-1984) I was mainly preoccupied with the prophets: Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah and Micah, fascinated me. Later the Elijah and Elisha stories were added, as well as the book of Exodus. And through the ‘conciliar proces’ (1987-1992), I become fascinated by the theme of the covenant.

Obviously, I like to work in the fields of the Old as well as the New Testament.

## PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS

### *Chapter 1*

The first Dutch version of this chapter appeared under the title ‘Lucas als geschiedschrijver’ in: F. Noël & P. Kevers (ed.), *Het Lucasevangelie* (Verslagboek Didachè-Studiedagen Bijbel 2018), Leuven/Den Haag 2019, 27-54. It is the written version of a lecture that I gave at the Didachè Studiedagen Bijbel 2018 on August 21, 2018 in Leuven, Belgium.

### *Chapter 2*

This chapter has not previously been published.

### *Chapter 3*

Parts of this chapter first appeared in my dissertation *Aan de dode een wonder gedaan: Een exegetisch-hermeneutische studie naar de dodenopwekking in Lucas 7,11-17 in relatie tot 1 Koningen 17,17-24 en Vita Apollonii IV,45*, ACEBT.SS, 14; Bergambacht 2016, 108-115. A heavily edited and supplemented version appeared as chapter 1 ‘De macrostructuur van het Lucasevangelie’ in *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 15-36. In this chapter I come to a slightly different understanding of the macrostructure. Further research has sharpened my perception of the structure of Luke.

### *Chapter 4*

The first Dutch version of this chapter appeared in *Interpretatie* 20/6 (2012), 37-39, under the title ‘Profeet en koning in parallelie in Lucas 1-2’. This chapter was heavily redacted and added to by me for inclusion in *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 37-49, under the title ‘De structuur van de ouverture (Lucas 1-2)’. I edited for this chapter only the end.

### *Chapter 5*

For the Dutch online exegesis team (16-11-2022) I translated Luke 1,39-56 and wrote a paper. I make use of that material in this chapter. For the passage ‘Mary and her Magnificat’ I used a paragraph from chapter 15 “‘Barmhartigheid” in het Lucasevangelie’ in *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 182-204, esp. 189-193. The first Dutch version of this chapter was recently published under the title ‘Elisabets vreugdevolle ontvangst van Maria: Een close reading van Lucas 1,39-56’, in *Kerk en Theologie* 74/3 (2023), 1-23.

### *Chapter 6*

The first Dutch version of this chapter appeared in *Interpretatie* 17/8 (2009), 20-22, under the title ‘Een noodzakelijke breuk. Lucas 2:41-51’, and afterwards, lightly edited and supplemented, as chapter 3 in *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 50-59, under the title ‘Onbegrip over Jezus’ eerste woorden. Lucas 2,40-52’.

### Chapter 7

The first Dutch version of this chapter appeared in *Interpretatie* 18/5 (2010), 4-6, under the title ‘Antwoord uit de hemel: Het programmatisch begin van Jezus’ optreden (Lucas 3,21-22)’, and appeared, heavily edited and supplemented as chapter 4 in *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 60-71, under the title ‘Het begin van Jezus’ optreden. Lucas 3,21-22’.

### Chapter 8

The first Dutch version of this chapter appeared in *Interpretatie* 19/4 (2011), 11-13, under the title ‘Slim bezig – de duivel: Satan en de duivel in Lucas-Handelingen’, and afterwards, edited as chapter 5 in *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 72-81, under the title ‘De duivel/satan in Lucas-Handelingen’. Only the beginning of the chapter has been slightly edited.

### Chapter 9

The first Dutch version of this chapter appeared in *Kerk en Theologie* 59/3 (2008), 197-213, under the title “‘Spreek met een woord en mijn knecht moet genezen’: Kanttekeningen bij Lucas 7:1-10’, and again, lightly edited and supplemented as chapter 5 in *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 82-102, under the title “‘Spreek met een woord en mijn knecht moet genezen.’ Lucas 7,1-10’. I have incorporated the literature published since then into this chapter.

### Chapter 10

The first Dutch version of this chapter appeared in *Met Andere Woorden* 36/1 (2017), 36-41, under the title ‘Jongeman, ik zeg je: “Ontwaak”’: Een bijzondere werkwoord vorm in Luke 7,14’, and afterwards, lightly edited as chapter 7 in *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 103-107, onder de titel “‘Jongeman, ik zeg je: ‘Ontwaak’ Lucas 7,14’.

### Chapter 11

The first time I worked on Luke 7,11-17 was for my thesis NT (VU, Amsterdam 1978). For *Schrift* 44/1 (2012), 21-25, I wrote ‘Dodenopwekking als teruggave’. In 2016 I obtained my PhD with my dissertation *Aan de dode een wonder gedaan: Een exegetisch-hermeneutische studie naar de dodenopwekking in Lucas 7,11-17 in relatie tot 1 Koningen 17,17-24 en Vita Apollonii IV,45* (ACEBT.SS, 14), Bergambacht 2016. In *Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 108-116, the article from *Schrift* was again presented, this time under the title ‘De dodenopwekking als daad van compassie’. Luke 7:11-17,’ focusing on Luke 7,11-15. To this I added a new article ‘De dodenopwekking als metafoor’ (p. 116-124), with all my attention for the doxology (7,16) as crucial for understanding the raising of the dead, in order to complete my dissertation. This chapter is a combination of those two articles, supplemented by a paragraph on the place of 7,11-17 in its context, because I had missed an important element in my research for my dissertation. I focused there solely on the place of 7,11-17 within 7,1-50. The extra section of this chapter is mainly concerned with placing my interpretation into an even broader context.

### *Chapter 12*

A first, Dutch version of this chapter appeared in *Interpretatie* 22/6 (2014), 15-18, under the title “‘Bent u degene die zou komen?’ Over de vraag van Johannes de Doper in Lucas 7:18-23’, and subsequently edited and added to as chapter 10 in: *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 125-135, under the title ‘De vraag van Johannes de Doper. Lucas 7,18-23’. This chapter is a thorough revision of that one.

### *Chapter 13*

The Dutch version of this chapter previously appeared in *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 136-155, under the title ‘Johannes de Doper in het Lucasevangelie’.

### *Chapter 14*

The Dutch version of this chapter previously appeared, under the title ‘Elia, Jezus en Johannes in lucaans perspectief’, in N.A. Riemersma (red.), *Lucas & Handelingen* (ACEBT 29), Bergambacht 2014, 77-87, and afterwards in *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 156-166, under the title ‘Elia, Johannes en Jezus’. An English version, slightly modified and supplemented, appeared under the title ‘Elijah, John, and Jesus in a Lukan Perspective’, in: A. Van Wieringen *et al.* (eds), *Themes and Texts in Luke-Acts: Essays in Honour of Bart J. Koet* (STAR), Leiden & Boston 2023, 46-60.

### *Chapter 15*

In this chapter I combine chapter 16 ‘Het Woord dat mensen doet reizen’, from *Het Lucasevangelie onder de loep: Opbouw, stijl en theologie*, Middelburg 2018, 205-213, with a lecture ‘Het Lucasevangelie als reisverhaal’, that I presented in Oosterbeek (NL) (11-02-2020). The new elements that I have added, are found mainly at the end.

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