Today we turn to the Gospel of Luke, beginning with sources and redaction. We touched on these issues in talking about Markan priority and the Q hypothesis, but now we want to gain a more comprehensive view of how Luke put together his gospel.

The place to start, of course, is with Luke’s explicit statement of his approach in his prologue: “1Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, 2just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.”

Of course, we looked at what this prologue suggests about the sources available to Luke when we explored the way the traditions of Jesus’ words and deeds were handed down. At that time we paid attention to his notice that many had picked up pen before him to do what he was setting out to accomplish. His was not the first gospel written by any means. And while the word “many” is too general to allow us to quantify the other writings he was familiar with, it was clearly more than one and doubtless also more than two.

We also noted that this evangelist admits to no personal familiarity with the events he narrates, since he speaks of reports that were “handed on to us.” By using the pronoun “us,” Luke places himself along with the many others who had used traditions about what Jesus said and did. Moreover, those from whom he and others have received these traditions are called “servants of the word,” which (as I noted) is a phrase used in early Christian texts to designate what we might call “preachers.” So this prologue acknowledges Luke’s reliance on both written and oral sources. But what was he trying to do in constructing his gospel from those sources?

Luke’s prologue contrasts what others have done and what he sets out to do. Let’s notice that the whole of v. 2, introduced by “just as they,” describes “the events that have been fulfilled among us,” telling us how Luke knows about them. The counterpart to v. 1’s acknowledgement of the “many who have undertaken to set down an orderly account” is introduced with the phrase, “I too decided,” that decision being “to write an orderly account,” just as earlier he reported that “many” had “undertaken to set down an orderly account.” So he acknowledges that his account
supplements a series already in existence. He wasn’t setting out to do something novel. So why did he do it?

When we looked at this prologue before, I noted that the Greek word the NRSV translates as “the truth” (asphaleian) approximates more closely our word “certainty,” or perhaps “veracity.” As I reported, Prof. Joseph Fitzmeyer, a leading Lukan scholar, offers this translation: “so that you may realize what assurance you have for the instruction you have received.” And that’s Luke’s point; he isn’t out to set the record straight, as such, but to back up or give basis to the instruction Theophilus has already received. This interest in establishing assurance for Theophilus is no doubt what lies behind Luke’s claim to have “investigated everything carefully” before writing. This doesn’t seem to be an explicit criticism of his predecessors – as if they did an inadequate job of research – but rather it is meant as reassurance to Theophilus. Luke puts himself forward as someone Theophilus can trust and strengthens that trust with the assurance that he has constructed his narrative diligently.

As we have seen, however, this does not mean that Luke was interested in reporting “just the facts” of what his investigation turned up. He was equally interested in giving his own interpretation of Jesus; it is a particular kind of account of Jesus that Luke offers as a basis for assurance, one that confirms and thus conforms to what Theophilus has already heard.

Indeed, Luke tips his hand that he offers a theological interpretation of events in his reference to these events as “having been fulfilled among us.” Luke frequently stresses how something Jesus said or did correlates with statements in the Hebrew Bible. E.g. in chapter 4, after Jesus has read Isaiah 61’s words about “the Spirit of the Lord being upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” – Jesus sits down, as was customary before commenting on the reading, and then says, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke’s Jesus makes the assertion – startling for his audience – that this familiar passage from the book of Isaiah has been uniquely realized in his own words.

Once more, at the end of Luke’s gospel, when Jesus appears to the disciples in a closed room, he speaks of his fulfillment of the scriptures: “Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’”

But the correlation of Jesus’ deeds and words with passages from the Hebrew Bible isn’t, per se, Luke’s main interest. As we’ll see, Matthew
specially highlights such correlations between Jesus and passages from the Hebrew Bible, quoting numerous verses that find an echo in Jesus’ deeds or words. But this is only part of Luke’s interest in citing Hebrew Bible passages fulfilled by Jesus. His prime concern is revealed more by the word “must” in this verse: what is foretold is inevitable. Indeed, anything the Lord has planned will occur, whether explicitly foretold or not.

The technical term for this type of thought is determinism: belief that a divine blueprint for history exists and will be realized – things couldn’t turn out any other way. E.g. after John the Baptist’s father questions the promise that he would sire a son in his old age, the angel says, “because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.” And, true to the angel’s decree, Zechariah remained mute until the day John is named. On that day, the infant’s relatives were determined to name him Zechariah (after his father), but his mother objected to that proposal. So everyone turned to Zechariah to settle the dispute. Luke reports, “63 He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And all of them were amazed.

64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God.”

An even stronger mark of determinism than the angel’s assertion that his promise would be “fulfilled” is his specification that his words would be fulfilled in their time. It’s not just that things have been planned and will come about, but that things have been planned to happen at specific times. This idea appears numerous times in Luke’s narrative. E.g. as we have seen, in Luke’s version of the eschatological discourse (chapter 21) Jesus asserts that “Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

Roman rule over Jerusalem is not a historical accident, but a state of affairs allotted for a set period of time; it is part of a divine plan. And notice the similarity in wording to the impediment the angel imposes on Zechariah: “until the day these things occur.” There is a set time for Gentile oppression of Jerusalem, just as there is a set time for the imposition of muteness on Zechariah: it will cease the day when the prediction of John’s birth comes true.

In this light, we should probably take as significant other seemingly bland phrases in Luke, such as the report at the end of chapter 1: “Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son.” We might normally take this to mean something like, “At the end of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, it turned out she had a boy.” But given the angel’s reference to “these things being fulfilled in their time,” as well as his limiting Zechariah’s muteness by
“the day these things occur,” we are justified in perceiving the phrase “the time came for Elizabeth to give birth” as presupposing determinism: there is a time for each significant event, set by God, when that event will inevitably prove out.

If this inference is as sound as it seems, then we should also find greater significance than we might otherwise be inclined to do in Luke’s subsequent report about Mary giving birth to Jesus while she and Joseph were visiting Bethlehem: “While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.” While again we might, on first blush, take this to mean no more than that it just happened that Bethlehem was where Mary went into labor, the fact that John’s birth is described as occurring at a previously determined time, and the fact that (as we shall see) Luke interweaves the births of John and Jesus so as to pair them from infancy, encourages us to perceive in the phrase, “the time came for her to deliver her child,” a belief that this birth, also, had been divinely scheduled.

Time and again Luke emphasizes the importance of a divine plan by which events unfold, and this same assumption underpins his continuing story of Jesus’ impact in the book of Acts. As noted by both Nickle and Tuckett, the gospel of Luke is the first of a two-volume work, whose second of which is the book of Acts, as indicated by its similar prologue: “1In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning 2until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.”

The author of this work again addresses someone named Theophilus and refers to what he wrote “in the first book,” whose contents had to do with Jesus’ deeds and words down to the day he was “taken up to heaven,” which is where Luke’s Gospel concludes. There can be little doubt that Acts is written as the sequel to the third gospel. Indeed, Luke backtracks a bit initially, returning to the scene of Jesus’ last moments with his disciples before ascending into heaven, after which he begins to unfold the story of the movement from its early days in Jerusalem until Paul is brought to Rome under arrest to stand trial before the Emperor.

It shouldn’t be surprising, then, to discover that the book of Acts evidences the sort of determinism we find in the Third Gospel. E.g. the first scene in Acts, following Jesus’ departure, is of the disciples meeting to select someone to take Judas Iscariot’s spot, since Judas had committed suicide after betraying Jesus. Peter broaches the matter this way: “16Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus – 17for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.”
Notice that Peter is said to describe as a *necessary* fulfillment of scripture not only Judas’ fate after betraying Jesus, but also his being numbered among the disciples, so that he was *allotted his share* in this ministry. Judas was inevitable because he was part of the divine plan revealed in scripture.

Likewise, in chapter 7 Stephen, just before being stoned, delivers an overview of Israel’s history in which he introduces the situation of the Hebrews living in bondage in Egypt as follows: “But as the time drew near for the fulfillment of the promise that God had made to Abraham, our people in Egypt increased and multiplied.”

Here again we find language about the fulfillment of a divine promise, but also, coupled with it, we find that fulfillment specified as slated for a particular time. There was a *time* for the fulfillment of the promise God had made to Abraham.

The point is, returning to the prologue to the Third Gospel, that Luke’s recounting of the story of Jesus is not simply a historian’s reconstruction of the past, but a tendentious telling of the story. He is concerned to tell the story of Jesus in a way that reassures his addressee and frames that message in terms of the fulfillment of a divine plan. Thus, we should expect to find in Luke an arrangement of the material that accomplishes those goals.

So how does Luke arrange his narrative? You’ll recall from an earlier session that Luke shows a distinctive placement of material we call Q and L. His first major bloc of such material, in 6.20-8.3, stands at the spot in his narrative corresponding to just after Mark 3.19. This, as you’ll recall, contains Luke’s “Sermon on the Plain,” so-called because, while Matthew introduces his sermon by reporting that Jesus ascended a mountain, Luke’s sermon is given this setting, in 6.17: “He *came down* with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon.” Luke’s topography for Jesus’ sermon is different than Matthew’s.

Be that as it may (and we’ll come back to this section), Luke’s next large insertion of material appears, as you know, in 9.51-18.14, the so-called “Lukan Travel Narrative,” introduced, in vv. 51-52, with the report, “51When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52And he sent messengers ahead of him.” -- You’ll notice again a sense of the determinism in Luke’s words: “When the days drew near for him to be taken up.” Jesus’ decision to head towards Jerusalem was dictated by his knowledge that the appointed time was drawing near.

Now, this statement in Luke corresponds to Mark’s report of Jesus setting out for Jerusalem: “He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around him; and, as was his
custom, he again taught them.” ---Following that parallel, however, Luke does not rejoin Mark’s narrative flow until 18.15, where he, parallel to Mark 10, tells of people bringing children to Jesus for his blessing. Up until that point, Luke’s narrative goes its own way.

However, you might have noticed that something intervenes between Mark’s introduction of Jesus’ journey to Judea and the episode of Jesus blessing the children. Let’s consider what stands in Mark 10:2-12 and how Luke deals with it.

In v. 2 Mark introduces one of his conflict stories, telling us that “Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” In the following verses Jesus rejects divorce on the grounds that God created marriage, through which he binds a man and a woman together. And since God binds them, humanly-constructed divorce isn’t valid. Then, in typical Markan fashion, he concludes by providing his disciples with a private exposition of his response to the Pharisees: “Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

Luke uses Jesus’ last statement, but not in his parallel context. Instead, he places it within his “travel narrative,” in chapter 16, where it stands in the context of a tussle with the Pharisees, but is not framed as a response to a question about divorce. In fact, the Pharisees have just ridiculed Jesus for speaking against wealth, and Jesus has retorted that their attitude is just another example of why God rejects them, after which he speaks of the enduring validity of the Torah: “It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped.” -- To that general statement Luke appends the statement on divorce. So Luke preserves the statement, but in a secondary role – almost as an after-thought to his story. In fact, immediately afterwards, Jesus launches into his story about the rich man and Lazarus and how they fared in life and after death. So Luke quickly returns to the theme of wealth that formed the context in which he included Jesus’ saying on divorce that he wrenched from the narrative context Mark gave it. And that is the only Markan saying preserved in the Lukan travel narrative. The remainder of 9.51-18.14 is from Q and L, thus forming what is known as the “great” or “large” interpolation.

I do, however, want to make it clear that Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem does not end with 18.14. Indeed, Jesus reaches the outskirts of Jerusalem only in 19.29, where he makes preparations for his “triumphal” entry into the city. But with 18.15, Luke rejoins Mark’s narrative, although that is not to say
that from there on we find only material Luke derived from Mark. In the remainder of the narrative of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem we find Q and L material, but always inserted within the narrative framework provided by Mark. E.g. 19.1-10, the story of Zacchaeus, the attitudinally challenged man whom Jesus called down from his perch in a tree to have supper with him, is L material. And then, after providing his own transition in vv. 11-12, Luke uses an expanded form of the Q parable of the landowner who, prior to leaving on a journey, entrusted his servants with different sums of money, charging them to make a profit.

At the end of that parable, Luke reports that Jesus left Jericho and arrived at the outskirts of Jerusalem, where he made preparations for his entry into the city, riding on a borrowed donkey – a story Luke takes over from Mark – and then he follows Mark until the end of the chapter, where (in vv. 39-44) he draws on L material in a dispute with the Pharisees, followed by Jesus’ wistful lament over Jerusalem.

So even after we rejoin the Markan narrative, with it giving structure to Luke’s story, Luke continues to insert material he has derived from other sources. The important point, however, is that outside the two major interpolations of Q&L material, it is Mark’s narrative that determines the course of Luke’s story.

However, I want to emphasize that chapter 19, where Luke interweaves Q&L material into the Markan narrative thread, is not typical of how much the Markan material is permeated by Q&L. In fact, outside of the two main interpolations, Q material is found rarely. Besides the Parable of the Landowner I mentioned in chapter 19, the remainder of Luke has only a couple of half verses from Q in chapter 22, as well as about a dozen verses from Q in chapters 3 & 4 (the so-called Mark-Q overlap sections). So, again, Luke’s Q material is, for the most part, incorporated into his two main interpolations.

As for “L” material outside these interpolations, obviously chapter 1, following the prologue, through chapter 2 is “L” material, since they are Luke’s infancy narrative, something absent from Mark and, as we shall see, quite different from the infancy narrative in Matthew. And yet, this L material doesn’t interrupt or set aside Mark’s narrative, since it precedes the point at which Mark’s gospel begins.

A similar comment could be made about the concluding verses of the book, 24.13-49, where Luke reports appearances of the risen Jesus to his disciples, a feature lacking in Mark, as you know. What’s more, those narratives themselves differ from the appearance stories found in Matthew.
As for “L” material elsewhere (besides the two main interpolations), one finds snippets of it throughout, although especially in chapters 22-23, where Luke recounts Jesus’ final days in Jerusalem and his passion. His version of Jesus’ passion has been very much shaped by his special material and his own redactional activity. In fact, as Nickle and Tuckett suggest, it is possible that Luke’s passion narrative owes its distinctive shape to a source valued by Luke’s community. ----- 

Now, to this point I have been giving a largely source-critical assessment of Luke’s gospel. The crucial questions, as you know, are why Luke has arranged the material the way he has and how he has shaped the material in the process. That is, of course, primarily the purview of redaction criticism. 

There are some aspects to Luke’s redaction of Markan material that are none too surprising at this point. E.g. Luke evidences no compunctions at trimming Mark’s narrative, not simply by paring off Mark’s surplus words, but also by dropping phrases that are similar to others he has already used. E.g. in Mark 4, Jesus concludes the parable of the sower who scatters seed on various types of soil with the summons, “‘Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’” And Luke follows Mark’s wording in his version of this episode. On the heels of that scene, we have Jesus’ private explanation of the parable to his disciples (in both Mark and Luke). Then in Mark we encounter this aphorism: “21 He said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? 22 For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. 23 Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’” When we turn to the Lukan version of this scene, we find agreement at every point except the final summons, which he omits, likely because it repeats the summons found at the conclusion to the earlier parable. 

In order to show you that this is neither an isolated case nor simply due to condensing within a limited context, let’s turn to the next words Jesus utters in Mark: “24 Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. 25 For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.”

When we compare the parallel in Luke, we find a surprising omission: the statement about the measure used is absent. Why? Nothing in the immediate context would seem to trigger this omission. For the explanation we need to leaf back to Luke 6, where Jesus utters these words: “37 Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; 38 give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be
put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

The affinity of these final words with those from Mark 4 that Luke omits in chapter 8 is patent and their omission confirms that on both the small and the large scale, Luke is interested in economizing. It’s not just his desire to reduce Mark’s verbosity that’s at play, but a more focused interest in reducing duplication.

But beyond this interest in economizing, Luke also shows himself willing to omit whole passages found in Mark, sometimes because they would be of little interest to his Gentile audience, as is likely the case with Mark’s discussion between Jesus, Peter, James and John as they descended the mountain after Jesus’ transfiguration. That discussion, centering on the question of why the scribes maintain that Elijah must return before Messiah comes – a topic based on the closing lines of the book of Malachi – would have carried little interest for Luke’s Roman reader(s), which is likely why he admitted it.

But beyond Luke’s omission of individual passages from Mark, more striking is what is labeled, “Luke’s Big Omission.” In chapter 9 Luke follows Mark’s narrative through v. 17, where one would expect to see him follow on with Mark 6.45-8.26. And yet, he omits those verses entirely. The obvious question is “why?”

To regain our bearings in Mark’s gospel, you’ll recall that Mark 6.7-13 is the third of three points in Mark’s first major unit in which Jesus deals specifically with a group of disciples, here commissioning and dispatching the twelve as his special envoys. You might recall that this begins one of Mark’s intercalations, of which the middle layer is a report of Herod’s speculations about Jesus and, spinning off from that, a report about John the Baptist’s fate at Herod’s hands. The other layer of the sandwich is composed of the scene of the twelve’s return and their report to Jesus. Luke carries all of this except the story of John’s fate, which (as we’ll see) he places earlier in his gospel.

The next scene Mark relates is Jesus feeding 5,000 men and their dependents with five loaves and two fish. Again, Luke carries this story, but it is the last one he will use until he comes to the equivalent of Mark 8.27.

The elements absent in Luke’s big omission are: the story of Jesus walking on water (6:45-52), Jesus’ healings of people at Gennesaret (6:53-46), the debate with the Pharisees over eating with unclean hands and the worth of the “tradition of the elders” (7.1-23); Jesus’ journey to Tyre and Sidon (7.24-30), his work in Decapolis (7.31-37); a report of the feeding of 4,000 (8.1-10); Jesus rejection of the Pharisees’ request for a sign (8.11-13);
a warning about the “leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod” (8.14-21); and
the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida (8.22-26) that introduces Mark’s
section on understanding Jesus’ identity.

Transferring this list alongside the Lukan framework, several of these
omissions find explanation on the basis of things we’ve already observed
about Lukan redactional tendencies. E.g. Mark’s story of the feeding of the
4,000 was probably dropped on Luke’s principle of economizing: he had
already reported the feeding of the 5,000 just prior to his Big Omission, and
thus considered this second incident superfluous for his purposes.

In other cases, it is not a matter of explicitly omitting a pericope, but
placing it elsewhere in his gospel. That is the case with the debate about
eating with unclean hands and the tradition of the elders. Certainly in its
Markan form this would be an arcane discussion for Luke’s Roman
audience, and so Luke tempers it by eliminating the specific issue of
“defilement” and making the issue whether or not they had washed their
hands before eating, without any discussion of the traditions of the elders.
Then he transfers this abbreviated form of the debate into the midst of a
series of disputes with the Pharisees in chapter 11.

The same is the case with Jesus’ rejection of the request for a sign, which
likewise Luke transfers to chapter 11, just a little ahead of where he
transferred the dispute about hand washing. Similarly, Jesus’ warning about
the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod is transferred by Luke to the
beginning of chapter 12, although in greatly abbreviated form, the reason for
which we’ll explore momentarily.

The Lucan omission of the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida is, in
part, another case of economizing, since Luke will later preserve Mark’s
second report of Jesus healing a blind man in Luke 18:35-43 (|| Mark 10.46-
52). However, there seems to be more going on in this case, because the
natural question would be why Luke didn’t preserve the first such story in
Mark’s narrative and leave out the second as redundant?

The important factor in this case is one shared with three other pericopes
omitted by Luke that we have yet to consider. And in fact, it is a redactional
maneuver that lurks behind the various omissions and transpositions of the
material from Mark 6.45-8.26. In addition to Luke’s tendencies to
economize by streamlining Mark’s narrative and even by dropping duplicate
sentences and episodes – not to mention his willingness to omit entire
pericopes – he also exhibits a strong tendency towards geographic plotting:
that is, arranging physical movement in his narrative according to his goal of
getting Jesus to Jerusalem.
You’ll recall that Mark’s story of Jesus walking on the water follows on his story about Jesus feeding the 5,000-strong crowd, stranded in the wilderness without food. Jesus sends the disciples north across the sea to Bethsaida, although at the conclusion of the story, after Jesus has caught up with them, they wind up, curiously enough, at Gennesaret. There Jesus heals some who are ill and has a debate with the Pharisees about the traditions of the elders, after which, we are told, “he set out and went away to the region of Tyre,” where he healed a woman. After that, Mark reports, “he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.” As you’ll recall, this is a very circuitous route home, since Tyre is to the north of Sidon. Moreover, saying that he went “towards the Sea of Galilee,” winding up “in the region of the Decapolis,” is peculiar, since the Decapolis lies on the other side of the Jordan river.

Whatever the odd itinerary in Mark, what’s important at the moment is to notice how Luke portrays things. Whereas Mark implicitly places the feeding of the five thousand on the southern shores of the sea of Galilee, since he subsequently reports Jesus sending the disciples across the sea to Bethsaida (although they wind up in Genessaret). In a peculiar twist, Luke places them in Bethsaida already with the feeding of the 5,000: 10He took them [the 12] with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. 11When the crowds found out about it, they followed him….12The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.”

So in Luke’s itinerary, Bethsaida is not the location the disciples set off for after the 5,000 are fed; it’s where the event takes place. And notably, Luke does not have Jesus wander the countryside, as Mark does. Not only does Luke set aside the journey to Tyre and Sidon (by omitting the entire episode), but he also removes a location specified by Mark in a passage Luke adopts. Peter’s confession of Jesus’ identity as the Messiah is introduced by Mark as follows: “Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”

Caesarea Philippi is 24.4 miles north of Bethsaida, as the crow flies. Moreover, it takes Jesus out of the region of Galilee and well into the area ruled by Philip the Tetrarch. Therefore, it is noteworthy how Luke modifies this introduction: “Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” - -- No longer is this episode set in the region of Caesarea, but is one among
several events that occur in or near Bethsaida. Only towards the end of chapter 9, with the beginning of Luke’s travel narrative, does Jesus set out for somewhere else: “51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him.”

It is at this point that Jesus undertakes his resolute trek to Jerusalem, with various stops along the way. And this, by the way, is no doubt why Luke adopts Mark’s second story of Jesus healing a blind man rather than his first. Mark’s first story is set in Bethsaida, just after Jesus and the disciples arrive there. Certainly Luke could have tailored the introduction for his purposes, just as he did the introduction to Peter’s confession. But what was probably especially attractive about Mark’s second story of a blind man healed was its location: “They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.” -- In fact, Luke takes this location over with ease, even if he simplifies it by having Jesus meet the man as he enters the city (rather than exiting it). And the importance of this episode in Luke’s travel itinerary is that it makes a natural penultimate stop on Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem. We noted that 9.52 reports Jesus set off on his journey towards Jerusalem by sending messengers as advance men into Samaria. The next time Luke gives us our bearings is in 17.11, where he reports, “On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee.” Next we find Luke’s report of Jesus encountering the blind man on the outskirts of Jericho, after which he reports Jesus’ entrance into Jericho, where he encounters the diminutive Zacchaeus, a uniquely Lukan story.

Following dinner with Zacchaeus and some interactions with the crowds, Jesus moves on towards Jerusalem: “28 After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives.”

Luke’s itinerary, then, takes Jesus from Bethsaida down through Samaria, to the border area between Samaria and Judea, into the city of Jericho, and finally to Bethphage and Bethany, where he makes preparations for his formal entry into Jerusalem. The use of the story of healing a blind man in Jericho serves Luke’s purpose well as a stop along the way, especially since there he also has Jesus interact with Zacchaeus.

This journey is of crucial importance to Luke. We’ve already noted Luke’s report that “when the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” --- Jerusalem is the place Jesus must go, because that is where his destiny will be fulfilled. And Jesus emphasizes
that uniquely in Luke, especially in his response to a report that Herod Antipas was seeking to kill him: “32He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’”

Again we find the sense of determinism I pointed out earlier: Jesus doesn’t fear Herod’s threat because the only place he can possibly die is Jerusalem, where prophets have always died; he must go there. Those two verses are unique to Luke. And then Luke subjoins to that a piece of Q tradition, this poignant lament: “34Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

Indeed, throughout Luke’s gospel Jerusalem plays a prominent role. And nowhere is that more evident than in the concluding chapter, which reports Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances to his disciples. Recall that Mark’s gospel concludes with the angel’s instruction to the women at the tomb: “But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” -- Notice that this command is based in something they are told to remember: “just as he told you.”

Luke’s parallel to this instruction also demands remembering, but of a different sort: “6Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” -- In Luke, Galilee becomes the place where Jesus told them what would happen, but is not specified as the place they will see Jesus again.

Rather than reporting the disciples’ trek to Galilee to meet Jesus, as does Matthew, Luke portrays Jesus’ appearances occurring in Jerusalem and its environs. In 24.13-32 Luke relates a story of two disciples traveling to the village of Emaus, near Jerusalem, and finding themselves in the company of a traveler who later reveals himself to be the risen Jesus. Luke then tells us: “33That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” 35Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. 36While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

Once again, for Luke Jerusalem is the place that matters, and he’s willing to manipulate the itinerary and even the reports of Jesus’ appearances to
make it central. And of course, Jerusalem will be the setting when Luke opens his second volume with the story of the early church. For him, Jerusalem is home base, and it is impossible to imagine the formative events of the church’s life playing out anywhere but there. And so, Lukan redaction entails geographic plotting of the story to have it culminate in Jerusalem.

Next session we’ll look at some of the further distinctive traits of Lukan redaction that help us understand the distinctive shape of his gospel.