

Text Commentary Resources
Robert H. Stein, *Luke*,
The New American Commentary
Luke 24:13-35

Context

The story of Jesus' appearance on the road to Emmaus is the first of three resurrection appearances reported in Luke and is unique to his Gospel.¹³ The second, the appearance to Peter, is also reported within this account (24:34). The story is one of the longest in Luke and consists of four parts. The first involves Jesus' encounter with the two disciples traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus (24:13–16). The second (24:17–27) concerns (1) the ensuing conversation in which one disciple, Cleopas, explains to the stranger about Jesus' death at the hands of the Jewish leadership; (2) the women's report concerning the empty tomb, which had been confirmed by others; and (3) the report of the angelic visit to the women. At this point the stranger explains from the Scriptures the necessity of the Messiah's death and resurrection. The third part tells of the two disciples inviting the stranger to stay at their home and of the subsequent meal. When the stranger (as in the Lord's Supper) takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and begins to distribute it, their eyes are opened. They recognize that the stranger is Jesus, and his teachings concerning the divine necessity of the passion are confirmed. Jesus then disappears (24:28–32). The final part involves the return of the two disciples to Jerusalem, where they are informed that the Lord has risen and appeared to Simon (24:33–35). In turn they share their experience of the risen Christ and how he was revealed to them in the breaking of the bread.

Comments

24:13 Now that same day. That is, the first day of the week (24:1) when the empty tomb was discovered.

Two of them were going to a village called Emmaus. The "two" belong to the "others" of 24:9. Possibly they were returning home after the Passover festivities since the Sabbath was over. The exact location of Emmaus is uncertain.¹⁴

About seven miles from Jerusalem. "Seven miles" is literally *sixty stadiou*s from Jerusalem. A *stadion* is about 607 feet; therefore the distance is approximately 6.8 miles. Some manuscripts, however, read 160 *stadiou*s or 18.4 miles. The latter probably was an attempt to correct Luke's *sixty stadiou*s by later scribes who identified Emmaus with the village of Amwas about twenty miles from Jerusalem.

24:14 About everything that had happened. This is explained in 24:20–24.

24:16 But they were kept from recognizing him. For a similar motif, cf. 9:45 and 18:34, although the terminology is different. As in John 20:14–15; 21:4 Jesus' followers did not recognize the risen Christ. The passive "were kept from recognizing" is a divine passive, i.e., *God kept them from recognizing Jesus*. This lack of recognition allowed Jesus to teach the necessity of his death and resurrection and to show how this was the fulfillment of Scripture (Luke 24:25–27).

24:18 One of them, named Cleopas. Cleopas is not the Clopas of John 19:25, for Cleopas is a shortened form of the Greek name Cleopatros (masculine form of Cleopatria), whereas Clopas is a Hebrew/Aramaic name. Some

¹³ Interesting parallels exist between this account and the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26–40). We find characters: traveling and confused (Luke 24:13–24; Acts 8:30–31); going from Jerusalem (Luke 24:13, 33; Acts 8:27–28); met by a messenger (Luke 24:15–19; Acts 9:29–30), who explains the Scriptures (Luke 24:27; Acts 8:32–35), showing the necessity of Jesus' death (Luke 24:25–26; Acts 8:32). We find a sacrament—the Lord's Supper or baptism (Luke 8:30; Acts 8:36, 38); the disappearance of the messenger (Luke 24:31; Acts 8:39); and people rejoicing (Luke 24:32; Acts 8:39). These similarities are helpful in pointing out Luke's theological emphases in the two accounts.

¹⁴ See J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 2:1561–62, for a brief discussion.

have suggested that perhaps Cleopas was known to Luke's readers in the same way that Alexander and Rufus were known to Mark's (cf. Mark 15:21). This is purely speculation, and even more speculative is discussion about who the other person was.

Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know? This is a better translation than, "Are you the only resident of Jerusalem who does not know." Clearly these things, according to Luke, did not happen in a corner (cf. Acts 26:26).

24:19 "What things?" he asked. Jesus led the disciples into the discussion that followed.

About Jesus of Nazareth. Literally, Jesus, the Nazarene.¹⁵

He was a prophet. This should not be interpreted negatively as being incorrect but positively in light of 7:16, 39; 9:8, 19. This is also evident from Jesus' use of this title as a self-designation in 4:24; 13:33 (cf. also Acts 3:22–23; 7:37). See comments on 7:16.

Powerful in word and deed. Compare Luke 4:14; Acts 2:22; cf. also 7:22. The combination "word and deed" is also found in Rom 15:18; Col 3:17; 2 Thess 2:17; cf. also 1 John 3:18. Compare Acts 1:1, "All that Jesus began to do and to teach."

Before God. That is, Jesus was approved by God. Compare Luke 1:6, where Zechariah and Elizabeth are referred to as righteous "before God."

All the people. Jesus was approved by the people. Here Luke repeated this familiar theme.¹⁶ See comments on 4:15.

24:20 The chief priests and our rulers. The responsibility for Jesus' death was placed upon the Jewish leadership. They are mentioned in 23:13 (where the "people" are also mentioned, but in 24:19 the people side with Jesus). "The chief priests and our rulers" probably is used as a synonym for similar expressions in Luke-Acts.¹⁷

Handed him over to be sentenced to death. This refers to the events of 22:71–23:2; 23:25; cf. Acts 3:13; 13:27–28. For an earlier prediction of this, cf. Luke 9:44; 18:32. For the earlier resolve of the Jewish leadership to put Jesus to death, cf. 20:20.

They crucified him. Although it is clear from 23:1f. that the Romans officially crucified Jesus, here Luke placed the ultimate responsibility on the Jewish leadership.¹⁸ Compare 23:21, 25; Acts 5:30.

24:21 We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. Compare Acts 1:6. The two disciples expressed their disappointment in the course of events. Undoubtedly they possessed a more political than religious understanding of how the Christ would redeem Israel. For them the redemption of Israel meant Israel's liberation from their enemies, i.e., the Romans. For Luke, however, Jesus did in fact redeem Israel¹⁹ and brought the kingdom of God. Yet it was by his death that Jesus accomplished this redemption and sealed this new covenant (Luke 22:20).

And what is more. In addition to not understanding that the redemption of Israel had in fact taken place, there was an additional "thing" that caused their sadness (24:17).

It is the third day since all this took place. This is not an allusion to the Jewish view that on the fourth day the soul left the body,²⁰ for no allusion is made to this, and Luke's Gentile readers would not have known this. It was rather for Luke a reference to Jesus' resurrection predictions found in 9:22; 13:32; 18:33.

¹⁵ For the use of this title elsewhere in Luke-Acts, cf. Luke 4:34; 18:37; Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 10:38; 22:8; 26:9.

¹⁶ Cf. Luke 7:29; 18:43; 19:48; 20:19; 21:38; 22:2; 23:5, 27, 35; Acts 2:47.

¹⁷ Luke 9:22; 19:47; 20:1, 19; 22:2, 4, 52, 66; 23:4, 10, 13, 35; Acts 3:17; 4:26; 13:27.

¹⁸ In Acts 3:17; 13:27–29 both the rulers and residents of Jerusalem were blamed, and in Acts 2:23, 36; 3:13–15; 4:10; 7:52; 10:39, it is the people of Israel who are blamed.

¹⁹ See comments on 1:66–74; 2:25, 30; cf. also 2:38; 23:51; Acts 28:20.

²⁰ Contra Marshall, *Luke*, 895.

24:22–23 In addition, some of our women amazed us ... said he was alive. These two verses give a short summary of 24:1–12. The summary includes the empty tomb (24:3), the angelic appearance (24:4), and the message that Jesus was alive (24:5; cf. Acts 3:15). For “early” cf. Luke 24:1.

24:24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb. This verse assumes the authenticity of 24:12. There only Peter is mentioned, although John 20:2–10 also mentions the “other” disciple. This implies that after Peter’s visit, other disciples also went to the tomb.

Found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see. The fact of the empty tomb, prepared for by Luke 23:55, was important for Luke (cf. 24:3, 24). He did not portray these and the other disciples as psychologically disposed to faith.

24:25 How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Compare 18:31. This verse is a thematic summary of 24:26–27 and leads to one of the main emphases of the chapter, as the parallels in 24:6–7 and 24:44–46 demonstrate. Jesus himself explained his passion and entrance into glory as the fulfillment of the OT prophecies. If the disciples believed the Scriptures (cf. 16:31; Acts 26:27), they would not have been sad (Luke 24:17) or confused (24:19–24). Jesus did not designate which prophets or where these prophets spoke of him. For Jesus and the Evangelists “all” the prophets “everywhere” spoke of him.

24:26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things? Once again the “must” (*edei*) of divine necessity is emphasized. See Introduction 8 (1). This teaching is encountered again in 24:44–48 (cf. 1 Cor 15:3–5). Whether there existed in the Judaism of Jesus’ day the concept of a “suffering Messiah/Christ” is greatly debated. For Luke and the early church, however, this was not an issue because for them God’s Son, the Son of Man, the Christ, the Savior, the Servant of Isaiah 53, and the Prophet were one person, Jesus of Nazareth. Any allusion of suffering associated with any of these figures in the OT therefore referred to the suffering of Jesus Christ.

And then enter his glory? Luke referred earlier to Jesus’ entering into his glory (Luke 9:26; 21:27), and the transfiguration provided a proleptic glimpse of this (9:32). The tense of the verb indicates that with the resurrection Jesus has now entered into his glory (cf. 22:69; Acts 2:33; 7:55; 22:11). The question of why the Christ had to suffer is answered by, Because the Scriptures said this. The next question, Why did the Scriptures say this? is not asked in Luke-Acts. Elsewhere in the NT, however, this is explained (cf. Mark 10:45; Rom 3:25–26; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:10–14; etc.).

24:27 What was said in all the Scriptures. “In all the Scriptures” can be interpreted in two ways: *the third section of the OT called the Writings* (cf. Luke 24:44) or *the Law and the Prophets*, i.e., *the whole of Scripture* (cf. 16:16). The second interpretation, which understands the word “Scriptures” as a synonym for “Moses and all the Prophets,” is to be preferred. The term “all” is another example of Luke’s fondness for exaggeration, for time would not have permitted Jesus to refer to “all” the Scriptures that referred to him. See comments on 21:17.

24:28 As they approached the village ... Jesus acted as if he were going farther. Jesus gave the two disciples the opportunity to practice hospitality to “a herald” of the gospel message. Luke may have intended for this to serve as a model of such hospitality.²¹

24:29 But they urged him strongly. The same verb is used in Acts 16:15.

Stay with us. This invitation to spend that night in their (or one of their) homes, which was seven miles from Jerusalem, implies that they were Judeans, not Galileans.

24:30 When he was at the table with them. A number of the resurrection appearances are associated with meals.²²

He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. The similarity between this and the Lord’s Supper (22:19) is striking. There is also a similarity with the account of the feeding of the five thousand (see comments on 9:16). Luke purposely portrayed this meal as a kind of Lord’s Supper.²³

²¹ Cf. Luke 9:1–6, 52; 10:1–12; Acts 16:15; cf. also 3 John 5–8; Heb 13:2.

²² Luke 24:41–43; Acts 1:4; 10:41; John 21:9–15; cf. also the noncanonical Mark 16:14.

²³ Probably the various references to the “breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 27:35 are also to be understood in this manner.

24:31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. In the fellowship of the Lord's Supper the two disciples recognized Jesus. The verb "were opened" is a divine passive much like "were kept from recognizing him" in 24:16 (cf. 2 Kgs 6:17). Through the explanation Jesus gave in Luke 24:25–27 and in the sharing of the sacred meal, the two disciples came with divine help to understand. Attempts to explain this recognition as due to their identification of Jesus' voice, his unique blessing, his special way of breaking bread, seeing the holes in his hands, seeing a gesture of some sort peculiar to Jesus should be rejected. Luke gave no hint of this. On the contrary he stated that Jesus was recognized in the "breaking of bread" (24:35), which for Luke meant the breaking of bread in the Lord's Supper.²⁴ Luke sought to convey to Theophilus and his readers that as certainty came to the disciples in the sharing of Scripture and the "breaking of bread," so too could they experience this certainty as they heard the Scriptures in the context of the church's breaking of bread (cf. Acts 2:42–47). The term "recognized [*epegnōsan*]" is the same word Luke used in 1:4 with respect to "knowing [*epignōs*]" the certainty of the things they had been taught.

Disappeared from their sight. Compare John 20:19, 26, where the body of the risen Christ also appeared and disappeared miraculously (cf. also Luke 24:36).

24:32 Were not our hearts burning within us while he ... opened the Scriptures to us? The two disciples recalled that even before they recognized Jesus his interpretations of the Scriptures (24:27) were already at work convincing them of his resurrection. For "opening the Scriptures," cf. Acts 17:3, where the word "explaining" translates the same Greek word. This word is also used in Luke 24:31, "eyes were opened." Luke's readers were to understand that through the opening of the Scriptures, i.e., their correct interpretation (24:27), one comes to know the certainty of the Gospel traditions (1:4). Compare the part the Scriptures play in the early church confession found in 1 Cor 15:3–8.

24:33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. The distance of sixty *stadious* (Luke 24:13) makes more sense here than 160 *stadious*.

There they found the Eleven and those with them. Compare 24:9.

24:34 And saying. The Eleven and those with them shared the news.

It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon. Since the departure of the two disciples from Jerusalem, the Eleven and the others had come to believe. They now knew with certainty that the Lord had arisen because he had appeared to Simon. The reference to Jesus' appearance to Simon is firmly established in the early church confession found in 1 Cor 15:4, even though it is nowhere described. This is not to be confused with John 21:15–23, which took place later and in Galilee. Because of the reference to "Simon" rather than "Peter," this verse recalls Luke 22:32. This appearance together with his remorse in 22:61 results in the "turning back" of Simon so that from henceforth he was able to "strengthen" his Christian brothers (22:32).²⁵

24:35 Then the two told what had happened on the way. The Emmaus disciples now recounted their experience of the risen Lord, which affirmed that "the Lord has risen" (23:34a).

How Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. Once again Luke emphasized that Jesus was known in the breaking of bread, for he wanted his readers to experience this as they participated in the "breaking of bread." Marshall notes, "In the reading of Scripture and at the breaking of bread the risen Lord will continue to be present, though unseen."²⁶ Luke believed that the fellowship of faith with believers around the Lord's table builds faith.

The Lukan Message

²⁴ Cf. Luke 9:16; 22:19; 24:35; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 27:35.

²⁵ The attempt by F. W. Danker (*Jesus and the New Age* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], 395) to interpret this verse as a question is unconvincing.

²⁶ Marshall, *Luke*, 900.

This account provides an interpretative key for much of Luke's theology, for a number of important theological emphases appear. It is the most important passage in the Gospel for understanding how Luke interpreted Jesus' death. On the human level Jesus' death was caused by the Jewish leadership. Luke in fact went so far as to say the Jewish leadership crucified him (24:20; cf. Acts 5:30). Yet Jesus' death must be understood as ordained by God, for only through death could he enter his glory (Luke 24:26). Jesus' death was therefore not a tragic accident but a divine necessity taught in Scripture (24:26–27; see 24:1–12—“The Lukan Message”; Introduction 8 [1]). Jesus' death was not the end, for the tomb was empty (24:22–23). The angels had declared that he lives (24:23). Two disciples on the Emmaus road had seen him (24:31), and so had Simon (24:34). This emphasis will appear again in the next account (24:44–45).

Luke revealed how his readers could come to know the certainty of the things they had been taught (1:4). One way was by the reading of this Gospel. Having laid out before his readers his credentials (1:1–3), Luke anticipated that his record of the events surrounding the life and death of Jesus would support what his readers already had been taught and thus would confirm this earlier teaching. Luke did not expect this account to be treated with the historical skepticism of those who argue that everything in the Gospels is to be disbelieved unless it can be proven true. Luke expected that the “burden of proof” lies with those who would deny his Gospel.²⁷ Thus the very reading of his “orderly account” (1:3) should confirm what the readers had been taught.

A second aid to such certainty is the proof from prophecy. All that Jesus taught and did, all that he experienced, was prophesied beforehand. Thus the Scriptures witness to the truthfulness of what Luke's readers had been taught. This involves not only the facts about Jesus but also the interpretation of those facts.

A third support involves the various witnesses to the resurrection. These include an empty tomb, an angelic message, a resurrection appearance to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, and an appearance to Peter. The doubt and unbelief of the disciples lends support to the overwhelming nature of these witnesses. Brown notes: “The slowness of the disciples to accept the corporeality of Jesus' resurrection [24:41], just as their refusal to accept the story of the empty tomb, guarantees the *asphaleia* [certainty] which is the author's purpose to establish.”²⁸

A fourth aid to faith for Luke's readers involves the reading of Scripture and breaking of bread within the community of faith. Through such participation they could come to assurance of the truth. They too could experience their hearts burning within them in the context of “devot[ing] themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). The applicability of the experience of the Emmaus disciples to the situation of his readers caused Luke to deal with it at great length. The lack of such applicability in the case of Peter's experience (24:34) may be why Luke dealt so briefly with it.¹

²⁷ For a discussion of the “burden of proof,” see C. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987), 240–54.

²⁸ S. Brown, *Apostasy and Perseverance in the Theology of Luke*, AnBib (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 79.

¹ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 609–615.