

# The Gospels

LESSON  
FOUR

## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE



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# The Gospels

## Lesson Four

### The Gospel According to Luke

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## INTRODUCTION

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Several years ago, the news reported that a group of people was trapped in a burning office building. Then a young man burst into the room and they followed his voice to safety. Stories from many survivors throughout the building revealed that he was a volunteer fireman who happened to work in the building. Although he lost his own life in the fire, he saved many others from certain death.

More than any other gospel writer, Luke described Jesus as one who saves. Whether we realize it or not, humanity is lost and desperate, without help or hope. We have no way to escape the judgment of God that threatens us. But the Gospel of Luke reminds us that at the cost of his own life, Jesus came to save us.

This is the fourth lesson in our series *The Gospels*, and we've entitled it "The Gospel According to Luke." In this lesson, we'll explore how to read the New Testament's third gospel with greater understanding, and how to apply its teachings to our lives.

We'll approach Luke's gospel in three steps. First, we'll consider the background of Luke's gospel. Second, we'll explore its structure and content. And third, we'll look at some of its major themes. Let's begin with the background of Luke's gospel.

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## BACKGROUND

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We'll explore the background of Luke's gospel by considering its author, its original audience and the occasion or circumstances of its writing. Let's turn first to its author.

### AUTHOR

From the outset, we should mention that the Gospel of Luke is widely recognized as the first volume of a two-volume work. The second volume is the book of Acts. And because of this, questions about the authorship of Luke are wrapped up with questions about the authorship of Acts. Listen to the preface of Luke's gospel in Luke 1:1-4:

**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. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from**

**the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4).**

And compare this to the similar preface in Acts 1:1-2 which says:

**In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven (Acts 1:1-2).**

Both these prefaces indicate that the author wrote to someone named Theophilus. And the preface of Acts refers to a former book. This has led most scholars to conclude that the former book was the Gospel of Luke.

There is also other evidence that the same person wrote both of these books. The style of the Greek of Luke is similar to the Greek in Acts, but very different from the style of the other gospels. The books also emphasize similar themes, such as the universal offer of the gospel, the work of the Holy Spirit, the irresistible power of the will and word of God, and the frequent description of Christ's work as "salvation." So, assuming that one writer produced both books, who was he?

We'll investigate the authorship of the third gospel in two stages. First, we'll consider the traditional view that the gospel was written by a man named Luke. And second, we'll explore Luke's personal history. Let's look first at the traditional view that Luke wrote this gospel.

## **Traditional View**

The Gospel of Luke is technically anonymous because it doesn't name its author. But this shouldn't be surprising. Theophilus certainly knew who wrote it, so there was no need for the author to identify himself. There are, however, several sources of information about the author's identity.

At least three types of evidence confirm the traditional view that Luke wrote the third gospel. First, comments from other parts of the New Testament point to his authorship.

The New Testament indicates that the author of the third gospel was with Paul in the later years of his ministry. For instance, in the book of Acts, the author sometimes narrated the story with a third person "they" and other times with a first person "we." The last of these first-person narratives is Acts 27:1–28:16, which describes Paul's trip to Rome.

Beyond this, Paul's epistles indicate that Luke was one of the few co-workers with him during this time. For instance, in 2 Timothy 4:11, when Paul's death was approaching, Paul told Timothy, "Only Luke is with me." Information like this doesn't prove that Luke wrote the third gospel and the book of Acts, but it does make it a strong possibility.

Second, early manuscripts of the Gospel of Luke also point to Luke as the author.

Dating early manuscripts is a highly technical science really, and there's three bits of evidence really, that scholars use to date an ancient manuscript. One, and actually the most important, — this surprises students sometimes — but the most important is paleography. Paleography refers to ancient handwriting; “paleo” is old and “graphy” is writing; so ancient writing. Scholars, experts of paleography can tell within sometimes a few decades, but certainly within fifty years or so when a document was written, simply because handwriting tended to change over time in a particular language. Sometimes the alphabet itself would change of course in terms of its writing, but certainly the way things were written; so that's paleography. The second would be chemical analysis of some kind. There's carbon fourteen dating, for example, or other kinds of testing where they would test either the ink or the animal skin or whatever the document was written on to try to determine its age. The third means to date a manuscript is any actual external comments or statements that were made. The scribes who copied them seldom dated them but sometimes they might actually make some kind of a notation or comment that would help us to identify specifically when that document was copied. So those are the three different ways that manuscripts are dated.

— Dr. Mark Strauss

One of the most reliable early manuscripts of the Gospel of Luke is papyrus number 75, often referred to as “P-75.” This manuscript is dated around A.D. 180. It contains much more of the third gospel than most other early manuscripts, and it bears the title “According to Luke.”

Many other ancient manuscripts also identify Luke as the author of the gospel, and no early manuscripts ascribe it to anyone else. Third, the writings of the early church also identify Luke as the author.

Important documents from the early church consistently assign authorship of the third gospel to Luke. The Muratorian fragment, dated around A.D. 170 to 180, is the earliest known document listing the New Testament books that the early church considered to be canonical, and it clearly affirms Luke's authorship of the third gospel.

Another ancient witness is the so-called Anti-Marcionite Prologue to the Gospel of Luke, written around A.D. 160 to 180 to refute the heretic Marcion. It introduces the third gospel this way:

**Luke, an Antiochian of Syria, a physician by profession, was a disciple of the apostles. At a later date he accompanied Paul ... Luke, under the impulse of the Spirit, composed his entire gospel in the region of Achaia.**

Moreover, many church leaders from the second and third centuries recognized Luke as the author of the third gospel. For example, Luke's authorship was asserted by

Irenaeus, who lived around A.D. 130 to 202; Clement of Alexandria, who lived from around A.D. 150 to 215; and Tertullian, who lived from A.D. 155 to 230.

**I think we can have every confidence that Luke is the writer of the third gospel. We know from the book of Acts that Luke was a doctor, actually, whom Paul met as he's coming across the top of Asia Minor to a place called Troas. He meets Luke, and they travel together to Philippi and quite likely Luke then stays in Philippi as a doctor there, and then he rejoins Paul on his travels from Philippi as they go up to Jerusalem in A.D. 57. So the picture we have from the New Testament is of Luke as being someone who knows Paul well, travels with him, and there's every evidence that this Luke is one and the same person that writes Luke's gospel.**

— Dr. Peter Walker

**If you were simply guessing the name of a companion of Paul, you probably wouldn't come up with Luke. He's not a very prominent figure in Paul's letters. You might more likely come up with Titus or someone else. So the mere fact that he's not a very prominent figure in Paul's letters suggests that the attribution to Luke, of both the gospel and the Acts, is likely to be right. But I also think there is good reason for thinking that the names of the persons to whom the gospels are attributed go back to a very early stage when the Gospels were first circulating. So I think the combination of the ascription to Luke and the fact that the same author in Acts appears to be a companion of Paul, make it very likely that the author of both works is the Luke who accompanied Paul on some of his travels, who is one of Paul's coworkers.**

— Dr. Richard Bauckham

Now that we've affirmed the traditional view that Luke wrote this gospel, let's look at Luke's personal history.

## **Personal History**

The New Testament tells us at least four things about Luke's personal history. First, he was not an apostle. In fact, Luke doesn't seem to have been an eyewitness to any of the events he reported in his gospel. Listen to these details from the Gospel of Luke 1:1-2:

**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 (Luke 1:1-2).**

**Luke's gospel is the only one of the four that has the sort of preface that a historian would often write to introduce a work of history. So it rather implies that Luke was particularly kind of self-conscious about following historical method of the time. And he talks about his sources in the preface. He doesn't claim to be an eyewitness himself, but he does claim to be taking up eyewitness testimony and recording it. So we have his claim to eyewitness testimony. But then there's the period after Paul gets to Jerusalem, on his last journey to Jerusalem and Luke is with him, Paul is in prison for a period of about 2 years. And it looks very much as though Luke is hanging around in Jerusalem and other places in Palestine for that period. So he has ample opportunity, actually, 2 years, when he could interview — as a good ancient historian was expected to do — he could interview the eyewitnesses who were members of the Jerusalem church, people like James the Lord's brother, who was certainly around. Some of the twelve apostles were probably around either in Jerusalem or in other parts of Palestine. So Luke was actually in a very good position to have interviewed eyewitnesses. And then, of course, he accompanies Paul to Rome where there might well have been other people who had their own stories to tell of what they remembered of the story of Jesus. So I think what we can say is that Luke was in a very good position to have had first-hand contact with the eyewitnesses.**

**— Dr. Richard Bauckham**

Second, Luke also appears to have been a Gentile convert to Christianity. When Paul wrote to the Colossians from prison, he sent them greetings from Luke who was with Paul at the time. Listen to what Paul wrote in 4:14 of Colossians,

**Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings (Colossians 4:14).**

This is significant because in verses 10-11, Paul had said that Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus were the only Jews who were working with him at the time. So, it's reasonable to conclude that Luke was a Gentile. This is confirmed by the fact that in Acts 1:19, Luke described Aramaic as "their language." Aramaic was the Jews' language, but it wasn't his.

Third, Luke also appears to have been well-educated. Many of the books in the New Testament are written in a fairly common style of Greek. But the Gospel of Luke shows more sophistication in its use of the language.

The fact that Luke was well-educated is also reflected in Paul's identification of him as "the doctor" in Colossians 4:14. While medicine wasn't as formal a discipline in



the days of the New Testament as it is today, it still required a person with skill, aptitude, and a degree of learning.

The fourth thing we know about Luke's personal history is that he was Paul's partner in ministry for many of the episodes reported in the book of Acts.

As Paul described him in Philemon verse 24, Luke was his "fellow laborer." According to Acts 16:6-10, Luke first joined Paul in Troas and went with him as he responded to the missionary call to go to Macedonia. From that point on Luke was often with Paul, except for a lengthy stay in Philippi recorded in Acts 16:40–20:5. Luke's faithfulness was particularly displayed in Acts 27:1 where he joined Paul's perilous journey to Rome.

**I think of all the people in the New Testament, I'd like to meet Luke. At one time I thought that I'd be a physician, so he's always intrigued me. And when it comes to him qualifying to write one of the gospels, there are several things, I think, that fit into my view of that. The first is just the personal. At Acts 16 Luke begins to talk about "we." Suddenly he's in the picture; he's not just getting a secondhand report. But Luke joins the company of the people who were actually part of what was going on, and they were getting a chance to experience early Christianity firsthand. And I think that's an exciting thing. The second thing is just the fact that he was a physician. Thinking about training to become one myself, I know that that's the kind of person who wants to get the diagnosis correct. They're going to be very careful to get their facts straight, you know, they want their details to be accurate, because whatever they conclude is going to be for the good of the patient so to speak. Probably the third thing that strikes me about Luke is the perspective that he had in traveling in the Greco-Roman world. His perspective on the gospel narrative is not even limited to Israel or Palestine. It's a global perspective. In a day when we're concerned about the Christian gospel being globalized, we can read Luke with some real understanding because he had an opportunity in Greece and in Rome and in other parts of the Greco-Roman world. He had the opportunity to see how the message of Jesus was going to be applied to the culture in which the message was being given.**

— Dr. Steve Harper

Now that we've explored the authorship of the third gospel, let's look at the identity of Luke's original audience.

### **ORIGINAL AUDIENCE**

We'll explore the original audience of Luke in two ways. First, we'll look at the book's explicit dedication to Theophilus. And second, we'll consider the possibility that

the book was also intended for a broader audience. Let's begin with Theophilus as Luke's first reader.

## Theophilus

There's been a great deal of debate over the centuries as to who Theophilus was and what it refers to in Luke 1:1-4 and he is mentioned also, of course and in Acts 1:1-2. Theophilus, the word "Theophilus" does mean "lover of God," and for that reason, many have thought that perhaps Theophilus was not an actual individual, but represents the readership of Luke's gospel which would be the lovers of God in the church. The other major possibility, of course, is that Theophilus was an individual. Most scholars, and for what it's worth I would agree with this second view, hold to the second view because Luke describes him as "most excellent," "*kratista*," there, and Luke later uses that very word, "*kratista*," to refer to Roman officials, to Felix and to Agrippa. And so it was apparently in Luke's mind a rather technical expression referring to a person of high standing, and perhaps especially a person of high standing in the Roman government. Beyond that, Luke 1:1-4 does seem to be a dedication. It just fits in terms of the genre of introductory dedications. And historical works were often dedicated using this kind of language to a patron, someone who actually paid for the production of the work. And so, it really fits into what we know of dedicatory statements and for that reason, as I say, almost certainly Theophilus was an actual person.

— Dr. David Bauer

Luke's preface implies that Theophilus was his patron, the one who commissioned and financially supported his writing. In Luke 1:3, Luke addressed his work to "most excellent Theophilus," or *kratiste Theophile*. The term *kratiste* was an expression of high honor. In fact, it's used to describe only two other people in the whole New Testament: the Roman governors Felix and Festus. If Theophilus was not a high-ranking Roman official, he was certainly a person of prestige and significance.

But the relationship between Luke and Theophilus was more complex than mere patronage. In some sense, Theophilus was also Luke's student. In Luke 1:3-4, we read these words:

Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Luke 1:3-4).

Theophilus already knew about Jesus. But Luke wrote this fuller and more orderly account of Jesus' life in order to give Theophilus confidence in what he'd been taught.

Having seen that Luke explicitly cited Theophilus as his first reader, it's also helpful to think of Luke writing to a broader audience.

## Broader Audience

There are many reasons to think that Luke wrote for a broader audience than just Theophilus. For one thing, early Christians tended to share letters and other writings with each other. As just one example, listen to what Paul wrote in Colossians 4:16:

**After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea (Colossians 4:16).**

Since early Christians tended to share their writings, it seems reasonable to assume that Theophilus would have been eager to share Luke's books.

Beyond this, the gospel's highly literary character makes it almost certain that Luke also had a broader audience in mind. The style simply is not that of a private note intended only for one person. The extensive historical research Luke referred to in Luke 1:3 also implies a more extended audience. And beyond this, the great length of the gospel and Acts suggests that Luke was producing a major work that he intended for a larger audience. But who was this larger audience?

It seems most likely that Luke wrote primarily for Gentile Christians. For example, his style of Greek was that of the Gentiles. And his emphasis on the universal offer of the gospel of the kingdom of God stressed that salvation was for all nations. Of course, Luke's gospel would have been valuable to Jewish Christians, too. But it wasn't directed to them the way Matthew's gospel was.

In a general sense, God always intends the whole Bible to be read and understood by all his people throughout history. But it's important to recognize that when the Holy Spirit inspired particular authors to write particular books, he worked through their individual personality and interests. In this primary sense, Luke designed his gospel to speak rather directly to the needs of Theophilus and other first-century Gentile Christians. By contrast, modern audiences are overhearing what Luke wrote to them. But if we keep Luke and his original audience in mind as we read his gospel, we'll be better prepared to understand what he wrote, and to apply it to our own lives.

Knowing who the author and audience of the gospel are, we're ready to examine its occasion.

## OCCASION

We'll explore the occasion of Luke's gospel in two ways. First, we'll consider its date of composition. And second, we will look at Luke's purpose for writing. Let's begin with the date of Luke's gospel.

## Date

At least two factors point to a date between A.D. 65 and 67. First, comparisons between Luke's gospel and Mark's gospel have led most New Testament scholars to agree that Luke used Mark's gospel as one of his sources of research. In our earlier lesson on Mark, we concluded that the earliest likely date for Mark was A.D. 64. If Luke used Mark as a source, then the earliest likely date for his gospel must be sometime after this, probably around A.D. 65.

Second, the book of Acts points to a date certainly no later than A.D. 69, and probably no later than A.D. 67. Acts doesn't record important events, like Paul's martyrdom, which took place around A.D. 65; the Neronian persecutions that ended in A.D. 68; or the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. These significant omissions suggest Luke wrote Acts before these events took place, or at least before he became aware of them. And according to Acts 1:1, Luke's gospel was completed even before he wrote the book of Acts. So it seems most likely that Luke completed his gospel by A.D. 67. And he almost certainly finished it by A.D. 69, before the fall of Jerusalem.

Now that we've considered the date when Luke wrote, let's turn to his purpose.

## Purpose

In Luke 1:3-4, Luke gave the following reason for researching and writing this gospel:

**It seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Luke 1:3-4).**

Luke wrote for Theophilus, and for the Gentile Christians like him, in order to strengthen their young faith in the Jewish Messiah Jesus.

When Luke was writing, Gentile Christians like Theophilus faced significant challenges to their faith. These challenges came from at least two sources. First, Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome created widespread fear that persecution might spread throughout the Empire. And this fear caused some people to doubt the Christian claim that Jesus had brought the kingdom of God.

Second, Christians were arguing over the status of Gentile converts to the largely Jewish church. And this prejudice and division raised doubts about the claim that Jesus offered salvation to every family of the human race.

In response to these challenges and doubts, Luke wrote to assure Gentile believers that they had made the right choice in following Jesus. Jesus really had inaugurated God's kingdom. And Gentile Christians really were full members of God's household. If they remained faithful to Jesus, they could be confident that they would receive all the blessings of salvation.

Now that we've surveyed the background of Luke's gospel, let's turn to our second major topic: its structure and content.

## STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

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You'll recall from earlier lessons in this series that, on a large scale, all four gospels deal with Jesus' life chronologically. But, on a smaller scale, they sometimes organize their stories about Jesus according to different principles. For instance, we saw that Matthew and Mark sometimes arranged their materials according to certain themes. By comparison, Luke arranged much of his gospel according to geography.

For our purposes in this lesson, we will divide Luke's gospel into six sections: a short preface in 1:1-4, followed by five major groups of stories:

- The first major division of the gospel describes Jesus' beginnings and focuses on the region of Judea and the Jordan River. This section runs from 1:5–4:13.
- The second major division is the narrative of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, which extends from 4:14–9:50.
- The third major division reports Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in 9:51–19:27.
- The fourth major division is the narrative of Jesus' ministry in and near Jerusalem in 19:28–21:38.
- Finally, the fifth and last major division of Luke's gospel is the narrative of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection outside Jerusalem, found in 22:1–24:53.

Since we've already looked at Luke's preface, we'll focus our attention on the five major divisions of his narrative, starting with Jesus' beginnings in Luke 1:5–4:13.

### JESUS' BEGINNINGS

Luke's account of Jesus' beginnings starts shortly before Jesus' birth, and spans his entire life prior to his public ministry.

Luke's main concern in these chapters was to show that Jesus was both the Son of God and the son of David, making him both fully divine and fully human. Moreover, as the son of David, Jesus was also the Messiah or Christ, the one who would provide salvation to the world by bringing God's kingdom to earth.

Throughout this narrative, Luke regularly referred to God's promises in the Old Testament, in order to show that God was fulfilling these promises through Jesus. And therefore, the only way to be faithful to God and to inherit his kingdom blessings was to receive Jesus as King and Savior.

These chapters can be divided into four main sections: birth announcements for John the Baptist and Jesus; their corresponding births and childhoods; John's identification of Jesus; and three confirmations of Jesus as the Son of God. Let's begin with the birth announcements in Luke 1:5-56.

## Birth Announcements

It's significant that Luke opened his gospel with an appearance of the angel Gabriel. Hundreds of years earlier, Daniel 9 stated that Gabriel had announced that Israel's exile would last for hundreds of years. So long as they remained under God's judgment, Israel would be in bondage. But in Luke's gospel, Gabriel announced that the period of judgment was about to end.

In Luke 1:5-25, Gabriel foretold the birth of John the Baptist. Gabriel visited the priest Zechariah in Judea, and told him that his barren wife Elizabeth would miraculously have a son. They were to name the boy John. He would be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth, and would serve in the spirit of the great prophet Elijah to prepare the way for God's salvation. At first, Zechariah doubted Gabriel's message, so he was struck mute until his son was born.

Luke paired the announcement of John's birth with Gabriel's greater announcement of Jesus' birth in Luke 1:26-38. Gabriel told Mary that God would miraculously generate a son in her womb, making God himself the child's father. God's son was to be named Jesus, meaning "Savior." Moreover, he would inherit the throne of his ancestor David, meaning that he would be the Messiah, the great son of David who would bring the salvation of God's everlasting kingdom to earth.

Since Mary and Elizabeth were cousins, Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth in Judea to tell her she was pregnant with God's son. We read about this visit in Luke 1:39-56. When Mary greeted Elizabeth, John leapt for joy in his mother's womb, and Elizabeth was immediately filled with the Spirit so that she understood the significance of her baby's reaction. Elizabeth blessed Mary, calling Mary's son her own Lord. And in response, Mary sang her famous song of praise, often called the Magnificat, in Luke 1:46-55, expressing her great joy at the salvation that was coming through her child.

Following the birth announcements, Luke compared the births and childhoods of John and Jesus in Luke 1:57–2:52.

## Births and Childhoods

Luke's account of John's birth and childhood can be found in Luke 1:57-80. John was born to aging parents. And when they presented him at the temple on the eighth day for circumcision, his father's voice returned to him. At that time, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied that his son would prepare the way for the Messiah, the great son of David.

Listen to how Zechariah described the Messiah's role in Luke 1:69-76:

**[God] has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago) ... to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham ... And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him (Luke 1:69-76).**

In the Old Testament, God had made covenant promises of salvation to Abraham and David. And Zechariah prophesied that God was about to fulfill these promises, and that his son John, would be the prophet who prepared the way.

Next, in Luke 2:1-52, Luke reported the birth and early childhood of Jesus. There are several parallels between this account and his previous narrative of John's birth, but Luke's record of Jesus' birth and childhood is much longer and more elaborate. It begins with Jesus' birth in the city of David, the Judean town of Bethlehem, which is recorded in Luke 2:1-20.

Jesus' birth was very humble. He was born in a stable and laid in a feeding trough. But the angelic announcement that proclaimed his birth to nearby shepherds was nothing short of majestic. Listen to what the angel said to the shepherds in Luke 2:10-11:

**Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10-11).**

The angel proclaimed the good news or "gospel" that the messianic King would save God's people from God's judgment.

This angelic messenger was then joined by the heavenly army of angels who sang praises to God for the birth of Jesus. Luke made it clear that despite Jesus' humble birth, Mary's son really was God's chosen Messiah and King.

Next, Luke described Jesus' circumcision and presentation at the temple in Jerusalem in Luke 2:21-40. At the temple, the Holy Spirit filled and moved Simeon, as well as the holy prophetess Anna, to announce that Jesus was the Messiah who would bring salvation to the world. Listen to Simeon's praise to God in Luke 2:30-32:

**My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel (Luke 2:30-32).**

This was in fulfillment of Isaiah 49:6, where God had spoken these words:

**It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6).**

Through Simeon, God revealed that Jesus was the Messiah who would bring salvation and glory to Israel. And more than this, he would even extend the gospel of God's kingdom to the Gentile nations, so that they might also be saved.

Finally, Luke returned to the theme of Jesus' sonship with a brief story of Jesus at the temple in Luke 2:41-52. When Jesus was twelve years old, he accompanied his parents to the Passover in Jerusalem, but he was separated from them when they returned home. His parents found him several days later in the temple courts, talking with the teachers. Everyone at the temple was amazed with Jesus' knowledge and understanding.

When Mary confronted Jesus, his reply revealed how special he was. Listen to what Jesus told Mary in Luke 2:49:

**Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house? (Luke 2:49).**

The temple was the house of his father because Jesus was the Son of God.

Following the births and childhoods of John and Jesus, Luke reported John's identification of Jesus in Luke 3:1-20.

## **John's Identification of Jesus**

In this narrative, John prepared the way for God's salvation by formally identifying Jesus as the Messiah. In his preaching ministry in the region of the Jordan River, John proclaimed the coming kingdom of God, exhorted people to repent of their sins, and baptized those who repented. But when Jesus came to him to be baptized, John identified him as the Messiah, and plainly declared that he wasn't even worthy to untie the Messiah's sandals. John said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit, as prophesied in Old Testament passages like Isaiah 44:3 and Ezekiel 39:29. And this meant that the final age of history had arrived, the time when God's salvation would be fully realized.

**It's interesting to note that in the Old Testament, that in Exodus 19, when the Israelites were going to hear from God, or God was going to descend on Mount Sinai, that they are told before that to wash their clothes and purify themselves. And so, it turns out that cleansing was really something that people would do in preparation for God's coming, or God's appearance. And if we look at John the Baptist's proclamation, he's basically saying that God is going to come in judgment and that people need to prepare themselves by repentance, and then, of course, by baptism.**

— Dr. David Redelings

**In the Gospels, we have John baptizing people. And then we have Jesus coming to be baptized of John. Why would he do this? I mean, John is saying, repent and be prepared for the kingdom. Does Jesus have to repent? Obviously, he doesn't. He is the sinless Son of God. Why then does he get baptized by John? Well, it's important to realize that John's baptism is in preparation for the coming of the kingdom. As he is calling people to repent, believe, it's not the same as Christian baptism in that he is announcing that the kingdom is coming; the King is arriving. They are to be prepared for it. Jesus, in coming to be baptized by John, now comes to begin his ministry. All of the baptism begins at the start of Jesus' ministry in the Gospels. He is identifying**



**with us — think of, in terms of Matthew — to fulfill all righteousness. It's not because he has to repent. It's not because he is a sinner. It's because he's identifying with his people. He's beginning his public ministry. He is acting as our representative in his life, which will then culminate in his death, resurrection, ascension. So that, that is the reason why he comes and is baptized by John to, in some sense, inaugurate his ministry, to begin what he is doing, to announce that what John has looked forward to is now coming in him. He is the one that now is bringing the kingdom to pass.**

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

Now that we've considered John's identification of Jesus, let's turn to the fourth and final section of this narrative: the confirmation of Jesus as the Son of God in Luke 3:21–4:13.

## **Confirmations of the Son of God**

Luke provided three separate confirmations of Jesus as the Son of God, beginning with a divine confirmation in Luke 3:21-22. Listen to this description of Jesus' baptism from Luke 3:22:

**The Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).**

At Jesus' baptism, God himself publicly confirmed that Jesus was his son through the visible appearance of the Spirit and his voice from heaven.

Next, Luke provided a genealogical confirmation that Jesus was the Son of God in Luke 3:23-38.

Like Matthew, Luke traced Jesus' genealogy through the righteous line of David and Abraham. But unlike Matthew, Luke extended his record to include the righteous line of humanity all the way to Adam. To understand the significance of this genealogy, listen to the way it ends in Luke 3:38:

**The son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God (Luke 3:38).**

Luke called Adam "the son of God" — the same title given to Jesus throughout these chapters. In this way, Luke pointed out something that other portions of the New Testament teach plainly. As the Son of God, Jesus was destined to fulfill the purpose of the first son of God, Adam. Or as the apostle Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15:45, Jesus was the "last Adam." Adam was God's servant king on earth who was supposed to do God's will. But he failed miserably. But Jesus is the great Son of God who succeeded where Adam had failed, thereby extending salvation to every nation on earth.

The last confirmation of Jesus as the Son of God was a personal confirmation from Jesus himself in Luke 4:1-13.

This is the account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. As Luke noted in Luke 4:1, the Holy Spirit filled Jesus and led him into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan. The Devil tempted Jesus to turn stone into bread, to receive authority over the nations from the Devil, and to throw himself off the top of the temple. And the Devil began two of these temptations with the mocking words "If you are the Son of God." In response, Jesus strongly rejected all three of Satan's temptations, and even quoted Old Testament passages that described what a faithful son of God should do.

**Jesus quotes the Bible when he's encountered by the Devil in the wilderness for several reasons. First of all part of what the gospel writers are doing are depicting, portraying Jesus as the true Son of God. And so, one reason that we see him quoting the Scriptures is because of his covenant relationship with God. He is going to the Scriptures and quoting from that expression of his covenant relationship to keep things in order, to keep the proper view of his own authority in relation to God the Father, and also to the Devil's limited authority as well. And so he says that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, just to remind himself of the priority of that covenant relationship, and that assists him in resisting these temptations from the Devil. But we see him quoting from a particular portion of Scripture, from Deuteronomy 6 to 8 in particular, because there we have Moses talking about the wilderness experience of God's people, and how that wilderness experience of the Exodus community tested what was in their hearts, to see what was in their hearts. And we have something very similar happening, this test of sonship in Jesus' temptation encounter, where Israel failed the test, Jesus passes the test. And so we see that sort of comparison in the use of the Old Testament by the gospel writers and by Jesus in the temptation narrative as well.**

— Dr. Greg Perry

Because it follows Jesus' genealogy that ends with Adam as the son of God, Luke's account of Jesus' temptation should be viewed in contrast with the account of Adam's temptation in Genesis chapter 3. In that story, the Devil tempted Adam in the Garden of Eden and when Adam sinned, God cursed creation and cast all of humanity into the wilderness. By contrast, Jesus resisted temptation in the wilderness, and this confirmed that he really was the faithful son of God who would bring God's faithful people back into paradise.

After Jesus' beginnings in Judea and the region of the Jordan, the next major section of the Gospel of Luke reports Jesus' ministry in Galilee. This section extends from 4:14–9:50.

## JESUS' MINISTRY IN GALILEE

In this section of his gospel, Luke reported many examples of Jesus' miraculous power and gospel preaching in order to prove that Jesus was the Spirit-anointed Savior promised by the Old Testament.

Luke's narrative describing Jesus' ministry in Galilee can be divided into five parts: first, Jesus' sermon at Nazareth; second, his teaching and miracles; third, the distinction between the roles of Jesus and John the Baptist; fourth, additional teaching and miracles from Jesus; and fifth, Jesus' preparation of the twelve apostles for ministry. We'll look at each of these sections, beginning with Jesus' first sermon at Nazareth in Luke 4:14-30.

### Sermon at Nazareth

All three Synoptic Gospels emphasize Jesus' miraculous power and gospel proclamation during his Galilean ministry. But Luke's presentation is distinct from the others because he introduced this stage of Jesus' ministry with the Lord's first sermon in his hometown Nazareth. Luke reported that Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and that he was given the scroll of Isaiah. So, he read Isaiah 61:1-2, and then made an astonishing proclamation. Listen to what Jesus read and said in Luke 4:18-21:

**The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor... Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing (Luke 4:18-21).**

When he said, "this scripture is now fulfilled in your hearing," what Jesus was saying was that something the Old Testament had provided for and anticipated was now being realized. And that was the whole idea of jubilee, that in the 49th or 50th year, depending on how you calculate it, Old Testament Israel was to release people from debts and restore them to their ancestral homelands, their tribal allotments, the land that their families had been given back during the days of Moses and Joshua. If we think of the Exodus as the big, important Old Testament event for redemption, we also need to understand the Jubilee was an important provision of God for restoration. Because, as long as we live in a fallen world, redemption is going to save us, but restoration is part of God's redemption. And so Jesus sets about to show the signs of this jubilee. He's freeing people from the oppression of demons, freeing them from social stigmatization, or social classification, and he's restoring them to God their Maker and their Father.

— Rev. Michael Glodo

Isaiah had prophesied that the coming of the kingdom of God would result in salvation for all God's faithful people. And Jesus proclaimed that that day had arrived. This quotation expresses Luke's basic model for interpreting Jesus' entire ministry: Jesus was the messiah or Christ, the Savior prophesied by the Old Testament who would manifest God's kingdom on earth by bringing salvation to his people.

After relating Jesus' sermon at Nazareth, Luke reported several examples of Jesus' powerful teaching and miracles in Luke 4:31–7:17.

## Teaching and Miracles

In this section, Luke demonstrated that Jesus really was the Messiah because he was fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2. Jesus provided freedom from an evil spirit in Luke 4:31-36. He healed many other people in 4:38-42. And he called the disciples Peter, James, and John in Luke 5:1-11.

And we find a similar pattern in the verses that follow, where the healings of the leper in 5:12-15, and the paralytic in 5:17-26 are followed by the calling of the disciple Levi or Matthew in 5:27-32.

The same sort of pattern is repeated in the next verses, too. But instead of healings, Luke recorded Jesus' teachings. In 5:33-39, Jesus taught that his physical presence ought to end fasting and bring rejoicing. In 6:1-11, Jesus taught that the Sabbath is for healing and saving lives. And in 6:12-16, he selected twelve of his many disciples to become his special apostles, who were assigned the task of establishing a new order for Israel.

Through these miracles and teachings, Jesus demonstrated that he really was the Messiah prophesied by Isaiah, because he brought the Lord's favor in the form of freedom, healing, and release from oppression.

Next, Luke reported a fairly lengthy sermon that Jesus delivered in Luke 6:17-49. This sermon is often referred to as Jesus' Sermon on the Plain, and it has many similarities to his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7.

**One of the interesting contrasts between Matthew and Luke is that we have a Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7, and what's known as the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6. And this causes no end of discussion and debate. Are these one and the same thing, or are they separate? I think two things need to be said. Firstly, we know that we're dealing with just a very small extract of whatever it was that Jesus said on that occasion. I mean, read Matthew 5–7 and it takes, what, perhaps forty minutes to read it out loud. Jesus is talking for hours and for hours and his teaching cannot be so compressed. So, we're dealing with extracts. So, are we talking about the same extracts? Well, I think we probably are. The other thing to say is that if you know the geography of that area, it is fascinating — there's hills just behind Capernaum, and so you can look at those hills and say, well, Jesus sat down, and people were on a hill. But in another sense,**

**if you look at it, it's actually a slow descent of volcanic rock, coming down from three thousand feet above, down to the sea level. And when you look at it from a distance, it's actually got tons of what you and I might refer to as plains. They're sloping, and they're on a hill. And I would have my cake and eat it. I would say the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is sitting on the mount, and the Sermon on the Plain, it's the same thing, it's a flat place. And I think there's a final point here which is fascinating — Luke wants to give us the impression of Jesus being accessible, so he describes it as being Jesus on the plain, he's with us. Matthew's wanting to have us see that Jesus is authoritative, Jesus on the mountain like Moses on Mount Sinai. And I think we can have both answers.**

— Dr. Peter Walker

In the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus emphasized the same great reversal that Isaiah had prophesied. The poor will be blessed. The hungry will be satisfied. Those who weep will laugh. And God will bless those who are helpless. But the good news also went a step further. Jesus called those who are blessed to follow him and to live by the standards and values of God's kingdom, which are often very different from earthly standards. For example, he called them to love strangers and even their enemies, in contrast to worldly values which tell us to be wary of strangers and to hate our enemies. So, the message of the kingdom is not just one of blessing, but also one of ethical responsibility.

After the Sermon on the Plain, Luke concluded this section with still more evidences that Jesus was fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. Jesus healed a centurion's servant in Luke 7:1-10. And in 7:11-16, he even raised the dead son of a widow at Nain.

Luke's next account from Jesus' ministry in Galilee is a group of stories revolving around John the Baptist in Luke 7:18-50.

## **John the Baptist**

After John the Baptist was imprisoned, he sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus if he was really the Messiah. And Jesus replied by reminding them of what he had done. Jesus' miracles and preaching clearly fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah 61:1-2, and therefore they proved that Jesus really was the Messiah. Listen to what Jesus told John's messengers in Luke 7:22:

**Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor (Luke 7:22).**

Jesus continued by affirming that John was the greatest of the prophets. But even John didn't measure up to the least person in the kingdom of God. And Luke punctuated this point in 7:47-50 by explaining that Jesus actually forgave the sin of the immoral

woman who washed his feet. John had baptized people in repentance as an appeal to God for forgiveness, but Jesus brought the kingdom into people's present experience by forgiving sinners, healing the sick, and preaching the gospel to the poor.

After the stories revolving around John the Baptist, Luke reported more of Jesus' teaching and miracles in Luke 8:1-56.

## Teachings and Miracles

In these additional teachings and miracles, Jesus focused on the good news of the kingdom. The parable of the sower in Luke 8:1-15, and the parable of the lamp stand in Luke 8:16-18, described the importance of responding to the message of the kingdom in faith and obedience. And he repeated these same themes in Luke 8:19-21, when he said that his true family members are those that hear and obey God's word.

Then, in Luke 8:22-56, Luke reported several miracles that confirmed and demonstrated the salvation Jesus was bringing: Jesus calmed a storm, cast out a demon, healed a sick woman, and raised a girl from the dead.

Finally, Luke closed his account of Jesus ministry in Galilee by reporting Jesus' preparation of the twelve apostles for ministry in Luke 9:1-50.

## Preparation of the Twelve Apostles

First, in Luke 9:1-9, Jesus sent his twelve apostles to heal and to preach the gospel. These were the same men he had set apart in Luke 6. Then he demonstrated his power by feeding 5,000 people in 9:10-17, teaching his apostles to trust in his power and provision. And these preparations culminated in Luke 9:18-27, where the apostles' confessed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, or Christ.

Luke concluded this section with several stories about Jesus continuing to prepare his apostles for ministry, especially the ministry they would have after he ascended into heaven. Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John in Luke 9:28-36, where the Father spoke from heaven to confirm their commitment to Jesus. Then Jesus' performed an extremely difficult exorcism in 9:37-45, and taught on greatness in the kingdom in 9:46-50. In all these accounts, Jesus prepared his disciples to recognize his authority, to rely on his power, and to minister as humble servants in his name, so that they would be effective leaders of his kingdom on earth.

After Jesus' ministry in Galilee, the next major section of the Gospel of Luke describes Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. This portion extends from Luke 9:51-19:27.

## JESUS' JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Luke mentioned Jesus' determination to go to Jerusalem five times in this section: in 9:51, 13:22, 17:11, 18:31, and 19:28. As one example, listen to Luke 18:31-32:

**Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him” (Luke 18:31-32).**

Through passages like this, Luke made it clear that Jesus was committed to God’s plan to save his people, even though it required him to die in Jerusalem.

We’ll divide Luke’s discussion of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem into four main parts: first, Jesus’ teaching on the nature of discipleship; second, Luke’s reports of the increasing conflict between Jesus and his opponents; third, Jesus’ teaching on the cost of discipleship; and fourth, Jesus’ commitment to God’s plan to save his people. Let’s begin with the nature of discipleship in Luke 9:51–11:13.

## **Nature of Discipleship**

Jesus’ commitment to build God’s kingdom and save his people led him to select and train his special apostles for servant leadership. In Luke 9:51–10:24, he taught them how to evangelize and warned them that life would be difficult for them. But he also empowered them with the Holy Spirit. After this preparation, he sent them to preach the gospel to the cities he planned to visit.

Following this, in Luke 10:25–11:13, Jesus provided a broad worldview for them by teaching on three topics related to discipleship: love for neighbor, love for God, and prayer.

Jesus began in Luke 10:27 by summarizing his teaching about love in this way:

**“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).**

Here, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 in order to explain that the whole Old Testament law teaches us how to love God and our neighbor.

The next two paragraphs illustrate the two parts of this law of love. The parable of the “Good Samaritan” in Luke 10:29-37 illustrates how to love one’s neighbor. This is the well-known story about a Samaritan who showed his neighborly love for an injured Israelite, even though there was tension between their two people groups. Next, in Luke 10:38-42, Jesus’ encounter with Mary provides an example of how to love God. By sitting at Jesus’ feet listening to his teaching, Mary showed that we should love God by making him the first priority in our lives, and by listening to him obediently.

Lastly, Jesus’ teaching on prayer in Luke 11:1-13 concluded his instruction to the apostles by teaching them to pray genuinely and persistently for the gifts and blessings of God’s kingdom.

**Prayer is very important for the Christian. It was an important part of Jesus’ life, and we can see its significance through the example of**

his life. We find that the greater his work-load, the more he prayed, and he sought God's strength while he rested. He realized that he needed to commune with the Father consistently in order to renew himself spiritually. He prayed all night before he chose his twelve disciples, knowing that one of them would betray him. In fact, when he chose his disciples he was looking ahead to the cross. And that is part of the reason Jesus spent the whole night praying before conducting this very important ministry. Jesus' prayer life is an example for us. Later, when his disciples came back joyfully because of their marvelous works, Jesus praised the Father, saying, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children." Jesus praised the Father, so we should praise him too. If even Jesus needed to pray and give praise, we need to even more. Before he was arrested, he prayed earnestly in the Garden of Gethsemane, and said finally, "My Father, if it's possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." So we see that Jesus was in complete submission to the Father. Jesus prayed because of his relationship with the Father, and wanted to complete the plan of salvation for humanity. His example teaches us that as children of God, our prayer and submission to the will of the Father are critical to our lives.

— Dr. Peter Chow, translation

Well, I would say the main reason it's important for Christians to pray is because every time we pray, it's an expression of our belief in Christ, our resting in the gospel. The only reason we can pray is because Jesus died for our sins; Jesus gave us access before the throne of God. We can boldly approach the throne of grace with confidence in prayer because Jesus has made a way for us to get there. And so, the first reason we pray is because it's an exercise of the gospel. The second reason we pray is because it's ongoing expression of dependence on God for everything. We come to him as our father who loves to bless his children, asking for our daily bread. But it's also a way we worship God, we express his worth, we adore him, we commune with him. There's this reality, being in constant prayer, the Bible talks about, where we walk around with a daily sense of God's presence, the consciousness that he is God and he carries weight in our lives.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes



**John Wesley called prayer the grand means of drawing near to God, the chief means of grace. In fact, when you look at the history of Christianity, reading Scripture and praying are the two primary spiritual disciplines. I think the reason why prayer is so important is that it creates the very kind of relationship with God that Christianity is intended to foster. When we pray, we are talking with God, listening to what God has to say to us, and then responding to what we hear. And that's the basis for the relationship. And that's really what God wants for us, is to have a relationship. You go all the way back into Genesis where God actually walks in the garden and seeks out Adam and Eve to have fellowship with them. Prayer becomes our way of walking and talking with God. That old hymn, "He walks with me and talks with me and tells me I am his own." I mean, you're getting to the heart of what Christianity is intended to be when you pray, because it's relational.**

— Dr. Steve Harper

After Jesus' teaching on the nature of discipleship, Luke stressed the increasing conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders in Luke 11:14–15:32.

## **Increasing Conflict**

During this part of his journey, Jesus purposefully antagonized the Jewish leadership for at least three reasons. First, he wanted to rebuke their poor leadership of God's people. Second, he wanted to call people into his own kingdom. And third, he wanted them to crucify him in Jerusalem, so that he could render saving atonement for the sins of his people, and be rewarded with kingship over them.

For instance, in Luke 11:14-28, the Jews claimed that Jesus was the "prince of demons." And Jesus responded in verses 29-53 by condemning their wickedness and pronouncing woes on them.

In Luke 12:1-3, Jesus warned the crowds not to be hypocrites like the Pharisees. In verses 4-21, he attacked the practices of the Jewish synagogues, rulers and authorities. In verses 22-32, he stressed that God would meet the needs of everyone that sought the kingdom of God, so that they didn't need to pursue worldly wealth like the Jewish leadership. And in verses 33-59, Jesus warned that his followers would certainly come into conflict with those who did not embrace God's kingdom.

In Luke 13:1-9, Jesus continued to antagonize the Jewish leadership by calling all Israel to repent of their sins. Then in verses 10-17, he increased the conflict by healing a crippled woman on the Sabbath, which greatly angered the ruler of the synagogue. And in verses 18-30, Jesus taught that the kingdom of God would not be entered by many who thought they would be admitted, clearly condemning the mainstream Jewish leadership and their followers. Finally, in verses 31-35, Luke reported that tensions were mounting between Jesus and the Jewish king Herod, who was now planning to kill him.

In Luke 14, Jesus provoked the Jewish leadership even further. In verses 1-24, he healed a man on the Sabbath, and then criticized the worldly values of the Jewish leaders — even suggesting that not one of them would inherit the kingdom of God. Then in verses 25-34, Jesus warned his followers that they might lose everything in this life as a result of the conflict they would encounter from those who opposed him.

After an introduction in 15:1-2, Jesus again pursued conflict with the Jewish leaders through his parables about things that were lost: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. In each story Jesus called on his people to reject the hypocritical exclusiveness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, and to rejoice when God finds his children among the lost sinners of the world.

After reporting Jesus' teaching on the nature of discipleship and his increasing conflict with the Jewish leaders, Luke focused his account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem on the cost of discipleship in Luke 16:1–18:30.

### **Cost of Discipleship**

Jesus wanted his followers to understand that their own lives in his kingdom would be patterned after his own. They would be persecuted by worldly leaders, and would struggle to remain faithful to God. From 16:1–17:10, Jesus taught that discipleship involves viewing everything we own as God's possession, which he has entrusted to us as his stewards, to be used entirely for his purposes. He also warned that earthly blessings can be a stumbling block, even preventing the rich from recognizing and receiving the true gospel. Lastly, he encouraged faith and repentance, assuring us that no matter how much good we do, our very best is still no more than God requires.

In 17:11–18:8, Jesus focused on the eventual judgment on this world. The good things we receive in this life; including, health, possessions, and justice should cause us to see God's goodness, and we should pray that he will bless us with them in this life. But they're still destined to perish at the final judgment. True wealth, health and justice come only as rewards in God's everlasting kingdom, so that's where our hope should be.

In line with these ideas, Jesus ended this section in Luke 18:9-30 by emphasizing the need for humility, because only the humble will receive God's forgiveness and blessing, and inherit eternal life.

Luke concluded his record of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem by emphasizing his commitment to God's plan to save his people in Luke 18:31–19:27.

### **Jesus' Commitment**

The first way Jesus showed his commitment to God's plan was by predicting his own death in Luke 18:31-34. Jesus knew he needed to die to save his people, and he was determined to follow through with his Father's plan.

Following this, Jesus demonstrated his commitment to God's plan of salvation by blessing the people he came to save, such as the blind man he healed in Luke 18:35-43, and the tax collector Zacchaeus that he called in Luke 19:1-10. These people were

typically rejected by society. But in line with the promises of Isaiah 61:1-2, they were going to receive a great inheritance in God's kingdom. As Jesus said of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:9-10,

**Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost (Luke 19:9-10).**

Lastly, in Luke 19:11-27, Jesus told the parable of servants of the king that were entrusted with his money while he was away. This parable demonstrated that if we want an inheritance in God's kingdom, we have to be committed to God's plan just like Jesus is.

After describing Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, Luke reported Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. This is the fifth major section of the Gospel of Luke, and it extends from 19:28–21:38.

### **JESUS' MINISTRY IN AND NEAR JERUSALEM**

Luke's report of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem begins in Luke 19:28-44, with Jesus entering Jerusalem while the crowds welcomed him with shouts and praises.

Following his entry into the city, Jesus' first act was to cleanse the temple by driving out the merchants. This event appears in Luke 19:45-46. This cleansing condemned the sinful practices that had corrupted Jewish worship and life, and thereby greatly insulted the Jewish leadership.

**We need the Old Testament historical background to understand the events of Jesus' temple cleansing, just as we need it to understand many teachings in the New Testament. We need to refer back to the Old Testament. The Book of 1 Kings, chapter 8, records the dedication of the temple. The temple had been under construction for several years. When it was finished, King Solomon and the Israelites came to dedicate the temple. King Solomon prayed to God, "Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive." In addition, King Solomon also prayed that when foreigners, who heard God's great name, came from a distant land to pray toward the temple, God would hear their prayers so that all the people of the earth might know God's name and fear Him, and know that the temple was built for God's namesake. So, in Jesus' time, when the religious authorities made the temple a den of robbers, it disgraced the name of God, because the temple is associated with God's name. Furthermore, when Jesus cleansed the temple, there was symbolic meaning. The temple pointed to Jesus himself because he is the true and final temple. Jesus is the reality of the temple for all**

**nations coming to pray, since we pray in the name of Jesus to our Father. So, if we understand the temple from the Old Testament, we can see the significance of Jesus cleansing the temple and its relationship to the coming of the Kingdom of God.**

— Dr. Peter Chow, translation

**What seems to be the thing that Jesus is most upset about is that the area of the temple, the court of the Gentiles, where they are having access to come and be in the presence of the Creator of the universe, the nations can come. They can't go into the inner part of the temple which is only for the Jews, but the outer court is for the nations, is for the Gentiles. They can come and they can pray there. And what we see is that there is no place to pray. There's no place for the Gentiles in terms of the real purpose of that space. And so what we see is Jesus is restoring the temple, and restoring the function of that space by clearing out that space for the nations to be able to come and pray.**

— Dr. Greg Perry

As we read in Luke 19:47–21:38, Jesus spent the next several days teaching in the temple courts, speaking about the kingdom of God. During this time, his conflict with the Jewish leaders intensified, as he continued to condemn their practices and as they continued to challenge his authority. Listen to what the teachers of the law and the chief priests did in Luke 20:20:

**They sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor (Luke 20:20).**

But Jesus didn't stop preaching the truth just because evil men were trying to trap him. Instead, he openly rebuked them. As he told the crowds in Luke 20:46-47:

**Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widow's houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely (Luke 20:46-47).**

As Jesus neared Jerusalem, Israel's refusal to accept him as their saving Messiah led him to prophesy the city's destruction. But even this catastrophe would be only a foretaste of greater judgment. On the last day, when Jesus returns in glory, everyone will give an account before him. And for this reason, Jesus calls his disciples in every age to obey him diligently, and to watch carefully for his return.

After reporting Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, we find the last major section of Luke's gospel: the narrative of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection outside Jerusalem in Luke 22:1–24:53.

## **JESUS' CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION**

In this section of his gospel, Luke explained how Jesus actually accomplished salvation for his people. He fulfilled his heavenly Father's plan by offering himself as an atoning sacrifice. And he was rewarded with the throne of his father David, so that he now rules over his people as their king.

Luke's report of Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection can be divided into two parts: Jesus' arrest, trial, and death and his resurrection and ascension. Let's look first at Jesus' arrest, trial, and death in Luke 22:1–23:56.

### **Arrest, Trial, and Death**

The record of Jesus' arrest, trial, and death begins in Luke 22:1-6 with the plot to betray Jesus. Then, during the Last Supper, recorded in verses 7-38, Jesus prophesied the betrayal by Judas, as well as the fact that Peter would deny that he followed Jesus. But in the middle of these dark predictions, he assured the disciples of their place in his kingdom, and of his control over all these events.

Following the Last Supper, we find Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives in Luke 22:39-46. Jesus was in great anguish during this prayer, as we can see by the fact that he sweat blood, and by his desire that the Father would somehow allow him to avoid crucifixion, if it were possible. But through it all, Jesus never wavered in his strong trust in the heavenly Father, or in his commitment to the Father's plan.

Jesus' arrest in Luke 22:47-53 set in motion the events of Peter's denial in verses 54-62, as well as of Jesus' trials before the Jewish leaders, Pilate, and Herod in 22:63–23:25. Herod and Pilate both found Jesus innocent of any crimes against Rome that might have deserved death. Pilate, however, gave in to the pressure of the Jewish leaders and the crowd, and condemned the innocent Jesus to be crucified.

**People are sometimes puzzled when they read the Gospels about the response that the crowds have to Jesus at his trial and his death, as he's before the crowds and with Pilate, the crowds call for his death and the release of Barabbas. One answer is that we have to keep in mind the depths of human sin, that people are very sinful, and we are prone to injustice. And we're prone to being carried away with the sentiments of the crowd and doing what's wrong just because it seems like at the time it's the thing that will make us most comfortable or most popular or — we just get carried away and do the wrong thing. And I think there was perhaps an element of that at Jesus' trial. I think something else to keep in mind is that the crowds who were**

there were probably crowds of people that really agreed with the Pharisees, who were very set against Jesus. The chief priests, who were afraid of Jesus; they were afraid that the Romans would take away their power; they would get in trouble with the Romans politically if they didn't do something to Jesus. So, you have their very cowardly actions on one hand. You have the misguided actions of the Pharisees who were not uncourageous people, but who just were theologically misguided in opposing Jesus and wanted to get rid of him for that reason. And so the crowds assembled were not all of the people, but they were a select group of the people that probably agreed with those who were opposed to Jesus. It's very important for us to remember that all of the early Christians, in the earliest days of the church really, were Jews, and that the apostles were Jews, that Jesus himself was a Jew, and that there were many Jews that were positively disposed toward Jesus. And those who shouted for his death at the cross were probably a small subset of those who, with whom Jesus came into contact during his ministry.

— Dr. Frank Thielman

Interestingly, Luke's narrative of Jesus' arrest and trials doesn't focus on Jesus' coming death, but on his identity as the Christ. Listen to this exchange between Jesus and the Jewish leaders in Luke 22:67-70:

**“If you are the Christ,” they said, “tell us.” Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me... But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.” They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You are right in saying I am” (Luke 22:67-70).**

In this passage, Jesus identified himself as the Christ, the Son of Man, and the Son of God. All of these terms referred to the fact that he was the Messiah that had been prophesied in the Old Testament.

Following his trials, Jesus' crucifixion is described in Luke 23:26-49. In verses 43 and 46, Luke twice quoted words that Jesus spoke from the cross that none of the other gospel writers preserved for us. These words emphasize two of the points Luke had made repeatedly in his gospel: first, that Jesus was filled with compassion for the helpless; and second, that Jesus trusted his Father who was in control of all these events. In Luke 23:43, Jesus responded in compassion to the thief on the cross beside him, comforting him with these words:

**I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43).**

And in verse 46, Jesus cried out in trust to his Father, saying:

**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit (Luke 23:46).**

Luke made it clear that our Lord's final moments before his death were filled with compassion for others and trust in his Father. Then, in Luke 23:50-56, Luke provided the account of Jesus' burial in a tomb of cut rock, his body unprepared for burial because the Sabbath was about to begin.

It's not hard to see how Luke's persecuted readers might have identified with Jesus' sufferings. Whatever persecution they were enduring, Jesus had endured worse. And what's more, he had done it for them. If their Lord had been willing to suffer and even to die for their sake, certainly they should be willing to suffer and die for him. But this wasn't a mere debt. Just as Jesus was rewarded for his obedience and suffering, his obedient followers would also be rewarded for their suffering.

Lastly, after describing the events of Jesus' arrest, trial, and death, Luke concluded his gospel with the account of Jesus' resurrection and ascension in Luke 24:1-53.

**Resurrection and Ascension**

In 24:1-12 Luke reported the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb, the angelic messenger, and the bewildered disbelief of his disciples. Jesus had risen from the dead, just as he had foretold. He had conquered death for himself, and for all those who have faith in him.

Luke 24:13-35 picks up the story later that same day, when Jesus joined two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He taught them to read the Old Testament in light of his own ministry and resurrection. Everything the Bible had ever recorded pointed to Jesus and his saving mission.

Then, in Luke 24:36-49, Jesus appeared to his disciples and encouraged them to testify to these events. He told them to continue his mission by preaching the good news of repentance and forgiveness to all nations. Then Luke set the stage for his second volume, the book of Acts, by reporting Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit to empower them for this task.

Luke concluded his gospel in 24:50-53 with Jesus' bodily ascension into heaven. In response to this miracle, the disciples worshipped, rejoiced, and praised God. The good news of great joy that the angel had announced in Luke 2:10 had finally come to God's people. Jesus the risen, victorious Lord was their Savior.

Luke wrote to assure Gentile believers that they had made the right choice in following Jesus. Through the structure and content of his gospel, Luke demonstrated that every aspect of Jesus' life was part of God's plan to establish his kingdom. He was the son of God and the son of David who came to fulfill Isaiah's prophecies of salvation. Jesus was an unstoppable force of grace and mercy, who would bring all nations under his rule. He really had inaugurated the kingdom of God. He really was offering salvation to all families of the human race. And he really would save everyone that was faithful to him.

Having considered the background and the structure and content of Luke's gospel, we're now ready to address our last main topic. In this section of our lesson, we'll explore some of the major themes that Luke emphasized.

## MAJOR THEMES

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In general, we can say that all three of the Synoptic Gospels — Matthew, Mark, and Luke — share the same central theme: Jesus is the Christ who brings the kingdom of God. But each of these gospels deals with this central concept in different ways. So, as we explore this idea in Luke's gospel, we'll focus on Luke's description of the kingdom of God as salvation.

Luke used the words save, saving, salvation, and savior at least 25 times — more often than any of the other gospel writers. He stressed our desperate condition without Christ, and our need to be rescued. And he taught that the kingdom of God is our greatest salvation.

The term salvation is deeply rooted in the messianic hopes of the Old Testament. We can define it as deliverance from the tyranny of evil, and from God's judgment against sin. Throughout the Old Testament, and especially in the prophets, God taught his people that a messiah would eventually bring salvation from the effects of sin, and even from its presence.

In line with Luke's emphasis on salvation, we'll divide our discussion of the major themes of Luke's gospel into three parts that correspond to different aspects of Christ's saving work. First, we'll consider Luke's description of personal salvation. Second, we'll consider his portrayal of God as our Savior. And third, we'll survey the types of people that are saved. Let's begin with Luke's description of salvation.

## DESCRIPTION OF SALVATION

Throughout his gospel, Luke showed that personal salvation is primarily a matter of reversing people's conditions. It changes their persons and standing before God, and alters their fate so that they're blessed instead of cursed.

We are all born as sinners. And as a result, we're condemned by God and heading toward everlasting destruction. But the gospel offers us forgiveness of sins, so that God no longer has a reason to condemn us. As Luke often put it, salvation results in peace between us and God. And with our newly favored status, we receive everlasting blessings in God's kingdom, which we'll inherit when Jesus returns and perfects the earth. In that new earth, there will be no more sickness or death or disability or pain. And no matter what our lives are like right now, we'll be wealthy and privileged in the world to come.

**Readers of the Gospel of Luke often note that Jesus pays particular attention to groups that lack influence: women, Gentiles, children, for that matter, in the social context of Jesus' life and ministry. There is, I**



**think, a profound theological reason for this, and it stems from the fact that Luke understands God’s end-time rule in terms of advantaging the powerless. And, corollary that, disadvantaging the powerful, the reversal of roles actually. Now, in fact of course, this reversal of roles is not unique to the gospels or to the New Testament or to the notion of end-time or eschatological, you know, “kingdom of heaven is at hand” sort of reality. You find it all the way through biblical revelation. The book of Genesis, of course, repeatedly we note that second-born sons, for example, tend to be chosen over against first-born sons. This is a reversal of expectations. That’s just one example of the reversal of expectations that you have in the Old Testament which, as far as Luke is concerned, I think, comes to culmination, to a climax, to fulfillment in the great celebrated reversal of expectations that we have in the New Testament, especially, as I say, a reversal of the powerful and the powerless.**

— Dr. David Bauer

You’ll recall that in Luke 7, John the Baptist sent messengers to ask Jesus if he really was the Messiah. And Jesus replied by paraphrasing Isaiah 61:1-2 — the same passage he had read in the synagogue at the start of his public ministry. Listen once more to Jesus’ reply in Luke 7:22:

**The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor (Luke 7:22).**

Everything Jesus mentioned here was a form of salvation, a reversal from bad conditions to good conditions.

In the new earth, these bad conditions will be completely eliminated. And even now, salvation gives us a foretaste of those everlasting blessings. But the great reversals of salvation aren’t limited to our outward circumstances. They also change us on the inside. As Jesus said in Luke 6:27-36:

**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you... Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:27-36).**

The blessings of the kingdom don’t just reverse external circumstances. They also reverse the character and perspectives of those who are saved. As with external reversals, these internal reversals are manifested partially in the present world, and fully in the next world. Right now, we begin to think and act differently because we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and we see the world through new eyes. These changes will continue in

heaven, where we'll be totally free from the presence, corruption and consequences of sin. And they will be completed when Jesus returns and gives us our new bodies in the new earth.

These blessings of salvation explain why time after time in Luke's gospel the proper response to salvation is joy. One way that we see this is through the many songs Luke included, such as Zechariah's song in Luke 1:68-79, Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55, and Simeon's song in Luke 2:29-32. Joy in salvation is also mentioned in angelic announcements, such as the message given to Zechariah in Luke 1:14, and the good news of great joy delivered to the shepherds in Luke 2:10-11. And joy is the consistent theme of Jesus' parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son in Luke 15. Jesus summarized the response of joy in this way in Luke 6:21-23:

**Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh... Rejoice in that day and leap for joy (Luke 6:21-23).**

God intends salvation to give us joy. He wants us to rejoice because our sins have been wiped away — and because we have a peaceful relationship with him — and because we are inheriting the blessings of his kingdom. This theme was so important to Luke that he even closed his gospel with it. Listen to Luke 24:52-53, where he reported what the disciples did after Jesus ascended into heaven:

**They ... returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God (Luke 24:52-53).**

**When we see God for who he is, when we taste and see that the Lord is good, it should lead to joy, it should lead to delight. If I brought my wife flowers and I said to her, "here's some flowers, honey, because I'm supposed to give these to you," well, that won't be quite what she's after. It needs to be done with delight and joy because I adore her. And so, our delight in God becomes a fundamental expression of knowing God as he really is. And so delighting in God, joy in God, a sense of being satisfied in him is at the very core of the Christian life.**

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

With this description of salvation in mind, let's turn to our second major them: Luke's emphasis on God as our Savior.

## **GOD AS SAVIOR**

We'll consider God as our Savior in three steps. We'll see that salvation comes by God's power, according to God's plan, and through God's Son. Let's look first at the fact that salvation comes by God's power.

## God's Power

The Gospel of Luke regularly echoes the Old Testament idea that God is the Savior of his people. For example, this is a dominant theme in Luke's opening chapters, which set the tone for the entire book. Mary rejoiced because God was her Savior in Luke 1:47. Zechariah sang of the salvation God is bringing in Luke 1:68-79. And listen to what Simeon said when he held the baby Jesus in Luke 2:29-30:

**Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation (Luke 2:29-30).**

Simeon referred to God as the Sovereign Lord — or *despota* in Greek — ascribing to God power and authority over all creation. And with the term “your salvation,” Simeon indicated that God is using his power to bring salvation.

And this same theme continues throughout the rest of Luke's gospel. For example, John the Baptist proclaimed God's salvation in the context of his powerful renewal of the entire earth in Luke 3:6. And in Luke 18:26-27, Jesus taught that salvation is impossible with men, but that everything is possible with God.

Luke wanted his readers to understand that God is in control of everything. And therefore, salvation can't be accomplished by a human being's strength, intelligence, determination, or wealth. Salvation belongs to God. It's his work, accomplished by his power. Only God has the authority to release people from his judgment. Only God has the power to change people on the inside. Only God has the might required to bring his kingdom to earth. And only God has the ability to reward his people with the blessings of that kingdom.

Besides emphasizing that salvation results from God's power, Luke taught that salvation is part of God's plan.

## God's Plan

For example, when Jesus began his public ministry in Luke 4, he read from Isaiah 61:1-2. And he astonished the crowd by claiming that he was fulfilling that prophecy at that very time and place. And throughout the rest of his gospel, Luke continued to demonstrate that salvation is God's plan by showing that the dramatic events of Jesus' life fulfilled God's promises in the Old Testament. Listen to Jesus' words near the end his public ministry in Luke 24:44:

**Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:44).**

The entire Old Testament talks about the salvation that God is accomplishing through Jesus. It has always been God's plan to save his people in this way.

Another way Luke showed that salvation fulfills God's plan was by regularly pointing out that the things Jesus did were necessary because God had required or even appointed them to happen. As just one example, listen to the way Jesus described his suffering and death in Luke 9:22:

**The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life (Luke 9:22).**

Notice that when Jesus explained what was going to happen, he used the word "must," which translates the Greek word *dei*, meaning "it is necessary." Why was it necessary? Because God required it. Everything that happened to Jesus was part of God's ancient plan to save his people.

The third point we'll mention to demonstrate that God is our Savior is that salvation comes through God's Son Jesus Christ.

## God's Son

Luke's gospel repeatedly affirms that Jesus is the Son of God. Sometimes Jesus' sonship identifies him as God incarnate, as in the angelic announcement of his birth in Luke 1:32-35. At other times, it emphasizes his authority. We see this at his baptism in Luke 3:22, where God spoke his approval from heaven, and during his transfiguration in Luke 9:35, when God instructed people to listen to his Son. Still at other times it refers to his role as God's messianic vassal king, as during the Last Supper in Luke 22:29.

But all these references to Jesus as God's Son share at least one thing in common: they all indicate that Jesus is the one through whom God is accomplishing salvation. Jesus is God's Son that was sent into the world in order to rescue his people from condemnation by dying in their place, and by bringing God's kingdom to earth.

Sometimes Christians wrongly think that the Father is an angry God that hates us, and that Jesus is his rebel Son that came to stand up for us. But nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus only came to save us because his Father sent him. Yes, Jesus really is our Savior. And he really does save us from the Father's judgment. But it's critical to understand that the salvation he brings originates with the Father. As God's Son, Jesus only does what the Father commands. He uses God's power in order to fulfill God's plan. And in this way, Jesus' saving work is proof that God the Father is our ultimate Savior.

Now that we've looked at Luke's description of salvation and at God as our Savior, let's turn to a third major theme in Luke's gospel: the variety of people that are saved.

## PEOPLE THAT ARE SAVED

In Jesus' day, no one would have been surprised if he had offered salvation to those that held places of honor or power within society. No one would have wondered

why he saved the ones who strictly conformed to the letter of God's law. And no one would have marveled if he had condemned the people that Jewish society already despised, people that God had apparently passed over for blessing, because of some failing on their part. But that's not what Jesus did. And one of the major themes of Luke's gospel is to call attention to the surprising people that Jesus did save, and to the surprising honor and status he gave them.

**One of the things that is notable about Luke's narrative is that he is interested in the least, the last, and the lost and in fact one of his major themes is the theme of reversal. The least, the last, and the lost are going to become the first, the most, and the found in the kingdom of God. Luke is really interested in, if you will, the ethical side of the gospel. He's interested in what was distinctive about the ministry of Jesus that would be seen as commendable or virtuous and so one of the things that we certainly do see in both Luke and Acts which is a two volume work, Luke/Acts, is a concern for the poor, and for women and for the diseased and for the elderly. There's no question that there's more emphasis in Luke/Acts than in the other gospels about these kinds of things. I mean, so much so that when we deal with the beatitudes of Jesus, instead of Matthew's, "blessed are the poor in spirit" in Luke it's simply "blessed are the poor." And this is a real concern of Luke. He is concerned about this because he believes that not only does redemption come through Jesus, but also justice. A rectifying of the wrongs of society, of the fallenness of humanity is brought about by Jesus and he really wants to emphasize that Jesus is the Savior of the world. He's, if you will, the Savior for everybody. It's one stop shopping in Jesus whether you're one of the most or the most elite persons or well educated persons or the most well-known persons in society, or the very least of the least, Jesus is for everyone and Luke certainly wants to emphasize that.**

— Dr. Ben Witherington

For our purposes in this lesson, we'll limit ourselves to looking at just four surprising types of people to whom Luke frequently called attention, beginning with the Gentiles.

The Old Testament speaks of Gentiles eventually being brought into God's kingdom and receiving its salvation and blessings. But the Jews in Israel's day typically looked down on Gentiles as being excluded from the primary blessings of God's kingdom.

By the time Luke wrote his gospel, the Christian church throughout the world consisted largely of Gentile converts. Through history, God had clearly demonstrated his intention to bless the Gentiles in astounding ways. And as we saw earlier in this lesson, one of Luke's reasons for writing was to assure the Gentiles that they hadn't made a mistake by becoming Christians. So, throughout his gospel, he called attention to those

places where salvation had been extended to the Gentiles, in fulfillment of the hopes and ideals of the Old Testament.

For example, in Luke 2:10-14, the angels announced that the joy of the gospel would be for “all the people” and for “men on earth.” Rather than saying that Israel’s new king had been born to save the Jews, the angels spoke in much more global terms. And in Luke 2:32, Simeon proclaimed that the baby Jesus would be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles.” And while all four gospels quote Isaiah 40 in the story of John the Baptist, only Luke 3:6 extended the quotation to include the words “all mankind will see God’s salvation.”

Luke also noted that the Samaritans, whom the Jews counted as their enemies, could also be saved. For instance, in Luke 17:11-19, Jesus healed ten lepers, but the only leper to return and thank him was a Samaritan. And only Luke recorded the parable of the Good Samaritan, found in Luke 10:30-37, in which the Samaritan was an example of neighborly love.

Beyond this, Luke recorded times when Gentiles demonstrated real faith in Jesus as the Savior. For example, in Luke 7:9, Jesus said of a Roman centurion:

**I have not found such great faith even in Israel (Luke 7:9).**

And as we saw earlier in this lesson, Luke traced Jesus’ genealogy all the way back to Adam, implying that Jesus came to save Adam’s entire race, including both Jews and Gentiles.

The second surprising type of people that received salvation in Luke’s gospel was sinners. Now, in an important sense, all human beings are sinners. But there were some people in Jesus’ day whose sins were so great and so public that these people were essentially ostracized by Jewish society, like the immoral woman in Luke 7:36-50, and Zacchaeus the tax collector in Luke 19:1-9. Tax collectors were sinners because they made their living by charging their countrymen exorbitant tax rates that were not required by the government. But Jesus came to save even them. He was eager to grant salvation to anyone who repented in faith.

As just one example, listen to this story from Luke 5:29-32:

**Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:29-32).**

The third surprising group of people that are saved in Luke’s gospel is women. In the ancient Eastern Mediterranean world where Jesus lived, women didn’t have many rights in society, and they weren’t highly valued. But Luke gave attention to the way that Jesus brought salvation to them. In Luke 8:41-53, Jesus healed Jairus’ daughter and the woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. He also showed great compassion

toward widows, who in the ancient patriarchal society had no help and virtually no hope. Luke 7:11-17 and 18:1-8 illustrate Jesus' concern and care for these most needy people.

One of Luke's most dramatic teaching techniques that highlighted the salvation of women was contrasting humble women with proud male religious leaders. For instance, in Luke 13:14-15, Jesus called the ruler of the synagogue a hypocrite, while in the very next verse he called a crippled woman "a daughter of Abraham." We find a similar contrast in Luke 7:37-50, where Jesus accepted the adoration of an immoral woman while condemning the proud Pharisee Simon.

And for his ultimate example of what it means to love God, Luke related the story of Jesus' friend Mary. In Luke 10:27, Jesus taught that the two great commandments were to love God and to love our neighbor. Then, in verses 38-42, Mary exemplified how to love God, specifically, by listening obediently to his teachings. Not Peter, not John, and certainly not the Jewish leadership, but a woman was the model of godly piety.

Finally, the fourth surprising type of people that are saved in Luke's gospel is the poor. Luke began his gospel by pointing out that the family of Mary and Joseph was poor. We know this because in Luke 2:24, the offering they brought to the temple was the offering of the poor prescribed in Leviticus 12:8.

Luke also showed that Jesus favored the poor in places like the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21, and in his story about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. And listen once again to Luke 4:18, where Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1:

**The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor (Luke 4:18).**

Luke was the only gospel writer to report this event. And he included it as a model for Jesus' entire ministry. His point was that part of bringing the kingdom of God is proclaiming the good news of salvation to the poor. Luke took special care to point out that the God of the universe had become incarnate to save even those that society despised. Gentiles, sinners, women, and the poor had very few rights in Jewish society and weren't expected to inherit the greatest blessings of God's kingdom. But Jesus rejected that value system. He offered full acceptance and endless blessings to everyone that received him as Savior and Lord.

**Of all the gospel writers Luke has a particular emphasis on marginal groups in Palestinian society of his day. We see him constantly pairing up accounts of men with accounts with women. We see him also paying particular attention to the Samaritans, paying attention to the poor. We see this parable for example that's indicative of Luke's gospel, only found in Luke's gospel, about Lazarus and the rich man. And we see again, a parable only in Luke, the Good Samaritan parable. And so these accounts of Jesus' teaching fit very well with his programmatic sermon in Nazareth. It says that, I have come, today the Scripture is fulfilled; the Spirit is upon me to declare good news to the poor and to the captives, to the oppressed. And Jesus tells his disciples that when they're going to have a banquet they should invite the lame and the poor as well. And so Jesus is illustrating something**

very important, that in our relationship with other people who bear God's image, we aren't to sort of think of ourselves better than we ought, is the way Paul put it. But we should see that Jesus reached out in grace to every aspect of society. He called his disciples to do that. And we are to do that as well. Jesus is ridiculed for spending time with the prostitutes and the sinners and the way that he responds is that, I have come, not for the righteous, but for the sinners. And so it's not only a reflection of Jesus' mission to reach every aspect of the people of God, of his society of that day, but it's also a sense of who we really are, of our real need as well. That we all need the grace of God, that we cannot merit God's favor on our own good works or our own station in society, and therefore we're all on equal ground before God and should be gracious to one another and reach out to each other because we have the same sort of need.

— Dr. Greg Perry

## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson, we've explored the Gospel of Luke by considering its background in terms of its author and original audience, and the occasion of its writing; its structure and content; and its major themes that revolve around the topic of salvation. If we keep these ideas in mind as we read Luke's gospel, we'll have a better understanding of his meaning, and be more prepared to apply it to our lives in the church and in the world.

The Gospel of Luke presents Jesus as the glorious Son of God who came to earth as the loving Savior of the world. He extends the good news of God's salvation to everyone, regardless of ethnicity, wealth or status. In his own day, Luke's gospel assured Gentile Christians that they hadn't made a mistake by following a Jewish Messiah. And the same is true in every age. Since the first century, the vast majority of the church has been Gentile. And we haven't made a mistake either. And as followers of Christ, it's our responsibility to keep preaching that same good news of repentance and faith to everyone in the world, knowing that we have the only message that can bring real salvation.



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