

The Gospel of Luke

Luke 1:1-8:21

The Structure

- A. Preface (1:1-4)
- B. The Birth of the Savior Messiah Lord (1:5-2:52)
- C. The Inauguration of Jesus' Kingdom (3:1-4:13)
- D. Jesus' Kingdom Begins in Galilee (4:14-6:49)
- E. Who is this Jesus? (7:1-9:51)
- F. The Journey to the Throne (9:51-19:27)
- G. Jesus in Jerusalem of Israel (19:28-21:38)
- H. The Climax of the Kingdom: Passion Death and Resurrection (22:1-22:53)

The Inauguration of Jesus' Kingdom (3:1-4:13)

The birth narratives set the stage for the formal inauguration of Jesus' Kingdom ministry. Luke has three parts to this section: The Baptism of Jesus, The Genealogy of Jesus and the Temptation of Jesus.

The Baptism of Jesus

Luke frames the Baptism of Jesus in relationship to the larger political scene:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. –Luke 3:1-2

Jesus Kingdom is in direct contrast to the prevailing Roman and Jewish leadership. Jesus' baptism marks a new political reality for the kingdoms of this world. The true and rightful leader of the world is stepping on to the scene of history. How will the people of the world respond?

At the heart of John's message is prophetic announcement of judgment with a call for serious and immediate repentance. He warns against presumptive faith in genealogical heritage rather than the "good fruit" of faithfulness to YHWH. "Good fruit" is identified for the wealthy, the tax collector and the soldier as sharing with the poor, repenting of abuse of power, dishonesty and extortion.

Jesus told with a display of power and divine authority, "You are my beloved Son; with whom I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22) That is an identification that Jesus is Israel's king. The divine utterance establishes the identity and authority of Jesus as the King according to 2 Samuel 7, Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42:1. However, Luke emphasizes with his placement of the Genealogy that Jesus is Son of God of all mankind.

The Genealogy of Jesus

Matthew and Luke both have a genealogy for Jesus. Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the restorer from exile, the Son of David, and a Heir of the promises to Abraham. While Luke traces Joseph's line through David and Abraham, he takes the line all the way back to Adam, "the Son of God". Luke is subtly laying groundwork for Paul's teaching, that Jesus is the *Second Adam*.

⁴⁵ Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

--1 Corinthians 15:45-49

Adam is the first Son of God in whom all mankind have fallen into sin and incurred the consequence of death. Jesus as the second Adam, will raise to new life all who are in him. (cf. Romans 5:12-21)

The Temptation of Jesus

Just as Satan questioned the veracity of God's words with the first Adam, "did God really say", he does so again. God said "you are my son..." to which Satan counters, "IF you are the Son of God...." (4:3, 9 cf. 4:41) Where the first Adam failed, the second Adam prevailed. Indeed, it would seem that the correct faith in correct interpretation of God's word is fundamentally at issue in the temptation story.

So the temptation mirrors Adam's temptation and fall into sin, but the story also carries the remembrance of Israel's failure to trust in God's word in the wilderness for 40 years.

Israel		Jesus
Deuteronomy 8:2	Divine Leading in the Wilderness	Luke 4:1
Deut. 8:2; Ex. 16:35; Num. 14:34	"Forty" (Years/Days)	Luke 4:2
Ex. 4:22-23	Israel/ Jesus as God's Son	Luke 4:3, 9
Deut. 8:3	Temptation: Manna/Bread	Luke 4:4
Deut. 6:13	Temptation: Idolatry	Luke 4:8
Deut. 6:16	Temptation: Testing God	Luke 4:12

Clearly where Adam and Israel have allowed Satan to dominate and control through manipulation, Jesus has fulfilled and ultimately will be given authority over Satan through the Word of God and the Spirit of God. As Luke's readers contemplate their own relationships with the powers at be, they learn that the Word and the Spirit are stronger than any other force in heaven or on earth. This will be demonstrated first in Galilee.

Jesus' Kingdom Begins in Galilee (4:14-6:49)

The Sermon in Nazareth

Luke frames the Gospel ministry of Jesus by first recounting the sermon he preached in Nazareth:

*And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.
¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,*

*¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” –Luke 4:16:21

Jesus was quoting from Isaiah 61:1-2 where the prophet announces a Jubilee, the Year of the Lord's Favor, where the consequences of sin and bondage are reversed. Luke's Gospel (and Acts) emphasizes this Jubilee program as the heart of Jesus ministry which includes:

- The Spirit-filled anointing *of Jesus* for announcement and action
- Good News to the Poor
- Release to the Captives
- Sight to the Blind
- Release to the Oppressed

The residents of Nazareth embrace the announcement of Jubilee but apply it only to themselves. Jesus challenges them to see that Jubilee is a gift not just for the people of Israel, but for the whole world. The people of Nazareth react violently to Jesus challenge of their narrow provincialism.

The narrative progresses to Capernaum, where Jesus liberates a man oppressed by the spirit of an unclean demon. He then heals Simon's mother-in-law of a fever which "leaves her". The Year of the Lord's favor had begun and the liberation was manifest in astonishing authority and power. "What is this

Word? With authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!” For Luke the power is in the Word and the Spirit, proclamation and action. The Good News of the kingdom is announced and the evil must depart. This kingdom ministry of Word and Power would not be accomplished by Jesus alone, he would first enlist several fishermen to his service.

Fishing for People (5:1-32)

Through a demonstration of fishing expertise with massive catch, Jesus reveals the nature of a calling for Simon Peter, James and John:

And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” –5:10

But first Jesus would have to teach them how to do it. The first catches of people would be equally as powerful, a leper is healed and “made clean” (5:12-14) and a paralytic is forgiven of his sins and empowered to walk. Through these actions, Jesus reveals that he is the master fisherman for people—God in the flesh. The Pharisees rightly ask, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” The Son of Man has the authority to forgive sins because the Son of Man is the Son of God!

By manifesting the kingdom in word and power, Jesus’ gained a growing band of followers called “disciples”. These disciples increasingly became the target of the religious leaders. The Pharisees questioned the inclusion of the tax collector Levi and other “sinners”. When asked why Jesus openly ate with these sinners he replied,

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” –5:32

The question of table fellowship would no doubt be in Luke’s readers minds as well. With whom should Christians associate and share their meals. “Shared meals symbolize shared lives—intimacy, kinship and unity.” Jubilee applies to the socially outcast as much as to the sick and poor. A restructuring of social relationships must take place in the Kingdom. The old garments and old wineskins can’t handle the new patch and new wine...and that will be distasteful to many who had a taste for the old wine! (5:36-39)

In Jesus, God is doing a new thing. Indeed, that is why Jesus disciples celebrate and feast, “the bridegroom is with them” (5:34)—the Lord of the Sabbath is with them! (6:5)

Jesus finally calls 12 “apostles” out of all the disciples which he had gathered around him. These 12 would be equipped to be the “fishers of men” who would be “sent out” to catch people for the Kingdom. The number twelve is significant in that through these 12, Jesus is reconstituting the twelve tribes of Israel. He is putting new wine in new wineskins! (5:38)

The Sermon on the Plain (6:17-6:49)

The Sermon on the Plain has many similar elements to the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew's Gospel. Both of these sermons represent consolidations of Jesus teachings. It is likely that he taught these messages over and over again in various contexts and at various times. The similarities and differences are accounted for by the repetition of the themes and both Jesus' and the Gospel writer's emphases in the sermon based on their context and audience needs.

In this sermon, Jesus is essentially defining the Kingdom worldview and life. There is a pattern of the World to which people conform and there is the transformed life in Jesus to which the disciple is transformed. (cf. Romans 12:1ff)

The Content of the Sermon focuses on:

- Blessings and Woe
- Generosity toward the poor and needy
- Mercy and love toward enemies
- Reconciliation and restoration, forgiveness and repentance
- The need for total and internal transformation

Jesus calls his followers to not only be hearers of the word but doers of it. The great multitude "comes to hear him and be healed" (6:18), but Jesus is looking for commitment and action! (6:46-49)

Jesus Demonstrates His Teaching (7:1-50)

The call to be merciful to enemies is one of the more difficult teachings of Jesus. Following the sermon, Jesus puts his own words into practice by showing love and concern to Roman Centurion servant and poor widow's son. Both episodes reveal issues of power, authority and status. It is the powerful Roman's humility and faith that impresses Jesus, it the widow's grief for her only son that moved him to compassion. The kingdom of God recognizes lowly humility and human need and responds with power.

Unresponsiveness to the Kingdom's Call (7:18-35)

Jesus compared the generation of Pharisees and scribes to a then-popular children's song:

*'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.'* —Luke 7:32

The song invites the hearer into response, but no response is given. That generation was skeptical of the invitations of God offered through John the Baptist and Jesus. Hence, they did not dance, and they did not weep. The Gospel writer Luke says that they had "rejected the purpose of God for themselves." (7:30)

John the Baptist called them to a baptism of repentance, but they refused to be baptized by him. The prophet sang the dirge, but they did not weep.

Jesus proclaimed the Good News of forgiveness and restoration for the sinner and the broken-hearted. He celebrated and ate with them, but they refused to come to the party table. The Lord played the flute, but they did not dance.

When we have a skeptical and critical spirit, could it be that we have no faith? Are we so skeptical of being “taken in” that we refuse to “enter in” to the abundant life that God has for us? Skepticism and a critical spirit could really be a mask for our unresponsiveness to God’s call on our lives. Remember, that in refusing to be baptized, the Pharisees “rejected the purposes of God for themselves.” Are we humbly responsive to the purposes and call of Jesus on our life?

It is easy to stand on the sidelines and be a critic. The Lord would have us enter into the divine drama as a participant. The kingdom of God calls us to enter into all the ups and downs of life and love. At times, the Lord sings the dirge that we might plumb the depths of repentance and weep over our sin and brokenness. At other times, he plays the flute with a joyous invitation to dance with the rhythmic freedoms of his grace.

A Right Response: The Sinful Woman (7:36-50)

The “sinful” woman who anoints Jesus feet with ointment reveals the true response that leads to salvation in the Kingdom. She is contrasted with the Pharisee and owner of the home who failed to show any hospitality to the Lord and only a critical spirit. Jesus identifies the heart of the issue between the two:

Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven. —Luke 7:47-48

The depth of a disciple’s understanding of God’s forgiveness of his or her own sins leads to a depth of love in the disciple. Salvation transforms character.

Proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom (8:1-56)

In Chapter 8 of Luke, we see three main themes: The power and agency of Jesus to save, the active presence of diabolic agents and influence, the gathering of faithful followers and the importance of authenticity.

Jesus is called “Master” (8:24) and Son of the Most High God (8:28). At issue is the peoples and disciples response to his word and his authority and power. Jesus is like a sower planting seeds. He is looking for a fruitful harvest. However, powerful forces such as the demonic power of the devil, oppressive persecutions and testings , and the worldly allure of riches and cares threaten to prevent belief and salvation. The authentic disciples “are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.” (8:15)