

WHY FOUR GOSPELS? THE FOUR-FOLD PORTRAIT OF CHRIST

in
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

by

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

LUKE — THE HUMAN AUTHOR — AND HIS PURPOSE

Some think Luke was a Jew; others, that he was a Gentile. In either case, he was a Christian physician, a man of culture, a careful historian, and a faithful friend. From the opening verses of the book of Luke and the opening verses of the book of Acts, we learn that he was used by the Holy Spirit to be the human author of both these portions of the Word of God; for he addressed both books to his friend, Theophilus.

With true humility, he kept himself in the background in both records. Yet from *The Acts of the Apostles* we can trace his close companionship with Paul by the use of the pronouns, “**we**” and “**us**.” He went with the great apostle on some of his missionary journeys, and was with him during his long imprisonments in Caesarea and Rome.

- It was Paul who called him “**the beloved physician**” (Colossians 4:14).
- It was Paul who wrote of him, saying that he was his “**fellow-laborer**” (Philemon 24).
- It was the aged Paul who, knowing that his own martyrdom was at hand, wrote the touching words, “**Only Luke is with me**” (II Timothy 4:11).

Evidently “**the beloved physician**” stayed with the great apostle even until he was beheaded by the wicked Nero. Little wonder Bible students have believed that Luke’s Gospel story reflects the influence of Paul, even as Mark’s narrative shows the influence of Peter.

The book of Luke is written in classic Greek, and is the most beautiful in style of all the New Testament books, the most finished in form. It sets forth the most orderly arrangement of the life of Christ on earth, of any of the four Gospels. It is written in the style of the Greek historians. For poetry and song it is unsurpassed. And for historical accuracy we need only compare Luke’s stated purpose, in the preface to the narrative, with the many definite dates and historical incidents mentioned in the first three chapters of the Gospel.

Let us read what he wrote to Theophilus about his purpose and plan — to present an orderly, authentic history of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus:

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first (or ‘from above’), to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed” (Luke 1:1-4).

Then follows a chain of definite dates and facts which only the careful historian would be likely to give; here are some of these, found only in Luke:

“ . . . in the days of Herod . . . ” (1:5).

“ . . . in the sixth month . . . ” (1:26).

“ . . . about three months . . . ” (1:56)

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed (or ‘enrolled’). (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria). (2:1, 2).

“And when eight days were accomplished . . . ” (2:21).

“Anna . . . seven years . . . a widow of about fourscore and four years” (2:36, 37).

“And when he (Jesus) was twelve years old . . . ” (2:42).

“Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberias Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests . . . ” (3:1, 2).

“And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age . . . ” (3:23).

Only the careful historian would pause to give such details of lasting value to a permanent record. And as we follow through the narrative, we see how accurately Luke recorded the facts, faithfully preserving one of the most important narratives in all the Word of God.

Of course, he was guided by the Holy Spirit, as were all the inspired writers; but the fact remains that God chose a scholarly master of classic Greek to pen this portrait of the sinless Son of Man.

In this connection, it is of interest to remember that Luke is the only one to tell us that the risen Lord **“showed Himself alive after his passion . . . forty days”** before he ascended into heaven (Acts 1:3). He was a historian, true to his task.

AN OUTLINE OF LUKE

While we are not attempting, in these lessons, to make an analytical study of the four Gospels; yet we do believe that a brief outline of the content of each book will help us to understand the purpose of the Holy Spirit in recording each Gospel narrative.

A very broad outline of Luke, therefore, might be as follows:

I. Introduction, 1:1-4.

II. The Birth and Boyhood of Jesus, 1:5-2:52.

III. The Preparation for His Public Ministry, 3:1-4:13.

IV. The Galilean Ministry of the Son of Man, 4:14-9:50.

V. The Journey of the Son of Man from Galilee to Jerusalem, 9:51 — 19:28.

VI. The Official Presentation of the Son of Man as Israel's King, and His Rejection, 19:29-21:38.

VII. The Suffering and Death of the Saviour of the World, 22:1-23:56.

VIII. The Resurrection; the Resurrection Ministry; and the Ascension of the Son of Man, 24:1-53.

From this outline, we note that the major portion of the book is devoted to our Lord's ministry in Galilee and on the way to Jerusalem as He "**set his face steadfastly toward**" His cross. Here again we see the wide scope of the purpose of Luke, to present the Son of Man as the Saviour of the world, laboring in "**Galilee of the Gentiles.**" It is Matthew who emphasized His ministry to the Jews.

PASSAGES RECORDED ONLY BY LUKE

The purpose of the book of Luke is abundantly evidenced by the many incidents and teachings recorded by the Holy Spirit in this third Gospel alone.

Luke has more to say about the birth, infancy, and boyhood of the Christ Child than do the other three evangelists. He alone tells of the seventy disciples sent out by the Son of Man to minister to Gentiles, as well as to Jews.

The many parables of our Lord, recorded by Luke alone, have "a distinctively human and seeking note." Here only do we read of the Good Samaritan, despised by the Jews. Here alone do we find the story of the repentant thief, as well as three of our Lord's sayings from the cross, all in keeping with the plan and purpose of the book.

Let us make a list of the most striking of these facts and teachings recorded by Luke only, taking them in order as they are written on the sacred pages. We shall not attempt a discussion of them, although we shall pause for passing comments on some of them, which particularly illustrate the purpose of the Holy Spirit in writing this account of the earthly life and ministry of the Son of Man, who came "**to seek and to save that which was lost.**" And, of course, it goes without saying that these passages are recorded nowhere else in the Scriptures, since they are omitted by the other three evangelists.

Perhaps it will help us to remember the facts which Luke alone tells us of the birth, infancy, and boyhood of Jesus if we bear in mind that all of chapters one and two are recorded by no one else in all the Word of God, even as the first two chapters of Matthew are found there and there alone.

We might list the different incidents as follows:

- The preface to the Gospel, 1:1-4. In this we note that the book is addressed to a Gentile, as the name, "**Theophilus**," indicates.
- The appearance of the Angel Gabriel to Zacharias, prophesying the birth of John the Baptist, 1:1-20, and the following verses, 1:21-25.
- The appearance of the Angel Gabriel to Mary, and the annunciation, 1:26-38.
- Mary's visit with Elizabeth, 1:39-56. This includes Mary's song of praise, known as "*The Magnificat*."
- The birth of John the Baptist and "*The Benedictus*," Zacharias' song and prophecy, 1:57-80.
- The decree of Caesar Augustus, and Joseph's and Mary's journey to Bethlehem, 2:1-5.
- The birth of Jesus; the manger; the shepherds; the angels with their message of "**a Saviour . . . to all people**," Gentiles, as well as Jews, 2:6-20.

The circumcision of Jesus,
2:21-24.

It is significant that, even in His infancy, all the demands of the Law of Moses were fulfilled concerning the Lord; because He came, "**not to destroy, but to fulfill**" it; because He was the absolutely holy Son of Man and could not break His own holy law; and because He came to fulfill it for us who could never keep it for ourselves.

It is also noteworthy that the offering presented by Mary, according to the Law, evidenced the lowly position of Joseph and Mary; it was "**a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons**." Had they been other than poor, they would have presented a lamb also. (See Leviticus 12:1-8).

Because He was born into the humble home, the Son of Man knew the experiences of the poor; and knowing them, He can "**succour them that are tempted**" and tried by the privations of poverty.

The adoration of Simeon and Anna, and their testimony to the advent of the Saviour, 2:25-38. Simeon's prophecy is significant; for it foretells salvation for "**all people**," describing the Lord Jesus as,

"A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel," 2:32.

The silent years of the Child Jesus in Nazareth, 2:39, 40.

The Boy Jesus in the temple at the age of twelve, 2:41-52.

Many have commented upon the beautiful songs of the book of Luke; and in these two opening chapters we have some of the most wonderful. For their beauty of style, for their praise and adoration of the Saviour of "**all people**," they are unsurpassed:

Mary's song of praise; the prophecy and song of Zacharias; the angels' song; Simeon's song and prophecy. (See Luke 1:46-55; 1:68-79; 2:14, 29-32). (Then there are the poetic quotations from the Old Testament, found in Luke 3:4-6; 4:10, 11, 18, 19; 7:27; 20:42-44). The genealogy of Mary, as well as the historical facts recorded in Luke 3:1, 2, we find only in this third Gospel.

In the opening lesson of this series of studies we compared in some detail the two genealogies of Christ, in Matthew and in Luke. It would be well for us to turn back to those pages, unless we are well established in the teaching they present. Just here we shall only remind ourselves that Matthew, writing to the Jews, traced our Lord's genealogy from Abraham to Joseph, the legal head of the Nazareth home, through whom Christ received the legal right to David's throne; whereas Luke traced Christ's genealogy back to Adam, the federal head of the race, giving us Mary's lineage and Christ's natural right to the throne of David.

Herein, we recall, is a remarkable illustration of the separate purposes of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the two accounts, thus giving the complete portrait of the King of Israel who is also the Son of Man and Saviour of the world.

Christ's reading from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth is found only in Luke. The entire passage is recorded in 4:16-30, and is so remarkable that we pause for a brief comment on the wonder of it. Taking the book of the Prophet Isaiah in His hands, the Lord "**found the place where it was written,**" in Isaiah 61:1, 2, foretelling His first and second comings into the world.

And the significant fact is that, having read about His first coming "**to preach the gospel to the poor . . . to heal the broken-hearted . . . to preach the acceptable year of the Lord,**"

He "**closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down,**" saying also, "**This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.**"

He purposely stopped reading, breaking off at the comma, in the middle of a sentence of the prophet; for the following words foretell Christ's second coming into the world to execute judgment "**in the day of vengeance of our God.**"

Moreover, it is in keeping with the purpose of Luke that he should be the one used by the Holy Spirit to tell of the desire of the Son of Man to preach the Gospel to the poor, to minister to the broken-hearted, the captives, the blind and bruised.

The verses which immediately follow this incident are also peculiar to Luke, and significantly so; for in them our Lord reminds the Jews of the Nazareth synagogue that in the days of Elijah and Elisha blessing had come upon the widow of Sarepta and Naaman the Syrian — Gentiles — rather than upon unbelieving Israelites.

Luke has in mind the whole world, which Christ came to redeem! Luke is the only one to tell us that the wicked men of that synagogue tried to cast the Lord down from the brow of the hill outside the city of Nazareth, but could not because "**he passing through the midst of them went his way**" (Luke 4:29, 30).

- The miraculous draught of fishes is recorded only by Luke, in 5:1-11, although in John 21:6-8 we read of a similar occurrence after the Lord had risen from the dead.
- The raising of the son of the widow of Nain from the dead (Luke 7:11-17) is found only in this third Gospel. So also are the following passages:
- The Lord Jesus in the house of Simon, the Pharisee, anointed by the sinful woman whose sins had been pardoned, 7:36-40.
- The parable of the creditor and the two debtors, addressed to Simon, the Pharisee, 7:41-50.

- Christ and the twelve in Galilee, ministered unto by the women, 8:1-3.
- Christ's final departure from Galilee, and His rebuke to James and John, 9:51-56.

The seventy disciples sent forth **“into every city . . . whither he himself would come,”** not to the house of Israel only, as the twelve were sent first, recorded by Matthew. This is another striking illustration of the purpose of Luke. The Lord's mild rebuke to the seventy upon their return, when they evidently were boasting that even the demons were subject unto them, led Him to utter a very important statement concerning His eternal deity, for He said unto them, **“I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.”** Only the eternal God could have spoken such words — and Luke alone records them.

The Good Samaritan is peculiar to Luke, and again it fits this particular Gospel.

The Jews despised the Samaritans; but the **“Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost”** — Gentile, as well as Jew. Indeed, He is Himself the One of whom the Good Samaritan speaks; for He came down where we are to lift us up out of the pit, where Satan had left us robbed and wounded by sin.

Martha serving; Mary worshipping, 9:38-42, we find only in Luke.

Two parables on prayer, 9:5-13, are recorded only by Luke; they are: the parable of the importunate friend, and the parable of fatherhood. Then, too, Luke is the only evangelist to tell us that it was **“as he was praying”** that one of His disciples said unto Him, **“Lord, teach us to pray.”**

And following that petition, He gave them what is commonly called **“The Lord's Prayer.”**

As the Son of Man, Christ depended upon His Father in heaven for strength and fellowship; therefore, Luke has more to say about His prayer-life — a human experience — than do any of the other Gospel writers.

Christ's denunciation of the lawyers, 11:45-54, is found only in Luke. So are the following:

- The parable of the rich fool, 12 :16-21.
- The parable of the steward and his servants, 12:42-48.
- “Christ a divider of men,” 12:49-59.
- Jesus' warning concerning repentance, 13:1-5.
- The parable of the barren fig tree, 13:6-9.
- The woman loosed from **“a spirit of infirmity,”** 13:10-17.
- Jesus teaching on the way to Jerusalem, 13:22, 23.
- His healing the man with dropsy on the Sabbath, 14:1-6.
- The parable of the ambitious guest, 14:7-15.

Two parables regarding the test of discipleship:

- The parable of the tower,
- The parable of the king going to war, 14:28-33.

The three parables concerning the lost, in chapter fifteen:

- The lost sheep,
- The lost coin,
- The lost — or prodigal — son.

Twice in this chapter we are told that “**there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth**” (verse 10).

- The parable of the unjust steward, 16:1-8.
- The rich man and Lazarus, 16:19-31.
- A parable of service, 17:7-10.
- Ten lepers healed, 17:11-19.

Luke is careful to tell us that the only one who “**returned to give glory to God**” was a despised Samaritan — in this “Gentile Gospel.”

- The reference to Lot and Sodom, 17:28-32.
- The parable of the unjust judge, 18 :1-8.
- The parable of the Pharisee and the publican, 18:9-14.
- The story about Zacchaeus, ending with the key verse of the book, 19:1-10.
- The parable of the ten pounds, 19:11-27.
- The Lord’s weeping over Jerusalem — Luke is the only one to mention His tears in this lament, 19:41-44.

The destruction of Jerusalem foretold in a way different from the kindred passage in Matthew 24. According to his purpose, in writing to Jews, Matthew prophesied concerning the coming Antichrist and his “**abomination of desolation**”; Luke, according to his purpose, tells how “**Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled**” (21:24).

The “**times of the Gentiles**” began with Nebuchadnezzar, and will end with the return of Christ in glory as the “**smiting stone**” which Daniel saw. Then “**the times of the Jews**” will once more continue their course, with Christ as their reigning King. Here is another highly significant illustration of how the Holy Spirit guided the pen of each writer, according to His divine purpose, even to the most minute details.

Peter and John were the two sent to prepare the Passover feast; Luke only mentions their names, 22:8.

The strife among the disciples at that feast is recorded only by Luke, 22:24-30.

The Lord’s warning to Peter, with His assurance that He had prayed for him, 22:31, 32. How much Luke tells us about prayer! Our Lord’s praying and our own need for prayer!

“**An angel . . . from heaven**” strengthened the Lord in Gethsemane, 22:43. Here His humanity is emphasized, in that our Lord was the Son of Man.

“In an agony he prayed . . . and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood,” 22:44. Again, Luke only gives us this glimpse of His suffering — as the sinless Son of Man.

“Sleeping for sorrow” are the words of the Lord, used only by Luke, to describe Peter, James, and John in their weakness, as they slept throughout His agony in the garden, 22:45. It was the sympathetic Saviour who looked upon them in compassion!

“Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?” the Lord asked Judas, 22:48. Only Luke tells us this — doubtless an expression of yearning over the hardened traitor.

The healing of Malchus’ ear, 22:51, is recorded only by Luke, the physician. (John 18:10 tells us the name of this servant of the high priest).

“The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter” following that disciple’s denial, 22:61. Only Luke tells us of that look which broke Peter’s heart.

Jesus before Herod, 23:6-12, is described only by Luke.

The Lord’s warning to the **“daughters of Jerusalem”** who lamented Him is mentioned in Luke only, 23:27-31.

“Calvary,” the Gentile name, is used by Luke alone, 23:33. It is the Latin form for the Aramaic word, **“Golgotha,”** meaning *“The skull.”* John tells us it **“is called in the Hebrew Golgotha”** (John 19:17).

Three of Christ’s sayings from the cross are found only in Luke; none of the other four are mentioned by this third Gospel. These three express His compassion and human sympathy, His power to forgive sins, and His trust in His Father — as a Man.

Needless to add, they also set forth a perfect example in forgiveness, in love for the souls of men, and in faith in the Father in heaven. We quote them here:

- **“Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do,”** 23:34.
- **“Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise,”** 23:43.
- **“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,”** 23:46.

The conversation between the two thieves, as well as the Lord’s promise of salvation to the one who repented, Luke only tells. This is but another illustration of the compassion of the Lord Jesus, so beautifully portrayed by **“the beloved physician.”**

The testimony of the Roman centurion is in keeping with the purpose of Luke. Matthew and Mark tell us that this soldier, witnessing the crucifixion, said,

“Truly this man was the Son of God,” Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39.

Luke, however, emphasizing His humanity, expressed it like this,

“Certainly this was a righteous man,” 23:47.

The reference to the women who **“beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid,”** their return to prepare the **“spices and ointments,”** and their resting on the **“sabbath day according to the commandment”** — all this detail is given us only by Luke, whose record has been called *“The Gospel of womanhood,”* with its emphasis upon the ministry of women to our Lord.

The walk to Emmaus with the two disciples, filled as it is with His wonderful teaching and glory, is found only in Luke.

This last chapter of the book has been called by some the most human of our Lord’s post-resurrection ministry — His eating before them, His showing the disciples His hands and feet, to prove that His risen body was real; His opening to them the Old Testament Scriptures concerning Himself; His breaking bread in their presence. As another has expressed it,

“He brought them to the written Word and left them there, with no fresh revelation.” None other was needed!

The risen Lord’s appearance to Simon, Luke 24:34; cf. I Corinthians 15:5, is found in Luke and I Corinthians only.

“A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have,” the risen Lord said to His disciples, as only Luke tells us, 24:39. Here again we see a glimpse of the reality of Christ’s resurrection body. He did not say, “. . . **flesh and blood**”; for His blood had been shed on the cross; and He had a new body, a spiritual, resurrection body, yet a very real body. **“The life of the flesh”** of this earthly existence **“is in the blood”** (Leviticus 17:11). But in His glorified body the disciples saw **“flesh and bones”** — immortal, glorious, and real.

The promise of the Holy Spirit, spoken after He arose, and the command to **“tarry at Jerusalem”** until He should come in power — these words are given only by Luke. However, John has very much to say about the promise of the Holy Spirit in our Lord’s farewell discourse, uttered shortly before He went to the cross to those eleven who loved Him.

The closing words of Luke greatly resemble some of the opening words of Acts, which book is but the sequel to the Gospel story as recorded by **“the beloved physician,”** and tells us what Jesus continued “to do and to teach” through His own Holy Spirit in the early church.

The Lord’s ascension from Bethany on the slope of the Mount of Olives is mentioned only in Luke 24:50 and by the same evangelist in Acts 1:12. While Mark tells us of His ascension into heaven, yet he does not mention the place from which Christ left the earth.

In our former lessons we saw that Matthew does not record this event because He is emphasizing the Lord’s relationship to this earth, as King over His earthly people, Israel. We saw that Mark pictures the risen Lord still **“working with”** His own in His intercessory ministry at the right hand of God. John gives no account of the ascension, evidently because he is writing particularly about our Lord’s eternal deity and omnipresence.

It was the “**Man Christ Jesus**” who was “**carried up into heaven**” (Luke 24:51). Some have seen in the word “**carried**” the thought of the humanity of the Lord Jesus.

The note of joy and praise and worship, with which Luke closes, is peculiar to this third Gospel:

“And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.”

It has been pointed out that Luke’s Gospel story is the most complete of the four, in that it opens with the prophecy of the birth of John the Baptist, and closes with our Lord’s ascension and His disciples’ obedience in returning to Jerusalem, there to wait for the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Here again we see that Luke was writing after the manner of the historian, guided always by the Spirit of God. Accordingly, His narrative is doubtless more in chronological order than are the others, even as he said to Theophilus that it was his purpose to “**write . . . in order . . . a declaration of those things which are most surely believed**” among those who love the Lord. (See Luke 1:1-4).

These passages recorded by Luke alone are not only abundant proof that the four Gospels are not mere reiterations of the same truths — although all four tell the story of the cross and the empty tomb; but these passages found in Luke only are also a remarkable key to the understanding of the purpose of the Holy Spirit in writing this book of Luke.

They aptly illustrate what we stated in the beginning of this lesson, that this third Gospel emphasizes the sinless humanity, the sympathetic love, and the world-wide scope of the compassion of the Son of Man and Saviour of Gentile, as well as Jew.

This is, indeed, the Gospel message “**to all people**,” even as the angel of the Lord said unto the shepherds on the night of the Saviour’s birth, and even as Simeon testified to the Jews when he held in his arms “**the Lord’s Christ**” in the Person of the Baby Jesus. (See Luke 2:10, 31).

Let us consider the contents of this list of passages, recorded by Luke only, long and prayerfully, that we may remember where to find them, and how to use them in telling lost men and women and boys and girls of the compassion and love of the sinless Son of Man.

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