

LUKE STUDY NOTES

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Personal Notes

What follows is a record of my own work I did in thinking through Luke, attempting to understand his work enough to pass it on to all of you. What I have written below is not a polished manuscript. Just warning you—you will find typos and grammatical errors. But it will give you a reference to help you understand more about the message Luke was conveying to Theophilus.

The purpose of writing these notes was different from my normal habit of seeking out the meaning and application of words and phrases. I assume that any human writer starts out to write with a desire to impact in some specific way whomever will read their writing. Any artist does the same thing. They want to inspire, motivate, change, enlighten, or perhaps entertain. There is something motivating them to write, something that needs to be said that they feel has not yet been said. To that end they have a purpose in what they choose to record and a purpose in the order they put it in even when they do a poor job of it!

Though the writings of Scripture are a special work of the Holy Spirit and therefore distinct from any others, I have learned that they still bear the marks of the human author the Holy Spirit inspired. His inspiration with regard to the writing of Scripture had much in common with the inspiration we have seen in artists and authors in the course of normal human existence. Its uniqueness is it is error-free. Like normal artistic inspiration the Holy Spirit's inspiration results in an intentional order, in a theme or themes and key ideas that resurface. No writer working under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit set out to simply put in writing a series of random events or ideas.

In bringing you this particular WE series, Kyle and I wanted our congregation to see these kinds of things in Luke's writing. So below you will read my own search of the text for an understanding of Luke's heart in writing as He did. So below you will see what I found as I searched for unifying ideas, what we call the "ideas that stitch the book together." I constantly asked several questions as I wrote my way through the book. Why did Luke choose to report the events He did from Jesus' life? Out of so many events to choose from, why did Luke choose these? Also, why did he report such events in the order he did? Are there ideas that tie each incident Luke chose to report from Jesus' life to the one he reports before it and after it? Are there some key ideas that are repeated? You will be blessed to see that it is possible to see such things in Luke's work.

There are a couple more things you should know as you read. From time to time I have noted a Greek word. Don't be intimidated by this. The meaning of the Greek word is usually noted immediately after. Don't labor over trying to pronounce the Greek, just move on to the meaning. Also, I use the NASB version of the Bible in my personal study, and so that will be reflected often in my quotations. If you read from any other version, you might feel confused at times. I hope you can get past that!

I pass this document on to you hoping that it will spur you on to a deeper experience of the life Jesus made available to us. Know this from me, His way is a great way to live.

Luke 1

Luke 1:1-4

Luke opens with some personal comments to the recipient of this account, a man named Theophilus. Several words/expressions that Luke uses give us insight into the nature of his account of Jesus' life that follows.

First, "many" had compiled such accounts, or "narratives" (ESV), of the things God had done through Jesus. And so there were multiple accounts of the events surrounding Jesus' ministry at the time Luke wrote. We don't know the nature of these accounts. We know that of the accounts that may have existed we have only those of Matthew and Mark that likely existed when Luke wrote. Most believe John gospel came later, though this is far from certain. Even if Luke wrote last, there were only three accounts we recognize of the life of Jesus that are legitimate. So we are uncertain as to what these "many" accounts were that Luke references. Luke has felt led to place his narrative out there with these other accounts, whatever they were.

Luke states that it is essential that any such accounts stand in agreement with the testimony of the Apostles. Luke clearly states that His account does. He calls the Apostles "eyewitnesses and ministers of the *λογος*." In this context that Greek word refers to the message of God as it was communicated through Jesus. So the Apostles were regarded by Luke as the guardians of the revelation God gave through Jesus. They controlled what was to be embraced and trusted out of all that could be said about Jesus. It is inferred by Luke's words that in this earliest season in church history there was this important rule that there must be apostolic authority behind such an account for it to be accepted as authoritative in the Church. It follows then that however many such accounts of Jesus' life might appear, Luke was recording for Theophilus what could join other apostolic testimony to serve as a standard by which the truth about Jesus could be properly discerned.

Second, Luke states that his narrative is "an orderly account." This short phrase is the ESV rendering of the Greek word *καθεξης*. It is a term peculiar to the writings of Luke. Its emphasis is not necessarily chronological. It seems it refers first and foremost to a purposeful order as opposed to a random one (Luke 8:1; Acts 3:24; 11:4; 18:23). So Luke has written with a specific purpose in mind. It would be reasonable then to expect to see in Luke's words unifying ideas and themes. We would expect to find such ideas and themes re-appearing in Luke's account so that we would get the big ideas he was trying to communicate.

Third, Luke states a primary purpose of his writing—so that the reader can know the exact truth about the things he had been taught. The Greek word rendered "exact" is *αοριστη*, a word that means secure, or safe. Luke's aim is to strengthen Theophilus' trust and faith, to give him strong confidence in the things he had already been taught. Therefore we would expect to find things in Luke's writing that inspire our faith and confidence—agreement and consistency with what we as Christians have already accepted as true.

Luke 1:5-7

Luke gives a context in time for the events he is about to report, citing them as occurring in the days of Herod king of Judea. Already his words are taking on a tone of precision so that the reader can have confidence in them.

Luke then introduces Zechariah and Elizabeth. Both are immediately linked to the past history of Israel. Zechariah is introduced as a priest according to a certain order, a division of the Levitical priesthood. So in him we are introduced to a man that was a part of all Yahweh had established centuries earlier. Zechariah was faithful to this ancient order of Yahweh.

The name of Zechariah's wife is not immediately given, but instead she is described as of the offspring of Aaron. Her name will be given in verse 7. Her background has the effect of strengthening the story's linkage to the people and events of the old covenant. When we are given her name, Elizabeth, we also are told that she was barren, something generally associated with the curse of the Old Covenant. We are also told they were both advanced in years. This statement will make the events forecasted in the verses that follow more incredulous, an effect Luke clearly wants to create through his writing.

Luke 1:8-18

Luke is deliberate in supplying us with details about the event that is about to occur in the story of this elderly couple. It is an event Zechariah experiences while he is alone, while he was routinely performing priestly duties. It occurs in the holy place of the temple. This gives the entire story that is about to unfold, the "account of the things accomplished among us" a holy, somber aura. It also harmonizes the event with the entire Jewish tradition. Though Luke was a Gentile, his narrative was not about something entirely new that Yahweh was doing. It was a continuation of an older Israelite story just as the writers of that story had projected.

An angel, a particular one whose name will be given later, appears to Zechariah and we are told that "fear gripped him." Luke reports "fear" and "amazement" frequently in his account (See Appendix 1). Fear and amazement are the reactions of those who were key players in the events surrounding the births of John and Jesus (1:65, 74, 2:9, 18, 33, 37-38). The same ideas appear in Luke's account as the frequent reactions of both believers and unbelievers to the spiritual and physical powers displayed by Jesus (2:47; 4:32, 36; 5:9-10, 26; 7:16; 8:25, 37, 50, 56; 9:34, 43, 45; 11:14; 20:26; 24:22, 41). Along the way as Luke speaks of this he injects at several point statements about the "fear of man" (12:14; 20:2) and then towards the end the important statement of the repentant thief on the cross regarding the fear of God (23:40). Finally Luke will report Jesus dealing with the fear of the disciples that they were seeing a spirit as He appeared to them after His resurrection (24:37-40). Fear seems to be an important human emotion to Luke.

The angel addresses these fears first. Then Luke reports the message the angel delivers. It is concise and full of detail. In their old age they would have a son. They were to name him John. He would give them joy. His birth would bring many joy and we are told why. A hint is given that he would separate himself from the excesses of humanity, but the big idea is that he would be "filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb."

This is a rather astounding projection to any Jewish couple living in that era. By all standards of their history and their Scriptures this would certainly be a cause for great joy. It would also be a signal that this life would fill a significant function in Yahweh's plan. Only the greatest of men in Jewish history had experienced and manifested the presence and extra-ordinary power of the Spirit of Yahweh. Of none had it been said that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in the womb.

In the writings of Luke the Holy Spirit is given a central role (See Appendix 2). He is mentioned twelve times in chapters 1-4:18 (1:15, 17, 35, 41, 67, 80; 2:25-26; 3:16, 22; 4:1, 14, 18). The book closes with Jesus stating the coming promise of the Father. This promise was the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell all believers. In between there are many accounts of evil spiritual beings being subjected to the work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus. It is not an overstatement to say that Luke's account is not only the story of the God-man. It is the story of what humanity looks like when indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The hope of this promise was significant to the Jews and central to what Luke wanted to convey to his readers.

The thought of Zechariah would immediately have drifted to Elijah. The verses that follow affirm the great deeds this child—John by name—would accomplish. They also link the child to the ministry of Elijah and to the specific prophecy of Malachi that projected that Elijah would appear again before the Promised One (Malachi 4:5-6). This was a mysterious prophecy that no doubt had fueled much speculation.

Luke 1:18-25

These verses report Zechariah's doubt at this incredulous projection. The angel rebukes this doubt. He does so by citing his own identity—Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God. There is no indication as to how Zechariah was to know this and the Angel's reaction to Zechariah's doubts seems rather abrupt and severe. However the sign given that the message was trustworthy was significant in several ways—to Zechariah's own belief, to the belief of those who would witness the life of John, and to those who would read Luke's account. This is the first of many signs that Luke would report that would provide readers with the certainty of the events reported and being taught by the leaders of the Christian movement.

This section concludes with a brief but significant statement about Elizabeth's seclusion. Her seclusion is mysterious, but would have had at least two effects. First, it would add to the anticipation of those few to whom the story was known, who would be wondering if any of what the angel had said would come to pass. Second, it would create a certain drama when after five months Elizabeth was seen in public and was noticeably pregnant. Perhaps the seclusion of Elizabeth is noted by Luke only to give us a time frame for what he is about to report next.

Luke 1:25-38

Luke switches the account quickly from Zechariah and Elizabeth to a young virgin named Mary. However he uses Elizabeth's pregnancy to establish the timeframe of what he will report about Mary. The incident he will describe happens in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

It is at this time that the same angel that appeared to Zechariah, Gabriel, appears to Mary. In reporting this Luke is careful to show the lineage of her husband-to-be, Joseph. He was a descendant of David. Again linkage is established between the history that has gone before and the events that Theophilus had learned of.

Luke reports that Mary's first reaction to the angel is like that of Zechariah, she is "greatly troubled." Again, such human emotions will be brought out continually in Luke's account. Luke connects this reaction specifically to the greeting of the Angel. It is possible to see in the Old Testament times when those to whom Angels came with such greetings went on to some very difficult assignments (Judges 6:11-12).

The Angel's message is packed with all sorts of profound truth. There was the matter of a miraculous conception he projected. There was the name of the baby, Jesus, meaning "Yahweh saves." Then there is the identity of the child who will be called the Son of God Most High (See Appendix 3) and who would be the hoped-for King of an endless kingdom.

Mary is stopped cold however over the miraculous conception and the impossibility of all this since she was a virgin. She knew this beyond a shadow of a doubt and was unafraid to claim it before an angel of God. The angel explains that the Holy Spirit will bring about this conception and birth. So Luke again mentions the Holy Spirit and Jesus is projected as the child of the Holy Spirit and therefore the child of God. Again, Luke seems to want the readers to see the tremendous power of this person, the Holy Spirit, who by the time of this writing indwelt Theophilus and each and every believer in Jesus. In a sense, everything that Luke will describe as having been accomplished by Jesus is by this statement of lineage attributable to the Holy Spirit.

Knowing that this would all seem so incredulous to Mary, Gabriel gives her a sign whereby she could have confidence in the truth of the message. The sign is Elizabeth's pregnancy, this relative of her who was known to be barren. This helps us see why the statement that this all came about in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy was important, and it provides the explanation for what Mary would do next.

Luke's record of the last thing the Angel Gabriel says to Mary is "nothing will be impossible with God." We are given a projection of a life that would radically change the course of the destiny of humanity. By that life humanity would be rescued and ruled. This is followed by this watershed statement that "nothing will be impossible with God." The wording in the original suggests that God is bound only by His own will. Nothing that God has decreed is impossible. It is the assurance of the eventuality of all the good things the angel has projected.

We see in Luke's record of this short statement that "nothing will be impossible with God," a technique employed several times by Luke in his account to Theophilus. Luke records short, pithy statements that provide clarification and great inspiration to people of faith (see also 5:8, 29; 14:15-24; 19:39-40).

Luke 1:39-56

What happens next happens immediately and "with haste" after Gabriel had appeared to Mary. So it occurs in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Luke reports that Mary's first response to the visit of the Angel was to travel to see Elizabeth. This was no doubt to confirm the words of Gabriel since he had given the fact that Elizabeth was now in her sixth month of pregnancy as the sign that his words to Mary would come true.

Luke reports that at the sound of Mary's voice reaches the ears of Elizabeth two things happened. Her own baby, John, leapt in her womb and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. In Elizabeth's greeting to Mary she calls Mary the mother of her Lord. This could only have been known by her through a revelatory event that is unrecorded or by some piecing together of the revelation of the Old Testament Scriptures. Her understanding is like that of David's, that this son of David was also her Lord (Psalm 110:1). Elizabeth then blesses Mary for her belief in what the Lord had revealed to her. This had been evidenced by Mary's having made the trip to confirm Elizabeth's pregnancy.

It is likely at the sight of Elizabeth being pregnant that Mary's joy becomes full and overflows in her prophetic song. Mary's immediate testimony in the song is that her own "spirit rejoices." It is safe to

view this song as the work of the Holy Spirit, confirmed not only by Mary's words but also by its presence in Luke's account.

Thus far in the first chapter of Luke we have the Holy Spirit mentioned three times. There is the projection that John would be filled with the Holy Spirit while in the womb (verse 15). We have read of Mary conceiving Jesus as a result of the Holy Spirit (verse 35). We have also read of Elizabeth's being filled with the Holy Spirit (verse 41). It is likely that Mary is speaking as a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit, though Luke does not state this. Thus far very early in this account addressed to Theophilus Luke very deliberately presents the Holy Spirit as the agent of the events that make up the story of the things accomplished by God through Jesus. This presentation of the Holy Spirit will continue to be very conspicuous well into chapter four.

Mary's song presents her thankfulness, but also projects that in this child the world's ruler has been birthed. His life will dramatically alter world history. It will also bring about the fulfillment of the things promised to Abraham. So we find for Theophilus more unmistakable linkage established between what God accomplished in Jesus and the narrative and prophecy of the Old Testament.

Luke notes that Mary stayed with Elizabeth for "about three months." She may have witnessed the birth of John, or she may have left just before that birth. In Luke's account there is a shift away from Mary and back to the events of John's birth. If Mary is present at John's birth, Luke does not note it.

Luke 1:57-87

Luke gives an account of John's birth, and John's circumcision. There was controversy concerning the name he was to be given. Luke reports this to show that at the very moment Zechariah confirmed that the baby was to be named John as the angel Gabriel had instructed, Zechariah's ability to speak returned to him. This was confirmation from God that the angel's message about this child was trustworthy. He was the forerunner spoken of by the Old Testament and he was filled with the Holy Spirit before he was born.

The witnesses of Zechariah's restored speech understood all this. Luke reports their reaction to what they witness. He says that "fear came on all those living around them." This is the second time he has mentioned the fearful reaction of people who witness the great works of Yahweh. Further, Luke reports that an expectation developed in them regarding John and adds that "the hand of the Lord was certainly with him." This all has the effect of affirming that the extra-ordinary projection by the Angel Gabriel that John would be filled with the Spirit while still in his mother's womb had occurred.

Luke 2

Luke 2:1-7

Luke shifts quickly away from the infant John to the birth of Jesus in these verses. He spends considerable time giving that event a timeframe in history that was known to the early readers. He also names the place of the birth, and why that was the place of Jesus birth—that Joseph was of the “house and family of David.” Both provide more important linkage for the readers between the life of Jesus and the projections of the Old Testament.

The actual birth of Jesus Luke handles with around just 30 words in our typical English versions. He seems content with three details that emphasize the humble trappings chosen by God to mark the event. He notes that Jesus was wrapped in cloths, placed in a manger, and that this occurred because there was not available to them the more ordinary accommodations. The swaddling of Jesus and the fact that He was in a manger would become important details in what comes next in Luke’s narrative.

Luke 2:8-20

These verses report the visit of angels to a group of shepherds, their message to them about the significance of the birth of an infant in Bethlehem, and the infant’s identity. The appearance of this angel was sudden and Luke again notes fright as the emotion of the moment as these shepherds encounter the special work of Yahweh.

The angel declares the nature of his message, specifying that it is one of “a great joy for all the people.” The term “the people” is one that effectively relates the news to Israelites. It is good news specifically to them because it relates to promises made specifically to them with respect to the curse of the Old Covenant they were under. The angel refers to the place of the birth of Jesus as “the city of David.” In noting these things Luke effectively affirms to the readers that Old Testament projections were fulfilled in Jesus’ birth.

The message affirms this infant with three terms of ascending significance. The baby was a Savior—one who rescues. The baby was Christ—the promised anointed one, Yahweh’s appointed King. The baby was “the Lord.” This was a term that equated Jesus with Yahweh of the Old Testament. All of this terminology points to very specific promises made to the nation in the writings of the Old Testament.

This spectacular news may have been too good to believe in had the angel not given an affirming sign. The sign was that this baby could be found in Bethlehem wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. The shepherds recognize the immensity of the statement of the angel, and go searching for this child lying in a manger swaddled in cloths in Bethlehem. When they find Him, just as they had been told they would, their faith in what the angel said about this Child, that He was “a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, was energized. It was at this point that they “made known the statement that they had been told about this Child” (verse 17). This news proclaimed by these shepherds stirred those who heard it to “wonder,” a term which did not express doubt, but rather mystified them. There was much to ponder in this event if it was as the shepherds said.

In a very personal way Luke relates to us Mary’s reaction to these things. She stored up all of it pondering the details and their implications. There was so very much for her to ponder as a young mother of this child.

Luke 2:21-38

Of all the incidences that Luke could have reported regarding the childhood of Jesus, he chooses two. Luke devotes the rest of this chapter to reporting these two incidents. Both of these occur in connection with the Temple in Jerusalem. Both seem given to strengthen the connection between all Yahweh had done under the old covenant and the coming movement of Jesus.

The first incident is reported in this section. It occurs a short time after the birth, after Jesus' circumcision when according to the prescribe pattern of the Law regarding first born sons Joseph and Mary bring Him to the temple to present him to Yahweh. Luke is careful to point out to the reader that even as an infant Jesus' life conformed to the Law.

The important portion of this incident however, is a spontaneous ministry orchestrated by the Holy Spirit by two old saints who clearly witnessed to all present that Jesus was Yahweh's promised deliverer. The first of these two witnesses was a man named Simeon. Luke is careful to associate His actions with the activity of the Holy Spirit, mentioning the Holy Spirit three times in conjunction with Simeon's presence at that moment in the temple.

After doing this Luke records Simeon's words, which clearly name Jesus as the promised means of Salvation. Simeon also says that Jesus was a "light of revelation to the Gentiles." So we have the understanding communicated for the first time in Luke's letter to a Gentile that God's work through Jesus would extend beyond Israel to all people (See Appendix 6).

Simeon goes on to speak to Mary. He reveals the fact that Jesus would be opposed by Israelites at great consequence to them and at considerable pain to Mary. This theme of the opposition within Israel to the promised one in Israel becomes a recurring theme in Luke (See Appendix 5). The "piercing" introduced in these words will of course also be a recurring theme as Jesus projects his own suffering.

The second of these old saints is a prophetess name Anna. Her arrival on the scene is reported by Luke in a way that implies the same divinely orchestrated moment as that explicitly expressed of Simeon's arrival. Her words are not quoted but it is clear that she spoke of Jesus being the one designated by God to bring about redemption.

After the report of this incident in the life of Jesus when He was an infant Luke reports the family's return to Nazareth. He also reports that Jesus "continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." The last statement of this commentary sets up what the reader will feel as they read Luke's account of a second incident from Jesus childhood.

Luke 2:41-52

The second incident Luke wishes us to know about occurs when Jesus is 12 years old. He has just made the comment that the grace of God was upon Jesus (verse 40). This section appears to be given to illustrate this. After all, we would expect that if God indeed became a human, that the child would be extra-ordinary.

Luke points out two things that were extra-ordinary about Jesus as a 12 year old. First, all were amazed at His understanding. Here we have the reaction of amazement once again appearing in connection with the presence of God among humans. We would expect that. And so the experts are amazed at both the things Jesus asked and the things he answered.

The second extra-ordinary thing about Jesus as a 12 year old is his answer to his parent's understandable dismay at not being able to find him. He expressed his dismay that they did not understand that he would be doing His Father's business. This was a many-faceted statement that they did not understand. It suggests that he understood his mission and identity better than they did. Once again Mary is said to "treasure these things in her heart" (see verse 19). This emphasizes the extra-ordinary aspect of Jesus' life even as a child.

After giving us this sample of how the grace of God was visibly on Jesus even as a child Luke closes this section with another statement of Jesus growth and development like the one that occurred after the first childhood incident Luke reported (verse 40). We are told that "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

Luke 3

Luke 3:1-14

At this point Luke takes the reader once again to the story of John, that other baby who had been born six months prior to Jesus. We left the account of John with the comment from Luke that John continued “to grow and become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel (1:80). In this section we will see the beginnings of John’s public appearance to Israel. So Luke has fast-forwarded us roughly 18 years.

Once again Luke begins this section with some notations that allowed the events he is about to report to be placed in a timeframe. As he moves from who was emperor to those who ruled in the affairs of Israel we see that all the principles involved in the death of Jesus are in place. Pilate, Herod, Annas and Caiaphas are all named.

Luke reports that at this time the word of the Lord came to John while he was in the wilderness, the place he was said to have gone to when Luke last mentioned him (1:80). As a result of receiving this message John moves near the Jordan River and begins preaching “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” So John called people to repentance—to change their direction with respect to Yahweh. He called them to be baptized as an expression of this. This was likely pretty dramatic. A Gentile wishing to be considered as one who had embraced faith in Yahweh and become an Israelite was baptized. In such a case Baptism was seen as a symbol of Israel’s safe conduct through the sea in the exodus. The Baptism of John then was nothing less than a symbol of a reconstituted Israel. That this was the understanding of the ministry of John is evidenced by Luke in the quote of Isaiah 40:3-5. That passage is directed to Israel to comfort them because Yahweh had a plan for their restoration and redemption. In preparing their hearts for Yahweh’s Messiah they would recognize Him and find in Him forgiveness for their sin. The passage in Isaiah speaks in symbolic terms of repentance.

Based on this role in the plan of Yahweh John’s message is a straight-forward declaration of the need for changed behavior. Luke gives a number of examples in this section of behaviors John called specific groups of people to embrace.

A significant part of Luke’s account comes to us in his record of John’s warning to the Jews. He warned them that there was no safety for them from Yahweh’s judgment merely because they were ethnic Israelites. A profound declaration is made by John in this matter when he notes that “from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham” (verse8). This was a projection that as ethnic Israel refused to be Yahweh’s people, God could and would raise up a people for Himself out of the gentiles. Luke will report Jesus taking the leaders of Israel under Annas and Caiaphas back to this imagery of John on the day of His triumphal entry as they were rejecting Him (19:40-44).

Luke 3:15-17

Luke reports that John successfully raised in Israel an expectation of Christ. When they begin to wrongly conclude that John was himself the Christ John defers. Luke reports how John deflected this expectation. He spoke of another mightier than Himself.

He was mightier in the sense of what he would accomplish in the lives of people, both believers and unbelievers. John baptized all who repented in water. The coming one would baptize all people. Those who repented would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Those who did not would be baptized with “fire”, a symbol of judgment. By reporting this statement of John Luke not only effectively sets

up the introduction of Jesus' ministry. He strengthens further the association of the Holy Spirit with the incarnation of the Son of God. Now the Holy Spirit is not only the agent in the event. He is to some degree Himself the object of it. The incarnate One would immerse His followers in the Holy Spirit.

It is noteworthy however that John speaks more in Luke's account of the judgment Jesus would bring than the actual indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Luke 3:18-21

Here Luke reports the ending of the public ministry of John. He will switch the readers to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He will only go back to John one more time (7:18-28). We have no idea how long John's ministry lasted. Luke seems content to present it with an abrupt beginning and an even more abrupt end.

John's ministry is effectively ended by Herod. Luke does not report the event in detail (See Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29). He seems to want to create an irony in the mind of the reader through the story of John's ministry. John came into the world already filled with the Spirit. Yet his ministry ends and he dies at the hands of the wicked. He was the greatest of men, yet died alone in prison the victim of the vilest of the vile. Herod, the offspring of Esau, triumphed over the offspring of Abraham and Levi. Where is the kingdom of heaven in that? The nature and makeup of this Kingdom of God is important to Luke and his writing aims at the readers rightly understanding the kingdom experience in the fallen world.

Luke 3:21-22

This is an account of the Baptism of Jesus. His baptism is reported as one of a number that were occurring. It is what happens after it that Luke uses to mark Jesus' uniqueness and allows this to be the launch in His account of the ministry of Jesus. Luke presents Jesus as praying after he was baptized. He does not indicate whether this was normal or abnormal. That makes the reader think it was normal. However something extraordinary happens. Heaven opens in some way that a visible effect was created. The Holy Spirit then ascends visibly on Jesus. Then in an audible voice Yahweh declares Jesus to be His beloved Son with whom He was well-pleased. The rest of Luke's book gives evidence to establish in the readers mind the certainty of this declaration. The Holy Spirit's mention will gradually diminish, though it will still be mentioned. The Son's words and actions as inspired by the Holy Spirit will take center stage because these are the focal point of what Yahweh was accomplishing during these short years of earth history.

Luke 3:23-38

It is at this point that Luke gives the genealogy of Jesus. As His ministry begins Luke wants to remind the reader that Jesus is the Son of David, as he has already shown, of the tribe of Judah, the legitimate King whose right it is to rule all things (Genesis 49:10). Jesus fits with Old Testament prophecy. His ministry is a continuation of all that was revealed in the Old Testament (See Appendix 4). But perhaps also Luke wishes to emphasize Jesus' humanity.

Luke's genealogy of Jesus speaks of Jesus being "supposedly" the son of Joseph. This is consistent with the fact that Luke has reported already that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, not through an act of Joseph with Mary. In addition Yahweh has just declared that Jesus is His beloved son.

The genealogy gives what we believe to be a genealogy of Mary, since it is distinct from the genealogy given by Matthew. The theory is that Luke is saying that Jesus was “supposedly” the son of Joseph, but he was definitely physically (genetically in our terms), a descendant of Eli who we suppose to be Mary’s father and Jesus’ grandfather. If this is true we find that Mary too is of the offspring of David. But again the primary thing Luke seems to want to emphasize is that Jesus fits in the human stream initiated in Adam. He was human.

Luke 4

Luke 4:1-13

The last thing said of Jesus before the statement about His age and the lengthy genealogy was that the Holy Spirit descended on Him. Then we have the statement that He began His ministry at about thirty years of age. Immediately after giving the genealogy Luke states that Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit, before describing any action done by Him. His next statement affirms this by saying that He “was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.”

Two important ideas that Luke communicates here are that Jesus was being led and directed by the Holy Spirit, and that simultaneously the devil was tempting Him.

Luke gives a sampling of the temptation the devil placed in front of Jesus. Much has been said and can be said about this temptation. Much can be made of Satan’s tactics. Much can also be made of how Jesus dealt with it. These are all important and useful applications of the text.

We must not miss the fact that the temptation was related to who Jesus was and the rights and privileges of being the Son of God. So Jesus was tempted just as we are, but at the same time with things that were deeply personal to Him, greatly beyond us, and not necessarily relative to us. Our commonality to Jesus’ temptation is primarily in the fact that it had to do with what Yahweh had Him on earth to be and do. The temptation was aimed at normal human vulnerabilities such as our desire to minimize our pain and our desire to be recognized and affirmed for who we are. They were also aimed at Jesus faith and trust in the Father’s goodness, as they are with us.

Luke closes the section by noting that Satan confronted Jesus with “every temptation.” This indicates that what Luke has recorded is only a sampling of Jesus’ temptation. It also lets us know that this temptation was extensive and included the full gamut of temptation. Luke also lets us know that this forty day period of temptation was not the only temptation Jesus faced.

Luke 4:14-15

Following the temptation Luke records that Jesus returned to Galilee and began what we normally associate with His ministry—His public teaching. Luke is careful to immediately note that as Jesus does this He is doing so “in the power of the Spirit.” He notes briefly that Jesus was “praised by all.”

Luke 4:16-30

So far in Luke’s account much has been made of God’s presence and working in the events and people associated with the incarnation. In the first three chapters Luke has presented very little by way of opposition to what God is doing. At every turn the Holy Spirit is working and in a sense God is “running unopposed.” That began to change with the record of John’s warnings to his audience and then his abrupt imprisonment. The account became more ominous with Jesus’ temptation. Still at this point we have Jesus’ public ministry beginning and Him being “praised by all.”

Luke will lead us through a great shift in this section. It is a shift that helps us understand the strong opposition to the Holy Spirit that runs beneath the surface of human affairs and behaviors even among God’s people. It brings out the extent of humanity’s need for Yahweh’s salvation.

Luke reports Jesus' ministry in His hometown. This story reflects the classic human response to the truth of God. There is our initial response in which we appear willing and anxious to obey. Then there is our resistance that comes about on further reflection.

Jesus does in His hometown what was customary--He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He also did what was normal in that he participated in the reading of the Scripture from the scroll that the person in charge handed to Him. That Scroll was the writing of the prophet Isaiah. Thus far nothing unusual has happened. He is a normal person of influence and recognized as a legitimate minister of the things of Yahweh.

Jesus chooses a passage from Isaiah 61. He reads what is in our version the first two verses. This is a description by Isaiah of the ministry of Yahweh's Anointed One--the Messiah. It describes what the Holy Spirit has anointed the "anointed one", the Christ, to do. Jesus stops after reading the first line of verse two. He does not continue so as to complete Isaiah's thought. He sits down. It is an awkward moment He has intentionally created by this short and incomplete reading. Luke records that all were looking at Him. This was because the entire incident demanded something more. As a teacher Jesus had rightly peaked their interest and engaged them.

Luke notes how Jesus "began" to speak. Luke will inject his own narrative into Jesus' speech, telling us of the audience's response. But he lets us know how Jesus began as the audience sat in awkward, silent anticipation. He began to speak by saying, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." By beginning in this way Jesus lets all know that His ministry, as empowered by the Holy Spirit, was Divinely purposed according to the first seven lines of Isaiah 61. Much more would follow in the future even as the Spirit had proclaimed through the prophet Isaiah's words. But for the present this was the Divine directive Jesus would carry out. The very next line in Isaiah's description was, "and the day of vengeance of our God." This Day of Yahweh would be later. For now God wished to proclaim through Jesus His grace.

Luke notes the first response of the audience. They are speaking well of Him. There is wonder, or amazement in their opinion. Once again Luke notes this classic first response among humans to the results of the miraculous works of the Holy Spirit.

He also notes where their minds begin to go in their analysis of what is happening in front of them. It is the small flaw that will quickly develop into a deep fissure between this crowd in the synagogue and Jesus. They think simply, "Is not this Joseph's son?" Luke leaves us with that and does not interpret it for us. He simply goes back to a report of Jesus' message to them. But because we know ourselves we know what might be their next thought—"Who does this guy think he is and who is he to instruct and correct us?" Jesus' words are about to be marginalized in their minds, not because the words were not true, but because of their implications.

From a human point of view, this might have been the right time for Jesus to back off. But in anticipating their growing response He wades right into the heart of the matter. In fact, He suggests that the unbelief they were beginning to entertain was the problem historically in Israel. This is a hint at the truth that will become more apparent as His ministry goes on, that He will be rejected by Israel and received by gentiles (See Appendix 6). Jesus could not have said anything more true, but neither could He have said anything more incendiary.

Luke reports their violent response, their attempt to end Jesus' life. The transition within a few verses in their mood is extra-ordinary. It all makes for a quick change in the dynamics of Jesus' public ministry that will be visible in the rest of the account (See Appendix 5). Luke has reported the opposition to Jesus from the Spiritual realm—dramatic, a forty day testing from Satan himself. Now he has reported the opposition to Jesus in the human realm. It is equally dramatic. It comes from

those Jesus had long relationship with and who were part of a long history with Yahweh. They start out together in a synagogue reading Scripture together on a Sabbath. They end up an angry mob seizing Him and trying to throw Him off a cliff.

From this point on in Luke's account we will see Jesus ministry continuing in the power of the Spirit, we will see it press forward and impact the spiritual realm, and we will see it gain momentum in spite of growing human opposition. Finally, we will see this kingdom prevail against all these forces though in an ironic way, leaving them apparently victorious but stripped of all power.

Luke 4:31-42

Luke has spoken often of the Holy Spirit's presence and His workings in Jesus. That language begins to disappear from Luke's account, though the power of the Holy Spirit continues to be very evident. We now begin to see a series of confrontations between Jesus with His wisdom and authority of the Holy Spirit, and evil spirits and symptoms suffered by humanity as they live in a fallen world subjected to evil.

The first of such confrontations that Luke reports happens in a synagogue in Capernaum, a city of Galilee. The people's response to Jesus as He taught is noted by Luke as one of amazement, because His words had authority. Luke notes this often as a response to Jesus, but does not give us the reason for this feeling that was inspired in people as Jesus spoke. He simply allows us to assume that it was because of the presence of the Holy Spirit and His power and His anointing—all things Luke has established thus far in his account.

In this synagogue a demon speaks through a man. The man cries out in the synagogue and identifies Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus responds by rebuking the demon and commanding him to leave the man. The demon does this in dramatic fashion.

The thing Luke wants the reader to know is the amazement that then wells-up in the witnesses of this event. He gives the word that began to be circulated, the people's assessment of Jesus that accompanies their amazement: "What is this message? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." Luke then notes the spread of this growing populist kind of fervor.

Luke follows this with more that affirms that the peoples' amazement was well founded. The story of His healing of Peter's mother-in-law shows His power over all that comes with living in a fallen world. He heals multiple people of disease and delivers multiple people from demons. The demons rightly identify Him. Jesus does not allow them to speak, likely because He did not want to give such being any credibility or voice since they are prone to deception and mixing the truth with lies. His authority even in this is clearly evidenced. And this sets up the statement of Jesus about His mission that Luke will give next.

Luke 4:43-44

Luke gives a brief description of Jesus' withdrawal from Capernaum likely because it allows the reader to hear Jesus' own declaration of His mission. But Luke reports on Jesus' departure from Capernaum perhaps because he will reveal something important and out of the ordinary about this town and its synagogue in chapter 7. In reading Luke's words here, the reader cannot help notice the contrast between the desire of the people in Capernaum for Jesus and the violent reaction to Him in the synagogue of His home town in Nazareth that had preceded.

As the multitudes from Capernaum implore Him to stay with them He declares that He must “preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.” This statement agrees with what he had declared from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth. His mission was a declaration of the work of the kingdom of God that He was initiating as Yahweh’s appointed King (See Appendix 7).

In the intervening verses between Luke’s report of the declaration from Isaiah in Nazareth and this statement by Jesus in Capernaum, Luke has recorded works of Jesus that show His power as king of God’s kingdom. Clearly He brings release to the captives. The identity of the king is being made clear. These acts have shown that in bringing this king to Israel, this is with certainty a time of Yahweh’s favor.

Luke reports that Jesus is true to this mission. Having proclaimed the message in Galilee, He now declares it in the synagogues of Judea (verse 44), though some manuscripts have Galilee here.

Luke 5

Luke 5:1-11

This section finds Jesus back on the shores of Galilee speaking to a large crowd. This becomes the occasion in which three key men, Peter, James and John become dedicated followers. Jesus brings this about in these fishermen through an extra-ordinary catch of fish. The event begins with just Peter, but the catch of fish is so great that James and John are summoned with their boat to help. Both boats are filled. Jesus meets these men in their occupation and enables them in their work far beyond what they could imagine. The incident of this great catch of fish makes the projection He gives about them more believable.

Luke's account of the result of this large catch is somewhat predictable now. He records Peter's words, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" Luke immediately explains this response in Peter by saying that "amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken." So the amazement and fear of those who see the works of God in Jesus continues.

This incident might be included by Luke to show Theophilus the depth of inadequacy felt by the leaders of the movement in the company of the Son of God. The movement would be built on such people who felt the shame of their sin and paltry faith in Yahweh. In the wake of Yahweh's blessing they might feel woefully inadequate. Under the curse of the Law they might feel some need to prove the legitimacy of Jesus' choice of them. The fact was that His would be a movement of those redeemed from all manner of sins.

Jesus' words Luke gives are addressed to these feelings. He makes a very short and simple statement to address these fears; "Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men." It was a highly unlikely prediction from a human point of view. But their response was to leave everything and follow Him.

Luke 5:12-16

Luke reports another miracle done by Jesus—the cleansing of a leper. It shows three things in connection with Jesus. First, the great significance of faith as reflected in the simple belief of an unclean leper. Faith is dramatically affirmed and rewarded by God. Second, that what Jesus was willing to do came about. In reflecting on this the reader might begin to see that Jesus' will was one with the will of God the Father. The reader might find further proof of this in Jesus' personal habit of prayer soon to be noted again by Luke (verse 16). We may have in Luke's writing the story of this, that Jesus' oneness with the Father was why He brought about the impossible. What had been revealed to Jesus' mother at His conception (1:37), was now being demonstrated in Jesus' deeds. The third thing we see in connection with Jesus is His disdain for popularity and acclaim and recognition. This is brought out by the command to the cleansed leper not to tell anyone. Fourth, we see Jesus' desire that the Law be honored and fulfilled. Had His critics watched Him with open hearts they would not have seen Him as a law-breaker.

The short section ends with Luke's report about a habit that Jesus practiced. He says He would escape from the crowd to the wilderness to pray. This is the second time such an escape is reported (4:42). This memory we have been given doubtlessly has motivated the devotional life of millions of Christians through the centuries. The work and opportunity is never ending, but it is appropriate to set it aside in order to conduct it all in harmony with Him. This may be included here by Luke to help the journey of the reader in response to Jesus' statement of conviction, "I am willing; be cleansed." The tasks of ministry are guided by our understanding of the Father's will in the matters in front of us.

Luke 5:17-26

This section marks the second confrontation in Luke's account of Jesus' with His detractors. Luke has reported a growing movement of followers of Jesus and a collective amazement and recognition by them of the hand of God on the man Jesus. He has shown us this, the beginning of His movement. In the portions of Luke's account that follow we read of five confrontations with Pharisees, Scribes and teachers of the Law. These are introduced into Luke's account as this section opens (verse 17). They were the supposed pillars and leaders of the day among the Israelites, the self-proclaimed guides of the multitudes. This opposition movement was influential and powerful.

We see Jesus' deliberate practice of speaking and doing what God wanted even though it was certain to be His undoing with respect to these who ruled the day. After stating that these detractors of Jesus were present from all over, Luke adds this phrase to set the scene, "the power of the Lord was with Him to heal." Based on this statement we anticipate physical healing. And sure enough, some ingenious men bring a bed-ridden friend to be healed. They are unable to enter the house due to the crowd. So they go up on the roof and remove material so that they can lower the man, bed and all into the room right in front of Jesus and in front of this company of Pharisees and teachers of the Law.

Jesus recognizes the moment not simply as one for physical healing. He sees a greater purpose of God the Father in the moment. This was a moment God was orchestrating to reveal to Israel that Jesus had authority to forgive sin. Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures the Messiah had been associated with the forgiveness of sin. Now in the theology of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law this paralyzed man was certainly a sinner. Clearly in their thinking he bore the curse of the Old Covenant (Deuteronomy 28:22). His sin had certainly caught up to Him by the standards of the theology of the day (Luke 13:1-4). As this man is lowered in His bed quite likely in between Jesus and these Pharisees, Jesus immediately makes the moment about the forgiveness of sins. He declares the man forgiven.

At this the thoughts of Jesus opponents are stirred up against Him. Their theology is offended. They rightly ask in that moment, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Their assumption is that Jesus does NOT have such authority. They are about to receive the surprise of their life. Jesus knows this thinking in them. He knew their theology and knew that God was orchestrating the moment with their beliefs in mind.

Jesus makes the moment about that question, the authority to forgive sins. He states that it would have been easier to say "Rise up and walk." Given their presence Jesus could have said this and created no tension in the room. But He deliberately chose the harder way and said "Your sins are forgiven." He chose to say what offended them because something far too important was at stake than this one man's health. The spiritual health of the world was at stake due to their sin. It is this great unsolved dilemma of sin that Jesus came to deal with. So Jesus, having said the hard thing

already, says now to these unbelieving ones “But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins . . .” and then turns and commands the paralyzed man to rise. The man does so and leaves the house healed and “glorifying God.” The clear message is that the man’s healing at Jesus’ command, an act of God, obviously proved Jesus was of God and had authority to forgive sin.

Luke does not record the reaction of Jesus’ opponents specifically. He does note as we are accustomed to reading now, that they were all “seized with astonishment and began glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, ‘We have seen remarkable things today.’” We do not know if that reaction included Jesus’ opponents. But it had certainly been affirmed by God that Jesus had authority to forgive sin.

Luke 5:27-32

Next Luke tells us of the calling of Levi—Matthew as he is known to us. Luke tells us that Matthew was a tax collector and that He leaves everything to follow Jesus (verse 28). This is the second time Luke has used this phrase in this chapter. He used it earlier of Peter, James and John (verse 12). These will be chosen as Apostles and it seems possible that Luke wants the reader to know the urgency these men felt regarding Jesus and His mission.

For now Luke uses this event in His account to report the second and third of five consecutive confrontations between Jesus and His detractors. Matthew was a tax collector and as such was deeply disdained by the Pharisees and scribes. Tax collectors were considered by them to be the worst of sinners. Predictably, they complain about Jesus keeping company with such sinners. It is a moment to proclaim the hope of humanity—that Yahweh initiates in the matter of our salvation. Jesus states this in a proverbial way and follows with a literal statement: “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.”

Luke 5:33-39

It appears from Luke’s account that it is on this occasion during the gathering at Matthew’s house that the Pharisees point out the lack of conformity they see in Jesus’ disciples to that of normal disciples—their own and John’s included. Jesus replies to their concern with several concise parables. His reply is especially astute and pithy.

The first short parable utilizes their experience of wedding celebrations. It aims at correcting their assumption that what they see currently in His disciples will always be. Their practices would change. They would observe them fasting and praying once He Himself had gone away.

The second short parable utilizes their experience with wine and wine skins. It addresses their expectation that His movement would be a continuation of their own. He was doing something new and they should be expecting new practices.

The third is a very short parable (verse 39) that utilizes their personal likes and dislikes in wine. It suggests that the natural human desire is for what is familiar. It simply makes this observation, but is meant to be a warning to the wise.

So with these three short parables Jesus has addressed any legitimate concern (verses 34-35), He has alerted the wise to expect new things Yahweh is doing (verses 36-38), and He has warned them of the normal human religious tendency to be so locked on a routine that we miss out on the fresh thing Yahweh has for us (verses 39).

Luke 6

Luke 6:1-5

With these previous three incidents that report Jesus' exchanges with those who were becoming His opponents Luke chooses to tell us about another incident involving them. He tells us simply that it occurs "on a Sabbath." It is an incident Luke includes here to reinforce the short parables Jesus has told in the previous incident. Those told us clearly that we should not expect that Messiah came to continue the old. He came to do something new. Even the Sabbath would change! Both this fourth incident and the fifth will have to do with the Sabbath.

As in the previous event the Pharisees take issue with Jesus' disciples. This time it is because they do not observe the Sabbath strictly enough. As they pass through grain fields on the Sabbath day they pick grain and "thresh" it and eat it. By the Pharisee's strict definitions Jesus' disciples are working on the Sabbath day.

Jesus' answers them by raising a question to them regarding an incident in the life of David as recorded in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 21:6). In that incident David broke the Law in its strictest sense due to his own hunger and that of his men. Now David was the consummate king in the Pharisee's minds and rightly so. He is rightly understood to be a picture of the coming Messiah. Perhaps Jesus is seeking to raise this question in the Pharisees minds: in this incident involving David are we seeing a picture of something to come in the era of the Messiah? Jesus speaks to the truth that the Messiah would have authority over all such Laws and customs. These would serve Him. He would not serve them. He states this clearly and literally with these words: "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." There is a clear claim to His own identity as the Christ here.

Luke 6:6-11

Without saying the Pharisees understood Jesus' messianic claim he has just reported, Luke reports a fifth incident. In it the Pharisees hostility toward Jesus has noticeably increased. Whether or not it has increased specifically because of this claim is uncertain. But the fact is that in Luke's account the reader is made to feel the increased hostility. So Luke is weaving the account together in a way that helps us feel the rising tension of this relationship that would ultimately result in Jesus' death. He is relating the rising tension to the claims Jesus is making about His own identity.

In the previous instances the Pharisees have been observers. In this incident they are calculating observers—looking for some reason to accuse Him. As the incident closes they are "filled with rage" and the discussion of what to do to Him begins.

Once again the incident occurs on the Sabbath day. It occurs in a synagogue, and it involves a healing. Again Jesus knew the designs and schemes of His opponents. He could have avoided the conflict that occurred. Instead He intentionally engaged it.

After recording the incident in which Jesus declares Himself Lord of the Sabbath, Luke now shows Jesus deliberately exercising that Lordship. At the same time Jesus is trying to lead His opponents through the thought process He Himself uses as He shapes the Sabbath. The bottom line however is that He exercises His right to shape the Sabbath instead of allowing them to shape how He will behave on the Sabbath. Yahweh affirms this action dramatically by healing the man with the withered hand.

The result is predictable given their predetermined agenda for the day. They are “filled with fury.” For the first time Luke reports intentional conversation among these opponents centered on taking action against Jesus. In the first of these five incidents the Pharisees simply opposed Him. Now they have become His enemies.

Luke has used the incidents not only to report the emergence of Jesus’ enemies. He has reported who Jesus was progressively revealing Himself to be. In the first incident He revealed that He had authority to forgive sin (5:17-26). In the second incident He revealed that He had come to minister with regard to sin and sinners (5:27-32). In the third incident He revealed that He came to do something new, not to sustain and establish the old and traditional path of Israel (5:33-39). In the fourth incident He claims to be Lord of the Sabbath, a day His enemies claimed authority over (6:1-5). In the final incident He exercises that authority and it is affirmed by Yahweh through a miraculous healing (6:6-11).

Luke 6:12-19

Luke begins this section by noting that it is during these days that Jesus spent the whole night in prayer and then chose from among His disciples those who would occupy the office of Apostles. He seems to want us to know when in the context of His ministry this prayerful choice and designation occurred. There are two things about this timeframe that we can observe from what Luke has said.

First, the choice of the twelve occurs after some battle lines had been drawn. Luke has just recorded five incidents in which Jesus confronted the Pharisees and other opponents. The rift between them had grown from disagreement to the point where they are discussing what they could do to Jesus. The conflict that would end His life and that Yahweh would use to fulfill His mission of salvation had begun.

Second, Jesus had intentionally gathered the men who would be Apostles. We know that Jesus had already invited them into relationship with Him and it appears that they had responded by leaving everything and following Him. That phrase has occurred twice in chapter 5 (5:11, 28), and relates to the response to Jesus’ invitation that he extended to four of the twelve men. Luke seems to have intentionally left us with an impression of the strength of their conviction about Jesus and His mission.

We also see from this account that these twelve were part of a larger group of disciples. From this larger group Jesus named the twelve Apostles. So from the beginning of the Church it is understood that there are many followers on equal footing as far as being members of the family of God. But certain ones are designated leaders. The term Apostle designates that though all in some sense represent Jesus, these twelve He has designated to the rest as those who should be looked to as officially approved and commissioned representatives of Him.

Luke clearly reports the holy nature of this choice—it happened prayerfully and as a result of proven commitment. At the same time in noting the names of the Apostles Luke designates Judas as one who became a traitor. So we are presented with the holy and somber occasion of the appointment of the Apostles carried out at a time when opposition was clearly growing, and we even have the seed of the opposition sowed in Jesus’ inner circle. All of it provides for a great irony. All of it gives the account a somewhat ominous tone. At the same time all of it is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

This newly re-constituted group comes down from the mountain and immediately engage a large and diverse crowd from a broad geographical area that have come on foot to hear Jesus and be healed of sickness and of unclean spirits. Luke reports that power was coming out from Him and healing these people. So in the face of opposition the movement of Jesus is moving forward with commissioned leaders, it is steamrolling evil, and it is gathering diverse people to it.

Luke 6:20-45

On this occasion in the presence of this great and diverse crowd Jesus blesses His disciples. The crowd would no doubt have included some gentiles since Luke notes the presence of people from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. Jesus seems to want to teach this crowd the blessed life and distinguish it from the more natural one. The things He says parallel the material given by Matthew (Matthew 5-7) in what Christians have designated “The Sermon on the Mount.” But Luke is not necessarily reporting the same occasion. The principles Luke reports Jesus teaching were likely ones that He often spoke of. They are the core of what we could call the values of His kingdom.

Luke reports four statements that define the experience of Yahweh’s blessing. It was important in this kingdom He was calling people to for King Jesus to define the blessing they should pursue. This is followed by four statements of “woe” that define signs of the potential disapproval of Yahweh.

Luke reports Jesus’ summons to love. This was a burden of the Old Testament prophets as they addressed Israel. Israel had experienced the steadfast love of Yahweh the Creator. Yet steadfast love had become absent from their relationships to each other (Hosea 4:1-4). Love was the fulfillment of the Law that the teachers of the Law had set aside.

Luke then gives us Jesus’ teaching on judging one another, one of the classic ways in which we violate love. His teaching on this devastates those who set themselves up as authorities and inspectors of the character of others. But more importantly it affirms that none can rise to the standard required by the Law. Jesus is teaching what all should have concluded from the centuries of history of Israel under the Law—there is none righteous.

This teaching on being judgmental of others is reinforced through the illustration Jesus gives of us knowing a tree by its fruits. The story is meant to help us all recognize that something is amiss in our hearts. It is not meant to enable us to judge. That is the very thing Jesus has just condemned.

Jesus has very subtly set forth the key value in the Kingdom of God. It is the heart. Kingdom business always involves the heart. The kingdom message is the gospel which addresses the heart and is our great hope once we realize what true blessing is and the fact that evil is in us.

Having given this level of information Jesus calls the hearers to act on His words. Through a parable of two men who built houses Jesus seeks to cement in our minds the importance of taking decisive action based on what we hear Him say. The message of His kingdom is that the wise take action and wise action is action that is based on the truth that Jesus the King embodies and makes known. As His preceding remarks have indicated, the truth runs counter to our instincts which is why the heart-work of the kingdom and submission to its King so critical.

Luke 7

Luke 7:1-10

Following this address made by Jesus to this large and diverse crowd, and following the closing call of that address to take action based on Jesus and His teachings, Luke gives an account of an unnamed Gentile man who did so. It is a story of not only a Gentile man, but a man who was a centurion, an officer in the Roman army. This story of this important but humble Gentile shows that he had been taking in the information of Yahweh the God of the Jews, and the spreading news of Jesus. He was a man who had taken appropriate action on his seedling faith.

The story centers on the fact that a valued servant of this centurion was sick. The centurion believes Jesus can heal this servant. He also understands that Jews were in some way specially related to Yahweh and Jesus. So he thinks it best to make request of Jesus through Jews. His posture in the entire story is one of an undeserving one hoping for special favor.

Luke reports this Gentile's credibility among the Jews by recording that the Jewish Elders are willing to plead earnestly with Jesus in His behalf, that Jesus might go and heal this servant. The Elder's testimony of him is this: "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue" (7:4-5). This was the synagogue in Capernaum that had received Jesus after His rejection and near murder in His home town of Nazareth. In contrast these in Capernaum had received Him and asked Him not to leave (4:42-44).

So Luke records that this urgent request is made by Jewish Elders to Jesus in behalf of this Gentile officer of the occupying army. Jesus consents to go and heal this man's servant. As far as we know from Luke's account Jesus never enters the house. When He is close the centurion's friends arrive to tell Jesus that He need not come. The centurion understands kingdom authority and has considerable faith in Jesus power and so says, "say the word, and let my servant be healed."

At hearing this Luke reports that Jesus "marveled at him." Luke has reported the crowds amazed and astonished at Jesus. Now he reports Jesus amazed. He also represents Jesus as deliberately turning to the crowd and explaining His amazement. He makes this remarkable statement, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."

This is a very weighty statement to record for Theophilus and millions of Gentile readers over the centuries. A Gentile is held up to Israelites by Jesus as a model and example of faith, THE single most important value of the King and the Kingdom. As far as we know Jesus and the centurion never meet. But Luke reports that when the centurion's friends return to his house they find the servant well.

The clear message is that a Gentile is authenticated as having effective faith, a wise man who built on the rock for Israelites to see.

Luke 7:11-17

Luke's narrative now takes us with Jesus and a great crowd of people to a town called Nain. As they enter they encounter another crowd, a funeral procession. It is particularly sad because the deceased is the only son of a widow. Luke notes that Jesus is moved by the moment and feels compassion for the widow. He moves to her, tells her not to weep, and by touching the bier and with a single command raises the dead son.

Luke reports that fear seized them all, which is becoming his familiar commentary on Jesus' displays of His power. He also reports that the crowd glorified God. Their assessment of Jesus includes two things. He is a great prophet and God has visited His people. This good report spreads to surrounding regions.

As Luke's narrative moves along we are consistently seeing in it the exceptional and astounding power of Jesus over all the consequences of evil in the fallen world. Now there is this that happens, Jesus' ability to negate the power of death. Luke moves on from this story with the statement that this report was spreading by word of mouth over a wide region.

Luke 7:18-35

This spreading news reaches the ears of John the Baptist. He is in prison, where Luke's narrative left him the last time he was mentioned (3:18-20). Luke's account has already reported John proclaiming Jesus as the one who would "baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (3:15-17). John's explanation of this idea of baptism with fire has also been reported. John had given a metaphorical explanation of Jesus' ministry as one of "cleaning His threshing floor." In other words, the grain had been cut and brought to the threshing floor, it had been appropriately treaded on by animals to separate the kernels from the stalk, now it was time to separate the grain from the chaff. John says that Jesus would do this, gathering the grain "into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire." Immediately after reporting this Luke reports John's arrest. So Luke's narrative has presented this proclamation by John of judgment as being a key part of his message about Jesus.

Combining this that Luke has already reported to us with the fact that in the narrative John is now languishing unjustly in prison, it is not hard to see why John begins to wonder if he has been right in identifying Jesus as the One who Isaiah had projected, the One who was Yahweh's salvation. And so he sends two of his disciples who ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

It appears from Luke's account that Jesus may not have answered them immediately. He simply continued the ministry of the moment, healing many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and of bestowing sight to the blind. Then His answer to those whom John has sent is simply to go and tell John what they had seen Jesus do. It is a brilliant way of encouraging John.

These great works they have seen are the very things projected by the Old Testament prophets. John was a student of these writings. Jesus was doing just what these had projected. To this Jesus adds this personal note to John, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me." This is an exhortation based on the projections of Isaiah that the Messiah would be scorned and rejected by many in Israel. It is a powerful personal word from Jesus to his relative, friend, and co-laborer in Yahweh's work.

After the messengers of John leave, Luke gives considerable space to what Jesus says to the crowd about John. First, Jesus identifies John's role in God's plan as being the expected messenger that would precede the coming of "the Adonai who you seek . . ." (Malachi 3:1). The prophecy Jesus quotes from Malachi goes on to speak of the judgment this promised One would bring as He stood in the temple. Luke sends the readers to this passage which certainly affirms John and His proclamation of judgment in Israel by Messiah.

Second, Jesus affirms the greatness of John the Baptist. Luke notes for the readers the varied response in Israel to John and the division that resulted in the country. John had been widely acclaimed by the common people and even the sinners. He had been rejected by the Pharisees and

experts in the Law. This was the very condition that was developing with respect to Jesus that Luke has been careful to report.

Third, Jesus affirms the stubbornness of heart that was being manifested in Israelites at this momentous time in Yahweh's plan when the stakes were so high. Israelites were behaving like one expects immature children to behave. They were playing childish games when great matters were at stake. God had given them in John one who lived in austerity and somberness. He'd given them one in Jesus who reached out to the sinners and was joyful and celebrative. They rejected both and Jesus likens this to petulant children who demand a game be played their way.

Luke suddenly concludes his lengthy report on Jesus' interaction regarding John and moves to the next incident He wishes to report about Jesus. In presenting Jesus own presentation of Himself as one who was a friend of sinners Luke sets up what will happen next in his narrative.

Luke 7:36-50

Having just reported Jesus' presentation of Himself as a friend of sinners, it is not surprising that Luke now offers proof of this. This is something Luke is anxious for His readers to know, that Jesus reaches out to people viewed as unworthy.

Luke reports that a Pharisee invites Jesus to dinner whose name Luke will give later in telling the story. During dinner Jesus is affectionately served by "a woman of the city, who was a sinner . . ." (verse 37). The Pharisee silently takes offense at this. Luke reports what he says to himself as he watches this woman shed tears and wash Jesus feet. In his thoughts the Pharisee is condemning the actions of the woman and more importantly rejecting the identity of Jesus because He allows such a sinner such close access to Himself. The Pharisee's reaction in the whole matter is what Luke had just reported Jesus condemning. It was the reaction of a spoiled and willful child.

Luke records Jesus response to this that He saw in His host. His words are careful and measured. Luke has waited to tell us the name of the Pharisee, but now reveals it by quoting Jesus' words as He calls Him by name; "Simon, I have something to say to you." It is a personal word Jesus has. It will be direct, but it begins in a manner that is friendly though forthright.

Jesus words capture the lack of spiritual fervor in Simon and the depth of fervor in the "sinful woman." It communicates the heart of the matter, then shows that this heart is a reflection of faith. Then Jesus states clearly that faith leads to forgiveness of sin. Luke's report of Jesus' words of forgiveness shows that Jesus does not present Himself as the cause of the forgiveness of the woman's sin. He simply links her forgiveness to her faith.

The response of those at the table is to question Jesus' identity. This shows two things. First, that the Pharisees position on the identity of Jesus remained where it had always been (see 5:21). The miracles and signs they had witnessed had not changed them. Second, that Jesus' message was and is that faith brings about forgiveness and a change in status with God. Those at the table were thinking in terms of merit. Jesus brought the good news that now, apart from the Law righteousness was being revealed (Romans 3:21).

Luke 8

Luke 8:1-3

Luke immediately switches from this gathering in the home of Simon the Pharisee to Jesus proclamation through cities and villages regarding “the good news of the kingdom of God.” Luke has just clarified the core of that good news as it was given regarding a notoriously sinful woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” Luke now speaks briefly to a small entourage traveling with Jesus with a very simple purpose, that people might know this good news.

The twelve traveled with Jesus and are mentioned as if that was to be expected. But Luke takes time and space to report that others had an important role in this tour as this good news was declared. Luke seems purposeful in reporting this. Significantly he names some women that were part of the group. It was likely rare for kings of the day to gather women around him for real kingdom purposes. Their presence to most kings would have been for fleshly pleasures. In Jesus’ kingdom women had real and noble value.

It may be too that these women were known to Theophilus, or could be known were he to investigate more closely Luke’s account. The names given might have allowed him to make some connections and so authenticate Luke’s words. We find that these were a part of “many others, who provided for them out of their means.” Luke wants to Theophilus to know how this vital proclamation has historically been enabled. The proclamation has produced many unlikely heroes.

Luke 8:4-18

Luke reports an occasion in this tour of proclamation when a great crowd gathered. On this occasion Jesus speaks in a parable to them. It is known as the parable of the sower. It is a straight-forward story, but curiously Jesus does not give the meaning of it to the crowd. He simply concludes it by calling out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” This was a way of saying to them there was something profound in that story that they should put forth the effort to understand.

The disciples asked the meaning of the story. Jesus prefaces His answer to them with some words that are as critical to their understanding as the parable itself. He indicates that His tactic of not explaining it to the crowd was deliberate. That is interesting due to the fact that they are together on this mission of proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God. He lets the disciples know that they themselves have the privilege of knowing the secrets of this kingdom of God.

However, something else was at work in the large multitude. There was actually a process of rejection at work in the multitudes. Jesus does not say God is the one who is the cause or energizer of this process. But in view of the presence of this in the crowd, the Spirit’s direction to Jesus was to make the proclamation of the kingdom in parables so that these whose heart was rejecting truth might not receive more of it. In other words they would have to ponder what they had been given in the parable and want to know its meaning in order to know its meaning. They had been invited to do this by Jesus in the statement He called out to them. The parable was simple enough to those that would take the time to ponder it. But it did required their desire and attention. Jesus knew that many would not follow through.

Jesus gives the meaning to His disciples. It is simple and uncomplicated. The key to understanding such things is given by Jesus in His statement about the people represented by the good soil. “They are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”

Jesus goes on to exhort the disciples with conclusions the pondering of this parable of the sower should lead us to. He states three of these that relate to His call to the multitude, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” The first Jesus states in parable form. No one lights a lamp and covers it. The idea is as you hear truth like this shape your life by it. It will reveal things about you and life in general. There is a hint of our responsibility to others given in this picture of placing the light on a stand for others who enter the room. Some might be tempted to be lazy regarding the proclamation of truth based on the parable of the sower.

The second application to the parable is similar but Jesus now states it plainly. It is the importance of allowing the light to reveal how things are. Go by what the light (truth) says. Do so knowing that this is what will be shown to be true to all when the judge comes. What the light reveals is what matters.

The third application of the parable Jesus makes is this; listen well because by doing that you will receive more. Receiving more likely means more truth and more benefit from it. The way becomes harder and harder for those that resist truth. Ultimately they lose what they thought they had. More and more is opened up to those who heed what they hear. Listening to truth and letting it do its work of revealing who we are is a great life-skill to develop and sharpen. Like the good soil we will bear much fruit.

Luke 8:19-21

Luke records an incident at this point in his narrative that happened in a house. It was not necessarily right at the moment Jesus was speaking with His disciples. But it reinforces what they had heard from Jesus. It reveals the special bond that is made between Jesus and those who hear the word of God AND do it.

It happens that Jesus mother and brothers have come to see Him, but cannot because of the crowd. Someone tells Jesus that these are awaiting Him outside. He says simply, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.” He has given those carefully listening and reading this account more information relating to the parable of the sower, and in particular to His application that “to the one who has more will be given” (verse 18).

Luke 8:22-25

Luke now shifts his account away from Jesus’ teaching and reports a series of miracles, each quite remarkable. The miracles are perhaps spoken of here to give added emphasize to listening to Him. It highlights the urgency of the parable of the sower. It also sets up strategic revelation by the King on His Kingdom that Luke will report amidst these miracles. And while it does all this it sets up the more detailed teaching of chapters nine and ten.

The first miracle reported is that of Jesus calming the sea. It all happens on the Sea of Galilee when a violent storm suddenly swoops in on them as they are crossing the sea in a boat. The boat is swamped by the high waters and they are in great danger. They awake Him in the midst of the crisis and He calmly rebukes the wind and the water and immediately they all are calmed. He says to them, “Where is your faith?”

There is in that statement an expectation that people with healthy faith transform such moments, even where the forces of nature are at work. This affirms the idea that where humanity is rightly related to God they are able to rule creation and all its forces as Yahweh originally intended (Genesis 1:26ff).

Luke reports the fear and amazement of the disciples, as he has consistently done in moments when they witness the power of God being brought to bear in real life through this person Jesus. Luke reports this amazement in the form of the question, “Who then is this . . .?” That question will be answered decisively in the days ahead and in Luke’s account of Jesus’ life (see 9:18-20). This incident is just a beginning in terms of how this expedition would stretch their faith.

Luke 8:26-30

Jesus and His disciples sail on in calm seas now until they arrive on the east side of the Sea of Galilee in the country of the Gerasenes. These were gentile people. The Kingdom of God is about to be made known to them in a very powerful way. This is important in terms of Luke’s overall message that the kingdom of God was inclusive and was the best of news for all people.

The previous miracle had to do with the natural world. However the world was known to be a spiritual place by the disciples and all the Jews. It included an entire world of evil beings both human and spiritual. This entire incident was a short expedition Jesus led the disciples in that confronted the “uncleanness,” both real and perceived, of humanity. It was a precursor of all the disciples would do later beyond Jesus’ death, when he would enable them to take the news of His kingdom beyond the boundaries of Israel and Judaism.

This is a well-known story because it is reported by Matthew and Mark as well as by Luke. It involves an intensely demonized man. He was a major dilemma among the people of the region. Luke takes some space to give us a feel for the problem presented by this unnamed man. He lived outside of society’s control. He could not be shackled or chained. He lived unclothed among the tombs. He was violent and unpredictable. His was a very dark story. It would be hard to conceive of anyone with a more hopeless future.

Jesus and the disciples land their boat and Luke’s language indicates that they are immediately met by this man. However, Luke also reports that in the presence of Jesus the demons in the man submit to the King. Their words spoken through the man and the posture they put him in, laying prostrate before Jesus, are a dramatic display of the absolute sovereign rule of Jesus over the darkest, most evil corners of the spiritual realm. Their use of the title “Most High God” marks one of the very few times that phrase is used in Scripture. It was an important one in terms of the Jews history and the mystery of the promised ruler, the Christ (See Genesis 14 and Appendix 3). The identity of Christ and His power is known and recognized in the awful, invisible world of evil. These terrible beings melt in His presence and obey Him. It is all an affirming sign to us that He will subdue them when His plan runs its course.

Luke reports Jesus’ commanding the demons to leave the man. He reports also their rather dramatic obedience to Jesus’ command. He allows them to enter a large herd of pigs that was grazing on the hillside nearby. He does this likely to allow all to see the fearsome power of these invisible enemies, how powerful Yahweh’s salvation is and why Yahweh’s salvation is so essential to humanity. The pigs come to a very violent and sobering end.

The lessons are both plain and unmistakable. Among the lessons is the fact that God meets and transforms the most helpless in the evil world. God’s power is such that the beings that give evil its power are unable to thwart His will. There are mysterious questions that accompany these lessons.

We can’t help but wonder why Yahweh allowed evil. We can’t help but wonder why He doesn’t bring it to an end sooner than His plan apparently has allowed. As we hold onto these difficulties and

attempt to live in the tension of them we also have to admit that there is great hope portrayed in this awful and strange story.

The gentile peoples of the area are taken completely out of their comfort zone by this entire incident brought about by this Israelite man. It was undeniable that a troublesome problem had been eliminated. The violent, unpredictable, fearsome man was now clothed and in his right mind. But at this point the fear of the people of that place, and perhaps the huge economic loss of the pigs are overwhelming enough to them that they ask Jesus to leave their country. Luke simply explains this by saying, "For they were seized with great fear."

As Jesus is honoring their request that He leave, The man whom He had delivered begs to go with Him. But He directs the man to "Return to your home and declare how much God has done for you." Instead of following Jesus physically he obeys him. Luke tells us that this man "went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him."

This was a pattern the ministry of the Apostles would follow. They would travel and establish the message with all its power then leave the mission of spreading the truth in the hands of the local people. The Apostles have observed a number of critical things in this short excursion to the other side of the Sea of Galilee that would inform them in the years ahead.

Luke 8:40-56

Honoring the request that He leave, Jesus gets back in the boat with His disciples and they sail back across the Sea of Galilee. The series of miracles recorded by Luke in this section of His account continues with two more. These two miracles are woven together to emphasize that Jesus' power is quite extra-ordinary.

First, a ruler of the synagogue begs Jesus to come to his home and heal his daughter who was near death. This is the second time a ruler of the synagogue is spoken of in Luke's account. The first ruler had not been honorable toward Jesus (6:6-17). This one is different, a man of faith.

As Jesus is making His way to this man's house another miracle occurs, this one mysteriously powerful. Luke, himself a physician, introduces us to an unnamed woman with internal bleeding of some sort that the physicians had not been able to heal. Her faith in Jesus was such that she sought simply to touch Him, believing that His power would by this act be brought to bear on her illness. She manages to do so in the crowded conditions and she is healed.

Luke is careful to report that the miracle occurs without any specific command given by Jesus. He then reports that Jesus specifically attributes this to the woman's faith. That is affirmed to the woman as she comes trembling in fear confessing own her actions. The emphasis then is not simply on Jesus' exceptional power, but on the difference faith makes and that faith is the anecdote to fear. The summons to faith rather than fear has been a significant theme of Luke since the announcement of the angel to Zechariah (1:18-20) and to Mary (1:37).

As this between the woman and Jesus is happening the news of the death of the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue arrives. In this moment we see again a summons to faith in the words of Jesus to the man. The human emotion of fear is named by Jesus as being the ruler's response to this awful news. Faith is named by Jesus as the anecdote to it. "Do not fear, only believe, and she will be well." The significance of this statement has been strengthened for the reader by the fact that they have just read about the fear and weak faith of the disciples (22-25) and the fear of the Gerasenes (verse 27). Faith is where we must turn in moments of fear.

But faith is now tested against the powerful reality of death and against the powerful emotion of the loss of a child. The need to heal the daughter has morphed into the need to raise her from the dead. It is in the moment of this deepened crisis Jesus calls the father and the crowd to faith. This continues when He arrives at the house. The account creates a potent moment in Luke's purpose of strengthening the faith of the readers.

Luke reports the miracle. It is complete. The daughter is raised from the dead. The call to faith has been legitimized. There is a clear contrast established between the fear of the Gerasenes and the faith of the woman with the internal bleeding and that of the ruler of the synagogue.

Curiously, there is another clear contrast. Jesus' instructions to the man set free from demons and the parents of this girl are different. The one had been told to tell of the great things God had done for him. The parents are told to say nothing of the incident. This is left a mystery to the reader.

Luke 9

Luke 9:1-6

Amidst the string of miraculous deeds Luke is reporting, he turns us now to the sending out of the twelve. Luke states that Jesus gives them power over all demons and power to cure diseases. Luke also states the purpose of their mission as being to “proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

Luke reports the brief the words Jesus gives them by way of how their food and shelter would be provided. Luke then simply says that they “departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.” His purpose seems to be to let us know that apostles were engaged in doing what He Himself had done. This is likely a matter of providing history, but it likely is meant to give added meaning to the incidents leading up to this mission and those that follow. All of these served a purpose in this regard, the teaching and the training of these core leaders.

Luke 9:7-9

Luke’s last mention of Herod was in chapter three, when he imprisoned John the Baptist (3:19; but see Joanna in 8:3). Luke reported John’s question to Jesus that he sent through two of his disciples (7:18ff). He has not reported John’s death at Herod’s hand. He does report here Herod’s processing of the spreading news about Jesus and the lore surrounding this news.

The purpose of this brief report is to let us know that what we would expect to happen if a man was doing such things as Jesus and His followers were doing, was indeed happening. There was the spread of the report by word of mouth and it reached the ears of the quasi-rulers. There was speculation, rumor, false report and even superstition. There is also a desire to see and to have an explanation. We would expect that if legitimate miracles were occurring.

Herod as a character likely also serves a purpose in Luke’s account. We know that the various “Herods” were multiple individuals that composed a dynasty. They received from Rome the right to rule over a portion of the land of the Jews. They were Edomites, descendants of Esau. Esau had distained his inheritance from Isaac and sold it to Jacob for a single meal. We know that it was said of Esau that though he was older, he would serve his younger brother, Jacob. Yet in Jesus’ time this Herod was in some sense ruling over Israelites. Amidst all the talk of the King and the kingdom of God we see in the gospel accounts Herod opposing the gospel movement, yet curious about it and strangely haunted by it all.

Luke 9:10-17

Luke does not report details of the experience of the Apostles on their mission of proclamation and healing. He only reports their return and their subsequent withdrawal with Jesus to Bethsaida. He moves quickly to give us an account of the feeding of the five thousand from five loaves of bread and two fish.

This miracle is a spectacular event that demonstrates Yahweh’s ability to provide abundantly for the needs of people and for the ministry He wishes to do among them through us. Its purpose likely was to grow the faith of those who would soon lead His movement. Luke reports that they gathered up twelve baskets of bread fragments when the meal was over, so that there was more bread at the end of the meal than what Jesus blessed at its beginning. The event certainly demonstrated to the

Apostles that Yahweh can and will do some extraordinary things through humans in accomplishing His will. They would certainly need to be confident in that.

In terms of Luke's account, his purpose in recording this event here is likely that it is yet another exceptional sign that Jesus was unique. To those who knew the Old Testament, this was a miracle of the sort Israel had witnessed from Elisha (See 2 Kings 4:42-44). In fact, it surpassed it in its scope. Biblically speaking, if Jesus was THE prophet like Moses it would be expected that He would do the works Israel had historically witnessed in its prophets.

Elijah has been spoken of already by Luke (1:17; 4:25; 9:8). Moses and Elijah will soon appear in Luke's account (vs 28-36). The series of miracles reported by Luke beginning at 8:22 demonstrates that Jesus was greater than these. It all sets up a very important confession about Jesus' identity that Luke would report next (verses 18-20), a projection by Him that had deep implications for the twelve (verses 21-22), and Jesus' summons to a life of sacrifice that was being proclaimed to all (verses 23-27).

Luke 9:18-22

Luke places his report of Peter's great confession here, after he has reported Jesus' authority over nature (8:22-25), over demons (8:26-39), over sickness and death (8:40-55). He has just reported a miracle greater than one done by Elisha on whom a double portion of Elijah's spirit rested.

Luke reports it in this way. Jesus, as He is praying alone with the disciples poses two questions to them. First, He asks them, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" The disciples report that most believe Him to be one of a number of the great men of the past, including John the Baptist and Elijah, risen from the dead.

Second, Christ makes the question more personal. He anticipates a different answer from them as He asks, "But you, who do you say I am?" Peter's answer is crisp and concise, "The Christ of God." The brevity of the answer lends power and conviction to it.

From our perspective, Jesus' command to them is curious. He tells these who are already sharing in the mission that they are to tell no one that He "is the Christ of God," such a big part of the Christian message. Luke has repeatedly said that Jesus and the disciples were proclaiming the "good news of the Kingdom of God (4:18;43; 7:12; 8:1). Yet the outright declaration of Jesus' identity was not part of that proclamation of good news at this time.

Jesus gives as the reason for this prohibition the fact that He must suffer and die and then be raised from the dead. We can only surmise that Jesus wanted the proclamation of His identity to be solidly linked to and to rest on the accomplished fact of His death and resurrection. It was essential that the Christ be as proclaimed by the prophets--the suffering servant. The title Christ (the anointed one) came to Jesus as a result of Him laying down His life for the sins of Yahweh's people.

What was "the good news of the kingdom of God" that Jesus and His followers were declaring? It was likely "good news" in that His teaching was "with authority". The Holy Spirit empowered it so that it registered in the hearts of listeners as true. It was also with authority in that it overwhelmed evil beings at work in the people and restored health in this way. It was good news in that it released hearers from the bondage of the traditions of the legalists. It was good news in that it anticipated the work of Jesus on the cross and all the blessings that would bring. It did all this without naming Jesus as "the Christ of God" (See Acts 2:36; Philippians 2:5-11).

Luke 9:23-27

To a larger group than just the twelve Jesus speaks to personal sacrifice they themselves would have to make with respect to the mission, even as He would make. Luke opens these comments by saying, “And He said to all . . .” This may be a way of Luke communicating that while He entrusted certain information to the twelve, He was proclaiming the message that experiencing the kingdom of God demanded sacrifice simultaneously to all. This is a way of alerting us to the fact that in the death He Himself would experience Jesus was leading the way in sacrifice. It would reassure us that Jesus subjected Himself to the very lifestyle He taught.

Jesus has spoken to them of His rejection, but not specifically mentioned His death on a cross. He now speaks of the cross all who would experience the kingdom of God would bear, meaning the price they would need to willingly pay in view of the privilege that was theirs. This was all cast in the imagery of them taking up their cross daily and following Him. Expressed in this way these thoughts of His would likely come alive in their minds after they had seen Him nailed to the cross. He modeled to the utmost the life He called His followers to.

Luke then reports Jesus saying something that sets up the next incident he intends to report. This is characteristic of Luke’s flowing style. Jesus said that “there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God.”

Luke 9:28-36

After this statement that some would be privileged to “see” the kingdom of God while yet in this earthly life, Luke reports what we refer to as Jesus’ transfiguration in the presence of Peter, James and John on Mt. Hermon. Luke has indicated that in this experience these men “saw” the kingdom of God. They saw it physically, even invisible elements of it. This experience included what they saw with their eyes and what they heard with their ears. They had been immersed in life with the coming King and in its power. But there was more to it that they were about to have a sensory experience of.

Luke notes first that they saw Jesus’ own face change visibly. He does not say in what way it was different, only that “the appearance of His face was altered.” They saw that His clothing glowed. We speculate that His face and entire body glowed and that its light passed right through the clothing He had on so that it glowed.

Luke notes a second thing they saw. They saw two men of the kingdom, two great men out of Israel’s past—Moses and Elijah. Luke does not say how they knew that’s who these men were. These must have been named in the conversations that ensued.

Luke tells of what they heard. First they heard conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. They also heard what that conversation was about. It was about Jesus coming “departure, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.” It was about the very thing He had told the twelve confidentially.

Luke reports that they saw a cloud that came and enveloped them. He once again reports their fear, the most common response to these encounters with the power of God.

Finally, Luke reports that they heard a voice speak to them out of the cloud. It was a voice that proclaimed Jesus to be “my beloved Son.” It commanded the three men to “listen to Him.” Later Peter would write that this was the voice of the “Majestic Glory” (2 Peter 1:16-21). This activity of listening and hearing in such a way that they are transformed is emphasized once again

This experience of “seeing the Kingdom of God” involved seeing its King in His glory, seeing people from the past who were now serving in that kingdom. It involved hearing them. It included hearing the voice of God Himself speak concerning Jesus His Son whom they had concluded was “the Christ of God.” The entire experience confirms in them that conclusion and so sets in motion all that the remainder of their lives would entail.

For the second time in the context they assume an appropriate silence about this entire matter. Matthew reports that their silence in this matter was at the command of Jesus (Matthew 7:9). They were to be silent until after He had been raised from the dead.

Luke 9:37-45

Luke wants us to know that the events that are reported next occur on the next day after Jesus, Peter, James and John come down from the mountain. The events stand in sharp contrast to the great experience they have had together of the sights and the sounds of the Kingdom. They are confronted with the reality of evil immediately in the form of a man asking Jesus to heal his only son who was being brutally demonized. The man reports that he brought him to Jesus’ disciples but they were unable to heal him.

It is in this context that Jesus utters what sounds like an expression of frustration, “O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you.” It is uncertain who Jesus was referring to. It is likely that it was a general comment regarding this whole scene. He had just spoken with Moses and Elijah about the serious affairs of the Kingdom of God that awaited Him and He had heard the voice of the Father speaking about Him as His only Son. He is now faced with an only son enslaved to an evil spirit. He is likely grieved at how powerless this father and his own disciples and probably all of humanity are in the face of evil and how different things might be if they would only believe. This was not the world as God had originally created it, where man was to rule over His creation with Him.

The healing of the boy is quick and complete and leaves the crowd “astonished at the majesty of God.”

Jesus chooses this moment, while the crowd is caught up in the wonder of all that had occurred, to speak some deep words to the disciples. This is the second time Luke has reported that Jesus spoke such words to them (9:22-27). “Let these words sink into your ears. The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.” The disciples did not catch the significance of this message. Luke reports simply that it was concealed from them so that “they might not perceive it.” He does not say the cause of this, only that it was concealed. We are left to ponder that. Was it hidden from all of them? Did some get it? Did Peter, James and John understand it due to what they had heard of Jesus’ conversation with Moses and Elijah? It seems not, and it seems Luke wants us to be reminded that we can miss things revealed by God, laid in plain sight for us.

Luke also reports that the disciples were afraid to ask Him about this statement that He had said, and that they had heard. Once again in His account Luke wants the reader to understand how these human emotions of fear and amazement are shaping the human response to Jesus and to God Himself. In this instance these emotions kept the disciples from things that would have enabled their growth in faith. This being trapped in the immediate emotion of the moment might be what Jesus saw as the root of the lack of faith that so frustrated Him.

Luke 9:46-48

Luke reports a series of incidents that have to do with style of leadership. Each emphasizes the importance of emptying ourselves of those things that subvert true spiritual leadership and turn it into fleshly leadership.

The first of these incidents occurs when an argument arises among those with Jesus about which of them was the greatest. It reveals that the Apostles were not exceptional men at this point in time. They were ordinary in the sense that they needed the affirmation and acclaim of titles and rank.

That Luke was told this story by those present when it occurred, and that the Holy Spirit led him to report it shows that God wanted us to know that His chosen ones were very much like each of us. This is where we all begin. We rise to other things. We do not naturally have them even though through Him we might have done some extra-ordinary things as the apostles had done at this point. They still were longing to establish themselves as distinct and distinctive. There is this human desire to be exclusive. In the next two incidents Luke will name specifically James and John in situations where this sort of immaturity is evident.

Jesus states the principle of emptying oneself of such human needs. This emptying is to characterize those individuals that lead His movement. We see this humility early in the Scriptures in Abram (Genesis 13:8-13; 14:17-22). Jesus gives a profound illustration of it here in holding a child at His side as He states the principle of being empty of all such self-promotion.

Luke 9:49-50

The second incident that has to do with the matter of leadership style involves John. He tells of an incident that threatened him. There was someone else with power to cast out demons in the name of Jesus. It was not someone who in John's view followed with them. In other words they had not been given official recognition by Jesus or officially sent out by Him as the twelve had (verses 1-6).

Jesus speaks of the need to let alone those who are advancing the cause of His kingdom. There is a desire in us for control and to lead by regulating so that everything that happens passes through our hands. Jesus simply says that we are not to hinder others from being used as God may choose to use them.

Luke 9:51-56

The third incident that has to do with the matter of leadership style is framed by a statement of time that allows us to understand the timeframe of the rest of Luke's account. It happens "when the days drew near for him to be taken up," as Jesus began to make His way to Jerusalem where He would die and be raised from the dead. The remaining verses of chapter 9 in our English versions and all those in chapters ten through twenty four occur during this final season of His life. So Luke's account gives special attention to these weeks of Jesus' ministry.

This third incident that addresses leadership style involves an unnamed city of the Samaritans. Those of this city would not provide lodging for Jesus. They refused due to hatred and rivalry that existed between Jews and Samaritans. It was not that they disliked Jesus and His followers. It was that they did not agree with His agenda and His loyalty to Jerusalem as the place of worship. So they refused to extend hospitality to Him because He was going to Jerusalem.

The disciples are offended by this. Two of them, James and John, are named as asking permission to call down fire from heaven to exact revenge on these who have rejected them. Jesus rebukes them. Luke does not report what Jesus says. Some manuscripts report what Jesus' says here, but evidence indicates that these were added later. Luke seems to have simply let us know that Jesus rebukes this response of using divinely bestowed powers to further our own needs and in reaction to our own hurts. Spiritual leaders must rise above these instinctive reactions. Jesus simply moved on to another place where the inhabitants would provide for them.

Luke 9:57-62

The fourth incident that has to do with the matter of leadership style involves people along the way who have opportunity to follow Jesus. Three incidents are grouped together to give the reader insight into the fact that all who appear willing to follow Jesus must be warned of the cost involved and the pragmatic issues they will have to deal with. As noted before this message of sacrifice was being declared "to all"(see 9:23-27). Jesus would live out this message to the utmost, but there was no doubt that a lifestyle of sacrifice was the call issued to any who sought to be a part of Jesus' kingdom.

We are not told by Luke what the response of any of these volunteers was to this message of personal sacrifice. His purpose seems simply to show there is sacrifice they must be prepared to make if they would desire to follow Christ. It is a great series of lessons for those Jesus had chosen as leaders, both for their own use and for their later use in appointing leaders themselves.

The first person volunteers to follow Jesus wherever He might go. Jesus simply warns this person that He has no home. The second Jesus invites with the simple words, "Follow me." This person replies that they need to go bury their father who has died. Jesus tells them to let those who are spiritually dead tend to this. We do not know if they heeded His command. The third says they will follow Jesus after saying goodbye to their family. Jesus replies that in following Him such looking back indicates they are not fit for the kingdom of God.

Again, Luke does not report the response of any of the three. His intention and that of the Holy Spirit seems to be simply to lead the readers to ponder their own responses to Jesus call to serve and obey. It also seems to be to show that a certain attitude is required of those who would rise to lead in Kingdom matters.

Luke 10

Luke 10:1-16

It is in the wake of these lessons on spiritual leadership that Jesus appoints seventy two individuals to go on ahead of Him and prepare people for His arrival in the towns along the way as He traveled to Jerusalem.

In the case of these seventy two appointees, Luke reports extensively on Jesus' instructions to them as they go. Jesus' instructs them in pragmatic things, like how they are to be provided for. He also instructs them on what He wants them to do—"heal the sick and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" He also instructs them on what to expect in terms of response. The "harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" is something they would surely experience and feel. The task of spiritual leadership is overwhelming. They are to meet the experience of this feeling with prayer to God for more laborers. The response to their message will be mixed. Jesus instructs them as to how to deal with both acceptance and rejection.

As He talks about rejection in particular He speaks to the tragic consequences of unbelief. He names towns in which his own ministry has been extensive and powerful, and yet the response has been minimal. His comparison of the unrepentant state of these Israelite towns with Tyre and Sidon remains a most humbling and convicting statement to this day if we ponder it. We have the ability to lapse into a smug self-righteousness, unmoved by His Spirit, unmoved by His power. We can get so use to His presence that it no longer moves us to reverence and awe. Allowing this is one of our greatest offenses and it adds up to us shutting out God Himself from our lives.

The pronouncement of judgment with respect to this spiritual apathy is meant to remind the reader of the urgency of the mission itself and the urgency of their own response to spiritual truth.

Luke 10:17-24

Luke gives us no report on the actual mission of the seventy two. He jumps straight to their return. He reports to us their joy. Then he reports the course correction Jesus gives them regarding the experience of this joy. After this he reports to us Jesus' joy in the moment as if to instruct us on where to look for an experience of joy.

The seventy two are joyful over the experience of power they had. They return with joy over this. Jesus replies by affirming this experience of power. His words affirm that this was a sign of a greater event to come, when Satan would be cast from the presence of God and would inflict harm on the unbelieving. Jesus is likely thinking of an event He would reveal later through John (Revelation 9), a season of judgment on the earth when the power of evil would be allowed to run its course even as it is being judged, just before Jesus' second coming.

Then Jesus reminds them of what will be a steady source of joy to them—that their names are written in heaven. Our ultimate hope and source of joy is not even in our experience of the things of God in this life. It is the prospect of the life we will have with Him for eternity. Jesus was planting this thought in them because in the ministry of the gospel there is sacrifice and suffering and even death. It is all mitigated by the prospect of God's kingdom as it will be.

Luke gives us an account of a moment on this occasion when he says Jesus "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit." This is an interesting moment in his account. After mentioning the Holy Spirit frequently in the first four chapters of his account, no mention is made of Him until now. Luke presents this joy in a

way that makes it seem to us as having swept over Jesus rather suddenly as He heard the account of the seventy two and felt their joy. This shows that His previous corrective comment about what they should rejoice at was not meant to condemn in any way their present joy over having experienced the kingdom in the present.

Jesus expression of this joy of the Holy Spirit inspires a spontaneous prayer of thanksgiving that He offers. He thanks God the Father for these wonders that these “babes” have experienced. The learned ones of the day had not experienced such spiritual authority. These that had simply believed in Him had. He thanks God for the irony and justice of this. Then He thanks the Father because of His own role in His plan that this all reflected. God the Father was doing His great work in the world through His Son, and Jesus felt the weightiness of the glory of that privilege.

Jesus knew that He was experiencing the beginnings of something that was historic. So were the disciples with Him. He turns and alerts them to the profound and historic nature of this that they are participating in. Many, He says, anticipated it and longed for it—good and great men and women. But they themselves had experienced it.

Luke 10:25-35

Luke shifts the scene at this point to a moment when a lawyer stands up to question Jesus. The lawyer does it to “put Him to the test.” His motive was not to learn and believe, but to undo Jesus’ credibility. It could be that this happened as Jesus was speaking with the seventy two. It could be that as they spoke together a crowd slowly gathered and that this incident interrupts Jesus more private debriefing with His disciples. Verse 23 might be indicating this. It is also possible that Luke is fast-forwarding to another event that happened in a synagogue in an unnamed town that Jesus visited as He made His way to Jerusalem. This would be a town to which two of the seventy two had gone previously and alerted the inhabitants of Jesus’ impending arrival.

When exactly this event happened is not as important as is the fact that Luke places it in His account at this point, right after Jesus’ expression of joy at the fact that the common people, babes by the standard of other men like this lawyer, had entered into a hands-on experience of the kingdom of God. In this context of joy and in this moment that Jesus has labeled as profoundly historic, this experience of the hardness and the mysterious nature of unbelief is also present. So the seventy two had experienced power over demons. Now they encounter a man who wishes to argue with the Son of God and wishes to justify Himself. The work of the kingdom of God in the present era always is a mixed experience of these two things.

In his attempt to undo Jesus’ credibility, the lawyer asks, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” It is a question about the pathway of life that results in inheriting a certain kind of eternal existence. It is not just eternal existence. All will have eternal existence. It is a question about an eternal quality of life—life as one rescued by Yahweh, free from the scourge of evil, experiencing His full blessing. It should be understood by us to be addressing in our terms not only how to get to heaven, but how to experience all that Yahweh desires to give us through His plan of salvation—the full blessing that His grace offers.

In answer to this question Jesus asks, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” So Jesus deftly avoids the Lawyer’s trap. He points the lawyer back to the law of Moses, the lawyer’s area of expertise. He asks the lawyer two questions, both of which are important. The lawyer knew that we must know both what the law says—its words—and we must interpret its words rightly. So Jesus asks a question related to both. The second question is critical. The essence of the conflict between Jesus

and the leaders of the Jews lay not in what the law said, but how it was to be interpreted and applied. Jesus was always pointing to how the law was to be understood, not just to its words.

In this case the lawyer answers with words that are well-chosen. He provides a great summary statement of the requirement of the law from statements that can be found in Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5. Jesus commends His answer and says, “Do this and you will live.”

Now, why did Jesus answer seem to indicate that salvation is earned by obedience to the law? Jesus drives the man back to the law because even as a lawyer he had not learned the lesson of the law. That lesson is that we always fail in our efforts to conform to the law. The law itself spoke often to this certain failure, projecting failure for Israel not success (Deuteronomy 4:25-31; 5:28-29; 29:4; 30:1-6; 31:14-30). The law would reveal to those who paid attention to its words and interpreted them right, that evil was such a part of their hearts that obeying the law was not possible. It would reveal to them that their hope was in Yahweh’s salvation—new hearts that He would place in them. Yahweh’s salvation was standing before this lawyer in flesh and blood. Jesus would bring about a new heart for humanity through the Holy Spirit.

The lawyer had not yet honestly faced the lesson of the law, that he was incapable of procuring the blessing of Yahweh by obedience. In fact He proceeds to seek to justify himself, that is, make himself look wise. He did this by suggesting that the term neighbor is vague. It seems apparent that the Lawyer had a narrow definition of neighbor that allowed him to feel he had treated his neighbor rightly and so had conformed to the law and was righteous. And so he poses the question to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Jesus knows exactly what the lawyer is doing and so responds with a very broad definition of “neighbor” through the story of the good Samaritan. In the end Jesus commands the lawyer to respond as the Samaritan had in the story, even to people he was not acquainted with. That this Jewish lawyer had to admit that the Samaritan was the law abider was itself a lesson on humility, which struck at the heart of the lawyer’s problem with Yahweh. The lawyer had been caught in his own line of questioning, but had been guided to a profound truth experience by Jesus’ gracious answer.

Luke 10:38-42

Luke reports to us the visit of Jesus in the home of Mary and Martha. We know that village was Bethany, which was near Jerusalem. In the two sisters we see a contrast that Luke thinks is important to highlight. Interestingly, he does not report other things about these two sisters, such as when Mary anoints Jesus (Mark 14:8; John 11:2), or when Jesus’ raises their brother Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44). But this event Luke chooses to include.

Luke’s account presents Martha as what we would call “task oriented,” a “doer.” He says she was “distracted with much serving.” Luke presents Mary as a learner, one anxious to simply be in the presence of Jesus. She sat at Jesus feet and “listened to His teaching.”

From our perspective both are necessary. In middle-class America “doers” are particularly valued. Our attitude often favors the one working and accomplishing tasks over one who is giving themselves to spiritual thought. Jesus gives His perspective when compelled to by Martha’s complaint. He describes to Martha her own heart, what is compelling her to be so consumed by the tasks. He tells her simply that she is “anxious and troubled about many things.” This is for us. Even in Christian work and ministry we can be distracted from listening to Jesus by tasks, by activity. Christianity can easily become doers at the expense of the greater challenge of being.

Jesus makes the profound statement that “only one thing is necessary,” and that one thing was what Mary had chosen. It is of prime importance that we believe this, shape our lives and schedules by it, and watch that we not drift from it.

Luke 11

Luke 11:1-13

Luke follows this story very intentionally with one that speaks of our partnership with God through prayer. Upon observing Jesus' practice of prayer, one of His disciples asks that He teach them to pray even as John had taught his disciples. Jesus responds to this request by giving an example of prayer. Through this brief example of prayer He is likely wanting to show that prayer does not require special physical posture, or rhetoric, or ceremony. It is everyday language—normal communication directed to God. Prayer deals with a wide range of concerns. It involves worship of God, prayer for the progress of His kingdom, asking for daily needs, for forgiveness and for power against temptation. This is all referenced in this simple example of prayer Jesus gives.

After this very brief example Jesus gives some thoughts on praying. We assume that these related to what He had observed as challenging to humanity. He teaches persistence in prayer. He seems to want to drive this point home in a memorable way in His words to us. He was going after prayerfulness, not just the activity of praying. He also emphasizes praying with trust in Yahweh's goodness. This trust has proven very illusive to humans from Adam on down through each successive generation. It is important to pray believing that God is so good that He will give of His very self, His own Spirit, to those who ask.

Luke's point seems to be to show that Jesus taught us to persistently ask for this latter thing, the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. This likely explains his placing of the story of Mary and Martha just before this instruction on prayer. We cannot seek out the physical presence of Jesus as Mary did. But we can experience continually the company and empowerment of the Holy Spirit by habitually asking for it. Through the Spirit we can experience Jesus' work of renewal. Jesus urges us to go beyond the activity of praying. He inspires us toward being prayerful people who are constantly asking, seeking and knocking, and doing so with receiving the Holy Spirit's presence and empowerment in view.

Luke 11:14-23

Luke moves from this scene with Jesus' tantalizing comment on receiving through prayer the gift of the presence of the Holy Spirit from God the Father. Luke now moves us to a public scene where Jesus deals with an evil spirit that has made a man mute. It is once again Jesus confronting in the power of the Holy Spirit the forces of evil. It is no contest. Jesus casts the demon out and the man speaks. Luke once again reports that the crowd marvels at this, words that he has frequently used so far in his account of Jesus.

However, Luke quickly reports something new that develops as this collective amazement was sweeping through those present. This time Jesus' opponents explain what has just happened by saying that Jesus Himself is empowered by the chief of such evil spirits and so is able to cast out evil spirits. This they offer as their explanation of what the crowd has seen. In the midst of this new murmuring others begin to clamor for a sign from heaven, as if this power against evil was not a sufficient one. The child-like amazement begins to be colored by unbelief.

Jesus seeks to reason with those present against this accusation and the doubts. In the process He will reveal important things about the spiritual realm. He speaks of grave implications involved should they arrive at wrong conclusions about what they have witnessed in Him.

First, to think He is empowered by a demon to cast out demons supposes that the kingdom of Satan is divided and works against itself. That suggests that Satan lacks the wisdom even of humans—that desertion and infighting can be tolerated. Second, to think this way was to have to concede that perhaps some of their own who were casting out demons were also empowered by demons. So to think as they were made them vulnerable on several points.

On the other hand, if Jesus was empowered by God to cast out demons, it meant that the kingdom of God was upon them. This was the conclusion that Jesus and the seventy two had all been seeking to lead people to. It was decision time for these. They were actually deciding who they would stand with. Would they believe in Jesus and stand with God and gather others into His kingdom? Or would they scatter others and be instruments of the evil one?

The language of scattering and gathering (verses 23) has historical underpinnings in Israel's history. History plainly reported that when Israel pursued evil they were scattered. It was in pursuing Yahweh that they had hope in being gathered. That this would be the case was plainly revealed to them in the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 4:25-31; 30:1-6). The decision before them was of utmost eternal importance.

Jesus warns the crowd of the dangers of a casual mentality toward such spiritual beings and their power. He is speaking against the cosmetic spirituality of the day that consisted of mere routine and ritual. It was that spirituality that let to the questions and accusations of the day. His warning was that there was a worse spiritual condition that could come upon a person than what they had witnessed on this occasion in the case of the mute man. It could come over them. Such one's who had tasted of truth could be deceived again and return to the very things that led them into slavery to begin with. The same compromises and sins engaged again could result in an even worse state of being for them.

Evil and evil beings must find in us more than cosmetic spirituality and self-help. It can't be that we live in the same house just swept clean. It must be a new house. Such beings must find the rule of God in our hearts--submission to the truth of God at the conviction of the Holy Spirit. There must be that which in the spiritual realm to spiritual beings conveys the ownership and authority of God Most High.

Luke 11:27-28

The things that Jesus says next help us understand what sends this signal of God's ownership loud and clear in the spiritual realm. Interestingly, Jesus says them as a result of what we would see as an interruption. This has a way of making us pause over them and so causes them to stick in our mind. They relate profoundly to what He has been speaking about spirits, the spiritual realm, and discerning what is of God and what is of demons and Satan.

The interruption comes as an unnamed woman shouts out the blessedness of Jesus' mother, Mary. It is likely legitimate in the sense that the woman is being blessed herself by the words of Jesus and particularly by what she sees of the salvation He is bringing from the realm of darkness. To her credit, she recognizes the source of Jesus' power and wisdom as being a great blessing. There is no doubt at all in her mind about what the crowd is witnessing on this day as they watch Jesus and listen to Him. They are witnessing in Jesus something historic in the plan of God. She was one of the good hearts present that day.

Jesus' words to the woman and to the crowd as they process what she has said are meant to steer the hearers in a direction that will lead them to right conclusions about Him. The first word Jesus

speaks in reply to this woman's forceful declaration marks what he is about to say as something that will contrast with her words. It is rendered in the ESV with the English word "rather." That is a good rendering. But Jesus' first word could be rendered by the much stronger expression "Much more." So what Jesus says is meant to divert the hearers from something that is true to something much more profound and important.

This will lead them in the way of Yahweh's salvation and rescue them from the demise of humanism that He has just described with the metaphor of a house swept clean. What He says will lead them into a spirituality that is more than cosmetic. The greatest of all blessings are found in learning what God has said and then in shaping one's life by that truth.

There is no greater privilege than this, to hear the message of God and shape one's life by it. To do this is to do more than simply sweep the house clean. To do this is to decidedly mark oneself out as belonging to God. It bears witness to His ownership because it could happen no other way except through His presence in one's life. It is to assure that one's life will be transformed. The state of such a one will be better as time goes on, not worse. To hear and keep God's message is to be able to discern the nature of what is seen and experienced. All who do this will know the source of what they see and hear. They will not mistake evil for the kingdom of God. They will not mistake the things of the kingdom of God for evil. None of the things that were happening in the hearts of those resisting Jesus on that day would have been occurring if they had been those who heard the message of Yahweh and kept it.

The privilege of Mary was to be chosen of God to bear the Messiah. From a Jewish point of view, particularly that of a female, Mary was the most blessed of women. Luke has affirmed the presence of this feeling of blessedness in Mary and that she knew that because God had chosen her for this role she would be viewed as particularly blest by future generations (Luke 1:48). But this blessing was a role—giving birth to a child. God assigns significant roles to even evil people and beings. In fact every living being has a role in His plan. Now clearly Mary's was a wonderful role. But one's destined role may not mean they personally experience Yahweh's salvation. There were many examples in Israel's history of kings whose role was of great privilege, but who finished very poorly, whose "last state was worse than the first." It is the greatest of blessings to hear the word of God and keep it. Jesus knew His own mother and knew that her experience of Yahweh's salvation was her greatest blessing.

Luke 11:29-36

Jesus has dealt with one of the reactions in the gathering crowd to the miracle they have witnessed, the deliverance of a man who was demonized and unable to speak. He has clarified the importance of reaching the right conclusion about who He Himself was and the source of His power. Now He deals with a second thing that the crowd was clamoring for. They sought a sign from heaven.

This is an interesting situation. They apparently did not view the deliverance of the demonized man as such a sign. This is likely because of what Jesus has spoken of when he refers to their own sons who were casting out demons. Though they viewed this as powerful, it was not necessarily something that the Messiah alone could do. They had seen this in others. So it was not enough for them that He had done such things as raising the dead in other places. They wanted to see such things with their own eyes.

This desire is NOT the practice of the historical faith in Yahweh. Historically, the practice of the faith has been to accept the testimony of others about Yahweh, to accept in particular the authority of the Scripture. Jesus therefore condemns this as characteristic of an evil generation. This sent the

message to these Israelites that they were aligning themselves with the Exodus generation who had been condemned for the lack of faith to be wanderers. They never entered the promised land. Even Moses slumped to their level of trust and was kept from the land. So this short statement should have been a grave warning to them if it alone was spoken by Him. But He adds to it.

In the rest of what Jesus says in this paragraph Luke gives to the reporting of this event Jesus does project that they will be given such a sign from heaven. He is referring here to the miracle of His own resurrection from the dead. As Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days, survived, then was regurgitated by the fish and proclaimed repentance to Nineveh, Jesus' would be raised from the dead in three days. This makes the resurrection of Jesus the central truth of Christianity.

Jesus also makes it clear that this sign would not lead them to belief. His words were very pointed. He tells them that the hated Syrians of Nineveh and the foreign queen of Sheba will be less liable in the judgment of Yahweh than they themselves will be because of the repentance of all these gentiles at the testimony given to them of the truth. He declares that this crowd and all the Israelites of the day were seeing something greater than either the Ninevites or the Queen of Sheba.

Once again in Luke's account the reader is given the idea that the community of Yahweh is composed of gentile believers. All people may enter Yahweh's kingdom through repentance, changing their mind about what is true. This was a very important principle to revisit with the church of the first century.

After speaking of the spiritual danger the listeners were in, Jesus gives them an illustration He hopes will remind them of an important principle. The principle is that right response to truth allows us to understand even more truth. Suppressing truth hinders us from knowing any truth and our lives become shaped by our ignorance.

Jesus relates this truth through a common experience the hearers of the day had. They all knew what it was like to bring a lamp into a dark room, even as we know what it is like to turn a light switch on in a dark room. Light enables us to rightly perceive and understand our experiences in the room. If we were just groping around in it in darkness our experience would be very different. This is a simple illustration all people can understand.

In the realm of spiritual darkness things are a little more complex. Something can appear to be true. It can appear to explain our experiences and our world. The room can seem light. Others can even agree with us that it IS light. Jesus tells this story and makes these remarks to warn the listeners that this condition was developing among them. It felt right to reject Him as Messiah. It would feel right to punish and kill Him. Such ideas that felt like truth were in them and would come to full bloom in a matter of weeks in Jerusalem. Such light was really darkness, and the darkness they would be led into would be deep.

Jesus knew His death was necessary. In moments like these He was equipping the hearers for the declaration of the truth of the gospel and the good news of forgiveness that His death would bring about. At the declaration of that good news they would need to recognize that the "truth" that they thought they had arrived at and that was guiding them in rejecting and killing Him was really darkness. They would need to repent of that path they had chosen, turn and be forgiven and saved (See Luke's record of Peter's declaration in Jerusalem in Acts 2:22-41).

Luke 11:37-54

In this section Luke shows that the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees was deepening. The “light” that was in them was darkness. This “light” was a wrong interpretation of the old covenant, the record of which we call the Old Testament.

This being the case, the section begins with an invitation extended by a Pharisee to Jesus for Him to dine with him. Jesus accepts the invitation. The Pharisee is “astonished” by the fact that Jesus does not engage in the ceremonial washing that was customary. This custom was in place due to the Pharisee’s wrong understanding of Moses’ writings. They were believing that sin and evil could be dealt with by such things. They failed to realize that all the messages in the law about what was clean and unclean were meant simply to convey that moral and spiritual uncleanness were ever-present in humans. We are born sinners and we think like sinners. Evil is IN us, not ON us. Jesus likely was deliberate in not participating in the ceremonial washing. He wanted to shed light on the matter of evil, that it is IN us. We cannot deal with it simply through ceremony and ritual and outward conformity to laws and codes. We need Yahweh to deal with the very heart of our being, the way we think. This was plain in the law (Deuteronomy 5:28-30; 30:1-6).

The supposed “light” that was in the Pharisee was darkness, meaning it was leading him away from truth rather than into it. In this situation he is “astonished” that Jesus did not engage his tradition. The multitudes have been repeatedly described by Luke as being “astonished” at the power of God manifested through Jesus. Here Luke is intentional in showing us that Jesus’ enemies were not at all acknowledging the obvious power of God in Him. They are so blinded by their wrong view of truth that they are astonished instead at what they judged as sin in this One—the Son of God. The “light” that was in them was darkness and they were reaching utterly wrong conclusions.

Jesus does not let up for a moment in His rebuke of these that were seeing things so wrongly. He projects the path they will walk down, traveling further and further from Yahweh, the One they professed to be following. The end would be very bitter for them. Jesus pronounces “woe” on them, which is an expression always connected to a warning of divine judgment. It is a warning given to both the Pharisees and the lawyers. These so-called experts in the Mosaic law had missed the truth of that law and so it was pointing them away from Christ rather than towards Him as their hope and King.

As this section closes Luke notes that these enemies of Jesus from this point on “press Him hard . . . to provoke Him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him to catch him in something he might say.” They are very intentionally seeking now to bring about the end they desire. But they are doing so not knowing that they are playing into the hands of the Most High God. He will work His purposes through what they intend as evil, even as He had done in the life of their ancestor Joseph (Genesis 50:20).

Luke 12

Luke 12:1-34

Luke sets aside for now this thickening plot to destroy Jesus to report what Jesus was saying and doing as His enemies were seeking to undo Him. “In the meantime” (verse 1), while they were seeking to destroy Him, He was pursuing His mission and declaring the truth with the time He had left. The things He begins to talk about are particularly aimed at THE decision the people of Israel were processing, namely, who was Jesus. The turmoil and division could be felt. People needed to understand the eternal importance of the decision, the kind of things that could skew their thinking and the kinds of sacrifices they would need to make personally if they were to do the right thing.

Luke tells us of what Jesus said to His disciples as a crowd of many thousands gathered around them. So these were words particularly for His followers, but spoken so that many could and would hear. They would pass by word of mouth to those out of the range of Jesus’ voice. But the disciples are the intended audience. Jesus will refer to them as friends (verse 4), and His words would be crafted to help them live in the light of the truth and not be taken in by the pseudo-spirituality of His enemies.

Jesus begins by telling them to beware of the “leaven” of the Pharisees. He called it leaven, or yeast, because there was that about it that affected everything these leaders influenced. The term was a powerful one among Jews because Yahweh for over a millennium had used leaven as a symbol of the evil that is IN humanity. The expression indicates that the Pharisees were wrong in a key matter, and the result was that they were wrong about everything. He indicates that their error was hypocritical.

Their hypocrisy was their blind assertion that the law proved them righteous before God and proved them His leaders while their actions were clearly showing how out of touch with Yahweh they were. The leaven that led to this state of hypocrisy—the key matter they were wrong on—was that they interpreted the law of Moses in a way that worked for them and made them look good. They did not interpret it by itself. So, for example, they interpreted its teaching on the Sabbath as prohibiting work. They had no provision in their thinking for what effort should be expended on that day for good that Yahweh wanted done either in them or through them. This method of interpreting Scripture, in a way that makes oneself look good, always leads to hypocrisy.

Today we would call this interpreting the Bible in a way that “works” for us. That is, we establish its meanings and its boundaries in a way that does not demand change from us and helps us feel good about ourselves. This method of interpretation allows us to ignore sin. It is a deadly charade spiritually and eternally speaking. But it is our default method of interpreting Scripture as humans. We must guard against it in us. No person dares assume in any moment they are not doing it, no matter how much training they have had in Biblical Interpretation. This error resides in our hearts even as it did in the hearts of the Pharisees.

Jesus speaks many words here that warn us that to allow ourselves such “wiggle room” under the authority of Scripture is to cover up what will certainly be revealed. Rather than being prepared for judgment we will be undone by judgment. The truth will win.

There are heart issues and values that make this hypocrisy easy for us to slip into. The key one is the “fear of man”. It has many faces. Some want to attract a following. Some want to please others and be respected by them. All do so because they value this life’s rewards more than God’s reward. So Jesus speaks to that issue directly and all that goes with it such as: not acknowledging Jesus Christ in the presence of others, denying the testimony and movement of the Holy Spirit in this matter in

favor of aligning with what is in vogue. Under this “fear of man” we suffer intimidation and cowardice at the very times when our belief in Jesus will require us to present and defend our belief to others.

Yahweh’s call to humanity is to be ruled by the fear of God. This was the recurring theme throughout the law and writings of the Scriptures. The fear of Yahweh was everywhere given as the essence of life (Deuteronomy 6:1-2; 8:4-6; 10:12-14; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26-27). Luke has continually noted fear as an emotion of humanity as they are confronted with the works of God. Now Jesus notes the fear of man as the most deadly of our fears in that it has very severe eternal consequences.

An important element of this section is the mention of the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ words warn against blaspheming the Holy Spirit as His enemies were doing. They did this by not accepting Jesus’ words and works as those of the Spirit of God. To do so is to reject the Spirit’s testimony from within. This act results in eternal condemnation.

On the other hand Jesus tells of the great comfort and blessing of the Holy Spirit to those who believe. They will be enabled by Him for strategic moments in the mission of Christ’s kingdom. So Jesus indicates that the Holy Spirit is the key player and the great prize in the drama that is building with respect to Jesus. Jesus’ enemies are blaspheming the Spirit by rejecting Christ. They will be isolated away from God. Jesus’ followers will be enabled by the Holy Spirit in following Jesus against this great opposition. They will be key players in God’s kingdom.

Jesus’ words have been warning us against very natural human tendencies in spiritual matters that turn us away from what Yahweh has for us. At this moment in his account of Jesus’ words Luke reports an interruption. A person in the crowd calls out to Jesus, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” It demonstrates our humanity at its worse, the kind of thing in us that takes the place of Yahweh’s heart for us. It is a classic demonstration of the way in which issues relating to this world’s goods steal our attention away from matters of eternal significance. It is an important moment in terms of what Jesus has been talking about—a great illustration of our problem.

Jesus seizes the moment rather than ignoring it. He uses it to give an important message. He warns “One’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” He warns that covetousness takes on many forms. He tells a story that illustrates the vanity of wealth.

But Jesus’ reply also had to cut deep into the heart of the person that interrupted, who was attempting to use Jesus to gain this world’s good. Their hypocrisy had been uncovered. They had used their moment with the King of Kings to address earthy things not things of eternity. The entire situation illustrates what it will be like standing before the judge with all of one’s impure motives.

Having utilizing this interruption as an occasion to speak about the hankering for wealth and its fleeting nature, Jesus now turns back to His disciples with an application of all that has been said on this occasion. Jesus realizes that we have a need for security. We live in a fallen world and our survival is not a given. It comes with great effort. It feels very uncertain. It is this insecurity that can push us toward the “fear of man” and the supposed security of riches. Our fear leads us to covet wealth and this world’s goods.

Jesus gives His disciples a series of powerful statements on how they are to deal with the pragmatic concerns and anxieties of survival in this life. Instead of imagining these to be our security, our security is to be firmly rooted in the character of Yahweh and His commitment to us. He uses illustrations from nature with straight-forward statements of God the Father’s love and concern for us. He calls us to trust in this by putting the agenda of His kingdom first in our lives. This will lead us to experience His great care.

These statements regarding the confidence they could have in Yahweh's kingdom would be the anchor of His follower's lives in terms of what was unfolding ahead of them in Jerusalem. They had no idea at this point how important this truth and the assurance of the Holy Spirit's power would become in the course of the next ninety days of their lives.

Luke 12:35-48

Luke adds a number of comments Jesus made regarding the primary challenge of His followers. The phrase "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning," sets the tone for the entire section. Its length gives an indication of the relative importance and difficulty of this charge.

Luke 12:49-58

These comments seem to be addressed to the larger crowd and the multiple attitudes Jesus knew were developing in them as they were making critical decisions about Him.

The first thing Jesus speaks directly to is the fact that the decision about Him had to be made by them irrespective of what others were doing, even members of their own families. They should anticipate division not unity on the matter of who He was.

The second thing has to do with discerning wisely the times they were living in. Particularly they needed to answer this question; what is Yahweh doing and who does He want me to be? This remains the question for every forgiven person indwelt as they are now by the Holy Spirit. We can be understanding regarding the will of Yahweh for us, we must not be oblivious.

The third thing has to do with resolving conflict with others. Conflict takes our hearts and minds away from what Yahweh wants to do with us. It so plays with our emotions that our ability to discern what God's heart and mind is in that moment becomes clouded. We must settle conflict quickly. The human psyche is such that unresolved conflict creates an emotional inertia that impedes spiritual vitality.

Luke 13

Luke 13:1-5

Luke continues to provide a record of Jesus' appeal to people in the cities and villages of Israel as He made His way to Jerusalem where He would be killed. He knew the momentous nature of the decision they were individually making about Him. So He was continually instructing them on how they needed to be thinking so as to decide rightly, in line with what God the Father and the Holy Spirit were revealing about Him being their Messiah.

Luke reports Jesus' comments on a current event. We do not know more details besides those reported here. Pilate had apparently judged some Galileans worthy of death. He had apparently wanted to send a message to others. He had killed them and mingled the blood of the victims either with sacrifices they themselves were making at the time or with the sacrifices other Galileans were making. People were processing the cruelty of this act and perhaps why these Galileans had become victims of this punitive, hateful action. It seems apparent that they thought Yahweh's will had come into play in the matter. Specifically it seems they thought that these Galileans were doing something that Yahweh punished them for through Pilate. Pilate carried out the judgment but it was really Yahweh's retribution. It was cruel and so to some it showed that these Galileans were certainly worse sinners than other Galileans.

Jesus addresses this underlying belief, that such a cruel thing had come about because God Himself had decided that the sins of these, whatever they were, were exceptional and needed to be punished in a way that sent a loud and clear message.

Jesus' reply does not exonerate the Galileans. But it does clearly state that their sin, whatever it was, was no greater than the sins of the rest. The message is that every person needs to repent due to their sin. The word rendered repent in our English versions is the translation of a Greek word that means to change one's mind. Specifically Jesus was calling for them to change their minds about their view of good and evil and therefore their view of Him.

The message of repentance began with the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 1:27; Jeremiah 5:3; Ezekiel 14:6), was refreshed by John the Baptist (Luke 3:3,8), and affirmed by Jesus. This is Yahweh's message in the present time and beyond. It is not an exaggeration to say that it is the message for every day of our lives. It is in repentance that our relationship to Yahweh is restored and we are refreshed in this fallen world (Isaiah 30:15).

Luke 13:6-9

Jesus tells a parable to illustrate the transformation that He desired to see in Israel. It is a story based in agriculture that would help the hearers understand the transformational power of repentance. Repentance is the fruit that logically is produced when we accept the truth.

This story also conveys the clear expectations of Yahweh. He does not expect that we will continue resisting the truth. He expects we will accept it and so bear fruit. The expected fruit of truth is change in how we think and behave. If truth does not initially produce this fruit He takes individual action to help it do so in us. But the expectation remains, and the time comes when our opportunity passes. Jesus' knew that Israel's opportunity would pass. At this point in His ministry He is likely sowing seeds for the hearer's response to the declaration of the Gospel in the years that followed His death.

Luke 13:10-17

The next thing Luke reports occurs in a synagogue in an undisclosed place. Jesus heals a woman who had not been afflicted by a disabling spirit for eighteen years. It was yet another healing that Jesus performed on the Sabbath day.

The ruler of the synagogue makes an announcement to the people that they may come to be healed on any one of the other six days of the week. Jesus is grieved over the hypocrisy of this and calls it that. It was hypocrisy because it alleged to be born out of respect for Yahweh and His law. But it set aside Yahweh's bigger concern for the needs of people. Jesus points out that all would work on the Sabbath to give a beast a drink. Why then would it not be right to heal a person who had been afflicted for eighteen years?

Luke notes the response to this incident. Jesus' adversaries were put to shame. But the people rejoiced at what Jesus was doing. Luke wants to show to the readers the affirmed wisdom of Jesus' thought and action and the hardened condition of Jesus' opponents toward Yahweh. They were put to shame, but unrepentant.

Luke 13:18-35

The reception to Jesus is mixed. There is a growing group of people who embrace Him. There is also an influential group who are increasingly entrenched in their unbelief. Their anger is growing, and Jesus seems to be intentional in bringing it out and addressing it.

The paragraphs that follow in Luke's account show Jesus making observations about this mixed response. Specifically, Jesus will indicate as He already has that those aligned against Him will kill Him. At the same time He will indicate that His movement that He has started will grow to include many people groups, even while these in Israel reject Him.

Jesus' enemies will kill Him, but they will not eradicate the Kingdom of God. Jesus likens His kingdom to a mustard seed. It is the smallest of seeds, but grows into a plant so large that the birds make nests in it. He likens His kingdom to leaven which a woman hides in a lump of dough that leavened the whole lump. Both the allusion to the birds and the use of the figure of leaven might be meant to convey the fact that unbelief would be present in and around Yahweh's kingdom in the years ahead. Both birds and leaven are used biblically as figures that illustrate evil in people. Jesus point may be that presently this mixed reaction to Him would have its season.

Luke reports Jesus leaving the town in which He had healed the woman on the Sabbath and traveling toward Jerusalem. As He goes He teaches people in the towns and villages that He comes into. Luke reports two conversations that occur as Jesus travels toward His end in Jerusalem.

The first conversation occurs with someone who had observed the mixed reaction to Jesus among the people and asks if it was just a few who were being saved. Jesus answers by making three observations. First, the door was narrow. He seems to leave this figure hanging without explaining it, but the indication is that belief is not so obvious a response that it is easy. Second He speaks of many seeking to enter who are not able because they respond too late. They will appeal to their experiences with Jesus, but their reality is that they were workers of iniquity. Third He says that these would be in a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. They will observe the prophets and a people composed of many ethnic groups in the kingdom of God. They will observe some unlikely people in that kingdom and some likely ones outside of it. So the question asked if it was only a few that would be saved. The answer indicates that there would be Jews NOT saved and other peoples

who would be. The question of the relative number is only vaguely answered by the suggestion that entry is through a narrow door.

The second conversation reported by Luke that occurs in route to Jerusalem occurs when some Pharisees tell Jesus to leave because Herod is seeking to kill Him. Jesus' gives to these a message to give to Herod that is really one for them to ponder. This was a common tactic in teaching done by rabbis of the day who would conceal their wisdom in riddles. To these whom He knew were part of the plot to kill Him, Jesus alludes to His resurrection on the third day. It may be that these Pharisees were a part of a dissenting group of the Sanhedrin trying to save Him from the plot that was brewing (Luke 23:50; Jn. 7:30; 19:39). To these He may have been giving this clue so that in the aftermath of His death and at news of His resurrection they would respond in belief (see also Acts 6:7).

Jesus provides more clues to these individuals in the lament He takes up for Jerusalem. He indicates that the tradition of leaders of the Jews in Jerusalem killing messengers sent to them in that city is long and documented. Their tradition was not one of obedience to Yahweh. It was a tradition of killing Yahweh's messengers and doing so in Jerusalem. He indicates that He was Himself traveling there to be a part of that tradition. He warns that this tradition is established in spite of Yahweh's repeated efforts to gather Israel. He warns that this tradition would end with His death because there would be no more heard through messengers from Yahweh. He was leaving them to experience the end to their desolate ways. Jesus also predicts the great mystery explainable only by His resurrection. He Himself would be the next messenger from Yahweh and it would be different. They would see Him again and they would then bless Him. The multitudes would do so within a few days now (Luke 19:28-44). But they themselves would not enter into that and so Jerusalem would be led by them into desolation. That would be the legacy of the spiritual leaders of the day.

Luke 14

Luke 14:1-24

For the fourth time in his account Luke reports a conflict Jesus has with the Pharisees over behavior appropriate for the Sabbath (6:1-5; 6:6-9; 13:10-16). The thought of the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath was perhaps the clearest illustration of the fact that they knew the letter of the law but had missed its intended purpose. Its purpose was to reveal what was in the hearts of humanity. They had an understanding of what NOT to do on the Sabbath. But they had no understanding of TO do—being moved on that day to do good. This is the classic fruit of legalism.

Legalism is the confidence that one can gain favor from God through adhering to laws of conduct. Legalism is NOT a matter of holding oneself to routine or to a standard of behavior. It is a false confidence that such behavior makes up for evil we engage and makes us right with Yahweh. So legalism is an attitude we hold toward our personal conduct, namely, that adherence to laws gives us good standing with God because. It is a false trust in ourselves and in law, the belief that by conformity to law we can earn God's favor. It inevitably produces arrogance and a lack of conviction about inner attitudes. It is a sin of the heart.

Again, legalism is NOT necessarily present where someone sets down rules for themselves. Rules and routine that promote real spiritual maturity can be and are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul commanded many such practices among Christians. We must not hide behind concern about legalism to justify a lack of self-discipline.

In the first incident reported by Luke in chapter 14 Jesus goes after this problem. We do not keep the Sabbath by not working. We keep the Sabbath when we set aside our normal work in order to do the important things Yahweh has for us so that our hearts remain His. Jesus reminds those present that it is good to do good on the Sabbath.

Luke then reports a parable that Jesus told the guests who were a part of the meal at the unnamed Pharisee's home. As they arrived they were occupied with who they could sit near or by in order to enhance their own status. He gives them some pragmatic advice on this. However He seems concerned that they be reminded of an important principle that Yahweh operates under. They could likely have quoted it, but they were not living by it. The principle is found in multiple places in the Old Testament (Psalm 147:6; Proverbs 11:2; Isaiah 2:11, 17). It is that "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." It is true to a considerable degree in this life. It is absolutely true with respect to eternity.

Luke also reports some advice along these lines of humbling oneself to the unnamed man who had invited Him. His counsel to this man is that he stop pursuing the honor to be gleaned by throwing such events for the influential. It was much more critical to pursue the honor that will come "at the resurrection of the just."

Luke then reports an unnamed man's remark after he had heard these things Jesus had said. The man said, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" There is no way of us knowing the man's heart in saying this. It is certainly a true statement. It could have been done very genuinely. It could have been done for show, to gain acceptance from Jesus. Jesus uses the moment to tell a story relating to that future event. It is a story of a man who invites guests to a banquet, all of whom make excuses for not attending when the time came. The point of the story is clear. Those invited to Yahweh's banquet in His kingdom show no interest in it. Therefore there will not be found room for them when it occurs.

The unnamed man rightly has rightly said that those who eat are the blest ones. Jesus' story is a warning. The warning is that the Israelites have been invited, but many will not be in attendance. It is clearly a warning to the Pharisees who were assuming that their zeal for the law earned them the right to attend this future event in God's kingdom.

At this banquet Jesus has taught the Pharisees a number of things that could have led to their repentance. Each element struck at the very heart of their theology of salvation. Now they have more to ponder about Jesus. The tone of His remarks is that they had better be very careful about assuming they were in right standing with Yahweh just because they had been invited into relationship with Him.

Luke 14:25-35

Throughout the gospel accounts the term disciple is used to describe those who followed Jesus. The term disciple was formed using the Greek verb meaning "to learn." Therefore it describes one who is learning from another. At its very heart is the idea of one who is in process. It also assumes that another exists who is a teacher. It also assumes some level of authority that the teacher has over the disciple. In this section Luke sets forth Jesus' teaching on this latter issue, the level of authority one needed to assign Jesus if they were going to be disciples, "learners", of His way of life.

Now, given the kinds of things Jesus was doing, things never done by any human being, who would not want to be His disciple? And so crowds were following Him. Luke reports what Jesus turns and says to the crowd accompanying Him. He states what is required of His disciples. It is stated very strongly by Him. It is not stated positively, but negatively--deliberately so. Jesus uses hyperbole to make it very emphatic and uncompromising. It was as if Jesus wanted to burst the emotional balloon of the crowd, who were gushing with excitement and fervor.

Jesus turns to the crowd and makes two statements that call for great sacrifice. The first requires hating those dear to any normal human beings—family members. The second requires bearing a cross. Both statements end with "you cannot be my disciple." The message is clear. If you wish to be my disciple it will cost you dearly. If you do not pay this price you cannot be one who learns my way of life.

Jesus did not do these things because He was against zeal and fervor. The rest of His words show that His aim was to produce in them realistic evaluation of their own zeal. To this end He gives two examples to show them that some degree of self-awareness and assessment is essential. The law should have taught Israel that human zeal quickly fades. But the teachers and leaders of the day had concluded the opposite. Jesus in this moment has to confront the mentality of the day that this misguided teaching had produced. That is likely Luke's intent in placing this incident here in his record. It stands out against the backdrop of what he has just pointed out through his reports of Jesus' teachings to the Pharisees.

Jesus makes three concluding statements that further summarize the challenge of the generation of His day. First, a summary of the demands of learning His way of life—that one renounce all he has (verse 33). Second, an illustration of the spiritual condition of Israel—they were like salt that had lost its saltiness (verses 34-35). Third, He makes the statement He often made after He has uttered something profound, "He who has ears to hear, let Him hear." It clearly points out that it is one thing to hear and it is quite another thing to appropriately engage transformation based on what is heard (vs 35). This is "hearing" as Yahweh defines it.

Luke 15

Luke 15:1-32

In this section of Luke we continue to see Jesus clashing with the Pharisees and speaking against them while teaching the multitudes. In this chapter we see three related stories told by Jesus addressing the complaint of the Pharisees that Jesus “receives sinners and eats with them” (verse 2). All three teach the principle that the repentance of anyone is to be rejoiced over. Each of the stories presents a little different perspective on the repentance of a person.

In the first story Jesus utilizes the imagery of a shepherd searching for a lost sheep. The story emphasizes Yahweh’s pro-active approach to seeking the lost. It reports the shepherd’s personal care for just one, and gives us the picture of him carrying the sheep back, rejoicing. Most of the words of the short story deal with the shepherd’s rejoicing and His summoning of his friends to celebrate with him over just this single lost sheep. Jesus tells those hearing that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who have no need of repentance. He lets the hearers deal with the tensions created by that statement.

In the second story Jesus utilizes the imagery of a woman who loses one of ten silver coins. When she finds it she summons her friends and neighbors to celebrate. Jesus tells the hearers that as in this story there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Again the emphasis is that the repentance of sinners is the prize that is worth great celebration in Yahweh’s kingdom.

The third story is a lengthy one. It utilizes the imagery of a wealthy father who had two sons. One takes his share of the inheritance and leaves the family. Here the intentionality of the sinner is emphasized. This son squanders his money living excessively and a famine leaves him coveting the feed unclean pigs are eating. He comes to his senses and returns to his father who gathers all to celebrate the return of the lost son. The story emphasizes the love of the father, and the intentional excessive living of the son, then his intentional repentance—and a rather pragmatic repentance at that.

Then Jesus gives a twist to the story. He does not leave it as the other stories, to emphasize the celebration in heaven over repentance. Rather He shifts the story’s focus to the attitude of the son who had been faithful. As this son witnesses the celebration over the return of his rebellious brother he refuses to join it. He angrily bemoans the supposed lack of reward for his own faithfulness to the family. This shift in focus is meant by Jesus to address the Pharisee’s attitude with respect to the company Jesus keeps. Their self-centeredness has no place in the kingdom of Yahweh. They want no love to be shown at all to those who transgress the law, including what they themselves have added to the Law. That attitude does not align with the Kingdom or its King.

Elsewhere Jesus has let the Pharisees know that they are not rightly sensing Yahweh’s heart with respect to themselves. These stories confront the fact that they are not rightly sensing the heart of Yahweh with respect to those who need to repent. If they had rightly listened to Jesus they would know that by this very attitude they were showing contempt for themselves. By the Law’s standard they too needed to repent. Instead, they viewed with contempt others condemned by the law. By such an attitude they justified Jesus’ rebuke of them.

Luke 16

Luke 16:1-13

Luke turns from the event at the unnamed Pharisee's home and the things Jesus said there to a parable Jesus spoke to the disciples. It is a parable that gives wisdom on handling money. The parable utilizes the conduct of an unrighteous man, to teach wisdom to the disciples.

Luke has just reported Jesus' response to the Pharisee's arrogance toward sinners. Their attitude does not reflect the wisdom of God. His wisdom is gained from observing both the evil and the good. To close oneself off to either is foolish. They could have become wise by mimicking the repentance they were observing in the "sinners" of their day.

This parable is about a dishonest manager who was the manager of a wealthy man's possessions. In our terms he was a financial manager. He was accused of impropriety and so was called to give an account of his transactions to his employer. Seeing his means of income was about to be taken from him, this manager slashes amounts owed to his employer by various debtors. He does so in order to create equity with these and so opportunity for future employment.

In Jesus' story the employer of this manager, upon seeing the records of these transactions, commends the manager's shrewdness. The manager had shrewdly used his authority and his master's wealth to create friendships and so provide future opportunity for himself.

Jesus commands His followers to imitate this shrewdness with respect to gaining eternal things. His teaching is expressed concisely in verse nine. It is to use worldly things to personally draw people into the kingdom. After such things have lost their value, these people you have impacted eternally will be a part of your new life in Yahweh's kingdom.

Luke then reports a number of things Jesus taught the disciples with respect to money and opportunity on this occasion. On the one hand money is insignificant. On the other hand it is a means of gaining things that really matter—true riches. The reality is that money is a "little thing" that we must prove faithful in. Great opportunity comes to those who have proven faithful at more routine things, of which money is one.

Luke's point in placing this parable of the unrighteous manager here in his account is that such important principles can be observed among the righteous and unrighteous alike. We should heed the wisdom gained by such observation. We cannot suppose that there is nothing to learn in the observation of evil people.

Jesus closes with a brief illustration of the danger of money. It can cause our commitment to God to be compromised. It is as impossible as serving two masters for anyone to try to love God while also loving money. Money must be kept in its proper place under the authority of God in our lives. It will tend to loom larger in our minds than what its true significance is. We must be alert to that danger.

Luke 16:14-18

It is likely in reaction to this statement that "you cannot serve God and money," that the Pharisees that are present begin to ridicule Jesus. Luke does not report what they said. He explains to us that they were lovers of money and so lets us know clearly that their reaction is to His statements about money. It is likely that they were particularly reacting to the idea that there was anything to be learned from the dishonest about money and eternity. Jesus' last sentence had drawn the lines very

clearly, “You cannot serve God and money.” It is convicting. Perhaps worse, it made them look bad. This seems likely to be the reason for their ridicule.

It is this, the desire to be well thought of, that Jesus puts his finger on as He responds to their ridicule. His words had stated plainly that they are conflicted. They were NOT able to serve God and money. What they were doing is justifying themselves—making themselves look good. They were good at that. But their hearts were not God’s. They had exalted themselves in front of men and it had worked. But Jesus makes it clear that this produced in God’s eyes what hidden motives always do, an abomination.

Jesus’ first point is that in the plan of God the Law and the Prophets were given by God to humanity to serve as their guide until the time of John the Baptist. We know from the gospel records that John came and announced the great conclusion to this entire era when Israel was guided by the Law and the Prophets. The bottom line was they had proved their guilt before God and that of all humanity. Their need now was to repent. The Law’s function was to prove the flaws in the hearts of humanity—their moral sickness.

So in the wake of the Law’s fourteen hundred year presence in Israel, John called for repentance and announced good news. The good news was that the kingdom of God, embodied in the Messiah, was coming. He was the One the Law and Prophets persistently pointed to as the source of Yahweh’s salvation. By in large the Pharisees rejected John and his message. Because of this John pointed out their lack of conformity to the Law and called them a “brood of vipers” (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7).

In speaking of John, Jesus hits the point of contention between God and these Pharisees. Their desire for wealth and power had indeed kept them thus far from repenting and so from serving Yahweh.

Jesus goes on to make a mysterious statement about the aftermath of John’s preaching. A similar statement is recorded in Matthew’s gospel (11:12). It is mysterious because it can be translated from the Greek in two ways. The ESV has rendered the Greek in this way: “since then the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.” The translators of the ESV have noted that the last phrase of that statement could also be rendered, “everyone is forcefully urged into it.” If the first rendering is correct, then it is not easy to determine what Jesus is alluding to. Perhaps He is speaking to the fact that the Pharisees and others are forcing the kingdom of God to take the shape they wanted it to. They are countering the teaching of Jesus and John and making themselves the controllers of it. If the optional reading is adapted, then Jesus is speaking of the fact that both Himself and John spoke and ministered in a compelling way so as to urge people to repent and move into an experience of kingdom life.

In the great clamor for the kingdom of God that Jesus was encountering each day in Israel the ideas about what that kingdom would/should bring were very diverse. This statement is likely made in response to these diverse expectations. Everyone had a different idea of what the kingdom of God should be like and all were clamoring for their particular dream. Jesus was constantly combating these ideas and even on one occasion the determination of a group who were intent on seizing Him by force and making Him king (John 6:15).

In contrast to these varied and self-serving expectations regarding the kingdom Jesus states this: “But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.” In other words the kingdom of God would harmonize with the character of God as He had revealed Himself. It would be built on the moral principles He had revealed as the standard of justice and truth. It would fulfill the statements made by God about His plan over the centuries. It would deal justly and thoroughly with the fallen nature of humanity according to all the Law required and

projected. So the kingdom of God would not be formed according to any human agenda, including that of the Pharisees. They need not defend the Law. They did need to bow to Jesus because He would be their King.

Jesus immediately provides an example to the Pharisees of one of the Pharisee's traditions which brushed aside God's design for marriage. It is a very poignant example that seems like a very abrupt departure from the subject of the Law. This could be explained by the possibility that Jesus had personal knowledge of the individual Pharisees who were ridiculing Him that they had themselves put away their wives, perhaps multiple ones at multiple times. This would tend to silence the room and set up the next even more sobering moment.

Luke 16:19-31

It is in this context that Luke reports Jesus telling the story of two men who die. One remains unnamed. He is simply a rich man. The other is named Lazarus, and he was very poor. He was a beggar and miserable. The two men knew each other in life.

In death they were separated. The details of the story are given that relate to what the experience of death was like before the death of Jesus. All went to the place of the dead—Hades. The righteous, including this poor man Lazarus went to the place of the dead called Paradise. It is noted by Jesus as being the place where Abraham was. The wicked dead went to the place of torment and this is where the story places the rich man. Both places are Hades, but within this realm of the dead both places are distinct. The story shows that there can be no movement between the two places. Those in torment cannot move to paradise. Those in paradise can do nothing for those in torment.

There is dialog between the two places and so the rich man calls to Abraham for relief. When this is not possible he asks that Abraham send someone back from the dead to warn his kinsmen. Abraham replies that his kinsmen have the writings of Moses and the Prophets. He says that if the rich man's kinsmen do not listen to the witness of Scripture, they will not listen to the witness of one who returns from the dead.

We can identify three different purposes of Jesus in telling this story. First, to warn listeners that the proper decision that they need to make about Him is foretold in the Scriptures by Moses and the Prophets. That means that the Pharisees, self-proclaimed guardians of Moses' law, had missed the message of the law. The story represents this ignorance as willful. It represents the writings as plain and understandable. Their unbelief was because they did not want to believe what it was saying about them and about Jesus.

A second purpose of Jesus was to prophesy regarding the future and so enable belief. His prophecy in this story is that His own resurrection will not bring about belief in them. He had already prophesied that His resurrection from the dead would affirm His identity as the Son of God (Luke 11:29-30; Matthew 12:39-40). Through these words He now proclaims that their resistance to and persecution of the Apostles and other Christians after His resurrection will affirm His identity as well.

A third purpose of Jesus is to teach clearly that being of the physical offspring of Abraham did not guarantee an eternity spent with Yahweh. This is a frequent theme in the gospel of Luke that belief and faith was uncommon but was honored by Yahweh in whomever it was found, Jew or Gentile.

A fourth purpose is not readily apparent at this point of time in Luke's account. It will become more clear toward the end of his writing. Luke will report that at least one member of the Sanhedrin believed, a man named Joseph (Luke 23:50). John indicates that another also believed, a man named Nicodemus (John 19:38-42). Jesus spoke words such as this because He knew that there were people being drawn by the Holy Spirit even among these hard-hearted ones. The plain truth of this story of the rich man and Lazarus powerfully brings home the reality that resistance to truth produces eternal regret. The stakes are never higher than in the decision regarding what is true.

Luke 17

Luke 17:1-10

Luke follows this dialog with the Pharisees with an account of conversations between Jesus and His disciples. The first conversation builds on the sobering truth of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. It speaks to the lesson the disciples of Jesus needed to learn from their observation of the unbelief of the Pharisees. The lesson is that as spiritual leaders we must live with the fragile faith of others in view, doing what strengthens their faith not what undercuts it. The imagery of being thrown into the sea with a millstone hung around one's neck makes Jesus point very emphatic.

Significantly, Jesus teaches them that they are to pay attention to each other's lives in this way. They were to rebuke each other's sin and forgive it. They were to guard against the kind of community the Pharisees had formed with each other. Their fellowship allowed a twisted alliance among them in which they allowed this arrogance to take root and thrive in one another. We must not enable each other's sin.

After speaking to this matter of nurturing faith in each other a request of the apostles is reported by Luke. The request they make is that Jesus increase their faith. It marks a great milestone in life when people realize that faith is the thing of supreme value and that it is in short supply. That is what makes Jesus answer to this question so valuable. Faith is the primary characteristic God is looking for in humanity. Faith produces life in Yahweh's kingdom and life of a different kind than the fallen kind normally experienced. Jesus will make two points regarding increasing faith.

The first point Jesus makes is that it does not take a great quantity of faith to bring about spectacular things. This has the effect of helping the listeners realize that they have even less faith than they think. It helps them understand that they really have asked the right question. They have zeroed in on their greatest need. To develop even a small amount of such trust in God is to do what is truly extraordinary among humans. Faith is thus made more extra-ordinary than the work.

The second point Jesus makes is that developing more faith is really a matter of being faithful and doing so for the right reasons. To do so for praise or status of some sort that will distinguish us is like an employee performing the job they are paid to do. Trusting Yahweh who is our Creator and who has extended such mercy and goodness toward us is our duty. It is right to want to increase in faith. We increase in faith as we are faithful, as we trust God enough to faithfully obey and do what He asks us to do.

Luke 17:11-18

Luke follows this private dialog between Jesus and His apostles with an account of a dramatic public act done as Jesus continues to make His way to Jerusalem. It is dramatic because Jesus heals ten lepers at once, ten men are healed from a dreadful plight. It is also profound because the lesson Jesus had just taught the apostles is clearly demonstrated. It is profound as well because it demonstrates what has become a frequent declaration by Jesus--the kingdom of God is open to all people and these will show greater faithfulness than many Israelites.

Jesus has just taught the apostles that in faithfully obeying their faith would be increased. Now He is confronted by ten lepers that ask to be healed but He does not heal them on the spot. Jesus requires a small demonstration of faithfulness from them. It was a requirement of such lepers in the Law of Moses that in the event they thought they were healed they go show themselves to a priest. The priest would pronounce them free of the disease and they would then be viewed by all as "clean"

(Leviticus 13:2; 14:2). Luke's account reports that Jesus commanded them to do this and as they went to show themselves to the priest they were healed. So they had to make the decision to obey Jesus BEFORE they were healed. As they obeyed they were healed. This affirmed to the apostles and to all who pondered the event that faithfully obeying leads to increased faith.

In one of the ten an act of extra-ordinary faith occurs next. He is inspired to return and give thanks to Jesus. He was a Samaritan. Thus the praise of Yahweh comes from a most unexpected source. Jesus specifically points out that it is "this foreigner" who alone returns to give praise to God. And so a re-occurring theme in His teaching and so in Luke's writing is given emphasis. The kingdom of God stands open to all people and is experienced in its fullest by any and all who believe and obey.

Luke 17:20-37

After reporting this great demonstration of the kingdom of God, Luke now reports Jesus' answer to a question posed by the Pharisees. In this section of his account Luke is switching back and forth between what Jesus says to three groups of people. He says things to His disciples—a large group, possibly numbering in the hundreds. He says other things to the apostles—the twelve. He also says things to the Pharisees.

The question asked by the Pharisees shows that though they were seeing some things that were extra-ordinary and made them curious, they were oblivious to the true significance of the times. This is reflected in their question regarding when the kingdom of God would come. They were looking for an earthly, political kingdom centered in Jerusalem and ruling over all nations.

Their expectation was in one sense legitimate. All of Yahweh's revelation pointed to the eventuality of His rule being established over His creation in the place He had chosen above all others to put His name. So there is little argument based on what Yahweh has revealed that there is to be a kingdom that fills the earth. There is little doubt that He had appointed a King from the seed of David to rule it. There was one whose right this was from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), and of the offspring of David. This one was referred to in Hebrew as Messiah, or in Greek as Christos. The English equivalent of these terms is "the Anointed One," or our adaptation of the Greek, the Christ.

And so it is a legitimate question to ask Jesus, "When will the Kingdom of God come." It is curious to us that this be asked in the midst of all that Jesus is both teaching and doing. It was a time when they were clearly seeing the power of God at work and many prophecies being fulfilled. It is also a time in which as a group they were not believing Jesus was truly the Christ and were seeking to destroy Him.

We can endlessly speculate on their reasons for asking the question. But Jesus' answer to them is important to Luke. He records what Jesus said to the Pharisees, and then the detail about the coming Kingdom that he gives to His disciples.

Jesus says to the Pharisees that their expectation of experiencing the Kingdom of God in the physical/political way they wanted it would not happen. They were right in anticipating its presence. They were wrong about the form in which it would presently appear to them. The fact is that the kingdom was present. It was in their midst even as they were asking Him about when it would appear. To say, "the kingdom of God is in your midst" was a perfect way to describe what King Jesus was doing. The King was present doing His work. He was gathering a people to whom He would extend forgiveness by His own sacrifice and in whom He would live by His Spirit and over whom He would rule. That was the present form of the Kingdom of God.

Luke reports Jesus giving greater detail to His disciples regarding this question of when the Kingdom of God was coming. We do not know if this was done in the presence of the Pharisees or in private. It is likely done privately in keeping with the fact that Jesus was not addressing those who were not believing Him in a way that gave them new information about Him. Rather, He is addressing them in riddles and parables, while giving more information to those who believed in Him (Luke 8:9-10).

A way of understanding Jesus words is to break them down into five observations He makes by way of instruction to His disciples about this coming of the kingdom of God. Specifically He speaks to them about His coming as King of this kingdom to rule as the Old Testament had projected over the whole earth (Daniel 7:9-27). To talk about the kingdom of God is to talk about its King, the Anointed One, Jesus. So Jesus speaks to them specifically about His presence on the earth.

The first thing Jesus says is that days are coming when they will long for just one day of Him being with them as He had been. That will not be. During that season of longing they were not to listen to any who told them that He was present. They were to resist any and all movement that proposed that He was physically present.

Second, He tells them that when He returned it would not be secretive. He uses lightening as an illustration. His return would be very visible and there would be no doubt that it was occurring.

Third, He tells them that before He came as King He would suffer and be rejected. He says that He will be rejected “by this generation.” The word used for generation here is one that can designate a people by the time period they live in. It can also be designating them as of a certain ethnicity. It is likely that when Jesus speaks of “this generation” He is not speaking just of the generation of those alive as His contemporaries. He is speaking of Israelites, Jews by ethnicity.

Thus far Jesus has made clear to the Pharisees that the kingdom of God is present. At the same time Jesus has made it clear to the disciples that a time was coming when He, the King, would not be present. This would be followed by His physical return to earth which would be obvious and observable, like lightening. However, this event that would result in Him ruling was not the next thing they should anticipate. The next thing they should anticipate is His rejection at the hands of the Jews.

Fourth, Jesus spends quite a bit of time speaking about the prevailing mood that will have enveloped humanity by the time of His return. People will not be anticipating His return. Life will be going on as normal. He uses the example of the mood on earth at the time of Noah leading up to the flood. He also cites the mood in Sodom at the time of Lot just before it was destroyed. Humanity will be oblivious to their impending doom, distracted and disinterested “on the day when the Son of man is revealed” as their judge and King.

Interestingly, one of those present and hearing these things was the Apostle John. Through Him God would give more information about the “revelation of Jesus Christ,” the entire season that would lead up to His revelation as Earth’s King and Judge. We know John’s writing on this subject as “The Revelation of John,” and its first words are “the revelation of Jesus Christ . . .”

Fifth, Jesus gives instructions on how those who wish to save their lives on that day are to behave. He is presuming that most will be immersed in the apathy of those times toward spiritual things and toward Him. But by the work of His Spirit there will be those who have heeded the warnings of Yahweh. The instructions to these are somewhat vague to us. We assume that when the day arrives the situation itself will make the instructions clear.

These instructions appear to be saying don't bother trying to preserve the things of your life at that time, those things the people of that day have carefully pursued. Turn your back on them. Turn your back even on life itself.

Jesus then makes a statement about people being either "taken" or "left" as a part of His return. This could be a reference to the event we refer to as "the rapture." Scripture indicates that before God pours out His wrath on the people of the earth who have rejected Him, He will protect those who have embraced Him from His judgment. He will do this by snatching them from the earth. This is an event Paul assumed to be coming and referenced it in his writings (1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17).

Others have suggested that this is a reference to the fact that when Christ returns to rule the wicked will be taken away to be judged. None will be a part of Christ's Kingdom when it begins that are not believers. Though this interpretation argues against the songs, novels and movies that have been made in our times based on the idea of some being "left behind," it can be argued that it is legitimate biblically.

Luke records a simple two word questions posed by the disciples to Jesus after He has referred to this snatching away that will occur. They ask, "Where, Lord?"

Jesus' reply to them comes in the form of a saying of the day. "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather." It should be noted that the language used also allows this saying to read, "Where the body is, there the eagles gather." Some have chosen to read it this way.

However one chooses to render the words the expression seems to have been a proverbial way of observing that where certain conditions exist, certain other things can be counted on to follow. Another way of wording this is to say that where certain conditions exist it is because of conditions that preceded them.

We have then, two ways of understanding this conversation. Jesus has been speaking of returning to bring judgment on the earth. The disciples ask "Where Lord?" Jesus answer indicates that His judgment will fall wherever there is reason for it and on whomever deserves it. Where there has been spiritual death, one would expect to find the grim end symbolized by the vultures.

A second way of understanding it is that Jesus has been talking about taking some people away from His judgment, protecting them because they are believers. The disciples ask "Where Lord?" They are asking Him where these will be taken to. He replies as He does meaning that they will be taken to the place appropriate to their nature, a place where one would expect to find such repentant people. Where God exists one would expect to find godly people, and that is where the godly will be taken to.

The mysterious expression given at the end of Jesus' remarks to the disciples should not detract from the fact that some very concrete things have been said. Jesus has made it clear to the disciples that a time was coming when He, the King, would not be physically present. This did not mean He would never again be present. His physical return to earth will come. He makes it clear that it will be obvious and observable, like lightening. However, this event that would result in Him ruling was not the next thing they should anticipate. The next thing they should anticipate is His rejection at the hands of the Jews.

Luke 18

Luke 18:1-8

Though there is a chapter break here in our English versions and a word of explanation that what follows is a parable Jesus passed on to the disciples, these words are likely additional ones spoken on the same occasion as those in the previous verses. Jesus is giving this parable to equip His disciples for life on earth while He is physically gone and they await His return. The last line of verse 8 clearly reflects this.

Luke succinctly states Jesus' purpose in telling this parable. It is "to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." So He is concerned that His followers not lose heart. The expression means to give up hope and to weaken in the practice of one's trust in God. It can happen very easily when waiting for a promise to be fulfilled. Whatever Jesus Himself knew about how many years would go by until He returned, He knew this was this danger among His followers.

The story is of a poor widow who achieved a ruling in her behalf because the judge got weary of her persistent, relentless pleas. As in any parable the details should not be pressed for meaning. The big idea is the point. The point is not that we should pray willfully and think we can get what we want by wearing God down. Jesus' emphasizes the godlessness and indifference of the Judge. His point is that if persistent requests are effective with the godless, how much more will they move God who initiated relationship with us. As we endure in a fallen world He will respond to our cry, and do so speedily. That is great news about our Creator.

Luke closes his report of this incident with a question Jesus asks. When it comes to the kingdom of God and the return to earth of King Jesus, this question is the primary one. The question is not when that kingdom will become a physical reality on earth. The question is will we faithfully trust in the promise of it, praying in trust in the goodness of this king until we see Him or our time on earth ends? Will we live life in God's kingdom trusting the King's rule, or strike out on our own? That is the question in our era that we answer each moment of our lives.

The verses that follow take up the subject of this life of trust in Yahweh.

Luke 18:9-30

Luke takes us on from this teaching given to the disciples to another occasion and an exchange that occurs with the Pharisees. However it is tied to this question Jesus had posed to the disciples on the previous occasion; "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

In the verses immediately following Luke shows Jesus addressing the detached, contrived godliness humans develop. It is not rooted in trust and reverence for Yahweh. It is simply a desire to distinguish themselves. Luke makes it clear that Jesus' parable is specifically addressed to the arrogance of these who viewed themselves as morally superior to others. The parable shows that this presumptuous faith in oneself is not the faith God seeks.

The parable has two characters, a Pharisee and a tax collector. Both address God. The Pharisee is projected specifically as praying. In his prayer he thanks God that he himself is so very good compared to others, particularly the tax collector that is present. The tax collector's words are not said to be uttered in a posture of prayer. He is projected as one who felt like an outsider, unworthy before God. He beats his breast as he speaks his words, a way of demonstrating one's feeling of

being in the presence of something profoundly beyond them (23:48). As he beats his breasts the tax collector simply says, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

Jesus plainly states the point of this story. The tax collector is justified. The Pharisee is not. When it comes to the faith and the kingdom of God, exalting oneself separates us from the King. Humbling oneself results in greatness bestowed by God. Humility begins with one’s recognition of their own moral condition in the presence of God.

This idea of humility is emphasized by the next incident Luke reports. He reports that people were bringing infants to Jesus to be touched by Him. They did this in recognition of His unique authority and presence they had witnessed. They wanted from Him any blessing that might be conveyed to their little ones. The disciples try to put a stop to this.

Jesus calls the disciples together and corrects them. He states first that the kingdom of God belongs to such ones. Jesus second statement explains this first one. He says that to enter the kingdom of God one must receive it as a child. He prefaces this with the word “truly.” This marks the statement as one worthy of further reflection, meditation and application. Upon such reflection, the statement minimizes perceived human assets like intelligence, achievement, self-discipline, and one’s history of moral merit. It emphasizes trust, absence of pretense and a simple sense of wonder.

A third incident is reported by Luke that further illustrates the difficulty of simple trust among humans. The story is about one called “a ruler.” We know nothing about the sense in which he was a ruler. We can only say that he was a man of influence. This ruler asks Jesus, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Perhaps the most important thing Jesus said to this ruler comes right at the start of His words. “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” That point is important for two reasons. First, goodness has to be understood in order to inherit eternal life. God alone is good. That means the thought of the rich man that he could do some good things that would allow him to inherit eternal life was flawed. It also means that this very normal human approach to eternal life is flawed. Goodness in the absolute sense only resides in One. If we seek to find eternal life through our goodness, eternal life is inaccessible to us. Second, Jesus is asking the ruler to ponder His identity. He is leading the ruler to the most significant question posed to humanity, one that Luke had reported earlier, “Who do you say that I am?” (Luke 9:18-20). Jesus’ opening statement can be viewed as a veiled suggestion to the ruler that both goodness and eternal life can be found in Jesus. In calling Jesus good the man was closer to an understanding of eternal life than he realized.

Having made such an informative statement on goodness Jesus sends the ruler to the Law. This ruler had not learned the lesson the law would teach him, that he was incapable of sustaining good. He needed to be under the law longer. Jesus’ gives examples of things from the Law the man needed to do. The ruler replies that he had faithfully done these. Jesus then gives him an instruction that will help him see his own heart. He tells him to sell all he has, give the proceeds away, and come and follow him. Luke notes that at hearing these words the man become “very sad” because he was “extremely rich.” The relationship between the two is unmistakable. The ruler had reached the limit his heart imposed on his own trust in Yahweh. His goodness was limited by His own heart. That is what the Law was designed to expose in humanity.

The visible sadness of this ruler leads Jesus to say what He does about the difficulty of the rich being saved. In Luke’s record Jesus has already said that no one can serve God and money (16:13). Ultimately salvation is a problem of the heart, and money dominates our affections. In speaking with those present about this great difficulty of saving the rich Jesus is asked, “Who then can be saved?” The question is an astute one that shows the one asking it has realized that it is not just the rich with

such heart issues. The answer to this dilemma is given by Jesus in a most interesting and informative way. He repeats the idea that was spoken by the angel to His own mother of His conception, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” We are given the hope in this statement that God makes eternal life possible for humanity by doing the impossible—providing forgiveness for our sins and then changing our hearts.

Peter poses another question based on what he had seen. He speaks of himself and the others that had left everything and followed Jesus. In the context his testimony is that the impossible was happening in His own life and that of others. Jesus assured Peter that such a work of God in their hearts that led them to take such action as they did would be rewarded by God in this life and would result in eternal life. The impossible was happening through the kingdom of God and its King and they were the fruit of it.

Combined together these three incidences explain why Jesus had wondered aloud if when He returned He would find the practice of faith among people on earth (18:8). The humility required in faith is not instinctive among humans. From a mere human perspective He would not find such faith. But the Kingdom of God was present and was moving forward within the hearts of many. When He returned He would find the impossible, faith throughout the earth. It would be so because of what God Himself would do.

Luke 18:31-34

Following all this conversation regarding God doing the impossible and bringing about eternal life for humanity, Jesus takes the twelve aside and reveals to them THE event that would make eternal life possible for humanity. It is the central event of Yahweh’s salvation plan. He speaks directly and plainly of the fact that He would be rejected by the Jews, then handed over to be abused and killed by the Gentiles. He also proclaims to them that He will rise from the dead the third day. The eternal life that He had just spoken of was in Him.

Luke notes that the twelve did not grasp the meaning of any of this. It is plainly worded by Luke for the readers and woven beautifully into His account. However those closest to Jesus were unaware of the events that were approaching. This too reflects the weakness of the human condition.

Luke 18:35-43

Luke reports all this critical dialog that began with the unlikeliness of eternal life for humans, then the impossibility of it, then the hope and certainty of it. Jesus gives the reason for such hope. That hope lies squarely in the fact that God is willing to do the impossible for humanity. Luke has also reported Jesus’ willingness to serve this purpose of God by giving His life sacrificially as it had been spoken by the prophets. Appropriately Luke follows this good news with the report of another miraculous sign of Jesus’ veracity and authenticity. He does so to make the message Theophilus was reading believable.

In Luke’s account Jesus had started His public ministry in Nazareth. He had announced His God-given Spirit-anointed mission by quoting from Isaiah 61:1-2. That Scripture proclaimed His preaching of this good news. It also predicted through the Holy Spirit’s anointing on Him that there would be the “recovering of sight to the blind.” That was a tall order that would expose any imposter. It was a bold proclamation for a young man beginning His ministry. By this time Jesus had already done this (Luke 7:21). It was an unmistakable sign that He was the Christ.

It is no surprise then that Luke reports the event that happens on the outskirts of Jericho as Jesus makes His way toward Jerusalem. There a blind man cries out for Jesus to have mercy on Him. He could not be restrained in calling out to this one passing by whom He embraced and addressed as THE son of David.

The entire event sends an unmistakable message. The blind man had proclaimed loudly Jesus' identity. Then he had asked Jesus, in the language of Isaiah 61 that he might "recover" his sight. Jesus responds in the same language, "Recover your sight, your faith has made you well." The man's sight is recovered to the amazement of the growing crowd. The blind man joins the procession into Jericho. We see through Luke's description a people glorifying God in masse.

Luke 19

Luke 19:1-10

As this procession makes its way through Jericho an important and very personal encounter occurs. It occurs between Jesus and an individual named Zacchaeus. Luke tells us that Zacchaeus was a “chief tax collector and was rich.” Luke also tells us that this man wanted to see who Jesus was. Nothing in any of this information would indicate that Zacchaeus was even casually interested in the salvation of Yahweh that Jesus represented. His curiosity about Jesus could have been based on the spreading word of the blind man that had been healed. It could have been more substantive. Luke’s words do not preclude that Jesus was not known by sight to Zacchaeus. It could be that in wanting to see who Jesus was Zacchaeus was wanting to observe Him in action and learn more about this man whom the multitudes were speaking of.

Somehow this man was known by name to Jesus. We are left to imagine how this came to be true. We know that Jesus was a keen observer of people and knew some before they knew Him (John 1:47). Jesus spots Zacchaeus in a tree that he had climbed in order to see past the crowds. It is at this point that He looks up, calls Zacchaeus by name and expresses His desire to dine at His house.

Luke expresses the joy with which Zacchaeus receives Jesus and also the grumbling that spreads through the crowd at Jesus being “the guest of a man who is a sinner.” That was Zacchaeus’ reputation. The celebration of the crowd has turned into grumbling. The healing of a blind man inspired hope. Attentiveness to a sinner, which should have been even more inspiring, inspired complaint. It all revealed the condition of the heart of a people.

Luke reports the transformation of Zacchaeus. The sinner takes his stand and proclaims his repentance and new loyalty to Yahweh. Jesus makes a most important announcement that proclaims what makes one “a son of Abraham.” This declaration of unlikely people that are invited into the kingdom of God continues in Luke’s record. It implies that the more likely among humanity are found wanting.

Jesus makes a declaration days before His death about His mission. His mission focused on saving the lost. The reality was and is that among humanity there are none who are not lost except those Jesus has found. This declaration carries that same implication as Jesus’ presentation of Zacchaeus as a son of Abraham had carried. God’s kingdom would envelop those perceived to be outside it and would exclude many who presumed they belonged. Luke’s account will turn now to a parable told by Jesus that reinforces this truth. It will go on from there to report a string of Jesus’ acts and teachings that strengthen this idea.

Luke 19:11-27

Luke introduces a parable by briefly describing the reason Jesus tells it. He says that Jesus tells it because “He was near to Jerusalem and because they supposed the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.” The language indicates that this all occurred at Zacchaeus’ house, that Jesus adds this parable to what He has said about Zacchaeus being a son of Abraham. The parable has to do with all Jesus is seeing in the assembled crowd, their fervor in the wake of the healing of the blind man, their zeal that was not according to knowledge, their grumbling over His association with sinners.

The proximity to Jerusalem is noted by Luke. It may be that in the area near Jerusalem where Jericho was there was a heightened passion for this kingdom, likely for all the wrong reasons. It may be that this, combined with the fact that Jesus was traveling toward Jerusalem and had made that known,

had the multitudes anticipating Him entering Jerusalem and taking charge. There were factors at work that made the crowds think that the time had come for the kingdom of God to appear. The expectation was likely that the kingdom of God be established by Jesus in Jerusalem within days so that Rome was subdued and Israel ruled the earth.

The expectation was not Jesus' death, as He had clearly taught was the ending that awaited Him in this journey to Jerusalem (18:31-34). Not even the twelve apostles had grasped this that He had plainly stated to them (9:21-22, 43-45). In the sense of their understanding of their Scriptures, they were not expecting His suffering as projected in Isaiah 53. They were expecting His takeover of the world kingdoms as projected in Daniel 7:13-27. The impending arrival in Jerusalem would absolutely reveal Him as the Messiah. But it would end in His sacrificial death for the sins of humanity as He pursued the mission He has just stated to the people at Zachaeus' house of seeking and saving the lost.

This parable is told to address the misunderstanding of what He had come to do. Its aim was not so much to change their thinking that day. In Yahweh's plan there was no way around Jesus dying for the sins of humanity. There could be no kingdom of God without His death. This parable would provide the hearers with information that would help them in the wake of His death to navigate the era of time in Yahweh's plan they were entering.

The parable informs them of Jesus' departure. His going away would serve a purpose. He would receive a kingdom. In preparation for that kingdom and the eventual day when He would institute His rule He had entrusted responsibility to His chosen servants. Like any king He would need those who would carry out His rule, particularly since it would extend to the entire world. Until that day when He would return to institute His government over all the earth His servants would be in charge of His possessions.

In the parable an interesting detail is given. The citizens of the territory He was given to rule send a message of rebellion to the One who had given Him the kingdom. They hated Him. Their message was simple, "We do not want this man to reign over us." This message has been clearly sent by many who were scorning Jesus on that very day. It has been sent by millions ever since.

The hatred of the subjects and their message of protest does not change the fact that He receives the kingdom. The story says simply that He returns to what is now His kingdom. He does so in spite of the citizen's hatred of Him. The message is clear. The rejection of Jesus as the Messiah does not alter who He is. It does not alter the course the world is on that will result in the rule of Jesus. He is God's Anointed One.

Most of the parable deals with the actions of this nobleman when He returns as the King. By comparison the details surrounding His departure are few. This has to do with the situation of the moment that Jesus was addressing through this parable. The hearers thought the time had come for the kingdom of God to be established as it was projected by the Old Testament in Jerusalem. Jesus has conveyed thus far that the time had come for the departure of the nobleman who would go and be officially crowned as king and then come back to rule. The parable was capturing precisely all that the Old Testament had revealed about the Messiah, including His rejection by those He was destined to lead.

The parable then, turns to give information about the return of this nobleman who is now the king to institute His rule. Interestingly He deals first with His servants, those He entrusted His work and affairs to in His absence. The parable shows clearly that He holds these accountable for the wealth He has entrusted to them. Those who had been faithful are entrusted with great responsibility in His

government. Their responsibility in great matters of His reign is proportional to their faithfulness with the comparatively “very little” matters they faithfully tended to in His absence.

One servant of the three did nothing with the nobleman’s treasure that He was entrusted with. He did not squander it. He simply preserved it. When called to give an account of his management of the treasure this servant excuses his lack of faithfulness. He justifies his own inattentiveness to the master’s wealth as being caused by the master’s deficient character and heavy handedness. The inconsistency of his thinking is quickly pointed out. His failure is quickly shown to be what it is. What was given to Him is given to the servant who had been most faithful.

In the parable there are bystanders who question the severity of the nobleman’s actions toward the irresponsible servant. Jesus abruptly ends the story with this objection to return to real time and to teaching the hearers that day. They had thought the present time was about God’s kingdom being established. Jesus has made it clear that the present time is about the departure of God’s future King. The present time is about them being faithful with what He has entrusted to them. They should expect His return and bring increase through what they have received through Him.

Jesus ends the parable with the question of bystanders who cast doubt on the King’s judgment. Jesus speaks directly to the sobering reality of what the day will be like when the event they long for arrives—the establishment of Yahweh’s government on earth. He gives them two sobering ideas. First, among His servants the faithful will be rewarded. The unfaithful will suffer loss. This reward and loss will have to do with their privilege and position in His kingdom when it is established. Second, those who did not want Him to rule will be purged from His kingdom. The language is very definitive—“Bring them here and slaughter them before me.” Intolerance toward those who rebel against Yahweh’s authority should be our expectation of the One who will reign over all. No one should expect to be blessed by the One whom they have rejected.

Luke 19:28-44

Luke moves quickly forward in his narrative to Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem. At this point Jesus clearly knows what awaits Him in Jerusalem. He also clearly knows His identity in the plan of Yahweh. He knows that a public presentation of Him as the Messiah is God’s plan. God wanted people to be able to piece together the Scriptures He had already provided and find proof from them that Jesus was presented as Messiah by Him. All this was so that they might know a week later that this very one had died for their sins. It was essential to carry out the public presentation in God’s prescribed way as it was projected by the prophets.

To this end Jesus directs two of the disciples to a colt on which he would ride as He entered the city. This was according to the predictions made by the prophet Zechariah (9:9). This is the only detail that Jesus choreographed. The rest, the laying down of garments and the chorus of the crowd that Luke reports, all seems to unfold spontaneously. Jesus affirms this in response to the Pharisees who tell Him to rebuke these followers of His. Luke reports His statement to these grumblers; “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” It was ordained by God this presentation of Jesus as the Messiah. It was not the result of a human scheme, nor could humans thwart it. It was ordained by God so much so that the inanimate objects He had created would declare it should humanity not rise to acknowledge it.

The event is different from the kinds of celebrations orchestrated by human kings and conquerors in several respects. Most notable is that as Jesus approaches the city He weeps over it. His entry did not project that war was over and peace had come to this city that is named for Yahweh’s peace.

Jesus utters a sad prophecy of the legacy He saw ahead for them. It was one of thorough destruction for the place and the people.

Jesus pronounces that this awful future awaited them because they did not “know the time of your visitation.” He is saying that they had not recognized the season when Yahweh had visited them in human flesh. They had rejected Him even as they had rejected so many of His messengers. All the horror of the curses of the Old Covenant (Deuteronomy 28) would now fall on them. It was all happening before His eyes just as the Scripture had predicted from the beginning.

Luke 19:45-48

Luke skips ahead from Jesus’ entering Jerusalem to His visit to the temple a couple of days later when once again He drives out of it those who were buying and selling goods. Jesus did this on two occasions. He did it early in His ministry (John 2:13-22), and again on this occasion which happened early in the last week of His ministry. Both occasions occurred during the feast of the Passover.

During this season Jerusalem was swelled with those appearing before Yahweh according to the Law. There was significant opportunity for profit selling animals for sacrifice to those making this pilgrimage. Travel to Jerusalem with such live animals would have been more difficult. Jesus’ reference to the transformation of Yahweh’s house from being a house of prayer to a den of robbers indicates that there was considerable advantage being taken by merchants of the entire situation and the prices were exorbitant.

Luke gives only one sentence to this incident that John skips entirely, Matthew adds a little to and Mark describes with considerable more detail. Still, Luke’s report of it fits well with the flow of his narrative. He has reported that Jesus entered the city as the Messiah, wept over its spiritual condition, and now speaks to that condition quite dramatically. More precisely, He speaks dramatically to the condition of the leadership and what thinking leader would not have been convicted and threatened by the mediocrity they had allowed? Why had they not righted this that was so terribly wrong, particularly since they had already been humiliated by His leadership in the matter (John 2:13-22)?

Luke quickly points out that in the aftermath of this the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him. In this they were totally out of step with the people, who Luke says “were hanging on His words.” John also reports this enormous public support (John 12:19), as well as the fact that Gentiles were seeking Jesus out. Mark too reports this grass roots support (Mark 12:12, 37; 14:1-2), as does Matthew (21:11, 46; 26:5).

That the leaders were out of step with the people was not particularly significant as it would be in the western world of our era. It was the norm in many aspects of leadership in the ancient world that leaders imposed their will. That people disagreed did not deter them from their objective. It only demanded that they execute it by intrigue and stealth, which is why Judas’ willingness to betray Jesus was such good news to them (Mark 14:1-2, 10-11; Luke 22:1-6).

Luke 20

Luke 20:1-18

As the agenda of the leaders of Israel moves forward Jesus does not seek to appease them or in any way establish common ground with them. Luke reports the growing tension between the force of Yahweh's Spirit working in Jesus and that of the flesh working in these leaders.

Luke begins by reporting the straight-forward question of the leaders, "By what authority do you do these things?" The most recent of the things Jesus had done was the cleansing of the temple. The authority over affairs in the temple lay with the High Priest and to some degree with the Sanhedrin. From an earthly standpoint Jesus had no right to do as He had done. He had acted as He had and no one opposed His actions as He physically drove out the merchants from the temple. Now a delegation of them confronts Him with this question as He is proclaiming the gospel in the Temple.

Jesus engages the conversation by posing a question to them. It was not a difficult question to answer. All in Jerusalem knew what the leaders answer would be. Jesus questions them about the source of the baptism of John the Baptist, whether it was from heaven or from men. They did not believe it was from God. They had not repented at it nor been baptized by John, though the multitudes had done so. On this issue they were out of step with Yahweh. Yahweh wanted that declared publicly because His judgment was coming on Jerusalem. By asking this question of them Jesus was certainly implying His own answer to the question they had posed to Him. Furthermore He was exposing the incongruity between their own spirits and that of the Spirit of Yahweh.

Seeing that they are about to be caught in their own devices they refuse to engage Jesus' question. He in turn refuses to answer theirs. But He wades forward in the fight and incites them to anger by setting before all who were listening a parable that spoke of them. It illustrates their hostile stance toward Yahweh and the certainty of His judgment of them.

The story is of a vineyard planted by a man. It was a figure borrowed from Isaiah that the leaders were very familiar with (see Isaiah 5). They were characterized as having rented the vineyard and attempting to seize ownership of it for themselves. They were characterized as having killed the owners messengers and finally his very son so as to make the vineyard theirs. The owner, a reference to Yahweh Himself, is projected as one who will destroy them and give His vineyard to others.

At this pronouncement of Jesus that the vineyard would be given to others these leaders know exactly Jesus literal meaning. Luke reports them crying out, "Surely not!" At this Jesus poses them a question about the meaning of an Old Testament prophecy from Psalm 118:22: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." He adds to this a prophecy from Isaiah 8:14-15 that speaks of the destruction of those who would reject the Messiah.

Luke 20:19-46

Luke's narrative shows Jesus intentionally bringing the underlying rebellion of these leaders of Israel against Yahweh to a boiling point. He marks the incident as pivotal in this respect by saying, "The scribes and chief priests sought to lay hands on Him that very hour . . ." He reports that their fear of the people keeps them from such a public declaration of their hostility.

Luke has observed often the presence of fear in the people (See Appendix 1). Sometimes this fear kept them from belief (Luke 8:37). This was the most common response to the Spirit's works of power through Jesus. Here he notes another fear that always creates hopeless contradiction in us. It is the fear of man. He has warned of this already (Luke 12:4-7). Now Luke's narrative will show how the fear of man further twists hearts that are already evil.

Instead of seizing Jesus openly the leaders opt for the stealthy tactic of inciting the governor against Him. They would seek to manipulate matters so that His death could be blamed on the Romans. This would serve their purposes well. Jesus would be done away with, the populace would be further incited against Rome and they would be re-established in their positions of control over the people. This coup led by Jesus against their leadership would easily be diffused and they would escape unscathed.

To this end they seek to draw Jesus into making a declaration against paying taxes to Caesar, which He easily sees through. In fact even they are forced to admire how deftly he handles the entire matter. For the moment they are forced to leave Him be. But they will continue to push this plan of theirs forward. It will succeed only to the degree that the plan of Yahweh Himself permits and only according to the timing and script that He has projected in writing for hundreds of years before. By the end of the week they will be congratulating themselves on their success. However the sun will have set on them, on Jerusalem and on the entire era of the covenant that they had twisted to serve them so well.

Luke reports that a group of Sadducees come to Jesus and seek to match wits with Him and undermine His teaching on a resurrection. It is likely that Jesus enthusiastically engages this and Luke is anxious to report it because Jesus' own resurrection was now only a week away. That He would be raised from the dead was the great sign that He was who he had claimed to be. These who opposed Him had asked for a sign from heaven. They would receive one, His resurrection. So Jesus is happy to engage their line of questioning.

In engaging this strange story of the woman who survived the death of seven husbands, all of them brothers, Jesus makes a number of significant statements about life after death. He knows this because He knows they did not believe in the resurrection, the very thing they were questioning Him about. His answer will indicate to them that their lack of believe in it held them in a cycle of ignorance about it. They could not believe because they would not believe.

Jesus words on this subject are brief. He begins by pointing out three things. First Jesus reminds them that there is a certain “worthiness” involved in attaining to the age they were thinking about, the age of the kingdom of God and the resurrection of the dead to life in that kingdom. So Jesus is reminding them that there is NOT a resurrection to such a life for all. Second, in that life of the Kingdom of God there is no marriage. It is a relic of the old life. This is because of the remaining truths about that life Jesus will remind them of. Third, these who are raised die no more. Once raised from the dead to such a life they become immortal. They are like the angels in this, made sons of God Jesus says, of the kind associated with the resurrection. God would later reveal through the writings of Paul the detail of this, that there would be a change in the bodies of these. Flesh and blood cannot live that life. The bodies of those raised to that life will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:42-58).

Without a break Jesus takes them to a statement from the Law of Moses. It is significant in that it is Moses’ account of God introducing Himself (Exodus 2). Moses in this account calls God “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Jesus points out the tense of the verb that is understood in Moses declaration. Moses did not write that Yahweh had been the God of these men, but that He still was their God. The Sadducees theology did not harmonize with the understanding of Moses that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob still worshipped Yahweh.

Luke tells us that the Scribes commend this careful scrutiny of the Scripture that Jesus evidenced here. They might have been willing to compliment this skill of Jesus because it made their own approach look good. They were ones who carefully observed and were watchdogs of the detail of Scripture. Their error was that they missed its bigger message because they were so immersed in arguing its detail. Luke notes that the compliment of the Scribes is given to Jesus because in that moment they realize that they are no match for Him in arguing the detail of the Scripture. He not only has refuted the Sadducees, He has proven Himself very astute in handling the Law. They had now lost courage to engage Him in such public debate.

Luke seamlessly reports Jesus seizing upon this compliment given to Him by the Scribes to place before them an important detail of Scripture that they had not pondered. Specifically, they had not pondered carefully the text of Psalm 110, one that they rightly said spoke of the Messiah, Christ, the One Jesus proclaimed Himself to be. Jesus argues that since they took Psalm 110 to be written by David about the Christ, then they must deal with the fact that David refers to Him as both his own son and also his Sovereign. This would not be expected from one such as David who was the King. The Scribes had not pondered this detail of the text. The result was that they were looking through a faulty lens as they evaluated whether or not Jesus was the Messiah.

The answer to this dilemma posed by Psalm 110 lies in the fact that Jesus is physically the offspring of David through Mary His mother. But He is also conceived of the Holy Spirit and so is God. He is the God/man and David knew this would be. He acknowledged Christ as His own Sovereign King. The Scribes had not processed this detail and so lacked the ability to rightly identify the Messiah.

Luke does not give any description of the reaction of the Scribes as does Matthew (Matthew 22:46). Instead, he chooses to immediately report that Jesus turns from questioning the Scribes to His disciples. He uses the occasion to warn them about becoming like the Scribes. Having just demonstrated His own attention to the detail of Scripture and having been complimented by the Scribes for His skill in answering, there was a danger that His followers needed to know about.

Followers of Jesus can to this day become so focused on the detail of Scripture that they miss its message. This is a human weakness. We can fall in love with the acclaim that comes with being smart in the faith rather than becoming living examples of it. Jesus warns His followers against falling in love with the earthy things like the praise and recognition of others that can be found in this heady pursuit of the information that is part of the faith. Our heart must be to live in faith not just to be able to define it. We must learn for the purpose of obeying not for the purpose of being recognized as learned. Jesus warns that with great knowledge comes stricter judgment.

Luke 21

Luke 21:1-4

This that is a new chapter in our Bibles certainly goes with what precedes it in terms of Luke's intent. It continues to develop the observation Jesus has just made about the Scribes, that the recognition and acclaim of this life has little to do with what is acclaimed by God our Creator and Judge. The fear of man is therefore exposed as something of great danger to us. Because of this love of praise that is a part of who we are, we must learn to discern what is in our hearts, what is motivating us. Though this is in the end very elusive (Jeremiah 17:9) we must be certain to frequently ask the question of ourselves.

Jesus observes people coming and going from the temple. In particular He makes an observation about them coming and placing their donations in a box placed there for such things. The rich make noticeably large donations. After a poor widow makes a comparatively puny donation Jesus comments on how such giving should be judged. The amount of the donation is not as significant as the amount of sacrifice it required of the giver. That is a both a humbling and significant observation. It reinforces the importance of us allowing God to do something in us inwardly rather than us merely carrying out the activity of the faith. The activity, in this case giving, is not minimized by Jesus or dismissed (Matt. 23:23). But we must seek to have our motives and values renewed and re-ordered. We must not fall into the error of just ruling our actions. God seeks to do the miracle in us of changing our hearts through His own Spirit.

Luke 21:5-25

As Jesus and His disciples are observing the activity in the temple, they also hear talk about the building itself and its beauty. Jesus uses the occasion to speak of the future of that building itself, to speak of Jerusalem, and of the peril for those of the faith that was approaching. It is commentary that extends to the times we live in and beyond.

Jesus first comment stimulates a question in those listening, as it might any of us. About the beauty of the temple Jesus says, "As for these things you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down." It is a comment that states the utter destruction of the temple. It is a very fitting comment given what He has been saying about the spiritual condition of Israel and the fact that Yahweh would take the kingdom from them and give it to others (20:9-19).

There were some listening to His message and believing. They were perhaps beginning to get the picture that some bad things were in store for Israel and Jerusalem. So when He speaks here of the destruction of the temple they ask the natural question, "Teacher, when therefore will these things happen? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" Their question is about "these things." It is about the destruction of the temple, and likely all the various things He has commented on regarding their future and the future in general over the past few weeks. There was so much He was saying by parable and by direct comments like the one He has just made about the temple. Jesus gives a rather extensive reply to both, In it He clarifies the timing of the destruction of the temple and He gives them a sense of the era ahead both for them and the movement they would help birth all over the world.

His first statement is a warning not to be misled. He says that many will come and attempt to mislead others. Some will claim to be Him. Others will proclaim that “the time is near.” He warns them not to follow such ones. So they have asked the right question. What do they need to know so as not to be misled?

His second statement is one that tells them not to be thinking that wars and disturbances are a sign of the end Yahweh has planned. He says such things will take place first, but He quickly adds that “the end is not immediately.” So right away Jesus gives an expectation of a period of time passing before the things would occur that He had been projecting, namely the destruction of the temple. He continues to give them information to keep them from getting alarmed over world turmoil and troubling events. He gives a number of descriptive statements about clashes between nations, earthquakes, plagues and famines in various places, and even what He calls “terrors and great signs from the heavens.” These will be a part of life on earth.

He then turns to more personal things they themselves will experience before the things that He has projected, like the destruction of the temple, come about. He describes the hardship and persecution they will endure as they live and proclaim the faith. The mission He has called them to will be arduous and will require endurance and sacrifice. He tells them He will be with them and enable them in that life and work. He says that their endurance will gain them their lives. In other words, He will enable them to continue in the mission as they determine to give what it takes to endure in it. As they endure in faith, He will provide for the situation in front of them. He will provide and preserve them through all the turmoil and trouble associated with pursuing His mission in this fallen and troubled world.

Jesus then gives a sign as they had asked for of when the temple would be destroyed. He says, “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.” So there would be much hardship, persecution, natural disaster, spiritual upheaval and the like that they would witness. None of it was a sign that the destruction Jesus had spoken of regarding Jerusalem and the temple was about to occur. The sign that event had arrived was when Jerusalem was surrounded by armies.

It appears that by these words Jesus is giving the questioners information on the times they would face as they lived out the rest of their lives in the first century. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple occurred in 70 A.D. It was thorough and complete. Many in the name of God greatly resisted this great Roman invasion. Jesus told His followers to flee it. His description of what would follow for Jerusalem is brief, but very significant. The destruction of Jerusalem was decreed by Him and would be complete. Israelites would be scattered far and wide. The city would be “trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” It would be difficult to describe any better with so few words what has happened to Jerusalem since the time of Jesus.

This idea that Jerusalem would be dominated by Gentiles for a Divinely decreed era was an Old Testament idea (Isaiah 63:18; Daniel 8:13). It is an idea embraced by other New Testament writers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Romans 11:25; Revelation 11:2). It appears to be a season that began with the surrounding of Jerusalem by armies in the first century. It is currently true in our world at the beginning of the 21st century. It appears that this domination by Gentiles will once again be emphatically demonstrated in Jerusalem before Jesus returns and restores Jerusalem to a place of significance under His rule. This can be seen in Jesus’ remarks that He makes following His proclamation here of Jerusalem’s destruction.

Jesus goes on to give a series of “signs” of His return to the earth as its King. They are very general in nature—phenomena occurring in the heavens and on earth. They are physical, spiritual, and even emotional. From other prophetic writings we know that THE sign of His second coming was precisely what it was for the first century destruction of the Temple—foreign armies set to dominate Jerusalem. That event was a sign of the beginning of Gentile domination of Jerusalem. It will again be the sign of Jesus return to rule (Ezekiel 38-39; Matthew 24:15-31; Revelation 11, 16, 19). It will be the sign once more of Yahweh’s destruction of the earth and all evil (Revelation 20:9). So in the Scripture foreign armies surrounding Jerusalem is given as a sign for three for three different momentous events in Yahweh’s plan. Jesus words at this point had a profound simplicity to the hearers in the first century. They are considerably more complex but equally revealing with respect to what lies ahead in His great plan for the earth.

Jesus gives hopeful words regarding such dreadful signs and the ache in the soul that will be present to those who see them. They are to “straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption draws near.” He continues to exhort them regarding the hope that these dreaded events would bring about and the lifestyle they imply for us.

He first makes a statement in a parable utilizing trees. By their emerging leaves and their tender shoots that come each spring, we know that summer is coming next. Likewise these signs Jesus has spoken of project the nearness of the Kingdom of God. This idea of the “nearness” of the Kingdom of God conveys two realities. First, that the evil and turmoil of the world should push us toward a deeper experience of the kingdom of God in its present spiritual form. He and His kingdom are “near” and we should draw near (Hebrews 10:22; James 4:8). Second, that the time of His return to earth to judge evil and reign over it is “near.” His coming is “near” in the sense that it is inevitable (Romans 13:11-12; James 5:8).

Jesus tell the hearers that “this generation” will not pass away until all has taken place. The term “generation” can refer to a group living at the same time historically. It can also refer to an ethnic group or even those of a certain spiritual heritage. Jesus is most likely referring to Israelites as a people, or to those of faith whom He has projected would be subject to persecution. He immediately reminds these of their security with this great promise; “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” This mirrored the Angel’s statement before Jesus was born that with God no word/message is impossible (Luke 1:37).

Jesus then exhorts those with Him to live alertly and intentionally with this certain ending that He has planned and proclaimed in view. Life is such that it can draw us into excessive, instinctive and unprincipled living—living with today only in view. Our hearts can be “weighed down” by this rather than buoyed by the hope of all God has.

Once we begin living that way we can be “trapped” by our own choices with respect to the “day” appointed by God for judgment. In other words consequences of our own choices can keep us from adequate and proper preparation for Yahweh’s ending. So Jesus draws His remarks to a close on this occasion with this solemn warning; “But stay awake at all times, praying that you may escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.” It is a warning to escape the peril to their faith these future events would impose by guarding their hearts and focusing on His words.

Luke 21:37-38

Luke tells us how Jesus spent His time on these last few days of His life before the Passover. Knowing that the time for His death was now very soon He made the most of His time in public teaching in the temple and the private dialog that was mixed in with that. Luke notes that He spent nights outside on the Mount of Olives. The description is one of austerity and it is one of intentionality. In this way Luke appropriately allows the reader to see Jesus' own example of living life to the very end with "the day" in view. The rest of the account will reflect this mentality.

Luke 22

Luke 22:1-6

Luke reports the desire of the Chief Priests and Scribes to put Jesus to death. He also reports their dilemma. They feared the accompanying public outcry against them of such an action. They did not mind bringing His death about in a premeditated way. But to arrest Him publicly might have brought about their own deaths. Their thinking was the ultimate in sinful thought processes.

Luke reported early in his account that when Jesus' birth was announced the angel described the conception of this child as a miracle brought about by the Holy Spirit. The angel's comment was "with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). Since then Luke has shown the impossible deeds brought about by the Holy Spirit in a human, the God-man, Jesus. He has consistently reported the awe of humanity in seeing such things. And all along the way he has spoken of the inability of humans to believe what their eyes were seeing when they did not want to believe. He has shown their ability to twist truth and make wrong right as it served them. He has also shown their covetousness toward all that gives them position and influence with each other. So the fear of man is constantly woven into Luke's account of Jesus accomplishing of the impossible. In this way Yahweh's salvation is constantly demonstrated as the glorious solution to the self-perpetuating fallen nature of the world.

Judas provides the leaders with their way around this fear of public outcry. Judas could help them arrest Jesus away from the public eye. They would deliver Jesus to the Romans and get them to crucify Him. The Romans would get the blame from the public and they would escape unscathed. That this was the quest of these leaders is demonstrated by their protest to the Apostles after the resurrection "You intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:28).

Luke 22:7-38

Amidst all of this human conniving and intrigue the drama of Yahweh's salvation plan roles along in time to the day the Passover lamb was to be killed. Luke notes this in order to give the readers a context of time in which the events occurred that they are reading of. The timing of them is of supreme importance. Time itself, with all the schemes of evil beings and men was in Yahweh's hands. All things were being used by Yahweh to do exactly what He wanted done. Though it was murder, a great evil and from a human point of view a tragedy, the timing of Jesus' death would be impeccable.

The celebration of the Passover commemorated Israel's rescue from slavery in Egypt. Yahweh broke Pharaoh's will to keep Israel enslaved by sending His Angel to kill every first-born in Egypt on a set night. Before that event of judgment Yahweh gave ample warning. He commanded all to kill a Passover lamb, so named because its blood was to be sprinkled on the doorpost of the family who killed it. When the Angel of Yahweh passed through the land to judge it, He would pass over the first-born of the household when He saw the blood on their doorpost. Each year until the present time that event is commemorated on the very month and day of its anniversary (Exodus 12).

Peter and John are designated by Jesus to go and prepare this Passover meal in the place He has chosen. Jesus Himself had apparently spoken beforehand with the one who owned the place where they would eat together. The owner is not mentioned by name, but makes the room available. It is likely that the submission of this individual to Jesus' need is thought by Luke to be a significant example and he included it to inspire obedience at a very pragmatic level. Such obedience is the

mark of the Kingdom of God. It contrasts sharply with what the leaders of Israel were doing with respect to their King. The owner's obedience is a model of one who is not weighed down by the cares of the world. Our life as we await the day of Yahweh is to serve our King with all that we have and are.

Luke records Jesus' words about His great desire to eat this meal with these men. We expressed His feelings to them in this way, "With passionate desire I have passionately desired this Passover to eat with you before I suffer." We note that this was to be His last meal before His agonizing death. It was the Passover meal, so significant spiritually. Millions had celebrated it for centuries. These, both the core of His movement and His closest friends, would eat it now with Him. They would watch as He fulfilled all that the Passover pointed to. It was a Passover like no one else had ever eaten. Jesus deeply wanted this for His closest friends.

The things Jesus says to these friends reflects their close friendship with Jesus. They also reflect the authority they had given Him as their Master. His words are affectionate, instructive, and hopeful. From the beginning they look forward to the experience they would have together with Him in the kingdom of God. In Luke's rather abbreviated account of the Passover meal He mentions Jesus speaking three times of His re-union with these friends, when they would celebrate together in the kingdom of God. He has already told them of that day when He would return to judge, then rule the earth. That future blessing is the hope that would mitigate their trials and those of all who would follow them in following Him. Jesus' words as He offers the first cup to them commemorate this last Passover together. But His words also proclaim the hope of drinking the fruit of the vine again together in His Kingdom.

As they begin the meal Jesus takes the bread of the Passover that had memorialized the affliction of slavery and the haste in which Yahweh's deliverance changed all that. Now He tells them that this bread also represents His body that was given for them. From this day forward they were to remember Him as they ate it. The salvation of Yahweh from Egypt had addressed their station in life as slaves. Jesus' body became the instrument of Yahweh's complete salvation from the ravages of sin, that which is the root of all slavery. That Yahweh Himself had appeared to them now in bodily form, the firstborn and only Son of God, that this One named Jesus had given that body as payment for their sin, it all offered them much to remember, ponder, and rejoice in. They needed to remember how the incarnation had radically altered their reality.

This all is strengthened as Luke tells us of Jesus offering a second cup. Of this cup Luke says it was offered "likewise." Like the bread the cup now represented more than it had in the traditional Passover. Jesus says of it, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." The new covenant had been greatly anticipated because of all that Yahweh had revealed about it through the Old Testament writers. It would bring forgiveness from sin, and because of that would bring about the joining of Yahweh's Spirit to humanity (Jeremiah 31:31-38; Isaiah 59:20-21; Ezekiel 37:24-28). All of this would be assured by a sight those who drank this cup together would see very soon, the pouring out of Jesus' blood. When they drank this cup in the future it was to remind them of this great sacrifice that brought about such a leap forward in Yahweh's salvation plan.

Luke does not linger at all over these words of Jesus. With no break in the cadence of the narrative Luke reports immediately Jesus' words about the betrayal of Judas. Luke reports Jesus stating the irony of His betrayal, that it would come from one whose hand was with Him at the table. Not only was the betrayer present, but was acting as an intimate friend of Jesus at that moment. This likely is a reference to the fact reported by Mark (14:17-21), that Judas was dipping bread in the same dish as Jesus. Luke also reports Jesus' warning about the severity of this sin that Judas had conspired to join Jesus' enemies in. Jesus clearly states that Judas' betrayal is not the cause of His death. His death

will occur only because it is predetermined by Yahweh as the center-piece of His plan. Judas was to be pitied. But Yahweh's plan is not threatened or shaped by such acts of treachery.

Luke then reports how those present begin to question who Jesus was referring to, which one of them was the traitor. He does not reveal the detail of the discussion about the traitor to the degree John does (John 13:21-30). Instead Luke moves quickly to another very critical discussion that develops during this Passover meal. In fact, it seems to be the key thing Luke wants the reader to know about. Other things said have been reported in passing. Luke lingers over this incident.

The incident Luke lingers over is a dispute that arises among the Apostles about who was the greatest among them. It is such an ironic question to us as readers, given the event they were celebrating and the events that would unfold in the hours ahead. It is certainly an unflattering incident in terms of the eleven who would lead the Church and wield Christ's authority in it. It was strategic for that movement because in response to it Jesus summarizes for a final time the unique leadership culture that the Holy Spirit establishes in the mission He is orchestrating. When we say the leadership of the Church is unique, we mean that though it shares common ground with the leadership we see in the affairs of this earth, Spirit-led leadership leaves a very distinct mark.

Jesus describes the unique mark of Spirit-led leaders by speaking of the absence of the need among them to be honored as "in charge," with all its appropriate titles and all the trappings of influence and power that characterize leadership in the world. Jesus clearly was the leader of those gathered and they all knew it. Yet they had witnessed even in this Passover the fact that He did not view any role as below Him. Luke has not reported that demonstration He meticulously gave when He behaved as a household servant and washed the feet of the twelve (see John 13:1-17). But Luke records Jesus' comment, "I am among you as the one who serves," that was given in that context.

The apostles would have authority in the Church and Jesus would affirm that and make it very clear. But they would lead with respect for the presence of the Holy Spirit in each believer and seek His leading as it was manifested through all. Their respect for all meant that they did not shy away from menial and unpleasant work. They led the way in it.

None of this is to say that Church leadership was democratic. It was leadership that led by the Holy Spirit's voice. That demanded respect for the fact that the circle of the Holy Spirit's influence extended through the entire body. The Apostles clearly respected, listened and watched for that voice. A principle of mutual servanthood prevailed. After the Apostles this principle gradually eroded and a more normal hierarchy of leadership evolved. Willful leadership took root where the needs and wants of the leaders were imposed on the Church. In the wake of this shift the Church moved toward its darkest hour.

The eleven learned servant-leadership well from Jesus. Luke has thoroughly reported Jesus' instruction to them on this point (9:46-50). On their part the Apostles were anxious to have such unflattering and fleshly incidents like this reported in the official records. They did this in order for subsequent leaders to hold to the course set by Christ in this important matter.

As part of this discussion Jesus affirms His choice of the Apostles. Their role and authority was unique and will remain so throughout eternity. It demanded that they be secure enough in who they were that they didn't need the trappings of success and power. This may be the reason He speaks of the role they will have in His Kingdom. Again in that statement about His kingdom we see that Jesus' remarks were hopeful even as the darkest of hours was settling in on this small group that would change the world.

It is also as part of this greater discussion on leadership that Jesus affirms the influence and leadership of Simon Peter. Peter would have a moment of deep failure that would be hard for him to stomach. One of the hardest challenges of Spirit-led leadership is to navigate transparently our moments of failure. Jesus predicts Peter's failure in faith and his return to faith. Both are a part of our reality as Spirit-led people. Our responsibility in the wake of failure is to return and strengthen our family in the faith. We must lead the way out of failure well because it failure is a part of our fallen experience of the Kingdom of Yahweh until we are fully redeemed. Against Peter's great objections Jesus shares this that is his reality.

Luke ends His record of the conversations at the Passover meal with comments made by Jesus about how their lives are about to change and how the ministry they were being entrusted with would change. It is all a reference to the fact that it would be carried forward among people hostile to Him, some even determined to stomp out His teachings. It would also go beyond the familiarity of the land of Israel. They would take the gospel into the whole world. They would be in danger as they came up against cultural differences, natural forces and even from the ever-present criminal element (2 Corinthians 11:26-27). They were being thrust from the friendly confines of the shadow of Jesus who led the mission into the responsibility of multiplying and growing it.

In these comments Jesus reinforces His coming rejection, as it had been projected amongst all the good news in the Old Testament that had been spoken of Him. These words also bear this hopeful message, "what is written about me has its fulfillment." If His rejection came true, then they could be certain that His victory in our behalf and His resurrection and His rule will also come true.

Luke 22:39-45

After eating the Passover meal together the eleven follow Jesus to the Mount of Olives. Luke has already noted that this was where He was spending the nights during this last week of His life. It is possible when Luke says this was Jesus custom he is referring to something Jesus did often when He was in Jerusalem. John notes that Judas was familiar with this practice of Jesus and knew the place (John 18:2).

Luke's account of what happens on the Mount of Olives is brief. He reports the great agony of Jesus' prayer. He notes Jesus' dread of the cross and His request that if possible for Yahweh to accomplish the mission in some other way this painful suffering be avoided. Luke's notes Jesus' submission in His anxiety to the will of Yahweh. It seems that we should understand that Jesus' intense suffering began here, not later when the actual physical punishment began.

We are not certain that Luke wrote the text of verses 43-44. These verses are not in many of the early versions of Luke's gospel. He alone among those who gave an account of these events notes that an angel met Jesus and ministered to Him. He alone also notes that Jesus' sweat flowed like great drops of blood. We could suppose that Luke being a physician, notes this perhaps because in hearing of this uncommon occurrence it was of special interest to him. But in the end we have to acknowledge that these words were likely added to give more emphasis to Jesus great agony.

Usually in examining such variants in the documents of the Scripture we assume that the briefest text and the less clear text is the closest to the original. We do not go simply by the text of the majority of the manuscripts even though we might like it for theological or pragmatic reasons. The reasoning for that is simple. Copyists who were anxious to spread the message of Christianity would be more prone to add material to give emphasis or clarity rather than taking words and phrases away from the original story. So it has been the practice of those who have worked at preserving the accuracy of the text of Scripture to accept the simplest and least clear text as the most accurate one. We can

be very confident that this spirit of intellectual honesty has been present in their great work. In versions like the NASB, the editors will often do as they have done here. Where many manuscripts include the verses in question, they also will include them, but they will note that the source of the words is doubtful.

Luke reports that twice Jesus urges those with Him to pray so that they would not enter into temptation. They are not able to do so because they are falling asleep. The readers of the story know well this weakness in which we might intend to pray but slouch toward something more natural than this more effective means of dealing with sorrow or anxiety. It is a powerful example Jesus leaves us with, one that the eleven and their followers seemed to learn well.

Luke 22:47-53

In these verses we read of the arrest of Jesus and the brief hearing the Sanhedrin conducted before taking Him to Pilate. We also read the account of Peter's denial of Jesus that happened as Jesus Himself had projected during the Passover meal (verse 34). Luke records the beginning of Jesus' physical abuse by those who have been designated to guard Him in these initial stages after His arrest.

Luke tells of the appearance of all who were a part of the mob that came to arrest Jesus, led by Judas. He does so in a way that three great ironies are brought out.

Luke first reports that Judas came up to Jesus to kiss Him, and so signal in the darkness of the night which of the group present was Jesus. There is always a painful and shameful irony in a friend's betrayal. Jesus points out the sinister irony of this act of Judas—his kiss. Judas used a gesture of affection to intentionally mark for rejection and death the incarnate Son of God.

The disciples who are with Jesus see the eventuality of the events unfolding in front of them and draw what swords they had among them. Jesus' earlier comment to them about needing to have a sword for all that was about to change (verse 35-38), had conditioned them for this response. Luke does not mention that it was Peter who swung his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest (John 18:10). He only mentions that someone did it. There was no fiercer opponent of Jesus and Yahweh than the high priest and those around him. One of his servants receives the brunt of Peter's anger and fierce determination to defend his friend. That Jesus rebukes his action no doubt plays into the emotions of Peter as he watches all that begins to unfold. He had certainly shown his willingness to die for Jesus as he had promised.

What happens next is a second great irony and one greater than the kiss of Judas. Jesus heals the injured man. Those who demanded a sign from heaven from Jesus of His authority earlier in the week (20:1-2), witness this, His compassionate treatment of an enemy. Yet these, the chief priests, officers of the temple, and the elders continue in their path to bring Jesus to a violent death. It is ironic.

Jesus makes a very brief statement about the underhandedness of these who have been plotting against Him. He describes to them what is shaping the events that they are presiding over. He says, "This is your hour and power of darkness." In the rapidly unfolding events of the first minutes of this great drama they have received a divine warning that Yahweh is permitting them to act in behalf of the powers of evil. That is the side they have chosen in this great purpose that God Himself will bring about through their evil. And so it is that those who presented themselves to the world as Yahweh's representatives fight with Him, but in doing so allow His salvation to come to all the world. That is the third great irony we see in the entire matter that is quickly unfolding. It is likely the greatest irony of history that this horrendous, abusive injustice was used by God to bring about the greatest show of love and grace the world has known.

Luke 22:54-62

Luke weaves together in these verse the beginnings of the proceedings against Jesus and the denial of Peter. They take Jesus to the home of the High Priest. Luke reports that Peter follows from afar. We can certainly find plenty to criticize in Peter but we should commend in him his value of loyalty. The presence of that value is the reason his weeping later at his failure is noted as "bitter."

Luke notes that Peter mingles with those present, those who had been involved in the arrest and various servants who served in the high priest's home. As he did this different ones identified him as belonging to those who followed Jesus. He had certainly appeared in public with Jesus regularly so that being associated with Him was to be expected. Three times different ones suggest his association and as Jesus had predicted, Peter denies the relationship. After the third denial Peter heard a rooster crow, and his eyes met Jesus' eyes. Luke records that "he went out and wept bitterly."

Luke has reported Peter's failure likely as Peter himself told the story. It was precise and unflattering. It showed Peter to be a man with great intentions who was ignorant of the plan and intentions of Yahweh in the moment. He was no small example of faith, yet still out of touch with his Creator. It underscored humanity's need for a savior.

Luke 22:63-65

We read next in Luke's account of the beginning of the physical suffering of Jesus. It stands in sharp contrast to the actions of Peter. This is likely intentional on Luke's part. In casting Jesus' actions against the backdrop of Peter's, Luke gives us a powerful contrast between the classic human intentions of Peter run amuck, and the resolve of Jesus who would hold a course of loyalty and obedience to God to the bitter end. It is a way of understanding why the sacrifice of Jesus by God was necessary.

Luke tells us of those who were likely members of the temple guard, who began striking Jesus with physical blows. Initially they had probably been uncertain what power this man who had a reputation of being divinely powerful might actually might have over them. But they became increasingly confident, bold and arrogant in their unbelief. They were over whatever pause the healing of the high priest's servant a few hours earlier might have given them. Jesus' claims were soon the brunt of their jokes. They mocked His reputation as a prophet punching Him, perhaps after blindfolding Him, then laughingly challenging Him to tell who had hit Him. Luke gives this as just one example of the blasphemies they hurled at Him. However, their brashness and impulsiveness was no match for the sinless restraint He had practiced throughout His years. He was resolved to accomplish what God desired. Their evil only strengthened that resolve.

Luke 22:66-71

Jesus' enemies had Him in custody and when morning came they called for a special session of the Sanhedrin. This was the counsel that the Roman's had allowed to have a voice over affairs relating to the religious laws of the Jews. Their desire in convening is not to investigate the matter of whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. They had made the decision already that He was not. So their only desire is to hear Him claim that title. When He did they would deliver Him over to the Romans as one claiming to be a King. The Romans would kill Him for treason and that would be the end of this One who threatened what measly power they had, or so they thought. So they had only one question they wanted to hear Him answer.

Combining the accounts of the other Gospel writers with Luke's account, we find that Jesus did not immediately answer their questions. But after some time He agreed that this was His claim. Having secured the answer they wanted they proceeded to turn the matter over to the Roman governor.

Luke 23

Luke 23:1-25

In this section Luke tells his readers about Pilate's handling of this matter that the Jews set before him. It is brief. It is mostly a summary of what Pilate says and does in response to the charges against Jesus. Luke seems particularly focused on showing us Pilate's public insistence that Jesus was innocent and should be released. So emphatic is Pilate that the entire "trial" seems more of a preliminary hearing by our standards. It is clear that Pilate saw insufficient evidence to proceed legally against Jesus. Three times he proclaims this. He even offered to punish Jesus, itself unjust if Jesus was in fact innocent. He does this just to appease the crowd. His act of sending Jesus to Herod is likely Pilate seeking to buy time, hoping the whole problem would go away. Herod's response in the whole matter shows his own arrogance toward Jesus and the Jews.

Luke's report highlights in the reader's mind the fact that the Jewish leaders had rejected Him as Jesus had repeated beforehand publicly and to His disciples (9:22; 17:25; 20:17). It also makes the rejection of Christ by the Gentiles just as heinous in that Pilate was willing to cast aside justice and kill an innocent man in order to keep peace. Luke's report of Jesus' brief appearance before Herod and his report that Herod and Pilate became friends over Jesus' death all heightens the idea that both Jews and Gentiles rejected Jesus as the Christ. They did so without a serious investigation of His claims. They were far too busy advancing their own agendas.

Luke all along reports the absence of any effort on Jesus' part to save Himself. This was due to His submission to the plan of Yahweh in the whole matter. It was behavior that Isaiah had projected of the Messiah, all demonstrated in the presence of the supposed experts among the Israelites in the Scriptures. (Isaiah 42:1-4, 53:7-12). It also occurred in front of the one appointed by the world empire of the day to administer justice.

Luke brings the whole matter to what seems like a premature conclusion. He writes of the Jews, "they were insistent with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices began to prevail." Luke briefly adds, "And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demands be granted." Pilate then, is cast by Luke as one who governed as Aaron did, by granting what is desired by those he is suppose to be leading. He is not led by moral or even legal principle but by expedience and pragmatics. Luke states of the Jews that they chose to have live among them one who was imprisoned for insurrection and murder rather than Jesus, Yahweh's anointed King.

Luke 23:26-50

These verses are Luke's account of the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus. Most notable to the reader is that as Luke is relating these facts he is also telling a number of personal stories connected with the events. And so we read of the man who carried Jesus' cross, the women who wept as they led Jesus out of the city, the unrepentant and repentant thieves, the centurion who witnessed Jesus' death, and the man who buried Jesus. No names are given except that of the man who buried Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea. These verses consist mostly of these stories rather than details on Jesus' suffering. Luke's only report of Jesus' words is the very brief interactions that He had with some of these individuals, His prayer of forgiveness for His enemies, and His loud cry to God as He died.

The name of the man who carried Jesus' cross is given by Luke. It is also given by both Matthew and Mark (Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21). His name was Simon. Mark notes as well that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus, possibly because these were all men known in the early Church. It may be that together the gospel writers' purpose in giving names was to identify those who could witness to the accuracy of his account.

Luke next tells of a group of women following Jesus who were mourning and lamenting the ending that was coming to Jesus' life. Of all the things perhaps said by Jesus in His final hours Luke gives the most space to Jesus' words to these women. They are prophetic, speaking of the awful consequences that awaited Israel and Jerusalem and all who reject the Messiah. Yahweh had a season of judgment prepared for Israel and for the entire world. Jesus' words on this occasion echoed things He had said earlier (Matthew 24:19; Luke 11:27; 21:23), as well as things written by Old Testament prophets regarding the great day of Yahweh (Hosea 10:8; Isaiah 2:19-20).

Luke notes a series of things that characterize the general demeanor of the event. He begins with the fact that Jesus was crucified in the company of two criminals. These would behave very differently, but for now Luke simply states they were criminals crucified on both sides of Him.

Luke then quotes Jesus' great statement of forgiveness. Luke characterizes it as something Jesus "was saying." In telling us this he may be indicating that Jesus said this a number of times, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Luke follows this with several sentences that describe acts of derision by those in the crowd that had gathered. The entire paragraph underscores the depth of the rejection and abuse humanity poured out on the one who God appointed as their Savior and King. There is abuse by the people, the rulers, the soldiers and from one of the criminals.

It is in telling about the abuse of these that Luke reports the repentance of one of the criminals. The repentance of this one person is made to stand out in sharp contrast to the conduct of the "better citizens" and rulers that have been a part of the drama thus far. This man is a lone voice. Luke does not mention the conduct of any of the eleven apostles or the extended group of disciples that we know were present. It does not mean that they said nothing of significance at the event (John 19:26-27). Luke simply chose not to report it and it is likely he did so to make the conduct of this unlikely candidate for the Kingdom of God to stand out. That has been an important subject Luke has been developing in His work. The repentant man asks Jesus that he might be a part of His coming kingdom. Jesus affirms the criminal as one of His own. Luke shows us the power of repentance. The themes of repentance and salvation and the coming kingdom are greatly strengthened by this brief interaction.

Luke gives a few sentences to describing circumstances that occurred as Jesus died. There was darkness that spread across the land from noontime to mid afternoon. We don't know the cause. Perhaps it was a solar eclipse, which some have researched and provided evidence of. If this is true then our ability to pinpoint the exact date and time of Jesus' death is not too far away.

Luke also mentions that the veil of the temple was torn in the middle. The tearing of that veil contrasted sharply with the physical darkness that had come over the land. From a human point of view the tearing of this veil that concealed the most holy place was impossible. Its material was too thick and strong. Matthew mentions other phenomena that occurred as well and the fact that the veil was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). As these phenomena are occurring Jesus breathes His last. He utters the prayerful words of Psalm 31:5, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

In blocking access into the most Holy Place on earth the veil of the temple symbolized the sin of humanity that created a barrier between them and Yahweh their Creator. So this tearing of the veil of the temple was an act of Yahweh that is of great theological significance. It signified that though from a human point of view a criminal act had been committed against God yet now there was no longer a barrier between humanity and God. The sacrifice of His own Son Yahweh Himself had planned and allowed. That sacrifice allowed forgiveness of sin. There was nothing left that banned humanity from the presence and experience of Yahweh. In the midst of the enveloping darkness there was this great sign given of hope. That temple with its holy place would never have significance again until Jesus returns as King of the earth.

After this brief statement of Jesus' death Luke will speak of two more unlikely men who recognized something significant in this rejected King. In the case of these two, their words and actions come after Jesus' death. They are not affirmed by Him in as dramatic a way as was the criminal hanging on his own cross. But their response to Jesus' death was significant in terms of what was ahead for the movement Jesus had started.

The centurion that had the duty of watching over Jesus was one of these that Luke tells us of. Luke links what the centurion says to having seen "what had happened." In the Greek version that is one word, which we could render "seeing". The centurion will say what he says after "seeing." Now what has he seen? Luke has chosen to say nothing about the earthquake Matthew mentions. Based on Luke's account readers know only that the centurion has seen the darkness and the normal abuses of crucifixion. Luke's point seems to be that the centurion has seen a quick death and one that seemed to be voluntary—Jesus simply saying "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." So if we were reading only Luke's account, as Theophilus likely was, we would think that the centurion observed that Jesus was no mere man because of the way he died, quickly and as a decision of His own will. Given the nature of crucifixion the centurion was expecting a slow death. That was the point of crucifixion, to punish people with a slow death. He had probably seen many people who wanted to die and could not under such circumstances. He observes something very different from what he expected here. He interprets this as an act of divine justice, however he might have understood this. And so he says, "certainly this man was innocent."

As in the other stories Luke has reported here, amid all the rejection of Jesus, there are those responding differently. Luke also reports the reaction of the onlookers who begin to disperse "beating their breasts," a way of openly expressing grief and sorrow. These are the onlookers who had gathered to observe this spectacle of Jesus as He hung on the cross. Amid all the hardness of human hearts some had been touched and were continuing to be touched.

Then Luke reports the coming of Joseph of Arimathea who places Jesus in a tomb. In contrast to the other individuals he has mentioned, Luke gives the name and some significant background details of Joseph. He tells the reader Joseph was "a member of the council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan or action) from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God." Now Luke has told us of one more man, one of considerable influence and standing, who has not been part of the rejection of Jesus. Joseph was waiting for the kingdom of God.

When the message of the gospel that interpreted the crucifixion of Jesus began to spread within a few weeks, it would find fertile ground in hearts such as all these that Luke has told us of. Though few seemed to expect Jesus' resurrection, as Luke shows by reporting the actions of those who prepared spices for Jesus' proper burial, many had been prepared by all they heard and saw of His life to believe the impossible. They had witnessed the great act of Yahweh who became a human, died for their sins. All of that was proven by the fact that He rose from the dead.

Luke 24

Luke 24:1-12

Luke moves quickly on to report the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. His account makes it clear that the followers of Jesus were not remotely anticipating a resurrection. The eleven are presented initially as unbelieving. A group of women, whom Luke will later name, have prepared spices to place in the linen wraps that Joseph had quickly placed around the body of Jesus. They had rested on the Sabbath day according to the instructions of the law of Moses.

Now, on the first day of the week, this group of women go to the tomb to do this ministry.

Luke reports that when these arrived they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Mark reports in his account that this stone was very large and that the women were wondering as they went to the tomb how they would roll it away (Mk. 16:1-5). Matthew reports that this was the work of an angel whose appearance was such that “for fear of him the guards trembled and became as dead men” (Matthew 28:1-4). Luke abbreviates his report of many such details. Even in giving the names of the women he states three names but states that others were present. Luke has a purpose other than giving details of the event.

What Luke does report is what is said to the women by two angelic beings who were present at the tomb. Their words to the women direct the women to remember what Jesus Himself had said while in Galilee about what would happen to Him in Jerusalem. He had told them that He would be rejected and killed then rise from the dead on the third day. Luke has let the reader know in his narrative of these statements Jesus made to His followers (Luke 9:21-22, 44; 18:31-34). Luke now notes that the angels take these women back to these words of Jesus and that they do recall them (v 8).

The movement that the Holy Spirit would carry on through people such as these would be based on the commands of Jesus and His teaching on the Old Testament Scriptures. It is helpful for us to remember that the Holy Spirit is crafting through Luke this account of Jesus' life. What we observe here is that Luke, in concert with the Holy Spirit, deliberately reports the resurrection in a way that centers the reader on the teachings of Jesus as He Himself was revealed by the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Luke's report of the resurrection seems intent on centering the reader on this idea—the reliability of the Scripture. The life of Jesus did not represent an abrupt turn by God away from where He had pointed people through Moses and other writers of the Old Testament. Rather Yahweh was pointing to Jesus through all those writings. Jesus was the embodiment of those writings. He was the One the entire movement would now look back to. By doing so they would also look forward to His coming again to fulfill the remainder of all the Old Testament had pointed its followers to.

After hearing the words of these angels Luke reports the women telling this news to the apostles. Luke wants us to know that the Apostles are not anticipating a resurrection. He reports that the testimony of the women seemed like nonsense to them and that they would not believe them.

He then reports Peter's visit to the tomb and the fact that he found only the linen wrappings that Joseph had placed around the body. There was no body. Again we note the brevity of Luke's account of this incident (see John 20:1-10). He reports Peter returning to His home “marveling at what had happened.” Again we notice Luke's mentioning of this emotion as a response to God doing the impossible (See Appendix 1).

Luke 24:13-28

Luke now moves into a second section of his report on the resurrection of Jesus. The purpose of reporting the incident that happens to two followers of Jesus is probably two-fold. First, by the law of Moses the facts were to be confirmed by two witnesses. The testimony of two men to an event was legally admissible as credible evidence. But Luke's greater purpose is clearly to center the readers on the reliability of the Scriptures. This is what Jesus Himself does as He appears unknowingly to the two and converses extensively with them. Only one of them is named, Cleopas.

The event seems like it must have been a really fun one for Jesus! Who doesn't like to be part of a great surprise! There is much unknown to us about it. How did Jesus disguise Himself so that He was not recognizable to these men? Answers to these kinds of questions elude us. Many of them arise as we read the rest of Luke's account about Jesus' appearances after He has been raised from the dead.

It is good to entertain such questions and to ponder the joy of Jesus in the events and that of these who were His friends. In Jesus we are likely looking at the capacities of the resurrection bodies that we will one day have. We must avoid thinking of these bodies as spiritual only (i.e. as ghosts), which Jesus clearly refutes (vs 37-39). Instead they are of a different type of matter than our earthly bodies, with different capacities. Paul would write of these resurrection bodies later (1 Corinthians 15:35-58). But there is much that remains a mystery. It is profitable to our faith and hope to speculate on the glory that awaits us based on the hope of these new bodies. Our speculation must stay within boundaries of Scripture and we must remember it is speculation! But our new bodies are a key piece of our eternal hope (Revelation 21:3-8).

The two men are presented to us as glum travelers leaving Jerusalem and processing the "Jesus events" of the past years. Jesus is suddenly present with them to help them process the complexities of it all, though they do not recognize Him. He starts by listening to their perspective. Luke emphasizes their gloom and the fact that they are spiritually and emotionally "stuck" by speaking of them stopping in the road and looking sad.

Jesus' then replies to them. Luke reports Jesus opening words. We are shaken from any feeling of this being a fun and playful event by Jesus' statement, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" What is happening in the event is joyful, it is happy, it is cheerful. But this admonishment is very serious one. Clearly there is an expectation on Jesus' part that these two have fallen short of where they should be by now. They were thinking wrong and it was not due to ignorance but of slowness of heart. They could have chosen to trust the Scriptures. Instead they were thinking like mere men. They are demonstrating the great human problem. We cannot be dismissive of our puny knowledge and trust in what God has put in writing. He has a clear awareness of our weakness and it is not so great that we cannot trust Him.

The rest of the conversation with these men is characterized by Luke with these words, "Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." Later they would recognize Him and describe their feelings in this conversation in this way, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

The effect of Luke's accounting of this incident is not primarily to prove that the resurrection can be trusted because these two men are reliable witnesses who saw Jesus with their own eyes. That seems to be a secondary purpose. By presenting Jesus' as admonishing them through the Scriptures Luke is presenting Jesus' resurrection as reliable because the Scriptures attest to it and defined the purpose of His death before it happened. Luke's account helps us see that Jesus' focus with the core of His followers in His post-resurrection appearances was to help them clearly see in the Old Testament the script of His life and death.

The two men returned to Jerusalem that same night and reported to the apostles the entire matter. The apostles report to the two is that Jesus had indeed risen and that He had by this time appeared to Peter.

Luke 24:36-49

As the Apostles are pondering the growing testimony that Jesus had risen and had been seen and conversed with, Jesus Himself appears in the room. Even with His greeting of "Peace be unto you," those present are overwhelmed with fright. This is another in a long line of observations by Luke of this default reaction in us to matters that require faith. We are startled and frightened.

Luke states the reason for the Apostles' fright and it is important to our theology of Jesus' resurrection and our own resurrection. The reason the Apostles are frightened is they think they are seeing an apparition of Jesus—a ghost. Jesus wants them to know that they are seeing Him. His resurrection was a material one not simply a spiritual one. And so He invites them to examine His body closely and touch it and learn that it has flesh and bones. Then He eats regular material, earthly food while they watch. So Jesus meets them in their ignorance because He does not want human superstition to shape their beliefs about the resurrection.

We believe therefore that Jesus' body was different in some way from our own, but it was a material, physical body of some sort. There is no doubt that He has powers that are different from what ours will be. But we must make certain that we believe in a resurrection and a transformation of our physical bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-58). We must believe what John wrote, who was present at this meeting: "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). That is the great hope of the Christian faith.

Luke reports to us that after Jesus takes time to calm the fears of those in the room He immediately directs their attention to the record of Scripture. The Hebrew Scriptures were composed of three sections. The three sections were the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (See Appendix 8). Jesus references all three and speaks of the fact that all three tell us about Him. He points those in the room to these and reminds them that ALL the things written about Him in these writings must be fulfilled. This relates to what Luke had told us in the first chapter of His writings. "No decree from God shall be impossible." Since Yahweh had decreed Jesus death, burial and resurrection, all they had witnessed in the last three days had to happen. Now they should be comforted and emboldened, because there was much more written in those Scriptures about what remained to happen with Jesus' kingdom.

There is a short, important comment Luke places in verse 45 about what occurs in the minds and hearts of this group through Jesus. Luke writes, "Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." This understanding of the Scripture was something that had continually eluded them. Their ability to interpret the writings Yahweh had given and understand the message of them was critical to the mission Jesus had entrusted to them.

The word used for “opened” is from *dianoigw*. This is a Greek word used to describe a change either physical or mental, that allows something physical to pass through (2:23), or that allows something mental or spiritual to be absorbed and understood. It was used twice in this latter way in this chapter as Luke described the experience the two men had with Jesus on the road to Emmaus (verses 31-32). It described the moment when they recognized Him—their eyes were “opened.” Then it is used of the moments on the road when Jesus was “opening” the Scripture to them—helping them understand it. So Luke uses it to describe a moment or season of enlightenment when we recognize a person or idea for what it really is (see also Acts 16:14; 17:3).

We are not sure what was involved in this opening of their minds. There might have been some lengthy discussion so that they learned the skill/art and science of interpretation. And without a doubt there was some work of the Spirit that helped that enlightenment occur. We all experience such moments in all of life’s endeavors where the light suddenly comes on and a thing makes sense to us. Such moments are common in the walk of the Spirit as He equips us for the work of God.

Whatever the Spirit’s role was in this moment, it is the work He would soon energize that Jesus speaks of next. He summarizes the things projected by the Old Testament about Himself, namely that He would suffer and rise again from the dead. Then seamlessly He moves into what is next. The gospel would be preached among all nations beginning from Jerusalem. He points to their role in this great mission of the next era by saying, “You are witnesses of these things.”

But it was not time for them to begin that proclamation just yet. There was something they needed. Better, there was a Person they needed to be able to do what was marked out for them. They needed to be given the Holy Spirit. In a situation that began with them thinking Jesus was a spirit, they are told that they must indeed wait for THE Spirit, the one that had been revealed and promised in the very writings Jesus has mentioned, those of Moses, the Psalms and the Prophets. The Holy Spirit was their essential helper. They were not to engage the mission until they received His presence and power in their lives. These are important words for us. We need Him. The work of changing hearts is such that it cannot be done without Him.

We are nearing the close of Luke’s volume that He wrote to Theophilus about the life and works of Jesus. He would write a second volume to his friend. That volume is known in our Bible as Acts. If you read the first few verses of Acts you will recognize that it began similarly to this volume and reflects Luke’s style. You will also see that the second volume overlaps this first one beginning here with the command of Jesus to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit to be fulfilled. Luke emphasizes to His readers in this way that the Holy Spirit is the key to our lives and ministries. So great is the blessing in His presence with us that Jesus described to His disciples that it was to their advantage if He went away and was no longer physically present with them (John 16:7). That is a remarkable statement of significance of the Holy Spirit’s ministry.

Luke 24:50-53

The last act of Jesus while He was physically present on the earth was to walk with His friends to Bethany, the town of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha and then to bless them. It is as He is blessing them that He is taken up out of their sight into His glory. Luke's report of this blessing is profound. Jesus was the one Yahweh had promised in the tragedy of Eden. He was the seed of the woman who would crush the great perpetrator of evil. The seed of the woman was the means by which the lost blessing would be restored.

Jesus had accomplished this in His death and resurrection. Now these who have believed in Him receive His blessing. Interestingly, that blessing is never concluded in either of Luke's account of it. Whether intended or unintended, this is appropriate. The blessing of Jesus continues to come from Him to all who believe. It is theirs eternally.

Appendices

Appendix 1

“Fear” and “amazement” are frequent emotions mentioned by Luke. He reports these as the routine reactions of people as they witnessed acts of God brought about in and through Jesus. This idea, that God routinely works in the realm of the impossible was the message given to Mary at the birth of Jesus (Luke 1:37). It was prophetic of things that would come upon individuals and the world itself through this Anointed One—Christ Yahweh’s King.

From the beginning of Luke’s narrative the key players in the events surrounding the births of John and Jesus experienced this fear and amazement (1:65, 74, 2:9, 18, 33, 37-38). The same ideas appear in Luke’s account as the frequent reactions of both believers and unbelievers to the spiritual and physical powers displayed by Jesus (2:47; 4:32, 36; 5:9-10, 26; 7:16; 8:25, 37, 50, 56; 9:34, 43, 45; 11:14; 20:26; 24:22, 41).

In the midst of these statements Luke records statements of the “fear of man” (12:14; 20:2) and the important statement of the repentant thief on the cross regarding the fear of God (23:40). We are warned that the “fear of man” can limit our experience of the works and acts of God. Finally Luke reports Peter marveling at the empty tomb (24:12) and then Jesus dealing with the fear of the disciples that they were seeing a spirit as He appeared to them after His resurrection (24:37-40).

Fear and what we could describe as a “marveling uncertainty” seems to be an important human emotion to Luke. This is probably all meant to help us trust that all that is the desire and decree of God will be accomplished no matter how impossible it seems from a human point of view. What God does is so beyond the realm of our experience that the idea of accepting it, trusting it, and anticipating it is scary to us.

Appendix 2

The Holy Spirit is an important theme in Luke. He is mentioned twelve times in chapters 1-4:18 (1:15, 17, 35, 41, 67, 80; 2:25-26; 3:16, 22; 4:1, 14, 18). The book closes with Jesus stating the coming promise of the Father—the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell all believers. In between there are many accounts of evil spiritual beings being subjected to the work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus.

- Luke attributes the following to the work of the Holy Spirit;
- The extra-ordinary life of John the Baptist (1:15,80).
- The conception of Jesus—the child produced by the Holy Spirit (1:35).
- Various prophetic messages affirming Jesus’ and John’s role in Yahweh’s plan (1:41-45, 57-79; 2:25-26).
- The enabler of Jesus and the proof of His identity (3:22; 4:1, 14,18).
- The source of Jesus’ joy (10:21).
- The source to all of a defense of the gospel (12:12).
- The object with respect to the unpardonable sin (12:10).

And Luke says it is this very Spirit that is given by Jesus to all who believe in Him (3:16; 11:13; 24:29).

Summary: The Holy Spirit produced in Mary the man-child Jesus. He came upon Jesus enabling Him for all he did. He would come upon and enable His followers to help them represent Jesus, spread and defend the gospel.

Appendix 3

(Use of the phrase “Most High” in account of Melchizedek and beyond)

When we arrive at the story of Melchizedek in Genesis 14, this much has happened. Yahweh has blessed humanity at creation with a special position—to rule over creation for Yahweh according to His direction. Humanity walked away from that blessing, but Yahweh has shown He will save and will restore that blessing to humanity.

He picks one man, Abram, and tells him that it is through him that all nations will be blessed. The original blessing, lost through the fall of Adam and Eve was to be restored through Abraham’s offspring. However, Abram was a herdsman. He owned no land, he had no offspring, and he certainly was not a king or ruler even among local rulers in the land of Palestine when the events of Genesis 14 occur.

Then there is a series of incidences in which four ancient kings form a coalition of sorts and begin to expand their territory. They wreak havoc among the people living in the land promised to Abraham. Eventually these coalition forces attack another coalition of five kings, and specifically the town Abram’s nephew was living in, Sodom. The four kings win the battle, loot Sodom, and carry off as captives a number of the citizens. including Abram’s nephew, Lot.

Word of this battle and the plight of the captives comes to Abraham. It is a pivotal moment for him. What is he to do? He is not a king. But by this time he does have a number of servants. He decides to intervene and so sets out with his own servants to rescue his nephew and the other captives. He attacks the coalition army with his makeshift army of 318. To the surprise of the readers, Abram soundly defeats them. It is a surprise because thus far in the account Yahweh has orchestrated nothing of this sort among His people. So far the record has left the reader with the impression that their numbers and influence has been steadily dwindling. Not this time however. Abram rescues the captives and recovers all the goods that had been carried off. In a moment the four king confederacy that had terrorized the region of Canaan was eliminated.

As Abram is returning from this remarkable event, taking the captives and the goods back to the king of Sodom there comes a moment when they meet. But at this point a third person abruptly enters the narrative of Moses. It is another king. Moses introduces him as Melchizedek king of Salem. That was a town that would grow to a city and be called Jerusalem. Salem means peace. The name Melchizedek means “king of righteousness.” So the town of peace was reigned by the king of righteousness.

There is one more thing Moses tells us that is important. Melchizedek is “priest of God most high.” So this mysterious figure we know nothing about, except that he was both a priest and a king, comes bringing “bread and wine.” This was likely a gift of gratitude for Abram who in defeating the coalition had rid the entire region of a reign of terror.

The use of the phrase “most high God” is of interest in the passage. It will occur four times in five verses. It occurs quite rarely in the Old Testament. Its equivalent, Most High, is more frequent

primarily in the Psalms. This title seems to be reserved for those occasions when the absolute sovereignty of Yahweh over creation and the dependence of humanity on Him are being stressed. So it is an expression that describes His transcendence with respect to all of His creation, humanity included, and all authorities human or otherwise, included. It is also an expression of the infinite worth of God on a more subjective level as well. If one were to somehow analyze and search so as to uncover the underlying essential element for physical, emotional and spiritual life and health, they would find that to be a person, Yahweh. This expression adds loftiness to Melchizedek's position and that of Abram. Used by these two men it is a very personal affirmation of God's authority over both of them and His felt value to them on a relational level. The use of the phrase by Abram later in the passage will minimize the significance of the third party at this meeting, the king of Sodom.

When Melchizedek addresses Abram he does so by first conferring a blessing on him. So we have in the story a King who is also a priest of the most high God, and that before any order of priests had been established by Yahweh. This priest/king conveys this specific blessing on Abram: "Blessed be Abram by God most high, possessor of heaven and earth." So as priest/king of God most high he is declaring Abram blessed by this most high God. Melchizedek is recognizing Abram's position in Yahweh's eyes even as he is acknowledging Yahweh's sovereignty over himself.

Then Melchizedek says, "Blessed be God most high who has delivered your enemies into your hand." This is a declaration by the priest/king that a kingdom kind of act had been brought about by Yahweh through the man of His own choosing. He affirms that God had partnered with a person in a military action to establish His will in the land Abram's family would eventually possess. This act of God was the first visible sign a kingdom was being built of Yahweh's chosen one. So the phrase "most high God" has been used two more times. The repeated use of this term in such close proximity highlights the event in the mind of the reader, though its actual significance cannot be clearly seen in Genesis 14 alone. There is something significant the reader is meant to catch a glimpse of in Moses book. David himself did not miss its significance (Psalm 110).

What happens next is significant. Abram does not slip into a swagger upon hearing the blessing of Melchizedek. The opposite happens. Abram defers to Melchizedek by giving to him a tenth of all he had. In that act Abram was acknowledging a certain presence of Yahweh in Melchizedek and honors him as such. He had experienced the blessing of partnership with Yahweh, now he was acknowledging that his blessing was a gift of Yahweh. All this is a sign of growing faith and trust in Abram, who would not be declared justified until the next chapter.

At this point the vanquished king of Sodom steps into this scene where honor and blessing are being exchanged. He says to Abram words to this effect, "You keep all the loot and just return the captives to me." To this Abram replies, "I have lifted my hand to Yahweh most high, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take anything from you lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'" So Abram is realizing that to Yahweh all things belonged—He was indeed God most high. That phrase occurs for the fourth time here. He has joined himself to Melchizedek by using this expression. This action expressed a growing belief in Abram that there was nothing that did not fall under the command and control of Yahweh. Abram was embracing Yahweh exclusively more and more. He was becoming more determined not to do anything that would cause the truth and principle that Yahweh was the sovereign of the universe to be distorted and abused.

Abram saw something in this priest/king. It motivated him to give Melchizedek a tenth of all he had to him. Later writers saw something as well. David saw in Melchizedek a kind of leader pictured, one whom he himself would be subject to even as Abram was (Psalm 110). He saw a future ruler who would be a king, but also "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." The writer of Hebrews saw the same thing (Hebrews 7). Christ would be a better priest than all the priests that had served Israel,

all of whom were after the order of Aaron and the Levites. Christ would be better because He was a SON of the Most High (Luke 1:32), a priest and a King. In other words Christ was like Melchizedek, of that same order. That order had disappeared but now had resurfaced. The new covenant necessitated a new order of the priesthood. It is as if humanity was given a glimpse of this order, then it was reserved by Yahweh as the one that would be taken up and perpetuated by His Son eternally.

From our perspective with the benefit of David's words and those of the writer to Hebrews we see Melchizedek's appearance in Moses' narrative as being of great significance. Melchizedek's actions, his visit with Abram and his blessing of Abram, was a picture of one greater than Abram that was the source of Abram's blessing. This One whom Melchizedek pictured was the source of blessing through Abram to all people. How much Abram knew in the moment of all this is impossible to determine for sure. But there is no doubt that he was through Melchizedek seeing far into the future a picture of his seed (singular) who would be Yahweh's salvation incarnate, His Christ. It is likely this incident that led Jesus to speak His mysterious statement that Abraham had seen His (Christ's) day and rejoiced (John 8:56-58).

Interestingly after Abram's growing faith has been displayed in this exchange, after Yahweh's blessing of Him had lifted him to a new level of influence, and after Abram had refused any reward from the king of Sodom, the account goes on to report Yahweh appearing to Abraham. Yahweh says, "Fear not Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." Moses' words report that on this occasion Abram is counted as righteous and Yahweh's earlier promise is given as a covenant to him.

Why did Moses highlight this incident through the frequent use of the title "God most high"? The incident spoke of the central figure, the King God would raise up from the seed of Abraham to restore the peace forfeited by humanity in the fall. A king of righteousness would emerge in Jerusalem, a priest/king of God most high.

David affirmed this linkage of his own descendant that would rule the world to Melchizedek (Psalm 110:4)—the priest of the most high God. When the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that her son would be recognized as "the son of the most high," and when Gabriel said that the son would be conceived as the "power of the most high" overshadowed Mary, it was a clear statement that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah. It is also linkage to the earliest writings of Scripture to show that the promise of God to save humanity from the curse and to bring that blessing that had been theirs back through the offspring of Abraham clearly was on course. The King of the kingdom was born.

Appendix 4

Luke shows that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament projections of Christ. It is very apparent that Luke wanted Theophilus to be convinced of this (3:46; 4:21; 9:22, 44; 11:30; 17:22; 18:31; 21:22, 24; 22:16, 22, 37; 24:7, 27, 32, 44-45). Many have fallen into the errant thinking that the current age is not connected to the Old Testament era. Nothing could be further from the truth. Luke's writing allows the reader to constantly see this.

Appendix 5

Luke reports often on opposition to Jesus. It is reported immediately as His ministry begins. There is the record of Satan's temptation (Luke 4:1-14). Luke begins this account with statements that Jesus was "full of the Spirit" and "led of the Spirit" (verse 1). He ends it with Jesus returned "in the power of the Spirit to Galilee" (verse 14). After this Luke reports the rejection of Jesus by those in His home town. From that point on there are frequent reports of human opposition to Jesus throughout Luke's account. It all reminds us that opposition always surfaces as God's King and His kingdom move among fallen people in this fallen world.

Appendix 6

Luke, himself a gentile, speaks to the fact that all nations will be blessed by Jesus and His message. There are numerous veiled references to this from the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry (4:24-27; other "hints" at this occur at 10:13-15, 29-37; 11:29-32; 13:6-9, 14:15-24; 16:19-31; 17:11-18; 19:11-27; 41-44). Then there are three more definitive statements scattered through the account (13:22-30; 20:9-19; 21:20-24). Finally, there is a very definitive one made by Jesus at the close of Luke's account (24:44-47).

Appendix 7

The kingdom of God—this is repeatedly referenced by Luke (1:33; 4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 8:1, 10; 9:2, 11, 27, 60, 62, 10:9, 11; 11:2, 20, 31; 13:18, 20, 28-29; 14:15, 16:16; 17:20-21; 18:16, 24, 29; 19:11, 15; 21:31; 22:16, 18, 29; 23:42, 51). The people were expecting it, they were talking about it, and Jesus was proclaiming it and teaching about it. Jesus talks about its present form, the future form of it, what matters in view of its certainty and in the future will be rewarded in it. He talks about what it requires of any who would experience it and what doing kingdom business involves. As its King He continually models the character that is its goal and He demonstrates clearly His power to subjugate evil.

Appendix 8

Jesus refers in Luke 24:44 to the three sections of the Hebrew Scriptures. The three sections were known as the Law (or the Torah—"the teaching"), the Prophets and the Writings. The following will help you understand what books of our Bibles were in each of these three sections.

- The Law (or the Torah)—this section consisted of the five books written by Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
- The Prophets—this section consisted of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Johan, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.
- The Writings—this section consisted of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Chronicles.

This became known as the "Common Order" and was reflected in the Masoretic text.