

A Gift From Heaven

Why Four Gospels: Luke

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Why War On Earth?

Lesson 12

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Why Four Gospels: Luke

The gospel according to Luke has a totally different structure from that of Matthew's. Luke wrote his gospel especially for the Greek Gentiles. The very beginning makes this clear. Luke's preface in the first four verses of his book is written in classical Greek style. His readers would immediately know whom this book was addressed to. As they continued to read, they would recognize other traits that would distinguish Luke from Matthew.

The Design of Luke's Gospel

One of the differences between these gospels can be found when Jesus addresses the high priest just before His crucifixion. Matthew writes, "But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." (*Matt. 26:64*) However, Luke writes, "But from now on, the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." (*Luke 22:69*) Matthew addresses the Jews. Because of their fear of committing a sin against the third Commandment, the Jews do not pronounce the name Yahweh. They describe God's name as, for instance, "the Mighty One". That is why Matthew uses this term for the name of God. Luke, however, writes his gospel for non-Jews. To make himself clear he writes about "the mighty God". Luke uses the addition "of God", because otherwise his readers might not understand Jesus' words.

The fact that Luke is addressing Greek Gentiles is one of the keys to understanding his gospel.

Trustworthy Witnesses

From the first few verses from the gospel of Luke, it is clear why Luke wrote his gospel. There had been many who had tried to describe what happened during Jesus' life on earth. These authors narrated these events as "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (*Luke 1:1,2*). Therefore, the gospels are a factual account of what the disciples of Jesus had told others. Jesus told His followers: "and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning." (*John 15:27*)

He said they had to testify. This means they had to relate facts truthfully. Witnesses appear before a judge. In such a situation nothing but facts are required. Personal experiences or personal beliefs of piety are irrelevant. When Luke uses the word "delivered" (*Luke 1:2*), he is not talking about inaccurate hearsay, but about facts, told by reliable witnesses. In the Bible, the word "delivered" carries authority. In our own way of speech, this word means something totally different, or even opposite of its Biblical meaning. You can see this by looking in *2 Thess. 2:15*. It says, "So then, brethren stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." Here the word "traditions" has the same root as "delivered" in *Luke 1*. In our own language "traditions" has a slightly negative connotation. We tend to think of fantasy and myth when we hear the word "traditions", but in the Bible this word expresses a most reliable witness. The Bible teaches us the difference between faith, "that was once for all delivered to the saints", and "human tradition" (*Jude 3, Col. 2:8*).

Human Investigation

In his gospel, Luke addresses the "most excellent Theophilus". He was most likely a high ranking Roman, whom he had met in Rome while he was there during Paul's imprisonment. It is assumed that Theophilus requested Luke to write an account of Jesus' life. This led Luke to write a gospel of Jesus Christ for the Greek-speaking people "that (they and) you may know the truth concerning the things of which (they and) you have been informed" (*Luke 1:1 -4*). Luke "followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account". But you must remember it is the Holy Spirit making use of human investigation, not Luke himself, who brings this book into being.

Luke was a physician of non-Jewish descent (*Col. 4:14*). After becoming a Christian he accompanied Paul for many years, and stayed with him to the end of his life. Paul was languishing in prison when he wrote, "Luke alone is with me" (*2 Tim. 4:11*). During the time Paul was imprisoned in Jerusalem and Caesarea, Luke had ample time to collect data and material for his gospel.

Most likely he interviewed Mary for more details. Mary carefully remembered what had taken place, and from her oral account Luke was permitted to write down what she had been "pondering in her heart" (*Luke 2:19,51*).

The Gospel of Healing

While writing his gospel, Luke did not simply give an enumeration of facts. His orderly description gives him the freedom to structure his writing in his own personal way. This special personal structure is obvious when he chooses to describe the appearance and rejection of Jesus at Nazareth before the warm reception at Capernaum. Chronologically, the order should have been reversed.

Jesus tells the inhabitants of Nazareth, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself-, what we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here also in your own country'." (*Luke 4:23*) What exactly happened in Capernaum is related by Luke in the following chapters. Wouldn't Luke have had any insight in the chronological order of events? He certainly did! From the book of Acts it is very clear that he was quite capable of writing a proper sequential account of events, however in his first book he wants to stress the purpose of Jesus' task. He especially wants to show his readers why Jesus came to this earth. Of the greatest importance to Luke is what he records about Jesus' own words. After Jesus had read from the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth, He closed with the words: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (*Luke 4:18,19,21 and Is. 61*). This saying of Jesus forms the core of Luke's gospel. With the coming of Jesus the human condition, broken and corrupted through sin, will be restored. The miracles of healing which Jesus performed are the heralds of a new age. The new earth will be purged from sin, and there will be no more sickness or death. (*Is. 25:8, Rev. 7:16,17, Rev. 21:3,4*)

Luke is allowed to write down the good news of renewed life. He is allowed to bring the good news to the "poor". Those poor are not all penniless people as we so often are led to believe. The "poor" are the followers of Jesus. Jesus says very pointedly to His own disciples, "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." (*Luke 6:20,21*)

The Saviour of the World

In addition, Luke stresses the necessity of Jesus' suffering (*Luke 18:31*). Everything foretold by the Old Testament prophets has to happen to Him. "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (*Luke 24:26,27*)

Luke wanted to show the Greeks, the Romans and all peoples that did not know God, the way to salvation. This could not be received from a deified human being, like Augustus the Roman emperor, who in those days was honoured as the "saviour of the world". Salvation can only be found with God, who humbled Himself by being born in a manger and dying on the cross. He was the true Saviour of the world. Luke, the physician, was allowed to write his gospel about the great Physician, Jesus, who brings salvation to a sin sick world.

Luke starts his gospel with Zechariah, a priest, and with the temple where Jewish ceremonies had taken place for many centuries. The gospel ends on the same note, but then it is Christ, the great High Priest who lifts up His hands like the priests did in the temple. Christ, who fulfills the priestly office and the priestly place, the temple, ascends into heaven.

Born from the Virgin Mary

Article 3

A child, who loves and trusts his parents, will do what they ask him. This is the kind of love God demands from His people, from us. He also demanded this from Adam and Eve. The reason we do not do what God asks us to do, is that Adam and Eve, our parents, did not. After the fall into sin, Adam chose against God and for Satan. He made the choice for death instead of for life. The point people sometimes miss or ignore is that he chose on behalf of all his descendants. What Adam did applied to all the people who would come after him. Paul says that through Adam's first sin "all men sinned" (*Rom. 5:12*). That is, all people, of the past, the present, and the future, are indebted to God. Can this great debt ever be paid?

The Debt Must Be Paid

The relationship between God and man can be rectified if the account is cleared with Him, if the debt is paid. God really wants that. He says under oath, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways..." (*Ez. 33:11*). Only when the debt is completely erased will God be satisfied. A man must appear who completely loves God and completely obeys Him. This man must also be able to bear the punishment God has imposed for sin, namely death (*Gen. 2:17*). This death means not simply dying at the end of one's life, but dead in the sense of being deserted by God. When God justly punishes sin He completely abandons us. With God there is no "second time around". God's death is eternal death. It is impossible to imagine what this really means. There is no man who completely loves God, so there is no one who can save himself from evil by experiencing this punishment. There is no human being who can totally live up to God's demands. You cannot pay for your sins with money. Good or charitable works will not help. Neither can you pay by sacrificing or by paying any kind of ransom. Remorse and promises to improve do not satisfy God either. A human being, sinful and evil, cannot save himself and others (*Ps. 49:8-15*). On the contrary, people increase their debts daily.

His Son Pays the Price

That leaves only one person who can save us: God. And so He did! He has given us His Son, Jesus, as a Mediator. He is called a Mediator because He has taken our place before God. Jesus did what we should have done. He took our punishment upon Himself, the punishment we should have suffered (*1 Tim. 2:5,6*). But something had to happen before Jesus could save man. God's Son had to become real man. As a human being, He had to love God completely, but still be able to carry the punishment that is a result of our sins. A fellow man must make up for what the first man, Adam, did wrong. The man Jesus, still the son of God, paid Adam's debts and our debts. That is why He is also called the "second Adam".

The Great Miracle

It happens often everyday. Still, the birth of a child is an incomprehensible miracle. Although we can explain much about this miracle today, in essence it still remains a mystery. The fact that a man and his wife can procreate children is a wonder regardless of how scientific the explanation of it may be.

It is a still greater mystery, then, that the Son of God was born as a human child. He was a child with a human mother, yet He was not procreated by an earthly father. As the Son of God He permitted Himself to be born as a human being. One might say that His birth, in sharp contrast to the birth of all other children, was of His own choosing. Taking the very nature of a servant, He was made in "human likeness" (*Phil. 2:7*). The Psalms already spoke about Jesus' decision to become a man. "Lo, I have come to do Thy will, O God" (*Heb. 10:7; Ps. 40:7,8*).

The Son of God became flesh, a normal child, not noticeably different from His friends, even when He grew up. He went through everything children go through when they mature. His emotions were the same as those experienced by children around Him. "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (*Heb. 4:15*). There was a difference, however. He did not know sin. He was in heaven when Adam said fare

well to God and chose his own way, so Adam's sin was not His. When He came to earth as a human being, He remained the Son of God. Christ was true God and true man, all in one person. We cannot understand this, but that does not make it any less true. What do we understand of God's doings? Everything He does is miraculous!

Born of the Virgin Mary

There are people who are insulted by the above heading. To them it is an impossibility that a woman can become pregnant without intercourse.

These people should be reminded that God created man from lifeless dust. He gave a son to a ninety-year old woman, Sarah, and her one hundred-year old husband. Why then, would God not be capable of performing this miracle? Mary also wondered how such a miracle would be possible. "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (*Luke 1:34,35*). The angel answers her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" (*Luke 1:35*).

Through this miraculous birth the communion between God and man could finally be restored. God wanted man's love. He wanted them to listen to Him. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only son" (*John 3:16*).

The birth of Jesus was also the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and, in them, to His people Israel. Mary was from the house of David. The family tree found in *Luke 3* is most likely hers. As a Son of Mary, Jesus was a Son of David, but He only had the right to David's throne when Joseph legally became His father. Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, was entitled to this. Being Mary's child, Jesus was one of David's descendants. Being one of David's descendants and Joseph's heir, Jesus had a claim to the royal throne and was the lawful successor to King David. Matthew and Luke's genealogy clearly show the lineage of the families (*Matt. 1; Luke 1:32-33, 2:4-5; 2 Sam. 7:16, 25-29; Rom. 1:3*).

All the promises have now been fulfilled, also the promise mentioned in *Psalms 72*, in which the glory of Jesus' Kingship is depicted. However, reality will far exceed what *Psalms 72* describes in words. Our eyes, ears and hearts do not suffice for this task. Jesus is Adam's promised offspring (*Gen. 3:15*). He is also Abraham's promised offspring, in whom all peoples will be blessed (*Gen.22:18*).

Finally, He is David's promised offspring, the King who will sit on the throne of heaven forever. God works in ways which man cannot comprehend. The love and power He employs to make the salvation of sinners possible, are incomprehensibly great (*Ps. 89:36-37*).

Why War on Earth?

Genesis 36

Humanity's record in fulfilling the covenant made with God is very poor. If God's promised salvation depended on men, even believing men, the situation would be dismal indeed. We need only think of those people we have discussed in previous lessons - Adam, Abraham and Isaac. Throughout the Bible we see the same thing happen.

Jacob used deceit to get Esau's birthright. Later, he lied to his father to trick Esau out of his blessing. Esau, who did not value God's promises, harboured a lasting grudge against Jacob. Consequently, even the one family to which God directly revealed Himself in those days fell apart because of internal strife. Remarkably, it is still this very same family out of which Jesus Christ was born. All too often though, Jacob and Esau forgot about this promised Saviour and thought only about themselves, their own affairs and their own future. And although they were partners in sin, God chose to bless Jacob. The Bible shows us that this difference between the brothers continued. Throughout history the Israelites, descendants of Jacob, and the Edomites, descendants of Esau, are always at odds.

When other nations attacked and robbed God's people, the Edomites stood on the sidelines mocking them. The prophets mention this attitude and the Psalms complain about it to God (*Obad. 10-14; Ps. 44:8-26; Lam. 4:21*). Why is Esau so hostile to Jacob? Why is the world so hostile to God's children?

A Covenant With the Enemy

God's love and faithfulness are limitless. He fulfills all His promises. But people clash with one another, and there is a fundamental reason for that. Whether your name is Cain, Abel, Esau or Jacob, all people, including you and I, have done a terrible thing. We have made a covenant with God's enemy, Satan. We have surrendered ourselves and our life to this enemy, and collaborated with the enemy of God. Adam made this covenant with Satan when he fell into sin, and as a result, we have too. God's creatures made peace with God's enemy. God's creatures formed a common front against Him.

God Saves Rebels

Fortunately, the situation did not remain that way. In that way, God decided to reform some of the rebels. For that reason He sent war on the earth. But why war of all things? To call Adam back to Himself, God broke the covenant man had made with Satan. He took people and dragged them to His side. These people were originally just as hostile as the others who persisted in their enmity against God (*Rom. 3:9-20*). Remember, Abel was no better than Cain, and Jacob was no less hostile than Esau. All of them appear to be equal victims of Satan's deceitful call. In fact, they could even be called willing instruments rather than victims. But God is merciful. He rescues people out of Satan's trap, and He creates war on earth (*Gen. 3:15*). Battle is now waged between those with God and those with Satan. God does this by promising the Messiah, the Christ. Jesus will be the great Saviour who will conquer God's enemy. Jesus has come to destroy Satan's work. Now rather than all creation being aligned with Satan, God has an army fighting on His side. This army is led by Christ, whom the Bible calls "the seed of the woman", and the army is called "the rest of her offspring" (*Rev. 12:17*).

This is the way God brings His salvation. A sinful person like Jacob is conquered by Him, and being conquered, he turns around and starts to conquer Satan.

Fighting the Good Fight

God conquered Jacob. Why Jacob and not Esau? God has His incomprehensible reasons for this. God chose Jacob, although he had not "deserved" this in any way, or "had it coming to him", but just because God wanted it that way. The Bible calls this "election" (*Rom. 9:11, Rom. 11:5,6*). Also today God keeps on drawing to Himself people, who had previously left Him, and ranks them on His side.

Meanwhile, the battle between Satan and God continues. Before Jesus came to this earth the battle was mainly directed against the people of Israel because, as you know, out of that nation the Christ would be born. After Jesus' ascension Satan expanded his war effort to include everyone whom God placed on His side. The "ruler of this world" (*John 14:30*), one of Satan's titles in the Bible, fights against the coming Kingdom of God. He hates the Creator and he wants to prevent God's kingdom from being established at all costs. Satan considers it a war without any restrictions. He will try anything to reach his goal. He even tries to make Jesus, the Son of God, disobey His Father, but Jesus did not falter for a second (*Matt. 4:1-11*).

This did not mean Satan accepted defeat. He kept on fighting (*Rev. 12:12*). As long as Jesus remained on earth, Satan fought Him as hard as he could (*Rev. 12:17*). Today, He is still fighting. Jesus is in heaven but Satan now persecutes His church. Do not underestimate the enemy of the church and of all believers. The Bible tells us that he "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour" (*1 Peter 5:8*). And people often are an easy prey to Satan. People are often more than willing to listen to him instead of to God.

To counter Satan's offensive, believing people will have to fight. They have to wage a bitter war against Satan, against all godlessness in the world and against evil in their own hearts. Believers have no choice but to be drafted into the "good fight of the faith" (*1 Tim. 6:12*).

The Victory Is Certain

Fighting a fierce opponent such as Satan is no easy task, but there is help. In order to challenge Satan, people need to ask God to help them in this war. Jesus Himself taught us to ask God to "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (*Matt. 6:13*). Paul, too, calls the congregation at Ephesus to arms. "Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (*Eph. 6:11-12*, see also *2 Thess. 2:1-12*).

The battle will be hard; it will be a terrible war. However, the outcome is already certain (*Rom. 8:31-39*). The history of the people of Israel during the days before the coming of Christ is one of strife. The Old Testament mentions this continually. Satan tried everything in his power to prevent the coming of the Saviour. He used other nations in an attempt to destroy the people of Israel through inhuman wars and deportations. Time and again he tried to convince God's people to rebel against God and to defect to idols. But God is certain to be the victor. God is faithful to His promises, even if His people are unfaithful to Him.

Ironically, it seemed as if Satan had finally won his great victory when Jesus died on the cross. But what looked like a victory was, in fact, defeat. For Jesus rose again from the grave. He won the victory over sin, death and the devil. The decisive battle has been fought. In a sense, the war is already over, but since Satan continues to attack the believers we must continue to fight back.

Questions 12

Why Four Gospels: Luke

1. In *Luke 7,8* two resurrections from the dead are mentioned.
 - a. Who were resurrected from the dead?
 - b. In each case another miracle preceded both miracles. What kind?
 - c. Show from the next events that people still did not believe after these resurrections.
 - d. Taking into consideration who the parents were, why would Jesus perform precisely these two miracles?
2. What is Peter's confession in *Luke 9:20* and what does Jesus Himself confess in *Luke 22:67-70*? Why could one call these texts a highlight in the gospel according to Luke?
3. When He was hanging from the cross, Jesus spoke seven times. Matthew and Mark mention the same words; both Luke and John mention each three different sayings. Can you list these seven sayings spoken from the cross?

Born From the Virgin Mary

1. Why did the promised Saviour have to be true man?
2. Why did He at the same time also have to be God? (see previous lesson)
3. Does God's promise to Abraham's descendants also apply to non-Jews? (*Gal 3:26-29*)

Why War on Earth?

1. A Christian also has to fight against himself In what respect? (*Rom. 7:14-26*)
2. Look up *Matt. 6:13*, *Matt. 4:4-11*, *Eph. 6:10-20*. What means are at the believer's disposal to win the battle against Satan?
3. Which people are "children of God", and which are "children of the devil"? (*1 John 3:1-17*, esp. verse 10)