393.ser

Jesus, the mid-point of History

Luke 4:21-30

21 And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." 22 And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" 23 And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." 24 And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 25 But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, 26 and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 4:27 And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." 28 When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst, he went away.

The gospel of *Luke* and the *Acts of the Apostles* were written by a Greek speaking Gentile called Luke[[1]](#footnote-1) who lived in Antioch,[[2]](#footnote-2) a very important centre of christianity in those early days.

Luke was a Doctor of medicine and therefore *scientifically minded*: he was also a disciple and travelling companion of Paul[[3]](#footnote-3) and a reliable writer who devoted years of throughly research and to write his gospel[[4]](#footnote-4) of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

Luke learned much about Jesus from his close association with Paul, a man of the keenest spiritual insight and ardent nature[[5]](#footnote-5) and also the gifted Simeon[[6]](#footnote-6), who was living and working in Antioch when christianity was *‘in it’s infancy’*.

Luke’s approach to writing the story of Jesus and the christian faith, was so important to him, he wrote in his introduction that[[7]](#footnote-7) *“it seemed good to me also, having followed all things accurately … to write an orderly*[[8]](#footnote-8) *account.”* [[9]](#footnote-9)[[10]](#footnote-10)

As a foundation for his gospel, nearly all of Mark[[11]](#footnote-11) was copied by *Luke* but rewritten in Luke’s *much more developed* literary style[[12]](#footnote-12) including some extra teachings of Jesus.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Also, judging by the content of his writings,[[14]](#footnote-14)

Luke, gained access to some of the most intimate and direct sources of information regarding Jesus – especially His teachings.[[15]](#footnote-15)

As a doctor of medicine, Luke had devoted himself to his profession of saving people’s physical lives, and then, after becoming a christian, he regarded the christian faith as ***the*** most serious matter of *life and death* and so his gospel message was made to be so *accurate and orderly,* people could believe it to the point of *staking their life on it.[[16]](#footnote-16)* [[17]](#footnote-17)

From the beginning-to-end of his gospel, Luke focuses upon Jesus who came to *‘seek and to save that which was lost’*,[[18]](#footnote-18) emphasising the reliability Jesus – His forgiveness and redemption to all – irrespective of race, gender or merit. With Jesus, this was a new era – a **mid-point in human history**.[[19]](#footnote-19) Israel ***before***Christ and christianity ***after*** Him.

That Jesus was ***the*** catalyst for the change from non-conformist Judaism to the **cradle** of primitive Christianity became evident in Galilee where he was *“glorified by all”*[[20]](#footnote-20) and particularly at Capernaum,[[21]](#footnote-21) where *“all men sang his praises”* but also where a demon is said to have *‘shrieked at the top of his voice … what do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.”* [[22]](#footnote-22)

Clearly, not everyone knew who he was since he was to face strong spiritual opposition throughout His ministry and became evident when he visited His hometown of Nazareth and where “*all spoke well of him”* and they were *“impressed by His gracious words”* but they fell-out with him to the point of wanting to kill him.

After reading from the scroll of Isaiah, Jesus rolled it up[[23]](#footnote-23) and returned it to the attendant and sat down thus taking the posture for teaching[[24]](#footnote-24) … **all** were expecting a *‘good’* sermon for even at this early time in His ministry, he had established himself as a good teacher.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Luke, a stickler for detail,[[26]](#footnote-26) writes that *“the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him”* … and He began to say to them … *“today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Luke adding the finer detail that *“all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words.”* [[27]](#footnote-27)

However, in His hometown synagogue at Nazareth,[[28]](#footnote-28) a *“cautious”*[[29]](#footnote-29) comment was made, *“is not this Joseph’s son?”* which caused some to become skeptical that Jesus should not make such claims about himself.[[30]](#footnote-30)

This change in attitude more-or-less became an obligation, *“what you did at Capernaum, (now you must prove yourself) by doing it here in your home town.”*

Jesus responds with the historical fact that prophets are rarely, if ever, appreciated in their home towns and illustrated that from history:

**First:** in the days of **Elijah** there was a famine in Israel but he was sent to none of them except Zarephath[[31]](#footnote-31) in the land of Sidon.

**Second:** there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet **Elisha**; and none of them were cleansed except Naaman[[32]](#footnote-32) the Syrian.

Unfortunately, these truths agitated the people at Nazareth into making a threat of death, Luke writing, “*all in the synagogue were filled with anger”* [[33]](#footnote-33) by wanting to *“throw him down headlong”* over a cliff to kill him.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Leon Morris, *“this was too much for them”* and anger swept over the whole congregation and they set out to lynch Him and to throw Him down from the brow of the hill[[35]](#footnote-35) … or to stone Him to death.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Jesus was able to escape their death threat to fulfill the Father’s will on the Cross: dying for the *sins of the world* whereas the contempt for this despised village lived-on with the seemingly *‘all conquering’* question mark, *‘can anything good come out of Nazareth?”*[[37]](#footnote-37)

Time does not allow for a details lists, however, it is true to say that almost everywhere Jesus went in his ministry He struck trouble, even Peter his closest and loyal disciple had to be rebuked for his *devil-like* lack of faith in opposition to God’s will being done.

I conclude by turning to the opponents of Jesus whose role as the Messiah, Son of God, Saviour of the world, forgiver of sins,[[38]](#footnote-38) loved by the multitudes but opposed and at times vigorously schemed against by those in the leadership of the old order of religion.[[39]](#footnote-39).

As Judaism was ending[[40]](#footnote-40) and christianity beginning all four gospels of Matthew,[[41]](#footnote-41) Mark,[[42]](#footnote-42) Luke[[43]](#footnote-43) and John[[44]](#footnote-44) write of Jesus healing paralytics who had been carried around on stretchers[[45]](#footnote-45) as invalids for much of their lives and who were suffering as *sinners* but Jesus cured them with the gracious words of divine authority, *“your sins are forgiven”* which profoundly angered the self-righteous and the powerful religious leaders.”

There are four stories:

. Matthew[[46]](#footnote-46) writes the story of an invalid man who Jesus told him his *sins were forgiven* and he got up and walked away and the people reacted by being *“afraid.”*

2. Mark[[47]](#footnote-47) writes the story of another invalid man who Jesus told his *sins were forgiven* and he got up walked a new life: this crowd was said to be *“amazed”.*

3. Luke[[48]](#footnote-48) has the story of a man said to be paralysed … they lowered him via the roof into the house via roof because the house was packed and when Jesus saw him he said, *“man, your sins are forgiven you”* and the man got up and went home. The crowd reacted *in ‘awe’* saying *“we have seen strange things today.”*

This is a very unusual event, exceeding all belief and expectation and so the people were astonished and filled with awe and fear and at the same time spontaneously expressing *“we have seen some strange things here today.”*

4. John[[49]](#footnote-49) writes the story of the man at the pool of Siloam who probably *camped* beside the pool as an invalid waiting for the rare chance to be healed by the angel who visited the pool on occasions to heal such people, however, this man missed out because he was slow in his *‘infirmed’* state!

Jesus noticed this and went to him and healed him with the gracious words, *“your sins are forgiven”* and he **was** healed on the spot but later on, the authorities interrogated him to be sure it was Jesus who was the *wrong-doer* and to find a way to stop Him from the error of his ways.

One of the most distinctive features of the Jewish people was their centuries of God being a vital and, at times, vigorous part of their living faith through the stirring events of their Bible – events that formed them as a people with a keen sense of their calling, identity and devotion to God.[[50]](#footnote-50)

However, the crucifixion of Christ, more than anything else, set all people thinking of this one event that changed the world: this dreadful thing that had happened, made them think of the incredible depth to the redeeming love of God – as the apostle Paul wrote, *“God was in Christ reconcilling the world … to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.”* [[51]](#footnote-51)

But the complex Romans with the ‘solidarity of the empire’ apart from God, all but ended the hopes of Israel in AD70 as they wiped away the origins and traditions of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the prophets, The Temple of Judaism and such was the insult to Godly humanity, they crucified so many people, they ran out of wood to make crosses.

practical advice. But the prophets were the vital force in the stimulation of Israel's better life, and their influence was felt profoundly throughout their history then the time came for one person to take on the one role of prophet, priest and king – Jesus the Christ the Son of God.

No other gospel – not Matthew, Mark or John gives such a comprehensive history of Jesus as does Doctor Luke who wrote Luke and who wrote the Acts of the Apostles and the foundation and guiding light so that God’s will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. World without end. Amen

The bottom-line of this message today is that Christ is the mid-point in history and christianity is to lead the nation into righteousness – *“how are we going?”*

1. . Irenaeus C. AD 180 is the first person to refer clearly to Luke and name him as the author of the third Gospel and Acts. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . Antioch, the capital of Syria, was a city of the first rank, a remarkably cosmopolitan meeting-place of Greeks, Syrians, and Jews. Tradition holds that the first Gentile church was founded in Antioch, (see Acts 11:20–21). According to Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1959, p24, they were amed as ”christians” as a ‘nickname’ (Acts 11.26). It was from Antioch that Paul started on his missionary journeys and Luke travelled with him from Troas about 49AD. and thereby learned much about Jesus directly from Paul. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . Barnabas encouraged Paul to Antioch. In his second missionary journey, Luke became a member of the party, joining Paul at the town of Troas and traveling to Macedonia with him – see Acts 16:11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . The literary style of Luke-Acts demonstrates that their author was a well-educated person with considerable gifts of expression. The traces of medical language and the interest in medical matters displayed in them are consistent with authorship by the ‘beloved physician.” I Howard Marshall, Professor of New Testament, Aberdeen. New Bible Dictionary, Third Ed., IVP, Nottingham, 1996, p703. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . Williston Walker, op.cit. p25. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. . Simeon was a disciple at Antioch who, with prophetic and teaching gifts, was one of those who ordained Barnabas and Paul (Saul) for their first missionary journey – Acts 13.1-2. He was surnamed Niger suggests he was an African. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. . Bishop of Bristol wrote, “A gospel is not an educational handbook about Jesus which argues the case for belief in his divinity. A gospel is nearer to preaching than to teaching. For the early Christians, one did not go from education to faith, but from faith to education … they heard the gospel and made a first acceptance of it; then they wanted to be taught more about it.” The Cambridge Bible Commentary, E J Tinsley, University of Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1965, p5. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. . In other words, ‘neatly and methodically’ arranged. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. . Luke 1.1-4. Theophilus is ‘unknown’ but several suggestions are made such as a Roman Official, A Jewish High Priest or a Lawyer defending Paul from death. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. . Scholars agree that the picture which emerges from Luke, is of a self-effacing man possessed of strong human sympathies who regarded himself as a servant to the Word of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. . The primacy of Mark is upheld for the simple fact that he was the originator of the form of gospel and is likely to have been written in the years preceding the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition, IVP, 1996, p728. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. . Luke uses a good literary style with a Hellenistic approach in terms of syntax. His language has a “biblical” ring to it because of his use of the Septuagint style of religious approach. Luke seldom uses loanwords from other cultures and repeatedly improves Mark's wording. The New Bible Dictionary, First Edition,1962. p758. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. . The New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition, IVP, Leicester, 1996 p704. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. . It is clear that Luke was deeply conscious of the urgent necessity for christian believers to have their faith built on a firm foundation of truth, therefore, Luke took much trouble to ascertain the facts and wrote an accurate and orderly account. Luke, is said to have donated two years of his life to complete this duty of love and care. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. . Luke declares (Chapter 1.1-4) he made an intensive study of the gospel’s history to write a reliable account from written documents containing authoritative information and reliable eye-witnesses. Luke 1.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. . The Bible Dictionary, First Ed., IVP, London, 1962 p 757. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. . At the beginning of his gospel account, Luke writes to “a” Theophilus that *“it seemed good to me … having followed all things accurately … to write to you … that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. . See Luke 19.10. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. . German Theologian, Hans Conzelmann in his commentary, The Theology of Luke, saw the ministry of Jesus as mid-point of history – preceded by the history of Israel and followed by the period of the christian church. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. . Luke 4.15 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. . Matthew 4.13, Mark 9.33, Luke 7.1, John 2.12, 6.16-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. . Mark 1.21-28 and Luke 4.34-37, Oscar Cullman writes, “It is certainly not by chance that beside “Son of God” the demons in the Synoptic Gospels use only one other title for Jesus, ‘Holy One of God.’ Cullman further comments on p318 in his book Christology of the New Testament, SCM Lon [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. . Torah scrolls are sacred objects and are kept by Jewish communities and housed in synagogues in special cabinets called arks. They are used in prayer services and read from regularly throughout the year on the Sabbath and holidays, progressing through the five books of Moses during the course of each year. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. . This in itself presupposes the fact He outwardly conforms to the Jewish picture of teacher. The Greek didasko means ‘teacher’ a natural role Jesus assummed at the Great Commission in Matthew 28.20. In John 1.38 and 20.16, Jesus is addressed as Rabbi by the disciples of John and his own disciples called him the same in Matthew 26.25; Mark 9.5, 11.21, John 4.31, 9.2 and 11.8. The Pharisee, Nicodemus calls him ‘teacher’ in John 3.2 and by the enthusiastic crowd in John 6.25 and by Judas in Matt 26.49; Mark 14.45. He was not an official teacher but such was the respect of people for his teachings, they readily gave him that title. See Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Eerdmans, Stuttgart, Germany, Kittel, Vol 2, p152 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. . According to Robert Young’s Concordance, Jesus was called and referred to as ‘teacher’ 58 times during His ministry. Lutterworth Press, London, 1939 p962. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. . Geldenhuys, ibid, p166, like other commentators, omits numerous details, especially in connection with Jesus earliest public ministry in Judea. Hence the comment by the apostle John at the end of his gospel, ‘but there are many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” John 21.25 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. . Professor G B Caird, Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford, in his Pelican Commentary, London, 1963, p87, points out “there was no ordained minister, and anyone of sufficient learning might be invited to take part in the services. In this case, it was only at the end of the first year of his ministry. See Luke 4.14-30 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. . E J Tinsley, Bishop of Bristol, The Cambridge Bible Commentary, 1965, p51 writes, “reports about him spread through the whole country-side. He taught in their synagogues and all men sang his praises.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. . Perhaps a ‘sneering’ fault-finding tone which is hinted at along the lines that He would have to ‘prove’ himself at Nazareth as he had at Capernaum and elsewhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. . Leon Morris writes, ‘notice that Luke speaks of astonishment, not admiration or appreciation. They wondered at His preaching, but they did not take it to heart. Tyndale Commentary on Luke, IVP London, 1974. p107.

    29. Oxford Dictionary: Fifth Ed., Clarendon Press, 1964, pp167, Shrewd; not forthcoming, unapproachable, self-contained. [orig. uncertain.] [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. . A Phoenician city, belonging to Sidon, where the widow, who son Elijah was raised, lived (1 Kings 17.8ff) cf Luke 4.26. The KJB has the Greek form Sarepta. It is mentioned in Obadiah 20. Paul called in there on his way to Rome – Acts 27.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. . Naaman is a common Syrian name in those days. He was a military commander of the Syrian army afflicted with leprosy but nevertheless held his high position. See 2 Kings 5. Elisha the prophet offered him a cure by bathing in the River Jordan. He was eventually healed. Naaman as the one who killed Ahabe but this is unproven – 1 Kings 22.34. He is also briefly mentioned in Luke 4.27. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. . Greek *thumos* is only used twice by Luke – Luke 4.28 and Acts 19.28. It means “wrath” which humans bring on themselves. It is likened to a “drink”which the godless nations are ensnared with so as to fall into sin and under the wrath of God. Modern fornication is likened to the long-term drink of destruction. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. . Professor G B Caird, ibid., p86, points out that this was only at the end of the first year of Jesus’ ministry. See Mark 6.1-6. He writes, Jesus’ announcement that the messianic age had dawned was received at first with rapt attention and excited comment, but, when the people began to realize that he had incidentally laid claim to a central position for himself in the inauguration of God’s reign, admiration turned first to doubt then to hostility. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. . Nazareth was in the hills, some 1,300 feet above the sea. To be ‘thrown down’ from there would have been a sure death. As it was, Jesus went to Capernaum, a trading city on the north west shore of the Sea of Galilee some 682 feet below sea level and made this his headquarters for his Galilean ministry. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. . Nathanael asked, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip replied ‘Come and see.’ Nazareth was the scene of more lasting events of profound consequence than those which occurred along trade routes or in landscapes of beauty.The Judaeans simply looked down upon Nazareth as the urbane inhabitant of a great city is supposed to look down upon a backwood settlements. Therefore, the Jews would have little to do with this place and largely despised it. John 1.45-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. . The biblical definition of sin is varied and includes the *Hebrew hattat, awon, pesa, ra*, and in the Greeek, *hamartia, hamartema, parabasis, paratoma, pneria, anomia, adikia* and so the common notion that sin is selfishness betrays a false assessment of its nature and gravity. Sin is failure, error, iniquity, transgression, trespass, lawlessness, unrighteousness and willful. The most characteristic feature of sin in all of its aspects is that it is directed against God. King David expressed this in his confession, *‘against you, you only, have I sinned*’ – Psalm 51.4. Paul in his indictment, ‘the carnal mind is enmity against God’ – Romans 8.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. . The primary role of the priest is that of **the ritual expert**, the one who has a special and sometimes secret knowledge of the techniques of worship, including incantations, prayers, sacrificial acts, songs, and other acts that are believed to bridge the separation between the divine or sacred and the profane realms. Britannia m is one of the oldest monotheistic religions and was founded over 3500 years ago in the Middle East.

    Jews believe that God appointed the Jews to be his chosen people in order to set an example of holiness and ethical behaviour to the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. . The Jewish Amoraim attributed the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem between the 14th April to 8th September AD70 as punishment from God for the "baseless" hatred that pervaded Jewish society at the time. Many Jews in despair are thought to have abandoned Judaism for some version of paganism, many others sided with the growing Christian sect within Judaism. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. . Matthew 9.1-8 has the story of an invalid man who Jesus told him his sins were forgiven and he got up and walked away and the people reacted by being “afraid.” [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. . Mark 2.1-12 has the story of another invalid man who Jesus told his sins were forgiven and he got up walked a new life: this crowd was said to be “amazed”. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. . Luke 5.17-26 has the story of a man said to be paralysed … they lowered him into the house via roof because the house was packed and when Jesus saw him he said, “man, your sins are forgiven you”and the man got up and went home. The reaction of the crowd reacted in ‘awe’ saying “we have seen strange things today.” [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. . John 5.1-9 has the story of the man at the pool of Siloam who probably lived beside the pool as an invalid waiting for the opportunity to be healed by the angel who visited the pool on occasions to heal such people. His infirmity meant he missed out on all occasions. Jesus noticed this and went to him and healed him with the gracious words, “your sins are forgiven” and he was healed [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. . The man at the pool of Siloam probably lived by the pool and therefore (maybe) not carried around as much as the other three. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. . Matthew 9.1-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. . Mark 2.1-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. . Luke 5.17-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. . John 5.1-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. . The Living World of the Old Testament. Second Edition. Bernhard W Anderson. Longman 1967, pp2-3. A wandering Aramean was my father. p10. The Exodus … is the central moment in Israel’s history. p11 To study isolated personalities like Moses, or to deal with abstract ideas like “the idea of God,” is to miss the point of the Old Testament. Personalities and ideas must be considered in relation to the corporate experiences of Israel in the drama of her history. p12 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. . Romans 5.10 and 2 Corinthians 5.19. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)