

10 studies on Luke chs 1 to 5

“Luke tells us that he had had a chance to stand back from the extraordinary events that had been going on, to talk to the people involved, to read some earlier writings, and to make his own quite full version so that readers could know the truth about the things to do with Jesus. He was an educated and cultured man, the first real historian to write about Jesus. His book places Jesus not only at the heart of the Jewish world of the first century, but at the heart of the Roman world into which the Christian gospel exploded and which it was destined to change so radically.” From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright p xii.

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Notes

1. In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: Stephen Gibson's Bible study booklet on Luke chs 3 - 8 from term 1, 2000; the Bible Brief from The Briefing magazine # 342; Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright, Luke (Tyndale Commentary) by Leon Morris, The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock, The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb, Handbook of Life in Bible Times by J.A. Thompson, the Life Application Study Bible and the Lifebuilder Bible study booklet Luke New Hope, New Joy by Ada Lum.

2. Some groups may find the studies too long for the time allocated. My suggestion is for individuals to do the whole study before you meet but if the group runs out of time then skip to the “To finish” questions for the last few minutes. Or if the group gets involved in a particularly interesting and relevant point then run with it rather than feel obliged to complete all the remaining questions.

3. Throughout the studies I've added paragraphs to fill in the extra detail that I thought would help groups better understand the Biblical text.

4. Thanks to Larry Tolnay for proof reading and helpful suggestions.

5. I'm always trying to improve Bible studies so your comments, good or bad, and ideas about future studies may help produce better studies. Please write down any thoughts you have and send them to me at edwardeoconor@hotmail.com or ring me on 9971 4897.

Ed O'Connor completed June 2009, updated 5/2/2010

Study 1, Luke 1:1-25, Birth of John the Baptist foretold

INTRODUCTION

"[The Gospel of Luke] recounts 'the tradition', the facts about Jesus; though they are not merely facts, but truth which when proclaimed changes the lives of men. This book, moreover, sets them out with a remarkable fullness, accuracy, and meaningful order, and demands our closest attention. Granted this, we may expect it to lay deep in our hearts the infallible basis of spiritual certainty in a world where all else is changing and inconstant. Let us then go to our study of it with a will." From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock p 31.

Getting started

1. Think back to your early days as a believer in Christ. What was it that convinced you of the truth of the accounts of Jesus' life?

Bible Read Luke 1:1-4.

2. Where is Luke's information coming from?

3. What is Luke trying to do with this book?

"Imagine a village in ancient Palestine. They didn't have printed books or newspapers, television or radio. They had official storytellers. Some great event would happen: an earthquake, a battle, or the visit of an emperor. Within a day or two the story would be told all round the village, and would settle into a regular form. Everyone would know the story, but some of the better storytellers in the village would be recognized by the others as the right people to tell it. . .

Plato had said, five hundred years earlier, that there was a danger in writing things down; human memories, he thought, were the best way to get things right and pass them on. In the century after Luke, one of the great Christian teachers declared that he preferred living testimony to writings. You can't tell where a book has come from, but you can look witnesses in the eye, and use your judgment about whether to trust them. . .

The main reason he's [Luke] writing is that the message about Jesus has spread far and wide, way beyond the original communities in the regions Jesus himself visited. Peter, Paul and other missionaries had carried the message in all directions, and doubtless there were garbled, muddled and misleading reports circulating about who exactly Jesus was, what he did and said, and what had happened to him. Luke knows of other writings that have begun the task of putting it down on paper, but he had a wider audience in mind, an educated, intelligent, enquiring public. 'Most excellent Theophilus' may be a real person, perhaps a Roman governor or local official, whom Luke has come to know; or this may be a literary device, a way of addressing anyone who has heard about Christianity, and who is perhaps 'a lover of God' (that's what 'Theophilus' means in Greek). He does imply that 'Theophilus' has already been officially taught something about Jesus and what it means to follow him, so perhaps he also intends it for recent converts who are eager to learn more.

In any case, if he is writing in the late 60s or early 70s, a further reason would be the horrendous war that was raging in Palestine at the time. The Jews rebelled against the occupying Roman forces in 66, until finally, after a long siege, Jerusalem was destroyed in 70. The result was that many towns and villages where Jesus had been seen and known were decimated. Not only was the older generation dying out, but communities that had witnessed Jesus' activities were being dispersed or destroyed. The stories, which depended for transmission on a peaceful, stable society, were in danger of dying out. Unless steps were taken to write them down, the message would not be passed on to the next generation. And since Luke, like all the early Christians, believed that the things that had actually happened – what we would call the historical facts – had changed the course of the world, it was vital that they be presented as clearly and unambiguously as possible." From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 2-4.

4. What do we know about Luke from Col 4:10-15, Philemon 24, 2 Tim 4:11?

"I wish we knew for sure who the author of this book was, but actually we don't. We call him 'Luke' because that's who the church, from very early on, said had written this gospel and the Acts of the Apostles (as you'll see from Acts 1:1, Acts appears to be written by the same person, and there are signs throughout both books that this is in fact the case). He may well have been the Luke whom Paul mentions as his companion (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11). . . A fair guess is probably that he was indeed Luke, one of Paul's companions, and that he was writing in the 60s and 70s." From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 2-3.

"Now Greek is a language of great richness; yet here is a case in which it might seem that English is richer, with a choice of two words where Greek has one. The Greek word is *sozo*. Is the translator to render it 'heal', or 'save'? For it has to do duty for both ideas.

Yet perhaps it is not a case of the older language being less rich than the newer. Perhaps the Greeks had a truer understanding of the nature of things when they reckoned that to save a man and to heal him were fundamentally the same, and that a single word should convey the double meaning. And perhaps we can see in Luke's eye a keen *professional* interest (to put it no higher) in the story of how there had been born 'in the city of David a *Soter*', [Luke 2:11] a Healer/Saviour, who had come into the world to deliver men both from sickness and from sin. . . He is telling of a man who had the power and authority to do the kind of work that he himself has been trained to do, but at depths undreamed-of, and in regions unexplored, and with effects so far-reaching as to confound his own elementary ideas of healing/salvation." From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock p 19.

Read Luke 1:5-25

"A Jewish priest was a minister of God who worked at the temple managing its upkeep, teaching the people the Scriptures, and directing the worship services. At this time there were about 20,000 priests throughout the country - far too many to minister in the temple at one time. Therefore the priests were divided into 24 separate groups of about 1000 each, according to David's directions (1 Chronicles 24:3-19).

Zechariah was a member of the Abijah division, on duty this particular week. Each morning a priest was to enter the Holy Place in the temple and burn incense. Lots were cast to decide who would enter the sacred room, and one day the lot fell to Zechariah. But it was not by chance that Zechariah was on duty and that he was chosen that day to enter the Holy Place - perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." From the Life Application Study Bible p 1784.

5. Which Old Testament events are brought to mind by Zechariah's and Elizabeth's experiences (see Gen 17:15-21, 30:1-24, Judges 13:2-24, 1 Sam 1)?

6. In the light of these Old Testament events, why should Zechariah have *not* doubted the angel's promise?

7. What do we learn about John's mission?

To finish

8. (a) Is it ok to question the things we read in the Bible? Why/why not?

(b) Is it ok to have doubts about the things we read in the Bible? Why/why not?

(c) How do we resolve these questions/doubts?

Study 2, Luke 1:26-80, Jesus and John the Baptist – beginnings

Getting started

1. Think of a time when you were told something you didn't believe but it turned out to be true. How did you feel both before and after being convinced?

Bible

Read Luke 1:26-38

2. What are the key things the angel announced about Jesus?
3. (a) How does Mary respond to the angel's announcement?

(b) Is Mary's response the same as our response when we read the Bible? Why/why not?
4. How is the announcement to Mary connected to Zechariah (cf. Luke 1:11-20)?
5. What have you read so far in chapter 1 that supports the fact that Jesus was born of a virgin?

"The child to be born will be the Messiah, the king of the house of David. God had promised David a descendant who would reign for ever – not over Israel only, but also the whole world. And this coming king would be, in some sense, 'God's son' (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7; Psalm 89:27). As with a good deal of New Testament language about Jesus, this is both a huge theological claim (Jesus is somehow identified with God in a unique way which people then and now find it hard to grasp and believe) and a huge political claim (Jesus is the true ruler of the world in a way which leaves Caesar, and the powers of the world today, a long way behind).

Put all this together – the conception of a baby, the power of God, and the challenge to all human empires – and we can see why the story is explosive. Perhaps that's one reason why it's so controversial. Perhaps some of the fuss and bother about whether Mary could have conceived Jesus without a human father is because, deep down, we don't want to think that there might be a king who could claim this sort of absolute allegiance?

Whatever answer we give to that, we shouldn't miss the contrast between muddled, puzzled Zechariah in the previous story and the obedient humility of Mary in this one." From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 11-12.

6. What would make you celebrate wildly and without inhibition and maybe even cause you to sing?

Read Luke 1:39-56

7. Why does Mary sing?

8. What does Mary sing about?

“Mary and Elizabeth shared a dream. It was the ancient dream of Israel: the dream that one day all that the prophets had said would come true. One day Israel’s God would do what he had said to Israel’s earliest ancestors: all nations would be blessed through Abraham’s family. But for that to happen, the powers that kept the world in slavery had to be toppled.” From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright p 15.

Read Luke 1:57-80

9. Why does Zechariah burst into song?

10. What does he sing about the promises of God?

11. What does he sing about his son?

12. What does he sing about Jesus?

To finish

13. How would you try to convince someone (of faith in Jesus) who doesn’t believe the Bible because of the virgin birth?

Study 3, Luke 2:1-21, The manger and the shepherds

Getting started

1. What do you think non-Christians mostly remember about the birth of Jesus?

2. What do you think non-Christians mostly miss in relation to the birth of Jesus?

Bible

Read Luke 2:1-7

3. What do we learn about (a) the Roman world?

(b) the Jewish world?

4. (a) What are the conditions surrounding the birth of Mary's son (see Luke 2:7)?

(b) How do these conditions compare with what we have learnt about God's Messiah in chapter 1 (see Luke 1:32-33, 35, 69-75)?

(c) What conclusions can you come to as a result of the comparison in (b)?

“Augustus was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. He became sole ruler of the Roman world after a bloody civil war in which he overpowered all rival claimants. The last to be destroyed was the famous Mark Antony, who committed suicide not long after his defeat at the battle of Actium in 31 BC. Augustus turned the great Roman republic into an empire, with himself at the head; he proclaimed that he had brought justice and peace to the whole world; and, declaring his dead adoptive father to be divine, styled himself as ‘son of god’. . .

Augustus, people said, was the 'saviour' of the world. He was its king, its 'lord'. Increasingly, in the eastern part of his empire, people worshipped him, too, as a god." From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 22-23.

Read Luke 2:6-21

5. (a) What does the angel say about Jesus?

(b) By comparing your answer in (a) with the paragraph on Augustus on page 6, do you see a crisis coming? What is the nature of this crisis?

6. Why is the manger so important? Luke mentions it three times in this passage (2:7, 12, 16).

7. How do the shepherds respond?

To finish

8. How do you respond to the gospel today? Has your enthusiasm tapered off over the years? Why?

Study 4, Luke 2:22-52, In the Temple

Getting started

1. As a child did you ever get lost? How did you feel? How did your parents feel?

Bible

Read Luke 2:22-40

2. What does Simeon say about Jesus?

3. (a) What troubling things does Simeon say?

(b) What do they point to?

4. Why does Anna point people to Jesus?

“The Temple in Jerusalem was planned by David (c. 1000 BC) and built by his son Solomon as the central sanctuary for all Israel. After reforms under Hezekiah and Josiah in the seventh century BC, it was destroyed by Babylon in 587 BC. Rebuilding by the returned exiles began in 538 BC, and was completed in 516, initiating the ‘second Temple period’. Judas Maccabeus cleansed it in 164 BC after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes (167). Herod the Great began to rebuild and beautify it in 19 BC; the work was completed in AD 63. The Temple was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. Many Jews believed it should and would be rebuilt; some still do. The Temple was not only the place of sacrifice; it was believed to be the unique dwelling of YHWH on earth, the place where heaven and earth met.” From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright p 318.

The presentation and the purification (v22)

“Two quite separate ceremonies are involved here, the presentation of the child and the purification of the mother. . . The presentation of the baby follows from the fact that *every male that opens the womb* (i.e. the first-born son of a mother, not necessarily of the father) *shall be called holy to the Lord*. . . Though Luke does not mention it, doubtless the usual five shekels were paid to redeem the first-born (Num 18:15f).

The Levitical law provided that after the birth of a son a woman would be unclean for seven days leading up to the circumcision and that for a further thirty-three days she should keep away from all holy things (for a daughter the time was doubled; Lev 12:1-5). Then she should offer a lamb and a dove or pigeon. If she was too poor for a lamb a second dove or pigeon sufficed instead (Lev 12:6-13). Mary’s offering was thus that of the poor.” Tyndale Commentary on Luke by Leon Morris pp 86-87.

“The consolation of Israel (v25) for which he looked is another name for the coming of the Messiah. This was expected to be preceded by a time of great suffering (‘the woes of the Messiah’), so that he would certainly bring comfort. In days when the nation was oppressed men of faith looked all the more intensely for the Deliverer who would solve their problems.” Tyndale Commentary on Luke by Leon Morris p 87.

Read Luke 2:41-52

5. (a) How do you think a married couple would feel after losing their only son for 3 days?

(b) Who does Mary blame?

(c) What was Jesus' excuse?

(d) Mary and Joseph didn't understand (v 50) but what do you think Jesus meant by v 49?

Growing up

"In Israel a child was not usually weaned until it was at least two, and sometimes even three. Until then it was breast-fed by its mother or sometimes by a wet-nurse. . . To have brought a child through infancy in days of poor medicine and indifferent hygiene was a cause for rejoicing. It was also a moment of release for the mother.

Then, as they grew older, young Israelites, like children everywhere, took to the streets and squares of the town or the fields around the village to play with their friends. At home, the mother and father would teach them their first lessons, and the family would say prayers together and attend worship on sabbaths and festival days. . .

School did not exist for most children until a couple of centuries before Christ, when the rabbis at the synagogues took on the role of teachers. Their instruction would have been mostly religious and moral, based on the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, but it probably also included basic numeracy and literacy. Education started when boys were about six, girls were never educated. Pupils sat on the ground at their teacher's feet, and learned largely by repetition. . .

[Children] would have learned skills from their parents and helped in fields, workshop or kitchen as soon as they could walk. . .

Israelite boys were initiated into religious and legal maturity when they were only thirteen. Most men would also be married by their late teens, women even earlier. . .

An ancient rabbinic tractate, *Aboth*, 'The sayings of the Father', describes the following stages of life: At five years one is fit for the Scriptures, at ten years for the Mishna, at thirteen for the commandments, at fifteen for the Talmud, at eighteen for the bride-chamber, at twenty for pursuing a calling, at thirty for authority, at forty for discernment, at fifty for counsel, at sixty to be an elder . . .

In the second century AD Rabbi Eleazar ben Simeon taught that a father was responsible for the deeds of his son until the age of thirteen. After that age the boy was regarded as a responsible member of Israel and could make vows, become a member of the synagogue and be recognized as legally responsible. It is perhaps significant that when Jesus was twelve years old he sat among the teachers, listening and asking them questions, when his parents went up to Jerusalem for the Passover. He may have been preparing himself for his imminent accession to manhood." From Handbook of Life in Bible Times by J.A. Thompson pp 83-85.

To finish

6. Do you think Jesus could have begun his ministry at the age of 12? Why/why not?

"'Thou, O Lord, art our Father', the Jews of old had said [Is 63:16]. But it is almost certain that they understood by this little more than that it was God who had brought their nation into being; and although the patriarchal communities of the days of Abraham were embedded in their national history as patterns of the family relationship which should exist between God and his people, the idea of his fatherhood was something they had never fully grasped – certainly not in the way that Jesus was going to teach it [cf. John 5:18].

So the first recorded words of Jesus are a statement about himself, and a claim to a relationship between himself and God different from, and deeper than, anything that had ever been known before. Furthermore, it is a relationship into which he is going to bring all others who are prepared to put their faith in God through him." From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock p 49.

Study 5, Luke 3:1–20, John the Baptist prepares the way

Getting started

1. What does baptism mean to you personally?

“**Rome** had ruled the area for about a hundred years, but only since AD 6 had there been a Roman governor resident in the area, living in Caesarea (on the Mediterranean coast) but also keeping a base in Jerusalem. Augustus Caesar, the first Emperor, had died in AD 14, and his place had been taken by the ruthless Tiberius, who was already being worshipped as a god in the eastern parts of the empire. Two of Herod the Great’s sons, Herod Antipas and Philip, were ruling somewhat shakily, under Roman permission, in the north of the country, but Rome had taken direct control of the south, including Jerusalem itself [see map p 17]. Most Jews didn’t regard Herod’s sons as real rulers; they were a self-made royal house, ruling, like Rome, by fear and oppression.” From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock p 32.

Bible

Read Luke 3:1-9

2. Why was John telling the people to repent?
3. What was John’s role in God’s plans (see also Luke 1:14-17)?
4. What has repentance got to do with John’s quote from Isaiah 40:3-5 (see also Mal 3:7)?
5. Why would John’s fellow Jews be uncomfortable with his message (vv 7-9)?

“They were saying to themselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father;’ they had grown up with the assumption that since they were descendants of Abraham, and therefore members of the chosen race, they were already in a right relationship with God. This false confidence John had to destroy. It was not enough that he should charm them away from their homes, to come and listen to stirring oratory down by the Jordan. He must touch their hearts, and convince them that not even the greatest spiritual privilege then known – that of being an Israelite – could of itself make an individual right with God and acceptable to him.

John’s actions conveyed the same message. For baptism was the rite by which Gentiles would become ‘Jews’; those who were already within the Israelite family did not need it. By preaching baptism to the latter (3:3), John places Jews in the category of Gentiles. Physical relation to Abraham is of not avail.

‘All the people’ who responded to John’s preaching ‘were baptized’ (3:21), for all needed to acknowledge themselves to be in a wrong relation to God.” From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock pp 54-55.

6. Would you recommend John's model for evangelism? Why/why not?

"The old prophets had spoken of a time of renewal, through which God himself would come back to them. . . **Baptism**, plunging into the river Jordan, was a powerful sign of this renewal. When the children of Israel had come out of Egypt – a story they all know well because of their regular Passovers and other festivals – they were brought through the Red Sea, through the Sinai wilderness, then through the Jordan into the promised land. Now they were in slavery again – in their own land! . . . John was doing what the prophet Isaiah had said: preparing a pathway of the Lord himself to return to his people. This was the time. Rescue was at hand." From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 32-33.

Read Luke 3:10-14

"The **tax-collectors** were disliked not just because they were tax-collectors – nobody much likes them in any culture – but because they were collecting money for either Herod or the Romans, or both, and nobody cared for them at all. And if they were in regular contact with Gentiles, some might have considered them unclean." From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 183-184.

7. After John's call repentance three distinct groups ask for specific details on what repentance means for them. What does John say to: (a) the crowds (v11)?

(b) the tax collectors (v13)?

(c) the soldiers (v14)?

(d) What is the basic sin that John attacks in each case?

8. (a) What sins do you think John would identify in our society?

(b) In what particular area do John's words search you out?

Read Luke 3:15-20

9. How does John describe the Christ?

10. Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit, as distinct from John's water baptism.
When does this happen in the life of a Christian today? (see Acts 2:38, 19:1-7 and 1 Cor 12:13)

11. "Baptism with fire" is an image of judgement, yet how is this also part of "the good news"?

"There was already, of course, a 'king of the Jews'. Herod Antipas, though officially a 'tetrarch' – a kind of second rank prince – was working on rebuilding the Temple, which was itself a way of claiming royal status. King Solomon, after all, had been the first Temple-builder, and some of Israel's greatest kings had rebuilt or restored the Temple. Herod was hoping to inherit his father's title, king of the Jews.

But John had other ideas. The true Messiah, the true king of the Jews, was coming, and his coming would bring devastating judgment. The idea of the Messiah as judge as well as saviour is an important part of mainstream Jewish expectation; the Messiah would bring God's justice to the world, and this would involve naming and dealing with evil. . .

Herod Antipas had had an affair with Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, after which she had divorced Philip (it was unheard of in Jewish law for a wife to divorce her husband) and married Antipas. John's denunciation of this flagrant and incestuous adultery was not simply a moral criticism. Part of the point was that if Herod had any pretensions to being the true king of the Jews, behaviour like that would prove him a sham. The Lord's anointed would never do such a thing. Like Elijah opposing Ahab (1 Kings 17 – 18), John spoke out fearlessly against Herod, and took the consequences." From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 36-37.

To finish

12. Is baptism/christening appropriate for babies? Why/why not?

13. Why is repentance necessary for salvation?

Study 6, Luke 3:21–4:13, Jesus' baptism, genealogy and temptation

Getting started

1. How do you deal with temptation?

Bible

Read Luke 3:21-38

2. What do the following tell you about Jesus?
(a) the Father's public declaration (v22)?

(b) the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus (v22)?

(c) Jesus' baptism for the forgiveness of sins even though he committed no sin (vv21-22)?

“Luke interrupts his narrative to give us a genealogy of Jesus. Matthew’s genealogy (Matt 1:1-17) begins with Abraham and moves forward to Jesus. Luke’s begins with Jesus and moves backwards to Adam. Matthew gives us the genealogy of Joseph, while Luke gives us the genealogy of Mary (NB: Heli was Mary’s father).” From p 4 of Stephen Gibson’s Bible study booklet on Luke chs 3 – 8.

3. What does the genealogy highlight about Jesus' relationship to Joseph?
4. Out of all the names, which five do you think are the most important and why?
 - (i)
 - (ii)
 - (iii)

(iv)

(v)

5. What claims about Jesus does the genealogy support (cf. Luke 1:32-33, 69, 73)?

“For a Jewish genealogy of Luke’s time, to start with God was very unusual. It highlighted a comparison between the first ‘son of God’ (i.e. Adam) and the new ‘son of God’ (Jesus).” From the Bible Brief by Andrew Richardson Reading 11 from The Briefing magazine # 342.

6. How is Jesus a better son of God than Adam?

Read Luke 4:1-13

“The devil takes up the precise point established by chapter 3, and makes it the basis of his challenge. ‘So you are the Son of God? Very well: if that is true, then prove it.’ In three ways Jesus may demonstrate, to the devil’s satisfaction, that he is in fact what the voices at the river, and the family tree, have said that he is.” From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock p 58.

7. In which specific areas does Satan ask Jesus to disobey God?
(a) Luke 4:3-4

(b) Luke 4:5-8

(c) Luke 4:9-12

8. Which part of Israel’s history is brought to mind by this passage (see Deut 8:1-3 and 6:12-16)?

9. How did Israel fail where Jesus succeeded (see Num 14:2-5, Ex 32:1-4)?

10. (a) How was Jesus like Adam?

(b) How was Jesus not like Adam (see also Rom 5:12-19)?

“For each of Jesus’s answers to the devil is a quotation from the Book of Deuteronomy [Deut 8:3, 6:13, 6:16]. The word ‘deuteronomy’ means ‘the second law’; the book is a re-statement of the divine law given through Moses. And it is the law which God gave *for man to live by*. The answers of Jesus are in effect as follows. ‘You suggest that feeding my body may take precedence over obeying my God. But God has told *men* – *men* – ‘that they shall not live by bread alone; therefore *I* shall not do so. You offer me universal power, at the price of worshipping you. But God has told *men* that they are not to worship any but him; therefore *I* shall not worship you. You propose that I should test his promises to suit my own convenience. But he has told *men* that they are not to test him in this way; therefore *I* shall not do so.’

What is he doing? He is deliberately emptying himself of his power and glory – ‘Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?’ [Matt 26:53] – and putting himself in the position of a *man*, under the authority of the law of God. ‘Being found in human form he humbled himself and became *obedient*’ [Phil 2:8]. He is in fact going right back to the beginning, back to square one: he is the new Adam. In Eden, the head of the human race was confronted by the tempter, disobeyed God’s word, and set the whole of mankind off on the wrong track. Now comes the second Adam, and alone in the wilderness he in his turn confronts the tempter. The difference is that he will win. He will be the totally obedient Man. Man as he was meant to be, Man who is altogether righteous, Man who never loses his relationship with God through sin.” From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock pp 59-60.

To finish

11. One purpose of Jesus’ baptism was that he might fully identify with his people.
(a) How did Jesus’ temptation fulfill a similar purpose (see Heb 2:18 and 4:15)?

(b) What wonderful benefits flow to us because of Jesus’ faithfulness (see Heb 2:14-18 and 4:14-16)?

Study 7, Luke 4:14–30, Jesus rejected at Nazareth

Getting started

1. What do you expect from the sermon in church?
2. How is the sermon better (or worse?) than reading the Bible passage and thinking about it yourself?

Bible

We are about to read Luke 4:14-30 where Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61:1-2 but before we do that we need to get an idea of the context of Isaiah 61:1-2, as follows:

"[Isaiah chs 56 – 66] relates to the period following the arrival of the first returnees from Babylon. Isaiah saw that time in prophetic vision; we see it now in the cold, clear light of history. It was a time of high expectations and immense difficulties. There was tension between the returnees and those, including foreigners, who had been living in the area during their absence. There were the frustrations inevitably associated with limited self-rule. The Judea to which they returned had been incorporated into the Persian empire, so they were home but still not their own masters. Their numbers and resources were limited, and neighbouring groups viewed them with suspicion or outright hostility. In these circumstances the challenges involved in establishing a secure and viable community were almost overwhelming.

But the most serious problems arose from the fact that this small community lived 'between the times', so to speak. The return from exile had begun but was far from complete (56:8). Many Israelites were still scattered in Babylonia, Egypt and elsewhere. The glorious new age the prophets had spoken about had begun to dawn, but much – very much – still awaited fulfilment. Things were not as they had been, but neither were they as they would be. The community lived in the tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet'. They had the beginnings of what God had promised but not the fullness of it."

From The Message of Isaiah by Barry Webb p 219.

3. From Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7, 11:1-5 what did the people expect when the Messiah came?
4. Using your answer in 3. how would the Messiah solve the problems of the returned exiles as outlined in the paragraph on the context of Isaiah 61:1-2?

Read Luke 4:14-30

"The return to Galilee which Luke records here seems to have taken place a considerable time after the temptation in the wilderness [see John 2:12-13, 23, 3:22-24, 4:1-3, 45, Matt 4:12, Mark 1:14]. But he omits the various events of Jesus's early ministry which John describes, and goes straight on to the incident in the synagogue at Nazareth, which will make very clear some of the implications of what he had been saying about the Son of God. . .

He was becoming widely known as a preacher (4:15), so it was quite natural that he should be asked to read the Scripture, and that he should then sit down again to give a short sermon on it (4:20)."

From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock pp 60-61.

"We should bear in mind that this is the earliest description of a **synagogue service** we have, so that this passage is of critical importance for the study of the synagogue. We may assume that some customs, which we know from later times, were as old as this, but we should be clear that this is assumption. Luke is our only authority for what was done at this time. If later custom was begun as early as this, the service would have commenced with prayer and there would have been a reading from the Law (the books from Genesis to Deuteronomy) before Jesus read from the prophets. There were no ministers as we understand the term, but the local synagogue authorities would invite people to read and to preach. Scripture seems always to have been read in the original Hebrew, though a translation into Aramaic would have been made by the reader or someone

else. From Acts it is plain that it was not uncommon for distinguished visitors to be invited to preach. The synagogue was used for instruction as well as for worship; indeed teaching may be held to be its primary function (*cf.* 13:10)."

From Luke (Tyndale Commentary) by Leon Morris pp 105-106.

5. What do verses 17 – 21 tell us about Jesus?

6. How do you think v 21 would have affected the original hearers?

7. What do we understand about Isaiah 61:1-2 in terms of Jesus' death and resurrection?

8. One minute the people are speaking well of Jesus (4:22) and the next minute they are furious with him (4:28). Locate Zarephath, Sidon (v26) and Syria (v27) on the map below. How does this help to explain the people's anger?

To finish

9. (a) What prejudices cause people to object to Jesus or his message?

- (b) How could you respond to these objections?

10. (a) Describe how last week's sermon effected you personally.

- (b) Compare this with the effect Jesus' sermon (4:14-30) had on the people. Should we be more personally effected when we hear the Word of God? Why/why not?

1. From Stephen Gibson's Bible study booklet on Luke chs 3 – 8 p 8: "Having been rejected in Nazareth, Jesus now makes Capernaum his base of operations. This fishing village on the shore of the Sea of Galilee was a good, central place. From here Jesus would take trips around Galilee, preaching and teaching in synagogues and the open countryside about the Kingdom of God. Jesus' great power and authority are very evident in the following passage." Before you read it . . .

(c) Why does Jesus tell the demons to be silent (4:35 and 41)?

“In the ancient world ills of the first kind were called, out of mere ignorance, demon-possession; in fact they were probably epilepsy and similar disorders. Such at least was the view of a more recent and more sophisticated ignorance! With today’s widespread interest in the occult, he would be a rash man who would now simply deny the older diagnosis. Perhaps the men of the Bible were right after all when they spoke of two distinct and equally real afflictions, ‘diseases . . . and demons also’ (440-41).” From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock p 67.

5. After sunset, when the Sabbath had ended, travel and healing was now permitted. A host of people are now brought to Jesus for healing.
 (a) What strikes you about what took place in Luke 4:40?

 (b) Why are people looking for Jesus the next day (v42)?

6. (a) How do Jesus’ actions in vv31-44 begin to fulfill his mission of proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind and releasing the oppressed (Luke 4:18)?

 (b) How does Jesus’ death and resurrection fulfill this mission?

7. What priority does Jesus give to his teaching and preaching (vv31-32, 43-44)?

To finish

8. Jesus’ healings are instantaneous. Should we expect this kind of healing today? Why/why not?

Study 9, Luke 5:1–16, Calling the first disciples and healing

Getting started

1. What do you remember about the events leading up to your conversion?

Bible

Read Luke 5:1-11

2. From Stephen Gibson's Bible study booklet on Luke chs 3 – 8 p 10: "Simon Peter, his brother Andrew and their partners James and John have fished all night and caught nothing. Now they must wash their nets. If nets were not washed and stretched out to dry they would rot and break."
Give 2 reasons why Jesus chose the boat belonging to Simon?

"It seems that he'd [Jesus] begun to teach a group by the shore, but the crowd got bigger and bigger and there simply wasn't room. So he improvised. Along the lakeshore close to Capernaum there is a sequence of steep inlets, a zigzagging shoreline with each inlet forming a natural amphitheatre. To this day, if you get in a boat and push out a little from the shore, you can talk in quite a natural voice, and anyone on the slopes of the inlet can hear you clearly – more clearly, in fact, than if you were right there on the shore with them. Jesus was simply exploiting the geography of the area and the ready availability of a boat." From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright p 53.

3. "Simon knew that Jesus was no fisherman, but he had enough respect for the teacher not to scoff when Jesus suggested fishing at an absurd time (5:4-5)." (Gibson p 10.)
(a) How did Jesus show to Simon that he had authority over more than religious things (5:6-10)?

(b) Why do you think authority over fish affected Simon so profoundly?

(c) What kind of authority would get your attention that strongly?

4. "*When Simon Peter say this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!'*" (v8). Simon Peter's words remind us of the experience of other great saints in the immediate presence of God." (Gibson p 11.)
(a) When are you in the presence of God?

(b) How do you react?

“As long as Simon’s boat is being used for a pulpit, the owner has no objection to Jesus’s saying in it what he likes. But when it reverts to being a fishing-boat, it is Simon’s once more, and Jesus no longer has a say in how it is to be used. Fishing is Simon’s job. In the same way, people will listen to Jesus, will consider what he says, and will even ask him to ‘make them better’ when they are sick; but for him to do as he does in this fourth episode, and to interfere in their job, their home, their leisure, that is another thing altogether. Those matters have nothing, surely, to do with ‘religion’.

So Jesus, the carpenter turned preacher, tells Simon, the fisherman, how to fish. We may guess the tone of Simon’s answer (5:5), and imagine the expression on his face! . . . Yet the word of power shows that Jesus knows even more about Simon’s job than Simon does himself, and it has a very material effect on the brothers’ situation (5:6-7).

Many would have to admit that it is at this point that the word of Jesus comes home to them – literally, because it invades the privacy of their own workaday life, instead of staying respectably in a Sunday church service where it belongs.” From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock pp 68-69.

Read Luke 5:12-16

5. Jesus’ healing of the leper is typical of his personal encounters.

(a) Why did Jesus first touch the man, then heal him (v13)?

(b) What can we learn from this?

“Local priests in all the towns and villages acted as teachers and administrators of the law. If someone wanted a clean bill of health, there was a standard procedure laid down in the law (set out in Leviticus 13), and it was the priest’s job to examine the person and declare them clean or unclean. Jesus intends to cure the man; but he also intends, of course, that he will be able to rejoin his family, his village and his community as a full and accepted member. He must therefore go to the priest; and, when opportunity occurs (that is, the next time he goes to Jerusalem on pilgrimage), he must make the offering laid down in the law to show his gratitude to God in the appropriate way.” From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright p 57.

“The leper was not just ill; he was outcast. He had not simply lost his health; he had lost his family, his friends, his home, his livelihood. No-one would, indeed no-one was allowed to, associate with him. So we can imagine how with the tingling of his revitalized flesh this man felt a thrill of emotion as Jesus stretched out his hand, and *touched* him’. For it was literally a renewed contact with his fellow man, perhaps the first for many years; and it signaled a coming reunion with family and friends, a reintegration with the society from which the disease had cut him off. It was to bring about a mending of all those broken relationships. . . But one of the great key words of the gospel is ‘reconciliation’; and as we are reconciled to God, so we are reconciled among ourselves, and the church whose members are no longer ‘lepers’ to one another, but united in fellowship and love, is a most powerful testimony to the power of the living God [John 13:35, 1 John 4:8, 12].” From The Message of Luke by Michael Wilcock pp 69-70.

To finish

6. (a) What is it about some people that you don’t like?

(b) How could you get over that enough to start liking them?

Study 10, Luke 5:17-39, Conflict over healing, eating and fasting

Getting started

1. What new thing have you been using that meant leaving behind or replacing the old thing?

Bible

Read Luke 5:17-26

2. Why do you think the Pharisees and teachers of the law were there?
3. What is the point Jesus is making by the question in v23?
4. (a) How does Jesus prove that he can forgive sins?

(b) How has Jesus proven that he has forgiven *our* sins?
5. Who is Jesus referring to by using the term "Son of Man" (see Dan 7:9-14)?

"The Pharisees were an unofficial but powerful Jewish pressure group through most of the first centuries BC and AD. Largely lay-led, though including some priests, their aim was to purify Israel through intensified observance of the Jewish law (Torah), developing their own traditions about the precise meaning and application of scripture, their own patterns of prayer and other devotion, and their own calculations of the national hope. Though not all legal experts were Pharisees, most Pharisees were thus legal experts." From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 312 & 313.

Experts/teachers of the law = scribes

"In a world where many could not write, or not very well, a trained class of writers ('scribes' [= teachers of the law]) performed the important function of drawing up contracts for business, marriage, etc. Many scribes would thus be legal experts, and quite possibly Pharisees, though being a scribe was compatible with various political and religious standpoints. They believed that Israel's law, the Torah, should be applied to every area of life, and so combined in themselves the modern roles of 'lawyer' and 'religious teacher', and much besides. It is small wonder that such people took offence at what Jesus was saying. If he was right, their entire programme was based on a huge mistake. If they were right, the mistake was his. The fierce opposition between them continues on and off right through to the final showdown in Jerusalem." From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 146 & 316.

“[H]ere [Luke 5:17] they are in force, from all over the small country. This may seem a bit excessive; why should they gather like this to check out a young prophet who is doing and saying strange things? The answer is that their particular cause – for which they were from time to time prepared to take drastic action – was the coming kingdom of God; and if someone else appeared on the scene who seemed to be talking about the same thing *but getting it all wrong*, they wanted to know about it. . .

The Pharisees’ kingdom-plan, in line with plenty of earlier Jewish aims and ideals, was to intensify observance of the Jewish law, the Torah. That, they believed, would create the conditions for God to act, as he had promised, to judge the pagans who were oppressing Israel and to liberate his people. In addition, some of the more militant believed that it was their God-given duty to take the law into their own hands, and to use violence to kick-start the process of revolution. Jesus’ kingdom-vision was very different – almost diametrically opposite, in fact. Since he was drawing crowds and becoming well known, they needed to find out what was going on.” From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 59 & 60.

Read Luke 5:27-39.

6. What are the implications of Levi’s actions in v28 for 21st Century Christians?

7. Why would Levi throw a banquet for Jesus and invite all his friends (v29)?

“**Tax-collectors** are never popular, but in Jesus’ day it was worse. They were extortionists. And, more than that: they were working for the Romans, or for Herod, and their necessary contact with Gentiles put them under political suspicion (collaborating with the enemy) and ritual exclusion (they might well be unclean). It’s significant that when Levi throws a party, most of the others present are, like him, tax-collectors. They had to befriend each other, since most ordinary folk wouldn’t have anything to do with them.” From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright pp 63 & 64.

8. Why are the Pharisees upset with Jesus (vv30 & 33)?

9. (a) How is Jesus like a doctor?

(b) Do you think of yourself as being sick (a sinner) or healthy (righteous)? Why?

10. Why was fasting inappropriate when Jesus was present (vv33-35)?

“**Fasting** in Judaism, and in the various sects and groups of Jesus’ day, was a sign of waiting, of bewailing the present time when God’s kingdom still had not arrived. It was a way of looking back to the disasters that had befallen Israel, and humbling oneself in repentance to pray for God’s mercy.” From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright p 64.

11. What does the parable mean when it talks about (a) patches on garments?

(b) wine and wineskins?

(c) How does this apply to us?

“But – the last line [v39] is unique to Luke, and it’s a solemn warning – don’t expect the people who have given their lives to the old movements to be happy about switching allegiance. They are likely to stay with what they know. They have got used to the old wine and are frightened they won’t like the new.” From Luke for Everyone by Tom Wright p 65.

12. How might v39 effect the way we do evangelism?

To finish

13. Name something specific about following Jesus that meant leaving behind the old way?