

READ: *this week's readings*

☐ Luke 1 ☐ Luke 2 ☐ Luke 3 ☐ Luke 4 ☐ Luke 5

Week 1

January 1-6

UNDERSTAND: *notes about God's Word*

Introduction to Luke - this Gospel is a magnificent and powerful portrait of Jesus. Written in the mid 60's to a government official (1:3) it stresses several key themes. These include the verifiable evidence that Jesus was real and that Christianity is not a fairy tale, the troubles money cause a disciple, the work of the Holy Spirit, how the Gospel is for all (even Gentiles), and what discipleship is about. Caution: the chapters are long so the daily readings might take longer than usual.

1 - **Verse 3** names Theophilus as the recipient, in all probability a real person. Luke has a concern in both of his books for showing how the Gospel is accepted by the powerful and intelligent. **Verse 9** - there were too many priests so lots were used to determine duties. This was an important job and one would only get to do it once in a lifetime. **Verse 27** - Luke ties Jesus to the promises of David regularly (see 33, 69). **Verse 67** - the Holy Spirit is a continual theme in Luke-Acts.

2 - **Verse 7** shows not a cute and cuddly scene (as portrayed today) but one of appalling poverty, dirt and humiliation. Jesus was born into just about the worst set of circumstances we can imagine. **Verse 10** - catch "all people" - the Gospel is for Gentiles too! **Verse 25-26-27** - the Spirit is emphasized again. **Verse 44** - we wonder how they lost Jesus but Mary and Joseph probably expected he was in a big crowd of family and so assumed they would see him at the end of the day when the group stopped for the night.

3 - **Verse 16** - the Holy Spirit's baptism here is something that promises power, but "fire" speaks of judgment (see the next verse). The big question in chapter 3 is the genealogy of **verse 23**. Why is it here? Why isn't it exactly the same as Matthew's? The answer to the first question is because it shows Jesus' connection to all men, going back to Adam not just Abraham. It also makes the point that Jesus was a real man, something easy to forget. The differences in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke have many possible explanations. Some think this is Mary's lineage via Levirate marriage or adoption.

4 - **Verses 1-13** - watch how Jesus defeats temptation by using the Scriptures. Verse 1 emphasizes the Spirit's work, but the practical outgrowth of being led by the Spirit is knowing your Bible so you can use it to overcome the devil! **Verses 14-30** show Jesus being rejected at Nazareth, His hometown. They cannot get over knowing about His humble origins. Jesus stings them by talking of Gentiles that God worked with instead of Israelites in **verses 26-27**.

5 - **Verses 1-11** show the kind of obedience Jesus is looking for: immediate, and without question. **Verses 33-39** are often misunderstood. Jesus speaks here of what is inappropriate, and even foolish to do. It is just the wrong time to fast, He says. That will come later, but now is the time to pay attention to Me.

APPLY: *living what we've learned*

Think about what you have seen of Jesus. Would you have followed Him if He called you (5:10)? *He is!* Are you pursuing Jesus Christ? The easy answer is "Of course." But how are you pursuing Jesus? What kind of following are you doing?

READ: *this week's readings*

☐ Acts 17 ☐ Acts 18 ☐ Acts 19 ☐ Acts 20 ☐ Acts 21

Week 9

Feb 25 - Mar 3

UNDERSTAND: *notes about God's Word*

17 - Luke continues several key themes here. One of those is that preaching should be based in Scripture when possible (**verse 3**). The other is that the Jews rejected the Gospel, and so are responsible for the persecution Christians were receiving (**verse 5**). **Verse 11** is often used to plea for verifying all that is done from the Bible. The verse does teach that but it really stresses character. Many of the Athenians lack that kind of heart (**verse 32**), and the chapter closes with a low moment for Paul. The Gospel doesn't gain much of a foothold in Athens, but watch Paul. He never quits.

18 - The decree of **verse 2** was made in 49 AD. Notice that both Jews and Christians alike are evicted from Rome. The government does not, at this time, see a difference in the groups. That will change. The Jews continue to be the Gospel's greatest obstacle (see **verses 6 and 12**). Paul is involved with vows twice in our readings this week. The vow of **verse 18** may be the Nazirite vow of special dedication and thanksgiving to God. One took a vow, then after completing it special offerings were made and the hair was cut (see Numbers 6). The Second Missionary Journey ends in **verse 22** and the Third Journey follows immediately (**verse 23**), as Paul heads back to territory he believes will be fruitful.

19 - These two episodes about John's baptism (Apollos in **18:24ff** and this one) go together. In the New Testament world there was confusion about Jesus and John and some didn't have the whole story. It is of interest that a lack of knowledge about the Holy Spirit in **verse 2** cues Paul to the reality that their entire Christianity is suspect. We get some honesty about what drives idol religion (money, **verse 25**) followed by another look at Paul's courage (**verse 30**).

20 - **Verse 4** lists these men's names because they were delegates from the various congregations who were sending money to Jewish Christian's relief (see 1 Corinthians 16:1-4). Worshiping with brethren, particularly observing the Lord's Supper, was very important for Paul. He waited so he could be with the brethren at Troas (**verse 7**). What a contrast to too many who make little effort to worship when "on the road" or even at home! As Paul gathers the elders from Ephesus he stresses how he has faithfully proclaimed all of God's word (**verse 27**). **Verse 35's** saying of Jesus is famous, but what many don't realize is that it is not in any Gospel. It must have come from Paul's own conversations with Jesus or from other who knew Jesus and told of what He said and did (see 21:16).

21 - This text is fairly straightforward. Paul is going to Jerusalem with money to relieve Jewish Christians in need and show how Gentile Christians cared about their brethren (see Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25-28. This concern drives him to Jerusalem, even as he is warned of impending danger (**verses 4 and 11**). What catches our attention is this business with Paul and the four men with a vow (**verses 20-26**). What is Paul doing getting involved in the old Jewish religion, we wonder? Remember that Judaism was more than just a religion, it was also a way of life. It was a culture, a lifestyle. Paul never told people to give up that lifestyle, or to deliberately do things to offend Jewish sensibilities. He circumcised Timothy to avoid offense (see 16:3-4), and the Jerusalem Conference's decision encouraged Gentiles not to offend Jews (see 15:23ff). What Paul does here is affirm that he isn't trying to force Jews to become Gentiles. Keeping old customs, like eating only kosher foods, was fine. However, if you asked Paul if they could be saved by those things he would have said "Certainly not!" (see Galatians 2:16) and he had no tolerance for the false gospel that Gentiles had to be circumcised (i.e., become a Jew) *first* before they could become Christians (see Gal. 1:8-9; 5:4-6). There was a difference in Jewish culture and Jewish religion. Paul was a part of that culture – it was how he grew up and who he was – but long ago he gave up trying to be justified by Jewish law to find grace in Jesus Christ (see Romans 7).

APPLY: *living what we've learned*

Our readings show how Paul kept butting heads with the Jews, and after giving them a fair chance he would move on to better prospects. Do you ever get weighed down having the same religious arguments with the same people again and again? Be like Paul and move on to someone who will really listen instead of argue and cause trouble!

UNDERSTAND: *notes about God's Word*

8 - Matthew begins a section here of nine miracle stories, arranged in groups of three. In between there are some short sayings of Jesus focusing on discipleship's demands. These miracles are also in Mark but they are shorter here, really putting Jesus "front and center." He has absolutely irresistible authority. **Verse 4's** call for silence is explained when we realize that Jesus' fame spread quickly enough without any help. Further, Jesus wanted people to listen to His message, not just seek His miracles. Note how Jesus is uncompromising in **verses 18-22**. Following Jesus must not take a backseat to anything. Mark and Luke mention only one demoniac while Matthew has two (**verse 28**). This well illustrates how the Gospels do not contradict but rather *complement each other*. Mark and Luke focus on one man because they want to give more detail about him (but speaking of one doesn't mean there wasn't another) while Matthew identifies two because that fits the purposes of his gospel (two witnesses were needed to establish testimony in Jewish law).

9 - Jesus quotes Hosea in **verse 13**, urging the Pharisees to stop dead ritualism and really live as God's people. The teachings of **verses 14-17** discuss what is appropriate to do. Some things just don't "fit," they "aren't done" because it isn't the right time for them. **Verses 18-26** have the marvelous "miracle within a miracle" story, and show Jesus' power over even death. **Verse 34** and **verse 36** stand together to show the failure of the religious leadership of the day. **Verse 38** urges prayer but we will see that those who are praying become those who are sent in chapter 10.

10 - This is the Limited Commission. Jesus' work cannot be done by Him alone so He commissions others to assist Him. Many of these verses are very famous and are often read in isolation. Read together they form a powerful set of teachings about how disciples will never be popular, but should instead expect persecution (**verses 15-28, 34-39**). In that persecution they should be certain God will care for them (**verses 29-30, 40-42**) and be determined to never give up or recant. **Verses 32-33** are the keynotes of this chapter. Notice how any act of service, even a very small one, matters to Jesus if our motivation is right in doing it (**verse 42**).

11 - Why John has doubts has long been a cause of speculation (**verse 3**). Perhaps Jesus wasn't acting like John the Messiah would. Jesus' answer is clear: I am doing what the Messiah was prophesied to do (**verse 5**). **Verse 12** is difficult. It may mean the kingdom has always been attacked by violent men, but others translate it "pressing forward vigorously" meaning men like John the Baptist and their hard work push the kingdom forward. Do not mistake **verses 28-30** to mean Christianity is easier than Judaism. Jesus contrasts the ways of Pharisees and all they had added to the Law with knowing Him and being in relation with Him. Obeying Jesus is a delight when we truly trust Him. We serve gladly and His burden is light when we want to serve because we know Jesus! It's not about less demanding law but about a relationship with Christ.

12 - **Verses 1-8** have been mistakenly used to prop up situation ethics but such cannot work. First, the apostles are not starving to death, they are just hungry. Secondly, Jesus says David did wrong. All this section shows is that Jesus' opponents attack Him for violating *their traditions* when they are unwilling to speak against David who violated *God's law*. **Verse 15** shows Matthew tying miracles to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, quoting Isaiah in **verses 17-21**. This speaks of the gentle spirit of the Messiah. People are always concerned they may have done what **verse 32** says can never be forgiven, but in context it is easy to understand what is meant. Jesus casts out a demon, and His enemies acknowledge He did so (**verses 22-23**) but then ascribe it to the devil's power (**verse 24**). Such is ridiculous, Jesus says (**verses 25-30**). Then Jesus says the heart that refuses to see what such miracles mean is a hardened heart that will never turn to God to ask forgiveness, and so cannot be forgiven. This means that one who is concerned about having committed the sin of verse 32 is showing the very opposite quality of heart and therefore cannot have so sinned! Jesus' statements about demons (**verses 43-45**) raise many questions, but this isn't Demonology 101. Jesus wants the Jews to see they must turn fully to God or things will only get worse. John prepared the way, Jesus taught, but many were not really receiving God's work. Refusing God only leads to more hardness of heart and a person who is worse off than before.

APPLY: *living what we've learned*

One of the themes in this section of Matthew is rejecting Jesus. Look over the reason and list reasons why people refused and rejected Jesus. How do people refuse Jesus today? Why do they reject Him? Are you with those who receive Jesus and His teachings or do preconceived ideas, a love for tradition, or other problems hinder you from accepting Him?