

Jesus in the Gospels

Any study of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) should always start with an understanding of how they relate to each other. As they are the biblical story of Jesus' time here on earth, we should consider them less four separate writings and more one story: the story of Jesus' life, told from four different perspectives.

While the book of John stands on its own in many ways, the first three gospels have striking similarities which are evident even to the casual reader. Scholars have determined that these three books write about the ministry of Jesus from a common point of view. This 'common view' has earned them the title 'Synoptic Gospels.'

There remain debates among scholars about how the relationship came to be: Which of the three Synoptic Gospels was written first? Did the other two use that first gospel to construct their own? Which gospel was written last and did that author use the first two? Is there another unknown or unidentified source that all three gospels used? Despite these questions, the relationship between the first three gospels is undeniable.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke structure the ministry of Jesus similarly, according to a general geographic sequence. Very little of this sequence is found in John, where the focus is on Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem during his periodic visits to the city.

In content, the first three evangelists narrate many of the same events, focusing on Jesus' healings, exorcisms, and teaching in parables. While John does include several significant healings, he includes exorcisms and no parables (at least of the type found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

Also, many of the events we think of as characteristic of the first three gospels, such as the sending out of the Twelve, the transfiguration, the Olivet Discourse, and the Last Supper narrative are not included in John. By having Jesus constantly on the move and by juxtaposing actions—miracles, especially—with (usually) brief teachings, the first three evangelists convey a tone of intense, rapid-fire action. John has a more meditative tone and narrates far fewer events than his synoptic counterparts. John prefers to present Jesus as speaking in long discourses rather than in brief parables.¹

Perhaps in another study we can examine the similarities and differences between the three Synoptic Gospels in greater detail but for the purposes of this study we are not diving in to all of the nuances of the Synoptics. www.para-gospel.com is a **great** resource to use if you would like to view the gospels side-by-side and see the similarities and differences for yourself. This site is simple and reliable, offering the side-by-side comparison in several translations. This website offers quite an interesting way to see how the four gospel writers approached the story of Jesus and it is worth reviewing.

God, in His perfect wisdom, included these three similar gospels in the Bible for a reason. If you look carefully at each you will see that some important differences rise up. These three gospels give us continuity and consistency in the truth of Jesus' ministry, and each of them also offers a

¹ Carson, DA & Moo, DJ (2005) An Introduction to the New Testament (Second Edition, p. 77). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

unique perspective on Jesus Himself. For the purpose of this study/reading guide we will take a dominant theme from each gospel and allow it to provide us a fresh understanding of Jesus.

Luke's Jesus: The Inclusive Savior

The book of Luke is the first of two volumes, often referred to as Luke-Acts. The first volume (Luke) is provided so that 'you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught' (Luke 1:4) and contains writings about 'all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven' (Acts 1:1-2). The second volume (Acts) is an account of the work of the Holy Spirit and the apostles in establishing the early church.

In the gospel, Luke distinguishes Jesus through exposition, through the direct quotations, and through descriptions of Jesus' ministry. The content that is included in Luke gives us a picture of Jesus that is complimentary to the other gospels but also distinct in many ways. He shows us the nature of Jesus' inclusive Messiahship and mission, which extends to all people over all time.

In presenting this inclusive Messiah, Luke's perspective builds a bridge over divisions that existed among his readers: poor and rich, diseased and healthy, Jew and Gentile. Reading the gospel in this light reminds us that Jesus is the Messiah with which we can continue to build bridges over social and cultural divides even today.

Luke's Christology is so foundational to how we live and operate as Christians today it should be understood by each of us who call ourselves by His name. We are going to look together at three ways that Luke shows Jesus as the Inclusive Savior. Before we begin, reflect on your own ideas of Jesus as the Inclusive Savior. You might like to return to these reflections and add to them after you have completed the readings.

The Inclusive Savior: For All People

Luke emphasizes Jesus' universality in the book of Acts when he records the debates among the early church on this subject (Acts 11, 15). However, he also deals with this universality in the gospel writing. It is generally agreed that Luke was a Gentile himself, but one who had a remarkable knowledge of Judaism. This made him an astute observer of the questions raised by the spread of the gospel beyond the Jewish people. Across both of his volumes Luke notes that the gospel sometimes inspires an interesting contrast of rejection by Israel and acceptance by Gentiles, although of course this is not true for all members of either people group. Luke is careful to note that the truth of salvation was offered to all people.

It's important to pause here and note that the inclusive nature of God's salvation plan through Jesus was told to us in Genesis 12:1-3. Read that passage and note your response to it below:

Read Luke 2:25-35 and reflect on this *early account* of God's plan of salvation for all people through Jesus:

Read Luke 3:1, 4-6 (cf Isaiah 40:3-5) and note the importance of the timing of this passage in the account of Jesus ministry. How does this passage reflect God's plan of Salvation for all people through Jesus?

Read the following passages and remark on how Luke shows Jesus' concern for all people, Jew and Gentile:

Luke 4:24-27

Luke 7:1-10

Many have remarked that Luke shows God's special concern for the outcast or 'other.' In this way, he shows a different layer of the 'all' who Jesus includes in salvation. Read the following passages and note who the outcast is and why he/she is outcast or 'other.'

Luke 2:15, 20

Luke 1:12-13

Luke 5:27-32

Luke 4:18 (cf Isaiah 61:1-3)

In Luke's gospel, we also see Jesus take particular interest in the poor. Including this group of people in His ministry was important to Him. Particularly note how the passages below turn the ideas of poor and rich upside down:

Luke 6:17-26

Luke 19:1-10

(For more on how Jesus felt about materialism, read Luke 12:13-34, 14:7-33, 16:1-31)

We also see clearly in Luke that Jesus had special concern for women and the family. Read the passages below and note your own observations about how he uplifted women and children:

Luke 7:11-17

Luke 7:36-50

Luke 8:1-3

Luke 18:15-17

In these and other ways we see Jesus as a savior inclusive of all types of people. Note any other examples from Luke that you can find here:

The Inclusive Savior: For All Time

Luke systematically lays out an understanding of God's plan for salvation through Jesus which is inclusive of all time: the time of Israel, the time of Jesus, and the time of the church. This theology pervades our contemporary Christian thinking so deeply it might even go unnoticed to the long-term believer. Luke's divinely inspired perspective on this issue is one of the foundational truths of the Christian church today. However, to the audience he was addressing, it was revelatory.

Read the following passages and note what each passage indicates about the historical inclusivity of God's plan for salvation through Jesus:

Luke 4:18-21 (cf Isaiah 61:1-2)

Luke 24:25-27

Read the following verses and note how these words from Jesus inform our current day understanding of His redemptive work through the kingdom calendar:

Luke 18:31-33

Luke 21:5-9

Read Luke 24:45-48 and Acts 1:8. Keeping in mind that as a two volume set, these verses are only a few verses apart, reflect on what these verses indicate about the inclusivity of God's plan for salvation through the continuing work of the church:

At the time of his writing (generally agreed to be roughly 30-60 years after Jesus' death and resurrection) Luke would have been aware of the growing concern about Jesus' delay in returning as promised. Scholars call this the 'delay of the parousia' which is a fancy way of saying the delay of the second coming of Christ. Early believers seemed to think His second coming would quickly follow the first (despite Jesus' warnings that no one could predict the time). In fact, many believed it would happen in their lifetime.

Read the following passages and reflect on how Luke is addressing the perceived delay of Christ's return (from Christ's own words):

Luke 12:35-40

Luke 17:22-25

Luke 21:25-28

These passages are a few examples of how Luke shows us God's plan for salvation through Jesus was in place through all time. Read through Luke in it's entirety and see if you can find more examples. Note them here:

The Inclusive Savior: Indwelling

You probably already know that the book of Acts is sometimes called the Acts of the Holy Spirit because so much of Luke's account is attributed to the Holy Spirit, as it should be. However, even in his gospel Luke mentions the Holy Spirit much more than his synoptic counterparts, showing us another way that Jesus is inclusive: His indwelling.

Luke has shown us that Jesus' work is inclusive in the world and in time. As Christians we might take for granted the presence of Jesus inside us as well as outside of us, but it shouldn't go unmentioned in a study of Luke's Jesus.

Consider the following verses and reflect on how they show the way that Luke sets the scene early in his gospel for the Holy Spirit involvement in the life of Jesus that is a theme throughout:

Luke 1:41

Luke 1:67

Luke 2:27

Luke 3:16-22

Luke 4:1, 14

Read Luke 24:49 and explain here how the Holy Spirit is part of Luke's Inclusive Savior:

Your turn

Now read the following passages and see how they show you that Jesus is an inclusive savior:

Luke 13:23-30

Luke 12:35-36

Luke 15:4-7
