

Exegesis of Luke 4:16-30

Jeff Applegate

CHRI 5315: Christian Scriptures II: The Gospels

November 7, 2021

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Context and Background	3-5
Luke 4:16-30	5-6
Exegesis Luke 4:16-30	7-13
Concluding Comments	14
Bibliography	15

Introduction

Written to Jews and Gentiles, the gospel of Luke provides an account of the life and Ministry of Jesus. In the incipit, the author describes the purpose his work “to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also to have followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”¹ This third gospel and the book of Acts did not name its author, however it was commonly understood that it was written by Luke. Luke is recorded as a companion of the Apostle Paul in Col. 4:14, 2 Tim. 4:11 and Philem. 24 providing Apostleship endorsement as a trustworthy record of the gospel that Paul preached. Eusebius reports that Luke was a Gentile and physician.² Scholars date the writing as early as immediately after the events written in Acts 28, c. A.D. 62, ending with Paul’s preaching in Rome “with all boldness and without hindrance.”³ There is no mention of Paul’s martyrdom, A.D. 64-67, or the persecution under Nero in A.D. 65, so it is most likely written before A.D. 65. Most scholars believe that Luke would have used the writings of Mark, written in the mid 50s A.D., as a source along with Q (unnamed source of Jesus’ sayings from oral traditions) and Luke’s own sources from eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.

¹ Luke 1:1-4 (ESV)

² Ecclesiastical History 3.4.6

³ Acts 28”31

Context and Background

The focus of this exegesis is on the Rejection narrative of Jesus' return and preaching in His hometown Nazareth recorded in Luke 4:16-30. The event is also recorded in Mark 6:1-6 and Matthew 13:53-58. The account takes place during a period of time that Jesus taught in Galilee and was identified as a "period of popularity."⁴ Galilee is a mountainous region in northern Palestine and was ruled by the Roman empire. American New Testament scholar James R. Edwards describes Nazareth as "an obscure hamlet of earthen dwellings chopped into sixty acres of rocky hillside, with a total population of five hundred – at the most."⁵ The gospel writers Mark and Matthew place this episode toward the end of Jesus' Galilean ministry where Luke brings this account forward to initiate his public ministry following his baptism and temptation in the wilderness. Australian New Testament scholar Leon Morris states, "It is not certain that the visit in Luke is the same as that in Matthew and Mark: It seems to be located earlier and contains an account of Jesus' sermon in the synagogue that is lacking in Matthew's account, as is the attempt to throw Jesus over a cliff. Earlier Matthew spoke of Jesus as going away from Nazareth (4:13)."⁶ The timing discrepancy is not a material to the meaning of the narrative and all gospel accounts provide the same narrative; Jesus returns to his hometown, he visits the synagogue on the sabbath and teaches; all the people marveled at his teaching, followed by questions of his origin; Jesus pronounces, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household;⁷" he was rejected by his people and did not perform many miracles. However, Luke's account provides more detail to the Rejection narrative. David Hill

⁴ Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus, A survey of Jesus and the Gospels*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 269.

⁵ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 2002.

⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 341.

⁷ Matt. 13:57

cites Dieblius and Bultmann agreeing that Luke supplemented the Markan record with traditional material from other sources and rewrote the Markan narrative.⁸

Luke establishes the setting for this narrative detailing Jesus' baptism, anointing by the Father and filling of the Holy Spirit. "Now when all the people were baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, 'You are my beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.'"⁹ Luke further describes "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness."¹⁰ Luke masterfully connects Jesus' baptism and filling of the Holy Spirit when introducing Jesus' return to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit."¹¹ He adds to the setting, "news about Him spread through all the surrounding districts. And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all."¹² Luke 4:14-15 establishes the circumstances for the Rejection narrative. Jesus had been anointed by God the Father, filled by the Holy Spirit in His baptism, tested and confirmed in the wilderness, was teaching in the synagogues and was praised by all as he returned to his hometown. The Rejection narrative is relatively short but pronounces significant theological implications to Jesus' message. Dr. Craig Evans, scholar and world renown expert on Jesus and the Bible states, "Of all the passages in this Gospel, this one is of critical importance and must be understood well if we are to appreciate the evangelist's theological perspective and major purpose for writing."¹³

Luke 4:16 – 30

⁸ Hill, David. 1971. "Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). *Novum Testamentum* 13 (3): 161-80.

⁹ Luke 3:21-22

¹⁰ Luke 4:1

¹¹ Luke 4:14

¹² Luke 4:14-15

¹³ Evans, Craig A. *New International Biblical Commentary, Luke*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002, 70.

¹⁶ And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to Him. And He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME,
BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.
HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO CAPTIVES,
AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,
TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,
¹⁹ TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.”

²⁰ And He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all the people in the synagogue were intently directed at Him. ²¹ Now He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²² And all the people were speaking well of Him, and admiring the gracious words which were coming from His lips; and yet they were saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” ²³ And He said to them, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! All *the miracles that* we heard were done in Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’” ²⁴ But He said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. ²⁵ But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a severe famine came over all the land; ²⁶ and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷ And there were many with leprosy in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸ And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; ²⁹ and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and brought Him to the crest of the hill

on which their city had been built, so that they could throw Him down from the cliff. ³⁰ But He passed through their midst and went on His way.

Exegesis Luke 4:16 – 30

16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. Luke is the only gospel writer who names Nazareth in describing Jesus' hometown. Mark reports that Jesus was accompanied by His disciples.¹⁴ Nazareth is an insignificant town and region where Jesus and his family lived and worked. **And was His custom;** growing up in Nazareth, Jesus would have regularly attended the synagogue and was probably well known. **And stood up to read;** In reverence to the Holy scriptures, rabbis would stand to read the scriptures before they would take the seat where they would teach from God's Word. Michael Graves, Professor of Biblical Studies at Wheaton writes. "during the first century it was customary for the Chief Priest to read the Torah on a prescribed schedule and read the Haftarah which was a portion of the Prophets read on the Sabbath."¹⁵ Scholar on Luke-Acts, Joseph B. Tyson says, "The reminder is particularly important in establishing Jesus' credentials as an observant Jew and in emphasizing a custom on which He and His Jewish compatriots would have agreed."¹⁶

17 And the scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to Him. And He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

18 *"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME,*

BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.

HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO CAPTIVES,

¹⁴ Mark 6:1

¹⁵ Michael Graves, "The Public Reading of Scripture in Early Judaism," The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 50/3 (September 2007): 474.

¹⁶ Joseph B. Tyson, *Images of Judaism in Luke-Acts*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992, p 60.

*AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,
TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,
19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.”*

Jesus opens with **The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me**, again referencing His infilling of the Holy Spirit at His baptism. **Because He anointed Me to preach.** Jack D Kingsbury, Professor of Biblical Theology at Union Theological Seminary describes, “To anoint” alludes to the noun “Messiah” which means “Anointed One.”¹⁷ Prior to reading the text, Jesus identifies Himself as being appointed by God to minister on behalf of the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the downtrodden to proclaim the Lord’s acceptable year.

Jesus reads Isaiah 61:1-2.

*18 “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME,
BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.
HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO CAPTIVES,
AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,
TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,
19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.”*

Isaiah 61 was a popular text at that time identifying the Lord’s Anointed One, the Messiah. Isaiah explains the goal of the Messiah’s purpose to “preach the good news to the poor, to “proclaim release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed and to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” Kingsbury explains, “the ‘poor’ in Luke’s story casts a wide net to include outcasts, disabled, needy, economically disadvantaged, hungry, poor in spirit, persecuted, blind, lame, deaf, sick and suffering death. The ‘captives’ and

¹⁷ Kingsbury, Jack Dean. *Conflict In Luke; Jesus Authorities, Disciples*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1991, p 45.

‘oppressed’ are all those whom Satan holds in bondage because of sin, disease or demon possession. The ‘blind’ are those physically who do not have sight, but also those who are spiritually blinded and in need of divine illumination.”¹⁸ Dr. Paul Hartig, Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies writes, “Jesus’ good news to the poor did not meet exclusive expectations (of the Jews) but was inclusive of Gentiles and outcasts.”¹⁹ To all these, which includes all humanity, Jesus calls to repentance and offers forgiveness and salvation. In Isaiah 52 the Lord identifies Himself as the one “Who brings good news, Who announces peace, and brings good news of happiness, Who announces salvation, and says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”²⁰ Evans adds, “in the Aramaic version of the OT, known as the Targum this Servant Song is unmistakably depicted as messianic.”²¹ And notes, “In at least one of the writings of the Qumran (11QMelchizedek 9-16) Isa. 61:1-2 is linked with Isa. 52:7.” Reading from Isa. 61:2 linked with Isa. 52:7, Jesus proclaims Himself as the Messiah.

The clause emphasized at the end of this passage, “to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” references the year of Jubilee occurring every 50 years as commanded by Moses in Lev. 25:10. At Jubilee, any property Israelites had been forced to sell was to be returned to the original owner or his family; and Israelites who had indentured themselves as slaves due to financial hardship were to be released.²² The principal aim of the Jubilee was “cancellation of debts,” or forgiveness. Kingsbury asserts as Jesus is reading Isaiah, He uses the metaphor “connoting forgiveness in the sense of ‘salvation.’ Jesus’ assertion, then is that he is the Messiah through whom God proffers salvation to Israel.”²³ Jesus proclaims the Jubilee to save through

¹⁸ Kingsbury, 45.

¹⁹ Paul Hertig, “The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke,” *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2, (April 1998): 167.

²⁰ Isa 52:7.

²¹ Evans, p 74.

²² Lev. 25:8-12

²³ Kingsbury, 45.

forgiveness the “poor,” the “captives,” the “blind,” and the “oppressed.”²⁴ Furthermore, Chris Bruno, Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology, asserts that Jesus inaugurated the Jubilee and no new proclamations need to be made.²⁵

After reading the scripture, Jesus sat down as was customary to provide interpretation and explanation to the scriptures. **And the eyes of all in the synagogue were directed intently on Him.** They had heard of his great teaching and were waiting in great anticipation for His teaching. It was likely noted by the congregation that Jesus strikingly omitted the last clause in Isaiah 61:1-2, “And the day of vengeance of our God.” Why does Jesus omit this last clause? He begins his teaching by announcing, **“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”** Isaiah 61:2 references both the coming of the Messiah and the Judgement of Israel. At this point, only the coming of the Messiah is being fulfilled as explained by Jesus and not the final judgement that will come, referring to His second coming. Tyson points out that the scripture emphasizes the immediacy of fulfillment of prophecy that at the very moment Jesus reads the scripture and it was heard, the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled.²⁶ Jesus declares that He is the Messiah, Suffering Servant, who was anointed by God at His baptism to preach the Gospel to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to recover sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. **And all were speaking well of Him.** Excitement certainly ran through the Synagogue as they understood the implications of this reading and interpretation of the scripture announcing Himself as the Messiah.

²⁴ Luke 4:18-19

²⁵ Christopher R. Bruno, “*Jesus Is Our Jubilee’...but How?: The OT Background and Lukan Fulfillment of the Ethics of Jubilee.*” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 1 (March 2010): 81–101. <https://search-ebscohost-com.libproxy.hbu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001787041&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

²⁶ Tyson, p 60.

Instead of simply exclaiming “This is the Messiah, the Son of God,” they respond with **“Is this not Joseph’s son?”** How could it be that this Joseph’s son is claiming to be the Messiah? Joseph is our neighbor and Jesus is His son that grew up among us. Is he really claiming to be the Messiah? Jesus responds, **“No doubt you will quote this proverb to me, ‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’”** Jesus recognizes what is coming next, a test to demonstrate the authority of His claim. Jesus, the Physician, should heal his own people. Do the same as we have heard you did in Capernaum. Jesus says, **“no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.”** (24, NIV, ESV) This is the same word used in verse 19 “to proclaim the ‘favorable’ or ‘acceptable’ year of the Lord.” Evans points out, “Underlying this expression is the long tradition of the rejected, persecuted, and martyred prophets of Israel.”²⁷ In the same way the former prophets were rejected for proclaiming the words of God, the people are excited to hear Jesus’ words proclaim the “acceptable” year of the Lord, but Jesus would not be “accepted” by his own people. Tyson also highlights “the intended irony in the juxtaposition of the adjectives in 4:19 and 4:24: the prophet who has been anointed to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord is not acceptable in his own country.”²⁸

Jesus continues to teach, **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, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 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.** Here Jesus illustrates his point with two OT prophets, Elijah and Elisha. Evans notes

²⁷ Evans, p 71.

²⁸ Tyson, p 60.

that “Elijah was regarded as the prophet of the last days who would prepare the way for the Messiah.”²⁹ Jesus cites the account from 1 Kings 17:8-16 where Elijah provides an unending supply of food to a Gentile widow in Sidon and her son yet does not provide for any Israelite while oppressed by the Romans. To further His point, Jesus cites the story from a previous oppressor of Israel in 2 Kings 5:1-14 where despite many Israelites suffering from leprosy, Elisha healed Naaman of leprosy, an officer of the Syrian army. Israel anticipated and expected the Messiah to come as a military conqueror to deliver them from the oppression of their enemies and bless Israel alone. **When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 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.** How could the crowd suddenly transform from speaking well of Him to being filled with wrath? This rapid transition is clumsy at best, and many scholars have offered possible scenarios leading to this transition. Monique Cuany, New Testament and Early Christian Supervisor at the University of Cambridge asserts in her article that the Jews may have been offended by Jesus’ presumptive statement regarding healing because it “implies their necessity to heal their own sickness and their need for repentance.”³⁰ Frederic L Godet, 19th century Swiss Theologian explains that Jesus is claiming, “Israel is deprived of the works of grace and marvels of healing which the Messiah works among the Gentiles.”³¹ And the resulting reaction to this refusal to perform healing is, “Thou rejectest us: we reject thee.”³² I would not expect either of these scenarios to solicit such wrath and agree with Lukan scholar E.J. Tinsley who does not believe such a violent reaction to Jesus would take place at the beginning of His ministry.³³ Isaiah 61:1-2 is the verse the religious

²⁹ Evans, p 72.

³⁰ Monique Cuany, “Physician, Heal Yourself!” – Jesus’ Challenge to His Own,” *Novum Testamentum* 58 (2016): 368.

³¹ Frederic L Godet, *Commentary on Luke*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981), 153.

³² Godet, 154.

³³ E.J. Tinsley, *The Gospel According to Luke*, (London: Cambridge University Press), 54.

leaders would cite anticipating a “day of vengeance” for their enemies, but Jesus illustrates the Messiah would not deliver Israel from their oppressive enemies but would save and bless their enemies. Tyson asserts that “Jesus challenges the Jewish assumption that they have a special relationship with God and does so on biblical grounds. This assumption is further challenged by Jesus’ commendation of the centurion in Luke 7:9, His parable of the good Samaritan (10:29-37), and the narrative of the ten lepers (17:11-19).”³⁴ Challenging the Jewish relationship with God would certainly ignite accusations of blasphemy which is the more likely reason for such extreme outrage. **But passing through their midst, he went away.** Luke does not give any commentary suggesting that Jesus’ escape was miraculous, but it was not the appointed time for Him to die.

³⁴ Tyson, p 62.

Concluding Comments

Placing the Rejection narrative at the beginning of Jesus' ministry along with the supporting details of the reading of the messianic prophesy of Isaiah 61:1-2, Luke sets the theological cornerstone for the remainder of his gospel message. Jesus comes to the synagogue and, in reading from the Prophet Isaiah, He proclaims to the Jews that He has been anointed by God the Father and filled with the Holy Spirit at His baptism and declares His role as Christ the Messiah. Jesus announces the year of Jubilee to save the lost, both Jew and the Gentile, through forgiveness offered through Him. Rejected by His hometown, He illustrates His teaching by associating their rejection of Him with the rejection of the prophets. Jesus explains Elijah and Elisha's message of God's redemption for the Gentiles that was assumed for Jews initiates the theological implication of a Savior for all and establishes the foundation for the theme of the remainder of Luke's gospel. Luke's orderly gospel account provides certainty concerning the things taught by the prophets; Jesus is the fulfillment of scripture, the Messiah, Savior of the world. Luke's account of the Rejection narrative is the foundation Jesus heralds to all men; "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."³⁵

³⁵ Mark 1:15

Bibliography

- Bruno, Christopher R. “‘Jesus Is Our Jubilee’...but How?: The OT Background and Lukan Fulfillment of the Ethics of Jubilee.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 1 (March 2010): 81–101. <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.libproxy.hbu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001787041&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Cuany, Monique. “Physician, Heal Yourself! – Jesus’ Challenge to His Own,” *Novum Testamentum* 58 (2016): 368.
- Eusebius of Caesarea. *340 A.D. Church History*. Ecclesiastical History 3.4.6.
- Edwards, James R. *The Gospel according to Mark*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.
- Evans, Craig A. *New International Biblical Commentary, Luke*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002.
- Godet, Frederic L *Commentary on Luke*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981.
- Graves, Michael. “The Public Reading of Scripture in Early Judaism,” *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 50/3 (September 2007): 474.
- Hertig, Paul. “The Jubilee Mission of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke,” *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2, (April 1998): 167.
- Hill, David. 1971. “Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth,” (Luke 4:16-30). *Novum Testamentum* 13 (3): 161-80.
- Kingsbury, Jack Dean. *Conflict In Luke; Jesus Authorities, Disciples*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1991.
- Morris, Leon. *The Gospel according to Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1992).
- Strauss, Mark L. *Four Portraits, One Jesus, A survey of Jesus and the Gospels*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2007.
- The ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008.
- Tinsley, E.J. *The Gospel According to Luke*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- Tyson, Joseph B. *Images of Judaism in Luke-Acts*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992.