

Gospel of Luke

Introductory Sermon Notes



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“THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL COME UPON YOU AND THE POWER OF THE MOST HIGH WILL OVERSHADOW YOU” LUKE 1: 35

“In the days of King Herod of Judea...” (1:5) and “in those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus...” (2:1) are loaded statements that introduce us to the world in which Luke lived - the setting for Jesus’ birth and ministry.

Herod was a hated and paranoid character. He had his second wife and her sons murdered and he imposed heavy taxation. Life was already somewhere between subsistence living and

abject poverty (which is how the overlord rulers kept occupied territories down) and now they wanted even more to pay for the reconstruction of the Temple. Always keen to impress Rome, Herod had placed the Roman Eagle on top of the Temple. When some rabbis pulled it down he had them burned alive. This was the “King of the Jews” who served Rome.

The Jews hated the Roman Empire and were unwilling and resentful subjects. Augustus had cruelly and

brutally slaughtered all other candidates for emperor. He declared his adoptive father, Julius Caesar, was a god and hence Augustus should be known as the “son of god!” He went even further and demanded he be worshipped as an emperor god. He assigned himself the title “saviour of the world”. Refusal to comply would result in suffering, torture and death for you and your family.

This was the world into which Jesus was born and lived.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you think Herod felt when some “wise” men showed up to tell the “old King of the Jews” that a “new King of the Jews” was coming! Does his reaction make more sense given what we know?
2. How significant is it that Jesus seems to have titles applied to him that were previously applied to the Kings and Emperors of Rome? How dangerous was it! What were people trying to say about Jesus?



TIMES OF JESUS

Herod the Great suppressed many of the political groups of the day, but when he died, this control disappeared and these groups began to rise in influence again. He left three surviving sons:

Archalaus was given Idumea and Judea in the South and Samaria in the midlands. He was exiled by Rome in 6 A.D. after killing 3000 people in a reprisal. From then on these areas were controlled directly by Roman Procurators like Pilate. Taxation in the South and Midlands went direct to Rome (see Matt. 2:19-22).

Herod Antipas (3B.C.–39 A.D.), appointed by the Emperor of Rome, ruled Galilee in the North West where Jesus spent much of his life. With his brother Philip (who was given Gaulanitis in the North East) and their followers they were known as the **Herodeans**. They were considered representatives of the Roman government and thousands of soldiers were garrisoned there. They taxed the people heavily for themselves and to send tribute to Rome – their aim was to keep Rome happy.

The **Sadducees** were allied with the Herodeans in Galilee in the North – they were conservative, wealthy, leisured and not popular. They liked things the

way they were and focused on living for “today” with little concern for change. In the South (e.g. Judea), the Sadducees dominated the Sanhedrin and with the Temple Party (the elite leadership) effectively had local control in Judea (much to the annoyance of the Herodeans) as the Roman Procurator left them to manage local Jewish affairs.

The **Pharisees** had fallen out big time with Herod the Great and since that time had formed a national party independent of the Temple. A body of teachers of the law who moved throughout Judea and Galilee using synagogues and halls to teach the Torah as a basis for national living, they were more antagonistic than the Herodeans. They saw the Roman presence and the ‘sinfulness’ of the people as a big problem and as inhibitors to God’s return to the Temple. They worked hard to maintain God-fearing practices – they focused on Mosaic Law rather than the Temple. They were probably the most powerful and perhaps best organised group in Jesus’ day with thousands of teachers/ scribes in numerous synagogues. Pharisees were dominant in

town and village life, but the Sadducees ran things.

Zealots were a nationalist organisation who believed that paying tribute to Caesar was treason towards God. They were violent and uncompromising. Antipas had pushed them out into the hills and caves from where they would mount occasional attacks on Romans and Jews. The Jerusalem to Jericho road was notorious for this kind of attack, with robbers quickly escaping into the hills. The nationalist movement was strong, full of hatred and hope for change.

Essenes were linked to the Pharisees but more extreme. They had strict rules for living outside of society in their own community - heavy monastic discipline where the dominant concern was to maintain purity before God

Rural Peasants, the vast majority of the people, were poor, heavily taxed, hostile and wanting change in leadership.

There were frequent famines and earthquakes.

INTERESTING POINTS

Women in first century Israel were considered second-class citizens, akin to slaves. The fact that they are mentioned as avid followers of Jesus is unusual – both that they would be allowed to follow him with his disciples in such a patriarchal context, and unusual that Luke would mention their presence at all let alone stand them in such positive contrast

against their male counterparts! Notice how Jesus' **disciples**, by and large, are not entirely successful in embodying the Kingdom; their role is mainly being “with” Jesus and learning from him in preparation for their role as witnesses as told in Acts. It is the **outcasts** – for example the sinful woman, the tax-collector, shepherds and criminals – who respond positively to Jesus message in exemplary ways!



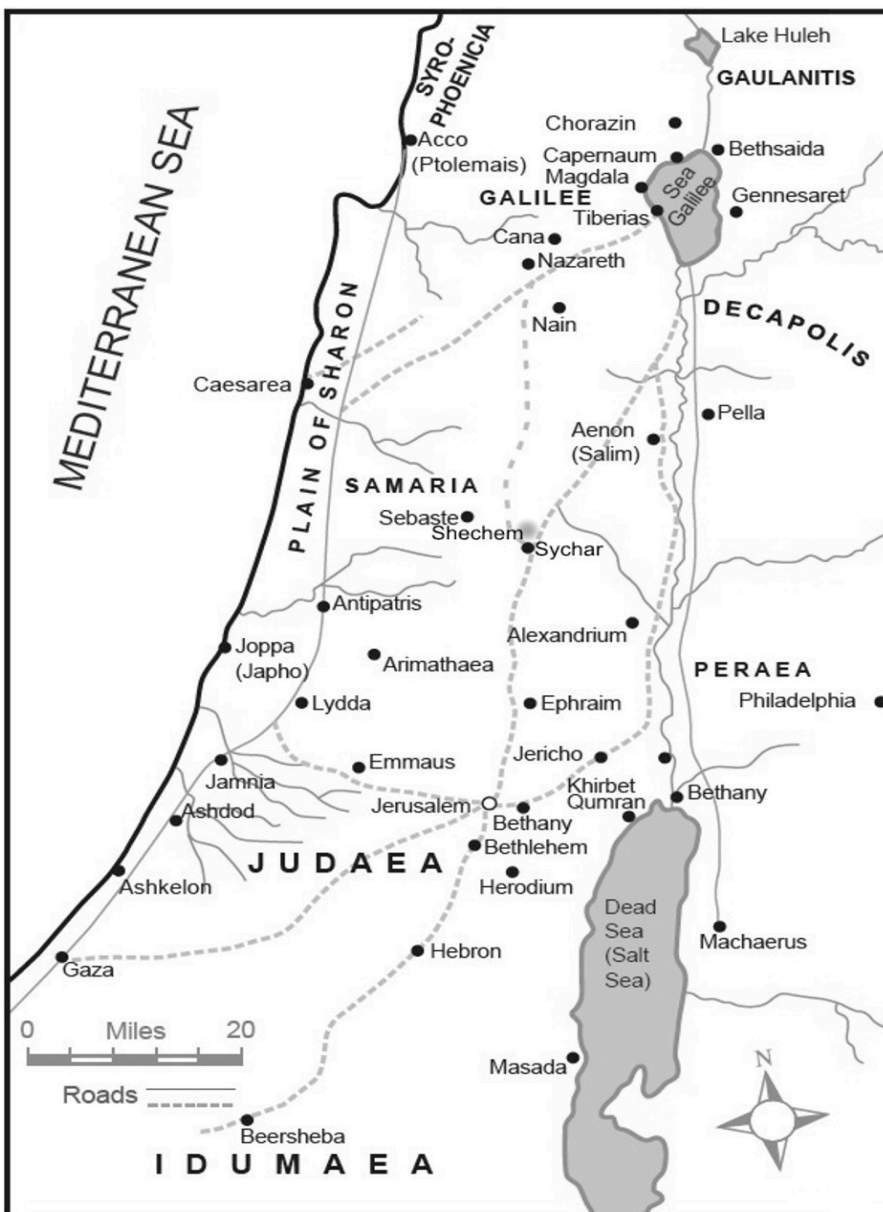
PURITY SYSTEM

The purity system created a society with very sharp boundaries. Sinners were those wicked ones who are outside of the Law. Sinners were considered as those opposed to God's will.

Sinners and outcasts could include:

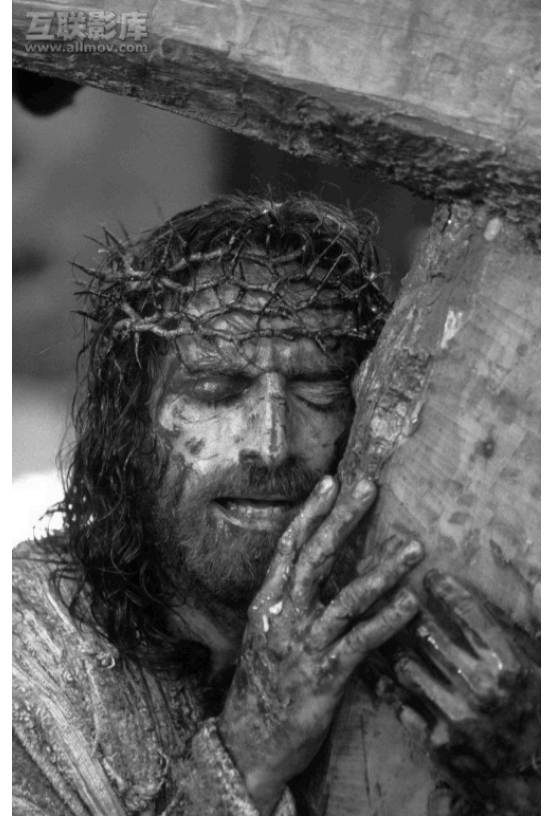
- the poor (financial status)
- the gentiles (national status)
- the ill, maimed or diseased (health status)
- women and children (gender/age)
- prostitutes, tax-collectors, shepherds (occupation)
- many others.

There was individual and national sin and they were linked. “Israel” knew “she” had sinned as a nation, had turned her back on God as she had done before in her long history, and the occupation of the pagan Romans was proof enough of God's judgment. Individual sin contributed to maintaining that state of national sin and was key to why God had not returned to save Israel and once again reside in the Temple.



OUTLINE OF LUKE

1. Prologue (1:1-4)
2. The Birth and Childhood of Jesus (1:5-2:52)
3. Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus (3:1-4:13)
4. The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee (4:14-9:50)
 - o Jesus claims, mission, controversy, disciples and proclamation of the Kingdom of God.
5. On the Way to Jerusalem (9:51-19:48)
 - o Discipleship: hearing and doing, Fatherhood of God, Jesus' behaviour questioned, eschatology, who's in, responding to the kingdom, arriving in Jerusalem.
6. Teaching in the Jerusalem Temple (20:1-21:38)
7. The Suffering and Death of Jesus (22:1-23:56)
8. The Exaltation of Jesus (24:1-53)



BOOK LIST

Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (SPCK, 2001)

Small sermons with superb historical background for the whole of Luke. (Easy read and highly recommended).

Michael Wilcock, *BST Message of Luke*

(IVP, 1979) Slightly older than *Luke for Everyone*, the BST series is also intended to be easily read by most people (Easy Read).

Philip Yancy, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Marshall Pickering, 1995)

Breaks through the stereotypical images of Jesus to reveal something very special. (Easy read and highly recommended).

Joel B. Green, *Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge University Press, 1995)

This book takes a look at some of the major themes found throughout Luke and explores their implications. (Medium read).

Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* (Eerdmans, 1999)

Two books in one. Draws upon Bailey's outstanding knowledge of middle-eastern and first-century Palestinian culture and to help us understand how those who heard Jesus speaking would have likely understood his message. (Medium read).

Alan Storkey, *Jesus and Politics* (Baker, 2005)

Superb examination of how Jesus and the gospel of the breaking in of the Kingdom of God cut into the politics of Jesus day – the theocracy of Judaism and the domination of Rome. How and why did Jesus engage with the politics of his day? (Highly recommended, but heavy reading).

Joel B. Green, *NICNT Gospel of Luke* (Eerdmans, 1997)

Only really for those who are serious readers and into their theology. Over 900 pages it explores Luke in incredible depth and is a superb reference resource. (Heavy reading).