

# Messianic Ministry Begins

**Luke 4:14** And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country.

<sup>15</sup> And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

<sup>16</sup> And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.

<sup>17</sup> And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

<sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

<sup>21</sup> And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

<sup>22</sup> And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

<sup>23</sup> And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Physician, heal yourself." What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well."

<sup>24</sup> And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.

<sup>25</sup> 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,

<sup>26</sup> and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.

<sup>27</sup> 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."

<sup>28</sup> When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.

<sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>30</sup> But passing through their midst, he went away.

<sup>31</sup> And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath,

<sup>32</sup> and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.

<sup>33</sup> And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice,

<sup>34</sup> "Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-- the Holy One of God."

<sup>35</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm.

<sup>36</sup> And they were all amazed and said to one another, "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!"

<sup>37</sup> And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region.

<sup>38</sup> And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf.

<sup>39</sup> And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them.

<sup>40</sup> Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.

<sup>41</sup> And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.

<sup>42</sup> And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them,

<sup>43</sup> but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."

<sup>44</sup> And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

(Luke 4:15-44)

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## Messianic Expectations

*Messiah*. The Greek word is “*christ*.” It means “*anointed one*.” “Anointed one” is what the *king* was called. Solomon prayed to God at the dedication of the temple, “O LORD God, do not turn away the face of your anointed one! Remember your steadfast love for David your servant” (2Chr 6:42). When David was first met by Samuel, the prophet anointed him in the midst of his brothers with oil (1Sam 16:13). Kings weren’t alone though. *Priests* were also anointed (Ex 29:4-7; 30:30; etc.). As were *prophets* (cf. 1Kgs 19:16; Ps 105:15).

When we hear “Messiah,” of course, we think of Jesus. In fact, even though they are the same word, *messiah* has a much different impact on us, for whatever reason, than does *christ*. We know that Messiah refers to a *coming king* and

that Jesus claimed to be that person. But what did the Jews think about this during his own day? What kind of Messianic expectations did they have? Did Jesus come into a vacuum of expectations? Did early Christianity just sort of make this whole thing up? The answers might surprise you.

First, we need to know that **the OT has many messianic prophecies**. Often times that word isn't used, but sometimes it is. Two of the best known are from Psalm 2 and Daniel 9. Here they are in with in the LXX. “**The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers gathered themselves together, against the Lord, and against *his Christ*” (Ps 2:2). This, of course, refers to the Son of God prophecy and him inheriting the nations (vs. 7-8). Next, “**And thou shalt know and understand, that from the going forth of the command for the answer and for the building of Jerusalem *until Christ* the prince *there shall be* seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks; and then *the time* shall return, and the street shall be built, and the wall, and the times shall be exhausted” (Dan 9:25). We've seen this passage in Luke 1-2 and how Luke may very well have been alluding to it in the time frame between Zechariah's visitation and Jesus' circumcision.****

Second, **we know that people were looking for and expecting** a coming Messiah any day. We've seen **Simeon** and

Anna and though they do not mention Messiah by that word, it is clear that they viewed him as Messiah. But how about Andrew, Peter's brother, who told him, "'We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ)" (Jn 1:41). You only "find" something if you are "looking." The woman at the well also said, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things" (John 4:25). And Jesus told her, "I who speak to you am he" (26). So there's no question but that many were looking for the coming Messiah in Jesus' day. But what exactly did they think they were going to get?

It is popular to hear that the Jews were all expecting a perfectly human political hero who would rescue Israel from the Roman Empire and reestablish the Davidic line of kings. And some were. This is represented, for instance, in the Psalms of Solomon, "See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel" (PsSol 17:21) and God will make him "powerful in the Holy Spirit" (37). But this was hardly the only expectation out there. In other places, Messiah would be a "Son of Man," a "Chosen One," "concealed in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits prior to the creation of the world, and for eternity" (1En 48:2-10). In other words, he would be divine, as the

Sibyl says, “From the *sun* who will stop the entire earth from evil war” (SibOr 3.652-55).

Some expected a king, as we have seen. Others, a prophet. “Until such time as the Most High shall send forth his salvation through the ministration of the unique *prophet*” (TestBen 9:2). Some expected a priest. “I will raise up before me a trustworthy *priest*, who shall minister according to my word and my will” (1Sam 2.35 Targ). Some expected a combination of the offices. “Until the *prophet* comes, and the Messiahs of *Aaron* and *Israel*” (1QS 9.9b-11) and “the branch of *David* who will arise” (4QFlor frags 1-3, colIv10ff). “The Lord will raise up a new *priest* ... and his star shall rise in heaven like a *king*” (TestLevi 18:2ff). These expectations knew no boundaries, either tribally or geographically or historically, as they date long before the third century BC.<sup>1</sup>

When Jesus’ ministry finally began, we learn that he returned from the wilderness to Galilee and began doing untold acts (Luke 4:14). Then he returned to his hometown of Nazareth and officially kicked off his ministry by reading from the prophet Isaiah (16). In that reading, he claimed that

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<sup>1</sup> See Glen M. Miller, “Messianic Expectations in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Judaism,” *christian-thinktank.com* (8-6-96), <https://www.christian-thinktank.com/messiah.html>. This is a fantastic and nearly exhaustive list of Messianic prophecies from the Bible and beyond. Incredibly, it has been up on the internet for over 25 years!

he had been “**anointed**” (18) to fulfill a prophecy that was widely believed to be **Messianic**. At first, the people were **transfixed** on him and they **marveled** at his words . But then a series of events unfolded that changed everything. **Expectations were not met**. But immediately after this, humans and ... not so humans, believed what they were seeing, and for it, the good news began to spread far and wide that someone extraordinary had come upon the people of Israel. What we are going to look at today is this extraordinary beginning of Jesus’ ministry, who believed him, who didn’t, what he was doing, what he was saying, and why Luke sets this up as the beginning of the official start to Jesus’ ministry.

## Luke 4:14-44—Context and Structure

Last time, we saw Jesus in the wilderness of temptation, where he fought and conquered all the temptations that the devil could throw at him. As such, he overcame as a prophet, as a king, and as a priest. Starting in **Luke 4:14**, a transitional verse, the Lord’s public ministry begins. This is his **Galilean ministry**, which will take us nearly through Ch. 9, before he starts to make his way down to Jerusalem where he will eventually be put to death on a Roman cross. **The seeds of the hatred of our Lord** begin in our passage today. Sadly



and astonishingly, they begin with those who knew him best. But so also, **the seeds of faith** and hope are also here. And necessarily so, because Jesus was preaching good news.

If you look in your Bible, odds are you will have **several headings** that take you from **4:14-44**. The ESV Bible for instance has *Jesus Begins His Ministry (14-15)*, *Jesus rejected at Nazareth (4:16-30)*, *Jesus Heals a Man with an Unclean Demon (31-37)*, *Jesus Heals Many (38-41)*, and *Jesus Preaches in Synagogues (42-44)*.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, if you read carefully, you will see that the passage begins, “**And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee ... and he taught in their synagogues**” (14-15), while the chapter ends, “**And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea**” (44). These are **virtually the same idea**. In fact, though it sounds like he is in a completely different place at the end, “Judea” is not being used as a synonym for *Judah* (that is the land near Jerusalem far to the south of Galilee), but rather he is using it as a Roman would, for they called all of *Palestine*, including Galilee, “Judea.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Many people have seen **sections** within this passage **as chiasms**. Some of these are a stretch, while others are quite sound. **Goulder** and **Bock** see one is **4:31-44**: a. teaching (31-32); b. exorcism (33-37); c. healing (38-39); c'. healing (40); b'. exorcism (41); preaching (42-44). See **Bock**, 422-25. **Vv. 16-20** are very clearly chiasmic (see below). **Vv. 16-30** might be; **31-37** might be.

<sup>3</sup> There is a **textual variant** with “the Judea” (**Luke 1:44**). Some copies have “**the Galilee**.” Why? Clearly, “Judea” is the harder reading, since Jesus is up in Galilee both before and after this verse. In the science of textual criticism, **the harder reading is usually the original reading**, because copiers can't understand it and thus change it in order to make it harmonize better (perhaps themselves thinking it was a mistaken scribal error). What the copiers did not understand is that Rome actually viewed Galilee (indeed, all of Palestine) as “Judea.” Thus, he tried to



Furthermore, as just mentioned a moment ago, as soon as Jesus goes to Nazareth and starts reading, he says that he is anointed to “[proclaim good news](#)” (18). This also has a parallel right before the end of the chapter when Jesus says, “[I must preach the good news](#)” (43). Therefore, we have good reason to believe that Luke wants us to see this entire section as a single unit of thought. One more point that really solidifies this is that the word “[synagogue](#)” is used [seven times](#) (the “perfect” number) in these verses (15, 16, 20, 28, 33, 38, 44). To put that into perspective, for the rest of Luke’s book, he only uses it nine more times.

As it regards the whole of this passage, we can view it from two literary perspectives. First, we have the perspective of [geography](#). Jesus is in the synagogues of Galilee, then he goes to the synagogue of Nazareth, then he returns to Galilee and goes to the synagogue in Capernaum, then he goes to Peter’s house in Capernaum, finally he goes to the synagogues of Judea-Galilee. These correspond roughly to

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smooth out what Luke said. But Luke knew his history and politics! And in calling this Judea, he is making a rather interesting political comment. That is, [Jesus didn’t just come for Israel!](#) On the variant and how Rome viewed Galilee as Judea see [Roger L. Omanson](#) and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 114. Also citing Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX*, pp. 557–58; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, pp. 198–9; Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, p. 216; [Silvia Cappelletti](#), “Non-Jewish Authors on Galilee,” *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 201, ed. Jürgen Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge, and Dale B. Martin (Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 73.

the ESV's heading breaks. Viewed this way, we have the following structure where **Jesus is first rejected** and **then accepted** and in the middle, there is a healing of a man with an unclean spirit in a synagogue!

- A. Mission: Teaching in the Synagogues of Galilee (14-15)
- B. Rejection in the Home Town Synagogue of Nazareth (16-30)
- C. An Unclean Spirit the Synagogue in Capernaum (31-37)
- B'. Acceptance in a New Home—Peter's House in Capernaum (38-41)
- A'. Mission Continued: The Synagogues of Galilee (42-44)<sup>4</sup>

We can also view it more **theologically**, centering on Peter's mother-in-law:

- 1a) Luk 4:16-17, He came to Nazareth and taught in the synagogue;
- 1b) Luk 4:18-22, The Spirit of the Lord has anointed Me to preach **good tidings**;
- 1c) Luk 4:23-29, The crowd, filled with wrath, tried to throw Him over the edge of the cliff;
- 1d) Luk 4:30, Passing through the midst of them, He went His way;
- 1e) Luk 4:31-37 chiasm, On the Sabbath, He cast out a demonic spirit from a man + rebuked it;  
**central axis) Luk 4:38-39, Jesus healed Simon's mother in law + immediately she arose and served them;**
- 2e) Luk 4:40-41, When the sun was setting, He healed all + demons came out of many, proclaiming Him + He rebuked them;
- 2d) Luk 4:42, He departed and went to a deserted place;
- 2c) Luk 4:42b, The crowd sought Him and tried to keep Him from leaving;
- 2b) Luk 4:43, I must preach the **kingdom of God** to other cities also + I have been sent for this purpose;
- 2a) Luk 4:44, He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Admin, "Luke 4:14-44," Biblical Chiasm Exchange (March 13, 2019), <https://www.chiasmusexchange.com/2019/03/13/luke-414-44/>

<sup>5</sup> Christine Smith, "[Luke 4, Chiastic Structures](#)," *A Little Perspective* (July 4, 2012).

Whatever the case, we are going to look at the rest of Ch. 4 **all at once**, because in seeing these stories together, they will tell us a different story than we would get if we viewed them each individually.

## Luke 4:14-15—Jesus Teaching in the Synagogues of Galilee

It begins, “**And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all**” (Luke 4:14-15). Jesus is coming back from the **wilderness**, which I believe is Bashan to the north and east, and the logical first rest-stop is **Galilee**.

You can think of Galilee in two different ways. First, there is **the political region** of Galilee governed by Herod Antipas. This includes the land west of the Sea of Galilee from 20 miles north to 20 miles south nearly to the Mediterranean Sea. It includes most of the land of ancient **Naph-tali, Zebulon** (see **Matt 4:13, 15**), and Issachar, with parts of Asher and Manasseh thrown in. These are all the northern tribes. It also includes Jesus’ hometown of **Nazareth**, which is right in the middle.



You can also think of Galilee as [the beautiful Sea of Galilee](#), which makes up its eastern border. This place today is an amazing tourist destination, a true holiday getaway. Nestled on three sides by rolling hills, the average temperature is 66/52 in January and 101/79 in August, so make your plans for winter. The lake itself (also called Gennesaret or Lake Tiberias by the Romans and others) is about 13 ½ miles north to south and 7 ½ miles east to west and is the only real source of fresh water in the country. It is full of fish and other life and there were many ancient villages scattered around its perimeter.

Luke tells us that Jesus has returned here **in the power of the Spirit** (Mark adds that John the Baptist has also just been arrested; **Mark 1:14**). It was the Spirit who anointed him at his baptism, led him into the wilderness, and now accompanies him as he makes his way finally into public life. The Holy Spirit and Jesus are inseparable, and Luke needs you to know this, especially for what will come in Acts.

Without telling us more, he says that “**a report about him went out through all the surrounding country**” (14). This is probably due to his **preaching** and his **miracles**, though Luke doesn't tell us. The point is, word of Jesus is spreading and spreading fast, like a wildfire.

The reason to think it may be related to his preaching is **vs. 15**. “**And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.**” “**Synagogue**” means “assembly,” and as such is closely related to *ekklesia*—church. It was essentially a kind of Jewish version of our local church. It was never meant to replace the temple. You couldn't do sacrifices there for instance. Rather, it was a place where the Torah and Prophets were read and interpreted, where sermons were preached, prayers were offered, and community was established. Historically, the Christian church service was modeled on the synagogue, and



for good reason, as the earliest Christians were Jews! (see for example [Justin Martyr](#), *First Apology* 65, 67).

## Luke 4:16-30—Jesus Rejected in his Hometown

This is background we get for the following story. First, we learn that Jesus comes to [Nazareth](#) (16). This is, of course, [his hometown](#), thus Luke adds, “... [where he had been brought up](#).” Therefore, the places he has been before this were not his hometown.

Next, we find Jesus [in his home synagogue](#), “[as was his custom ... on the Sabbath day](#).” This was his life-long habit. To put it in Christian terms, Jesus went to church. Then Luke tells us, “[and he stood up to read](#).” Jesus was not the local Rabbi, however, we have every reason to believe that he had been trained in the Scriptures, as we saw when he was twelve. In fact, in the three other Gospels, Jesus is called “[Rabbi](#)” many times. Thus, it isn’t like just anyone could go in and start reading and preaching, like you often find in some of today’s Protestant denominations.

Next comes [the good part](#). “[And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him](#)” (17). Did Jesus ask for this

particular scroll or was it just the one they gave him?<sup>6</sup> Whatever the case, “He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written...” and he begins to read from Isaiah 61. And this is what he read. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). The text begins with a prelude, that the Spirit is upon him for a mission. That mission includes five things, three of which are pure proclamation. The others include miraculous healing and deliverance.

Curiously, when you go and read the Hebrew of Isaiah 61:1-2, you will not find the miraculous healing—“recovering of sight to the blind.” It isn’t there. However, it is found in the LXX and the Targum is very close, saying, “be revealed to light.” What happened to it? I have a sneaking suspicion that this is one of those texts that the Rabbis deliberately

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<sup>6</sup> Origen thinks it was divine providence. Calvin thinks Jesus chose it, and the way he puts it ought to make all hyper-Calvinists a bit uneasy. “It was no accident that he opens the scroll and finds the chapter of the reading that prophesies about him. This too was an act of God’s providence.... Precisely the book of Isaiah was found, and the reading was no other but this one, which spoke about the mystery of Christ” (Origen, *Homilies on the Gospel of Luke* 32.4). “There is no doubt that Christ chose this passage with deliberation. Some think it was presented to him by divine inspiration, but because freedom of choice was given to him, I prefer to say that it was his decision to choose this passage over others” (Calvin, *Harmony of the Gospels*).



tampered with, because this is the one thing that can truly be said to be done by a [miracle worker](#). A possible reason for this has to do with the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the scrolls, the beginning of this sometimes reads, “[For that is the time of the acceptable year of Melchizedek...](#)” (11Q Melch 10a).<sup>7</sup>

The thing about Melchizedek is that we know the Rabbis were facing a crisis of religion thanks to Christianity. Part of the crisis had to do with books like Hebrews which seemed to claim that [Melchizedek and Jesus](#) were, for lack of a better way to put it, the same (see also Psalm 110:1-4 LXX). The difference is that Jesus was Melchizedek *incarnated* as a human. At Qumran, Melchizedek is likened to God himself. The name only means “King of Righteousness,” so that fits Jesus perfectly. The idea is that Melchizedek is a proper name for the Angel of the LORD. In other places, especially the genealogies between Shem and Abram, we know that the Rabbis were taking out hundreds of years in order to make the claim that Shem was Melchizedek, thus making that figure perfectly human.<sup>8</sup> So perhaps they did

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<sup>7</sup> The translation in [Alan Segal](#), *Two Powers in Heaven* (Boston: Brill, 1977, 2002), 194.

<sup>8</sup> I have a large part of a sermon on this. See [Douglas Van Dorn](#), “[Myths, Genealogies, and Scripture Alone: A Sermon on 1 Timothy 1:1-7](#),” RBCNC.com (12-5-2021), especially pgs. 19-30.

that here, too, taking out the supernatural part of the prophecy. This is especially highlighted by the fact that in the Scrolls, this very passage is explicitly said to be Messianic. “The heavens and the earth will listen to His *Messiah*...” and then it starts referencing Isaiah 61:1-2 (see chart below).

Luke 4:16-20	Isaiah 61:1-2	Targum Isa 61:1-2	(Isa. 61:1-2 LXA)
<p>In the Synagogue (4:16b)            He arose (4:16c)            He received the scroll (4:17a)            He opened the scroll (4:17b)            "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me</p> <p>To proclaim the good news to the poor (4:18c)</p> <p>Proclaiming release to the captive (4:18d)  <b>Recovering of sight to the blind (4:18e)</b>            Setting free the oppressed (4:18f)            Proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord (4:19a)            He closed the scroll (4:20a)            He returned the scroll (4:20b)            He sat down (4:20c)            In the Synagogue (4:20d) – “And all the eyes in the Synagogue were fixing their gaze on him.”</p>	<p>The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me</p> <p>to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,</p> <p>to proclaim liberty to the captives,</p> <p>and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;  <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,            and the day of vengeance of our God;            to comfort all who mourn; (Isa. 61:1-2 ESV)</p>	<p><i>The prophet said,</i>  <i>A spirit of prophecy before the LORD God is upon me, because the LORD has exalted me</i></p> <p>to announce good tidings to the poor;            he has sent me to strengthen the brokenhearted,            to proclaim liberty to the captives,</p> <p>to those who are bound, <i>Be revealed to light,</i>            to proclaim the year of pleasure before the LORD, and the day of vengeance before our God;            to comfort all those who mourn;</p>	<p>The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me; he has sent me to preach glad tidings to the poor,            to heal the broken in heart,            to proclaim liberty to the captives,</p> <p>and recovery of sight to the blind;  <sup>2</sup> to declare the acceptable year of the Lord,            and the day of recompense;            to comfort all that mourn;</p>
	<p><b>4Q521 or the 4QMessianic Apocalypse</b> [the hea]vens and the earth will listen to His Messiah ["anointed one"], and none therein will stray from the commandments of the holy ones. Seekers of the Lord, strengthen yourselves in His service! All you hopeful in (your) heart, will you not find the Lord in this? For the Lord will consider the pious (hasidim) and call the righteous by name. Over the poor His spirit will hover and will renew the faithful with His power. And He will glorify the pious on the throne of the eternal Kingdom. He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the b[ent] And f[or] ever I will cleav[ve to the h]opeful and in His mercy... And the fr[uit...] will not be delayed for anyone. And the Lord will accomplish glorious things which have never been as [He...] For He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor ... He will lead the uprooted and knowledge...and smoke (?)</p>		

There are a couple of other things to point out about what Luke is doing here as well. While Luke cites “*recovering of sight to the blind*,” he essentially stops before the prophecy is finished. Specifically, Isaiah continues, “*and the day of vengeance of our God*” (and then to comfort all who mourn, which is in the Beatitudes). Why would he stop here? Because at this time, that is the First Coming, *Jesus is not here to carry out that day of vengeance of God*. This is precisely what many were looking for the Messiah to do, as a political savior from Rome. But Luke says Jesus did not read that far.

Finally,<sup>9</sup> in having these five things and not the others he could have added, combined with the entire setting of Jesus in the *synagogue, rising, receiving the scroll, opening the scroll, closing the scroll, returning the scroll, sitting down*, and the returning us to the larger *synagogue*, Luke has created a mini-chiasm in this text. Why does that matter? It is because “*Recovery of sight to the blind*” becomes *his central focus* (see above). And that will have profound meaning in just a moment.

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<sup>9</sup> I'll mention one other thing as a side note. The LXX does not have setting free the oppressed, while the Targum and Hebrew do. So perhaps Luke is actually reading a now lost copy of the Hebrew that we do not have, one that still retained the blind part. Whatever the case, this informs what we are about to see even more.

But first, let's look just a little more deeply at these five things Isaiah predicts the Messiah will do. First, at the Spirit's anointing, he will "*proclaim the good news to the poor.*" Jesus is coming to give **good news**. The day of vengeance isn't particularly good news. He is giving *good* news. This news is to **the poor**. This is a fact that we learn time and again in the Gospels. The good news isn't for those who have everything. It is for those who have nothing. The poor are going to be a major focus of Luke's Gospel, whereas Matthew tends to say poor *in spirit*. They don't contradict. Luke wants people to know that those with real, physical, economic poverty which people feel on a daily basis are who the good news is given to. And it is not that Jesus then makes them rich through Word-of-Faith and giving money to televangelists! The promise isn't that they will be made **rich** now, but rather, **in the life to come**.

Second, he will "*proclaim liberty to the captives.*" The ESV's first "proclaim" is the appropriate word "*evaggelizō*," the announcement of glad tidings. This second "proclaim" is a different verb, "*kerussō*." This is a word that means **proclaim or herald or even preach**. Here, it is *liberty* to the captives. Read this in light of **Israel in slavery** to the Egypt being told that God would set them free through Moses and of the prophets

saying that God would return them from captivity in Babylon. In the context of the Gospels, especially with what has just come before in the temptation and what we will see later with the demons, it surely also has to mean **spiritual freedom** from the slavery to the devil.<sup>10</sup>

Third, he will “*proclaim recovery of sight to the blind.*” While proclamation is still the main verb, clearly, that proclamation will be accompanied by **actual miracles** that Jesus will work later in the Gospel. But as we will see, in a moment, it is **not just physical blindness** that is in view. Still, what an incredible thing that Messiah is coming to do. Such miracles as the world has never seen. Because Jesus is Divine.

Fourth, he will “*set free those who are downtrodden.*” This now refers not merely to a proclamation, but an **actual redemption accomplished**. The Messiah will set them free! But who? The nation? No, the downtrodden, those who are always being trampled underfoot by the elites. It is **not a universal redemption**, but a **particular one**.

Fifth, he will “*proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.*” Again, this is *kerussō*. But now it refers to **the Jubilee!** The year of Jubilee occurred every fiftieth year. On it, debts

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<sup>10</sup> This is one of the reasons John was questioning if Jesus was really the Messiah. If he is the Messiah, why doesn't he come and bust John out of prison? **We'll see this in ch. 7.**

were cancelled and original ownership of land was returned. This is a proclamation that certainly would go hand in hand with redemption and slavery. Jesus is setting the people free, bringing what was typologically promised through the Law.

Calvin beautifully summarizes all this,

The prophet shows what would be the state of the Church before the manifestation of the Gospel, and what is **the condition of all of us** without Christ. Those persons to whom God promises restoration are called *poor*, and *broken*, and *captives*, and *blind*, and *bruised*. The body of the people was oppressed by so many miseries, that these descriptions applied to every one of its members. Yet there were many who, amidst their poverty, blindness, slavery, and death, flattered themselves, or were insensible to their condition. The consequence was, that few were prepared to accept this grace.

... We are here taught what is **the design of the preaching of the Gospel**, and what advantage it brings to us. We were altogether overwhelmed by every kind of evils: but there God cheers us by his life-giving light, to rescue us from the deep abyss of death, and to restore us to complete happiness ... We see who are invited by Christ, and made partakers of promised grace. They are persons, who are every way miserable, and destitute of all hope of salvation. But we are re-



mind, on the other hand, that we cannot enjoy those benefits which Christ bestows, in any other manner, than by being humbled under a deep conviction of our distresses, and by coming, as hungry souls, to seek him as our deliverer: for all who swell with pride, and do not groan under their *captivity*, nor are displeased with their *blindness*, lend a deaf ear to this prediction, and treat it with contempt.<sup>11</sup>

Calvin hits on why people will not hear or believe this good news. They are like those at Laodicea. “You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. See your condition so that you can see that Jesus heals it through faith” (Rev 3:17).

After Jesus reads this passage, he undoes all that he had done. He rolls up the scrolls, gives it back to the attendant and sits down (Luke 4:20). Then Luke tells us, “The eyes of all the synagogue were fixed on him.” What would he do next? What lesson will he give? What will Jesus teach is the meaning of this passage?

Jesus blows all his friends expectations out of the water. He wasn't going to teach them anything. Rather, “And he

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<sup>11</sup> John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 229.



began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’” (21).

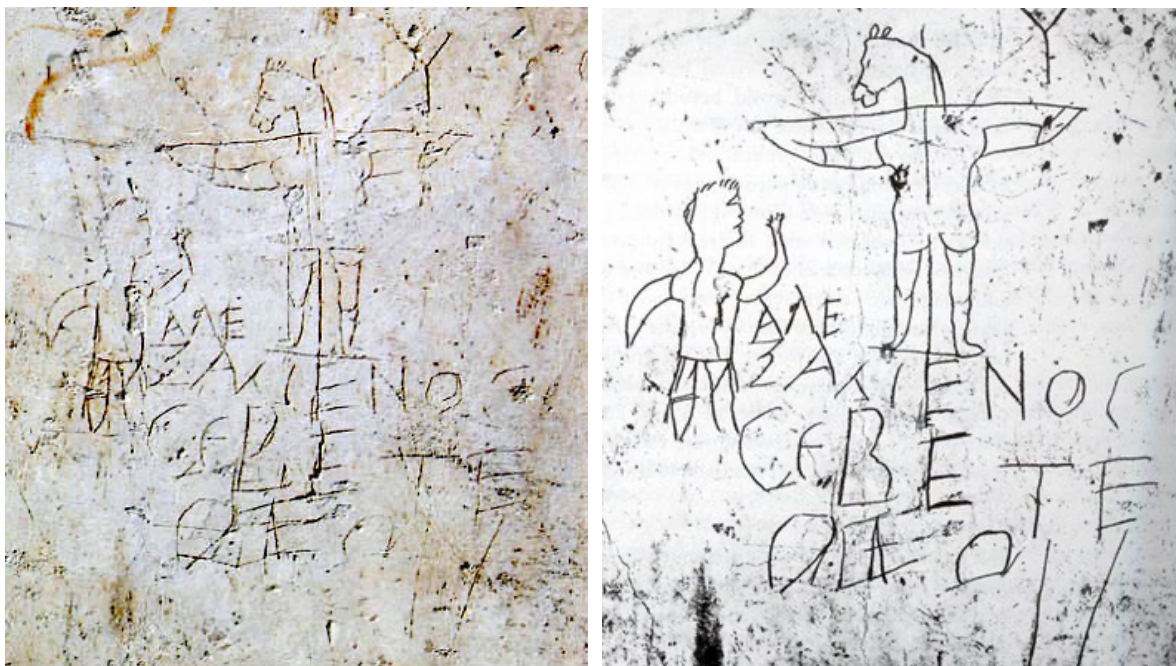
At first, “All spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.” (22). And why not? Luke has already told us that as he grew, he “increased in favor with God *and man*” (2:52). Certainly, this must include those here in the synagogue right now.

But then they stopped and thought about it. It’s like when someone tells you a joke and you at first laugh along out of habit, but then realize that the joke was about you. Except this was no joke. Had he just told his friends and family that this Scripture was being fulfilled right now, as he read? Yes. So they all begin to say, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” Of course they know both Joseph and Jesus. And that’s what hit them. How can this man they’ve known since childhood make such a claim as this? Familiarity breeds contempt. Rather than ask if this is Joseph’s son, as Ryken rightly points out, they should have been asking if this was *the Son of God*, for Luke has told us no less than four times that this is who he is in the last few verses.

Jesus’ next words are stunning. He knows full well what is going on in their hearts. They don’t believe him. These are the kinds of people who *won’t* believe him. So we read,

“He said to them, ‘Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well’” (23). This very cryptic response makes sense if you think about Jesus. His family is poor, we know that. So how can this poor man give anything to anyone? And how could he be a king, as Messiah will be? Second, though they’ve heard about the miracles he’s done in other towns, they don’t believe him unless he proves himself to them. Essentially, they are Israel in the wilderness, putting God to the test, which Jesus has just refused to do.

To illustrate what is really going on in their hearts, I learned this week of the very earliest depiction we have of Jesus. It is called *Alexamenos Graffito* and it dates to the first century. It is not an icon as you might think, but rather, a piece of graffiti drawn by some unknown blasphemer on a plaster wall in Rome. It makes fun of a Christian named Alexamenos for worshipping a criminal who was put to death on a crucifix. It gives Jesus the head of a donkey. The inscription reads, “Alexamenos worships his god.” It is a total mockery.



The same thing is going on here in his hometown. You say you came to heal? Heal yourself first. They obviously thought he was insane.

Jesus adds fuel to the fire. He says next, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown” (Luke 4:24). A brief word here is necessary. The context of Isaiah 61 is very clearly that of priestly work. Priests were the teachers and preachers. Priests made things clean and whole.<sup>12</sup> Many were expecting a king. Now Jesus talks about himself as a prophet. Prophet, Priest, and King. It’s all right here, *again*.

To illustrate his teaching, he picks out two prophets from the OT: Elijah and Elisha. He continues, “But in truth,

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<sup>12</sup> I detail this in *Waters of Creation: A Biblical-Theological Study of Baptism* (Erie, CO: Waters of Creation Publishing, 2009), 5-6.

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” (Luke 4:25-27). This is truly subversive, not only because he dares to equate himself with the two greatest prophets of the OT, but because he picks out two stories that show the prophets only healing *the Gentiles!*

His point is, you must have *faith*. There were many widows, but Elijah was sent only to Zarephath, where a woman was waiting who would believe him. Naaman was a foreign soldier of a despised people, but he had the faith to travel all the way down to the Jordan to be healed, merely by the word of the prophet that it was there or nowhere.

The *point is not missed by his friends*. “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*” (28-29). The angry mob had their sights set on some hill, perhaps Mt. Precipice, which overlooks the valley below. It’s interesting that the



Devil just told himself to throw him off the temple, now the people are going to try and do the job for him.

But this **story concludes** with an ironic miracle. “**But passing through their midst, he went away**” (30). He wouldn’t do a miracle for *them*, but he did a miracle for *himself*, and did they even realize it? Not before it was too late. How did he do it? Who can say? It was a miracle. This part of the story concludes as a kind of **foretaste of what is to come with Jesus**, both in the constant rejection he will face, and in the fact that it is not yet his time to die. He will choose the time, not them. For now, his ministry is only beginning.

## Luke 4:31-37—Jesus and the Unclean Spirit in the Synagogue



In the second story, we find Jesus now “**going down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee.**” “Going down” makes sense, because Nazareth is between 1100-1600 ft. above sea level, while Capernaum is 700 ft. below it. The city lies on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, less than three miles from where the Jordan flows into it.

Like he did in Nazareth, so now he does in Capernaum. “And he was teaching them on the Sabbath” (31). Like his hometown, we read, “And they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority” (32). This is the same reaction we see from the people at the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7:29), which in fact is less than a mile away overlooking the valley. In fact, with the placement of Matthew’s Sermon right after the temptation, this may refer to the same sermon!

Next comes the purpose of this story. It is rather jarring, unexpected. For they are, essentially, in church! “And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are-- the Holy One of God’” (Luke 4:33-34). We don’t have enough time today, so we’ll learn much more about what demons are in Luke 8 and the story of Legion.

Instead of that, because we all know that they are supernaturally evil creatures in the Gospels, let’s just think about what purpose this serves. First, we have an unclean demon in a synagogue. What are the Jews doing allowing something

unclean in the house of God? Something is very wrong with this picture.

Second, this is an obvious contrast between what we have just seen. His own friends and family did not know who Jesus was a moment ago, but now, **this totally foreign entity** in a town far away **knows exactly** who Jesus is. Curiously, Luke does not choose “Son of God” this time, but “**the Holy One of God,**” probably having to do with his priestly ministry and the fact that they are in a synagogue. Indeed, this very synagogue still has ruins that you can tour in this very place to this day.



Third, this plays very much into **the genealogy** where we said that seventy generations between the binding of the sons of God and the coming of Jesus are being fulfilled. At that time, the prophecy stated, the **judgement would come upon the evil spirits**. This is what the demon is very obviously alluding too when it says, “**Have you come to destroy us?**”



Fourth, notice the strange mixture of singular and plural pronouns: “destroy *us*...” and “*I* know...” This is typical of demon possession with their **confusions** of nearly all things black and white. It also shows the deep connection between the demonic entity(ies) and the human host. It must have been a truly terrifying experience for everyone in the building, for it seems to come out of the blue.

Finally, unlike Nazareth, where they demanded a sign and Jesus wouldn't give one (except to escape), **Jesus performs a miracle here**. It is a miracle with words, “**But Jesus rebuked him...**” (35). It is a miracle of **exorcism**, “... **saying, ‘Be silent and come out of him!’**” Unlike exorcists (old and new) and their rituals that can take weeks and even months, and even then might not work, with just **a single word**, Jesus commands the demon to come out. And thus it finishes, “**And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm**” (35).

Next, we are meant to continue **contrasting the two stories**. “**And they were all amazed and said to one another, ‘What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!’**” (36). These people were **not clamoring for proof** of anything. So Jesus healed the man. And the people were amazed, but rather

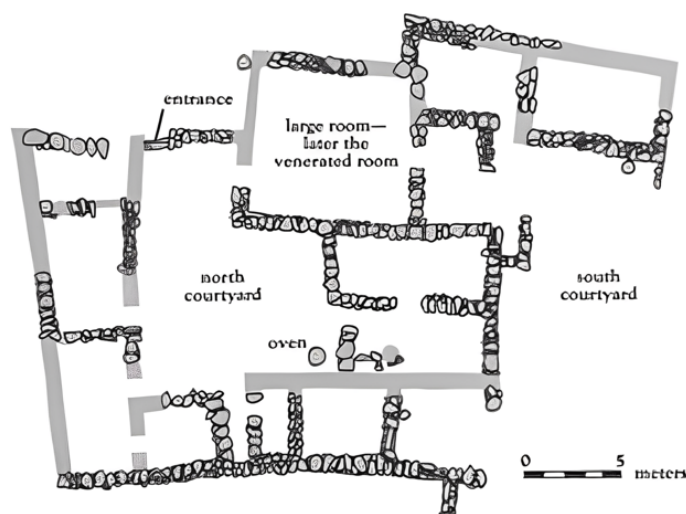
than try to throw him off a cliff it says, “**And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region**” (37). Surely, the word eventually got back to Nazareth and his mother and brothers and sisters and friends.

In the structure of the passage, **this is the geographical center**, a synagogue in Capernaum, an unclean spirit in the house of God; a man who can exorcize a demon with merely a word; an unclean man, surely made poor by his pitiable condition, being made clean; a man in slavery to the devil being set free. Jesus is now doing exactly what he told the people at Nazareth that he had come to do. They may not see the proof, but we get to. There is no one like Jesus Christ, the Messiah of God. Never has been and never will be again. Look at him and what you are told and ask yourself what you think about this man.

## Luke 4:38-41—Jesus Accepted in a New Home

But we’ve only just begun the Gospel. **The next story** takes us to **a house in Capernaum**, and it is set up to deliberately contrast with Nazareth. It says, “**And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon’s house**” (38). Now, we have not met Simon yet in the Gospel, but we all know he

will later become Peter. This is **Peter's house**. Incredibly, around 40 years ago, under the foundation of what is today a Byzantine St. Peter's Church, which is itself just 100+ feet away from the synagogue, there are ruins of what is believed to be Peter's actual house.<sup>13</sup>



Next, we see that **Peter was married** (so much for the celibacy of the priesthood). “**Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf**” (**Luke 4:38**). Again, Jesus will perform a miracle, but not because these people were demanding that he prove himself. Rather, they believed he could and even would do it. **They had faith.**<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> **James F. Strange** and Hershel Shanks, “Has the House Where Jesus Stayed in Capernaum Been Found?”

*Biblical Archaeology Review* 8:6 (November/December 1982).

<sup>14</sup> Sharpened the *BAR* pic with picwish.com.

So, “He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them” (39). This can be viewed as the theological center of the structure, and appropriately so, because in it, we have the embodiment of the exact opposite response of his friends in Nazareth. They forced him out of the synagogue and meant to throw him off a cliff as he was rejected in his hometown. Now, Jesus finds a new home, the home of Peter, and in Luke’s Gospel, his mother-in-law becomes the first person who will serve him. Not a man. Not a disciple. A sick (now healed) old woman. Jesus’ kingdom throws the kingdoms of the world upsidedown.

The next verses show even more, this contrast, with the following structure:

- A. teaching (31-32)
- B. exorcism (33-37)
- C. healing (38-39)
- C’. healing (40)**
- B’. exorcism (41)**
- A’. preaching (42-44)

“Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, ‘You are *the Son*

*of God!*’ But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ” (40-41). Like Peter’s mother-in-law, many more are healed of diseases, through the laying on of hands, something we will see in Acts as well. Like the earlier demon exorcism, other demons are dealt with, by a word. This time, they call him the Son of God. This time, they know that he is the Messiah! Incredibly, isn’t it? Demon hounds from the pit of hell know who Jesus is, while so many humans who see him face to face don’t have a clue. That is what this entire passage is about. The Messiah has come. Who will see him? Who will believe him? Who will accept him? Who will not? This is the reason Luke has these stories here at the beginning. He is forcing you to look upon Jesus, as they did, and react to him. Is he **the Messiah** or he is a **delusional, insane lunatic** who has **lied** to the entire world for 2,000 years? If he is the latter, then why does anyone waste their time pretending? If he is the Messiah, why in the world won’t people believe in him?

### **Luke 4:42-44—Jesus Teaching in the Synagogues of Judea**

The passage **ends exactly the way it, and in fact the chapter, began.** “**And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to**



him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, ‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose’” (42-43). Jesus went into a desolate place to be tempted by the devil. Now, he goes into a desolate place to get away from the people. But they find him and desire that the Messiah continue his healing, teaching ministry to them. **They are hungry for spiritual food.** Are you?

But Jesus did not come only for Capernaum. He must **preach the good news** of the kingdom of God **to others** as well. That is why he was sent. Here we have two major themes that we find elsewhere, **the kingdom of God** and **being sent by the Father**. But Luke does not unpack them here. Instead, he simply concludes that “**he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea,**” that is, Galilee of the Romans.

What we are left with today is **a crossroads**. We see that different people had different expectations of the Messiah. Just like many continue to have today, including, of how they think he must be in the future. Some had their expectations met. Others, not so much. The fact is, the Messiah had come as the great Prophet, Priest, and King, not merely of Israel, but of his own Kingdom, which would suddenly

and lastingly impact the world of men. But it would come on Jesus' terms, not ours.

His own **friends** knew him since childhood. Indeed, this included even his own **brothers**, men like James and Jude. But they were **too familiar** with him to believe him. Familiarity breeds contempt. Some sit here in church, week after week, being given great blessings of drawing near to the means of grace. But still, you have not truly ever asked yourself who this Jesus really is. If you are not careful, the time of God's grace will pass you by and that terrible day of judgment will come, because you saw the grace of God and heard the good news, and drew near many times to it, only to reject it. **Don't be like his friends in Nazareth** who threw him out and tried to kill him. May your heart be softened by the word as you hear that he preaches good, not terrible news, as you see that he heals infirmities, casts out demons, displays powers that are unknown in the world of men, publicly before watching eyes. Know that this living Christ continues to perform great miracles today, especially the miracle of the new birth as he calls the dead to life. Do not come to him out of doubt, **but faith**. Do not put God to the test, but see that he has already proven himself faithful many



times over. Come to him and be like those who did not want him to leave.

This is true, not merely for those who have not yet trusted in Christ, but for **you who have**. We are dealing here not merely with the likes of James and Jude, who would later turn to the Lord, but with the likes of Peter, who did at the very beginning. Be hospitable. Be kind. Be loving to one another. And **be full of awe** as you realize again and again that the promises of the coming Messiah are true, they really happened, this same good news has come to you, and God has opened your heart to trust him. **Worship** was the heart of the temptation. Worship is the heart of these stories as well. Be thankful and leave here knowing that you who were once his enemy and a stranger to his promises, poor, blind, and spiritually oppressed have been brought near through the proclamation of the good news, through the opening of your eyes, and the setting free of the tyranny of your own sin and the devil.

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