

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE

Pluralism contends, says American Heritage Dictionary, "that no single explanatory system or view of reality can account for all the phenomena of life."

Rationalism maintains "that reason is the prime source of knowledge and of spiritual truth."

Existentialism "regards human existence as unexplainable..." Søren Kierkegaard, an existential icon, said, "Where am I? What is this thing called the world? Who has lured me into the thing and now leaves me here? How did I come into the world?"

Left to just reason and experience, life is an unsolvable puzzle.

General revelation is available by observing nature, sensing the inner need each of us has to know and relate to a Power greater than ourselves. **Special revelation** occurs when God has spoken to people in dreams, visions, through angels and, most dramatically, by sending His only Son, Jesus Christ, to live among us.

Just as Jesus is fully God yet fully man, so the Bible claims to be fully *inspired* by God, yet *written* by mortals like us. Peter described this miracle (2 Peter 1:21): "...men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Each writer had his own style, but his writing, as included in the Bible, was and is the very Word of God. Paul, who wrote much of the N.T., said all Scripture is God-breathed, or inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Bible has weathered the test of time.... The Scriptures are unique in their manuscripts' quantity, quality and antiquity. Many have sought to ban and destroy the Bible, but their efforts have been futile. The Bible is by far the most popular book in the world."

The O.T. was written in Hebrew. Its *historical* section runs from Creation and the founding of Israel to 400 years before the birth of Christ. Its major message is that God will, at a future date, dispatch His only Son, Jesus Christ the Messiah, to earth to usher in the Kingdom of Heaven, to restore a relationship between the Creator and the people He created.

The Bad News is that we sin. We are not sinners because we *SIN*; no, we sin because we are *SINNERS*. As God had warned Adam and Eve, the *punishment* for disobeying Him was eventual *physical* death -- and what's worse, eternal separation from God.

Ahhh, but there's Good News. God loved the world so much that He sent His one and only Son from heaven to earth to die for all of your sins and mine. With Christ's death on the cross God the Father's requirement for a perfect Sacrifice was totally satisfied, and all our sins -- past, present and future -- were forgiven. To make that forgiveness *ours*,

all God requires of us is to personally *believe* it, thereby accepting His free gift of salvation. When we do, the Bible says we'll have eternal life with Him in heaven after we die -- as opposed to eternal life in a place the Bible calls hell -- where people only *wish they could* die.

The N.T. books were written about A.D. 45-95 and, like the O.T., eventually collected, copied and sent across the Roman Empire.

The Doc in the House -- Luke

Luke was a historian and a physician, given to writing detailed, chronological patient histories, thus qualified to enrich his Gospel, the longest of the four, with many historical details. Sir William Ramsey says of him, "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense. In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

As the N.T.'s only Gentile author, he wrote another part of the N.T., the Book of Acts. He became a close friend of Paul and was in Rome with him when Paul was thrown into prison. Tradition tells us Luke was from Antioch in northern Syria. He died as a bachelor at age 84.

Luke's warm, compassionate narrative was penned probably ten years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It was written to an influential man in Greece named Theophilus, or "lover of God," to confirm Theophilus' faith in the historical Jesus.

Not an eyewitness himself, this book was the result of Luke's painstaking examination of the testimony of eyewitnesses and written sources. He was out to create a comprehensive account of the life of Christ to (a) encourage believers and (b) stimulate others to believe that Christ is who He said He was.

Jesus' great empathy and humanity are stressed, revealing the ideal Son of Man who could relate to sinful, hurting people and be the sinless sacrifice for our salvation. When it comes to the Greek ideal of perfection, nobody else filled the bill but this God-man Jesus. Luke shows Him uniquely qualified to be the Savior of *all* -- Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, wealthy, destitute, loved, hated, politically active and religiously inclined.

Luke takes us back 2,000 years traces the mounting devotion as well as hatred for Jesus that rose simultaneously during His three years of active teaching. It's the Bible's most intricate account of Christ's ancestry (chapter 3). He also gives us the most in-depth of account of His birth (chapter 2), one you'll hear often during the Christmas season.

Let's read 1:1-45.

In Matthew and Mark we looked at John the Baptist's life. Let's read about his birth in 1:57-80.

We pick up the story now after Christ is born as we read 2:21-35.

Only Dr. Luke records what happens during Jesus' twelfth year on earth. Let's go to 2:41-52.

After being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus faces the devil setting up the announcement of His mission on earth. It's in 4:1-21.

Have you heard of "The Transfiguration?" Luke describes it. On a Palestinian hilltop named Mount Tabor Jesus is joined by Moses and Elijah, two of the most revered patriarchs who represented the Jews' vaunted "Law and the Prophets." It had been nine centuries since Elijah had last set foot on earth. For Moses, it was his first visit to Palestine. Let's read 9:28-36.

Jesus has been teaching the crowds in northern Israel and mentoring His twelve disciples. He's just multiplied five measly loaves of bread and two fish, about as lavish as a Long John Silver's "Catch of the Day," to feed a throng of 5,000 men plus women and children. Let's join Him in 9:18-26 as, for the first time, He reveals to His disciples His ultimate mission.

Jesus was consistently hounded by the Jews' religious leaders who fancied themselves as the world's foremost experts on everything. They tried to trap Him into making theological errors. Ultimately, they'd have a more sinister purpose. Let's go to 11:52-12:59.

The Pharisees and teachers of Moses' law got up tight with Jesus for hangin' with the "sin crowd." So, our Hero whips out three of His best stories, using them to illustrate that *religion* is not as important to Him as our *relationship* to Him. 15:1-32 is the key chapter in this book, spelling out the Good News in the language of the street. Let's read it.

Luke covers Jesus' arrest by the Roman soldiers, His trials, His crucifixion and resurrection, but we'll get into that in the Book of John next time.

The final scene in Luke takes place east of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. Jesus has led His disciples there after appearing to them in His resurrected body, having conquered the grave as promised. Let's close with 24:36-53.

His Deal

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