

Commentary on Luke's Gospel  
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**SECTION 2 continued (3.1-4.44).**

**Chapter 4 Jesus Triumphs Over Temptation In The Wilderness And Reveals Himself As The Anointed Prophet.**

The words 'Of God' meaning 'son of God' at the end of chapter 3 lead us straight into a narrative where Jesus as the Son of God is prominent, and where He is 'full of the Holy Spirit'. He now has to consider the task to which as Son of God, as He has been reminded He is by what followed His baptism, has called Him. He has been called to a full orb'd ministry. It is more than just to preach. 'Full of the Holy Spirit' signifies more than 'filled (pimplemi) with the Holy Spirit', for the latter always refers to being inspired in preaching and prophesying, whereas the former includes having divine wisdom (Acts 6.3) and divine faith (Acts 6.5) and includes the performing of miracles (Acts 6.5 with 6.8; 8.6-7). This filling (pleres) can be permanent (the Ephesians are told to 'go on being filled' (pleroo) in Ephesians 5.18) and we are probably not intended to see the phrase as applying just to what happens next but as applying to His whole ministry. His anointing in the Holy Spirit is in order that He might proclaim the Good News and perform miracles (4.18) and will continually be the source of His power and authority throughout.

**Note On Being Full (pleres) Of The Holy Spirit.**

If we are to properly understand teaching about the Holy Spirit we must carefully interpret the different phrases used about Him. Two distinct verbs are used about the filling of the Holy Spirit, pleroo and pimplemi, and the former connects with the noun pleres. Let us glance at them in order.

- 1). 'Full (pleres) of the Holy Spirit.' This is used of Jesus' permanent and unique experience of the Holy Spirit (4.1), an experience which began with His being 'drenched in the Holy Spirit' after His baptism, and undergirded all His ministry from then on, resulting in His rejoicing in Spirit (10.21) and finally promising His disciples that He will send to them power from above (24.49). In His case we can hardly doubt that 'full of the Holy Spirit' is to be read in all through Luke's Gospel. The Holy Spirit was not given by measure to Him (John 3.34). The same phrase is used in Acts in order to describe those who were recognised as being in a good spiritual state, as manifested by being full of wisdom, faith or spiritual insight (Acts 6.3, 5; 7.55; 11.24). It was men who were full of the Holy Spirit who went out preaching and performing wondrous miracles of healing and casting out evil spirits (Acts 6.3, with 6.8, 10; 8.5-8).
- 2). 'Filled (pleroo) with the Holy Spirit.' This 'being filled' (pleroo) is in both cases of its use evidence of continuing spirituality and reveals itself in joy and praise, and is for all believers (Acts 13.52; Ephesians 5.18). It is clearly distinguished from the use of pimplemi.
- 3). 'Filled (pimplemi) with the Holy Spirit'. The result of this filling is always inspired words. In the case of John the Baptist and Paul it is a permanent experience, otherwise it is a temporary experience for a particular purpose. It parallels 'the Spirit of the Lord came upon --' in the Old Testament which could also be permanent or temporary. It is found in Luke 1.15, 41, 67; Acts 2.4; 4.8, 31; 9.17; 13.9.

End of note.

**Jesus Goes Into The Wilderness To Prepare For His Life's Work and Is Tempted by the Devil (4.1-12).**

So as He contemplates His future ministry Jesus has to consider the way in which He will go about it, and for that purpose He goes into the wilderness as John had done previously. (Mark says that the Holy Spirit 'drove' Him there). There as He considers the way ahead He has to face the Tempter. Whether this was just in His thoughts (spirit to spirit - consider 'led in the Spirit in the wilderness'), or whether He actually saw the Devil (diabolos = 'slanderer') we do not know. If the latter we can be sure he came, not in any grotesque form, but disguised as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11.14). It may well be that towards the end of His lonely vigil Jesus met an attractive stranger in the wilderness through whom the Devil spoke with the subtlety of the serpent, as later he would take Judas and speak through him. We certainly come across such evil possessed men later (e.g. Acts 13.6). (Compare how Jesus can even address Peter as 'Satan' (Mark 8.33).

The story of the temptations of Jesus is paralleled in Matthew, but not in Mark where it is only referred to in summary. There is, however, a difference in the order of the temptations from Matthew. Both Matthew and Luke saw the story as a whole and presented it in that way, drawing out three examples, the threeness indicating the completeness of His temptation and His victory over it, and putting them in the order that suited their purpose. Indeed over the period of forty days the same temptations no doubt came again and again in differing orders and in different ways, as Jesus wrestled with how he should approach the future. Both Mark and Luke certainly seem to suggest that they covered most of the forty days (Mark 1.13, and see Luke 4.2, 13 which agrees), for there Jesus was facing up to His future, and how He was to use the awesome powers over which He now had control. There can therefore be no question of a specific order for them, and to speak of one order being more correct than the other is to simplify a complex situation. What is described here is the culmination of His being tempted over the whole forty days on how to conduct His ministry, illustrating the essentials of what was involved, not a stage managed three part drama. (We may also note that it is only the leading temptation that is actually said to be after the forty days were almost up. It is we who assume a chronological order. The 'then' (tote) in Matthew 4.5 can mean 'at that time' and need not be specific). What is not mentioned is that at the same time He worked His way through to what His paths should be. That will be unfolded in what follows.

But what is significant in Luke is that He is depicted as ending up with the temptation in Jerusalem as the climax of the temptations. The order is not chronological but thematic. The idea of Jerusalem is central in Luke's Gospel. In this Gospel Jesus makes a set path for Jerusalem (9.31, 51, 53; 13.22, 33; 17.11; 18.31; 19.11, 28) even in childhood (2.22-38, 41-50) and when it comes to His resurrection appearances we are only told about those that occurred in Jerusalem. To Luke, as a Greek writing to Greeks, Jerusalem symbolised Judaism and Israel. All therefore to do with the Messiah centres around Jerusalem. Thus to manifest Himself in Jerusalem is the climax of His temptations, and foreshadows His final victory in Jerusalem. There He will reveal Himself in His resurrection, a far greater 'sign' than is suggested here, but a sign with a purpose. In Matthew, where the Kingship of Jesus is emphasised, it is the expression of world Kingship that is the ultimate temptation on which to end. Here it is the temptation to perform a spectacular sign in Jerusalem. Both were temptations He probably faced again and again as he prayed in the wilderness.

The temptations of Jesus illustrate 1 John 2.15-16. The desires of the flesh are prominent in the temptation after bread when He was hungry, the desires of the eyes in terms of seeing all the kingdoms of the world as possibly belonging to Him, and the pride of life in the temptation to demonstrate to all in the wrong way His supreme power and authority and importance to God. But as John points out concerning such temptations, 'these are not of the Father but are of the world', and in each reply Jesus makes, this is made clear.

We will deal further with the significance of the temptations as we go through the text, but it is important to recognise that throughout the temptations, which occur while He is meditating on His approach to His new ministry, loyalty to God is what is central. How He will approach

His mission in that light is what is in question, together with what His attitude towards concerning His God-given gifts will be. This comes out in each reply. 'Man shall not live by bread alone', 'you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve', 'you shall not put the Lord your God to the test'. His reply is thus that He will succeed only by being God-centred, and seeking to do only His will, and it is then revealed as not His will to use His powers for selfish ends, or in seeking glory and power, or in performing extravagant signs. His purpose must be to let God shine through. It is a mission therefore that to some extent, whether high or low, we can all participate in (Matthew 5.16).

One last word may be said about the temptations, and that is that they place Jesus firmly in the line of those who had gone before. Adam, the first man, was tempted in Eden (Genesis 3). Abraham was tested with regard to Isaac his son (Genesis 22.1). David was tested with regard to his kingship (2 Samuel 24.1/2 Chronicles 21.1). And so also was Job, the man with whom God had said that He was well pleased (Job 1-2). Now here was the new Adam, the Fulfiller of the Abrahamic promises, the Greater David, the One in Whom God has declared Himself well pleased. He was a sitting target for the Devil.

But what did the Devil see? He saw the kind of man he hated, one of those who sucked up to God. He saw one Who had come to fulfil the prophecies which were bad news for him. He had seen the details of His birth, and what had been said about Him, He had seen His attendance at 'His Father's House'. He had even seen what had occurred at His baptism. It was not good. But he remembered back to Eden. There too there had been a 'son of God'. There too everything had been against him. But with extreme cunning, a little deceit, and a knowledge of human nature he had won. And now he could win again. For with all his knowledge and perception he saw One Who was only a man. How could he have dreamed that God would humiliate Himself to such an extent as to become man? It was beyond His distorted perception to appreciate. So while he recognised that God had fortified this Man with huge powers, and had set Him apart as His 'Holy One', every man had his weak spot. It was simply a matter of probing until he found the weak spot of Jesus.

The passage may be analysed as follows following the pattern which occurs a number of times in the Pentateuch where there is a threefold pattern:

- a Jesus goes into the wilderness full of the Holy Spirit (1a).
- b There He was led in the Spirit for forty days being tempted by the Devil (in Matthew by the Tempter) (1b-2).
- c Temptation 1. Command that this stone become bread (3)
- d Answer. It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone' (4).
- c Temptation 2. All the kingdoms of the world to be given to Him if He will bow down and worship the Devil (5-7).
- d Answer. It is written 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve' (8).
- c Temptation 3. Throw yourself from the pinnacle of your Father's House, for has He not promised to protect you (9-11).
- d Answer. It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test' (12).
- b And when the Devil had completed every temptation, he departed from him for a season (14).
- a And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and fame went out concerning him through all the region round about, and He taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all (15).

Note that in 'a' Jesus goes into the wilderness full of the Holy Spirit and in the parallel returns in the power of the Spirit into Galilee. In 'b' He is tempted by the Devil, and in the parallel the Devil ceases his temptation. The three temptations and the answers are the central part of the chiasmus, centring on what is important. (This threefoldness occurs in chiasmi a number of

times in the Pentateuch. See for example our treatment of the Balaam narratives in Numbers).

4.1-2 'And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led in the Spirit in the wilderness during forty days, being tempted of the Devil. And he ate nothing in those days, and when they were completed, he was hungry.'

Now full of the Holy Spirit Jesus departs from the Jordan and led in the Spirit enters the wilderness for forty days without food. This follows the pattern of Moses who twice went into the mountain to meet with God and went without food in order to receive the Law (Exodus 34.28; Deuteronomy 9.9). Possibly we are to see in this that Jesus was here receiving a new Law. Compare also how Elijah endured without food for forty days after being provided with food by an angel twice (1 Kings 19.5-8), resulting in his receiving a revelation of God and instructions for his future, and how it was in the wilderness that John received 'the word of God' (3.2). So Jesus is following in the path of the three greatest of the prophets as He too prepares for His future. He has not entered the wilderness in order to be tempted. He has entered it in order to receive the word of the Lord, and guidance as to His future.

We may also see here that Jesus entered into the experience of Israel in the wilderness where God tested them for forty years (Deuteronomy 8.2; 13.3-4). Here too was a test as to whether love for God would triumph over personal self-seeking and aggrandisement, and where Israel failed, Jesus, representing the new Israel, would succeed. In point of fact it can be noted that all Jesus' replies to the Devil's temptations are taken from a passage that reflects this time in the wilderness ((Deuteronomy 6.13-8.3).

But we must not make the purpose of being tested the reason for entering the wilderness. The leading by the Spirit was primarily in order to consider His future and to receive the word of God, as John had before Him, not in order to be tempted. For in 11.4 Jesus teaches His disciple to pray that they might not be led into temptation. The temptations that He faced rather revealed what subjects His mind was on while in the wilderness, how to win the world, and how to reveal His Messiahship. Yet when anyone seeks to hear the word of God inevitably temptation will come, for the Devil, the great deceiver, will seek to turn them from God's path. And thus was He tempted of the Devil as He considered His future before God, temptation brought in order to lead Him to go about His future work in the wrong way. How the Devil did that comes out especially in the other two temptations, but it is reflected here also.

Having been without food for nearly forty days Jesus began to feel hungry, and it was then that the Devil seized what he thought was his opportunity. We should note from this, and from what happens later, that the Devil is not seen as omniscient. Indeed with regard both to Jesus and the early church in Acts he constantly made errors which instead of achieving his purpose helped to bring about God's purposes.

It is clear that the disciples learned of His experiences from Jesus Himself. Thus is it made quite clear that Jesus did believe in a personal Devil, or Satan as he is described elsewhere. Had He merely been pandering to innocence He would not have introduced him where it was not necessary. It was only necessary here because it was true, and in order to be a warning to them of something that would be real for them too.

It should be noted that the temptation comes from without. (That is true even if it came into the mind rather than from a physical presence). He could not be tempted from within, for He was without sin. But He was as much open to temptation from without as we are. And He had the same physical feelings and desires, although in His case not intermingled with sinfulness. They were untainted. But He still knew hunger. He was in essence, as Man, in the same position as Adam before the Fall.

'He was hungry.' Here we have the reminder that Jesus was true man. While He was the Son of God in an exalted sense, He was also a son of Adam. Thus it was not only the Son of God of chapter 1 Who faced this temptation, it was very much the son of Mary.

**4.3 ‘And the Devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone that it become bread.”’**

The Devil (or as Matthew puts it, ‘the Tempter’) then indicates one of the small white round stones that must have looked very much like bread and suggests that He command it to become bread. Note that the very temptation depends on Jesus’ confidence that He can do so. It assumes that Jesus was even at this stage aware of His total potential.

Note the subtle ‘if’. Was Jesus really the Son of God, was He sure that He had what it took to fulfil His Messiahship? Why not make a little trial of it now, and feed Himself at the same time, thus making it clear to Himself that He did have these special powers which He had never yet used? After all, he may have pointed out, God had provided Elijah with angel food in the wilderness, thus it could be no sin to feed on miraculous food in such a situation, for His forty days were over. Now He could well take the time to see to His own needs.

While no Messianic reference is specifically made here it may well point to the fact that some time during the forty days a previous temptation mooted earlier had been to provide bread in a similar way for the hungry. One of the expectations of the Messiah was that like Moses He would provide ‘bread from heaven’, He would provide a ‘Messianic banquet’ (compare Isaiah 25.6). This comes out in that later as a kind of Messianic sign Jesus does multiply bread for a crowd (9.12-17), as Elisha had done before Him (2 Kings 4.42-44). These last incidents reveal that it was not the miraculous provision of food that was wrong, but the doing it for the wrong reason, either in order to obtain popularity and a following, or in this case for His own selfish purposes. It suggests that the Devil clearly knew what He might be intending to do in the future and suggested that in these particular circumstances He would be justified in doing a little practise in advance and feeding Himself, just as Elijah had been fed by angels. This would then bolster His belief that He was the Son of God, and do Himself a good turn at the same time. Thus the temptation was that He do ‘the right thing’ for the wrong motive. There is no greater temptation than that.

That we need to bring in the Messianic reference comes out in that otherwise the temptation would have been rather foolishly naive. Playing tricks with stones would hardly be a temptation. It was only if it was linked with the most sacred possibility in the future that it could be represented as almost legitimate. ‘You will be doing it then, why not do a little practise now, and give yourself confidence for the future?’

We will note as we consider these temptations that each of them was offering a quick fix to a Messianic problem. Here Jesus was hungry. By a quick fix, using His powers as the Son of God, He could set that to right in an instant. The next stage would have been the quick fix that would have solved the world’s hunger (how could He refuse to offer to the world what He had taken for Himself?). But would the world’s need have been satisfied? The world would still have continued on with its inner hunger, and with no one to satisfy it. In the next temptation He will be offered a quick fix to taking the world under control, but without remedying its greatest need, deliverance from sin. And then He will be offered the quick fix which will win over the whole of Jerusalem, but to what purpose? To be a seven day wonder. No wonder Jesus, guided by the Spirit, resisted them.

**4.4 ‘And Jesus answered him, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone.” ’**

Jesus reply from Scripture is that man shall not live by bread alone (Deuteronomy 8.3). The point was twofold. Firstly that material things must not become such a consuming passion that they come in the way of doing God’s will. And secondly, in view of the context of the quotation, that what God has to say is more important than bread. His meat is to do the will of God (John 4.34). Man should not be seeking his own benefit but for what results from God’s will and word. Had God wanted Him to be fed he would have sent His angel, but for Jesus to descend to what the Devil suggested would be to lower Himself from the standard of

the word of God and make Him not fit to be its minister. It would be to use powers, given to Him for His Messianic task, for selfish purposes. How great a warning this should be to all who receive gifts for God's work that none of it should be spent in order to gratify our own desires.

We should note that had Jesus used His powers to produce bread He would have been going against His own teaching. In the Sermon on the Mount He tells His followers that their concentration should be on seeking the Kingly Rule of God and His righteousness with the result that 'all these things (food and clothing) will be yours as well' because 'your Heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things (Matthew 6.32-33). It would have been no example at all if He had already betrayed this principle by, on the first occasion of real hunger, creating for Himself what His Father had not given Him.

Why does Jesus call upon the Scriptures? Certainly it may be as an example to us, but equally certainly it was because having emptied Himself of the availability of His deity He was dependent on the Scriptures, in communion with His Father, to know the path that He should take. He walked as we walk, in the light of the Scriptures. But from His earliest years He had learned them well, so that when He needed guidance His Father could bring them to His aid.

'It is written.' This was a recognised way of quoting Scripture. It made clear that therefore what was said must be true, and must be obeyed. Once it was seen as 'written' in the Scriptures all argument ended for they were the Scriptures of truth, the word of God (Mark 7.13).

Some good manuscripts do add 'but by every word of God' (A D Theta f 1 f 13), but Aleph B W omit it, and while we can see why a scribe would add it, it is difficult to see how it could drop out a number of times. However, even if it is not there its implication is there from Deuteronomy 8.3.

We may perhaps as a postscript compare Jesus' position here with that of Israel at Massah and Meribah in Exodus 17.1-8 with Deuteronomy 6.16 (which Jesus later quotes in verse 12). There too in the wilderness there had been a crying need for sustenance, but how different had been their response to that of Jesus. In this as in many other ways Jesus repeated the history of Israel and succeeded where they had failed.

4.5 'And he led him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.'

The next temptation that we learn of is that of being 'led up' and shown all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. Even if this merely means of the Roman Empire there is no place on earth where these could possibly be seen. It could only happen in the mind. This would seem to confirm that these temptations were largely in the mind. But without an outside source to bring them to His attention, Jesus would never have faced them.

There then spread before His mind was the uttermost part of the earth that He had been sent to reach. It would take much time and much suffering to do so.

Luke omits mention of the mountain, probably because he wants all attention to be directed on what is seen. It was in any case only a visionary mountain.

4.6-7 'And the Devil said to him, "To you will I give all this authority, and the glory of them, for it has been delivered to me, and to whoever I will I give it. If you therefore will worship before me, it shall all be yours." '

But there was a short cut available, a quick fix. The Devil has been allowed a certain level of authority over these Kingdoms (something of this is made known in Daniel 10), although it is only because man has submitted to it, or even sought it in its idolatry. Yet clearly if the temptation were to be meaningful Jesus must have accepted that there was truth in what the Devil said. He claimed that he was able to give to Jesus authority over all these kingdoms (here indeed was something for Caesar to be afraid of), and give Him their glory (all their

wealth and power), for it is in his hands and he is able to give it. The Devil clearly believed that God had given him permission to do this (compare how he had sought permission in other circumstances in Job 1-2). So if Jesus was only willing to bow and worship him, submitting to his ways, then it could all be His.

Here was an alternative to the way of suffering. The prophets had suffered because they had not controlled the kingdom. But Jesus could control all kingdoms, and then do what He would with them. Of course, like Adam He would have lost His integrity and His righteousness, but He had only to think to realise how much good He could do. He could rule them wisely and justly and thus almost accomplish His purpose (of course He would eventually die but that was yet a long time ahead and not to be thought of). The very fact that Jesus is seen as interested in such a position demonstrates that His concern is not just for Israel, but for the world.

It does seem that we must recognise here that the Devil does not fully realise Who he is talking to. By His self-emptying even the Devil had been deceived. But he did know that He was the One sent from God to deal with sin. And that was what he was seeking to prevent. However, there was some awareness there, for he carefully avoids drawing His attention to the fact that He is the Son of God. He realises only too well that this would be incompatible with what he is suggesting. He is trying to make Him a 'son of Belial'.

Outwardly for Jesus there was great temptation. Much of what He wanted to achieve could be achieved. He could go out and by the power now available to Him He could subdue the world and subject it to His will (at least outwardly). And if he submitted to the Devil there would be no opposition. The Devil would be on His side. It would fulfil prophecy (Psalm 2.8, but ignoring verse 7; Isaiah 9.7, but ignoring verse 6; Daniel 7.14, but ignoring verse 13). And instead of humiliation and suffering He could have power and splendour and glory, (but without being the Son of God). And He could lead the people justly. But what He would not be able to do was lead them to God and to truth. He would have surrendered that ability. Nor would the hearts of men be changed. He would become a Messiah, but a false Messiah. He would be trying to achieve some of God's purposes in ways that were not of God, and He would end up with a world empire full of sinners, whose end was destruction.

Again we recognise that in His self-emptying He recognises His mission, for He has learned it from the Scriptures, But He also knows that it is His Father's will that He be identified with the suffering Servant, and the anointed Prophet of Isaiah, although as yet not being fully aware of all the implications. This must all be so for this to be a temptation at all. And thus again for His solution He turns to the word of God.

4.8 'And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve." '

It was not difficult for One who sought to be obedient to know what to do. For it was written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve' (Deuteronomy 6.13). This was the principle on which His whole life had been lived, and He recognised that nothing must come before this. If the Father's will was to be the way of suffering, so be it. But what was sure was that God must come before all. To submit His will to that of any other for whatever reason could not even be contemplated. And so He gives His reply to the Devil. Whatever he offers it will not be enough, for He is God's Servant and will worship and serve Him only. God's purposes must be carried out in God's way.

That there is Messianic implication here is clear, for many of the Old Testament promises for the Messiah had been of ruling over the kingdoms of the world. That task He could have fulfilled had He taken advantage of the Devil's offer. But it would have involved submission to another than God, and that was not what being the Messiah was all about. Thus He declares His decision on the basis of Scripture, which is constantly His guide.

It is also interesting to note that what Jesus is rejecting here is not only a temptation but the dream of many in Israel. It was their hope and longing that the Messiah would arise and defeat the nations of the world and set Israel in the highest place. But here Jesus turns that idea down. He knew that He was in fact powerful enough to achieve what Satan had offered even without Satan's help. But as a way of bringing about God's purposes He rejected it. He later explains why to Pilate. 'My kingship is not of this world. If my kingship were of this world then would my servants fight' (John 18.36). Then He explains that He had come to be the King Who witnesses to the truth which is precisely the position that He takes up here.

4.9-11 'And he led him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge concerning you, to guard you', and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest haply you dash your foot against a stone.'"

The first temptation had been physical, the second political, although with great physical advantages, the third is religious. It was to do with favour in Jerusalem. By one great act, one quick fix, He could become the darling of the Jewish religion in Jerusalem. By this great demonstration He would be revealed as the darling of God, as the protected One, as the One who was borne by angels. By it He could win the favour even of the religious leaders. The Jews demanded signs (11.16, 29; 1 Corinthians 1.22). It would be the 'sign' that they were always looking for, and reveal Him as a child of the Temple. Of course, it would mean turning from the path of prophetic truth, for the leaders would not put up with what they saw as 'heresy', as their fathers had not before them, but as long as He was compliant He would have their full support. Here then was the easy way to win men over, but to what?

The Devil knew of the regard that Jesus had for His Father's House (2.49). Surely therefore, here if anywhere he would be able to trust His Father to watch over Him. What He must do then is prove this to the nation. Let Him then climb to the pinnacle of the Temple and throw Himself off. Had He not Ezekiel's example to go by? Ezekiel had been caught up by what appeared to be an angel and by the Spirit and had flown through the air (Ezekiel 8.3; 3.12-14; 11.1). Why then would His Father not do the same for Him?

The pinnacle of the Temple is usually seen as the royal colonnade on the south side of the outer court which overlooks a deep ravine. To dive from there into the ravine would make a spectacular display. Others have seen it as the lintel over the gate of the Temple, or the apex of the Temple. There was a belief that the Messiah would appear on the roof of the Temple, why not then add to it by diving off and really making an impact?

But the Devil has now become more subtle. He will not just make a suggestion, he will support it from Scripture (although a little misquoted, for he drops out the significant words 'in all your ways', in other words in the normal course of life). Jesus keeps quoting Scripture, well, let Him consider what the Scripture says, it says "He will give his angels charge concerning you, to guard you' (Psalm 91.11), and again, 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest haply you dash your foot against a stone' (Psalm 91.12). So surely if Jesus launches Himself from His Father's House (2.49), how can he possibly doubt (unless He does not believe the Scripture) that as His Son, His angels will watch over Him and bear Him up and prevent even a foot being dashed against the stone? (That is surely what a father does in his house).

Then by this action He can convince Himself, and others, that He really is the Son of God, vindicate the Scriptures, and at the same time demonstrate to the people the preciousness of His life to God, and that He is the Son of His Father. Who then would fail to believe? And would it not be a demonstration of His great faith? (The Pharisees would later approach Him with a similar temptation (11.29 with Matthew 16.1)).

We are not to think that the Devil wanted Him to do it at that moment. He was only there in vision. The idea was possibly that He should do it later when the Temple was crowded.

**4.12 ‘And Jesus answering said to him, “It is said, You shall not put to the test the Lord your God.” ’**

Jesus reply was unequivocal. ‘You shall not put to the test the Lord your God’ (compare Deuteronomy 6.16). It is true that God promises His protection to His people, but only as they face the vicissitudes of life, not in order to test out God. It is when they make the Lord their refuge (Psalm 91.9) not when they take advantage of his goodness. To do what was asked would not be an example of great faith but of great presumption. By this, as in the other two replies He has made, He reveals that He considers that attitude towards God is paramount. What comes first is pleasing God and walking before Him. He will perform signs when they are revealing the compassion of God, or when the power of the Devil must be overthrown, or in order to manifest Himself to men of faith so as to increase their faith, for all these are turning men’s thoughts towards God. But He will not do it in order to win men over to Himself alone. Men won over in that way are not won over to God at all.

We can summarise these three prominent temptations as:

- Not being willing to accept from God only what comes to Him in the will of God, but rather using His powers to go outside it.
- Taking the opportunity to use a quick and easy way to power by force, thus ignoring God’s essential purposes of establishing righteousness and ruling not just the people, but the hearts of the people.
- Taking advantage of a suggestion that He use the spectacular in order to win men’s minds by taking wrong advantage of God’s promises.

All these, and all temptations related to them, He had discarded. He now knew from the Scriptures what was the way ahead (4.18-19).

The temptations did not end here. Often when He saw the poverty of the people and the struggle for food He must have been tempted to solve their problems, and there was a constant danger that the people would seek to stir Him to physical attempts to seek power. But He knew that neither the one nor the other would solve the problems of the world. Today in some parts of the world men have sufficiency, and over sufficiency of food. Are they thereby better people? History has demonstrated that when men grow fat they grow sinful. And today we have nations with comparatively righteous laws. But are their citizens without sin?

But in some ways the last temptation was the one He experienced most in the future. He would constantly have to decide when He should use His powers, and when He should refrain from doing so. He was challenged to produce signs by the Pharisees (Matthew 16.1) and even to descend from His cross (23.35) at which they would believe in Him (27.40-42). So often in His life it would have been easier to give way and do something spectacular. But He knew that it would not achieve God’s real purpose. Was not what He did do spectacular enough? It was sufficient for those whose hearts were open to believe.

**The Devil Has To Acknowledge Defeat And Retires To Lick His Wounds While Jesus Advances Triumphantly Into Galilee To Preach and Heal (4.13-15).**

**4.13 ‘And when the Devil had completed every temptation, he departed from him for a season.’**

At length, defeated, Satan bowed out. Every temptation that he had put had failed. He must go away and think again. But he was not finished. How could he be? His whole future was at stake. He would leave matters for a while and come back at a later time. There must be a weak spot somewhere.

**4.14-15 ‘And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and fame went out concerning him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.’**

Meanwhile Jesus, having sorted out in His own mind His future, returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. He was still full of the Spirit and walking as the Spirit led Him. And He began preaching and performing miracles in a number of places including Capernaum ('what we have heard done in Capernaum' - verse 23) and His fame went throughout all the region round about, and He taught in their synagogues, and all spoke well of Him and wondered at what He said and did. After His experiences in the wilderness, this was the way that He had chosen to take.

This introduction leads us to expect remarkable things, and demonstrates a considerable ministry, and it is therefore salutary to recognise that the first activity that we are told about in detail is a failure. It is an indication that the Devil is smarting from his defeat and is now reacting. We will see in Acts that this is a typical scenario, initial success, reaction, persecution which causes a change in venue, blessing.

'In their synagogues.' At this time Jesus apparently preached in the synagogues. It is only later that the crowds become so large that the synagogues will not hold them. He may also no longer have been welcomed in many of them.

The description of a powerful and successful ministry in two lines followed by a detailed incident is typical of Luke. Regularly in Acts the continual proclamation of the word is summarised, or even not mentioned, with emphasis being laid on some incident which reflects what is happening. For example in Acts 16 we are told nothing about the preaching that resulted in the lively Philippian church. We are simply given three incidents which reflect it.

#### Jesus Reveals Himself As The Spirit Anointed Prophet of Isaiah (4.16-21).

In this next passage Jesus reveals that the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the coming anointed Prophet is to come about through Himself. It commences with His proclamation of Himself as such in the synagogue at Nazareth, and goes on to demonstrate the different ways in which the prophecy will be fulfilled. But there are mixed reactions to Him and in the end they are so angry at His comments that they drag Him to a precipice in order to kill Him, at which He walks through their midst and goes away. It appears that basic to their anger is His failure to perform miracles in Nazareth (verse 23), which we learn elsewhere is because of their unbelief, an unbelief that prevented them bringing their sick to be healed. They were not going to bring their sick to the local carpenter! It is typical of perverse human beings that although they did not come for healing they still blamed Him because there were no healings. But this is exacerbated when they misunderstand His comments,

We can compare here Matthew 13.53-58; Mark 6.1-5. There is a question as to whether these are describing the same incident, for in Matthew 4.13 Jesus has already left Nazareth in order to dwell in Capernaum. There are also clear differences. In Matthew and Mark Jesus is accompanied by His disciples, while in Luke the disciples are not mentioned. In Matthew/Mark He is represented as having done at least some miracles in Nazareth, while in Luke the impression is that He had done none. Had He even done one or two surely they would not have been so sceptical. In Matthew/Mark the people identify Him in terms of his mother, brothers and sisters, in Luke He is identified in terms of Joseph, this may suggest that in the latter case Joseph was still alive, or had only recently died while in the former case he had been dead long enough for the changed description to become normal. In Matthew/Mark He simply marvels at their unbelief, in Luke they nearly kill Him. Thus in spite of the similarities, which are explicable simply in terms of the fact that both cases occur in His home town/former home town, so that similar reactions and comments arise, they would appear to be different incidents. There is no reason at all why, after time had caused tempers to cool down, Jesus should not have made a second attempt to reach those whom He had known from babyhood and some of whom had at times been so kind to Him. By then He was fully established throughout Galilee as a Prophet, and some who felt friendly towards Him might well have urged him to come back and try again. And it would be in His nature to give them a

second opportunity. The repetition of the proverb is not at all unlikely. It referred equally in both cases.

- a Jesus entered Nazareth where He was brought up (16a).
- b He entered, as His custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read (16b).
- c He read the passage about the Spirit of the Lord being on the Prophet with the consequent results of proclaiming good news, releasing captives, opening the eyes of the blind, freeing those in bondage and proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord, and He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on Him, and He began to say to them, “Today has this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.” (17-21).
- d And all bore Him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” (22).
- e And He said to them, “Doubtless you will say to me this parable, ‘Physician, heal yourself,’ whatever we have heard done at Capernaum, do also here in your own country.” (23).
- d And He said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country.” (24).’
- c But of a truth I say to you, ‘There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land, and to none of them was Elijah sent, 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 Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian’ (25-27).
- b And they were all filled with wrath in the synagogue, as they heard these things, and they rose up, and cast Him forth out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, so that they might throw Him down headlong (28-29).
- a But He passing through the midst of them went His way (30).

It will be noted that in ‘a’ He comes to Nazareth, and in the parallel He goes His way. In ‘b’ He enters the synagogue to read, and in the parallel those in the synagogue drive Him from the synagogue and seek to hurl Him over a cliff. In ‘c’ He proclaims His ministry as the anointed Prophet, and what the consequences are going to be, and in the parallel He describes the consequences of God’s previous activity through His prophets. In ‘d’ they begin to express doubt because He is Joseph’s son and in the parallel he points out that a prophet is not honoured in his own country. In ‘e’, central to their problem is that He is not doing in Nazareth what He has been doing in Capernaum.

4.16a ‘And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up.’

This incident took place some time after Jesus commenced preaching, as in fact verses 15-16 make clear. (Some argue that we find it in Mark 6.1-6 (very much abbreviated), but that is questionable. See above). Either way Luke apparently has knowledge of what happened which was unavailable to Mark, probably because Mark’s source Peter was not present, while Luke’s source was (it may have been His mother). It is clear that Luke wishes to present Nazareth as a kind of official launching point of His ministry, partly because of the suitability of what Jesus said when He was in Nazareth as an introduction to His ministry, and partly because this was where the angel had declared Him to be the Son of the Most High, the Davidic king, and the Son of God (1.32-34). It may well be that the actual launching point was unknown. Alternately it may be because he wants to demonstrate immediately after the temptations how the attack of the Devil always follows blessing, resulting in a move in situation and further blessing (see especially how this pattern is brought out in the case of Paul in Acts 13-14, 16-18).

(Jesus had already ministered for a period in Judaea, but that had been in support of John.

He had not then wanted to diminish John and had not therefore fully identified Himself, even though John had identified Him clearly. But now that John was in prison He launched His own ministry publicly, and that is what Luke is bringing out. See John 1-4. See also Matthew 4.12; Mark 1.14 which both identify the commencement of His ministry in Galilee with the imprisonment of John.)

Nazareth was not a large town, being nestled in a valley on a mountainside, which looked out over the plain of Esdraelon. But it was as, we already know, Jesus' home town. He had grown up there and they had seen His perfect life, and had grown used to it. He was simply particularly well favoured, but He was not important. They saw what we would have given our eyes to see, but it had hardened them against the truth, just as too much of the Gospel can do the same. Too much of what is wonderful makes us lose our sense of wonder. (Everyone knows what the Gospels say, but few have ever really read them. They judge on hearsay. Others have dissected them into little bits and cannot see the forest for the trees.)

4.16b 'And he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read.'

Arriving in Nazareth Jesus went on the Sabbath to the synagogue 'as His custom was'. This may signify that it had regularly been His custom to go to the Nazareth synagogue, which we would anyway have assumed, or it may be referring to His custom on the Sabbath day to go to the nearest Synagogue as in verse 15.

In the Synagogue He stood up to read. This would be at the invitation of the ruler of the Synagogue and was probably part way through the 'service'. This is the first description that we have of a Synagogue service, but if we assume that it followed the pattern of later services it would commence with prayer, the Shema and the Blessings, followed by a reading of the Law. It is only then that someone would be called on to read from the Prophets. The Scriptures would be read in Hebrew and possibly translated into Aramaic.

4.17 'And there was delivered to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written,'

The scroll handed to Jesus was the book of the prophet Isaiah. We do not know whether this was because the reading for the day had been fixed, or simply by the choice of the ruler of the Synagogue. Either way Jesus opened the book at what we know as Chapter 61. This is the description of the Spirit anointed Prophet of the last days. Jesus then read from it.

4.18-19

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives,  
And recovering of sight to the blind,  
To send forth those who are oppressed in deliverance (forgiveness),  
To proclaim the acceptable year (year of acceptance, time of favour) of the Lord.'

The passage describes the Spirit anointed Prophet and what He will achieve. He will preach Good News to the poor, He will proclaim deliverance to captives, and the opening of the eyes of the spiritually blind, He will set at liberty those who are oppressed (this phrase taken from Isaiah 58.6 LXX or equivalent), and He will proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

It need hardly be pointed out that this outlined ministry of the Prophet is a brief description of Jesus future ministry, and it is no accident that this chapter in Luke will continue with a description of His authoritative teaching (verse 32), the deliverance of a man who was captive to evil spirits (verses 33-35), the opening of the eyes of the people (verses 36-37) the healing of a fever (verses 38-39), and then the healing of various diseases and further deliverances from those oppressed with evil spirits (verses 40-41), all fulfilments of the prophecy.

**Note why the Spirit has come on Him. He has come to proclaim Good News. This is what Jesus' message and the message of the early church was all about (see verse 43). And we will soon learn that Jesus Himself is the Good News. The reference to 'the poor' does not mean the destitute. It refers to those who are not of the rich and the mighty (Psalm 49.2), to those who are of humble mind open to salvation (Psalm 69.29). It is used throughout the Old Testament, and especially in the Psalms, to describe those who are spiritually sensitive among the people, largely found among the common classes, because among them wealth, riches and power have not distorted their thinking. They have not been stultified by the deceitfulness of riches and power. Thus they are more openly receptive to God. (See e.g. Psalm 34.6; 35.10; 40.17; 49.2; 68.10; etc.).**

**He has come to proclaim freedom to the captives. The picture is of deliverance and salvation. In the Old Testament the captives were those who had been oppressed by a foreign power as a judgment on their sins. Their release arose because God was having mercy on them and their sins were forgiven (see Jeremiah 29.14). Now they could return home because they had returned to God. So the prophet here is to proclaim salvation and forgiveness, deliverance from sin and from the tyranny of Satan, to those who found themselves bound and oppressed. But we see from what follows that it includes deliverance from captivity by evil spirits.**

**Note also Isaiah 42.7 where it is the Servant of the Lord Who will 'open the blind eyes, bring out the prisoners from the prison, and those who sit in darkness out of the prison house'. There, as here, the blind and the captives and those who are in darkness go together. Again in Isaiah 49.9 the Servant is told 'In the time of favour (the acceptable time) ---you will say to the prisoners, "Go forth", to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves (come in to the light)"' and the result is that they will no longer be hungry or thirsty or needy. In Zechariah 9.9, 12, the coming of the King riding on his ass's colt will result in the 'prisoners of hope' or 'hopeful prisoners' being restored. In each case the thought is of those who are out in the darkness being brought into God's favour and thus finding a new life of freedom. The similarity of phrases identify the Servant and the prophet as the same person.**

**'The recovering of sight to the blind' goes along with this. The emphasis is on the spiritually blind. They walk in darkness and do not know where they are going (see John 12.35).**

**In the reading a line is left out ('He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted'), and instead another line is added further on from Isaiah 58.6, (to send forth those who are oppressed in deliverance (forgiveness)'). It was in fact quite acceptable for the reader not to read the whole in the case of the prophets (but not of the Law of Moses which was sacrosanct). He could omit what he wished. More questionable from a Jewish point of view might be the way that Jesus incorporates, presumably from memory, a line from Isaiah 58.6. But we do not know that this was not permissible, and anyway Jesus as a prophet did not always see the need to follow convention. Perhaps He wanted to include the hint of forgiveness contained in that line. Or perhaps He had in mind the sending forth of His Apostles (those sent forth). Whatever the reason it would be like underlining them for most would recognise the changes and it was intended to make them think.**

**The introduced line reads, 'To send forth those who are oppressed, in deliverance/forgiveness (aphesis).' He may have incorporated this because it speaks of those who are 'sent out' (apostello) having in mind that He will send out those Whom He sets free from sin to deliver others (His Apostles, sent out ones), or His emphasis may be on the forgiveness available for those who are delivered. He wanted all to be aware that forgiveness was available. Forgiveness was also at the root of the preaching of John the Baptist (3.3).**

**'The acceptable year of the Lord' (the year of acceptance, the time of favour) has in mind the year of Yubile, and refers to that time when God was to step in and act again on behalf of His people bringing them relief and blessing. The year of Yubile was the year of cancellation of debts and restoration of lands (Leviticus 25.8-17; Deuteronomy 15.1-11). God's promise for**

**His people was that one day He would step in, in the Jubilee of all Jubilees, delivering them, removing sin, and restoring and blessing them to the full.**

**Thus to declare that that year was now here was to declare a ministry of ‘the last days’, that is, the days in which God will do His final work. ‘The last days’ began here, continued in the Acts of the Apostles, and have continued even to this day. It will be noted that He does not read about ‘the day of vengeance of your God’. That yet awaited the future for He was here to save and not to judge (John 3.17), and the judgment would take place when God drew history to a close.**

**4.20 ‘And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on him.’**

**Having read the passage standing, a mark of respect for the Scriptures, He gave the scroll back to the Synagogue attendant and then sat down (probably in the special seat allocated) in order to preach. It was quite normal to speak sitting down. And all eyes in the Synagogue were fixed on Him ready for what He had to say. We are intended to sense the expectancy.**

**4.21 ‘And he began to say to them, “Today has this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.” ’**

**There would have been a great stirring at His next words for He declared, “Today has this Scripture been fulfilled in your ears.” Here was a clear declaration that He was present among them as the Spirit anointed Prophet, (as what had happened after His baptism had made clear to Him). ‘Today’ stressed that in Him God’s promised period of salvation was now commencing. We can imagine the astonished looks that passed between them as what He had said came home to them. Here was the local carpenter, and what claims He was making for Himself.**

**That this description of the anointing of the Holy Spirit was Jesus’ own interpretation of what had happened after His baptism should be noted by all who wish to actually be true to Scripture. While He was there declared to be both King and Servant, we learn here that He saw His anointing with the Holy Spirit as essentially as a Prophet, ready for His ministry.**

**4.22 ‘And all bore him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”**

**They all took note of what He had said. This probably refers not only to His opening words, but also to words which followed. Luke is only giving us the gist of what is being said. From what follows we would expect to read antagonism in this verse, and it can in fact be read like that. They bore witness to what He said, were quite astonished at it, even though they were words of grace, and queried how Joseph’s son could talk like this. Other, however see it as their at first being impressed by Him, but eventually reacting when they remembered Who He was.**

**‘Bore witness’ could mean favourably or antagonistically. The fact that they wondered at how he could speak such gracious words might suggest that it meant favourably, in which case the atmosphere is to be seen as changing when they suddenly shook themselves and realised Who it was Who was speaking. He was only the local carpenter! But it may be that they were antagonistic from the start, even though they had to admit that for a carpenter He spoke well.**

**Or it may be that here Luke is describing the words from the onlookers point of view. They are words proclaiming the grace of God. But these people were so hardened that these words of grace did not touch them, and instead raised their antagonism.**

**And then they looked at one another in even more wonder, and said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” They could not understand it. Here was the village carpenter and yet He was speaking such profound and impossible words. The words that follow demonstrate that they were not happy about it. They felt that He was taking too much on Himself. And they no doubt recognised that there had been none of the miracles in Nazareth that they had heard had**

happened in Capernaum.

4.23 ‘And he said to them, “Doubtless you will say to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself’, whatever we have heard done at Capernaum, do also here in your own country.” ’

Thus Jesus chides them because of their attitude, and puts into their mouths the words that they wanted to say, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ In other words ‘get yourself sorted out’. These words probably mean that as He has not performed any miracles in Nazareth He needs to heal Himself so that He could perform in Nazareth what He had performed in Capernaum. They did not pause to consider that the reason why nothing had happened in Nazareth was because no one had brought their sick to Him (contrast the people of Capernaum in verse 40). And this was because they found it difficult to believe that the local carpenter could be a healer.

Others have read ‘Physician, heal yourself’ as meaning, ‘Physician heal your own townspeople as well.’ That healing is certainly what they wanted, for they wanted Him to do in Nazareth what He had done in Capernaum. Indeed what follows suggests that there was a great deal of antagonism because He had not done so.

Some have suggested that it meant that He should remember that He came from a poor family and better Himself before He sought to lecture others. What could He know of helping the poor when He was poor Himself? But that would not connect with the next phrase.

‘Whatever we have heard done at Capernaum.’ Note the note of doubt. They had heard it, but they were not convinced that it was true. (Nazareth was a little cut off from the mainstream of life).

4.24 ‘And he said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country.”’

Then Jesus explained quite firmly (‘truly’) why He had performed so few healings in Nazareth (Mark 6.5). It was because no prophet was acceptable in his own area, and especially in his own home town. Thus they did not have the faith even to bring their sick to Him. (Their view was probably that if He was a genuine healer, which they doubted, He ought to seek the sick out for Himself. After all it was His home town. He would know where they were. But although Jesus healed all who came to Him He never sought out the sick. He saw His ministry as one of preaching and proclaiming the Kingly Rule of God. He healed the sick out of compassion).

Note here His repetition of the fact that He is a Prophet. Although they may see Him as only a local boy, and a carpenter, they needed to face up to the fact that He was from God. He then seeks to illustrate His point about unacceptability of prophets in their own country from the Scriptures.

‘Truly I say to you.’ (Literally ‘Amen, I say to you’). As used to introduce an authoritative statement in this way this is typical of Jesus’ speech and unique (Amen is used elsewhere by others, but only as added to confirm a statement). Although it occurs in Luke only six times (he sometimes translates with ‘nai’ or ‘alethos’), it occurs much more often in the other Gospels which show that Luke has amended it. This is partly because Luke regularly smoothes out Aramaisms. Thus when he does leave it in it increases its emphasis (here and in 12.37; 18.17, 29; 21.32; 23.43).

Luke gives the proverb in such a way that ‘country’ could refer to Israel as a whole, so that it could be read that way by his Gentile readers, so as to make what follows more applicable to them, but here it certainly means his own neighbourhood. There are no Jewish parallels for this proverb, although there is one which says, ‘heal your own lameness’, but something like it is found in Gentile writings (our scanty sources for Jewish teaching in 1st century AD are, however very limited). It is, however, the kind of proverb that is very applicable and would quickly spread.

**4.25-26 'But of a truth I say to you, There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land, and to none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.'**

**In reply to them He first pointed out that in the period of the great famine in the time of Elijah when God was judging His people, Elijah had not been sent to widows among his own countrymen, but to a widow woman in Zarephath, in the land of Sidon. Following His proverb His point here was that Elijah too had not been welcomed in his own country. It thus illustrated why He too had been able to heal in Capernaum but not in Nazareth. In Capernaum they had flocked to Him. Here in Nazareth they had not stirred.**

**We must remember that Capernaum was on a busy trade route, and was by the Sea of Galilee, with boats coming in and out. Nazareth was a quiet little town situated in the hills. Thus Capernaum probably looked down on Nazareth, ('that out of the way place') and Nazareth probably bristled at Capernaum ('those sophisticated upstarts'). They thus looked on each other as in a sense 'foreigners', (as is common with countryfolk) and this was probably what was in Jesus' mind. (The parochial attitude of country folk was proverbial). But to a people already infuriated His words suggested that they were not as good as the Sidonians. They were thus not at all pleased.**

**Luke would, however, be delighted to include this saying, for it was an early indication to his Gentile readers that Jesus did not see Gentiles as excluded from God's mercy.**

**'Three years and six months.' It would appear that this was the period of time for the famine recognised in their traditions (compare James 5.17). The famine would continue after the drought was over until new crops began to grow. It became recognised as a standard period of trial.**

**4.27 'And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.'**

**His second illustration was of the healing of the leprosy of the Syrian general Naaman. He pointed out that there had been many lepers in Israel, and yet it had only been the foreigner, the Gentile, who was cleansed. Again His point is that Elijah's countrymen did not come to him for healing. And again He was probably making the same point about why He had healed in Capernaum and not in Nazareth, with the double witness sealing His point. But it infuriated them even more. It appeared to them as though He was suggesting that God had rejected Israel and was only ready to show mercy to and heal the Gentiles. Such misunderstandings do occur when people are not listening properly because their minds are already made up. So Jesus' innocent remarks appeared to them as blasphemy. Their fury had been roused to fever point, and they lost control of themselves.**

**We must remember that these were troubled times and that Galilee was a hotbed of seething rebellion, waiting to burst into the open. They were ever ready for a fight. Thus it seemed to them that Jesus was a traitor and a blasphemer. And there was only one thing to do with people like that. His words were like a spark on tinder dry wood.**

**4.28-29 'And they were all filled with wrath in the synagogue, as they heard these things, and they rose up, and cast him forth out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, so that they might throw him down headlong.'**

**So filled with anger as they listened to Him in the synagogue, they rose from their seats, dragged Him outside the town, and prepared to throw Him headlong over a nearby cliff, a part of the mountain on which Nazareth was built.**

**We have here the second indication that God's purposes are not going to go smoothly but are going to meet up with resistance. John is now in prison (3.20), and the life of Jesus is**

threatened. Not only is the Devil at work in seeking to bring the work of God down (4.1-12), but the rulers are assisting Him, along with Jesus' own home town. It was a symbol of the fact that the Jews as a whole would reject Him too. The way ahead is not going to be easy

**4.30 'But he passing through the midst of them went his way.'**

Their attempt to kill Him failed. We are not told why. Luke wants us to appreciate that God just would not let it happen, and that in this deliverance the words of Psalm 91.11-12, quoted by the Devil in the final temptation, had proved true for Jesus because He had been faithful and had resisted the temptation. In a sense what the Devil had said was true. Jesus was here as the Son of God and He was thus untouchable until God gave the word. Perhaps some town authority intervened. Perhaps someone talked a bit of sense into enough of them for them to step in and prevent what their fellow townsfolk were doing, pointing out that they would be called to account for it. Perhaps there was a sudden storm. Perhaps Jesus turned and looked at them, and suddenly they were filled with awe, and gave way before Him (compare John 8.59; 18.6). We do not know what happened, but whichever way it was, God had delivered Him. And the result was that He was able to pass through their midst and go on His way.

The story had great significance for Luke. Firstly because it was a declaration of Who Jesus was, the Anointed Prophet of Isaiah, and therefore on the same plain as the Servant of the Lord and the Davidic King. Secondly because it revealed the aim of His ministry and what He had come to do. Thirdly because it was a clear indication that Jesus saw God's mercy as available to the Gentiles. And fourthly because it bore witness to the fact that Jesus was under divine protection.

It may be noted that there is an interesting parallel here that may or may not have been intentional. Jesus temptations consisted of shortage of food, wrongly used political power and falling from a height to prove God's faithfulness. The widow in Sidon was short of food, and was fed, the Syrian general Naaman was connected with political power, and was cleansed, and the intention of the crowd was to throw Jesus headlong from a height, but He was delivered. It was an indication that Jesus had made the right choice and that what the temptations had been about would be fulfilled, but it would be in God's way.

Another interesting fact about this passage is the way that it summarises the life and purpose of Jesus from the point of view of Luke's writings. It proclaims Him as the Anointed One who has come, it outlines His ministry of proclamation of the Good News and of the deliverance of those held captive, together with the forgiveness of sins, it reveals the growth of opposition, and the intention to put Him to death, from which He escapes in a kind of resurrection, and it reveals that the Good News will finally go to the Gentiles, because Judaism has rejected Him. It is His life in miniature.

#### **The Anointed Prophet Ministers In Capernaum And Elsewhere (4.31-44).**

In this passage the work of the Spirit Anointed Prophet is seen as coming to fulfilment. Here we are given the essence of His activity. Primarily He teaches with authority. But He also frees a man from captivity by evil spirits, He delivers from an oppressive fever, and carries on a successful healing and deliverance ministry, and then He goes on to proclaim the Kingly Rule of God in other towns also.

Pause before you enter here. Consider what you read, and wonder. Do not just say, 'Oh, we know these stories from Mark.' Consider that these next verses reveal that into this imperfect world has come One Who has total authority over the powers of evil, One Whose creative word can remove the effects of disease in a moment, One Who can make totally whole all who come to Him with any imperfection whatsoever, and One Who can bring men forgiveness and bring them under the direct and personal Kingly Rule of God. Here is revealed God's Salvation (1.30). Here is the guarantee that men can be transferred from under the tyranny of darkness into the Kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1.13), here is the proof that

Satan's power will not finally prevail, here is the assurance that one day all will be made well, in Him is the certainty of our future hope, for it will all be accomplished by the One Who stands here. We are about to read a cameo of the history of salvation.

The passage may be analysed as follows:

- a He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And He was teaching them on the sabbath day (31).
- b And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority (the authority of the Kingly Rule of God) (32).
- c He casts evil spirits out of a man and they declare 'We know Who You are, the Holy One of God' (33-34).
- d He rebukes the spirits and they come out of the man (35).
- e All are amazed and report concerning Him goes everywhere (36-37).
- d He rebukes a fever and the woman is wholly restored (38-39).
- c He heals many and casts out evil spirits and they declare 'You are the Son of God' (40-41).
- b He goes on His way to proclaim the Kingly Rule of God to other towns (42-43).
- a And He was preaching in the synagogues of Judaea (some authorities say 'Galilee' but often to Luke 'Judaea' includes Galilee (44)).

Note that in 'a' He teaches in Capernaum and in the parallel He preaches 'in Judaea' ('the land of the Jews'). In 'b' He preaches with the word of power/authority and in the parallel He proclaims authority of the Kingly Rule of God. In 'c' the evil spirits bare testimony to Him, as they do in the parallel. In 'd' He rebukes the evil spirits and the man is restored and in the parallel He rebukes the fever and the woman is restores. So Jesus equally heals a man and a woman. Central to the passage in 'e' is that all are amazed so that report about Him goes everywhere.

#### Teaching With Authority, Proclaiming The Good News To The Poor (4.31-32)

4.31 'And he came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the sabbath day.'

Having left Nazareth in a hurry Jesus now 'came down' (from the mountainside to the lakeside) to Capernaum, on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. He had already been active there (one or two of His future disciples lived there) as we learned from verse 23. And He taught them on the Sabbath day (in the synagogue - verse 33).

4.32 'And they were astonished at his teaching, for his word was with authority.'

And as the people listened to Him they were astonished at His teaching because His word was with authority. He spoke with power in the Holy Spirit, and He did not just cite other authorities like the Rabbis did, for they constantly referred back to the traditions of the Elders. He said quite boldly, 'I say unto you' (see Matthew 5.22, 27, 32, 34, 39). He was an authority in Himself like a true Prophet.

Notice the priority given to His teaching. That is why He has come (verse 43 compare 8.1). Everything else is secondary. In 9.2 the Apostles are sent out having been given authority over evil spirits and to cure diseases in order 'to preach the Kingly Rule of God and to heal'. By 10.1. He is sending out seventy to go ahead in order to prepare for His arrival.

#### Delivering One Who Was A Captive of Evil Spirits (4.33-36).

Second to His work of preaching and proclaiming the Kingly Rule of God (verse 43) is His work of defeating the Devil and all his minions. He has come to break the tyranny of darkness (Colossians 1.13) and to release the captives, and thus reveal that the finger of God is at work (11.20).

**4.33 ‘And in the synagogue there was a man, who had a spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice,’**

**In the synagogue at Capernaum where He was preaching there was a man who had an unclean spirit (or ‘demon’. This word would make clear to Gentiles what an ‘evil spirit’ was) within him. The fact that it is ‘unclean’ emphasises that it has no approach to God. It is excluded by its condition. This was a spiritual power of evil which had taken possession of him. Probably in some way he had been disobeying the Law, which was quite clear on such matters, and messing around with the occult, and had thus become possessed. Christians should always avoid the occult.**

**At certain times this evil spirit spoke through him, for he had possessed his body so that he could live through him. Such spirits did not make their presence too obvious as they wanted to allay people’s suspicions. But when this one was faced with Jesus Christ it either could not, or did not want to, keep quiet. The very act of Jesus in entering the synagogue would have alerted the evil spirit, and it was afraid because it recognised Him, and cried through the man’s mouth with a loud voice. It wanted to know what Jesus proposed to do.**

**‘Spirit of an unclean demon.’ Only here. Being the first instance Luke wants all to be clear about what these evil spirits are, whatever expressions they use. He does, however, use daimonion twenty three times, and ‘unclean spirit’ five times, linking daimonion and unclean once. Matthew has daimonion ten times and ‘unclean spirit’ twice. Mark has daimonion thirteen times and unclean spirit eleven times. They are thus interchangeable.**

**4.34 “Ah! what have we to do with you, Jesus, you Nazarene? Are you come to destroy us? I know you who you are, the Holy One of God.”**

**It wanted Jesus to know that it had recognised Him. ‘What have we in common?’ it cried? (Literally, ‘what is there to us and to you?’). In LXX this phrase is used to translate ‘what are you to do with me’ (Joshua 22.24) and ‘why are you interfering with me?’ (Judges 11.12). See also 2 Samuel 16.10 19.22 1 Kings 17.18; 2 Kings 3.13). The ‘we’ possibly meant the evil spirit and the man together. Or it may have been that the man was possessed by more than one spirit, or that it is speaking on behalf of all evil spirits. But it did not want to have anything to do with Jesus and wanted to be left alone. It knew that one day it would be destroyed because of its rebellion against God, and it was afraid that that was what Jesus had come for. ‘Are you come to destroy us?’ it asked. ‘Is that why you are here? Has the time come?’ Then it let Him know that He could not escape being identified. Being itself in a position where it tried to keep itself hidden it assumed that Jesus would want to do so too so that He could exert His power unobserved. So it exposed Him. It probably felt that this would thwart what He was trying to do. Let Him not think that He had deceived it. It knew Him for what He was ‘The Holy One of God.’ And it would expose Him. Perhaps it hoped that this identification would cause Jesus to retreat.**

**Others see in it a vain attempt to manipulate Him and gain power over Him by use of His name. It was believed by many that a man’s name made him vulnerable, and that it could be used to work harm against him. An alternative possibility may also be that it is simply the result of shocked horror at the unexpected, and reaction to His holiness. The evil spirits had in many cases been in untroubled possession for years. The last thing that they had expected was to face up to One Who was to prove their Master, and when they did their equilibrium was temporarily disturbed because of the power and holiness that flowed from Him of which they were aware. It was their last hopeless attempt at defence.**

**‘The Holy One of God’ meant the One Who has been especially set apart by God by His unique reception of the Holy Spirit, the ‘Son of God’ (1.35). As such He was here to do God’s will and carry out His purposes. It carried with it a suggestion of the divine, for in Isaiah God was constantly described as ‘the Holy One of Israel’. But the Greater David was also**

describable as 'His Holy One' (Psalm 16.10). The evil spirit may not have understood fully and precisely Who He was, but it knew what power Jesus had as God's Holy One, and that it could not compete with Him, and was subject to His word.

#### Jesus Rebukes the Evil Spirit And It Comes Out.

4.35 'And Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Hold your peace, and come out of him." And when the demon had thrown him down in the midst, he came out of him, having done him no hurt.'

And Jesus exercised that power. He rebuked the evil spirit, commanding it to be silent, and to come out of the man. He would not accept testimony from evil spirits. And the evil spirit had no option but to obey. It could not resist the power and authority of Jesus. So, probably in helpless fury, it threw the man that it possessed to the ground. And then it came out. It had no option. And its assault on the man was to no avail. The man was unhurt and freed from the evil spirit.

4.36 'And amazement came on all, and they spoke together, one with another, saying, "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out."

What they had seen amazed the people who saw it. They had never seen anything like it. They knew of exorcisers who had various methods for trying to deal with evil spirits, including the use of incantations and formulae, and of various physical props, and the use of powerful names, but they had never come across One Who could get rid of them by a word on His own authority. They were astonished. They asked themselves what word this was that could force evil spirits to do its will. Why this man could command evil spirits with authority and power in such a way that they obeyed Him. Note the combination, He had the authority to command and the power to ensure that His command was carried out. We, of course, know the secret, He is the Lord's Anointed.

#### The Whole Region Is Now Made Aware of Jesus and His Ministry (4.37).

4.37 'And there went out a rumour concerning him into every place of the region round about.'

And the result was that the news about what He had done was spread around the whole region, improving as it went around (compare verse 14). Jesus was thoroughly 'in the news', and His fame was spreading everywhere.

#### Jesus, Freeing the Oppressed and Afflicted, Rebukes A Fever And It Leaves A Fevered Woman (4.38-39).

Having revealed His power to rebuke evil spirits, Jesus now revealed His power to rebuke disease. Even distorted nature was seen as responsive to His commands.

4.38 'And he rose up from the synagogue, and entered into the house of Simon. And Simon's wife's mother was gripped with a great fever, and they besought him for her.'

Leaving the synagogue Jesus went to Simon's house to receive hospitality. Simon would shortly be renamed Peter and become an Apostle. He had probably previously been a disciple of John the Baptist (John 1.41-42). Certainly his brother Andrew had. But when He arrived with them they discovered that Simon's mother-in-law 'was gripped' with a 'great fever'. Note the specialist medical terms used here, used by many physicians, but not used in the other Gospels. Luke was well acquainted with the medical terminology of the time. Physicians distinguished between a 'great fever' and a 'lesser fever'. So those present turned to Jesus and requested His help. Unlike the Nazarenes they believed implicitly that He could heal.

4.39 'And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose up and ministered to them.'

And Jesus responded to their plea, and standing over the woman rebuked the fever, and it left her, revealing that all disease had to respond to His word. And the woman then immediately arose and produced a meal for them. God was arranging for His Son to be fed legitimately. Her actions, following immediately after arising from a bed on which she had been lying with a severe fever, revealed the total adequacy of the cure. People do not usually feel sprightly after a great fever.

Note how the healing of this woman, who is Peter's mother-in-law, parallels the healing of a man in the same way in verse 33. The preparing of a meal parallels other places where women are seen as preparing meals. It is a part of their ministry (10.40). The women who followed Jesus probably did the same (8.2).

'He rebuked the fever.' It is as though the fever is at fault and behaving as it ought not. But behind His rebuke is the sinfulness of man that had caused such things as this fever. Had it not been for man's sinfulness this fever would never have been. Thus is He rebuking mankind. And the great fever is an offence against God. It has marred His perfect handywork.

#### Jesus Continues To Relieve The Oppressed and Afflicted (4.40).

4.40 'And when the sun was setting, all those who had any sick with different kinds of diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them.'

Once the Sabbath was over, and the sun was setting, many sick people were now brought to Jesus with many different kinds of diseases. They dared not bring them on the Sabbath because the Scribal regulations said that the only healings allowed on the Sabbath were those of necessity. Nor could they have carried the sick people's mattresses on the Sabbath. And He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. Now His power was being revealed by a touch. The laying on of hands was not a normal Jewish method of healing, but none other healed like Jesus. It indicated that He was identifying Himself with the sick person as the One Who bore their sicknesses and carried their diseases (Isaiah 53.4; compare Matthew 8.17). Note that it is only Luke who notices the details of the method of healing. But Jesus never laid hands on a demon possessed person. He healed them by a word of command.

4.41 'And demons also came out from many, crying out, and saying, "You are the Son of God." And rebuking them, he would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah.'

And many evil spirits came out at His word, crying out, "(We know Who you are), You are the Son of God." They too wanted Him to know that He had been recognised. Here we are now made aware that they recognise His divinity, and that He is *the* only Son of God. But He did not want their testimony because He did not want the idea to get around that He was the Messiah, and they were quite well aware of that as well. Such an idea could cause trouble for it would make belligerents gather to Him, and give people the wrong idea about Him, and He did not want that. So he wanted to silence the evil spirits altogether. They were only out to cause mischief.

This is not saying that the titles of Son of God and Messiah were synonymous. It is stressing first what He was and second which name He especially did not want to be spread around. Fortunately they had not used it yet, but they were out to be troublesome and would do so if they suspected that He was afraid of them doing so. Furthermore testimony from evil spirits could only harm Him and give the wrong idea. It would suggest a kind of alliance between Him and them. So He rebuked them, commanding them not to speak because they knew that He was the Messiah. Why did they obey Him? Because they knew that He could bind them and destroy them. Better to be silent than to be bound and destroyed.

Note how this incident parallels the example of the man in the synagogue earlier. And by it He has revealed His superiority over all the power of the Enemy (10.19). Even the world of evil

spirits must obey Him.

It should be noted in all this that in accordance with the terms of Jesus' commission in verse 18 all this was part of the declaration of Who He was. All was preaching and proclamation of the fact that God's Promised One had come, and that Satan was facing ignominious defeat. Each miracle of Jesus declared that eventually, through Him, creation would be restored to better than its original condition, to a condition of purity, innocence and wellbeing (Isaiah 11.6-9; Revelation 22.1-5). It reminds us that when we consider a miracle we must ask, what does it show us about Jesus? In 5.1-11 Jesus causes four fishermen to net a great catch of fish. Then immediately Jesus makes the point that from now on He can make them fishers of men and women. The miracle declares a deeper truth about Him. Another example can be found in 11.20, where Jesus says that if he casts out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingly Rule of God has come on those who hear. God's authority and power is being made known. In Mark the healings of a blind man and a deaf and dumb man point to the fact that the disciples eyes will be spiritually opened, their ears will be spiritually unstopped and their mouths will proclaim truth (with Mark 7.31-37 compare 8.18; with 8.22-26 compare 8.27-33). Do not look at the miracle, He says, consider what it reveals, that the Kingly Rule of God is here and that the 'Stronger than he' has come. It is only the unseeing crowds who think only of the miracles (Mark 7.37). But He is not speaking merely about the miracle of 11.14. He is speaking about all His activity. The miracles reveal a deeper reality that lies behind them of what Jesus is, as does all that He does. Every healing was an indication of the creative and saving power of Jesus, and of the possible healing of the soul, and of the perfection of Heaven which is to come, and the multiplication of them was an indication that His blessing was open to many. It is what Jesus was as a whole that should make its impact on our life. The sad thing is how many in His crowds saw the miracles but missed out on Who Jesus really was.

4.42 'And when it was day, he came out and went into a desert place, and the multitudes sought after him, and came to him, and would have stopped him, that he should not go from them.'

The result of all this was increasing popularity. So desiring privacy in order to speak with His Father He went aside into a desert place to pray, but even there the people sought Him out and tried to persuade Him to stay with them. Jesus was constantly being interrupted at prayer simply because people, including His own disciples, were constantly seeking Him.

It is interesting that Jesus is never depicted as praying together with His disciples, although He does teach them how to pray. Nor does He encourage them to pray with Him. In John 17 He is praying *for* them. He always goes alone to pray. This again confirms His uniqueness. None could share in His prayers. But all were to pray.

4.43 'But he said to them, "I must preach the good tidings of the Kingly Rule of God to the other cities also, for that is why I was sent." '

The crowd pressed Him to remain. They were not like the Nazarenes. But He informed them that He could not stay. It was necessary for Him to proclaim the Good News of the Kingly Rule of God to other towns and cities. For that was why God had sent Him, and had anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. Now that He had commenced His ministry it was urgent for it to go forward speedily, for He must work the works of Him Who had sent Him while it was yet day (John 9.4).

This is the first mention of the Kingly Rule of God, a concept which was central to Jesus' message and to the preaching in Acts. The point behind it was that God was their King and so they must acknowledge it and voluntarily enter under His Kingly Rule. They must yield themselves to Him to obey Him and serve Him. Later we learn that it is entered by believing in Jesus Christ and being born from above by the Holy Spirit (John 3.3). But the point was that God's Kingly Rule was now available to all who would obey Him.

In the idea of the Kingly Rule of God is depicted the whole of salvation. That is possible only because of the Kingly Rule of God. It is by the outworking of His power and authority that salvation is available. To step by faith into salvation is to step under His King Rule. From then on we are His for ever. And in the end that Kingly Rule will result in everlasting perfection and glory.

### EXCURSUS on the Kingly Rule of God And Its Significance.

One problem we have in understanding the idea of 'the Kingdom of God' is that we tend to think of a kingdom as being a piece of land with boundaries. To us a 'kingdom' is a country. But in ancient days a King's 'kingdom' extended to wherever he could exercise his power. There were no fixed boundaries. It was not an area of land. It represented a number of people or peoples over whom he held sway. The Bedouin chieftain was 'king' over his people as they travelled around, wherever they were. They were available to do his bidding and owed their loyalty to him. Wherever he exercised his power, regardless of location, he was king. Thus if you were surrounded by a group of the chieftain's men in the desert you were in his 'kingdom', you were under his kingly rule. The word 'basileia', therefore, means rather 'Kingly Rule' than 'Kingdom' and points to God's personal and effective rule over those who own Him as their king, and who respond accordingly.

When the term occurs in the New Testament we always have to consider its context. The Jews were on the whole very much expecting the establishing of a physical Kingly Rule where their King would rule and would gain worldwide supremacy so that they would have a position of authority over the world. He would make them 'top nation'. Often the references to the Kingly Rule of God have this in mind (e.g. Matthew 18.1; Luke 17.20; 19.11; Acts 1.6).

These particular verses refer to men's wrongly held views of the Kingly Rule of God. But Jesus made very clear that the Kingly Rule was not to be expected in this way (Luke 17.21; John 18.36). His Kingly Rule was not of this world (John 18.36). Rather it was now present in Him, and men must respond to it from their hearts and come in submission and obedience to God and to the Lord Jesus (Matthew 7.21-22). In order to see and enter into it men must be born from above (John 3.2, 5-6). Then one day it would be revealed in its full glory when the King returned, having first gone away, and those who were His would then enter the everlasting Kingdom (Luke 19.12; 21.31; 22.16, 18; Mark 14.25).

It may well be that we are to see a growth of conception between the Kingly Rule of God which was declared once Jesus had been pronounced by the Father as His Son (Mark 1.11) and that which resulted when He was raised from the dead and received His crown and His throne (Matthew 28.18; Acts 2.36; Luke 19.12). In both cases the Kingly Rule of God demands man's response to Christ as King, but the first was after His proclamation as God's appointed prophet, while the second was after His official coronation, when He had redeemed His people for Himself. We must not, however, overstress the differentiation. Jesus was on earth as king from the beginning (Matthew 2.2; Luke 2.11).

This may be illustrated by (roughly) what did happen when new kings were established.

- First they gathered supporters, and set up a base, hoping also that a statement of support would have been given by the old king.
- Then their name was put forward by their supporters, and they selected those who were to help them to the throne by using their influence and winning over support.
- After this they saw off any rivals often by violence.
- Then, if they were successful, once their position was established, they were publicly crowned.
- Then the announcement of their coronation would be made to all their subjects.
- After that they may well have to consolidate their position against rivals, because kingship over the whole was not yet established.

- Then they would finally have to deal with all those who had previously followed their rivals who would be forced or cajoled to submit.

We can to some extent compare here the situation with Adonijah and Solomon in 1 Kings 1. Each was seeking to establish his kingship. Each gathered his supporters. But it was Solomon who was successful, and who moreover obtained the approbation of the old king. We can also compare to some extent the conflict between David and Ishbaal/Ishbosheth (2 Samuel 2-4).

So we may see in the case of Jesus:

- That He was born King (Matthew 2.2; Luke 2.11).
- That at His baptism Jesus was named as the rightful heir, and God's choice for the throne. He was declared King (Mark 1.11).
- Then He went about establishing the basis of His Kingly Rule (as portrayed in the Gospels) and gathering His supporters who would help to establish His rule (Mark 1.15; Matthew 5-7).
- Then He acted to redeem His people, defeating unseen foes who were against them, and at His glorification His Kingship was confirmed by official enthronement (Matthew 28.18; Mark 16.19; compare Luke 24.51).
- Then once, He had received His throne, His kingship was to be proclaimed to the world and the people be won over to accept it (Acts 1.8; 2.36).
- Then finally He will appear in His glory and enforce His rule on those who have resisted it.
- Then He will deliver up His kingship to His Father (1 Corinthians 15.24).

The Kingly Rule of God was promised at Jesus' birth when the angel announced that He would be 'called the Son of the Highest', and that He would 'receive the throne of His father David', and 'of His Kingly Rule there would be no end' (Luke 1.32-33). There is a real sense in which these three phrases not only explain three aspects of what He had come to do, but also the three stages of that Kingly Rule.

- 1). It began openly when He was 'called the Son of the Highest' and was announced as the Son of God (Mark 1.11) and went out to proclaim the Kingly Rule of God (Heaven).
- 2). It was further established when He was enthroned as King after His resurrection, and 'received the throne of His father David' (Acts 2.36).
- 3). It will come to its final culmination when He has finally established His everlasting kingdom, overcome all opposition, and hands it over to God so that 'of His Kingly Rule there will be no end' (1 Corinthians 15.24).

### 1). The Kingly Rule of God Began To Be Established When the King was Acknowledged By His Father And Began To Gather His Followers.

There is a real sense in which the Kingly Rule of God began when Jesus had received the Holy Spirit and was told, 'You are My Son' (Mark 1.11; compare Psalm 2.7, and see Luke 7.28), although to some extent it was present with John the Baptist (Matthew 21.31-32) and had been on offer right from the time of Moses.

From the time of His reception of the Spirit onwards He went out in order to proclaim that the Kingly Rule of God was 'at hand' or 'had drawn near' (Mark 1.14-15), so that those who submitted to Him and believed on Him entered under the Kingly Rule of God. Indeed the fact that Jesus cast out evil spirits by the Spirit or finger of God was the proof that the Kingly Rule of God had come to them (Matthew 12.28; Luke 11.20). It was present there among them, evidenced by the power that the King exercised. It had come with power (Mark 9.1), a power to be revealed in the Transfiguration, and in Christ's resurrection and enthronement and what followed (Mark 9.1; ; Luke 9.27; Matthew 28.18). The sick who were healed, and those who refused to listen to His Apostles, had both 'come near to the Kingly Rule of God'. It had been revealed to them and offered to them. They had had to choose whether they would

submit to the King and obey Him (Luke 10.9, 11).

Those who came under that Kingly Rule were greater than John the Baptist in his prophetic role (Matthew 11.11; Luke 7.28; 16.16), for in it he was only pointing forward as a prophet. He was pre-kingdom, the last in the line of the Torah (Law) and the Prophets (Luke 16.16). He was the preparer of the way (3.2-3). Yet even so through his ministry the tax collectors and prostitutes (representing the most despised kinds of men and women) who repented for the forgiveness of sins under his ministry (Mark 1.4; Luke 3.3), and entered 'the way of righteousness', came under 'the Kingly Rule of God' (Matthew 21.31-32). So John was very much involved with the introduction of the Kingly Rule of God, and it could be described in terms of entering the way of righteousness (the way of forgiveness and obedience to God). But his office as prophet and preparer of the way was 'lower' than the office of servant under the Kingly Rule of God which had now come, because it was simply preparatory, while the latter was the great reality. The King had now come and the actual Kingly Rule was now being exercised by Jesus under God. What the prophets had promised was here. Thus what Jesus brought was something greater than John could offer. (And John entered it when he deferred to Jesus).

Since John's day the Kingly Rule of God allowed violence and the violent took it by force (11.12). That is, it could be entered by those who made a determined effort, and refused to be put off (compare Mark 9.47; Acts 14.22). For the Kingly Rule of God was being proclaimed and men were pressing into it (Luke 16.16). It could not be entered easily. It required intensity of purpose and a true change of heart, 'repentance for the forgiveness of sins', but it was very much a present experience for many. The purpose of this saying in Matthew 11.11 is in order to represent Jesus and His followers as 'greater' than John the Baptist because He and they are bringing about the new age, the new Kingly Rule, that John pointed to.

When the Pharisees asked when the Kingly Rule of God would come, Jesus replied that when it came it would not be seen by looking around, but by looking within, for 'the Kingly Rule of God is within you' (Luke 17.20-21). It was not a grand outward display, but a changing of heart and mind and a submission in loyalty to God.

Some would translate this as 'the Kingly Rule of God is *among* you', signifying that it was present in Him and His disciples, but that they (the Pharisees) could not see it. Either way the thought was that it was present in Jesus and was to be responded to from the heart, and that the Pharisees were missing it because they were looking for the wrong kind of Kingdom. Only through response to Jesus and the work of the Spirit could the Kingly Rule of God be known. Except a man be born of the Spirit he could not see or enter into the Kingly Rule of God (John 3.5-6).

When the disciples prayed they had to remember that this Kingly Rule of God had, even at the time when Jesus was speaking, to be sought above all else (Matthew 6.33). Once they sought this they would not need to pray for food and clothing, for everything else would be added to them. That is why when they went out to preach they were to take no extra food or clothing (Matthew 10.9-11). They had entered under the Kingly Rule of God, and would be fully provided for with regard to all their physical needs. Thus as they went out to proclaim it they were to pray for its extension daily, praying, 'your Kingly Rule come, your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven' (Matthew 6.10). The Kingly Rule thus consisted in men responding to Him and doing His will on earth. In other words God's Kingly Rule was coming, in that men responded to the preaching of Jesus and began to do what He taught them, and they were to pray that this might become true of more and more. Responding to the King and the teaching that He had brought would equate to entering under the Kingly Rule of God.

The Kingly Rule of God (Heaven) belonged to those who were poor in spirit, to those who were persecuted for righteousness sake (Matthew 5.3, 10; Luke 6.20). They were humble and contrite, and willing to undergo persecution precisely because they had come under God's

**Kingly Rule.** On the other hand it was hard for those who had riches to enter the Kingly Rule of God, because then their riches would have to be placed at His disposal (Mark 10.23-25; Luke 18.24-25), and they found it hard to give them up. To put the hand to the plough and then to turn back was to be not worthy of the Kingly Rule of God (the submission to the King had then ceased - Luke 9.62). And in order to be esteemed under the Kingly Rule of God it was necessary not to break God's commandments, or teach men to do so (Matthew 5.19). That would be rebellion. That is why only those whose righteousness exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees, (who did by their teachings cause men to break the commandments - Mark 7.8-13; Matthew 23.1-36), could enter it (Matthew 5.20).

This clearly indicated that entry into His Kingly Rule did not come about by following the teachings of men but by responding in submission and obedience to the King. Those who listened to the teaching of Jesus and responded to it entered that Kingly Rule, which involved not only calling Him 'Lord, Lord', but doing what He said, doing the Father's will (Matthew 7.21). Thus the Scribe who on learning of the two great commandments said, 'Teacher, you have said the truth', was told that he was not far from the Kingly Rule of God (Mark 12.34). All that was now required was his full response to Jesus in accordance with what he had learned.

The mystery (a hidden secret now revealed) of the Kingly Rule of God was made known to them precisely because the significance of His parables was made clear to them (Matthew 13.11; Mark 4.11; Luke 8.10). And this consisted of the fact that the word of the Kingly Rule of God was being sown, and those in whom it produced fruit were within the Kingly Rule of God (Matthew 13.19-23). In another parable the good seed which grew and flourished were the children under the Kingly Rule of God (Matthew 13.38). One day all who did not so flourish would be removed in judgment, and then the righteous would shine forth as the sun under the Kingly Rule of their Father (Matthew 13.43).

There would thus initially be a time when the Kingly Rule of God coexisted in the world with those who were unresponsive to the King, but in the end these latter would be dealt with and then God's Kingly Rule would be fully manifested (Matthew 13.41-43). This brings home the dual aspect of the Kingly Rule of God, the present and the future. On the one hand there are those in this present world who are within the Kingly Rule of God, and on the other there are those who are rejecting that Kingly Rule. (There are also those who are professing to be under the Kingly Rule of God, but are not in reality under it - Matthew 13.47; 18.34). But in the future, within God's everlasting Kingly Rule, the righteous will shine forth within the Kingly Rule of their Father. It was this future Kingly Rule from which Israel would regret being cast out of when they saw that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets were welcomed there, while they were excluded (Luke 13.28). And to that Kingly Rule would come people from all parts of the world (Luke 13.29).

For the Kingly Rule of God is at present like a net gathering up all within it, and once they are gathered up, all that is not fit for it because of lack of response to Him will be removed (Matthew 13.47). Those who are truly instructed concerning the Kingly Rule of God bring out what is old (God's instruction in the Old Testament) and what is new (the teaching of Jesus which expands and explains that teaching). They study God's word and eagerly hear the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 13.52). Thus the Kingly Rule of God is powerfully at work, reaching out to seize men, and then sifting them, and removing the bad from among them.

To Peter and the other Apostles were given the keys of the Kingly Rule of God so that they could 'bind and loose', that is open it up to all who will respond to it (which Peter and the Apostles do in Acts 1 to 15) and determine how it should be regulated and what manner of lives Christians must live (Matthew 16.19; 18.18). They would make clear the requirements of God which bound all who followed Him.

To enter the Kingly Rule of God one must become humble, open and responsive like a little

child (Matthew 18.1-4; 19.14; Mark 10.14-15; Luke 18.16-17). Those who have entered under the Kingly Rule of God are like servants to a king, and they will in the end have to give account and will be dealt with according to their behaviour (Matthew 18.23-35; 25.14-30, 31-45). They are like labourers who have hired themselves out to a master, and at the end of the day all receive the same reward, for it is within the master's gift (Matthew 20.1-16). In Jesus' day the many tax-collectors and prostitutes were entering the Kingly Rule of God, revealed in the fact that they became obedient sons and daughters of the Father, while the more religious were delaying and in danger of missing their opportunity (Matthew 21.28-32). Thus the Kingly Rule of God would be taken away from those who professed to serve God but did not recognise their sinfulness and repent, that is from the old Israel (the vineyard), and would be given to a new nation of Israel who would produce the fruits required by God (Matthew 21.43) becoming branches of the true vine (John 15.1-6), and entering the new congregation of Israel (Matthew 16.18).

The Kingly Rule of Heaven was like a King calling people to the wedding of His Son, Who, when many refused to come, destroyed them, and also cast out the one who refused to wear the clothing provided by the King (Matthew 22.1-14), while those whom He called in from the highways and byways, who responded to Him and who wore the clothing He provided, celebrated and rejoiced, for they were within His Kingly Rule. Indeed the condemnation of the Pharisees lay in the fact that they themselves did not enter under the Kingly Rule of God, while at the same time they prevented others from entering, 'shutting up the Kingly Rule of Heaven from men' (Matthew 23.13).

Thus while there may not be agreement on the interpretation of all the passages mentioned, they are sufficient to establish that the Kingly Rule of God could be entered and experienced under the ministry of Jesus. It was not just something for the future. They could already experience 'eternal life', the life of the age to come, while they lived out their lives on earth (John 5.24). They could accept Jesus as their King and follow Him, as sheep follow a shepherd (John 10.27-28).

## 2). The Kingly Rule of God Continued And Was Confirmed When Jesus Was Glorified And Received All Authority in Heaven and Earth.

This aspect of His Kingly Rule clearly follows on from the previous one and much of what is written there applies here also. But the situation is now crystallised and the proclamation of Jesus as King and Lord is made more strident. A clear reference to Jesus as receiving authority and power through His resurrection is made in Matthew 28.18; Acts 2.36; Luke 19.12, and we are probably to see this as tying in with the crowning of the Son of Man in Daniel 7.13-14, which spoke of the Son of Man coming to receive His Kingly Rule. It was this passage which partly lay behind Jesus referring to Himself as the Son of Man.

This is the aspect of the Kingly Rule that Acts is mainly seeking to present. Acts is calling men to respond to the risen and glorified Lord and Christ and enter under the Kingly Rule of God (Acts 1.3; 8.12; 19.8; 20.25; 28.23, 31). It is a Kingly Rule into which all Christians are transferred (Colossians 1.13). And as Paul could further say, 'The Kingly Rule of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Romans 14.17). 'The Kingly Rule of God is not in word but in power' (1 Corinthians 4.20), bringing men to salvation through the preaching of the cross (1 Corinthians 1.18).

The Good News of this Kingly Rule of God had to be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations, before the end could come (Matthew 24.14; Acts 1.8). Compare Mark 13.10 where it is called simply 'the Gospel, the Good News', and Luke 24.47 where it is called 'repentance and forgiveness of sins -- preached in His name'. These differing references stress what the content is of the preaching of the Kingly Rule of God. It is to hear of Jesus Christ, to respond to Him, and to repent and receive forgiveness of sins.

Then at the end those who were His would enter the everlasting Kingly Rule of Heaven (Matthew 25.34), inheriting eternal life (Matthew 25.46). And then will Jesus 'drink wine' (celebrate) with His own under the Kingly Rule of His Father, within the Kingly Rule of God (Matthew 26.29; Mark 14.25).

### **3). The Everlasting Kingly Rule Of God When His Own Have Been Made Perfect Is Yet Future For Those Who Are His.**

The third aspect of the Kingly Rule of God is when men finally enter the everlasting Kingdom, when they finally come into God's presence in total and complete submission and worship. It is spoken of throughout the New Testament. When the Son of Man comes in His glory (Matthew 25.31) the whole world will be judged and His people will 'inherit the Kingly Rule which was given them from the foundation of the world' (Matthew 25.34), and 'will go away into eternal life' (Matthew 25.46) rather than going into everlasting punishment (Matthew 25.31-46). Then will the King drink wine with them (a picture of celebration) in the Kingly Rule of God (Matthew 26.29; Mark 14.25; Luke 22.16, 18). The coming of this Kingly Rule will be prepared for by the signs of the end (Luke 21.31). It is then that men will weep and gnash their teeth because they will see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the prophets entering it, together with people from all parts of the world, while they themselves are cast out (Luke 13.28-29; Matthew 8.11). And then will the righteous shine forth as the sun within the Kingly Rule of their Father (Matthew 13.43).

This expectation of the future Kingly Rule of God ('His heavenly Kingdom') is prominent in the letters of Paul. Flesh and blood will not inherit it (1 Corinthians 15.50) nor will those who live openly sinful lives (see 1 Corinthians 6.9-10; 15.24, 50; Galatians 5.21; Ephesians 5.5; 2 Thessalonians 1.5; 4.1, 18; see also James 2.5; 2 Peter 1.11). Putting all this in the words of Jesus in John, men can receive and enjoy eternal life, life more abundant, now (John 3.15; 5.24; 10.28; 1 John 5.13) and then enjoy it later to its fullest degree in Heaven (Matthew 25.46; Titus 1.2).

End of Excursus.

4.44 'And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judaea (some authorities say 'Galilee').'

The passage that we have been looking at now ends with a general comment about His activity as a Spirit-inspired Prophet. He was continually preaching in the synagogues of 'Judaea'. This might at first appear strange, for surely He was ministering in Galilee? But in fact that is what Luke is saying. On a number of occasions He uses 'Judaea' to signify to his Gentile readers 'the land of the Jews', the place where Jews are (1.5; 4.44; 6.17; 7.17; 23.5; Acts 10.37; compare Acts 1.8 where it is clearly inclusive of Galilee which is not mentioned; and Acts 2.9 where it again covers all Palestine).