

Contents

1	The Coming of Jesus — <i>March 28–April 3</i> —————	6
2	Baptism and the Temptations — <i>April 4–10</i> —————	14
3	Who Is Jesus Christ? — <i>April 11–17</i> —————	22
4	The Call to Discipleship — <i>April 18–24</i> —————	30
5	Christ as the Lord of the Sabbath — <i>April 25–May 1</i> —————	38
6	Women in the Ministry of Jesus — <i>May 2–8</i> —————	46
7	Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and Prayer — <i>May 9–15</i> —————	56
8	The Mission of Jesus — <i>May 16–22</i> —————	64
9	Jesus, the Master Teacher — <i>May 23–29</i> —————	72
10	Following Jesus in Everyday Life — <i>May 30–June 5</i> —————	80
11	The Kingdom of God — <i>June 6–12</i> —————	88
12	Jesus in Jerusalem — <i>June 13–19</i> —————	96
13	Crucified and Risen — <i>June 20–26</i> —————	104

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The Book of Luke

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (*Luke 15:20*).

We know that verse. It comes from one of the most well-known and beloved stories in all literature, sacred or mundane. Astonishingly enough, we would never have heard it but for a simple missionary doctor who embedded that precious gem in a letter he wrote to his learned friend Theophilus.

The doctor’s name is Luke, a Gentile convert, and the letter is The Gospel According to Luke. In addition to the Gospel, Luke also wrote the book of Acts. Having been a travel companion of Paul, Luke was a keen observer of, and participant in, the great Jesus movement sweeping the Roman Empire. This close association with Paul led Luke not only to grasp the profound meaning of the Christian church—which stood its ground against Caesar’s demand to be honored as divine—but also to learn more deeply from credible sources about the Man behind it all: Jesus Christ. So, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Luke wrote a two-volume work on what could be called “Origin and History of the Christian Church.”

Part 1 of this work is the Gospel, written and delivered to Theophilus before Acts was written (*Acts 1:1*). Many conservative scholars date Luke’s Gospel to about A.D. 61–63.

Theophilus was a Greek convert, and in addressing the letter to him, Luke was

especially conscious of directing his Gospel to the Greek and Gentile members of the community of faith, while not disregarding Jesus' Jewish roots. Matthew wrote primarily to the Jews, and so he emphasizes Jesus as the Messiah. Mark wrote to the Romans, and we see Jesus marching across the land with the news about the kingdom. John was a deep thinker, and in his Gospel emerges Jesus the Word, the Creator, the Son of God. But Luke writes with an eye on the Gentiles. To them he presents Jesus, the Son of man, as the Savior of the world and Friend of humanity. The universality of salvation is the underlying theme of his Gospel; so, his genealogy traces Jesus all the way to Adam and links him to God, while Matthew's genealogy stops with Abraham, the father of the Jews (*Luke 3:23–38; compare with Matt. 1:1–17*).

Luke writes with an eye on the Gentiles. To them he presents Jesus, the Son of man, as the Savior of the world and Friend of humanity.

Luke's Gospel is the longest in the New Testament. Some miracles appear only in Luke, such as the raising of the widow of Nain's son (*Luke 7:11–18*) and the healing of Malchus (*Luke 22:50, 51*). (For other miracles, see *Luke 5:4–11, 13:11–17, 14:1–6, 17:11–19*.) Many parables are peculiar to Luke, including several famous ones: the good Samaritan (*Luke 10:30–37*), the rich foolish man (*Luke 12:16–21*), the prodigal son (*Luke 15:11–32*); the rich man and Lazarus (*Luke 16:19–31*), and the Pharisee and the publican (*Luke 18:10–14*). The Zacchaeus story (*Luke 19:1–10*) is also Luke's unique contribution.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Luke claims to have surveyed the historical materials, interviewed the eyewitnesses (*Luke 1:2*), and then with "perfect understanding of all things" wrote "an orderly account" that readers "may know the certainty" of Jesus and His good news (*vss. 3, 4, NKJV*).

When asked if he would recommend a good biography of Jesus, the great theologian James Denney replied, "Have you tried the one that Luke wrote?"

Good idea. Let's try it together, as a world church, this quarter.

John M. Fowler has served the church for 53 years as pastor, theology and philosophy teacher, editor, and educational administrator. As author of numerous articles and books, he has written two other Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guides: "The Cosmic Conflict Between Christ and Satan" (2002) and "Ephesians: The Gospel of Relationships" (2005).

Got Questions?

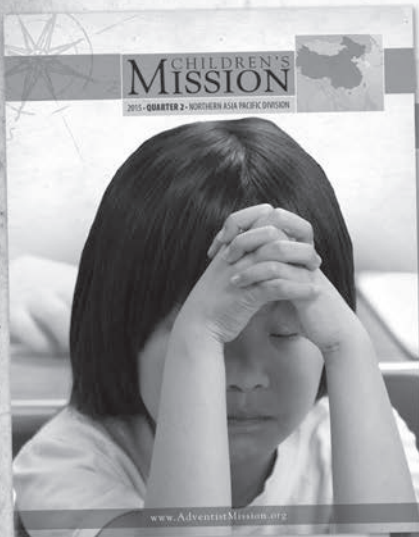
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