

Introduction to the Gospel According to Luke: The Perfect Man

King Canute, the 11th-century Danish ruler of England, found himself constantly surrounded by a court of fawning, flattering yes-men.

“O King,” they would gush, “you are the greatest ruler who ever lived! You are invincible! There is nothing you do not know, and nothing you cannot command!”

Weary of this empty, sycophantic praise, Canute decided to teach his court a lesson they would never forget. He ordered his palace guards to carry his royal throne down to the seashore. There, at the very edge of the water, the king sat down while his perplexed courtiers gathered around, wondering what grand demonstration their monarch had in mind.

Looking out at the horizon, King Canute stretched out his arms and commanded, “Waves, be still! Tide, be stopped!”

The ocean, completely indifferent to his royal decree, rolled on. The tide continued its steady rise. The freezing water came up around Canute’s ankles, then his thighs, and then his chest. Yet, he stubbornly kept shouting, “Waves, be still! Tide, be stopped!” Finally, a massive wave crashed directly over him, toppling the throne and washing the king up onto the sand, gasping and sputtering.

The courtiers stared in absolute horror, thinking their king had lost his mind. But Canute stood up, wringing wet, and ordered the guards to carry his throne back to the castle. When the entourage returned to the throne room, the king walked over to a crucifix on the wall showing Jesus upon the cross. He pointed at it and turned to his court:

“Do you see this Man? He commanded the winds and the waves of the sea. He is the perfect man. As for me—I am just a man.”

The Gospel of Luke is the biography of that exact Man—perfection incarnate, the only flawless human being to ever walk the earth.

Jesus as the Son of Man

While Matthew introduces us to the Messiah-King, Mark to the Suffering Servant, and John to the Divine Son, the Gospel of Luke highlights Jesus' true humanity. Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man—which was our Lord’s absolute favorite title for Himself, used more frequently in His earthly ministry than any other name.

The definitive key to understanding this Gospel is found in

Luke 19:10. This single sentence provides a beautiful, natural structural outline for the entire book:

“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

1. "The Son of Man came..." (Chapters 1:1 – 4:13)

This opening movement focuses on the Incarnation. Luke details how Jesus physically entered the human race, providing a meticulous narrative of His conception, birth, boyhood, and human lineage.

2. "...to seek..." (Chapters 4:14 – 19:27)

The vast middle section of the Gospel tracks Jesus' active ministry, showing Him moving deep into the heart of humanity. He penetrates human emotions, thoughts, and vulnerabilities—putting His finger directly on the throbbing centers of human sin and suffering to bring healing power.

This seeking ministry reaches its dramatic turning point in

Luke 9:51: *"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."*

3. "...and to save what was lost." (Chapters 19:28 – 24:53)

The final movement opens as Jesus reaches the holy city: *"After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem"* (Luke 19:28). This marks the formal close of His seeking ministry and the launch of His saving ministry. The narrative follows Him through the temple, up the Mount of Olives, into Pilate's judgment hall, and ultimately to the cross, the tomb, and the resurrection.

Luke the Author: The Beloved Physician

The human instrument behind this Gospel is unique among biblical writers. Luke was a **Gentile**, making him the only non-Jewish writer to pen books of the New Testament. Though he is mentioned by name only three times in Scripture, his literary footprint is massive, having written both this Gospel and the Book of Acts.

The Apostle Paul affectionately calls him *"the beloved physician"* (Colossians 4:14). Luke likely practiced medicine in the port city of Troas before joining Paul's missionary team, a transition marked by the famous shift to "we" and "us" pronouns in the narrative of Acts 16. His medical background explicitly colors his writing; Luke uses more technical medical vocabulary than the classical writings of Hippocrates, the father of medicine.

As he states in his prologue, Luke was not a first-generation eyewitness to Jesus' early ministry. Instead, he functioned as a disciplined historian, conducting rigorous research and interviewing eyewitnesses to compile an orderly, accurate account.

A Historian Vindicated: The prominent 19th-century archaeologist and historian Sir William Ramsay originally set out into the Middle East with the explicit goal of disproving Luke's historical reliability. However, after decades of digging up ancient artifacts and tracking geographic routes, Ramsay completely reversed his position, famously concluding that Luke had not made a single historical error and was one of the greatest historians to have ever lived.

The Distinctive Text of Luke

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are historically grouped together as the synoptic gospels because they view (*"optic"*) the life of Christ from a shared (*"syn"*) perspective, overlapping significantly and focusing heavily on Jesus' Galilean ministry. John stands apart, focusing primarily on the Judean ministry and the final passion week.

Yet, even among the synoptics, Luke provides a treasure trove of unique historical data. Because of his meticulous research, we are indebted to Luke for preserving essential events omitted by Matthew and Mark, including:

- A detailed, tender obstetrical and narrative account of the virgin birth.
- Twenty miracles, six of which are entirely exclusive to Luke's Gospel.
- Twenty-three parables, including eighteen found nowhere else (such as the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan).
- The profound Emmaus Road appearance and other vital resurrection details.

The Universal Man

Luke wrote his Gospel specifically tailored to the Greek or Gentile mind.

The strict religious framework of Israel could produce a devout Pharisee. The military might of Rome could produce an unyielding Caesar. The brilliant, philosophical world of Greece could produce an intellectual giant like Alexander the Great or Plato.

But none of these cultures could produce perfection. Only God could present the Universal Man—a Savior who crossed all cultural and ethnic barriers to fulfill the highest, deepest longings of human nature. That is the Jesus you will meet in the Gospel of Luke: the perfect Man who came to find you, to understand you, and to save you.