

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 69.6%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: Introduction to the New Testament – Part 1 – Political and Religious Background

Monday: Introduction to the New Testament – Part 2 – Introduction to Matthew and Mark

Tuesday: Introduction to the New Testament – Part 3 – Introduction to Luke and John

Wednesday: Luke 1:1 – 4 & John 1:1 – 18

Thursday: Matthew 1:1-17 & Luke 3:23-38

Friday: Luke 1:5 - 14

Saturday: Luke 15 - 25

Current # of email addresses in the group: 691

After a couple month break, welcome back to the Chronological Reading Program! We have around 60 to 70 new email addresses who have joined us for the New Testament. Welcome! For those who are new, below you will find links to the previous weeks if you later decide to go back to the Old Testament. Additionally, locally, Elder James Malizia takes what I send out and turns them into audio files for those who prefer to listen. You can find those also at the below links. They won't be available tonight, but usually are up by the day for which they are intended. I also print this email to PDF and attach it each week for those who prefer to have it in a PDF.

I have a lot to write here in week 1 regarding what to expect. First, as mentioned before, UCG has not yet produced and published a New Testament reading program with commentary like they have for the Old Testament. I am therefore forging forward. I have worked

diligently to write “truth” and do my research. In addition to my own research, I have drawn from Scott Ashley’s Gospel class that he gave to UCG elders. I thank Scott for his tremendous research and instruction regarding the 1st century Jewish world. I also want to thank Elder Lud Kiramidjian, who has worked diligently to take Scott Ashley’s class and make a transcript. This has been extremely useful to me. Lud is also serving to look over my weekly reading program in advance of me sending it out. I appreciate in advance the large amount of time that will take and for helping to ensure accuracy of information, fix many typos, and to also help make sure I didn’t leave anything glaring out. In addition, I welcome any of the elders who receive this each week, to share with me any clarifying statements/concerns/questions/etc. It has been a great comfort to me these last three years to have a dozen elders in the group that are also reading over this.

I need to also state that I am not a writer, nor do I have the time to spend a lot of time going back through what I write to check for errors or carefully craft each sentence. Please forgive me in advance.

In this first week, I have included links to several of my sermons. Please understand, it’s not for the purpose of self-promotion. There are many tremendous speakers within the Body of Christ, that may have covered that material even better, but there are times I can not possibly include everything regarding a certain subject. I include these links only for those who would like a recommendation for how they can learn more on a certain topic. Take it or leave it.

I must also mention, one of my great passions as a minister is to learn from the actual source languages of the Bible. I have taken some classes on Greek, and I’m signed up to start a course on Hebrew. I am by no means an expert on Greek, but I am learning a lot, and I will share a number of Greek words throughout our New Testament study. Some people like word studies, some hate them. I will try to be brief in these

studies, and I will also try to only do them where I believe it adds depth or clearer understanding into God's Word.

I have tried to be disciplined not to make comments on verses that were clear without explanation, but I am a pastor, and my family often says "Preachers be preaching". I'll do my best.

Lastly, sometimes I felt it made sense to move verse by verse through a chapter, and other times, I found writing about the chapter more generally made more sense. When moving through verses, I will write the verse before the comments.

Current and archive of this reading program is available at:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/announcements/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep>

The audio archive information is also available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:

https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA_tacLBfv1XR3jH

You may actually prefer accessing it directly from this Playlist tab:

<https://www.youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792/playlists>

3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 108

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

Day 729 – SUNDAY: November 9th

Introduction to the New Testament – Part 1 – Political and Religious Background

Daily Deep Dive:

Before diving into the New Testament scriptures, it's important that we understand both the political and religious background of the Gospel accounts.

Roman Background of the Gospel:

Timing:

Judea and Galilee were a part of the larger Roman Empire. It's important for us to understand that God specifically chose the time, what empire would be ruling, what language they would be speaking, etc... for when to have His Son born, live and die (Galatians 4:4-5). All of this would impact how the Church would be founded and able to spread.

For example, at the time Jesus Christ was born, the first Caesar reigned and was ushering in his gospel, the gospel (or good news) of Augustus. His was a counterfeit gospel to the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, but Caesar Augustus did usher in a period of relative peace.

For more information on this counterfeit gospel, I covered this in a sermon.

<https://www.ucg.org/sermons/which-gospel>

Had Jesus Christ been born 100 years earlier or later, the political landscape would be much different. A hundred years earlier Judea was in a great deal of turmoil and change. The Greek Empire was not conquered, but instead collapsed. Rome, was able to quickly expand by picking up the pieces of the Grecian Empire, including those pieces of the Middle East, like Judea and Galilee. That period of turmoil would have made it very difficult, if not impossible, for Jesus to carry out His ministry. There was just too much chaos as kings and kingdoms rose and fell.

Had Jesus Christ been born 100 years later, Jews had rebelled against Rome, and there was another major war known as the Bar Kokhba revolt/war (132 to 136 AD). This was the last and most devastating of three major Jewish rebellions against the Roman Empire. This too would have made it nearly impossible for Jesus Christ to carry out His ministry.

God specifically chose the timing, a period of peace, security and stability, for His Son to live and teach. This period of peace in Rome is called the "Pax Romana". That's Latin for "Peace of Rome". This period

of relative peace in Judea, under Roman occupation, would last until the late 60's AD when the Jews revolted, leading to the temple's destruction in 70 AD.

This Pax Romana created a period of time over several decades where Jesus Christ could be born, could carry out His ministry and teachings, the Church could be founded, and the Gospel message could spread.

Transportation:

Under Roman rule, there were two aspects of transportation that took major steps forward. One, was the Roman road system. The Romans had developed a massive system of "good" roads that facilitated the movement of their troops across the empire. When Roman soldiers were not fighting, they were building and maintaining infrastructure, like roads, dams, bridges, aqueducts, and walls.

These road systems would have allowed Jesus and His apostles/disciples to travel relatively quickly and safely around the empire.

The second aspect of transportation that took a major step forward under the Roman Empire was that of ships. There were ports where you could catch ships and travel throughout the empire. Rome raised a navy and brought peace to traveling the Mediterranean Sea by getting rid of the pirates that previously roamed freely. They called the Mediterranean "Mare Nostrum", meaning "Our Sea/Lake" in Latin. This will have a great impact on Paul being able to journey throughout the empire.

Mail:

The Roman Empire had established a mail system that allowed people to send letters and messages throughout the empire. Due to this system, we have letters that were written to various congregations in the first century.

Koine Greek:

Koine Greek was the common language of the Roman Empire. Many languages were spoken throughout the empire (such as Aramaic being the common language of Judea and Galilee), but it was Koine Greek that tied the empire together. One could travel anywhere in the empire and find people who spoke Koine Greek. Koine Greek is a precise language. It's no accident that God wanted the New Testament words captured in this precise language. Had there not been this language throughout the empire, it would have been much more difficult for the Gospel to spread.

Religion in the Roman Empire:

When Rome conquered or took control of an area, they typically let the inhabitants continue with their existing religions, as long as peace was maintained. Rome would even adopt aspects of other religions and take them back to Rome and incorporate them into their own religious practices. Evidence shows where Rome adopted gods/goddesses from Egypt, Greece, Persia, India, etc...

Rome's tolerance of other religions was a benefit to the Jews and the early Church. This facilitated the early spread of Christianity, since Rome simply viewed it as a different sect or branch of Judaism. From Rome's standpoint, both Jews and Christians kept the Sabbath, the Holy Days, ate and avoided the same foods, etc... This initially allowed Christianity to spread as a legal and legitimate religion in the empire.

Various Jewish Religious & Political Groups:

There were at least three religious groups at the time of the New Testament, known as the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes --- and there were at least two political groups, the Zealots and the Herodians. The word "Pharisee" comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to separate". By the time Jesus begins His ministry, this group has been around about a century and a half. Their approach to the Torah and their self-imposed traditions, were very detailed. They viewed their traditions, or oral laws passed down, to be as binding as the

written law. Through this dedication, they would become self-righteous, arrogant and elevate themselves above the common people. The Pharisees believed in a resurrection, angels and demons. Not all Pharisees were “bad” in the sense of being unwilling to be taught, arrogant, etc... We will see that there were good Pharisees. While maybe not a 100% identical continuation, many consider modern Orthodox Jews today to be a modern equivalent to the Pharisees. A quick note about the scribes. The scribes are often closely connected with the Pharisees. The scribes were highly educated in the law, specializing in reading, writing and interpreting the law. They served as government record-keepers, secretaries, legal advisors, and teachers. Scribes were often referred to by the titles of “Lawyers” or “Doctors of the Law”.

For the Sadducees, one theory is that they got their name from Zadok, who was High Priest at the time of David and Solomon. Over time, the term shifted from “Zadokites” to “Sadducees”. The Sadducees were generally the priests who had descended from the sons of Zadok. Another theory, connects the Hebrew word for “righteous” (tsaddîq), as where the name derived from. This sect was mostly composed of priests, aristocratic families and wealthy merchants who held political power. This group only believed in the five books of Moses as inspired from God. It’s for this reason, that they don’t believe in a resurrection, since the resurrection is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah (though it is implied in Genesis 22:5 (cf., Hebrews 11:17-19). The Sadducees were more willing to be open to Greek thought, which led to corrupted ideas, such as the belief in an immortal soul, and led to clashes with the Pharisees. One key thing to understand about the Sadducees is that they were willing to ally and partner with whoever was in power. They were opportunists. Due to being priests, they are closely associated with the Temple and made a lot of money from buying/selling and currency exchange at the Temple. This was their power base, and after the fall of the temple in 70 A.D., we don’t see them mentioned anymore.

The third sect we'll discuss is the Essenes. They are not specifically mentioned in the Bible, but we know about them from both archeology and historians. They were a deeply religious group of people who lived in Qumran. This group is famous for "Dead Sea Scrolls" which were found in caves near their community. They were preserved for 2,000 years in these caves due to the very dry dessert climate. The Essenes built an isolated community separate from the mainstream world. They are known for their ascetic lifestyle, with emphasis on ritual purity and strict adherence to the law. Ascetism is a lifestyle of severe self-denial and abstinence from all forms of indulgence and temptation. They believed they could achieve higher spirituality and morality through rigorous denial of physical pleasures and comforts, including food and sex during marriage. They would "add" to God's Word, by teaching to abstain from things God made good in moderation.

The Zealots, were a politically motivated group who wanted to push Rome out of their land, in order to establish the Kingdom ruled by the Messiah. The term Zealot is associated with their zeal for God in their movement. They were nick named "Dagger Men" because it was fairly common for them to hide daggers in their robes to secretly attach unsuspecting Romans or collaborators with Rome. They rejected any cooperation with Rome, including paying taxes, as a betrayal of their faith. The Zealots played a significant role in the Jewish revolt against Rome in the late 60's A.D., which ultimately led to the destruction of the second temple in 70 A.D.

The Herodians, were a group of political supporters of the family of Herod the Great. These Jews were not really religious. They were pro-Rome and favored Hellenistic culture. They too plotted against Jesus, viewing His teachings as a threat to their authority and the established political order. They are mentioned three times in the Gospels.

Here are a few more things to mention before we wrap up for the day: Hellenization:

Before the rise of Rome, Alexander the Great's conquests (4th century BC) spread Greek language, philosophy, and culture across the ancient world — a process called *Hellenization*. Even after Rome took control, Greek remained the language of education, trade, and public discourse. Greek thought emphasized logic, reason, and the pursuit of knowledge, shaping the intellectual environment into which the Gospel later came. The Greek language and mindset allowed the good news to travel quickly, and helped early Christians engage both Jewish and Gentile audiences with reasoned faith.

Mixed rule:

During the time of Jesus, Judea and Galilee were governed under a mixture of Roman and local rule. Rome often appointed local “client kings,” such as Herod the Great and his sons, to manage regions on its behalf. In other areas, governors or procurators like Pontius Pilate answered directly to Caesar. The Jews enjoyed limited religious freedom, but not political independence. Understanding this political structure helps explain the tension between Rome's imperial authority and the Jewish longing for a Messianic kingdom — a tension that frames much of the Gospel narrative.

Temple versus Synagogues:

While the Temple in Jerusalem was the heart of Jewish worship through sacrifices and festivals, synagogues served as local centers for prayer, reading, and teaching of Scripture. They had emerged during the Babylonian exile when the Temple was inaccessible, and by the first century every town (with 10 or more Jewish men) had one. This network of synagogues allowed Jesus and the apostles to travel and teach directly from the Scriptures wherever they went. It also explains why the early Church naturally grew out of this teaching-centered environment, grounded in Scripture and community.

Samaritans:

The Samaritans were not foreign Gentiles transplanted into the land, as was once commonly assumed, but rather a remnant of an ancient Jewish sect that developed around the beginning of the Greek period. After the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., the Assyrians resettled people from various nations into Samaria. These settlers intermarried with the remaining Israelites, and their religion became a mixture of pagan and Israelite beliefs.

Modern historical research has shown that they are descendants of Israelites who maintained their own worship centered on Mount Gerizim rather than Jerusalem. They still observe the Passover on Mount Gerizim, sacrificing the lambs on the fourteenth day of Nisan, “between the two evenings,” preserving rites that closely resemble ancient Israelite practices from before the destruction of the Second Temple.

By Christ’s time, the Samaritans’ faith was partly true to the Torah, but corrupted by centuries of compromise and false worship—a blend of truth and error that reflected their mixed ethnic and spiritual heritage. Archaeological findings confirm the existence of their temple on Mount Gerizim, visible from Jacob’s well where Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman (John 4:5–26). These discoveries validate the Gospel account as historically accurate, showing that Samaritan worship was active and distinct in Jesus’ time.

Intertestamental Period:

Between the close of the Old Testament and the coming of John the Baptist (aka “John the Baptizer”) lies roughly four centuries often called “the silent years.” During this time, no recognized prophet spoke to Israel, but God was actively shaping history to prepare for the Messiah. The Persian Empire fell to Alexander the Great, ushering in Hellenistic culture; later, the Maccabean revolt (167 B.C.) briefly restored Jewish independence under the Hasmonean dynasty. Finally, Rome absorbed Judea into its empire.

This time also saw the rise of several key groups such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes, whose traditions later conflicted with Christ's teachings.

By the first century, the stage was set — politically, linguistically, and spiritually — for the arrival of the true King and the spread of His Gospel.

Day 730 – MONDAY: November 10th

Introduction to the New Testament – Part 2

Daily Deep Dive:

Background to Matthew:

Matthew is the author, and his name means “gift of God”, but he’s also called “Levi” in Mark & Luke (which is of Hebrew origin and means “joined to”). Many people had more than one name, which was common in multicultural settings. Levi would have been his Hebrew birth name, while Matthew would have been his Greco-Roman name. Mark & Luke call him Levi, likely because they wanted to highlight his Jewish identity. Even in our world today, people who immigrate to another country, often take a name of that country that is easier for people of that culture to say, and identifies that as a part of that new culture. He’s also called “son of Alphaeus” in Mark 2:14. Matthew lived in Capernaum, at the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This was a profitable spot due to the fishing and a major road, the Via Maris (“The Way of the Sea”), which ran from Babylon to Egypt. Matthew was a tax collector (aka “a publican”) in this city/area, which likely made him a fairly wealthy man. We know he has a big enough house to host a number of people and throw a banquet. While the Gospel books do not contain anything denoting who authored them, the early church leaders were unanimous in stating that Matthew wrote this account. The account seems to be written to a Jewish or Jewish-Christian audience. Here are some of the reasons for that assumption:

- Matthew's account is focused on the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He has more quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament writings than any other New Testament author.
- The tracing of Jesus' genealogy from Abraham.
- He gives little to no explanation on Jewish customs such as ritual washings, circumcision, etc... Which makes sense if the audience was already well familiar with Jewish customs.
- He uses common Jewish terminology, such as "Kingdom of Heaven" (versus Kingdom of God). Jews wanting to protect against violating the third commandment, were reluctant to use the name of God. The terms, however, are interchangeable.
- Focuses on Jesus as the "son of David", which would have resonated with a Jewish audience who was looking for the Messiah to be from the line of David.

Why would Matthew record this account? After Christ's resurrection and ascension, the Apostles served as eye-witness teachers who could answer the questions of new Christians. As a result of Rome's persecution against Christians, the church was scattered, and there was no longer a central, unified body of believers, in close proximity to the apostles. The need arose for there to be an authoritative recording and witness of the teachings of Jesus Christ and His experiences. Matthew would emphasize that Jesus was the Messiah from the line of David. Matthew would emphasize that while Jesus was King, that His Messianic Kingdom was not yet setup on earth.

We tend to think that all the gospel accounts were recorded in chronological form, but this is not true. Matthew, Mark and John were all Jewish. Luke appears to have been a Gentile. Jewish thinking, is very different than our Western thinking. Western thinking is very linear, but Eastern thinking (which includes Jewish thinking), can be grouped around ideas and themes. Each Gospel writer writes to a somewhat different audience, and they include and exclude and

arrange their material in a way to try to get their message across to their particular audience.

What language was Matthew written in? This is debated. Some scholars feel Matthew was written originally in Hebrew. However, it's important to note that there are no manuscripts, scraps, or anything found, that would provide any evidence this is true. They base this belief on a quote of a quote from Irenaeus (who may or may not have been part of the true Church). In the 300s A.D., Eusebius quotes Irenaeus as essentially saying that Matthew recorded his account in his native tongue (which they take to mean Hebrew). However, it could mean Aramaic or Hebrew. It's also possible, even likely, that Matthew, who likely was able to write (which would have been necessary as a tax collector), may have originally recorded Christ's exact phrases in Aramaic or Hebrew, depending on the real spoken words of Jesus Christ, and then later, when compiling them into the final form, recorded his account in the common Koine Greek language of the empire.

When was this account written? Most believe that Matthew was written between 65 to 70 A.D. which likely makes it the third account to be recorded.

Background to Mark:

Mark is the author of this account (not by direct statement, but by unanimous testimony of the early church). His name was John Mark or "John, also called Mark" (Acts 12:12, 25 & Acts 15:37). *John was of Hebrew origin* (Jochanan, meaning "Jehovah is a gracious giver") and Mark was of Latin origin (Marcus, meaning "a defense").

John Mark was the cousin of Barnabas (see Colossians 4:10). The Greek word ἀνέψιος in classic Greek could mean either "nephew" or "cousin". But by the first century, it no longer had the meaning of the older classical sense of "nephew" --- and was being used exclusively to refer to "cousin" instead. By the time of Paul, another Greek word was being used for nephew (ἀδελφιδούς). This is supported by the following:

- **LSJ (Liddell–Scott–Jones):** “cousin” (later Greek).
- **BDAG (the leading NT lexicon):** “*cousin (the son of one’s uncle or aunt)*” — explicitly not “nephew.”
- **LXX (Septuagint) usage:** consistent with “cousin” or “kinsman.”

It appears from 1 Peter 5:13, that Mark learned directly from Peter, and has a close relationship with him. It’s wondered whether John Mark came into contact with the Gospel through Peter in Acts 12:12. It seems Peter calls Mark his son, in a spiritual sense, similar to how Paul calls both Timothy and Titus his sons.

Mark likely received from Peter various stories and teachings of Jesus Christ that he compiled together. Early Christians like Papias (early 2nd century) said that Mark wrote down “Peter’s eyewitness memories” of Jesus, however Papias stated that Mark did not record them in order. It’s also worth noting that Mark does not record some of these moments of Peter’s life that other Gospel writers record that may have been embarrassing to Peter, such as walking on water but losing faith, etc...

Mark begins traveling with Paul and Barnabas, in Acts 12:25, and helps them during their first missionary journey (Acts 13:5) but later leaves them to return to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). We will talk more about the likely impact of this on the relationship between Mark and Paul when we get to Acts 15:36-39.

Mark is also Jewish as far as we know, but his audience appears different than Matthew’s. Evidence seems to suggest that the audience was the church at Rome, or at least a Gentile audience. Mark explains Jewish customs which he wouldn’t have needed to do if his audience was Jewish (see Mark 7:2-4 & Mark 15:42 of examples where he goes out of his way to explain what he is saying). We see that Mark translates Aramaic words into Koine Greek (see Mark 3:17, 5:41, 7:11, 15:22 & 15:34). Mark also includes several Latin phrases, which again would be meaningful to a Gentile audience (not meaningful to Jewish

audience). Latin was still very common in Rome, but used very little at that time outside of the city of Rome. Latin examples, include:

- Centurion - Κεντυρίων (Kenturiōn) – meaning a Roman military officer over 100 men. The use of this Latin term (instead of the Greek *hekatontarchēs*) reflects Roman military language and suggests Mark's audience was familiar with Roman titles.
 - Legion - Λεγεὼν (Legiōn) - A unit of the Roman army, roughly 6,000 soldiers.
 - Praetorium - Πραῖτωριον (Praitōrion) - The governor's headquarters, often associated with the judgment hall or military palace. A Roman administrative term reflecting imperial authority.
 - Execution/guard - Σπεκουλάτωρ (Spekoulatōr) - An officer of the Roman guard or executioner sent to behead John the Baptist.
- Another Roman military title, rarely used outside Roman contexts.

It seems clear that Mark's account is the most "Roman" of the four Gospels. It's also the shortest of the four Gospels.

Mark's account seems very focused on "action", which makes sense through the lens of a Roman audience. The Roman Empire was far more interested in "action" than "teaching". In that culture, one would receive a task/job/commission, move to carry it out, and then report back as quick as possible that they had successfully accomplished their mission. It seems Mark wants to demonstrate what Jesus Christ did, and less about what He taught. That Jesus Christ was a man of "action". The Gospel of Mark contains a sense of urgency or rapid action. Over 40 times, Mark uses the Greek εὐθύς which means "forthwith, immediately, straightway".

While the dating of the Gospel of Mark varies greatly, most scholars seem to date it around 65 to 70 A.D. The famous fire of Rome occurred in 64 A.D., and Emperor Nero blamed this blaze on Christians, which resulted in widespread persecution from around 64 to 67 A.D. Mark

may have been preparing his readers for such a time of persecution (compare Mark 8:34-38 & Mark 13:9-13).

The major themes of the Gospel of Mark are:

1. Jesus as the Servant-King — the Son of God who came not to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45). His divine authority is evident through miracles and power over nature, demons, and disease, yet His path leads to suffering and death. Mark shows that true messiahship involves sacrifice, not worldly glory.
2. The Kingdom of God – As opposed to Rome’s Empire, Mark opens with Jesus proclaiming: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand”* (Mark 1:15). The Kingdom is both present (in Jesus’ ministry) and future (to be fully realized at His return).
3. Discipleship and the true cost of following Jesus – Mark shows that discipleship involves learning through failure, and being transformed by humility and service (Mark 8:34-38; 9:35).
4. Faith versus Fear/Faithlessness - Mark contrasts those who respond to Jesus in faith (e.g., the woman with the issue of blood, Jairus) with those paralyzed by fear or unbelief (e.g., the disciples in the storm). This tension challenges readers to trust God even when He seems hidden or silent (Mark 4:40; 5:36).
5. The true identity of Jesus - Mark repeatedly raises the question, *“Who is this man?”* — from the crowds, to the disciples, to the centurion at the cross (Mark 4:41; 15:39). The Gospel gradually reveals that Jesus is both Messiah and Son of God, but not the kind of Messiah people expected to come.
6. Urgency in action - Mark’s frequent use of the word “immediately” (εὐθύς) gives the Gospel a sense of urgency and movement. Jesus is constantly in motion — healing, teaching, casting out demons, etc...

Day 731 – TUESDAY: November 11th

Introduction to the New Testament – Part 3

Daily Deep Dive:

Background to Luke:

Like the other Gospel's, there is no author directly stated. So how do we come to conclude that Luke is the author? Early Christian writers, such as Irenaeus (~180 A.D.), refer to Luke as the author. Another piece of evidence, a Latin manuscript fragment (known as the Muratorian Fragment), dates to 170 to 200 A.D. includes the oldest known list of New Testament writings. This fragment names Luke as the author. Another clue is the use of "we" in sections of Acts. Luke is understood to have written Acts. Luke's Gospel is a companion volume to the book of Acts, and scholars can see that the language and structure of these books indicate they were written by the same person. They were both addressed to the same person, Theophilus. In Acts 16, 20, 21, 27–28, the author suddenly uses "we" instead of "they," indicating the writer was traveling with Paul. Paul's known traveling companions from his letters include Luke, Timothy, Titus, and Silas—but Luke is the only one not otherwise named in Acts, which fits the author's modest anonymity. Additionally, we see in Colossians 4:14 that Paul says, "Luke the beloved physician". The vocabulary and phrasing of this Gospel, suggests the author was an educated Greek writer, possibly with medical training. In passages describing illness and healings (see Luke 4:38, 5:12 & 8:43), the author uses precise medical terminology not seen in the other Gospels. The author's Greek style is the most polished of the four Gospels, consistent with someone with more education. All of this together leads us to conclude that Luke is the author.

Luke was likely a Gentile, not Jew, by birth. He traveled with Paul at various times starting with Paul's second missionary journey, and continuing to Paul's final imprisonment in Rome, even when all others had deserted him (see 2 Timothy 4:11 likely written during Paul's final imprisonment).

Luke is a different Gospel than Matthew and Mark. Paul largely went to the Greek world, and Luke's Gospel account appears to be written to that audience. The Greek world prided themselves on their logic, reason and rational inquiry. Luke writes logically and includes a great deal of history and details that could be used to prove his account as accurate. Interestingly, it does the same for us today, as it has allowed for both archeologists and historians to verify its accuracy.

As mentioned before, the letter is addressed to Theophilus, which is made up of two Greek words, Theos (θεός) meaning "god" and philos (φίλος) meaning "friend". Put together this means "friend of God". This doesn't appear to be a generic title toward all faithful Christians, because it is singular in the Greek and it begins with "most excellent". Theophilus appears to be a Greek or Roman. This same title is also applied to Felix (Acts 23:26) and Festus (Acts 26:25). The title "most noble" in Acts 26:25 is the same Greek word translated "most excellent" in Luke 1:3. Therefore, Theophilus appears to have been a chief civil magistrate over some city in Greece or Asia minor. It's possible, he was Luke's patron (a wealthy individual who covered living expenses for another), who may have supported Luke while he wrote both Luke and Acts.

Like John Mark, Luke was not an eyewitness. We know he traveled with Paul, so certainly Paul was one of those eyewitnesses Luke spoke to.

As we set the chronological order of our reading program through the Gospels, there is something important included at the beginning of Luke that we should consider.

In Luke 1:1-4 it states: " Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know

the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.”

We learn a number of things from this passage. For one, that there had already been others who had recorded, in order, a narrative of the life of Jesus Christ. This also shows us that Luke set out to both determine and record an “orderly account” based on the eyewitnesses he spoke to. We aren’t told all of who these people were, but Luke was likely very diligent to seek out many of these “eyewitnesses” and to record the details. For Luke’s account to convince individuals of the Greco-Roman world, they would need an accurate and chronological recording that they could verify. Matthew, Mark and John were not concerned with a strict chronological order, and often grouped their accounts by themes.

Please note: While many “harmonies” are arranged around Mark’s account, we will use the order of Luke’s Gospel as it is likely the most chronological of the Gospel writings.

Luke’s Gospel has been called by scholars the “Gospel of Compassion”. It contains more detailed accounts of healings than any other Gospel. Approximately 40% of Luke is unique from the other Gospels. Consider what we wouldn’t have if we didn’t have the Gospel of Luke:

The unique birth and childhood narrative:

- The announcement to Zechariah about John the Baptist (1:5–25)
- The annunciation to Mary (1:26–38) — Gabriel’s visit to Nazareth
- Mary’s visit to Elizabeth and the Magnificat (1:39–56)
- The birth of John the Baptist and Zechariah’s prophecy (*Benedictus*, 1:57–80)
- The census under Caesar Augustus and journey to Bethlehem (2:1–5)
- The manger scene and the shepherds (2:6–20)
- Jesus’ presentation at the Temple, Simeon’s and Anna’s prophecies (2:22–38)

- The 12-year-old Jesus in the Temple, astonishing the teachers (2:41–52)

Parables found only in Luke:

- The Good Samaritan (10:25–37)
- The Friend at Midnight (11:5–8)
- The Rich Fool (12:13–21)
- The Barren Fig Tree (13:6–9)
- The Great Banquet (Excuses) (14:15–24)
- Counting the Cost / Building a Tower (14:28–33)
- The Lost Coin (15:8–10)
- The Prodigal Son (15:11–32)
- The Unjust Steward (16:1–13)
- The Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19–31)
- The Unworthy Servants (17:7–10)
- The Persistent Widow (Unjust Judge) (18:1–8)
- The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9–14)
- The Ten Minas (19:11–27) — a variation of the Parable of the Talents
- The Two Debtors (7:41–43)
- The Good Shepherd Searching for the Lost Sheep (variant, 15:4–7)

Unique miracles and events:

- Raising of the widow's son at Nain (7:11–17)
- The sinful woman anointing Jesus' feet in Simon the Pharisee's house (7:36–50)
- Ten lepers cleansed; only one (a Samaritan) returns to give thanks (17:11–19)
- Healing of a woman crippled 18 years (13:10–17)
- Healing of a man with dropsy (14:1–6)
- Zacchaeus the tax collector (19:1–10)

Luke's account emphasizes the humanity of the Messiah.

In fact, one of the major themes of the Luke's Gospel is that Jesus was the Savior of ALL humanity (not just the Jews). Luke traces Jesus genealogy all the way back to Adam, not just Abraham, to emphasize, He is the Savior for all humanity. Jesus is called "Savior" more in Luke than any of the Gospels. Luke emphasizes Gentiles, Samaritans, Romans and women.

Luke's account gives the most attention, dignity and voice to women, showing them to be active in God's plan and models to all of faith, courage and discipleship. Not only does Luke's account often present women as the first recipients of God's revelation, Luke highlights Christ's great compassion toward women:

- The widow of Nain (7:11–17) — Jesus raises her only son, moved by compassion for her loss.
- The sinful woman who anoints Jesus' feet (7:36–50) — forgiven and publicly honored for her love and repentance.
- The woman with a disabling spirit (13:10–17) — Jesus calls her "a daughter of Abraham," affirming her covenant identity.
- The woman who touches Jesus' garment (8:43–48) — Jesus stops to acknowledge and affirm her faith publicly.
- Mary and Martha (10:38–42) — both shown as disciples; Mary is commended for choosing to learn at Jesus' feet — a place typically reserved for male disciples.

Additionally, Luke's account highlights women as financial supporters, spiritual followers and eyewitnesses to Christ's ministry.

Unlike Matthew's genealogy of Christ, Luke's genealogy appears to trace through Mary's line, not Joseph's.

The last thing I will mention about Luke's special focus on women is their faithfulness at the cross and the tomb when in contrast to many

of the males who had fled.

- They stand near the cross, watching and mourning (23:27, 49).
- They witness the burial (23:55–56).
- They are the first at the empty tomb (24:1–11).
- They receive the angelic message of the resurrection.
- They announce the risen Christ to the apostles — becoming the first proclaimers of the resurrection.

Another theme of Luke is the “reversal of fortunes”. Luke consistently shows God overturning the expectations of humans.

- The poor are blessed; the rich warned (6:20–26; 12:13–21; 16:19–31).
- The humble are lifted up (14:11; 18:14).
- The outsider becomes the example of faith (10:25–37; 17:11–19).
- The last become first (13:30).

Luke has quickly become one of my favorite books, because Luke is very different from the other Gospels and provides a God-inspired balance that is needed.

Before I leave the background of the Gospel of Luke, I thought it was worth mentioning a theory on Luke & Acts that has been around since approximately 1720, which is the idea that accounts of the books of Luke and Acts together were collected by Luke as a part of the Apostle Paul’s legal defense as he awaited trial before Emperor Nero. There is a book entitled “Paul on Trial” by John W. Mauck (who himself is a practicing attorney), where he details how it served as a “legal brief” to provide evidence that Christianity was not subversive to Rome, and that Paul was not guilty of the charges that had been brought against him. Mauck’s approach brings an apologetic legal-perspective to New Testament studies, emphasizing elements like “witness testimony,”

“investigation,” and “account” which, he argues, echo the language of first-century trials.

Background to John:

While again, the Gospel of John does not name its author directly, evidence strongly suggests that John, the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus’ 12 apostles recorded it.

First, the author identifies himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20-24) who was an eyewitness to many events. This disciple is present at many key events (the final Passover meal, crucifixion, and empty tomb).

The writing of this book includes detailed descriptions of places, times and events suggesting that the author had firsthand experience with Judean life before 70 A.D. and detailed knowledge of Jewish customs, fitting for someone raised in Galilee and familiar with Jerusalem.

John was a prominent leader of the New Testament church, but is not mentioned in this Gospel, which would be hard to explain his absence from the account if he wasn’t the one who wrote it.

Externally, Irenaeus (180 A.D.) recorded that John was the author. Polycarp, a known disciple of John, also testified to this. There are others as well, but this should be enough that we can move forward with that assumption.

The name John comes from the Hebrew Jochanan, and it means “Jehovah is a gracious giver”.

His brother was another apostle, James, the two being also known as the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17), and were the sons of Zebedee.

John and James were likely cousins of Jesus Christ.

If you are interested in why that is a strong and reasonable possibility, you can read the following from our booklet “Jesus Christ the Real Story”:

<https://www.ucg.org/learn/bible-study-tools/bible-study-aids/jesus->

[christ-real-story/jesus-family-connections](#)

(The section I'm referring to starts at the heading "Some apostles were cousins")

Most scholars believe the Gospel of John was written in the 90's A.D. What is fascinating about the book of John is that approximately 90% of the Gospel is unique! Even the 10% that overlap with Matthew, Mark and Luke, often uses distinctive wording, structure and theological emphasis. It appears that John deliberately avoided including previous material that had already been covered and retained by Matthew, Mark and Luke. Additionally, the Gospel of John counters false gnostic teachings, which grew in influence and became widespread in the later part of the 1st century.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are often called together the "synoptic" gospels. "Syn" meaning "same or together" and "optic" meaning "seeing or viewing". Those three gospels are generally thought to contain the "same view", or a "view that is together". They have similarities, although, we've also covered already how they are all very different, but they are generally thought to cover the same material.

Not only does John cover different material, his focus also seems to be different. There are no parables in John.

In the late 1st century, Gnostics were emerging as a group of teachers who blended elements of Greek philosophy, mysticism, and distorted Christian ideas. They believed that salvation came through secret knowledge (*gnosis*) rather than faith or obedience to God. Gnostics taught that the material world was evil, created not by the true supreme God -- but by a lesser, ignorant deity. They claimed that Jesus was a divine spirit sent to reveal hidden truth so souls could escape the physical world and return to the realm of light.

John emphasizes that Jesus was God who came in the flesh. Gnostics would deny that if Jesus came in the flesh, that He was the Messiah. So

John has a focus, in his Gospel account, and also his letters (1st, 2nd and 3rd John) of countering this growing wrong teaching. John focuses on Jesus' humanity, that He was a normal human being who got tired, hungry and grew thirsty. This was meant to counter the false gnostic teachings.

Additionally, right away in John 1, John begins down a profound process of showing Jesus as the divine "Word" who existed with God, and was God, who created all things, and that this Word became flesh as a human being. John also reveals Jesus as a human being (physical), as the "light of the world" (John 8:12, 9:5). All of this is a counter to gnostic teachings.

In addition to the major theme of "Jesus as the Divine Son of God", there are other prominent themes, such as Light vs Darkness (truth vs deception, good vs evil) throughout.

"Love" is another major theme of the Gospel of John. In addition to one of the most famous of all scriptures, John 3:16, John talks about love approximately 57 times. Contained within these verses is the ideas of "God's love for the world", the Father's love for His Son, Jesus' love for His disciples, and the command for them to love one another as Christ loved them.

Finally, contained in the Gospel of John is the theme that Christ came for the purpose of revealing the Father. Through all of the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel of John, we learn about God the Father.

Why didn't Christ write His own Gospel?

In John 5:31, Christ stated: "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true."

The principle of the Bible is that a matter is established by two or three witnesses (compare Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15, Matthew 18:16, 2 Cor 13:1, 1 Timothy 5:19, & Hebrews 10:28).

It was not legally valid for someone to serve as their own witness.

There had to be independent eyewitnesses of who Jesus Christ was, and what He did and taught.

How old were the disciples?

People have often thought of the disciples as middle-aged men. This is a big topic, but I think when we look at a number of clues in the Bible, that they were much younger.

For anyone interested in hearing me go through those clues, I will include a link to a sermon I gave where I go through a lot of this.

<https://www.ucg.org/sermons/let-no-one-despise-your-youth-1>

Day 732 – WEDNESDAY: November 12th

Luke 1:1 – 4 & John 1:1 – 18

Daily Deep Dive:

Luke 1:2 – It's worth noting that the word translated in the KJV/NKJV for "minister" in the Greek comes from:

- ὑπό (hypo) = "under"
- ἐρέτης (eretēs) = "rower" (from ἐρέσσω, *to row*).

So literally, ὑπηρέτης originally meant "an under-rower"—a subordinate oarsman in a Greek trireme or galley. These were the men rowing on the lower deck, working under command of a higher officer.

Over time, the term broadened from the nautical image to mean:

- An assistant, attendant, or helper to a superior (like an aide or subordinate official).
- A servant or functionary acting under authority.

By the first century, in Koine Greek usage, ὑπηρέτης was commonly used for anyone carrying out orders under another's direction—whether in civil, religious, or spiritual contexts.

In the New Testament, ὑπηρέτης appears about 20 times, with meanings including:

1. An attendant or servant – e.g., the officers of the high priest (John 7:45–46; Luke 4:20).
2. A subordinate official – such as in Acts 13:5, describing John Mark as a *helper* to Paul and Barnabas.
3. A minister or servant of the word – Luke 1:2 uses it of those who were “*servants of the word*,” i.e., assistants in proclaiming the message.

In English Bibles, translators often render ὑπηρέτης as *minister* when the context implies spiritual service under divine authority rather than menial or physical labor.

For example:

In Acts 26:16, Christ says to Paul, “*I have appeared to you to appoint you a servant (ὑπηρέτην) and a witness...*”

Here, *minister* captures the sense of servant under orders in God’s work.

So “minister” reflects the dignified sense of subordination to God’s mission, while “servant” would emphasize humility and service in general.

Luke 1:3 – Luke says he had “perfect understanding”. The Greek for perfect means “diligent, accurate, exact”. I believe Luke is simply illustrating that he had worked very diligently to be accurate in his record.

We covered “most excellent Theophilus” in the introduction to Luke.

Luke 1:4 – The word for “instructed” in Greek means to be “taught by word of mouth” (orally instructed).

John 1:1 – I’m going to take this opportunity to speak about the Septuagint, as I will reference it from time to time.

After the Babylonian Exile (6th century B.C.), many Jews began speaking Aramaic rather than Hebrew in daily life. Hebrew continued to be used for worship and scholarship, but was no longer the common spoken language for most Jews.

By the 3rd century B.C., as Jewish communities spread throughout the Greek-speaking world (especially Alexandria, Egypt), many Jews had adopted Greek as their main language. Because of this, they had trouble understanding the Hebrew Scriptures.

Around this time, Jewish scholars in Alexandria began translating the Hebrew Bible into Greek, producing what became known as the Septuagint (commonly abbreviated LXX). According to tradition, the first part translated was the Torah (Pentateuch) under the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (c. 285–247 B.C.), with the rest of the books added over the next century or so.

I wanted to reference the Septuagint for John 1:1, because I find it interesting that John was inspired to start his Gospel with “In the beginning” (or in Greek *Ἐν ἀρχῇ*), which is the exact same way Genesis 1:1 begins in the Septuagint. John takes us back to Genesis 1:1, or the beginning, to start his Gospel.

We are immediately introduced to a Being called “the Word”. Even though we have read this many times, it’s worth remembering that John doesn’t use the name of Jesus Christ until verse 17. He is intentionally teaching his audience a lot of information about this Being in a very systematic way. “The Word” in Greek is *λόγος* (logos). It’s a very common word, used 330 times in the New Testament. *λόγος* (logos) is actually a difficult word to translate into a single word in English. It’s often used about something that is being communicated (something said), but it’s also used in connection with “revealing something” that was previously unknown.

John is the only one of the New Testament writers to use this word “Logos” in a personified way toward this God Being -- and he does it seven times in his writings. In a personified sense, we get a Being who is communicating on behalf of, or communicating to reveal Someone and Something. He came to reveal the Father (Matthew 11:27, Luke 10:22). We could call Him the Spokesman for the God Family at that time.

This Being, the Word, was both “with” God and “was” God. In the Greek this phrase “was with God” implies more than simple proximity — it suggests an active, intimate relationship or face-to-face orientation. The phrase emphasizes the close, dynamic relationship between the Word (Logos) and God — a unity of purpose and presence.

John 1:3 – This God Being, the Word, was from the very beginning and created all things, both visible and invisible (Col 1:16).

John 1:4 – Physical life yes, but also Spirit life. In Him was no darkness, only light, only goodness and truth. Our ability to understand goodness and truth, comes through Him. Later in the book of John, Jesus Christ would proclaim, “**I am the way, the truth, and the life**” (John 14:6) & “**I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.**” (John 8:12).

John 1:5 – It’s worth noting that the word translated “comprehend” (NKJV) has a broad range of meaning and could also easily be translated here as “did not overcome”.

John 1:6 – John the Baptist (aka John the Baptizer).

John 1:7 – We spoke in the introduction remarks this week that one can not bear witness for themselves, others must do that to be a valid

witness. This Greek for “witness” (μαρτυρία - *martyria*). It’s a legal term about the formal declaration of facts based on personal knowledge — testimony given by a witness in a court or before an authority. It carried the same weight as our English “testimony under oath.” It could be used for a witness statement presented in court, or the evidence itself that confirmed or denied a claim.

In the New Testament, *μαρτυρία* keeps its courtroom imagery:

- God is the ultimate Judge.
- Jesus and His works are the evidence.
- Believers are witnesses giving testimony (μαρτυρία) about truth.
- Satan is portrayed as the accuser (κατήγωρ) in the heavenly courtroom (Revelation 12:10).

We will see this legal idea used many times throughout the New Testament.

John 1:10 – John Gill’s commentary states: “the inhabitants of the world knew him not as their Creator: nor did they acknowledge the mercies they received from him; nor did they worship, serve, and obey him, or love and fear him; nor did they, the greater part of them, know him as the Messiah, Mediator, Saviour, and Redeemer.”

John 1:11 – Adam Clarke’s commentary states: “to those of His own family, city, country: - and His own people, - His own citizens, brethren, subjects.” [End Quote] Christ Himself would later say in Matthew 13:57 ("A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.")

John 1:12 – We did not have any right, authority, or ability to become children of God, that had to be given or bestowed upon us. This privilege is promised to those who “believe” in His name. This word translated in English “believe”, in Greek is πιστεύουσιν (present active

indicative, 3rd person plural). This tense is continuous in Greek, meaning for this to be true, it must be ongoing, active, living, not a one-time mental agreement of the mind.

John 1:14 – He has now gone from this Being, the Word, who was from the very beginning, was with God and was God, who created all things, and brought us to the fact that this God Being, the Word, became flesh (a body of meat of man or beast).

The NKJV says He “dwelt” among us. I think we miss something with that translation. In Greek this says He “pitched His tent” or “He tabernacled”. In Greek this was something temporary. This is a Biblical theme we don’t want to miss. Just as God’s glory (The Hebrew noun “Shekinah,” meaning the indwelling or dwelling presence of God, actually comes from the same root as “shakan” — “to dwell.”) was with Israel in the Tabernacle, here now the Word (Logos) tabernacles in a temporary flesh among humanity.

John 1:16 – As Christ was full of grace and truth, so all of us have received from that fullness of grace and truth in our lives. The NKJV says “grace for grace”. In the Greek this is χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος (*charin anti charitos*). The little preposition ἀντί is key — it can mean instead of, in exchange for, or following upon. Verse 17 immediately builds on this by saying “For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” It’s worth pointing out that “but” is not in the original language. No connecting word is included. It’s not an “either or” statement, as if we have or choose between law OR grace. The law was and is a blessing! But even within that law, we were all doomed by it. We needed the gracious gift of forgiveness that came through the perfect life of Jesus Christ, and His sacrifice, to be free from the penalty of being under the law.

John 1:18 – Says that “No one has seen God at any time.” John says this again in 1 John 4:12. Later, Jesus Himself will say in John 5:37 “**You**

have neither heard His (the Father's) voice at any time, nor seen His form. And again, Christ says in John 6:46 "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father."

The God that was seen and heard in the Old Testament, was this Being, the Word (Logos), who has now been shown to be Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Son has now declared (made known) the Father.

Anyone desiring more information, I went through this in a sermon entitled: "The God Who Was Seen and Heard"

<https://www.ucg.org/sermons/god-who-was-seen-and-heard>

Day 733 – THURSDAY: November 13th

Matthew 1:1-17 & Luke 3:23-38

Daily Deep Dive:

Matthew here will immediately connect Jesus to Abraham (covenant and promise) and David (royal lineage and Messiahship). Matthew arranges his list deliberately with 3 sets of 14 generations. This is spelled out in verse 17. However, if you go back to the Old Testament genealogies, there are not 14 generations. Matthew has skipped some generations, to structure this as 14, 14, & 14. Fourteen generations is mentioned 3 times here. I first began to understand how much I was misreading scriptures (or missing in scriptures), when I read a book entitled "Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes" by Richards and O'Brien. The book explained that in the biblical world, numbers often carried symbolic or qualitative meaning, not just quantitative value as we tend to think in the modern West. They note that ancient writers frequently used numbers to convey patterns, completeness, or significance—rather than precise counts. This is important, because as we read through the Gospels, we will see many times where a number seems arbitrary to us (like the number of brothers of the rich man, in the parable "The Richman and Lazarus), but God doesn't do anything arbitrary. Other times we may be tempted to read literally, a number that is meant more symbolically. We understand this in regards to the

number 7. It often is used to indicate completeness or perfection. Unlike our English language where we have numbers that are separate from our alphabet. Ancient languages generally didn't have separate numeric systems. The Israelites had a system where the first letter of their alphabet was given a numeric value of 1, their second letter, the value of 2, etc...

Scholars have attempted to figure out why Matthew uses 14, 14, 14, when it's not actually the exact number of generations. Scholars see that David's name is used twice in this verse. His name was spelled without vowels in Hebrew as "D-V-D". D was the fourth letter, and V was the 6th letter, and so $4 + 6 + 4 = 14$. Those scholars believe that it was a special way of coding, 14, 14, 14 as "David, David, David". Or in other words, that Jesus Christ was the prophesized son of David, who would be the King of Israel and ultimately King of Kings. Another clue is that in verse 6, it specifically lists David as "David the King" (twice).

Notice the inclusion of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba ("wife of Uriah"), and Mary. This is highly unusual in genealogies (Biblical or otherwise). Women in this culture were not to be heard, and to some degree, not to be seen. Three of these women were Gentiles, which again is highly unusual for Matthew to include. Matthew does not call Bathsheba out by name, instead, he seems to purposely want us to think about the fact that Uriah was a Hittite. Matthew seems to be stressing Bathsheba's Gentile connection as well. Each represents God working through surprising and even sometimes "messy" circumstances. This shows God's mercy and inclusion of Gentiles. Jesus Christ wasn't somehow tainted by the sins and "mess" in His family tree. God is faithful even through exile and human failure (murderers, adulterers, prostitution). God's grace and plan extends to outsiders and sinners.

While Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience, he seems to purposely make a subtle, yet profound point, right off the bat of his Gospel account, and it's the same point that Paul makes in Galatians 3:28:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

We also see here in Matthew that this genealogy traces through Joseph, Jesus’ legal (not biological) father, showing Jesus’ rightful claim to David’s throne under Jewish law was through His legal father (a descendent of David through Solomon). This demonstrates Jesus as the legal heir of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:16). However, Jesus was also a descendent of King David on His mother’s side through Nathan (and therefore also a biological descendent of David). Luke’s genealogy account focuses on Jesus’ divine Sonship through being ultimately the son of Adam, son of God. While Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience, Luke’s Gentile audience would have been drawn to Jesus as the Savior of all of mankind, not just the Jews.

The two together shows God’s grand design to make Jesus both “King of Israel” and “Savior of the whole world”.

It’s also important to remember, for Jesus to be the promised Messiah, He not only had to be from David, but of Abraham (Genesis 22:18), Jacob (Numbers 24:17), Judah (Genesis 49:10), Jesse (Isaiah 11:1), David (2 Samuel 7:13) and Zerubbabel (Haggai 2:22-23). Matthew’s recorded genealogy shows that Jesus fulfills these prophecies).

Luke 3:23 – Thirty years of age was the age that a priest (a type of Christ) entered their work (compare Number 4:23, 47). Here Jesus begins His ministry at the same age.

Day 734 – FRIDAY: November 14th

Luke 1:5 – 14

Daily Deep Dive:

Luke 1:5 – Herod the Great was the Roman-appointed king of Judea (deputation from the Roman emperor, he had the government of all Judea, which upon his death was divided among his sons) who ruled

from 37 BC to 4 B.C. He was known for his political skill, ambitious building projects, and ruthless defense of his throne. Herod greatly expanded the Second Temple in Jerusalem, built fortresses such as Masada and Herodium, and founded the city of Caesarea Maritima. Though admired for his architectural achievements, he was also infamous for paranoia and brutality—executing members of his own family and, according to Matthew 2, ordering the massacre of Bethlehem’s infants in an attempt to kill the newborn “King of the Jews.” His reign marked both prosperity and oppression, bridging the Jewish world and the rising power of Rome.

Zacharias – This name is of Hebrew origin (Zechariah), meaning the “Lord has remembered” or “Remembered by God”. We don’t know anything of his parents. Parents often named their child for their specific hopes and dreams for that child. As the Jewish people were now under the oppression of Rome, and not a free nation, maybe this name was to indicate their hopes that God would remember His people once again and send the promised Messiah. If they had intended to name him after the prophet Zechariah of the Old Testament, they may have drawn from themes of Zechariah’s writings regarding the “coming Messiah” and the “Messiah’s reign of peace and prosperity”.

Elizabeth – Was of the daughters of Aaron, so she was a Levite. Elizabeth is also a name of Hebrew origin ('ēlîysheba'), meaning “God of oath” or “my God has sworn”.

Near the end of David’s life, he began making preparations for the temple that Solomon would build. David organized the priests into 24 scheduled groups (see 1 Chronicles 24:3 – 19). Each group served in the temple for one week. After 24 weeks, all the groups would have served, and it started over. Three times during the year (Festival seasons), all 24 groups would come and serve due to the increased amount of work to be done. What’s interesting is that we know that

the first group would begin their service right after the Feast of Tabernacles, and therefore we can calculate when each group would serve (roughly) throughout the year. The “Abijah” group is listed in 1 Chronicles 24:10 as the 8th group. So they would serve in the 8th week after the Feast of Tabernacles, which would be roughly early December and again around mid-June.

Luke 1:7 – In the 1st century Jewish culture, barrenness carried deep social stigma and emotional pain. Children were seen as a sign of God’s favor and blessing (Psalm 127:3 – 5). Therefore, not having a child, was a sign of God’s displeasure or punishment. A woman’s security was deeply tied to her ability to produce children, especially a son, to continue the husband’s heritage. Some men would seek a divorce due to infertility. It’s interesting that God first establishes the righteousness of both Zacharias and Elizabeth before telling us she was barren to dispel any thoughts of God’s displeasure or punishment.

Luke 1:8 – Again, they would serve in the 8th week after the Feast of Tabernacles, which would be roughly early December and again around mid-June.

Luke 1:9 – The JFB commentary states: “The part assigned to each priest in his week of service was decided by lot. Three were employed at the offering of incense - to remove the ashes of the former service; to bring in and place on the golden altar the pan filled with hot burning coals taken from the altar of burnt offering; and to sprinkle the incense on the hot coals; and, while the smoke of it ascended, to make intercession for the people.” [END QUOTE]

Additionally it should be understood, that it’s estimated that at the time of Christ, there were approximately 24,000 priests. If they were divided into 24 groups, it means that there was roughly 1,000 priests serving each week. There were four specific roles one could be

selected to do. These included removal of the ashes from the altar (Leviticus 6:10-11); slaughtering and preparing the daily burnt offerings (Numbers 28:3 – 4); placing the parts of the sacrifice, grain offerings, drink offerings, on the altar; and finally offering the incense on the golden altar (Exodus 30:7 – 8). Being chosen to burn incense was so rare that they made a rule that once you had been selected, you could never do it again, unless everyone else in your group (nearly a 1,000 priests) had that opportunity. So roughly, your group would get 14 opportunities a year (two weeks of service), plus the Festival seasons where there were now 24,000 priests roughly. If my math is correct, if a priest served from 30 to 50 years old in Temple service, and there were always roughly 1,000 priests in your group, you would have approximately a 1.4% chance each year of being selected, and over your 20 years of service, only 1 out of 5 priests would ever get that opportunity. It was a once in a lifetime moment, that most never got to have. I share that to help bring home how it was no accident or random moment for Zacharias. At his old age, he likely thought this would never happen.

This might prompt you to ask: Well was he old, or was he still 30 to 50? It's a great question, and one I don't have a great answer for. The fact that he and his wife were past the age to have children, indicates he was older than 50. Some have speculated that priests that had "retired" from heavy duty with the sacrifices, may still have been allowed to be drawn for the special service of offering incense. I have no idea.

Luke 1:11 – Again, in the idea of training ourselves that no detail is arbitrary and those details are often symbolic. Why include the detail that the angel of the Lord appeared on the right side of the altar of incense?

Throughout Scripture, the right side carries strong symbolic meaning:

- It's the side of favor, blessing, and authority (Psalm 16:11; Psalm 110:1; Matthew 25:33).
- God's right hand represents His power and acceptance (Exodus 15:6; Isaiah 41:10; Hebrews 1:3).

Here are two possible conclusions: By standing on the right side of the altar, the angel's position visually conveyed divine approval and mercy — this was a message of favor, not judgment. Additionally, Zechariah was offering incense at the time of prayer when the angel appeared (incense representing the prayers of the saints per Revelation 5:8). The angel standing on the right side of that altar — as if in response to the offering — signifies that the prayers had been accepted.

Luke 1:13 – How many prayers over the years from the privacy of their own home, do you imagine Zacharias (and Elizabeth) had prayed for a child (or maybe even more specifically for a son)? God had orchestrated for Zacharias to be standing here at this very moment in time! Think about this moment, in his one and only time, ever getting offer a prayer in the Holy Place, before the veil separating the Holy of Holies, what words did Zacharias include?

How much pain had they endured from people assuming they had sinned and were being cursed by God? But all of a sudden, all that's changed. They were now about to be supremely blessed, an obvious miracle of God was going to become visible to all.

His name was to be John, or more accurately, Jochanan (Hebrew origin meaning "God is a gracious giver"). Every time Zacharias and Elizabeth would say the name of their son, they would be reminded of this miraculous gracious gift from God.

The timing of all of this is so amazing. The words of Jeremiah 29:11 come to my mind: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,

says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

God had David set in motion a plan of priestly service, designed roughly 1,000 years before. And here, at the exact right timing, according to God’s great plans for Zacharias and Elizabeth, and His ultimate plan of salvation, the timing is exact and perfect.

Day 735 – SATURDAY: November 15th

Luke 15 - 25

Daily Deep Dive:

Luke 1:15 – Why could John the Baptist not drink wine or strong drink? Some of speculated that he was to be under the Nazarite vow, but it doesn’t say that, and it doesn’t include any of the other restrictions (cutting hair, fresh grapes, raisins, dead bodies, etc... – Compare Numbers 6:2-8). I think Luke writing to a Gentile audience would have included more information here if John were to be placed under the Nazarite vow from birth. However, there is biblical precedent of a child being set apart at birth under a Nazarite vow (see 1 Samuel 1:11).

It’s also possible, that John is being set apart and consecrated for a special role from birth, and being Holy (full of God’s Spirit from birth) and that alcohol could be problematic with that special calling.

Wine & strong drink in Scripture isn’t sinful (Psalm 104:15; John 2:1–10, Deut 14:26), but abstaining from it symbolized:

- Clear-mindedness and purity in service (Leviticus 10:9 forbids priests from drinking wine while serving before God),
- Separation from worldly pleasure and indulgence, and
- Undivided dedication to God’s message.

As a prophet preparing the way for the Messiah, John’s life itself had to reflect the message of repentance and holiness.

He was to be visibly different — living simply, filled with the Spirit rather than influenced by wine (compare Ephesians 5:18).

John 1:17 –In the last book of the Old Testament, in Malachi 3:1 it records: "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts."

And then in the final chapter of the final book of the Old Testament, in the final verses, Malachi 4:5–6, it states: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse (or utter destruction)."

So we see verse 17 of Luke, quoting these final verses. John would not only fulfill this, but also per Malachi 3:1, he would be the one to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

John Gill commentary states about both Malachi 4:6 and Luke 1:17 the following: "**And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children**,.... Or "with" the children, as Kimchi; and Ben Melech observes, that על is put for עם, and so in the next clause: **and the heart of the children to their fathers**; or "with" their fathers; that is, both fathers and children: the meaning is, that John the Baptist should be an instrument of converting many of the Jews, both fathers and children, and bringing them to the knowledge and faith of the true Messiah; and reconcile them together who were divided by the schools of Hillel and Shammai, and by the sects of the Sadducees and Pharisees, and bring them to be of one mind, judgment, and faith, and to have a hearty love to one another, and the Lord Christ." [END QUOTE]

Regarding John turning the “the disobedient to the wisdom of the just”: Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:2 “in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”

God had to do this in all of our lives. We all were the “disobedient”.

Luke 1:19 – There are three angels mentioned by name in the Bible: Gabriel, Michael (the only one specifically called an archangel in Jude) & Hēylēl (Isaiah 14:12). As a side note: Hēylēl in Hebrew means “shining one” or “morning star”. This was taken into Greek as Phosphoros (light-bearer) and Latin as “Lucifer” (meaning “light-bringer” / morning star).

Gabriel is only mentioned in the New Testament here and in verse 26. Gabriel in Greek is of Hebrew origin and comes from the Hebrew gabrîy'êl (used in Daniel 8:16 & 9:21). Gabriel means “Warrior of God” or “Mighty one of God”.

Gabriel gives Zacharias his credentials for being believed. First his name, which Zacharias would know well from Daniel. From Daniel, Zacharias would know this angel as one who is able to reveal the future (70 weeks prophecy) and give meaning to visions (Vision of the Rams and Goats). Additionally, Gabriel states that he literally stands in God’s presence and was specifically sent with this joyful news.

Luke 1:21 – It says the people “marveled” (NKJV), but the word in Greek simply means “to wonder”. We might say, “I wonder what’s taking him so long”.

Luke 1:24 – He goes home after his week of service, and Elizabeth gets pregnant.

Luke 1:25 – It's important to note how she feels when her barrenness has been removed. Her nearly lifelong shame and disgrace that she felt from the people was over. How sad that she had felt that way for so long in that culture, and how exciting for her that it was over. What a special honor God had in store for her (to have and raise the son prophesized in Malachi)!