

# The Gospel of Luke

Michelle Nailon CSB

Is Christian Morality Unique? Part 1

Gospel of Luke

**Slide set 7 of 10**

# What about the Gospel of Luke, written around the same time but for a very different readership?

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▶ The gospel of Luke was written at approximately the same time as the gospel of Matthew, that is, around 85 CE.

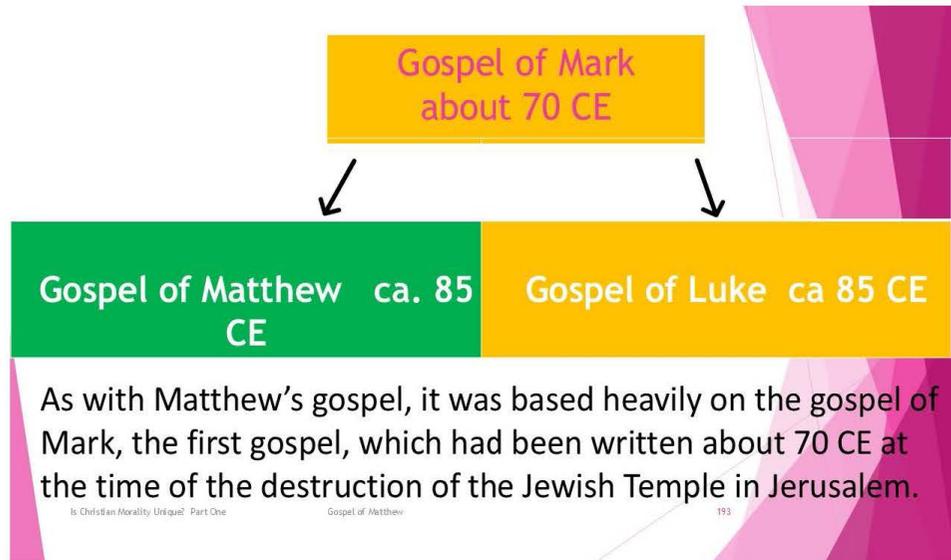
Luke was writing his gospel for Gentile (Non-Jewish) Christians.

Could you name about five things that he would need to take into account in addressing these people?  
e.g. in terms of their knowledge of Jewish traditions?  
their possible affluence  
doubts about whether or not they could be entrusted with and pass on, the message of Jesus

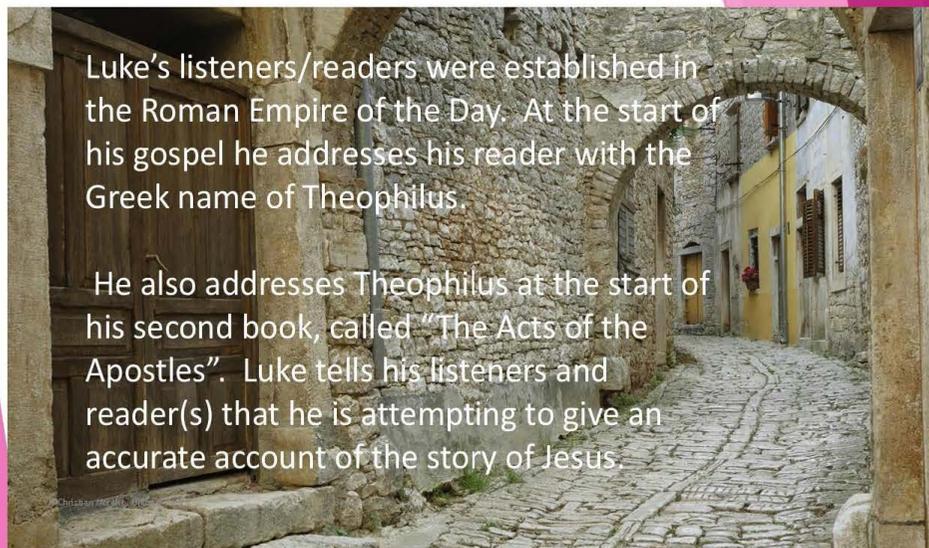
Can you see any parallels with present times in the history of the church?

## From very early times - with Paul in the 50's CE there were Jewish Christians and there were Gentile Christians

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However the community that Luke belonged to was quite different from Matthew's type of community.

While Matthew was based in a community of Jewish Christians, Luke was based in a community of Gentile (that is, non-Jewish) Christians.



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In Luke's second book he describes what happened in the early years of the Church after the death of Jesus.

This includes his account of a Jerusalem Council of the Church about 50 CE and the mission of Paul to the Gentiles.



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Luke begins his gospel, like Matthew, by describing the birth and early start in the life of Jesus.

However, while Matthew presents Jesus as a child of Jewish heritage, Luke presents him as **a child of the world.**



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Because Luke is writing for Gentile Christians, he is dealing with themes that are different from those of Matthew who wrote for a community of Jewish Christians.

Luke is dealing with questions relating to Gentile Christians.



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By now, in 85 CE, the Church was growing quickly and the vast majority of "Christians" were from a non-Jewish background.

These people did not know the background stories of the Old Testament.

They did not have the traditions of Judaism nor their focus on keeping the Jewish law.



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Church leaders were wondering if the church could be passed on safely to this new generation of Gentile Christians.

In his writing, Luke encouraged them to believe that the power of God would prevail.

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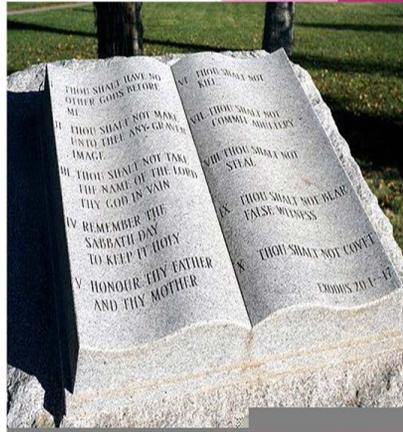


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At the same time, in his gospel, Luke tried to remind his listeners/readers about the importance of keeping the Commandments.

He put special focus on the three Commandments of:

- ▶ "Thou shalt not kill."
- ▶ "Thou shalt not commit adultery" and
- ▶ "Thou shalt not steal".



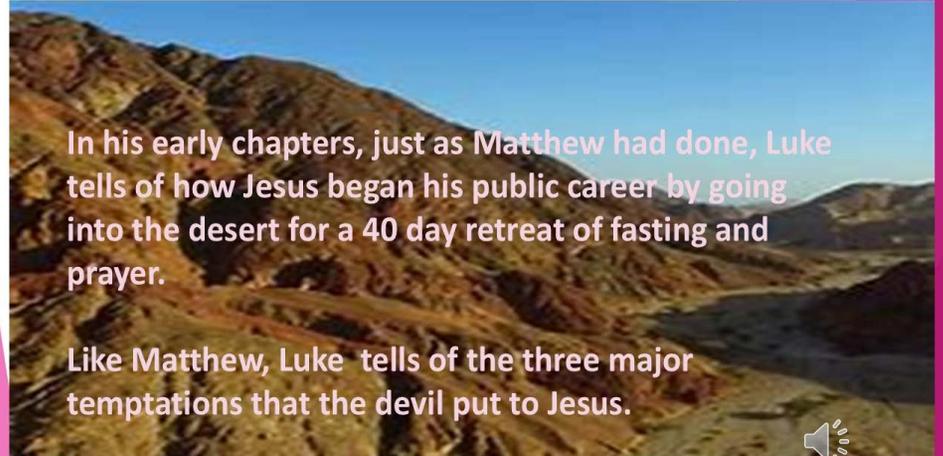
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In his early chapters, just as Matthew had done, Luke tells of how Jesus began his public career by going into the desert for a 40 day retreat of fasting and prayer.

Like Matthew, Luke tells of the three major temptations that the devil put to Jesus.



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Jesus refused to turn stones into bread

(cf over-reliance on material goods "Thou shalt not steal")

He refused to worship Satan despite the promise of world power

(cf. "Thou shalt not kill")

He refused to throw himself from the temple roof and assume that his father would save him

(cf. taking family for granted in "Thou shalt not commit adultery")



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As with Matthew, threaded through the Gospel of Luke, there is the same theme of stressing these three Commandments about

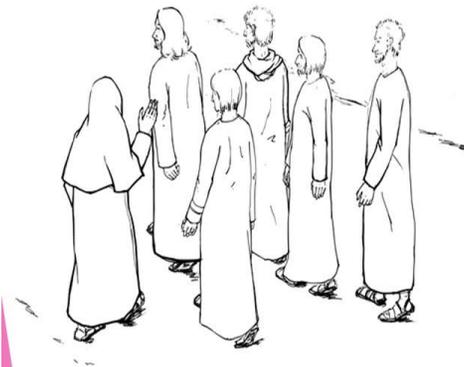
- ▶ money,
- ▶ power and
- ▶ relationship

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For example, in the gospel when someone asked if they could follow him, Jesus warned them, "The birds of the air have nests, and foxes have holes. But the son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9:57-8)

▶ In other words a follower of Jesus needs to be prepared to give up material benefits.

▶ This is "raising the bar" of **"Thou shalt not steal".**



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In the same chapter of Luke's gospel, Jesus invited someone to follow him. But they said "Let me go to bury my father first" that is, wait until his father had died. Jesus said "Let the dead bury the dead. Your duty is to go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God." (Lk 9:59-60)

In other words, the man's "career" and will to power needed to be subordinated to the call made to him to spread the gospel. This is "raising the bar" of **"Thou shalt not kill".**

▶ Someone else (in the same chapter) who was invited to join Jesus said, "I will follow you sir, but first let me go and say good bye to my people at home".

▶ Jesus replied "Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

(Lk 9:61-2)

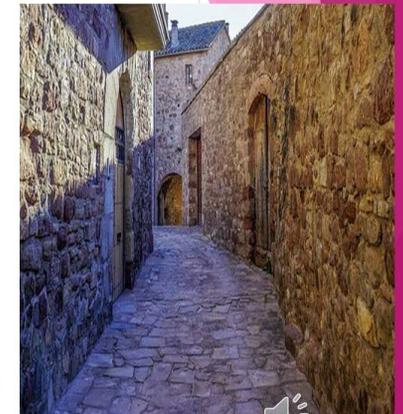
▶ An interpretation of this is that the man was challenged to let go of home, family, marriage etc. in order to follow Jesus. Such a challenge was

"raising the bar" of

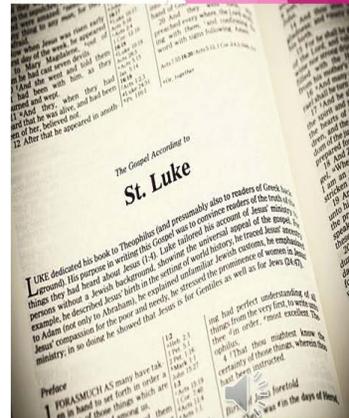
**"Thou shalt not commit adultery."**

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- ▶ There is an interesting point to be noticed here. Usually the sequence of the three Commandments is “Thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal” in that order, or the reverse order.
- ▶
- ▶ The Commandment about power, that is, “Thou shalt not kill” therefore comes either first or third.
- ▶ But in Luke’s story of both the Temptations and in the above passages Luke puts a reference to power cf. “Thou shalt not kill”, second in the sequence.
- ▶ This reflects how **“power”** is a theme that runs through his gospel.



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In the three cases just described, people were challenged to move beyond having -- **material comfort, having a career and having a secure family.**

Commandments	Challenge to move beyond
“Thou shalt not steal”	Material comfort
“Thou shalt not kill”	Having a career
“Thou shalt not commit adultery”	Having a secure family

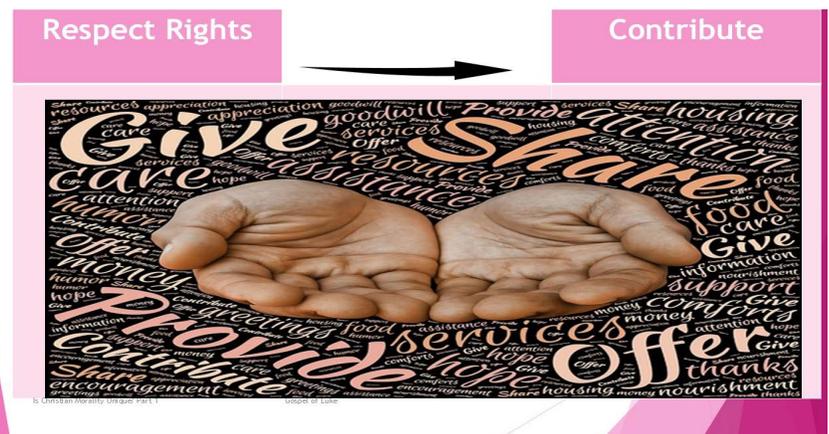
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“Thou shalt not steal”	“Thou shalt not kill”	“Thou shalt not commit adultery”
Be ready to	Be ready to	Be ready to
Give up material comforts	Give up worldly power	Give up home comforts

The Gentile Christians were challenged to not only keep the Commandments but to move beyond them.

For those who were the listener/readers of Luke’s gospel their desire for **possessions**, for **power** and for **family**, needed to be subordinated, to the call that has been made to them to follow Jesus.

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Any Comments?