

## The Lord's Favor

Luke 4:14-30 on February 2, 2025

Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

*Please read Luke 4:14-30 before going further in this transcript.*

After spending the first two chapters of his Gospel laying out the birth narratives of John the Baptist and Jesus, Luke then spent most of chapter 3, and the beginning of chapter 4, setting the stage for their public ministries. Two weeks ago, Pastor Eric preached on Jesus' baptism by John, and then His temptation by the devil, which revealed that Jesus is God's Son: God's beloved, true, and faithful Son. Jesus is now about 30 years old, and He's filled with the power of God's Spirit, so Luke now records the official launch of His public ministry in Galilee.

Referring to a map can help us get our bearings when we come to passages like today's (see last page of this transcript). Galilee was located on the northern end of Israel, and Luke will now focus on Jesus' ministry in this particular region for the next 6 chapters, in Luke 4-9.<sup>1 2</sup>

Let's note a few key places:

- Looking at the larger map on the left side, the Jordan River runs right down the middle, from the Sea of Galilee in the north, to the Dead Sea in the south. Somewhere along this stretch of river is where John the Baptist baptized Jesus. Luke 4:14 mentions the region of Galilee. It's the yellow area in the top center of our map.

- Now looking at the zoomed in image of Galilee on the right side, Luke 4:16 mentions Nazareth. It's on the SW side of Galilee, and this is Jesus' hometown, where He grew up as a boy, and learned to be a carpenter. Luke 4:23 mentions Capernaum,<sup>3</sup> which, as you can see, is located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This is where the Apostle Peter lived, which makes sense, since he made his living as a fisherman.<sup>4 5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although "Luke does have Jesus journey outside of Galilee in 8:26-39." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> "The section's basic theological question is, 'Who is Jesus?' Who can do such works and teach with such power?" Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 386.

<sup>3</sup> Capernaum = "kuh PUHR nay uhm" W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 49.

<sup>4</sup> Nazareth is about 20 miles from Capernaum. Learn more here:

<https://www.exploringbiblelands.com/journal/2013/04/14/from-nazareth-to-capernaum#:~:text=In%20the%2030%20kilometers%20between,seen%20in%20the%20picture%20above>

<sup>5</sup> My *NIV Study Bible* notes that Capernaum was a strategic ministry location for Jesus' time of ministry in Galilee, because it's located right by the water. Capernaum was not only centered in a densely populated area, but it also made boat travel readily available. It's worth noting that archaeologists have found evidence of a first-century synagogue there, as well as a potential link to the Apostle Peter's house *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1710 information on Capernaum Synagogue, etc.

Luke will now spend the next several chapters recording the historical events of Jesus' ministry in the region of Galilee. So it may be helpful to keep this map in mind in the coming weeks.

In today's passage, verse 15 describes Jesus' initial reception by the people this way: "...and everyone praised him." But, by the time we get to the end of today's passage... verse 29 says, "They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff." For some reason or another, the people from this particular synagogue in Nazareth wanted to throw Jesus off the cliff! But why! What did Jesus teach in their synagogue that was so upsetting to them!? Well, Jesus was proclaiming "the year of the Lord's Favor." By why would that upset them?

Luke 4:14-15 begins, "14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him." Jesus returned from His temptation out in the wilderness, and He began His public ministry. Verses 14-15 give us a general overview. Then, the following verses will describe, first of all, the events in Nazareth, and then, the events in Capernaum, which we'll get to next week.<sup>6 7</sup>

Verse 14 notes that Jesus ministered "in the power of the Spirit." This brings to mind the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus at His baptism in the form of a dove, as well as being "full of the Holy Spirit" and "led by the Spirit" when He went out into the wilderness to face the devil's temptation.<sup>8</sup> Luke records all of this for us, to help us see how Jesus, in His humanity, models for us dependence on God's power, and the importance of being in step with the leading of His Spirit. Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry, God's Spirit guides Him day by day, and equips Him for His earthly ministry, including the teaching that's He's about to bring. Luke will further emphasize the importance of the Spirit's work when he goes on to write his Gospel's sequel, the book of Acts. This demonstrates the continuity between Jesus' ministry, and the ministry of His 1<sup>st</sup> century Christian followers, who are told to wait until they received power from on high (the Holy Spirit).<sup>9</sup> Taking this one step further, Jesus sets an example for those

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<sup>6</sup> "Luke 4:16-30 has received much attention because of its location in the Gospel in comparison to its Synoptic parallels: Mark 6:1-6a and Matthew 13:53-58." Citing Aland, Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 394.

<sup>7</sup> Well within his editorial rights, it seems likely that Luke moved the account of Jesus' ministry in Nazareth ahead of his account of Jesus' ministry in Capernaum in order to highlight its importance, and in order to introduce this section of his Gospel which focused on Jesus' Galilean ministry. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 398.

<sup>8</sup> See Luke 3:22 and 4:1.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 1:4-5,8. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 391.

of us who are following Him today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We too must depend on God's Spirit for daily guidance, and empowerment for godly living.<sup>10</sup>

The setting for Jesus' teaching in today's text was in the local synagogue in Nazareth, but verse 15 makes it clear that Jesus had taught in multiple synagogues, and the news about Him was spreading like wildfire. These local synagogues were somewhat similar to our local churches. They were places where Jewish worshippers would gather (which brings to mind our gospel G, GATHER). Bible scholar Darrell Bock gives some helpful background information regarding 1<sup>st</sup> century synagogues: "The origin of synagogues is still shrouded in mystery. In all probability, synagogues arose during the Babylonian captivity, when the temple could no longer be a focus for worship."<sup>11</sup> It's believed that the synagogue services were composed of several elements:

- > Reciting the Shema from Deuteronomy 6, and saying prayers.
- > Readings from the Old Testament Law and the Prophets.
- > Instruction on the readings, and then a benediction.<sup>12 13</sup>

Luke 4:16-17 goes on, "16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:" So Jesus is now back in His hometown, and like any other devoted Jew, He faithfully attends His local synagogue, just like He'd done every other Sabbath day during His growing up years.<sup>14</sup> This was not His first time in this synagogue; Jesus had gone to this synagogue for years; this is where He grew up. But now He was returning there as an itinerant preacher whose reputation preceded Him; the news about him had been spreading through the whole countryside.

So that day in Nazareth was a little different, because He wasn't just there as a local community member, but as someone who'd gained regional notoriety. There was a mix of curiosity and excitement, but also perhaps some skepticism. In the words of verse 22, they were asking one another,

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<sup>10</sup> Consider Galatians 5:13-26.

<sup>11</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 392.

<sup>12</sup> In Jesus' day, it's likely that the Old Testament text would first be read from the original Hebrew, but then translated by someone into the local language of Aramaic, because many Jews no longer knew Hebrew. After the reading, any qualified male in the audience could give instruction, as long as there were at least 10 men present. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 403.

<sup>13</sup> This practice in the synagogues likely carried over to some degree in the early church worship practices in places like 1 Corinthians 14:26-40.

<sup>14</sup> Nazareth, where He'd grown up. Where people knew the story about the time His parents had left Him at the temple when He was twelve years old; people who had traveled in the same caravan to Jerusalem and back each year for the festivals. Where people had watched this commoner grow up and attend the local synagogue each week. Where people had watched him grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:39-40,52).

“Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” This suggests that, for many of the locals, there was a disconnect between the gracious words that were coming from His mouth, and His simple origins as a local boy who’d grown up in their town learning the carpentry trade.

Verse 17 says that someone handed Jesus the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and He finds the place from which He wants to read in Isaiah 61. By the way, the fact that Jesus “FOUND the place where it is written,” indicates that He intentionally **CHOSE** this particular reading, for this particular moment in His ministry.<sup>15</sup> Luke 4:18-19 records, “18 The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”<sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> Darrell Bock shares a helpful insight regarding this proclamation of “good news to the poor,” which could also be applied to the prisoners, as well as to the blind and the oppressed: these suffering and marginalized groups all “sense their need in the greatest way and, as a result, respond most directly and honestly to Jesus. They characterize concretely the person in need. Their material deprivation often translates into spiritual sensitivity, humility, and responsiveness to God’s message of hope.”<sup>18</sup>

Oh that each one of us reading this message today, would respond with a similar sense of humility, by recognizing and admitting just how desperately poor and imprisoned we are, apart from the Lord’s favor. For Jesus’ original audience, “freedom for the prisoners,” would have made them think about their release from exile in Babylon, but everyone knew that the reason they were taken captive in the first place, was their sin. So verse 18 also has significant, broader overtones of freedom from spiritual captivity.<sup>19</sup> Each of these phrases in verse 18 can be understood literally, but also metaphorically, for our lost spiritual condition. So, for example, “recovery of sight for the blind,” refers not only to Jesus’ ability to heal physical blindness, but also, more broadly, to His ministry of healing our spiritual blindness.

My *Study Bible* has a helpful note regarding verse 19’s reference to the Year of the Lord’s favor: it doesn’t refer to “a calendar year, but the period when salvation would be proclaimed – the Messianic age [*which by the way, began when Jesus came and continues today*]. This quotation from

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<sup>15</sup> See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, top of p. 404.

<sup>16</sup> Jesus ended his quotation of Isaiah 61:1-2 halfway through verse 2, “probably because the ‘day of vengeance’ will not occur until his second coming.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1207 footnote on Isaiah 61:2.

<sup>17</sup> Consider 2 Corinthians 6:2 in relation to Luke 4:18-19.

<sup>18</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 408.

<sup>19</sup> See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 409.

Isaiah 61... alludes to the Year of Jubilee,<sup>20</sup> when once every 50 years slaves were freed, debts were canceled, and ancestral property was returned to the original family. Isaiah predicted primarily the liberation of Israel from the future Babylonian exile, but Jesus proclaimed liberation from sin and all its consequences."<sup>21</sup> Luke begins his account of Jesus' earthly ministry with this particular incident because verses 18-19 are at the very center of Jesus' message and ministry.<sup>22</sup> This is the Good News which is not only being taught by Jesus but is also being brought by Jesus. Notice how in verse 18 Jesus refers to Himself three times in a row:

- The Spirit of the Lord is on ME!
- Because He has anointed ME!
- He has sent ME!

Jesus prophetic authority shines through brightly in today's text, but His authority goes way beyond just powerful teaching. Jesus not only proclaims the year of the Lord's favor, He brings it!

Verses 20-21 go on, "20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." When Jesus sat down in verse 20, it wasn't because He was finished, it was because He was about to begin. In that culture, teachers would teach from a seated position, which is why all eyes were fastened on Him.<sup>23</sup> And His opening words, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,"<sup>24</sup> would have hit like a hammer. Jesus makes an incredibly bold self-proclamation about His mission and His identity, so anyone who suggests that Jesus was merely a great prophet, needs to think again.<sup>25</sup> Jesus is declaring that God has anointed Him, that He is there, in that very time and place, to fulfill these words of Isaiah. And these are familiar words to Jesus' listeners, words which the Jewish people had been reciting, with expectant hope and longing in their hearts, for generations.<sup>26</sup> Darrell Bock says it this way: "when one cited Isaiah 61, the

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<sup>20</sup> See Leviticus 25:8-55.

<sup>21</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1711 footnote on Luke 4:19.

<sup>22</sup> "The deliverance imagery parallels the description of the Jubilee year (Leviticus 25:8-17), when debts were cancelled, and slaves were freed every fiftieth year. It is a picture of forgiveness and spiritual liberation, which is at the center of Jesus' message." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 406.

<sup>23</sup> So the parallel would be in our day and age would be when Pastor Eric or I stand behind the pulpit, right after the Scripture reading is completed. Notice how right after Jesus sat down in verse 20, "The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him." That's because the people were now expecting Him to teach on what had just been read.

<sup>24</sup> "Luke only notes Jesus' brief declaration here, but the following verse indicates that the crowd was impressed with his message of gracious words, a remark that suggest that Jesus said more than what Luke recorded. The text also says that Jesus began to speak, suggesting that he gave more than one sentence of exposition." See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 412.

<sup>25</sup> Compare this with Jesus self-awareness and proclamation in Luke 2:49.

<sup>26</sup> As promised in his Gospel's opening verses, Luke continues to record the many ongoing fulfillments that happened in Jesus' day. See Luke 1:1-4.

audience would think immediately of the coming of God's new age of salvation. ...What is in view is a spiritual and social transformation...."<sup>27</sup> He goes on to say... "Jubilee was interpreted in Judaism as a reference to the dawn of God's new age. The citation in Luke, then, ...takes that picture of freedom to show what God is doing spiritually and physically through his commissioned agent, Jesus. Jubilee, by analogy, becomes a picture of total forgiveness and salvation, just as it was in its prophetic usage in Isaiah 61."<sup>28</sup>

Luke 4:22 describes the people's response, "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked." So, at this point, they seem impressed: "Not too shabby for our hometown boy!" Even so, Jesus bold proclamation in verse 21 likely caught most of them completely off-guard. So even as they were marveling at His gracious words, they were also feeling a sense of dissonance, "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

Jesus senses the skepticism from His hometown crowd, so He addresses the elephant in the room. In Luke 4:23, "Jesus said to them, 'Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"<sup>29</sup> "Physician, heal yourself" is an ancient proverb that people used to say when they were challenging whether someone was legit: "if you have actual power and authority, then prove it!"<sup>30</sup> We'll learn more about Jesus power to heal, and do miracles, next week. For today, we're focused on the message that Jesus taught, which is exactly what Jesus continues doing in the following verses...

Luke 4:24 goes on, "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown."<sup>31</sup> As we'll learn in the coming chapters, it wasn't just the folks in Nazareth who wouldn't accept Jesus, it was also a number of God's covenant people throughout the land of Israel.<sup>32</sup> Jesus then goes on to

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<sup>27</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 407.

<sup>28</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 410.

<sup>29</sup> This begs the question: exactly what HAD Jesus done in Capernaum? Well, quite a bit actually, but there's debate among scholars as to exactly what Jesus had done there up to this point in His ministry. You see, it seems that Luke may have organized His material more theologically than chronologically in chapter 4. In other words, if we jump ahead to verses 31-44, we'll notice that they talk about Jesus' ministry in Capernaum. Our elder chair, Jerry Drebels, will be preaching on this passage next Sunday.

<sup>30</sup> "In ancient literature this proverb ['Physician, heal yourself!'] questions a person's power and authority." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2078 footnote on Luke 4:23.

<sup>31</sup> Some Bibles translate verse 19, "To proclaim the ACCEPTABLE year of the LORD" which connects it with verse 24's "no prophet is ACCEPTED in his own country." For example, see the NKJV. In other words, verses 19 and 24 use the same Greek word, and its range of meaning can include both "favor" and "acceptable." "[verse 19] favor. Greek dekton, which connects with the word 'accepted' (Greek dektos) in verse 24; although God has forgiven his people and shown them favor, they did not find this good news acceptable." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2077 footnote on Luke 4:19.

<sup>32</sup> Regarding Israel not accepting prophets, also consider Luke 13:33-34.

teach them how His own rejection would be similar to their rejection of God's Old Testament prophets.<sup>33</sup> In verses 25-27 Jesus says, "25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." Now, Jesus' original audience would have known these stories from 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings quite well, but for those of us who don't know them so well, we simply need to recognize that Jesus is not being all that flattering here.<sup>34</sup> What Jesus is highlighting from these two examples, is how God did not show His favor to His own covenant people in Israel, but rather to a couple of foreigners. God did this during a time when the nation of Israel was divided into separate northern and southern kingdoms.

You see, Elijah and Elisha ministered during a time when God was sending His prophets to warn His people, to repent of their disobedience, and to turn back to covenant faithfulness.<sup>35</sup> But since they remained hardhearted, God's favor was demonstrated in these two miracles for two Gentile foreigners.<sup>36</sup> So in His teaching, Jesus highlights not only God's plan for Gentile inclusion but also His judgment on the Nation of Israel for her rebellion against God, which caused them to lose God's favor. And Jesus is now saying that the same kind of thing is about to happen all over again, ironically, right on the cusp of His proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor. They were going to miss out on the Lord's favor again, because they would reject God's messenger again. So even though these folks had initially spoken well of Jesus and appreciated His teaching, they were now coming to the realization that they liked Jesus' teaching but not how He was applying it to them. And that my friends is why they turn on Him.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> In verse 24, when Jesus mentions that no prophet is accepted in his "hometown," He may be referring even more broadly to His entire home country, meaning God's people all throughout the land of Israel. In other words, it wasn't just the Jews in Nazareth who wouldn't accept Him, but also Jews from all throughout the land of Israel wouldn't. This would actually fit well with the following two illustrations that Jesus mentions: the many widows and people with leprosy who lived in Israel but did not receive the Lord's favor. Luke 4:44 does something similar when it says that Jesus "kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea," in the context of Jesus being in Capernaum (Galilee in the north). In other words, Luke seems to have in mind the broader region, not just one or two particular towns.

<sup>34</sup> Read more about the widow at Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:7-24 and Naaman the Leper in 2 Kings 5:1-19.

<sup>35</sup> See 1,2 King introductory notes in *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 508.

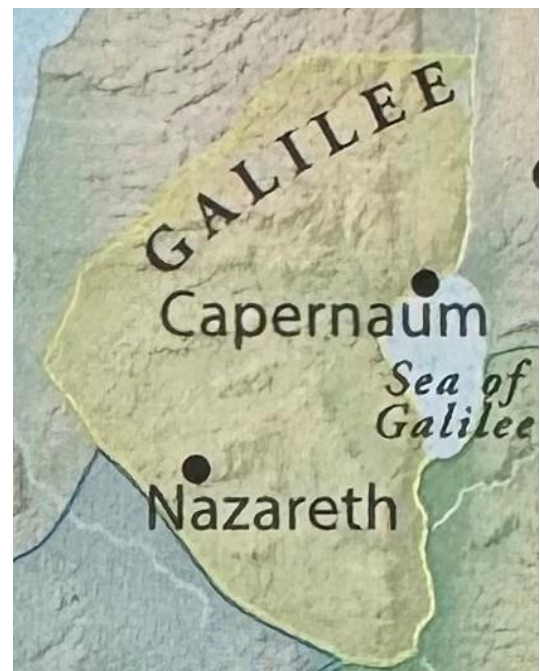
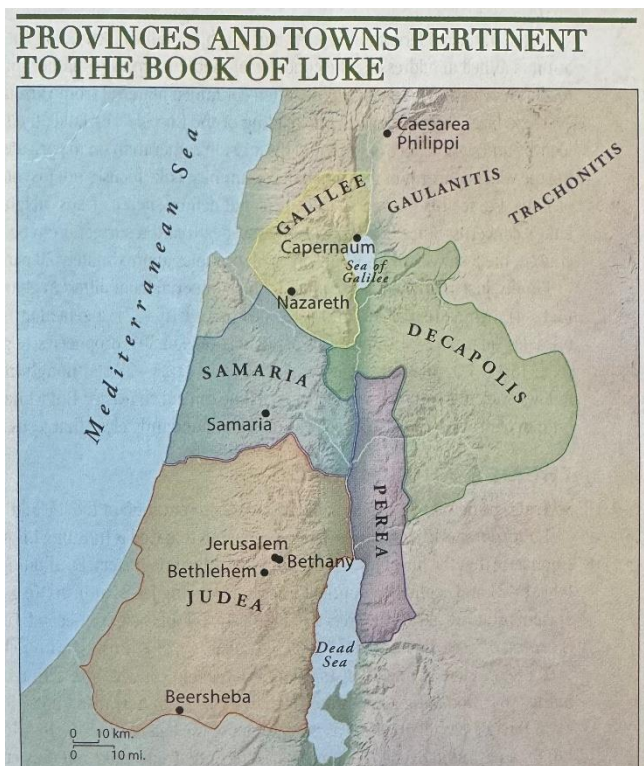
<sup>36</sup> It's worth noting that God's concern for the Gentiles is not something new. Even in Old Testament times, God's heart was inclined toward all peoples, not just His special chosen people of Israel.

<sup>37</sup> So in Luke 4, "Jesus' point was that when Israel was in rebellion, and rejected God's messengers of redemption (Elijah and Elisha), God caused non-Israelites to receive the covenant blessings that were properly Israel's. This is what aroused the anger of the crowd." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, pp. 1711-1712 footnote on Luke 4:26-27.

Luke 4:28-30 concludes, “28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.” The threat of being thrown down this cliff was real.<sup>38</sup> And yet, at the same time, it was an empty threat, because Jesus’ time had not yet come.<sup>39</sup> Luke doesn’t explain it to us, but somehow Jesus simply walks right through the middle of this angry crowd. No one dares try, to actually go through with this threat.<sup>40</sup>

Back in verse 18 Jesus declared Himself to be anointed by God, but here in verse 29, the people REJECT the one God anointed. They do this, in spite of the fact that Jesus had come to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor...  
...to proclaim good news for the poor.  
...to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind.  
...to set free those who were oppressed.

This leaves those of us reading this message today, to make up our own minds about Jesus: will we accept Him or reject Him? Will we continue to live our own way, or will we choose to live God’s way, and enjoy His favor?



<sup>38</sup> I imagine Jesus would have been well acquainted with this cliff, since it was just outside His hometown. I can picture Him as a young boy, playing with His friends, chucking rocks over the edge and watching them fall... ALL the way to the bottom.

<sup>39</sup> See John 7:30.

<sup>40</sup> “Luke does not explain whether the escape was miraculous or simply the result of Jesus’ commanding presence.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1712 footnote on Luke 4:30.