Lesson 6
Luke 4:14–32; 5; 6:12–16; Matthew 10

Before looking at some individual verses from this lesson, consider the overall structure of Luke’s narrative and think about how his story of the calling of the Twelve compares to Matthew’s. I have put the verses in bold that the lesson focuses on, but I have outlined all four chapters so that you can think about how Luke tells the story as a whole. Because of the length of the materials, I have created study questions only for the first part of the lesson, Luke 4:14–32.

Luke’s story

The forty-day sojourn in the desert and the temptation of Christ (Luke 4:1–13)

He cures many others of various diseases, and the evil spirits witness that he is the Christ (Luke 4:40–41).

The people beg him to stay with them, but he says he must preach in other places as well (Luke 4:42–44).

Jesus calls Peter, James, and John (Luke 5:1–11).

He heals a leper (Luke 5:12–15).

He heals a man of palsy by saying, “Thy sins are forgiven thee” (Luke 5:16–26).

He calls Levi (often assumed to be Matthew), a tax collector (Luke 5:27–28).


He tells them the parables of patching a new garment with old cloth, of putting new wine into old bottles, and of the superiority of old wine (Luke 5:36–39).


He heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, with Pharisees observing and looking for something to accuse him of (Luke 6:6–11).

Jesus calls the Twelve (Luke 6:12–16).
Notice that, after telling of the first sermon and after telling of the call, Luke recounts various miracles that Jesus performed. Why do you think he does that? How are those miracles related to the events that precede them? What is the symbolic significance of healing the sick and casting out devils? Is there a sense in which the symbolic significance of healing and its literal significance come together in the healing of the palsied man?

After calling Levi as a disciple, Jesus tells us several stories about Jesus’s interaction with the scribes (the religious teachers) and the Pharisees. What is the significance of these stories? Why do they come after the story of Levi? What do they show us about Jesus and his teachings?

How do these major stories, beginning with Jesus calling Peter, James and John, and the stories of healing and of confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees, lead us to the story of the calling of the Twelve?

**The Twelve**

We have four lists of the Twelve, with some variation among them:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simon (Peter)</td>
<td>Simon Peter</td>
<td>Simon (Peter)</td>
<td>Peter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Andrew (Peter’s brother)</td>
<td>James</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notice that these occur in three groups of four. For example, in Matthew’s list we find these groups: (Peter, Andrew, James, and John), (Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew), (James, Thaddaeus, Simon, and Judas). Though the order of the persons in each group of four varies from list to list, each person always appears in the same group. What might explain that?
Here is how the differences between the names on these lists are traditionally resolved:

Peter = Simon Peter = Simon, Bar Jonas (son of Jonas) = Cephas

James = son of Zebedee = Boanerges = son of Thunder

John = son of Zebedee = Boanerges = son of Thunder = John the Beloved = the disciple Jesus loved

Andrew = the brother of Peter

Matthew = Levi

Philip

Nathanael = Bartholomew

Thomas = Didymus (meaning “twin”) = Doubting Thomas

James = the son of Alphaeus = James the Less = James the Younger

Thaddaeus = Lebbaeus Thaddaeus = Judas, brother of James

Simon the Zealot = Simon the Canaanite (“Canaanite” doesn’t refer to the Canaanite people of the Old Testament; it is a transliteration of an Aramaic word meaning “zealot”)

Judas Iscariot

We cannot be sure, but a popular explanation of Judas Iscariot’s name, an explanation with scholarly backing, is that Iscariots means “man of Kerioth,” a town south of
Judah; hence Judas may be the only non-Galilean among the Twelve. Other less popular explanations of the name, though also with scholarly backing: Iscariot means that he is a member of the Sicarii, a group of Zealots who assassinated using daggers (sica in Latin); Iscariot is derived from a Hebrew word meaning “betrayer”; the name is derived from a Greek word meaning “to hand over”—he handed Jesus over to the temple priests; the name refers to his occupation, either a red dyer or a fruit grower; Iscariot is an Aramaic word meaning “the man from the city,” in other words, “the man from Jerusalem”; like the first and the last explanation, the final proposal assumes that the name refers to his hometown, but instead of Kerioth or Jerusalem, it argues that the name refers to Askaroth or Askar, near Shechem.

Look at the number of relatives among the first Twelve: Peter and Andrew are brothers; James and John are brothers; James, son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus seem to be brothers. In addition, some have argued that some of the Twelve were Jesus’s cousins. Do you think these relations are significant? If so, what is the significance?

Comparing Luke and Matthew:

L uke

It is clear that apostle is a title, and the apostles are mentioned several times (9:10; 17:5; 22:14; and 24:10).

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M a t h e w

The Twelve are called “apostles” only here, and it is not clear that the word is used as a title here.

Peter is said to be “first.”
The Twelve are arranged in pairs, perhaps reflecting the missionary arrangement we see in Mark 6:7.

— The list is prefaced with mention of the power given them and is followed by a charge to them.

— We are told that James and John are brothers.

Do these differences tell us anything about the different foci of Matthew’s and Luke’s testimonies?

Luke 4:14–32

Verse 17: Why do you think Jesus chooses Isaiah 61 for the scriptural passage that he will use for his sermon? (Esais is the Greek form of the Hebrew Isaiah. Remember that the name Isaiah means almost the same thing as the name Jesus, “the Lord is salvation.”)

We don’t know how synagogue worship in Christ’s day was conducted, but a century or so later it was like this: two formal prayers, a reading from the Torah and a reading from the Prophets, a sermon that consisted of an explanation of a scriptural passage, and a priestly blessing on the congregation. It was probably similar in Christ’s time. It seems, then, that Jesus was asked to give the sermon. Presumably following custom, he stands to read from the Old Testament prophets; then he seats himself to comment on the
passage. Why would the custom be to stand when they read the scriptures but sit when they commented on them? What is there in these verses that reinforces Luke’s themes in his Gospel? Why might Luke want to draw these themes to the attention of his readers near the beginning of his Gospel?

**Verse 18:** As you read this quotation from Isaiah, think of how its parts apply to Jesus. What does it mean to say that the Spirit of the Lord is on him? (See Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14). Remember that *Christ* and *Messiah* are the Greek and Hebrew words, respectively, for “anointed one.”

The Greek word translated *poor* in this quotation does not refer to individual poor people. Instead, it refers to the state of being poor.

The phrase “he hath sent me” uses a verb that indicates that the action is completed: he has sent me and I have arrived. What does that tell us about Jesus’s preaching?

This is one of the few places, perhaps the only one, where Luke uses the Greek word translated *heal* for anything other than physical ailments. What does “heal the broken-hearted mean” in a gospel context? What does it mean to free the captives? To whom or what are they captive? Who are the blind whom Jesus says he has come to heal? What can they not see?

Notice that Jesus has inserted a line that is not in Isaiah 61:1–2: “to preach deliverance to the captives.” That line comes from Isaiah 58:6.

**Verse 19:** Here is another way to translate this verse: “To proclaim the Lord’s year of grace [i.e., the Jubilee year; see
Leviticus 25:8–55].” How are the practice of the Jubilee year and the preaching of the gospel related? How is the message that Christ has come the message of a Jubilee year?

**Verse 21:** Jesus begins his commentary with “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” What would his listeners have understood him to say?

Notice that, as with the verb translated “hath sent” (verse 18), the verb translated “is fulfilled” indicates that the fulfillment has been completed.

Luke gives us only the beginning of his sermon. Many ancient writers did this as a way of naming an entire work, though usually they did so when the material they referred to was well known, just as we often refer to hymns by their first line rather than by their title. Jesus’s sermon may have been well known in Luke’s time, so he didn’t feel he needed to repeat it. Or it may have been interrupted and not finished. Which do you think likely? Why?

**Verse 22:** How do the people respond to Jesus’s sermon?

The verb translated “bear witness” means “to testify,” “to acknowledge the truth of something,” or “to speak well of.” How do those who hear him bear witness of him?

The verb translated *wonder* is in a tense that means that its action continued indefinitely. We might translate it “continued to wonder.” What point is Luke making?

The word translated *gracious* also means “favorable, pleasurable, beneficial, pleasing,” but this isn’t so much a comment about Jesus’s preaching style as it is about the content of his preaching: “words of grace” rather than “graceful words.”
What do his hearers find truthful and pleasing? Why are they surprised? If they are surprised that Joseph’s son can do what he has done in their synagogue, how do you think they are most likely to explain what has happened?

**Verse 23:** Given the villagers’ response to his sermon, what is surprising about his response to them? How do you explain his response? What does “Physician, heal thyself” mean, and how is it related to the sentence that follows: “Do here in your region whatever we have heard that you did in Capernaum”? Isn’t that a reasonable request? Of what is Jesus accusing them?

**Verse 24:** Why does Jesus begin this pronouncement with “amen,” translated *verily*?

Haven’t we, in verse 22, seen them accept him? What point is he making? How does this apply to us today, or does it?

**Verses 25–26:** Jesus compares himself to Elijah (“Elias” in Greek). Notice that 1 Kings 17:1 says that the drought lasted three years, but Luke has Jesus say that it lasted for three years and six months. (Compare James 5:17.) Three years and six months is a standard number used in apocalyptic literature for times of persecution, stress, and struggle. (Compare Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 11:2; 12:6, 14.) Either Luke or Jesus seems to be using the standard number to make a point rather than to be historically accurate. What is that point? How does this story illustrate Jesus’s relation to Nazareth? Does it also say something about his relation to Israel?

**Verse 27:** Jesus compares himself to Elisha (“Eliseus” in Greek). What is the significance of the fact that in the story
of Elijah the woman to whom he goes is a Sidonite? (Where is Sidon?) Why is it significant that Naaman is a Syrian? What do these stories say to those who hear them?

**Verses 28–30:** What part of Jesus’s sermon seems to have angered his fellow villagers enough to make them want to kill him? Why?

Notice the restraint of Luke’s description of Jesus’s escape: he simply passed through their midst and went on his way. What do you make of that restraint? What is its effect in the story as a whole?

**Verse 31:** Jesus moves from Nazareth to Capernaum (which means “village of Nahum”), a reasonably large fishing village on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeologists are quite certain that they have uncovered the house of Peter in Capernaum, which they think might have included a room in which Jesus lived.

**Verse 32:** Does the people’s reaction in Capernaum differ from that in Nazareth? Why?