

# Bible Studies for Life: March 3

*The Mission of Jesus • Luke 3:1-6, 4:14-21*

*By Carl M. White*



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It is worthwhile to note that the focus texts do not begin with, "Once upon a time." In other words, this is not a myth, it is not a legend, and it is not a fairy tale. The story of Jesus really happened, at a real time in history, at real places, and with real people.

In Luke 3:1-3, nine individuals are named, all contemporaries of one another. Five are Roman government officials: Tiberius Caesar, Pontus Pilate, Herod, his brother Philip, and

Lysanias. Two are high priests: Annas and Caiaphas, and two more are related to Jesus: Zechariah, married to Mary's cousin, and Zechariah's son, John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin.

In addition, six specific places are named: Judea, Galilee, Iturea, Traconitis, Lysanias, and Jordan. These are not found in some make-believe, magical land. You can locate them on a map, even visit them today.

Our second text adds to this historical founding. Luke 4:14-21 takes place in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus' hometown. It is a place where he and his family were well known.

Luke could not have stated it any stronger than this. The story of Jesus was connected to real people, at a real time in history, and to real places. It is rooted in history, not in mythology.

### **A Prophetic Voice**

The story of Jesus is rooted in history, and it is also rooted in prophecy. Both focus texts for today's lesson include quotations from the prophets. In Luke 3, the prophecy of Isaiah is about a person sent to prepare the way for God's messiah. The immediacy of this prophecy finds its fulfillment in John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus. He is in the wilderness pointing toward the Messiah, Jesus.

Note the language in 3:5-6. It is about building a road. Even today a road is made more level by moving the dirt from the top of the hill into the valleys in between. Many roads follow the top of ridges; thus, they have many curves, even sharp turns. Modern road builders will try to straighten such a road out.

The prophet uses this familiar terminology to describe the salvation history of the Gospel. God's path to find us is straight, from the manger to the empty tomb. It is the Gospel.

The path of religion has many ups, downs and turns. Religion is the attempt to achieve our own righteousness. We strive to be righteous so we may then present our righteousness to God, hoping it will be enough. It never will be.

The Gospel tells us of how God came to us by sending His only Son, who lived a pure, righteous life. God accomplishes righteousness in his Son, and then gives his Son's righteousness to us. That's the Gospel.

In the days when sailing ships plowed the seas, each ship's safety rested upon the strength and dependability of ropes. British ropes were known as the best. You could always tell if your hand was holding a British rope because there was one scarlet strand woven into it.

Woven into the very fabric of history is the scarlet thread of God's plan of salvation. Like a treasure, it can be found in every part of the Bible. It is found in the story of creation and in the tales of the patriarchs. It is woven into the epic of Moses, Pharaoh, and the children of Israel. It is evident in the history of Israel's movement into the promised land, and in the founding of the Kingdom. It sings from the poetic waters of the book of Psalms. It resonates with reason from the books of wisdom.

When Israel soared in obedience to God's law, the scarlet thread of God's plan is present. When Israel collapsed under the weight of its own sin, the scarlet thread is still evident. From the thundering voices of the prophets, you hear not only the judgement of God but also his mighty plan of salvation.

When Jesus rose to read from the Word of God that day in the Nazareth synagogue, a thousand plus years of salvation history echoed in the words he read. This is the mission of Jesus, to bring the presence of God and his saving grace into the drama of human life, into the drama of your life.

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