

The Book Luke Forgot to Write

Scripture reading: Mal. 4:1-5, Matt. 1:1

Text: "When the fullness of the time was come" (KJV) Ga. 4:4

Luke forgot to write one book! For his friend Theophilus he wrote a life of Christ followed by a second volume we call "the Acts of the Apostles." Isn't it too bad he failed to chronicle the events prior to the birth of Christ! 400 years had elapsed since Malachi uttered the last words of O.T. Prophecy. Surely an account of that period would shed much light on the N.T. story, and Luke had the skills which could have researched this history. Largely to satisfy my own curiosity about this pre-Christmas era, we are thinking today about "the book that Luke forgot to write."

Perhaps he would have begun like this: "The former treatises have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach, and of how His Apostles continued to proclaim the Gospel. Now it seems best to set forth in order those things which took place after the voices of O.T. Prophecy ceased until Jesus was born in Bethelhem, so that you may fully understand what our brother Paul meant when he wrote, 'When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his son.'" As a sort of pseudo-Luke, I have spent many hours with a ponderous volume entitled, "The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus," a first century Jewish historian's rambling, sometimes disconnected, and frequently inaccurate account. This should be required reading for anyone taking a degree in "Practical terrorist tactics and dirty politics." A companion volume would be the Apocrypha, a collection of between-the-testaments religious but non-cannonical writings.

The 2000 year history of the Jews until the time of Christ divides into 14 periods and 5 of them are between the testaments. (1) The patriarchs, (2) The Egyptian sojourn (3) 40 years in the wilderness (4) The Judges (5) The united kingdom (6) The divided kingdom (7) A century under the Assyrians (8) A century under the Babylonians and in captivity (9) A century under the Persians and the restoration to Jerusalem, and the last O.T. prophecies. (10) The short decade of Alexander the Great's history-changing conquest (11) A century of Egyptian dominance (12) ~~Over~~ a century of Syrian dominance (13) A short century of independence under the Macabees, (14) Roman assumption of control under Herod the Great about 40 years before Christ.

Stimulated by Greek culture, commercial prosperity, and quest for learning, <sup>as well as military conquest</sup> the age saw great growth of an international community. Yet simultaneously these 4 centuries were a period of violence, despair, and darkness for the people of God. Senseless atrocities, mass killings, incessant feuding between petty kings, deceit, broken promises, assassinations, use of hostages for political leverage, bribery, corruption, public display of immorality, supersitition, idolatry, sacrilege of holy places... all reach incredible proportions focussed right in Palestine. How many of God's faithful during those dark days longed for the fulfillment of Malachi's last words: "For behold, the day comes burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble...But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings..."

Look at the 5 periods of this interval:

1. Alexander the Great. 75 years after Malachi, this Macedonian conquered ~~the~~ his world in one decade. At 14 Aristotle inspired in him a keen interest in the world of men and nature. At 18 he commanded a part of his father's cavalry. At 20 he became king. Mastering his native Greece, he swept across Asia Minor, down the Palestinian coast, and around Egypt where he founded Alex<sup>a</sup>dra, later to become a center of culture and commerce. Turning to destroy Persia, he paused to take Jerusalem. Already, in response to bribery and flattery, he had allowed a Samaritan renegade priest to build a rival temple on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria...a pattern of behaviour

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exciting the hatred of Jews for Samaritans. In great fear, the Jews prayed for deliverance and went out to meet Alexander as a religious procession. Josephus records: "Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his mitre on his head, having a golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved, he approached by himself and adored that name, and first saluted the high priest." Alexander recalled a dream of such an impressive welcome and was overwhelmed when the priests read to him Daniel 8 which clearly predicted his coming." Alexander's short brilliant career introduced an international culture and language which centuries later became a major vehicle for initial missionary activity. Already God was preparing the "fullness of the time."

2. Egyptian period. Upon Alexander's death his vast empire was divided between four ~~generals~~ generals. Egypt and Judaea came under Ptolemy Soter, the first of 14 Ptolemies. The last of the dynasty was Queen Cleopatra...but there were many Cleopatras. If you think she was a bad girl (and she was) you ought to read about some of the others! The second Ptolemy, Philadelphus, was an enlightened ruler, famous for the erection of the 400-ft high lighthouse of Pharos, one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. He also founded the great library of Alexandria and arranged for the translation of the Old Testament into Greek by sending word to Eleazar the high priest to send six elders out of every tribe "skilful of the laws" to make a "clear and agreeing sense of these books." The 72 elders brought an OT parchment on which the laws were written in gold letters of such exquisite workmanship as to excite the admiration of Ptolemy. He housed the translation committee on the Island of Pharos in a quiet place "fit for their discoursing together." It is said that in 72 days (disputed by scholars) the 72 produced what is known as the Septuagint which is important for several reasons. (1) It predated by many centuries our Hebrew O.T. manuscripts and provides valuable clues for scholars <sup>reconstructing</sup> determining the original<sup>text</sup>. (2) It was the Bible studied and quoted by Jesus and most N.T. writers whose common language Greek, or koine, can be better understood by comparison with similar usage in the LXX. (3) As the first attempt to produce the Scriptures in another tongue, it spread through the known world a knowledge of God, Hebrew history, and God's Word through the prophets, forming a basis upon which Paul and other missionaries built a claim for Christ on the hearts of men. It prepared the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius the Roman centurion, Lydia the seller of purple from Asia Minor. The LXX was a major factor in the preparation of the "fullness of time." God used an alien, pagan, monarch to <sup>accomplish</sup> prepare it.

3. The Syrian Period. Another of Alexander's generals inherited Syria, establishing the Seleucid dynasty, many with <sup>the</sup> name Antiochus. They warred incessantly among themselves and with the Ptolemies of Egypt and <sup>the</sup> gradually gained control of Palestine where the Jews became victims by constant involvement in these factious quarrels. It was an era of uninterrupted martyrdom of Jews, often at the hands of their own leaders. Priests were secular rulers and generals, buying and selling offices, engaging in intrigue, conspiracy, bloody warfare, and unspeakable atrocities. Some were Hellenists advocating the Greek way of life. One Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes, removed a faithful high priest ~~xxxx~~ and installed his wicked brother Jason who was turned out by a still more wicked brother. Antiochus used this strife to utterly despoil Jerusalem in 168 B.C. As the Nero of ~~xxxxxxx~~ Jewish History, he slew or sold into slavery thousands of women and children, tore down the city wall, wantonly defiled the temple, even erecting a statue to Jupiter on the altar of burnt offerings. Never had the Jews seen such horrible persecution. Meanwhile the Samaritans as usual collaborated with the hated foreigners, further widening the rift between them and the Jews. All these events had been clearly foretold by Daniel and were the scenes conjured up in the minds of His <sup>Jesus</sup> hearers when Jesus predicted "the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be" (Mk. 13:14) This time of terror, suffering, and despair was a part of the preparation of the "fullness of the times," increasing the longing of many for an eternal peace and security.



A. The Maccabean Period. In hot reaction against Seleucid atrocities, Mattathias Maccabeus and his five sons lead a Jewish revolt. He died and his son Jddas Macca-  
heus took over. A master of the art of guerilla warfare, he often defeated large Syrian forces with a handful of men. He became governor of Jerusalem and high priest as well, rebuilt the city of Jerusalem, purified the temple, restored its sacrifices and initiated a period of relative independence for Judaea although constant warfare with Syria continued. He made a mutual defense pact with the rising power of Rome to the west. After his death, power passed successively to his brothers and grandsons. Again things fell into decay with these leaders forever wrangling among themselves and following the evil example of foreign tyrants. As in other countries sons fought their mothers, brothers killed off each other. One of the last Maccabees was Alexander who seized Jerusalem from a rival and committed an awful attrocity against his own people. Josephus says (403) that he "did one of the most barbarous actions in the world to them; for as he was feasting with his concubines in the sight of all the city he ordered about 800 Jews to be crucified; and while they were living, he ordered the throats of their children and wives to be cut before their eyes." With a deteriorating situation like this, what hope could religious Jews put in their own leadership? No wonder the Messianic hope took on a nationalistic and patriotic add political tone so that the Jews of Jesus' day looked for a truly righteous but also a politically strong successor to King David.

5. The Roman Period. Now Rome rose as a world power and Jewish factionalism played right into her hands. In 63 B.C. Pompey took Jerusalem, desecrating the temple <sup>by</sup> and entering the holy of holies. Judaea became a Roman province with the last of the Macabees mentioned above ruling as kings and high priests by Roman permission. In 37 B.C. the last of the Maccabees was slain by Herod who was not really a Jew but came from east of the Jordan. He explained away the crime before the Roman Triumvirate and was made king of Judaea in the process. After conquering his domain by force he hung on to power by cunningly keeping on the right side of the winners during the contemporary struggle for power in Rome itself. Called Herod the Great, he should be called Herod the Worst. He was a tyrant who bathed his own house and his own people in blood. "History tells of few more immoral families than the house of Herod, in which the intermarriage of its members so entangled the fam genealogical tree as to make it a veritable puzzle." (ISBE) He was married 10 times and had innumerable children. He murdered several of his wives and lots of his children, in-laws and other relatives, as well as political enemies. The Emperor Augustus is said to have exclaimed, "I would rather be Herod's hog than his son." For him the slaughter of the innocents of Bethlehem after the wise-men had tipped him off about the birth of another king was completely in character. Withal, he was a born leader of men, an astute and unprincipled politician, and an excellent architect. To appease the Jews after building all sorts of arenas and heathen temples, he rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, finished a decade before the birth of Christ, and acclaimed as one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. This was the temple where Jesus was presented as an infant, where he celebrated His first passover at 12, and where He worshipped and taught during His ministry. When His followers wanted Him to admire its beauty, He predicted its destruction. Herod died in 4 B.C., unmourned and unloved. His son, Herod Antipas, continued the family tradition of violence and immorality..including the beheading of John the Baptist. The time had come to fulfill the words of Malachi...the second 'Elijah' and "the sun of righteousness!"

Conclusion. Like the darkness "in the beginning" when the earth was without form and void and the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters and God spoke, "Let there be light," so moral, spiritual, political and social darkness had spread over Judaea and it was time for God to act again. Actually He had been far from inactive during the 400 years since Malachi. Culturally and politically He had prepared for a new age so that New Testament characters lived in a remarkably peaceful and prosperous time. The spread of the Greek version of the O.T. had already internationalized the Hebrew faith. The constant horrors of life in Palestine had driven countless Jews abroad where their synagogues were initial preaching points for the Gospel

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The "Jews" had suffered under Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Egyptian, Syrian, Roman, yes, even Jewish tyrants and they were sick of the weakness of human rulers. They, disgusted with priests so thoroughly secularized and so spiritually impotent. Only God, God incarnate, Immanuel, could save them! Is it any wonder that common people flocked to hear the stern exhortations to repent from the rugged John the Baptist, and heard gladly the simple words of the Master, "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt. 11:28)

For all the meanness and hatred and rottenness of that world, there remained those humble souls, faithful to God and His laws, unsoiled by the filth and pollution about them, searching for the fulfillment of God's prophecies through Isaiah, Malachi, and the rest. Of Zecharian and Elizabeth it is written: "And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." The chief priests could pursue their evil ways, but there were also priests like him. When the infant Jesus was presented in the temple, an old man named Simeon who "was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel" took the child in his arms crying, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation...a light for revelation to the Gentile and for glory to thy people Israel." The Christ-child was similarly welcomed by the faithful hal-mun-ni Anna who did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fast and prayer night and day. Later the disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus, "Are you he who is to come or shall we look for another?" All this seeking and yearning was going on...and in the "fullness of time" God sent forth His Son.

If there is anything that the book Luke forgot to write tells us, it is this: God keeps His promises. He is never idle. He is always at work carrying out His right ~~eous~~ plans. No time is so dark but what He can produce dramatic change. Far be it from me to presume to fit into any scheme of prophetic timetable the recent unprecedented visit of the president of Egypt to Jerusalem setting up a meeting between erstwhile implacable foes who have recently fought four violent wars...but I do know that the middle-East situation will never be the same again. A modern illustration of how God can and does cause the impossible to happen...with the greatest example of all in sending His Son when His people were sunk in utter hopelessness. In the midst of ours or any other evil and perverse generation, we look to Him alone for salvation, and cling to our firm hope of the final return of our Lord who will ~~rule~~ forever rule in righteousness and justice and peace.

"And so," Luke might conclude his book, "O Theophilus, let me remind you of the last words of our Old Testament prophet Malachi: 'But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings', an event which has now come to pass among us, so that our brother Paul rightly says, 'But when the time has fully come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.'"

## OUR GLORY

Scripture Reading: Galatians 6:11-18

Text: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." (Galatians 6:14)

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." In preparation for our communion service today, I was studying this text last Tuesday morning. The ladies had taken over our house for White Cross work, and I considered it prudent to get out of the way and drove to perhaps the highest point in Montreat where an outdoor vesper worship spot has been placed on a little wooded hill-side. Sitting in my lawn chair I had just perused the chapters on the meaning of the death of Christ in a three inch thick theology volume and picked up another book entitled "Kingdoms in Conflict," when a small van carrying a couple of girls came up and stopped. I groaned, thinking that my peace and quiet would be shattered by a car radio turned up full volume to raucous music. Instead, a neatly dressed young lady of college age stepped out, greeted me, announced that she represented the Jehovah's Witnesses and started off by asking if I ever read the Bible. Knowing that she did not believe in the Trinity...God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, nor the divinity of Christ in the way we believe the Bible teaches, I challenged her on this point and we had a ten-minute "discussion" on the subject in a no-win atmosphere after which I commended her on her zeal and she departed. I was amused that this representative of a group calling their worship places "Kingdom Halls" had caught me beginning to read this book "Kingdoms in Conflict" and a volume of traditional Christian Theology. Maybe by this God was reminding me how what we believe about the Person of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the third Person of the Trinity, and the significance of His cross is the key point in the conflict between His kingdom and all other kingdoms.

The Apostle Paul had in mind this conflict when he wrote: "Far be it for me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." His letter to the Galatians is concerned with the conflict between Christians, some of whom were insisting on observance of the Old Testament regulations and ceremonies, particularly circumcision as something necessary in addition to the cross. He knew how Romans gloried as citizens of their great empire, how Greeks prided themselves on their superior intellectual knowledge, how Pharisees boasted of perfectly observing every jot and tittle of Jewish law. He had been a part of all those cultures himself. Why should he now glory in that most despicable, indescribably ugly, forever shameful, incredibly painful method of executing criminals and slaves...but never Roman citizens? Why should he boast about that obscure Galilean peasant, poor and lowly, of no account so far as his world could determine? For that matter, why should any of us glory in His cross? Think of some reasons, as we approach the Lord's Table.



I. WE ARE SAVED BY THE CROSS. Why mention this again in the company of Christians? Haven't we heard this time and time again? Of course...but Jesus knew what He was doing in giving us this sacrament to remind us of that cross, of the One who died there, and of why He died. His Kingdom is in conflict with all other kingdoms, and it is so easy to take pride in other realms, and to give our allegiance elsewhere. Even Christians can take pride in their magnificent churches, or stained glass windows, or elaborate church programs and activities. They can be boastful of their own orthodoxy, upright convictions and spotless morality. Others can pride themselves on following some church leader and thus give him the honor and obedience and allegiance they should give the Savior. Such things can take precedence, and we need to be called back to Paul's words here, "Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Why do we glory because we are saved by the cross?

1. The cross tells us that we are sinners. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." It shows us that "the wages of sin is death." No effort on our part, no amount of money, no life of good deeds is ever enough.

2. The cross tells us that God is just. Because He is righteous He cannot ignore sin. His nature requires that sin be punished. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" proclaimed an Old Testament prophet.

3. The cross tells us that God is loving. "Here is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (I Jn. 4:10) Our Father yearns to have His children restored to His family.

4. The cross tells us that God is willing to sacrifice, in order to forgive sinners. Here is a mystery beyond our comprehension...yet it was taught when God provided the ram for Abraham to offer in the place of his son Isaac...and it was taught in all the Old Testament system of animal sacrifices. Those sacrifices had to be without blemish, teaching that God would supply His own sinless and perfect Son to take away the sin of the world.

5. The cross tells us that Jesus was not only compassionate and forgiving during His earthly ministry, but also was supremely humble and obedient in giving Himself in humble submission to the will of His Father.

6. The cross also tells us that a substitute is worthless unless the one for whom it is made accepts it...and that brings each of us into equation. The simplest and yet most profound explanation of the cross is in those words, "Christ died for

us." From the repentant thief crucified beside Jesus to Paul the erudite scholar, from the most ignorant savage in a distant jungle to cultured scientists today, millions have found cause to glory in that simple word: "Christ died for me."

II. WE ARE BROTHERS & SISTERS AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS. Paul was concerned about divisions among the Christians to whom he wrote and saw the cross as that which could bring them together. During the days just prior to his crucifixion, Jesus was anxious that His followers be united both for their own joy and for the effectiveness of their witness to Him. Today, amid all the things in our world which tear us apart, before the cross is where we all stand on the same level ground. As Paul said in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Two hundred and fifty years ago Protestants who were persecuted in Bohemia and Moravia were invited to settle on the estates of Count Nicolaus Von Zinzendorf near Dresden in eastern Germany. After a time the count was distressed at the quarreling and bickering and scrapping which developed among these Christian guests. Finally he called them all together and told them to pray. Their prayer meeting lasted day after day until Zinzendorf met them again and saw that a great change had come over them. No longer was there fighting and fussing but mutual love and forgiveness. "What has happened?" he asked. They answered: "During this time of prayer we have all studied about the cross of Christ. God has caused us to realize that at the foot of the cross of our Savior who died for us, we are all alike sinners, we all have the same Savior, and we all have the same salvation. Other differences among us disappear as we sinners all stand before our crucified Savior sharing the same salvation." Those Moravians formed a society which sent missionaries to the ends of the earth, which strongly influenced famous Christian leaders such as John Wesley, and which continues today in Pennsylvania and here in North Carolina as a great evangelical body.

No human organization can do what the cross of Christ can to bring people together. Neither the United Nations, nor federations and councils, clubs and societies can really accomplish this. But when God's children realize the essential and central place of the death of His Son in God's plan to reunite His family, then around this truth we can with Paul "glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

III. WE HAVE VICTORY THROUGH THE CROSS. When Jesus died for our sins, the mighty conflict of the spiritual forces of light over darkness was won. That cosmic struggle still goes on in our world, but victory is assured. Paul saw victory in his personal life when he wrote: "Far be it for me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus

Christ, BY WHICH THE WORLD HAS BEEN CRUCIFIED TO ME, AND I TO THE WORLD." Acceptance of the Savior as Lord, the forgiveness offered in His name, and the power of the Holy Spirit sent by the Christ gave him victory over the world in which he once gloried.

Little wonder that the cross has become a symbol duplicated in tens of thousands of ways.. from ornamental crosses around our necks to crosses on steeples and on national flags. The practice of the Roman Catholics of crossing themselves comes from ancient times when persecuted Christians could not reveal their identity for fear of their lives but used that secret sign as a sort of pass-word among themselves. Many a traveller meeting a stranger of another language has drawn a cross and found Christian companionship and unity far beyond what words could ever express.

Early in 1950 a new building for a nurses school was completed in our city in Korea. The church here in America had raised funds to re-habilitate work following the disruption of World War II. \$30,000 had provided a building including classrooms, offices, chapel, dormitory rooms, dining and kitchen facilities. Over the front entrance was a small cross, made with bricks placed in a slight relief out from the brick wall itself and not particularly noticeable at all. When the Korean War began and North Korean communist troops occupied our city, they used that building as part of their headquarters. Since entering the building marked with a Christian cross over-head did not suit these anti-Christians and atheists, they climbed up and chipped it off level flush with the surface of the wall. Some months later when they retreated and missionaries with Korean friends returned, what could hardly be seen before was now clearly high-lighted. That cross, defaced as it was, had been made of bricks firmly mortared into the wall so that chipping off the front edge made it many times more conspicuous than before. Our Christian community saw this as an illustration that the cross of Christ is a symbol of the ultimate victory of the plans of the Almighty. We are reminded of lines from familiar hymns, about the "old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame...so despised by the world, stained with blood so divine"...the cross of Christ "towering o'er the wrecks of time."

CONCLUSION. Why may we glory in the cross? We are saved from sin by the Savior who died there, we are drawn together as the family of God there, and thus was forever won victory over sin, its guilt and its consequences both now and for eternity. May the celebration of this communion service help us with Paul to say, "Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Not the labors of my hands can fulfill Thy law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone, Thou must save, and Thou alone.