

The Nazareth Pericope

Luke 4:16-22

Isaiah	Luke
The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,	“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me	because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.	to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me	He has sent me
to bind up the brokenhearted,	
to proclaim freedom for the captives	to proclaim freedom (LXX “release) for the prisoners
and recovery from darkness for the prisoners,	and recovery of sight for the blind
	to release (LXX “release) the oppressed
to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor	to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

“to release the oppressed”

Taken from Isaiah 58:6

Rare occurrence in the Bible: an insertion of one text with another

Jesus could have read it this way.

Luke could have constructed it later to meet his purposes.

It is not a “mistake.”

Luke inserted “release” for both structural and theological purposes.

Structural: To harmonize with “release” the prisoners

Theological: To make “release” the main idea of the passage.

1 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up,
2 and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.
3 And he stood up to read.
4 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.
5 Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:
6 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
6 Because he has anointed me
7 to preach good news to the poor.
8 He has sent me to proclaim release
for prisoners
9 and recovery of sight for
the blind,
8 to release the oppressed,
7 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
5 Then he rolled up the scroll,
4 gave it back to the attendant
3 and sat down.
2 The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he
began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”
1 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.

By placing the two Spirit-filled/Anointed phrases together, Luke brings to the fore the work of the Spirit in the ministry of release which is about to be proclaimed. As such, the apparent anomalies in the chiasmic structure (the two Spirit-filled phrases and ending with proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor), rather than weakening, strongly promote the two main themes of the Nazareth pericope. The simplest way to express these two themes is that Jesus is the Christ (through the testimony of the Spirit) and now is the time (by the year of the Lord’s favor).

The Key term: aphasis (Greek ἀφεσις)

Jubilee Term

Key text in OT is grounded in the Jubilee:

Leviticus 25:10 Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty (LXX “aphesis” (Gr. ΑΦΕΣΙΣ) throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan.

Jubilee Themes

“To preach good news to the poor.”

“To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Jubilee Time

Some have asserted that when Jesus made His pronouncement in Nazareth it was the actual year of Jubilee.¹

A Time of Redemption

Leviticus 25:25 “If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold.

Application: Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit after being anointed by God at His baptism and the temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:14). On the Sabbath day, he proclaims to his next of kin in Nazareth, that He has been anointed (christened the Christ, Messiah) and has come to release them from their debts and imprisonment according to the law of the Jubilee.

They respond with the cynical remark: “Is not this ‘Joseph’s’ son?” (Who does this guy think he is anyway? He is *not* the Messiah and we are *not* in prison).

Jesus then tells them that a prophet is not without honor, except in His own family. Jesus relates two stories from the ministry of Elijah (the widow and Namaan) which showed that the Lord could only work among the Gentiles because of the unbelief in His people. Jesus’ family responds to the rebuke of their self-righteousness by forcibly taking Him out of the town and attempting to kill Him.

¹ A. Strobel also argues that behind Christ's quotation lay an actual historical jubilee year which is dated in A.D. 26-27 (Kerygma und Apokalyptic 1967:105-111). Writing contrary to this view is Prior, who regards any literal or liturgical reckoning of years to account for the Jubilee as "indulging in interesting speculation" (Prior 1995:141). While a chronological reckoning of the years may be somewhat tentative, I believe the theological foundation of the linking of the Jubilee with the Nazareth pericope to be sound, despite the remarks of Tannehill (and others contra Sloan) that "this remains a possibility but has not been proved" (1986:68).