

Study/Series: New Testament Overviews

Luke

I. Introduction.

- A. Theme of Luke: Jesus is the Savior of the world, especially the downtrodden and common people.
- B. Introductory Notes.

II. Background.

A. Authorship Matters.

- 1. Luke, the companion of Paul on some of his missionary journeys, is the author of both Luke and Acts. He was a Greek, an educated man, and a physician (medical doctor).
  - a. The two books together comprise more volume of material than any other NT writer, including Paul.
  - b. It is the longest gospel, and it has the most material that is exclusive to it, not found in the other gospels.
- 2. Theophilus is the addressee. 1:1-4. He was probably a new Christian—a real person, not an imaginary dialogue partner. Luke likely wrote to him for the purpose of confirming him in his new faith. It is interesting that his name means “loved by God” or “lover of God.” Thus, anyone who fits those categories can benefit from it.

- B. Purpose. Its main purpose is to set down an orderly historical narrative, generally chronological and consecutive. Luke was an able historian, careful to preserve confirming historical references and details; for example, 3:1-2.

- C. Audience. Luke’s gospel was written to the Greek portion of the Gentile world: those who touted high education, boasted of high social order and class, looked down on the common man; thinkers whose religions nevertheless defied logic and reason. So, Jesus is the Savior of Greeks (that kind of Gentile) and self-righteous, yes, but especially of the outcasts they look down on.

### III. Distinctive Features That Support the Theme.

- A. Its Focus. It focuses on individuals. Much of Luke's history focuses on individuals in contrast to Matthew's focus on the kingdom. Jesus is the Savior of the individual sinner as well as the whole number of the elect.
- B. An Emphasis on Women. Luke recounts dealings and doings of Mary, Elizabeth, the women who ministered to Jesus, the widow of Nain, the immoral woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears. He included two parables featuring women, etc. In that day, including among Jews, women were degraded, treated as second class citizens without rights, etc. Luke shows that Jesus is the Savior of women (downtrodden as they were); since then, where Christianity goes, the condition and treatment of women improves, as those with equal human dignity as men.
- C. An Emphasis on Children. "Only children": 7:12; 8:42; 9:38. Covenant children: 18:15-17 (he uses the Greek word for "infants"); at that time, the only reason the infants they brought to Jesus were not baptized was that they were still under the OT administrations of the covenant of grace, so the male babies were circumcised with the sign and seal of the covenant of grace.
- D. An Emphasis on Outcasts. The immoral woman, 7:36ff. Zaccheus the tax collector, 19:8ff. The thief on the cross, 23:39ff. Note the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and the Parable of the Pharisee and Publican; the prodigal and the publican were outcasts, even if they made themselves outcasts. Jesus is the Savior of outcasts.
- E. An Emphasis on the Poor and Oppressed. Texts on the poor and oppressed: 4:17-21; 6:20, 30; 14:11ff. He warns of the danger of the love of money: 3:13ff.; 16:13. Jesus is the Savior of the poor, needy, and helpless especially as they reflect spiritual poverty. At the same time, Jesus is the Savior of the self-righteous and self-sufficient who are warned in order to get their attention, rather than consoled.
- F. An Emphasis on Jesus' Relations, and Ministry to All Kinds.
  - 1. He dined with Pharisees, 7:36-50; with religious Jews, 10:38-42; with tax collectors, 19:1-10; with His disciples, 24:13-32.

2. He was sent by the Father for all kinds: Gentiles, 2:32; “all flesh shall see,” 3:4-6; Samaritans, 9:54; 10:33; 17:16; non-Israelites, 4:25-27; all nations, 24:47.
3. Jesus is the Savior of all kinds, thus of the world—not every individual in the world, but all kinds of people throughout the world; as Rev. says, “every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” Thus, agreement is seen with the theology of John regarding the scope of salvation as limited to the elect even though he uses the term “world” as in John 3:16.
4. J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament*, pg. 210: “The parable of the Prodigal Son, simple though it is, has often been sadly misinterpreted....The key to the interpretation is given in Luke 15:1, 2. Jesus was receiving publicans and sinners. Instead of rejoicing at the salvation of these poor, degraded sons of Abraham, the Pharisees murmured. Jesus spoke three parables...The teaching of all three of these parables is constant....That application may be expressed very simply: ‘God rejoices at the salvation of a sinner; if, therefore, you are really sons of God, you will rejoice too.’ In the parable of the Prodigal Son, however, the application is forced home more poignantly than in either of the other two. In that parable alone among the three, the Pharisees could see—in the elder brother—a direct representation of themselves. The incident of the elder brother, sometimes regarded as a mere detail, really introduces the main point of the parable. Everything else leads up to it. The wonderful description of the joy of the father at the prodigal’s home-coming is all intended as a contrast to the churlish jealousy of the brother. The elder brother was as far as possible from sharing in the father’s joy. That showed that he was no true son....But when salvation, in the person of Jesus, had at last come to the poor, sinful outcasts of the people, the Pharisees drew aside.”

#### IV. Other Emphases.

##### A. Prayer.

1. Nine of Jesus’ prayers are recorded in Luke. Seven of these appear only in Luke; e.g., 5:15-16; 9:28-29; 22:31-32.
2. Luke records two of Jesus’ parables on prayer: 11:5ff; 18:9-14.

- B. The Holy Spirit. See 4:1, 14; 10:21-22; 24:49. Jesus is the Savior who was equipped by the Spirit for His saving work. Jesus applies His saving work through the Spirit. Jesus enables His people to serve God by the Spirit.
- C. Joy. Luke records five hymns of praise to the Savior. In addition, joy is seen in 1:14; 6:21-23; 10:21; 15 (joy over repentance); 18 (Zaccheus); 44:47. Jesus is the Savior who brings the joy of salvation.
- D. The Humanity of Jesus Christ. John, in his gospel, emphasizes the Deity of Christ. Luke emphasizes the humanity of Jesus. He gives Mary's genealogy that emphasizes that He "was born of her substance, yet without sin" (Westminster Confession of Faith 8.2; Larger Catechism Q. 37; Shorter Catechism Q. 22). The genealogy leads back to Adam; thus, He is human. He calls Himself the Son of Man numerous times.
- E. Birth Narrative. Luke's is the longest narrative of the birth of Jesus Christ. It looks at Jesus' birth from Mary's perspective.