

Dr. Robert Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 7, Joel Green – Purpose, Theology Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 7, Joel Green – Purpose, Theology, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This text presents **Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture** on **Joel Green's "Purpose Theology"** within the **Theology of Luke-Acts**. Peterson outlines Green's perspective on **Luke's Gospel**, emphasizing its **social setting**, concern with **power dynamics**, and portrayal of **Jesus as a savior** in contrast to the Roman Empire. The lecture highlights Luke's theological focus on **God's redemptive purpose**, manifested through Jesus' ministry to all social strata, and the call to a counter-cultural life characterized by grace, contrasting it with Greco-Roman patron-client relationships. Ultimately, the discussion centers on **salvation as a pervasive theme** in Luke-Acts, impacting all aspects of life and forming the identity of God's people.

2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 7 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → Gospels → Luke).



**Peterson_Theo_LkA
cts_Session07.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 7, Joel Green – Purpose, Theology

Briefing Document: The Theology of Luke-Acts and Joel Green's "Purpose Theology"

I. Overview:

This briefing document summarizes the key themes and important ideas presented in Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture on Joel Green's "Purpose Theology" as it relates to the Gospel of Luke. The lecture highlights Green's emphasis on the socio-political context of Luke's narrative, the overarching purpose of God in salvation, and the implications for the early Christian movement. Peterson incorporates insights from Green's commentary and his book, "The Theology of the Gospel of Luke," to illuminate Luke's theological agenda.

II. Main Themes and Important Ideas:

A. The Socio-Political Context of Luke-Acts:

- **Luke's Awareness of Power Dynamics:** Green emphasizes Luke's keen awareness of the social and political landscape of his time. The opening of Luke's Gospel, set during the reign of King Herod and referencing the census under Caesar Augustus, is not merely chronological but intentionally places Jesus' arrival within a context of political tension and Roman dominance.
- *"From the opening verse, it's apparent that Luke is concerned with the balance of power. The narrative opening in the days of King Herod of Judea, Luke 1-5, is more than a vague chronological marker but locates these events in a particular period of political tension."* (Page 1)
- **Jesus as a Counter-Narrative to Imperial Power:** Luke presents Jesus as the true savior and bringer of peace, directly contrasting this with the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus, who was also hailed as a "divine savior" who "has brought peace to the world." This positioning is deliberate and highlights a theological challenge to the existing power structures.
- *"That in this very context, Jesus is presented as savior, Lord, the one through whom peace comes to the world, can hardly be accidental."* (Page 2)
- **Socio-Political Reversal and Eschatological Anticipation:** The songs of Mary and Zechariah, as well as the hopes of Simeon and Anna, reflect a deep eschatological anticipation for God's intervention that includes a socio-political reversal, with the

powerful being brought down and the lowly lifted up, and the end of foreign occupation.

- *"The song of Mary portrays God's mighty acts of salvation as socio-political reversal, with the powerful brought down from their thrones and the lowly uplifted."* (Page 2)
- **Luke's Understanding of Social Stratification:** Luke's social world was structured around power and privilege, determined by factors like religious purity, family heritage, land ownership, vocation, ethnicity, gender, education, and age, rather than modern economic class distinctions. At the bottom of this hierarchy were the "unclean" and "expendables."
- *"Rather, Luke's social world was defined around power and privilege and is measured by a complex of phenomena: religious purity, family heritage, land ownership for non-priests, vocation, ethnicity, gender, education, and age."* (Page 2)

B. God's Purpose of Salvation for All:

- **Centrality of God's Purpose:** Green argues that the narrative unity of Luke-Acts underscores God's central purpose to bring salvation to all people, regardless of their social standing, ethnicity, or gender.
- *"The narrative unity of Gospel of Luke and Acts highlights the centrality of God's purpose to bring salvation to all..."* (Page 3)
- **Ecclesiological Purpose of Luke-Acts:** Peterson, drawing on Green, suggests that the primary purpose of Luke-Acts was ecclesiological: to strengthen the early Christian movement facing opposition by affirming their understanding of God's redemptive purpose and calling them to continued faithfulness and witness.
- *"The purpose of Luke-Acts then would be primarily ecclesiological, concerned with the practices that define and the criteria for legitimating the community of God's people and centered on the invitation to participate in God's project."* (Page 4)
- **Salvation as the Unifying Theme:** Recent scholarship, including Darrell Bock and Howard Marshall, identifies salvation as the primary and unifying theme of Luke-Acts, integrating various textual elements within the narrative.
- *"Recent scholarship has repeatedly identified salvation as the primary theme of Luke-Acts. Darrell Bock agrees. Howard Marshall agrees."* (Page 4)

- **God as Savior:** From Mary's address to God as "my Savior" in the Magnificat to Jesus being identified as "Savior" by the angel, God's role as the initiator and provider of salvation is paramount.
- *"If salvation is the central theme of Luke, then it is not accidental that in one of the earliest references to God in the gospel, Mary addresses him as God my Savior in her Magnificat, Luke 1-47." (Page 4)*

C. Jesus as the Embodiment of God's Purpose:

- **Jesus' Reconstructed Vision of God:** Jesus' ministry, particularly his journey to Jerusalem, aimed to reshape his followers' understanding of God as a gracious and benevolent Father.
- *"Especially in the central section of the gospel...Jesus attempts to reconstruct the view of God held by his followers in order that they may recognize God as their Father, whose desire is to embrace them with his gracious beneficence." (Page 4)*
- **Jesus' Hermeneutical Struggle:** Jesus' conflicts with the Jewish leadership revolved around the correct interpretation of God's purpose and the scriptures. Luke argues that Jesus' interpretation, validated by his resurrection and ascension, is divinely legitimated.
- *"In fact, Jesus' struggle with the Jewish leadership and with the Jewish institutions is essentially hermeneutical. Who understands God's purpose? Who interprets the scriptures correctly?" (Page 5)*
- **Jesus as Prophet and Messiah:** Luke portrays Jesus as more than a prophet; he is the Davidic Messiah, the Son of God, fulfilling his regal and prophetic destiny.
- *"Jesus is portrayed as a prophet but as more than a prophet. He's the long-awaited Davidic Messiah, son of God..." (Page 5)*
- **Salvation Through Miracles and Table Fellowship:** Jesus' miracles of healing and his inclusive table fellowship demonstrate the in-breaking kingdom of God and communicate divine salvation, particularly to those marginalized in society.
- *"In Jesus' interactions with people at the table and in his ministry of healing, he communicates the presence of divine salvation for those whose position in society at large is generally on the margins." (Page 6)*
- **Jesus' Teaching on a Reconstructed World Order:** Jesus' instructions emphasized a radical shift away from conventional notions of honor and status, calling for love

of enemies, extending hospitality without expectation of return, and embodying God's beneficence.

- *"To put it differently, Jesus, as a son of God, is God's representative, whose life is characterized by obedience to God and who interprets for others...God's nature and plan and the contours of appropriate response to God."* (Page 6)

D. The Revolutionary Nature of God's Grace:

- **Contrast with Greco-Roman Patron-Client Relationships:** Peterson highlights John Barclay's work, emphasizing the fundamental difference between God's grace and the reciprocal obligations inherent in the Greco-Roman patron-client system. In that context, giving was rarely without expectation of return and served to reinforce social hierarchies.
- *"The whole social structure was a web of relationships involving patrons, those with greater power than prestige than their clients. Patrons gave not freely. They did give, and they helped others but with great obligation, understood demand..."* (Page 7)
- **Jesus' Free and Unconditional Giving:** Jesus' ministry, reaching across all social strata, demonstrated a radical form of giving, mirroring God's own grace, which was revolutionary in the first-century context.
- *"In the midst of this, Jesus comes and does not only minister to the lowly, but whether it is the high, the middle, or the lowly, he gives freely, and he teaches that he gives the way God gives."* (Page 8)
- **Grace as Foundational for the New Covenant Community:** God's grace is not only the message of salvation but should also define the relationships within the community of God's people.

E. Unexpected Faith and Resistance to God's Purpose:

- **"Nobodies" Exhibiting True Faith:** Luke's narrative features individuals often considered marginal or sinful (e.g., the sinful woman, Zacchaeus, the repentant thief) who demonstrate unexpected insight and exemplary responses to Jesus, sometimes surpassing the understanding of the disciples.
- *"What he's saying is the disciples don't always get the message, and so Luke brings in others Greene calls them nobodies who do a better job than the disciples at certain points in the narrative."* (Page 8)

- **Hostility to Jesus and God's Agenda:** Those in positions of power, threatened by Jesus' ministry, opposed him and saw him as contradicting their understanding of God and the existing social order.
- *"Those hostile to Jesus calculate the divine agenda along quite different lines and see his ministry as a threat to their own positions of leadership and the institutions that perpetuate the present order of things. In short, they see Jesus as opposing God himself." (Page 9)*

F. Holistic Nature of Salvation:

- **Salvation as Present and Comprehensive:** Salvation in Luke-Acts is not merely a future hope but encompasses present life, restoring human integrity, revitalizing communities, ordering the cosmos, and empowering the church to practice God's grace in all spheres.
- *"Salvation is neither merely a theory nor merely a future but embraces life in the present, restoring the integrity of human life, revitalizing human communities, setting the cosmos in order, and commissioning the community of God's people to put God's grace into practice..." (Page 9)*
- **Integration of Social, Economic, and Political Concerns:** Luke's understanding of salvation does not separate the spiritual from the social, economic, or political dimensions of human existence.
- *"Salvation embraces the totality of embodied life, including its social, economic, and political concerns." (Page 9)*

III. Conclusion:

Dr. Peterson's lecture on Joel Green's "Purpose Theology" effectively highlights the profound socio-political awareness embedded in Luke's Gospel and the overarching purpose of God to bring salvation to all. Green's work underscores how Luke presents Jesus as a counter-cultural figure whose ministry and message directly challenged the prevailing power structures and offered a revolutionary vision of God's grace. The lecture emphasizes the ecclesiological significance of Luke-Acts in strengthening the early church and calling believers to embody and extend God's holistic salvation in their lives and communities.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 7, Joel Green – Purpose, Theology

Study Guide: The Theology of Luke-Acts (Session 7 - Joel Green, Purpose Theology)

Key Concepts and Themes:

- **Joel Green's Approach to Luke:** Understanding Luke's Gospel through the lens of sociology and rhetoric, emphasizing the social setting.
- **Social Setting of Luke-Acts:** Luke's concern with the balance of power, social status, and stratification in the first-century Greco-Roman world, defined by factors like religious purity, heritage, land ownership, vocation, ethnicity, gender, education, and age.
- **Political Context of Jesus' Birth:** The significance of Herod's reign and the Roman census in understanding the tensions and expectations surrounding Jesus' arrival.
- **Jesus as Savior and Lord in Context:** Luke's presentation of Jesus as the true bringer of peace and salvation in contrast to the Roman Emperor's claims.
- **Eschatological Anticipation:** The strong expectation of God's deliverance and the end of subjugation present in the birth narratives (Mary, Zechariah, Simeon, Anna).
- **Luke's Theological History:** Luke's narrative as intentionally designed to present Jesus' mission, goals, and purpose.
- **Centrality of God's Purpose:** The overarching theme of God's plan to bring salvation to all people, regardless of social standing.
- **Purpose of Luke-Acts:** To strengthen the Christian movement by affirming God's redemptive purpose and calling believers to continued faithfulness and witness.
- **Salvation as the Primary Theme:** Luke-Acts emphasizes salvation as a unifying element that encompasses the restoration of human life and communities.
- **God as Savior:** Mary's recognition of God as her Savior in the Magnificat highlights God's active role in salvation.
- **Jesus as God's Representative:** Jesus' life as an example of obedience and his role in interpreting God's nature and plan.

- **Redefining Membership in God's People:** Shifting the focus from inherited status to an embrace of God's grace and acts of mercy.
- **Contrast with Greco-Roman Social Norms:** Jesus' teachings on love, hospitality, and giving as counter-cultural in a society based on reciprocal obligations and patron-client relationships (drawing on John Barclay's work).
- **"Nobodies" as Examples of Faith:** Luke's portrayal of unexpected individuals (sinful woman, Zacchaeus, repentant thief) who demonstrate profound understanding and response to Jesus.
- **Opposition to Jesus:** The growing hostility from those who see Jesus as a threat to their power and the existing social order.
- **Salvation as Holistic:** Luke's understanding of salvation as encompassing social, economic, and political concerns, not just the spiritual or individual.
- **God as Benefactor:** The depiction of God as the ultimate giver whose redemptive purpose is revealed in Jesus.

Quiz:

1. According to Joel Green, what makes his commentary on Luke particularly noteworthy?
2. How does Luke establish the political context of Jesus' birth in the opening chapters of his Gospel? Provide an example from the text.
3. What is the significance of presenting Jesus as "Savior" and "Lord" in the context of the Roman Empire and its ruler, Caesar Augustus?
4. Describe the social hierarchy of the first-century Greco-Roman world as presented in the lecture. What were some of the key factors determining a person's status?
5. According to the lecture, what are the two primary purposes of Luke-Acts as suggested by Joel Green?
6. What does it mean to say that Luke's theology is a "narrative theology," and what is the aim of his historical account?
7. How does Jesus redefine what it means to be a child of Abraham in Luke's Gospel?

8. Explain the concept of patron-client relationships in the Greco-Roman world and how Jesus' teachings challenged this social structure, referencing John Barclay's ideas.
9. Provide two examples of the "nobodies" mentioned in the lecture who demonstrate a significant understanding of God's purpose.
10. How does Luke understand the concept of salvation? Does it have a narrow or broad scope, according to the lecture?

Answer Key:

1. Joel Green's commentary on Luke is particularly noteworthy for its solid exegesis and its use of sociology and rhetoric to help understand Luke's message. He effectively analyzes the social setting to which Luke speaks.
2. Luke establishes the political context by situating Jesus' birth during the reign of King Herod of Judea and mentioning the census ordered by Caesar Augustus. This highlights a time of political tension and Roman dominance.
3. Presenting Jesus as "Savior" and "Lord" in this context is significant because Caesar Augustus was also recognized as a "divine savior" who brought peace. Luke intentionally contrasts this, presenting Jesus as the true source of peace and salvation.
4. The social hierarchy was based on power and privilege, determined by factors like religious purity, family heritage, land ownership (for non-priests), vocation, ethnicity, gender, education, and age. The ruler held the most power, followed by the governing class, priests/merchants, peasants/artisans, and finally the unclean and degraded at the bottom.
5. The two primary purposes of Luke-Acts are to strengthen the Christian movement by ensuring them in their interpretation and experience of God's redemptive purpose and faithfulness, and to call them to continued faithfulness and witness in God's salvific project.
6. Narrative theology means that Luke tells the story of Jesus with a theological purpose. While his history is accurate, it is designed to make a point and present Jesus' person, mission, and goals.
7. Jesus redefines being a child of Abraham by emphasizing behaviors that manifest an unmitigated embrace of the gracious God and open-handed mercy toward others, especially those in need, rather than inherited status.

8. Patron-client relationships were a dominant social structure based on reciprocal obligations where patrons provided benefits to clients who were expected to repay through loyalty and contributing to the patron's honor. Jesus' teachings challenged this by advocating for selfless giving and extending hospitality without expecting reciprocation, which was counter to the prevailing worldview.
9. Two examples are the sinful woman who anointed Jesus (who showed great love and understanding) and the wealthy toll collector Zacchaeus (who responded to the kingdom message with radical generosity and repentance).
10. Luke understands salvation broadly, encompassing not only spiritual deliverance but also the restoration of human life, the revitalization of communities, and the setting of the cosmos in order. It embraces the totality of embodied life, including social, economic, and political concerns.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze how Luke's portrayal of the social and political context of first-century Palestine in the birth narratives (Luke 1-2) serves his theological agenda. Consider the significance of figures like Herod and Caesar Augustus, as well as the themes of power and subjugation.
2. Discuss Joel Green's assertion that "salvation" is the primary theme of Luke-Acts. How does this theme unify the narrative and address the diverse social strata and concerns presented in Luke's Gospel? Provide specific examples from the text (even if not explicitly detailed in the excerpts) to support your argument.
3. Compare and contrast Jesus' teachings on relationships and giving with the prevailing social norms of the Greco-Roman world, drawing on the lecture's discussion of patron-client relationships and John Barclay's insights on grace. How revolutionary were Jesus' ethical teachings in their historical context?
4. Examine the significance of the individuals referred to as "nobodies" (e.g., the sinful woman, Zacchaeus, the repentant thief) in Luke's Gospel. How do their responses to Jesus highlight key aspects of God's purpose and challenge conventional understandings of faith and acceptance?
5. Evaluate the claim that the purpose of Luke-Acts is primarily ecclesiological. How does Luke's narrative address the challenges and identity of the early Christian community, and how does it invite them to participate in God's ongoing salvific project?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Exegesis:** The critical interpretation and explanation of a text, especially of scripture.
- **Rhetoric:** The art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the use of figures of speech and other compositional techniques.
- **Sociology:** The study of the development, structure, and functioning of human society.
- **Motif:** A recurring subject, theme, idea, etc., especially in a literary, artistic, or musical work.
- **Eschatological:** Relating to the "last things" or end times, such as death, judgment, heaven, and hell, or the ultimate destiny of humanity and the world.
- **Subjugation:** The act of bringing someone or something under domination or control.
- **Social Stratification:** The hierarchical arrangement of individuals or groups within a society based on factors like wealth, status, and power.
- **Greco-Roman:** Relating to the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome, especially the period from the Roman conquest of Greece (2nd century BCE) to the division of the Roman Empire (4th century CE).
- **Marxism:** A political and economic theory where a society has no classes. The struggle between social classes is a basic force in shaping capitalist economies.
- **Continuum:** A continuous sequence in which adjacent elements are not perceptibly different from each other, although the extremes are quite distinct.
- **Parable:** A simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the Gospels.
- **Narrative Theology:** A theological approach that emphasizes the importance of stories and narratives in understanding and communicating religious truths.
- **Ecclesiological:** Relating to the church, its nature, structure, and organization.
- **Hermeneutical:** Relating to the theory and practice of interpretation.
- **Divine Imprimatur:** Official approval or sanction from a divine source.
- **Congruent:** In agreement or harmony.

- **Vindication:** The action of clearing someone of blame or suspicion; proof that someone or something is right, reasonable, or justified.
- **Davidic Messiah:** The expected king and deliverer of the Jews; a descendant of King David.
- **Table Fellowship:** The practice of sharing meals together, which in Jesus' ministry often included people from all social standings, signifying inclusivity and the breaking down of social barriers.
- **Beneficence:** The quality of being kind and doing good.
- **Agonistic:** Characterized by striving for superiority, often in a competitive or combative way.
- **Patron-Client Relationships:** A hierarchical social relationship in which a patron (wealthy or influential person) provides benefits to a client (person of lower status) in exchange for loyalty and various forms of support.
- **Grace:** Unmerited favor from God; in the Greco-Roman context (as discussed by Barclay), giving was generally associated with obligation and expectation of return.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 7, Joel Green – Purpose, Theology, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on the Theology of Luke-Acts Based on Dr. Peterson's Session on Joel Green

1. According to Joel Green, what is a key characteristic of Luke's Gospel beyond its historical accuracy? Joel Green highlights Luke's skillful use of sociology and rhetoric to effectively convey his message. Luke intricately weaves in the social setting of his time, including the understanding of reality, the role of the supernatural, societal institutions and their functions, and social dynamics. This approach allows him to address the specific context of his audience and underscore the significance of Jesus' life and ministry within that framework.

2. How does Luke's birth narrative (Luke 1-2) reflect the socio-political context of the time? Luke's account of Jesus' birth is deliberately situated within a period of political tension under King Herod and the Roman Empire. Mentions of Herod's controversial rule, the Roman census under Caesar Augustus (who was considered a "divine savior" bringing peace), and the anticipation of a Davidic king highlight the existing power dynamics and Israel's subjugation. In this context, Jesus' arrival as Savior and Lord, bringing true peace and establishing an everlasting kingdom, is presented as a direct challenge to the prevailing political order and a fulfillment of eschatological hopes for liberation.

3. What does Luke emphasize regarding social stratification in the first-century Mediterranean world? Luke's social world, unlike post-industrial societies focused on economic class in a Marxist sense, was structured around power and privilege. This was determined by a complex interplay of factors such as religious purity, family heritage, land ownership, vocation, ethnicity, gender, education, and age. At the top were rulers and the governing class, followed by priests and merchants, then artisans and peasants. At the very bottom were the "unclean," the degraded, and the "expendables" with no social value.

4. What does Joel Green identify as the overarching purpose of Luke-Acts? Green argues that the primary purpose of Luke-Acts is ecclesiological. This involves strengthening the Christian movement amidst opposition by affirming their understanding of God's redemptive purpose and faithfulness. It also calls them to continued faithfulness and witness in God's ongoing salvific project. Essentially, Luke-

Acts aims to define the practices and legitimize the community of God's people, centered on the invitation to participate in God's mission.

5. What is identified as the central and unifying theme of Luke's theology? Recent scholarship, including the work of Darrell Bock and Howard Marshall, consistently identifies salvation as the primary and coordinating theme of Luke-Acts. This salvation is not merely a theoretical concept or a future hope but encompasses the restoration of human life, the revitalization of communities, the ordering of the cosmos, and the commissioning of believers to actively practice God's grace.

6. How does Luke portray God's involvement in the narrative of Jesus? Luke's narrative is deeply theological, centered on God's purpose and design. While God may not frequently appear as a direct character, the progression of the story is guided by the divine will. This purpose is revealed through various means, including scriptural references, heavenly messengers, and the divine choreography of events, all empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus' life and ministry are presented as fully congruent with God's ancient plan.

7. How does Jesus' ministry, as depicted by Luke, challenge the prevailing social norms of his time, particularly in relation to grace and patronage? Jesus' ministry profoundly challenged the Greco-Roman social structure built on reciprocal patron-client relationships where all gifts came with obligations. Jesus ministered to people across the social spectrum, including the marginalized, offering healing and table fellowship that signified the in-breaking kingdom of God. He taught radical concepts like loving enemies and extending hospitality without expectation of return, embodying and teaching a form of divine grace – giving freely without demanding reciprocation – which was revolutionary in that cultural context.

8. According to the sources, how successful were Jesus' initial disciples in understanding and embodying his teachings on faithfulness and God's purpose? The sources suggest that Jesus' initial disciples struggled to fully grasp and consistently embody the radical nature of his teachings and God's inclusive purpose. Luke often highlights instances where others, whom Green refers to as "nobodies" (like the sinful woman, Zacchaeus, and the repentant thief), demonstrate a more profound and unexpected understanding and response to Jesus' message. This contrast underscores the transformative nature of God's grace and the new social order Jesus inaugurated, which wasn't always readily embraced by those closest to him.