

New Testament Literature: Luke — Background and Themes

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Dave Mathewson examines the background and distinct theological themes of the Gospel of Luke. Framed as the first volume of a two-part historical work connected to the Book of Acts, Luke utilizes eyewitness testimony and research to present an orderly narrative. Mathewson highlights Luke's focus on Jesus as the Savior of the world who extends divine grace specifically to social outcasts, while emphasizing stewardship of wealth and a lifestyle of prayer and praise.

Outline

I. Introduction and Course Logistics

- A. Opening announcements and upcoming review session
- B. Opening prayer and quiz administration

II. Literary Context and Composition of Luke

- A. Luke and Acts as a two-volume work
 - 1. Structural bridge between Gospels and apostolic ministry in Acts
 - 2. Splitting of Luke and Acts in the New Testament canon
- B. Luke's methodology and purpose (Luke 1:1–4)
 - 1. Awareness and use of prior written sources
 - 2. Reliance on eyewitness testimonies
 - 3. Writing an "orderly account" for Theophilus
- C. Authorial background
 - 1. Tradition of Luke as a physician
 - 2. Relationship as an associate of the Apostle Paul

III. Literary Structure: The Chiasm of Luke-Acts

- A. Macro-structure of Luke-Acts
 - 1. Begins with Jesus in the broader Roman world (Luke 1–2)
 - 2. Focus shifts inward toward Jerusalem at the end of Luke and start of Acts

3. Expands outward again from Jerusalem to the Roman world (Acts 28)

B. Structure of the Gospel of Luke

1. Chiasm centering on the travel narrative to Jerusalem
2. Strategic placement of central themes at the core of the narrative

IV. Key Passages and Themes in Luke

A. Outreach to social outcasts and the disenfranchised

1. Nativity story: Lowly shepherds as first witnesses (Luke 2)
2. Parable of the Good Samaritan: Samaritan as the unexpected hero (Luke 10)
3. Healing of the ten lepers: Only the Samaritan returns to give thanks
4. Story of Zacchaeus: Jesus ministers to a despised tax collector

B. Parables of grace and celebration (Luke 15)

1. Parable of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin: Joy over what was lost being found
2. Parable of the Prodigal Son
 - a. Grace extended by the father through self-humiliation
 - b. Reaction of the older brother and open-ended invitation to the Pharisees

V. Distinctive Theological Themes

A. Jesus as the Savior of the world

1. Emphasis on compassion for social outcasts, misfits, and sinners
2. Fulfilling Old Testament scriptures and Davidic promises (Emmaus Road)

B. Stewardship of money and possessions

1. Warnings against hoarding wealth
2. Exhortation to share resources with the poor

C. Life of prayer and praise

1. Jesus portrayed at prayer at critical moments (e.g., Gethsemane)
2. Foundation for the ongoing role of prayer in the early Church in Acts