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Review: The Gospel of Luke

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Christian writings to discover patterns of thought that were part of the cultural heritage or worldview of the interpretive community which produced and originally read the Gospel of Mark. According to Garrett, three interpretive conventions are particularly important guides for understanding the subject of testing in the Gospel of Mark. (1) The sufferings of righteous individuals were viewed as satanic testing. God permits Satan to put his righteous servants to the test. (2) The testing of the righteous may take place through the persecutions of the wicked, who are blinded by Satan and by their own iniquity. (3) It was believed that if a righteous sufferer endured testing unto death, God would accept that death as a sacrifice, as a substitutionary atonement for others. According to Garrett, Mark's Gospel fits this pattern of thought, since it presents Jesus as tested by Satan and sinners and regards Jesus' death as a ransom for sin.

Just as Jesus faced temptations and trials, so his followers must expect to undergo testing. So Garrett examines Mark's vision of discipleship, which Mark expressed through his negative presentation of the disciples. The disciples repeatedly failed because they did not comprehend the necessity of Jesus' suffering. According to Garrett, Mark expected his readers to know that after the death and resurrection of Jesus the disciples were restored and became revered leaders in the church. Therefore, Mark's portrayal of the disciples had an encouraging purpose, to show that the death and resurrection of Jesus heals disciples of blindness and empowers them to faithful obedience. The time after Jesus' resurrection is fundamentally different than the time before. Believers can no longer be deceived into regarding life and personal comfort as necessities to be preserved at all costs.

I would agree that Mark's presentation of the disciples was intended to be encouraging—Jesus can restore and use those who have failed. Nevertheless, Mark's narrative was probably also meant to be a warning. Mark emphasized the failures of the disciples and only hinted at their restoration. When the disciples misunderstood, Jesus corrected them with instructions concerning the importance of sacrifice and service, instructions that were addressed not only to the disciples but to "anyone" and "whoever" (Mark 8:34–35, 38; 9:35, 37; 10:43–44). Jesus' corrections of the disciples before the resurrection do not seem irrelevant for those who live after the resurrection.

In light of her comments at the end of the book, Garrett apparently recognizes that readers will be resistant to some of her interpretations. I must admit that at times I thought Garrett was unnecessarily forcing an outside interpretive model on Mark's Gospel as the key for unlocking all of its teaching. Yet even those who disagree will recognize that Garrett presents her viewpoints clearly and argues for them with skill. Her work serves to highlight an important but neglected theme in Mark's Gospel.

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*The Gospel of Luke.* By Joel B. Green. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, xcii + 928 pp., \$50.00.

This massive study replaces the 1951 commentary by N. Geldenhuys, the inaugural volume in the NICNT series. Green is currently Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary. He has attempted to break new ground for the NICNT series. He deals only sparingly (usually in footnotes) with historical and language issues, concentrating instead on literary, cultural and social matters. The objective is to show how Luke constructed his narrative of Jesus' words and deeds so as to convince his readers of the significance of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection universally for all social classes, and to show those who would be Jesus' disciples what kind of response God requires in faith and faithfulness. Cross-references to Matthew

and Mark are few; less than one percent of the 37-page Scriptural index is devoted to the other gospels.

The author's focus is narrative historiography or *narratology* (discourse analysis), the study of Luke's literary art and narrative theology. The third Gospel, he says, belongs to the Greco-Roman literary tradition of ancient historiography, not biography. Luke identifies his own work as a long narrative account of many events (1:1–4), focusing primarily on the fulfillment of God's ancient purpose in Jesus Christ. Since Luke-Acts is a two-volume set with the narrative unity of a continuous story, the Gospel should not be interpreted separately from Acts. Luke has interpreted the events he presents, and "ordered" them carefully to portray his own worldview.

Narrative analysis identifies three types of relationships between texts. A *co-text* is the string of linguistic data within which a given text is set, such as a paragraph or pericope. The most important co-text is the immediately preceding material. *Intertext* refers to how a text relates to a larger "linguistic frame of reference" from which it draws meaning (especially OT texts, images, persons or parallels). Finally, its *context* is the socio-historical reality of the world Luke describes and in which he wrote. Luke's primary challenge, says Green, was not to verify that certain events took place, but to present these events in a "meaningful sequence" within a "coherent narrative." For example, Luke assumes that Jesus was a healer, but his task is to provide this activity with "interpretive significance" by wrapping it in OT promises and allusions and then narrating it within the Spirit-anointed ministry of Jesus.

The commentary treats the text itself, rather than the world *of* the text or the world *behind* the text, as the major object of historical interest. The purpose of Luke's Gospel is primarily ecclesiological—to strengthen the people of God by reassuring them of the redemptive purpose of God through Christ and calling them to continue their faithful witness to God's salvific program in spite of opposition. It shows that Jesus' kingdom proposes to turn society upside down, to reverse mankind's assumptions concerning status, class, and gender so that the first become last and the poor are elevated above the rich.

Readers may find it difficult to discover Green's comments on specific phrases or exegetical problems. The commentary often reads like a series of literary essays, with the spotlight landing only sporadically on specific details. Nevertheless, Green's exegetical insights are usually creative and helpful.

For example, Luke names Gabriel as God's messenger to Zechariah in order to reinforce the fact that, as God's personal servant who reveals divine mysteries (Daniel 8–9), the angel speaks with God's own voice and authority (1:19). John's prediction that the Messiah would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire" probably refers to two baptisms, the second relating to the final judgment (3:16). Jesus' statement that "no one is greater than John," but that "the least in the kingdom is greater than he," shows simply that John's status was greater than any other human being, but Jesus' kingdom inverts normal ways of measuring status, so that now even the "little ones" (blind, lame, deaf) have been "raised up" (7:28). The sinful woman who wiped Jesus' feet with her tears (7:36–50) had already been forgiven during a prior encounter with Jesus, so that Jesus' statement, "her sins have been forgiven, for she loved much" (7:47) signifies only that her love, due to Jesus' prior forgiveness, moved her to serve him. To "hate" one's father and mother (14:26) speaks not of "affective abhorrence," but a "disavowal of primary allegiance to one's kin." The story of Lazarus and the rich man (16:19–31) is a "story parable," with elaborate culturally based parallels between the two main characters. Green's detailed interpretation of this story, while ignoring most theological implications, is highly suggestive for applicational sermons. He shows in a footnote that Jesus' statement, "The kingdom of God is within you" (17:21), is better translated "among you" or "within your purview," and cannot refer to an inward, spiritual kingdom.

The author's devotion to the "story behind the story" and to Luke's overall narrative context sometimes leads him to downplay historical and theological issues. For example, he calls Augustus' census and Quirinus (2:1-2) "problematic" and merely lists several publications in a footnote for readers to consult. He ventures no guess as to how Luke's genealogy parallels that of Matthew. Nor does he suggest any connection between Luke's "sermon on the plain" (6:17-49) and Matthew's "sermon on the mount." He calls the rich ruler's reference to Jesus as "good teacher" (18:18) a word game rooted in a concern with status, and ignores any Christological implications in Jesus' response ("No one is good but God alone.") He labels the passage of a camel through the eye of a needle (18:25) an impossibility, but fails to analyze or explain the background of the saying.

Preachers will find this work especially helpful in showing how passages in Luke can be understood and communicated in context. Most readers will want to utilize the more exegetical commentaries by Bock, Fitzmyer, Marshall, Nolland, and Stein as necessary companion volumes. Perhaps the publisher should consider commissioning a dual track (literary and historical-grammatical) for subsequent replacement volumes, so as not to lose the original focus of the series.

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*The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel*. By Andreas J. Kostenberger. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, xvi + 271 pp., \$30.00.

The present work is a modification of the author's doctoral dissertation. Kostenberger gives a detailed analysis of the concept of mission in the fourth Gospel with a view to taking the results of his study and, in combination with other studies, forming a Biblical theology of mission applicable to the modern Church.

I found the chapter dealing with methodology to be the most informative. Kostenberger clearly lays out a method of study in sympathy with modern linguistic theory. He seeks to study all of the significant words and concepts that bear on his topic. The semantic field rather than a few obvious words is the focus of attention. Another major emphasis is how to relate the ministries of Jesus and the disciples. Are they to be seen as being in continuity or discontinuity with each other?

The main body of the work is a detailed study of the various words and word groups that John uses in presenting his concept of mission. Kostenberger first analyzes John's conception of Jesus' mission and then his view of the mission of the disciples. Often his conclusions seem fairly obvious. Yet, the analysis is necessary because of the variety of views with which he must interact in his own exposition. He concludes that John presents Jesus' mission as threefold. First, Jesus was sent from the Father to do his Father's will. Jesus is seen as a model of the dependent servant who has an intimate relationship with the Father through obedience to his will. Second, Jesus is the one who has come from the Father and is returning to him. That return to the Father is through the supreme act of obedience via his death on the cross. Finally, Jesus' mission is seen in his eschatological role of shepherd/teacher who calls his followers to the same kind of fruit-bearing that he has demonstrated. These three roles of Jesus combine together to form his mission as the Messiah.

After detailing the mission of Jesus, Kostenberger turns his attention to the mission of the disciples. While observing certain aspects of continuity, he correctly notes that John distinguishes the mission of Jesus from the disciples even in the terminology that he uses. John restricts certain mission-related vocabulary to Jesus (e.g. "descend," "ascend," "signs"), while other terms are used only of the disciples (e.g. "follow"). The disciples are seen as representative of other believers and their mission is the mission



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