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CHRIST AMONG THE NATIONS

*Narratives of Transformation
in Global Mission*

Sarita Gallagher Edwards
Robert L. Gallagher
Paul W. Lewis
DeLonn L. Rance

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Centrality of the Cross: God's Historic Plan of Salvation in Lukan Perspective

Robert L. Gallagher

In this introduction to Part I, I will explore Luke's unique way of declaring God's great truth of salvation for humankind in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Furthermore, at the end of the chapter I will provide an overview of Part I that deals with Christ our Savior in the form of biblical, historical, and contemporary narratives.

In the hermeneutical journey, I will seek to contribute toward a mission theology in two issues that have relevance in my context and the global arena. First, even though the Roman and Jewish leaders nailed Jesus to a cross and killed him, it was according to God's predetermined plan and foreknowledge. The early church witnessed God's predestined hand and purpose, and through the death and resurrection of the Christ, God manifested God's great purpose in the world.

Second, it was Luke's conviction that God implanted the divine plan of salvation within human history. The other Synoptic

Gospels do not have this concept that what God did through the Messiah was a part of a larger historic backdrop. Hence, scattered throughout Luke-Acts are historic references of both empire and local significance.

My hope is that in this study of Lukan theology, the Savior's connection with the nations will assist God's people. God desires all nations to know God's will, which came about through sending Jesus the Son of God, and continues to establish itself through the church today. The church needs the Spirit's insights concerning the Lord's salvation as it works out the implications of faith and practice in mission for a pluralistic and multicultural world.¹

NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE BE DONE²

The cross of Jesus did not surprise God. Jesus declared, "The Son of Man will go [to die] as it has been decreed" (Lk 22:22). At the foothills of the Mount of Olives he prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42). Peter recognized this truth and declared to the audience at Pentecost that even though they nailed Jesus to a cross and killed him, it was according to "God's set purpose and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23). Again, he says in his second sermon, "But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer" (Acts 3:18).³

The early church witnessed God's predestined hand and purpose that caused Herod, Pontius Pilate along with the Gentiles,

¹ For further understanding of Christ's salvation in the Gospel of Luke, see Robert L. Gallagher, "Good News for All People: Engaging Luke's Narrative Soteriology of the Nations," in *Contemporary Mission Theology: Engaging the Nations*, ed. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig, American Society of Missiology Series, no. 53 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 193–202; and Robert L. Gallagher, "Salvation: Narrow Way but Broad Mission: A Response to Christopher J. H. Wright's *Salvation Belongs to Our God*," *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue* 1, no. 4 (2010): 10–11.

² Lk 22:42.

³ See Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (New York: Harper & Row), 90–91.

and the people of Israel to gather against God's holy Servant Jesus. "They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen" (Acts 4:28; see Ps 2:1–2). Unbeknown to these groups, God accomplished his purposes despite their defiance toward the Messiah. Luke underscores that God's plan was inevitable, no matter how powerful the opposition of human agencies. Gamaliel recognized this fact before the Sanhedrin Council, asserting that human plans can be overthrown, yet the plans of God can never be thwarted (Acts 5:38–39). The purpose of God reached its culmination at the death of Jesus, although it had operated throughout the First Testament (Acts 13:22), and continued to do so in the early church (Acts 20:27), especially via the apostle Paul (Acts 21:14; 22:14).

Use of the Verb Dei

Luke's point is that through the death and resurrection of the Christ, God manifested God's great purpose in the world. God desires all nations to know God's will, which came about through sending the Son, and continues to establish itself through the church. To reinforce this idea of God's will in the world, Luke uses the verb *dei*, which is translated as the English word "must" (or "ought" or "should") over twenty times in both his gospel and the Book of Acts, compared to Matthew (four times), Mark (seven times), and John (ten times). The meaning of *dei* here is a "binding necessity," which the Gentile writer employs to reinforce that God's plan of sending Jesus was essential for God's purpose. It was God's will declared.

Luke's gospel uses *dei* to describe Jesus's ministry in doing God's will (Lk 2:49). Jesus says, "I must (*dei*) proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent" (Lk 4:43). In Luke's account, however, the most frequent binding necessity of God was for God's Son to suffer and die (Lk 9:22; 17:25; 22:7, 37; 24:7, 26, 44). In the synagogue at Thessalonica, Paul explained, "The Christ had to (*dei*) suffer and rise from the dead. This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ" (Acts 17:3). The death of Jesus was central to God's plan

of salvation, and Luke emphasizes the fulfillment of Scripture in his death (e.g., Lk 4:21; 18:31–33; 21:22; 22:37; Acts 3:18; 13:27, 29; 26:22–23).

Salvation toward the Parousia

This intention was foretold repeatedly throughout the Hebrew Scriptures (Acts 1:16; cf. Lk 24:44–47), and did not stop with Christ's ascension. God's design of salvation for the world progresses toward the *Parousia*. Peter declared that God would send Jesus back to earth if the Jewish people would repent, and return to him to wipe away their sins, and subsequently receive the presence of the Lord. This Jesus is none other than "the Christ [or Anointed One; i.e., Messiah] who has been appointed for you [Jewish people]—even Jesus. Heaven must (*dei*) receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:20–21). The time between the ascension and the messianic second coming is also in the divine necessity of God, whereby people might receive his salvation through Jesus Christ the Nazarene. As Peter announced before the Jewish Council, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must (*dei*) be saved" (Acts 4:12). In particular, Luke sees Paul as an anointed messenger of God's way of salvation continuing beyond Christ's ascension (see Acts 9:6, 16; 14:22; 19:21; 22:14; 23:11; 26:16; 27:24).

Luke has a unique way of telling about God's absolute truth of salvation for undeserving humanity. Unlike the other Evangelists, he does this by using his second volume, the Book of Acts, to share the events after the ascension to show that God's plan is well defined. The path of God's salvation lies in following the risen Lord Jesus. We should not miss Luke's opinion that there is no other way of salvation. It has already come through Jesus. The words of Paul to the Philippian jailer confirm this route. He asked Paul and Silas, "'Sirs, what must (*dei*) I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household'" (Acts 16:30–31).

Furthermore, Luke sees a necessary obligation within God's plan for Christians to obey. Even when standing before antagonistic leaders, Jesus promised that his followers would be given Spirit-inspired words that "you should (*dei*) say" (Lk 12:12; cf. Acts 5:32). It is God's purpose to give words to God's people to proclaim "the full message of this new life" (Acts 5:20). Peter and the apostles knew of this divine necessity as they boldly answered the high priest's accusation of insubordination, "We must (*dei*) obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29; cf. 4:8f.). They were witnesses of the Messiah's death, resurrection, ascension, and dispensing of salvation, having received the Holy Spirit through obedience (see Acts 5:30–32).

NOW IT CAME ABOUT IN THOSE DAYS⁴

In Acts 5:31 when Peter professed that Jesus was the "Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel," it was Luke's conviction that God implanted the divine plan of salvation within human history. Scholars use the German term *heilsgeschichte* to describe this phenomenon in Luke-Acts, often translated as "redemptive history" or the "history of salvation." As noted earlier, the other Evangelists do not have this concept that what God did through the Messiah was a part of a greater historic canvas. The gospel writers only mention secular history when it directly involves the events of Christ such as his trial before Caiaphas (the high priest) and the Sanhedrin Council (Mt 26:57f.; Mk 14:53f.; Jn 18:12f.).

Only Luke draws attention to both Roman and Palestinian history as the background to the intention of God in Christ Jesus. He moves from census decrees sent forth by Caesar Augustus and the subsequent records taken by Quirinius, governor of Syria (Lk 2:1–2) to road trips in Palestine. For instance, Mary and "Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee [to register for the census] to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David" (Lk 2:4–5). Our gospel

⁴ Lk 2:1.

writer sets the messianic birth narrative firmly in the context of Roman secular history. In Luke 3:1–2, the author again thrusts his theological purpose securely into human history, stressing that even the most powerful figures are significant only because of God’s plan through Jesus. This passage highlights Luke’s breadth of historic understanding from imperial Rome (Tiberius Caesar) to political Jerusalem (Pontius Pilate, Herod, Philip, and Lysanias), including Jewish religious leaders (Annas and Caiaphas).

Secular History of Acts

This same embedding of God’s work into secular history via Jesus the Messiah continues into the Book of Acts. The first persecution of the people of the Way⁵ occurred under the auspices of the Sadducees, and Luke names the high priests implicated: Annas, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander (4:6). During the reign of Emperor Claudius, Luke mentions a great famine (11:28), and the expulsion of the Jewish people from Rome (18:2). The Gentile author notes the names of Roman proconsuls such as Sergius Paulus of Cyprus, “an intelligent man” (Lk 13:7, 8, 12), and Gallio of Achaia (Lk 18:12); Asiarchs, political officials of the province of Asia who were friends of Paul (Lk 19:31); and Roman governors such as Felix (Lk 23:24) and Porcius Festus (Lk 24:27) with King Agrippa and Bernice (Lk 25:13). In addition, Luke speaks of Roman centurions, for example, Cornelius of the Italian cohort or battalion (10:1), and Julius of the Augustan cohort (27:1), together with Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander in Jerusalem (23:26).

Peppered throughout Acts are historic references of both imperial and local significance, from the Roman officials of the paragraph above to church leaders and antagonizers. Luke records the names of the Hellenistic servers of Acts 6:5 (Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas); the ministry team in Antioch of Syria: Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul (13:1); and Paul’s traveling companions: Timothy and Erastus (19:22), Gaius and Aristarchus (19:29), and Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, and Trophimus (20:4). More-

⁵ See Acts 9:2; 16:17; 18:25–26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22.

over, together with the early church leadership, Luke cites the opposition of the silversmith Demetrius who instigated the Ephesian riot (19:24, 38), and Ananias, the high priest, with Tertullus the lawyer (23:2; 24:1), who before Felix, accused Paul of causing a riot in Jerusalem. God's salvation story in Luke-Acts is set firmly in the real history of everyday life and people.

Summary of the Argument

For Luke, the central pivot of human history is the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. There was history before and after Jesus, yet the sovereign plan of God's salvation hinges on the central figure of Christ: his life set in secular history, the cross, and subsequent ascension to the Father (Lk 9:51). Leon L. Morris states, "History is the stage on which God works out his salvation plan, and for Luke, Jesus is right at the center."⁶ For Luke, Christ empowers the new era of salvation through the Holy Spirit by continuing his ministry in the early church and in subsequent generations through the present day.

OVERVIEW OF CHRIST OUR SAVIOR

After the introduction to Part I, Chapter 2 examines a biblical narrative in the Gospel of Luke that deals with the author's concept of salvation through *sōzō*, the Greek root of the term. Chapter 3 is a reflection on the historical account of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, a German Pietist missionary bringing Christ our Savior to India in the early eighteenth century. The last chapter considers a contemporary salvation story set in the Oro region of Papua New Guinea.

Love that Saves a Harlot

The Lukan study not only reinforces the importance of Christ as the source of God's salvation but also provides an opportunity to consider the Lord's all-inclusive provision of deliverance from

⁶ Leon L. Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 177.

sickness and sin through Jesus Messiah.⁷ Luke's gospel records nineteen occasions where the author uses the word *sōzō* (meaning safe, save, deliver, or protect).⁸ The focus of the study, however, will consider only one such episode that involves the idea of *sōzō*. The following is a brief description of the story found in Luke 7.

Luke 7:36–50 records the narrative of Jesus meeting a woman in the town of Capernaum who was a prostitute. At a luncheon organized by Simon the Pharisee, the host rejects Jesus as a prophet for allowing the woman to touch him. Kissing Jesus's feet, the party-crasher anoints them with her tears and an expensive perfume, mopping up her shame with her hair. Jesus then says to the woman, "Your faith has saved (*sōzō*) you; go in peace" (Lk 7:50). During the all-male exclusive luncheon, Jesus recognizes faith through the woman's actions, and accordingly she receives salvation or deliverance of her many sins, and the peace of God.

Ziegenbalg and the Salvation of Souls

Ziegenbalg developed a missional strategy of education, translation, mutual respect, discipleship, and indigenous leadership that was revolutionary for his time. His work in translation, collection of indigenous religious writings, and correspondence with fellow missionaries sent shockwaves through and beyond the European courts of ecclesiastical and political power.

The consequences of his missionary ventures not only provide a valuable insight into the Pietist missions' movement, but his mission strategy also offered an example and source of inspiration for early Western Protestant missions. Chapter 3 is the salvation

⁷ This essay will not observe the Lukan narrative of Jesus healing the demonic Legion (8:36), the woman hemorrhaging for twelve years (8:48), Jairus's dead daughter (8:50), the ten lepers (17:19), and a blind beggar (18:42) because of its limited scope. In a number of these instances, the Lord recognizes that the person's faith had healed [*sōzō*] them, and made them whole.

⁸ The Greek word, *sōzō* ("salvation"), occurs thirty-two times in Luke-Acts (Lk 6:9; 7:50; 8:12, 36, 48, 50; 9:24 [twice], 56; 13:23; 17:19 ["made well"], 33; 18:26; 42; 19:10; 23:35 [2x], 37; 39; and Acts 2:21, 40, 47; 4:9 ["made well"], 12; 11:14; 14:9 ["made well"]; 15:1, 11; 16:30, 31; 27:20, 31).

account of the first Protestant missionary to India complete with unexpected twists, ironic turns, and surprising pathways. It is a story that still models the way for holistic missions today.

Salvation's Call in Papua New Guinea

Bruce and Joan Cartwright, Australian missionaries with the CRC Churches International, left the comforts of Adelaide, South Australia, in the 1970s to bring Christ to the Melanesian people in Papua New Guinea (PNG). It was during a gospel outreach among university students in the PNG capital of Port Moresby that the Cartwrights experienced a powerful manifestation of God whereby many attendees received Christ as their Savior and Empowerer in the Holy Spirit.

After this occurrence, Vele Wari invited the Australians to his northern village where there occurred a number of outstanding miracles of God's salvation. This phenomenon resulted in the spread of the gospel to surrounding animistic villages that subsequently changed their allegiance over to Jesus Christ. Eventually, the regional elders declared their desire that the entire people group should receive water baptism since their communities were now following Jesus. Hence, the Cartwrights and Wari were in a quandary. What should they do? In this story, the dilemma before them was the gospel validity of mass salvations.