

Lukes Answer 1

WHO IS JESUS?

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STUDY FIVE: LUKE'S ANSWER (PART ONE)

Comment: Because much of what Luke records in his Gospel is also found in Matthew and/or Mark this presentation of Luke Answer (Part One), which is based on his Gospel, is not extensive.

SUMMARY

- A Saviour - Christ the Lord
- Light for the Gentiles/Lifter of the oppressed/Friend of sinners
- The Goal and Fulfilment of God's Self-revelation
- Jesus Christ - the Son of Man
- Son of Man - a reference to Christ's humanness
- Son of Man - a reference to his substitutionary death
- The Son of Man - The Lord of Glory

Like the other Gospel writers Luke wastes no time letting us know who Jesus is.

- He is 'the Lord' whom John the Baptist goes before: Luke 1:17,76.
- He is 'the Lord' for whom John the Baptist prepares a people: Luke 1:17,76.
- He is called 'the Son of the Most High': Luke 1:32.
- He is a king with an eternal kingdom: Luke 1:33.
- He 'the holy one ... called the Son of God': Luke 1:35.
- He is Elizabeth's 'Lord': Luke 1:43
- He is the 'rising sun' who shines 'on those living in darkness': Luke 1:78,79.

All of this Luke tells us, preparing us to receive the One whose birth he is about to describe; all of this he tells us preparing our hearts and minds to acknowledge Jesus Christ, God in human flesh.

A SAVIOUR - CHRIST THE LORD

Luke alone tracked down the shepherds and recorded this joy-filled, excited story of their encounter with the infant Christ. Years later as Luke spoke to them those shepherds still remembered their sheer terror as they were engulfed in the blazing glory of the presence of the Lord; they remembered also the exultant wonder and praise that surged through them as they realised the truth and the impact of what they had heard and seen. These shepherds were the first human witnesses (other than Mary and Joseph) of that incredible event called the 'incarnation'. The message of the angels had been precise and clear: this new-born human baby is: a Saviour,

Christ, the Lord (Luke 2:1-20).

We must not let our familiarity with the story or with these words rob us of the impact and significance of these titles. In the history of God's self revelation it is *he* who alone is Saviour (Isaiah 43:11; 45:21; 49:26; 60:16; Hosea 13:4). Yet here the angels come with the message that this new-born human is 'Saviour'. And he is not just any saviour: he is Christ (that is, the long anticipated Messiah). He is also 'the Lord'. So we must not here suppose that Jesus of Nazareth is a saviour in the same way that Moses or Joshua, or even Cyrus, the unbelieving Persian, was 'saviour'. They were mere human beings, instruments of salvation and deliverance under the almighty hand of God. *This* Saviour is the ultimate Saviour: the Christ, indeed, the Lord. *This* Saviour is God himself clothed in human flesh. As Simeon stated a few days later when he saw this baby at the temple 'my eyes have seen your salvation' (2:30). Here in this human child is the salvation of God. Here in this human child the entire history of revelation, the entire process of God's unveiling of his saving character and purposes finds its fulfilment and maturation. Beyond this child and apart from this child, there is no salvation.

Simeon's faith reveals a further connection: he had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until 'he had seen the Lord's Christ' (2:26). Now, having seen the baby Jesus, he says 'now dismiss your servant in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation' (2:29-30). Simeon *knows* that the Christ (the Messiah) and God's salvation are one and the same, and, as verses 31

and 32 indicate, he also knows that this salvation, as we will see later in this study, is something far more than the national/political salvation which the majority of the Jews expected the Messiah to bring.

As we read further through Luke's Gospel we find the same presentation of Jesus as Lord of all as we found in Mark, as Luke relates many of the same anecdotes from the years of Jesus' ministry. We see him exercising his Lordship (authority) over:

1. evil spirits (4:31-37; 8:26-39; 9:37-45).
2. sickness (4:38-41; 5:12-26; 8:40-48; 13:10-17; 17:11-19; 18:35-43).
3. men (5:1-11, 27ff; 9:1-6, 57-62; 10:1-17; 12:49-53; 14:25ff; 17:7-10).
4. the law (5:33-39; 6:1-11, 17-49; 11:37-54; 13:10-17; 14:1-6).
5. death (7:11-17; 8:40-56).
6. nature (8:22-25; 9:10-17).

In all of these Jesus acts and speaks with all the authority and power of God. He assumes that he has the right to command obedience in all of these situations, and what he says comes to pass. This divine authority over everything includes, as we saw in Mark's Answer, the authority to release men from the power of Satan (Luke 13:10-16) and from the power of the curse of Genesis 3, as the prophecy read in Luke 4:16-21 indicates.

This powerful, all-embracing authority of Jesus Christ was recognized by the Roman centurion in Luke 7:1-11. He knew what authority was, and he recognized it in Jesus Christ: an authority of such a magnitude that a mere word would achieve the desired result. Jesus called this recognition of and confidence in his authority 'faith', and commended the centurion for it.

To such faith he calls us.

THE LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES / LIFTER OF THE OPPRESSED / FRIEND OF SINNERS

This record of the Centurion's faith brings us in touch with a key theme in Luke's report: that Jesus is 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles' (2:32). This was anticipated by Zechariah when he said 'to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death' (1:79), mentioned by the angels 'on earth peace to men' (2:14), rejoiced in by Simeon 'my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people' (2:30,31), and proclaimed by John the Baptist 'And all mankind will see God's salvation' (3:6).

Jesus is not interested in 'the righteous' (5:32). In embracing the Gentiles Jesus embraces all: all who are the under-dogs, the despised, the victimised, the outcast. All who did not fit into the acceptable mould into which 'religious' people demanded they fit - all these felt the love of Jesus' embrace. In his first recorded public speech he referred to this aspect of his mission:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight to the blind.
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (4:18,19)

To those who seemed least to enjoy God's favour or blessing Jesus came with his message of compassion. To those who seemed most to be labouring under the effects of the curse of Genesis 3 he came with his loving, liberating touch. When John the Baptist sent messengers inquiring about his identity Jesus replied: 'Go back and report to John what you have heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor' (7:22). He then went on to say 'Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me' (7:23).

So all-embracing is his love that it gives offence, and he knows it, but he will not allow the cold, hard hearts of the religious elite to curb his compassion. **Consider:**

- He touches the leper (5:13).
- He calls a despised tax-collector to be his disciple (5:27).
- He eats and drinks with "tax collectors and sinners" (5:30;15:1-2).
- He esteems human need more important than religious rules (6:1-11;13:10-17;14:1-5).
- He commands love and mercy towards enemies (6:27-36).
- He treats a widow with compassion (7:11-16).
- He is known as a friend of tax collectors and "sinners" (7:34).

- He recognizes and accepts an expression of love from a sinful woman (7:36-50).
- He makes a despised Samaritan the hero in his story about loving (10:25-37).
- He weeps over the hard-heartedness of Jerusalem (13:34-35).
- He tells parables in which the poor are invited to parties (14:12-23).
- He focus on the individual in need (15:1-7).
- His compassion is not negated by rebellion and wrong living (15:11-32).
- He commends the faith of a Samaritan leper (17:11-19).
- He teaches forgiveness for sinners who trust in the mercy of God (18:9-14).
- He has time for those thought insignificant (18:15-17).
- He makes a point of spending time with the despised and rejected (19:1-10).
- He values the quality rather than quantity (21:1-4).

In all of this Luke portrays the love of God for the whole world in the attitude, words, and actions of Jesus Christ. It is a love that goes beyond friends to enemies; it is a love that reaches out to those who have no significance or recognition in the eyes of either the world or organized religion.

It is *this* Jesus, who thus redefines the mission of God to the lost and suffering world, whom Luke commends to us a Jesus unbounded and unfettered by the traditions, perceptions and expectations of the religious norm. Light in the darkness. Acceptance of the rejected. Love for the despised. Welcome for the outcast. This is Luke's Jesus.

THE GOAL AND FULFILMENT OF GOD'S SELF-REVELATION

Although Jesus, standing in stark contrast to the rigid exclusiveness of his religious contemporaries, redefines the love of God to embrace the despised and the outcast, this is not an entirely new thing.

Jesus does this in fulfilment of prophecy.

When he stood in the synagogue at Nazareth (4:16-21) and outlined his mission as indicated above he did it by reading from Isaiah 61:1,2. When he gave his response to John the Baptist's question (7:18-35), he did so with reference to Isaiah 29:18,19; 35:5,6; 61:1,2; and Malachi 3:1.

Rather than contradict God's prior self-revelation Jesus completes it, bringing it to its consummation. He told his disciples privately:

'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it' (10:23,24).

Just prior to this statement Jesus had said: 'No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (10:22). As we learn from the other Gospel writers, only those who really see Jesus actually know God the Father. Here, in Jesus, God is revealed. If we do not see him here, then we do not really see him at all. Here all of true prophecy finds its goal: the revelation of the knowledge of God. It is this climax, this end, this absolute and ultimate revelation to which all the previous revelation points with anticipation: that the Son, Jesus, reveals the Father, completely. Beyond Jesus there is no further revelation.

[For further study: read 1 Peter 1:10-12; Hebrews 11:15-16,39-40; Colossians 1:25-2:3. Also be sure to read the two studies on this website titled 'John's Answer'.]

Not only does prophecy reach its fulfilment in Christ's revelation of the Father in his life and ministry, it also finds its ultimate validation in Christ's death and resurrection. Here Jesus willingly submits himself to seemingly unimportant and unnecessary details simply because 'it is written'. All that happened from his entry into Jerusalem (19:28-44, compare Matthew 21:1-11, and read Psalm 118:26; Isaiah 29:3,4; 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11; Zechariah 9:9), through to the rigours of the arrest, trial and crucifixion (22:37; 23:30; 24:25-27,32,44-47; read Psalm 22; Isaiah 53:12; Hosea 10:8), happened in fulfilment of the Old Testament scriptures.

But this fulfilment of the minute details of prophecy fades into relative insignificance as Jesus fulfils in his death and resurrection the big picture placarded prophetically in the history and religion of Israel.

The historic exodus of Israel from Egypt anticipates on a mega scale the redemption/salvation secured by the death/resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was the topic of conversation between Jesus and Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:31, where 'departure' translates the Greek *exodos*). There on that mountain the voice of God the Father came from the cloud 'This is my son, whom I have chosen; listen to him' (9:35) and Moses and Elijah disappeared. The meaning is clear: all the Law

(represented by Moses) and the prophets (represented by Elijah) find their fulfilment in Jesus, God's Son. They find their meaning and purpose and goal in him (24:25-27,44-47). Now that he has come their purpose has been completed. Listen now to him.

Also in Luke 9 we find that Jesus begins to draw the attention of his disciples to his impending death:

9:22 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.'
9:44 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.'
17:25 'But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.'
18:31,32 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him.'
22:22 'The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.'
22:37 ' ... and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfilment.'
24:6,7 'Remember how he told you ... "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again." '

Perhaps the two most poignant of Jesus' references to his death in fulfilment of prophecy are these:

[1] Luke 13:33: ' ... I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day - for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!' He then anticipates his rejection in Jerusalem:

'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!'

Here we have in Jesus' own words what John described with 'he came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him' (John 1:11). Here the long-standing plan of God for the salvation of the world through the sin-bearing death of his Son hits the road in the heart of Jesus. Misunderstood, despised, rejected, by those he came to save. Love beyond description. Amazing grace.

[2] Luke 22:15: 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.' Again Jesus anticipates his death, but here it is in the presence of those who (with one exception) love him.

Here he sees his death not in terms of his rejection, but in terms of what it will accomplish for those who believe in him. 'I have eagerly desired ... ' Here at this final predictive Passover meal he gives instruction on the reality it portrays - the substitutionary death, the blood which seals the new covenant (22:17-22). Here at this final Passover meal the true meaning and significance of every Old Testament sacrifice is revealed: Jesus Christ, sacrificed for us. After this there is no more sacrifice; after this there is no further Passover. In the death of Jesus the reality has come, the shadow is rendered redundant (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 9 & 10). To Jesus, though he shrunk in agony from the shame and suffering of the cross, that same cross was yet anticipated with eagerness for in it the divine purpose was achieved (Hebrews 12:2).

[In God's grand economy, the *history* of Israel finds its culmination in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: it was this it portrayed, it was this it anticipated. In God's eternal plan of salvation, the *religion* of Israel finds its significance and true meaning and power in the person, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: without his ultimate priesthood and his ultimate sacrifice it is just another religion. In God's sovereign purpose, the *nation* of Israel fulfils its destiny, its purpose, in the incarnation of the Son of God: Jesus Christ, the one true Israelite, in whom the true God is glorified, in whom true man is identified.

Because of Jesus Christ, the Passover meal is no longer an anticipation, a looking forward to a long expected fulfilment. Now, in the new perspective given to it by Jesus Christ, it can only be a looking back, a remembering. The Christ of prophecy has come. He has given his body as a sacrifice for our sins, and by that death has established the new covenant which had also been long expected (Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 34:25;36:24-32; 37:26; Hosea 2:18-23; Hebrews 8:1-13; 12:24). When Jesus Christ cried out 'It is finished' (John 19:30) he was not speaking in a superficial way referring to his life or his suffering being ended; his reference was to something immeasurably greater. The word he used was '*tetelestai*' from the Greek *teleo*, which means to bring to completion, to carry out into full operation, to bring something to its appointed goal. Here in the cross/resurrection event Jesus

Christ completes the saving plan and purpose of God. Here all the prophecies contained in the history, religion and nation of Israel are brought to fulfilment. Here is the climax, the reaching of the appointed goal, the end. Beyond this cross/resurrection event they have no purpose. (The word '*tetelestai*' is in the perfect tense, which indicates that what has been done remains done: *it is finished, and it stays finished, God's eternal purposes have been brought to completion, and they stay completed.*)]

So, Jesus here in Luke 22:15,16 says: 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you ... I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.' Here he stands on the eve of the most important day in earth's history. Here he stands knowing that tomorrow the eternal plan of the triune God for our salvation will be achieved in time and space. Here he stands about to accomplish that to which he has been committed from before the beginning of time (Hebrews 10:7; Revelation 13:8). Little did the disciples realise the intensity of Christ's desire to eat this, the *last* predictive Passover. Even less did they realise that tomorrow the *one real Passover*, of which all other were mere shadows, would occur. As he said a little while later: '*... what is written about me is reaching its fulfilment* [Greek: *telos* = consummation, perfect discharge, realisation]' (Luke 22:37).

JESUS CHRIST - THE SON OF MAN

The 'Son of Man' title is one that puzzles many. It is not, as a superficial understanding would assume, merely a reference to Christ's humanness. It refers back to Daniel 7:13,14 where Daniel recorded his vision of a glorious person who 'was given authority, glory and sovereign power' by God, and whom 'all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped' and whose 'dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.' He is described as 'one like a son of man'. A similar but even more powerful vision is recorded by John in Revelation 1:12-18, also described as 'like a son of man', but also obviously identified as Jesus Christ, because he is 'the Living One' who said 'I was dead and behold I am alive for ever and ever'.

Luke records Jesus' use of this title in a way that maintains this combination of the human and the glorious, as well as incorporating the element of suffering alluded to in the Revelation vision.

Son of Man - a reference to Christ's humanness.

In Luke 7:34 Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man who 'came eating and drinking'. He thus identifies himself as one of the crowd, indistinguishable, in some ways, from other men. So closely did he identify with the average human being that the religious elite even called him 'a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and "sinners".' It was his obvious, unquestionable humanness that made his absolute, exclusive claims about himself so repulsive to the scribes and the Pharisees, as John recorded: 'We are ... stoning you ... for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God' (John 10:33).

Not only did Jesus, the Son of Man, identify with our humanness, he also identified with the majority of earth's citizens in their poverty: 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head' (Luke 9:58). This deliberate identification with us in our material poverty was an essential element of his mission on earth.

As Hebrews records:

'it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering' (2:10)
and 'Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity ... ' (2:14)
'because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted' (2:18);
'for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin' (4:15).

These verses from Hebrews teach that for Jesus Christ to be qualified to act as our substitute in the presence of God he had to be perfected by exposure to the same kinds of suffering (testing, temptation) as we are, otherwise his taking our place would be meaningless. He could only be our perfect substitute if he went through what we go through. So, the Son of Man shared our humanity. Incognito. Hidden among the masses of the poor.

The Son of Man - a reference to his substitutionary death

Jesus said: 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life' (Luke 9:22).

'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men' (Luke 9:44).

'This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation' (Luke 11:29,30).

'First he (the Son of Man) must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation' (Luke 17:25).

'We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again' (Luke 18:31-33).

'The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him ... Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?' (Luke 22:22,48).

And the angels said:

'Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again." ' (Luke 24:7).

In these verses we learn that it is God's decreed purpose that the Son of Man suffer and be killed. It is a divine necessity. It is something that *has* to happen. The one who identified with us in our humanness here identifies with us in our subjection to the curse and condemnation of sin. He takes our place. He bears our sin. He shoulders in his own body the judgement, the punishment due to us. He, the Son of Man, is the sin-bearer. We would all do well here to read again Isaiah 52:13-53:12, where this role of the 'man of sorrows' is passionately portrayed.

The Son of Man - the Lord of glory.

Yet that is not all. As in the visions of Daniel and John, the Son of Man is also a figure of power and glory. Consider the words of Jesus:

'The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath' (Luke 6:5). He here claims for himself divine authority to interpret the significance of the Sabbath laws.

' ... the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels' (Luke 9:26).'

' ... the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God' (Luke 12:8).

'You must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him' (Luke 12:40).

'For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other' (Luke 17:24, read 17:20-37).

' ... when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?' (Luke 18:8).

'At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ... pray ... that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man' (Luke 21:27,36; read 21:25-36).

'But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God' (Luke 22:69).

These verses give to the Son of Man an identity far removed from the poor, rejected, suffering, dying human described earlier. Yet it is the same person. That human was also the Lord of glory, the One who comes bringing blinding and inescapable judgement on the inhabitants of earth, the One who sits at the right hand of the Father, assuming his rightful place of authority and power, the One who holds the fate of us all in his hands. The incognito is here seen and known world wide. The one rejected by men is here exalted by the Father and all the holy angels. The one who suffered the taunts and mockery of men is here feared by those same men.

It is *this* glorious Son of Man whom we shall see and whom we shall honour when he returns. At that day his glory will fill the earth as his glory filled the temple in Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 6). Yet we who are united to him by faith will not shrink from him in fear, for we know that, behind the glory, indeed as part of his glory, the Son of Man has nail prints in his hands.