

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## What is Distinct about the Theology of Luke?

BENJAMIN L. GLADD, PHD

1

### Distinct Yet Complementary

The New Testament includes four Gospels about the one gospel. In addition, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, often referred to as the “Synoptics,” contain a significant amount of textual overlap. Why not a single Gospel about the one gospel? Though the reasons are manifold, there’s one reason in particular: each evangelist intended to narrate Jesus’s ministry with a unique set of aims. The four narratives present Jesus as true Israel and the divine Son of God who lived a faithful life, died for sins of his people, and rose from the dead, but each evangelist retells this story a bit differently. By tracing these differences, then, we can arrive at a distinct (yet complementary!) theology of each Gospel. The aim of this short essay is to summarize two unique layers of Luke’s narrative about the one gospel.



### The Magnificat

First, the Gospel of Luke displays a markedly vertical concern, a theme that begins its trajectory in the well-known *Magnificat* ([Luke 1:46–55](#)):

He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has *scattered the proud* in the thoughts of their hearts;  
he *has brought down* the mighty from their thrones  
and exalted those of humble estate;  
he has *filled the hungry* with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty. ([Luke 1:51–53](#))

Luke puts his finger on the defeat of ungodly rulers and the exaltation of the lowly—an emphasis that runs throughout all of Luke–Acts. The Evangelist also explains how the Lord will do so: just as God redeemed Israel from the clutches of Egyptian slavery, he will deliver Israel once more and with great finality. The combination of words and expressions in the Magnificat, such as “the Mighty One” ([Luke 1:49](#) CSB), “great things”

[WWW.LIONANDLAMBAPOLOGETICS.ORG](http://WWW.LIONANDLAMBAPOLOGETICS.ORG)

© 2022, LION AND LAMB APOLOGETICS—PO BOX 1297—CLEBURNE, TX 76033-1297

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

([Luke 1:49](#)), “holy is his name” ([Luke 1:49](#)), “strength” ([Luke 1:51](#)), “arm” ([Luke 1:51](#)), “scattered” ([Luke 1:51](#)), “thrones” ([Luke 1:52](#)), and “his servant Israel” ([Luke 1:54](#)), evokes the first exodus. But, unlike the first exodus, God promises Mary that he will not redeem Israel primarily from the oppression of Rome but from the enslavement of sin and the devil.

Jesus’s victory in the wilderness began the toppling of Satan’s rule ([Luke 4:1–13](#)). As Jesus ministers throughout Galilee, he continues to dismantle the devil’s kingdom by expelling the demons who have bound humanity since the fall of Adam and Eve (see [Luke 4:31–37, 41](#); [Luke 8:26–39](#)). Later in [Luke 10](#), Jesus appoints an additional seventy-two disciples, probably representing renewed humanity (see [Gen. 10–11](#)), to proclaim the presence of the kingdom ([Luke 10:1–11](#)). When the seventy-two disciples return from their mission, they exclaim, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name” ([Luke 10:17](#)). Jesus responds with one of the most cryptic lines in the third Gospel: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” ([Luke 10:18](#)). Here he alludes to [Isaiah 14:12](#), aligning Satan with the king of Babylon. The point is that God’s eternal kingdom is eclipsing Satan’s temporary kingdom. One kingdom falls and another rises.

Satan’s “fall” stands in stark relief to Jesus’s exaltation. For example, Luke goes out of his way to underscore Jesus’s lowly condition. He was born in a manger or feeding trough and possibly in the animal’s quarters of a relative’s house ([Luke 2:7](#)). Mary and Joseph, too, on account of their poverty, offer up a pair of doves for Mary’s purification instead of a lamb ([Luke 2:24](#); see [Lev. 12:6–8](#)). Throughout Jesus’s career, he evinced a life of humility and service in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecies (e.g., [Isa. 22:27](#); [Isa. 42:1–9](#); [49:1–6](#); [50:4–9](#); [52:13–53:12](#)). But the greatest demonstration of his humility lies firmly in the cross ([Luke 23:44–49](#)). He innocently bears God’s curse for those who deserve it! The narrative doesn’t end at the cross, though. Not only does Luke narrate Jesus’s resurrected appearances ([Luke 24:13–49](#)), he is also the only evangelist to include the ascension ([Luke 24:50–52](#)). When Jesus ascends into heaven and sits down on his Father’s throne, then he is qualified to carry out divine judgment on evil, initiate the new creation, serve as mediator between God and humanity, dwell with creation, and pour forth the Spirit.

## Old Testament Allusion

Second, while most Christians believe that Jesus fulfills a dozen or so messianic prophecies (e.g., [Isa. 11](#); [Jer. 23:5](#); [Ezek. 34:23](#); [Zech. 9:9](#)), Luke argues that the *whole* of the Old Testament anticipates Jesus’s life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. Every verse, paragraph, and chapter in the Old Testament, in some way, prophetically anticipates the person of Christ. The evangelist quotes the Old Testament over thirty times in his Gospel

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

and alludes to it hundreds of times if not more. There are also conceptual parallels to the Old Testament in nearly every verse.

---

*Since Jesus is the perfect Adam and Yahweh incarnate, his reading of the Old Testament is always valid and exemplary.*

---

3

Luke presents Jesus as the long-awaited, virgin-born Son of King David ([Luke 1:69; 2:4; 6:1–5](#)), the last Adam and the true Israel of God ([Luke 3:38–4:13](#)), the Messiah announcing the eschatological year of jubilee ([Luke 4:18–19](#)), the rejected prophet of Israel ([Luke 4:24–27](#)), Yahweh incarnate who redeems his people in the second exodus and leads his people to the promised land of the new creation ([Luke 3:4–6; 9:51–19:27; 20:42–43](#)), the new Moses ([Luke 6:12–49](#)), Daniel's Son of Man ([Luke 9:21–36; 21:27; 22:69](#)), Isaiah's suffering servant ([Luke 1:32; 22:37](#)), the new temple ([Luke 19:45–46](#)), the resurrected one ([Luke 24:1–12](#)), and the great interpreter of Israel's Scriptures ([Luke 24:25–27, 44–47](#)).

This line of thinking, however, broaches one of the most difficult topics in the New Testament—if Jesus fulfills the entirety of the Old Testament, then why do the disciples (at least initially) and the majority of first-century Jews refuse to trust him? At the nub of the issue is *how* Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. For example, the Old Testament contains a bundle of themes that appear to be unrelated on the surface: temple, second exodus, coming Messiah, kingdom, covenant curses and blessings, end-time suffering and tribulation, descent of the Spirit, forgiveness of sin, justification, restoration of true Israel, and so on. Yes, the Old Testament expected that these themes and events would come to fruition at the end of history, but the Old Testament does not explicitly bring them together in the coming Messiah. In other words, Jesus mysteriously pulls together seemingly disparate redemptive-historical threads and consciously fulfills them in *himself*. Like spokes protruding from a wheel, Jesus, the center of redemptive history, fuses these themes together in his ministry.

The brilliance of Luke's Gospel lies in the way in which he presents Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of Israel's Scriptures, but where did Luke and the other apostles learn to read the Old Testament in this manner? The apostles learned to interpret and read the Old Testament through the Old Testament itself (the Old Testament prophets' use of antecedent revelation), the synagogue, family, and Jesus himself. Out of those four areas of instruction, Jesus is the primary resource. During his career and especially after his resurrection, he explained to the disciples how his ministry accords with the Old Testament and how Scriptures ultimately point to him. The question is, in reality,

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

whether believers should interpret the Old Testament like Jesus. Since Jesus is the perfect Adam and Yahweh incarnate, his reading of the Old Testament is always valid and exemplary. If we should live like Jesus, we should also read like Jesus.

Benjamin L. Gladd is the author of [From the Manger to the Throne: A Theology of Luke](#)

---



Benjamin L. Gladd (PhD, Wheaton College) is professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary. He has written several books on biblical theology, edits the Essential Studies in Biblical Theology series, and serves on the editorial board of *Themelios*.

---

© Crossway, November 13, 2022. Retrieved November 20, 2022.

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/what-is-distinct-about-the-theology-of-luke>