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**Green, Joel B.**

***The Gospel of Luke***

New International Commentary on the New Testament

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Joel Green's commentary focuses on the Gospel of Luke in its final form, viewed as a literary work. It is a strict and complete example of a recent trend to abandon the methods of tradition history, form criticism, and redaction criticism. Green does not even make comparisons of Lukan material with other Gospels. He does not assume, however, that a literary work can be understood apart from a cultural context. "All language is embedded in culture," Green writes. Hence we must be concerned with Luke's "social setting," and by this

we mean more than "narrative world" as this phrase is used in narrative criticism. We mean more than the world available to us only through the narrative viewed as a closed system, but less than the world often represented to us by historical-critical inquiry. The former strips the Gospel of Luke of its cultural embeddedness, while the latter assumes too easily that the (real) social world wherein Luke's story is set can and should simply be read into Luke's narrative. As we will see, Luke does not represent the "real world" so straightforwardly, but both seeks to provide an alternative view of that world and chooses aspects of that world to emphasize while downplaying others (p. 12).

Green's point is important. No literary work can be divorced from its cultural context, yet that context can be interpreted in various ways. A significant literary work is engaged in presenting its own interpretation of social life.

Green describes his method as "discourse analysis," a discourse analysis that correlates "culture-critical and narratological concerns" (p. 1). He uses some technical terms from discourse analysis, such as "co-text" and "presupposition pool," but his writing is more accessible to the general reader than one might guess at first. His footnotes, however, direct the reader to technical works.

Green insists that each section of Luke "must be read with reference to its narrative location," for "the order of the narrative . . . is a primary control on the determination of meaning" (p. 11). Thus indeterminacy is reduced when we take account of the narrative as a developing whole and consider the immediate co-text of each scene. Green suggests larger narrative connections by occasionally noting that a scene establishes a "narrative need" to which later parts of the narrative will respond. This commentary, however, is not a technical work of narratology. Much of Green's theoretical framework remains in the background.

The commentary follows this pattern: sections of Luke are presented in the NRSV translation (which is occasionally modified), followed by several pages of general commentary and then by comments on two to four verses at a time. The comments on verses are written in full paragraphs rather than short notes. This procedure results in more extensive comment on fewer issues than the alternative approach. Even though this is a large commentary, it overlooks some issues of detailed interpretation that could affect the way a passage is understood. But it gives full and helpful discussion of other issues. Little space is given to argument with opposing views, although some critique is found in the text and some in the footnotes. Comments on the Greek are confined to the footnotes. There are twelve "interpretive asides," but they are not distributed through the whole commentary. Seven of the twelve concern the infancy narrative, and the last of the twelve is on Luke 9:1-50.

Green--rightly, in my opinion--understands the infancy narrative to provide fundamental clues to the theological perspective of Luke-Acts. At the beginning, the driving force behind the whole narrative, the divine purpose of salvation, is highlighted. Because the divine purpose is central and carries the narrative into Acts, it is a mistake to classify Luke as a biography, as if it were primarily a characterization of Jesus. According to Green, the covenant with Abraham, cited in the Magnificat and Benedictus, is a universal covenant, embracing Jews and Gentiles. I would agree, but I think Green misses some of the narrative's subtlety. The narrator does not introduce the full scope of God's promise and purpose at the beginning. The initial scenes reveal the truth but not the whole truth. A salvation that embraces both Jews and Gentiles first appears with clarity in Luke 2:30-32, after strong emphasis on salvation for Israel, in fulfillment of God's promises. It is important to read the infancy narrative as a continuous and progressive disclosure of God's purpose.

Green recognizes that the references to salvation from enemies (Luke 1:71, 73) and to the "redemption of Jerusalem" (2:38) imply the end of foreign occupation of the Jewish homeland (p. 59). But he does not recognize that this sets up a "narrative need" for the fulfillment of these expectations. This need must be considered when we note the strong emphasis in the later narrative on the destruction of Jerusalem by its enemies. The emphasis on devout expectations, supported by divine promises, in the infancy narrative combines with the later emphasis on the disappointment of those hopes to produce a tragic effect. In discussing the scenes of pathos that focus on the destruction of Jerusalem (e.g., 19:41-44), Green's main point is that this event means the end of Jerusalem as a cultural center (pp. 681-82). In my opinion, Green gives insufficient attention to the significance of Jerusalem's destruction in a narrative that begins with the expectation of Jerusalem's redemption.

As with other commentaries, I sometimes agreed with the interpretation of particular passages and sometimes did not. But apart from a few points, such as those noted in the two preceding paragraphs, I found the overall perspective on Luke to be convincing. It is very similar to my own. Green's interpretation of Luke is presented clearly, in full detail, and in a format that will be useful not only to the specialist but to a broader public.