

# LUKE - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

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## THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

### What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
  - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. Who was the author of Luke and Acts? What was his profession? Was he a Jew? Did he write primarily for Jews? Who was Theophilus? Was Luke a first-hand witness of the events about which he wrote? (Luke 1:2,3) Where did he get his information? What picture of God would you have if you had only Luke? Do you think Luke received any first-hand direct revelation to be included in this book? Where did he do his research? When and from whom did Luke first learn of Jesus? (Acts 16:6-10) Why would this prosperous Greek physician apparently suddenly give up everything and cast his lot with that little-known group of Jewish "believers"?

The ancient and unanimous consensus of Christian tradition points to Luke as the author of the Gospel that bears his name. In his *Ecclesiastical History* (iii. 4.6) Eusebius (died c. 340) specifically designates Luke as the author of this Gospel. A century earlier Tertullian (died c. 230) spoke of Paul as the 'illuminator' of Luke, that is, the one who encouraged Luke and provided him with much of the information contained in Luke's writings. About the year A.D. 185 Irenaeus wrote: "Luke, the follower of Paul, put in a book the gospel that was preached by him." The famous Muratorian Fragment, a portion of a document written toward the close of the 2d century, agrees with Irenaeus, stating that the third Gospel was written by Luke the physician, a companion of Paul. Early tradition thus unanimously favors Luke as the author of the Gospel that bears his name. There is no evidence that points to anyone other than Luke as the author. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 663

Luke was apparently a Greek physician whom Paul met at Troas. (See Acts 16:6-10) Luke joined Paul and his other companions when they first went to Greece and began the work in Europe. He continued to work with Paul until almost the end of Paul's life. (See 1 Timothy 4:11) **Luke and Paul each wrote about the same amount of material; and together, they wrote most of the New Testament.** Colossians 4:10-14 suggests that Luke was not a Jew but that he was a Greek physician. Eusebius says that Luke was from Antioch. Tradition suggests that Luke was martyred in Greece by being crucified on a live olive tree.

The book of Luke was apparently written before A.D. 62 as suggested by the following reasons. The book of Luke was apparently written before Acts, and Acts seems to end with Paul's early imprisonment at Rome in about A.D. 61 or 62.

We know nothing at all about Theophilus except what we read in the introductions to Luke and Acts. The name means "friend of God" and could possibly be a term used generically for fellow-Christians. However, in Luke 1:3, Luke seemed to be speaking to a specific person. Luke probably began collecting his material and stories about the life of

Christ while Paul was in prison in Caesarea. (c. A.D. 58-60) Paul likely told him of the basic outline of events in the life of Christ. During Luke's time at Caesarea, it is very likely that he made trips throughout Palestine and talked to many of the original eyewitnesses to those events. Probably later while they were both working in Rome, Luke added to his Gospel portions of Mark's description of the life of Christ. They were writing to different audiences and for different reasons and probably never thought that people would raise the question of why they repeated so much of the same information.

Luke became one of the most prominent workers in the Christian church partially because of his association with Paul. Certainly, the Holy Spirit recognized his talents and worked with him in his writing and missionary work. We must assume that Luke was persuaded by Paul of the truth of the gospel; and like the disciples being called to follow Jesus, Luke was asked to go along with Paul and his companions.

### **Luke**

Most of us, most of the time, feel left out—misfits. We don't belong. Others seem to be so confident, so sure of themselves, "insiders" who know the ropes, old hands in a club from which we are excluded.

One of the ways we have of responding to this is to form our own club, or join one that will have us. Here is at least one place where we are "in" and the others "out." The clubs range from informal to formal in gatherings that are variously political, social, cultural, and economic. But the one thing they have in common is the principle of exclusion. Identity or worth is achieved by excluding all but the chosen. The terrible price we pay for keeping all those other people out so that we can savor the sweetness of being insiders is a reduction of reality, a shrinkage of life.

Nowhere is this price more terrible than when it is paid in the cause of religion. But religion has a long history of doing just that, of reducing the huge mysteries of God to the respectability of club rules, of shrinking the vast human community to a "membership." But with God there are no outsiders.

Luke is a most vigorous champion of the outsider. An outsider himself, the only Gentile in an all-Jewish cast of New Testament writers, he shows how Jesus includes those who typically were treated as outsiders by the religious establishment of the day: women, common laborers (shepherders), the racially different (Samaritans), the poor. He will not countenance religion as a club. As Luke tells the story, all of us who have found ourselves on the outside looking in on life with no hope of gaining entrance (and who of us hasn't felt it?) now find the doors wide open, found and welcomed by God in Jesus. (*The Message* - Introduction to the Gospel of Luke)

2. Historically, Luke's writings were not accepted by some of the early Christians for many years. Can you think of any reason why that might have been? How many "Gospels" (accounts of the life of Christ) were written before Luke was written? Was Luke thinking of Matthew and Mark only when he said "many"? (Luke 1:1) Could you name some others? Did Luke mention any names in his Gospel that other writers did not mention?

Luke wrote very favorably of women and even of marriage, and that was not a popular attitude in the early days of Christianity. There were many early Christians who favored the ascetic ideas that later led to the development of monasteries and nunneries. The polytheistic pagan Greeks believed that the soul of a person was immortal and dwelt only temporarily in the human body here on this earth. Because of the influence of the Stoics and others, they developed the idea that denying the body was a noble thing to do. Later, putting these ideas together, they generally believed that anything that was good for the soul was probably bad for the body and vice versa. Thus, it was believed that “real Christians” would deny themselves any “bodily pleasure” that might distract them from their focus on the kingdom of God. This is where the idea of celibacy came from.

As a result of Luke’s favorable attitude toward women and marriage, several groups of early Christians did not want to accept his Gospel as an authentic part of the New Testament. Instead, they substituted five apocryphal “gospels” (the five Ebionite Gospels found in the *New Testament Apocrypha* which few people today have even heard of) that agreed more with their own theology. These other “gospels” speak of the apostles traveling around the Mediterranean area separating husbands and wives and encouraging young people to dedicate themselves to God instead of marrying. They also speak of the apostles performing some fantastic miracles such as actually making a camel go through the eye of a needle (*Acts of Peter and Andrew* vv. 13-22, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, translated by M. R. James, pp. 458,459) in order to convince some people to become Christians and to give their money to the church!

No doubt, Luke was aware of many oral stories about the life of Jesus, and he set about to determine exactly which of those stories were true. Because Luke probably spoke to many of the less prominent individuals involved in the life of Jesus in one way or another, he mentioned many more names of those people—particularly the women—than did the other Gospel writers. These are probably just some of the reasons that conservative early Christians were reluctant to accept Luke as part of Scripture.

3. How do you feel about the fact that an estimated ninety percent of Mark is apparently copied in either Matthew or Luke? If there were so many things to write about in the life of Christ that “if every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written,” (John 21:25) why is there so much repetition, even apparent copying in the three “synoptic” Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke?

See **MARK - A TEACHER’S GUIDE #1**; also **MICAH - A TEACHER’S GUIDE #5**; **ISAIAH- A TEACHER’S GUIDE #4**; **JUDE - A TEACHER’S GUIDE #3**.

As noted in William Barclay’s *The Daily Study Bible*, about ninety percent of Mark is copied almost verbatim in either Matthew or Luke. If you consider also the portions of Mark that are loosely followed by the other writers, there are only about twenty-four verses in Mark, or about one percent of his writings, that are not copied. In modern times, this would be considered plagiarism. However, we must remember that footnotes had not yet been invented!

The Gospel writers each had a specific reason for writing what they did. Each wrote to

a different audience. They wrote on scrolls or perhaps on early papyrus sheets. They had never seen a book like the ones that we take for granted. They expected Jesus to return almost immediately. They could not have imagined that almost two thousand years later, we would be analyzing their writings by computer to see if they “borrowed” from each other! Furthermore, since the Holy Spirit is the primary “Author” of each of these documents, doesn’t He have the right to repeat whatever He chooses to repeat when writing to different groups?

4. Why are there differences between the genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17 and the one in Luke 3:23-38? Why did Matthew start from Abraham, and why did Luke end with Adam? Why did both of these men, especially Luke, trace the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, who had no blood relationship with Jesus, rather than through Mary? (Or did he?) Why was Luke the one who recorded the most about the events connected with the birth, the childhood, and the youth of Jesus? Why was Luke the one to record the story of Jesus as a boy in the temple—the place and time when Jesus apparently first recognized that He was not “Joseph’s son”? (Luke 2:41-50)

See the handout **“The Genealogy of Jesus.”** Luke recorded much more of the details of Jesus’ life than any of the other Gospel writers. Luke gave the details of His birth and childhood. He is the one who identified who was ruling at the time so others could recall the events that were occurring in the world concurrently. Although Luke was very brief on the subject, he gave more details about the childhood of Jesus than the other Gospel writers. He gave more details about the final events of Jesus’ life, especially the arrest and crucifixion. Many of these differences may be because Luke was something of a scientist and was more concerned with the specific details. He was also writing primarily for a Gentile audience for whom many of the details of the Jewish customs were not familiar. Thus, for those of us living thousands of years later, Luke is a most useful resource. Maybe the Holy Spirit had us in mind when He commissioned Luke to write!

5. Would any of the temptations of Jesus be a temptation to you? (Luke 4:1-13) If Jesus had performed a miracle in answer to the Devil’s challenges, would it have answered anything?

When studied in depth, the temptations of Jesus have many very major implications. The Devil and Christ were in direct conflict in a major battle of the great controversy. In the previous such battle, the Devil and all his angels lost and were no longer able to stay in heaven. (Revelation 12:7-13; Jude 6; Luke 10:18)

The primary issue in these temptations seems to have been whether or not Jesus would use His own divine power for personal vindication or benefit. The repeated question was, “If you are the Son of God...” These are not temptations that affect you and me, so it is more difficult for us to understand what Jesus was going through. Satan knew that appetite was a major area of temptation for humans. He tried to use that on Jesus. Jesus did deny Himself to an incredible degree by fasting for forty days. Few of us are willing to miss a single meal.

Jesus depended entirely on guidance from His heavenly Father. We think we can handle things on our own. Jesus was offered the whole world if He would simply “bow down” to Satan. Jesus had come to undertake a very difficult mission, and He knew that

at best He would win only a few people. Satan offered Him a shortcut; he would give Him the whole world! But to do so, He the divine Creator would have to bow down to a mere creature. He would have to recognize Satan as a “god.” That is what Satan has always wanted most of all. Satan suggested that what the “plan” required was too much for any human to survive. Satan was thus trying to suggest that God’s eternal plan was not only unreasonable but maybe even impossible!

Satan even used Scripture to try to support his claims and promote his temptations. He asked Jesus to presume upon the promises of God. If there was any way Satan could break up the plan of salvation, he would be successful in his battle against Jesus.

6. Why do you think Jesus was rejected when He went back to His home town of Nazareth? (Luke 4:1-30)

This is a very sad story. Why didn’t the people back home welcome Jesus with open arms? How could the people He spent most of His life with not be excited about the “local Boy” who apparently made good? Shouldn’t they have welcomed Him with a homecoming parade? Had Jesus been so out of harmony with them all of His life that they were ready to reject Him? Or, did they still think of Him as a little Kid? Was His family poor and despised? Is that why they could not accept Him? If Joseph was dead, who was supporting Mary?

Jesus Himself suggested at least some of the answers. He said that a prophet is respected everywhere except at home! (Luke 4:24; John 4:44; Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:4) Why would this be? He mentioned the stories of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16) and Naaman the Syrian general. (2 Kings 5:1-14) The fact that He spoke only about miracles done for foreigners seemed really to annoy them.

Even when He spoke in the synagogue, He emphasized the parts of Scripture that they were not too excited about; and He did not even quote their favorite part of the passage: Isaiah 61:2 where it talks about defeating their enemies! Jesus knew all of this very well. So, why did He intentionally annoy His friends and family? Had He ever spoken to them like that before?

7. If Jesus planned for us to memorize and recite together the “Lord’s Prayer,” why did He give a different version in Luke 11:2-4 than in Matthew 6:9-13? Were these two prayers given on the same occasion?

These two versions of the “Lord’s Prayer” were given on two very different occasions. In Luke 11:2-4, He was speaking to His disciples privately; in Matthew 6:9-13, He was speaking to the multitudes. But neither of those prayers were intended to be memorized. These are sample prayers to give us a very brief idea of how to pray and what to pray for.

8. What miracles, parables, or events are recorded only in Luke?

The raising of the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:11-17)

The naming of the women who followed Jesus (Luke 8:1-3)

The sending out of the seventy-two (Luke 10:1-12,17-20)

The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

Mary sitting at Jesus' feet while Martha served (Luke 10:38-42)

The parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21)

The healing of the crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17)

Healing the man with swollen arms and legs (Luke 14:1-6)

The lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15)

The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

Healing the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19)

The parable of the widow and the judge (Luke 18:1-8)

The Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-24)

The story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

Jesus before Herod (Luke 23:6-12)

The healing of Malchus' ear (Luke 22:51)

The details of the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)

Do you recognize any pattern in this group of stories? Where did Luke learn about them?

Notice that Luke, being a Gentile, did not have the same prejudices against Samaritans. He was the only one that spoke well about any Samaritan at all except for the encounter with the woman of Sychar/Samaria as recorded in John 4, and John's Gospel was written many years later. He is the one who gave the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the Samaritan leper who was the only one to return and thank Jesus. (Luke 17:11-19) The Jewish attitude toward Samaritans is perhaps best represented by the disciples question in Luke 9:52! They were ready to call down fire on them!

Luke also wrote kindly about **tax-collectors!** (Luke 18:9-24; 19:1-10) He wrote quite favorably about **women**. (See #2 above) Luke is the one Gospel writer who spoke out regularly against **the folly of riches**. (Luke 1:53; 6:20-26; 8:14; 12:13-21; 14:7-14; 16:1-31; 21:1-4; compare 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17; James 1:10, 11; 2:5, 6; 5:1-6) Notice how the different Gospel writers handled the story of the rich young man. (Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30)

Luke was a physician, and he recorded the largest number of healing miracles. He wrote a lot about the common people that were touched by the life of Jesus. It seems likely that he investigated many of those stories himself. No doubt, being a scientist, he was impressed by the experience on the road to Emmaus with its appeal to the evidence in support of the claims Jesus made about Himself. (See #10 below) Luke also mentioned Herod's encounter with Jesus, perhaps because many people knew the name of Herod, and it would give credibility to the whole account.

Luke was the one Gospel writer who recorded much of what happened on Jesus' last major journey to Jerusalem—starting in Galilee (Luke 9:51) and traveling through Galilee, Samaria, Decapolis, Perea, and finally through Judea to Jerusalem. (Luke 19:44)

The Jews of Galilee often traveled through Perea on the east side of the Jordan River down to Jericho and then up to Jerusalem to avoid traveling through Samaria even though it would have been much shorter for many of them to go through Samaria.

As Luke specifically states (see on Luke 1:1-4), he was not an eyewitness of the events he describes. His Gospel is both longer and more complete than any of the others. Of the 179 separate incidents recorded about the life of Christ, Luke has 118, or about 66 per cent. Of these, 43 incidents are exclusive with Luke. They are concerned mostly with the infancy and childhood of Jesus (Luke 1&2), and with the period of His Peraean ministry (Luke 9:51 to 18:34), to which Luke devotes 31 per cent of his space. His order is more nearly chronological than that of Matthew, but not so much so as that of Mark or, more especially, that of John. Luke reports 26 of the 40 parables, and 20 of the 35 miracles that Jesus did. From a historical point of view Luke is more full and complete than either of the first two Gospels, and, for that matter, than John. Luke stands first in length, in completeness, in uniqueness, and in the number of miracles and parables reported. (Adapted from *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 191)

What do these differences tell us about God? Was the Holy Spirit reaching out to non-Jews through Luke? Are you more comfortable with Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John? Aren't you glad that we have all four of them?

9. What does the parable of the prodigal son—or lost son—tell us about God? (Luke 15:11-32) Is it only recorded in Luke because this parable was spoken originally to non-Jews? How could the other Gospel writers have left out such a significant story? Why did Luke include the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? (Luke 16:19-31) What was Jesus' main point in the context? Is it actually possible to speak back and forth from heaven to "hell"? Who is "Father Abraham"? What kind of chasm could prevent anyone (even God?) from passing over between the two? (Luke 16:26)

The parable of the prodigal son should probably be renamed the parable of the loving, forgiving father. This father loved his son no matter what his condition. He forgave his son as the son was leaving home. This can be determined by the fact that he noticed the son coming "a long way off." The father had been searching that road for months and perhaps years for the blessed day when the son would return. He did not have to be begged to forgive his wayward son. Such a thought never crossed his mind! When the boy came home, the father had to celebrate because he felt so good. The wayward son certainly did not expect or ask for a party! The older son acted much more like what we see people acting like today—even in Christian circles. He was more concerned about himself and justice than he was about that foolish brother of his.

The father in this story is so much like our heavenly Father that this is one of the best pictures we have of God in the entire Bible. What does it tell us about Him?

See item #17 for discussion about the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

10. Why did Jesus disguise Himself for all that time that He was talking to the men on the road to Emmaus? (Luke 24:13-35)

If Jesus had immediately informed those men of His true identity, they would have been so excited they would either have turned and immediately headed back for Jerusalem to tell the other disciples, or they would have spent their time so engrossed with the excitement of His resurrection that they would have paid little attention to what He had to say to them. That is not what Jesus wanted. It was essential for Him to get them to listen carefully to what He had to say so that they would realize that He was the Messiah who had been prophesied by the Old Testament. That was very important for the future stability of the Christian church, especially the church in Judea.

By taking them carefully through the Old Testament and showing how it predicted His sufferings and death, He gave them a solid foundation for their faith. Back in the days when all they could think about was how they were going to conquer the Romans and rule the world, they could not have understood that message. (See Luke 18:34) Now that they were beginning to realize the full reality of His death, they were ready for a larger perspective on the future.

Jesus did not reveal Himself in His true character to them, and then open the Scriptures to their minds...**He maintained His disguise till He had interpreted the Scriptures, and had led them to an intelligent faith in His life, His character, His mission to earth, and His death and resurrection. He wished the truth to take firm root in their minds, not because it was supported by His personal testimony [even though He was God], but because the typical law, and the prophets of the Old Testament, agreeing with the facts of His life and death, presented unquestionable evidence of that truth. When the object of His labors with the two disciples was gained, He revealed Himself to them.**—Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 214 (1878)

God never asks us to believe without giving us adequate evidence upon which to base that faith. (SC 105) Jesus Himself was just demonstrating this characteristic of God. If we always demanded solid evidence for what we believe, God would win and Satan would lose every time. If God tried to persuade us by the use of miracles (many of which could be counterfeited by Satan), then we would be in a constant confusion as to which miracles were the true ones and which were the counterfeit. That would suit the Devil just fine. No wonder the Devil always tries to make light of evidence!

Why did Luke not record for us the specific texts that Jesus mentioned as He led the two men to understand that He was the Messiah predicted in the Scriptures? Could those be the texts that Stephen, Peter, and Paul used in their presentations about Jesus being the Messiah?

11. Ultimately, what was the real reason why Jesus came and died? What if Jesus, having lived His life here, decided to return to heaven at the last minute before dying? Would it have made any difference? Who required the death of Jesus? What if Jesus had just died in Gethsemane? Would that have made any difference? Of what did Jesus actually die? Did He actually die of crucifixion?

This is one of the most important questions of all time! The death of Jesus is often



referred to as the “atonement.” A correct understanding of the atonement is essential in putting all of the teachings of the Bible together in a way that makes sense. Unfortunately, there are many people who do not believe that the atonement needs to make sense! They believe that Jesus just needed to pay the penalty for our sins—which He did. What more do we need to understand? They believe that Jesus did what He had to do and that is all that is important. They do not think they need to understand why or how. They just leave it up to God.

The problem with this approach is that how we understand the atonement affects how we understand many other parts of the Bible. There is no reason for God to even give us a Bible unless we are supposed to understand it! If we do not need to understand anything, God only needed to give us a few brief statements about what He wants us to do and then end by saying that He will take care of everything else! The Bible is not like that at all! The Bible is full of real stories about real people that encourage us to ask questions and understand what God is doing in the lives of ordinary human beings like us.

When God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He warned them that there was an enemy there and they should avoid contact with him by staying away from the only place where he was allowed to go—the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (See Genesis 2:17) That warning given by God was not a threat; it was an attempt to preserve them from the disastrous results of disobedience, rebellion, separation, and death which would result from sin. (Isaiah 59:2) Genesis 2:17 is a statement of factual information about the serious consequences of sin. Separated from the Source of life by sin, Adam and Eve would inevitably die. They should have died immediately!

God knew that if He allowed them to reap the perfectly natural consequences of their sin, they would have died immediately. We call this death that results from sin the second death, or the final death. (Revelation 2:11; Revelation 20:6,14; 21:8) God also knew that if He allowed them to die immediately, there would be two serious consequences. **First**, the rest of the universe looking on would have believed that God Himself had killed them. This would lead to obedience and worship based on fear which is totally unacceptable to our loving God (1 John 4:8,16,18) and would lead to rebellion. The experience of almost every teenager is evidence of this! **Secondly**, it would have removed Adam and Eve from the possibility of realizing their mistake and repenting and coming back to God.

On the other hand, if God had forgiven them and given them a second chance in the Garden of Eden, He would have been proclaiming openly to the universe that His proclamation that sin leads to death (Genesis 2:17) was an arbitrary decree that could be set aside at will rather than it being an inevitable fact.

For these reasons and many more, God did the only thing that was acceptable to Him as our loving, heavenly Father. He decided to keep us alive on “life support” in a temporary state of sin until once and for all, He Himself had a chance to demonstrate the truthfulness of His pronouncement recorded in Genesis 2:17.

Thousands of years went by until “at the right time,” (See Galatians 4:4) God sent His Son to demonstrate the awful reality of the truthfulness of Genesis 2:17. Jesus came and lived to show us what kind of Person God is and what kind of lives He wants us to live.

Then He showed us the terrible seriousness of sin by dying the death that is a direct result of sin (the second death or final death). This demonstrated once and for all to the satisfaction of the entire universe the fact that sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2) Who is our Source of life and leaves us in a state of total alienation from God—eternal death or the second death. Jesus as a human being died that death. He went through all the agony of that separation and final death as if He were being alienated from the Father forever. But Jesus was not a sinner; He was only demonstrating for the benefit of those who are willing to watch, listen, and learn how serious that death really is. But as God, Jesus could arise on Sunday morning when His Father called Him back to life. (John 10:18)

Jesus did not die of crucifixion. Crucifixion is a slow and lingering death. The two thieves who were crucified with Jesus had their legs broken when the Sabbath hours approached so they would not have to be left on the crosses to die over the Sabbath. (John 19:31-34) However, Jesus was already dead. He did not die of crucifixion.

Jesus died to prove that God's way of running our universe is the only possible way to maintain a loving, trusting friendship throughout eternity. No trace of selfishness could be allowed. There is no room for individuals who want to "go their own way." This is not because God arbitrarily forbids it, but because it just will not work. Sin, ultimately and always, is self-destructive. Look at the condition of our world at the present time if you are not sure of that!

12. Jesus said that He came to give His life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 9:15) In what sense was the life and death of Christ a ransom? The idea of ransom suggests that a price is paid to an "enemy" to retrieve something of value.

In its crudest essentials the **ransom theory** suggested that when man fell from grace he became the Devil's possession and, however it came about, a just God could not ignore it. In order to free man from this bondage, He agreed to pay a price, the death of His own Son. Since the Son's value was more than that of all the damned souls together, Satan willingly entered into the arrangement. But, alas, in accepting the payment he was deceived. Satan, unable to hold the Son of God in his power, thus lost both the souls of the damned and the soul of the Son of God. (from *You Can Go Home Again*, Provonsha)

Others have suggested that when God gave the ransom to Satan, there was a "hook" inside—Deity was hidden inside the body of Jesus, and thus, He could not be held by Satan. Do you believe that God could practice deceit, even on the Devil? If not, what does the idea of ransom suggest? If this ransom theory of the atonement is correct, why can't God save all sinners?

The "ransom theory" of the atonement has several serious problems with it. It suggests that God is doing business with the Devil and manages to deceive and trick him into a deal where the Devil loses everything! It suggests that salvation is an economic matter that can be bargained for or negotiated by powerful people. The Old Testament idea of

“redemption” is somewhat similar. In redemption, a near relative could buy back a person or piece of property before the seventh year or the year of jubilee and restore it to the person who lost it or to the family as a whole.

The ransom theory was suggested by Origen (A.D. 185-254) and discussed somewhat further by one of his later followers, Gregory of Nyssa. For more details on this theory, see Dr. Provonsha’s book, *You Can Go Home Again*, p. 23,24. (There have been many other explanations of the plan of salvation down through the years. Dr. Provonsha gave an excellent summary of many of those “theories” in that section of his book.)

13. Does the Bible anywhere suggest that God has said, “Love and trust Me, or I will kill you”?

Almost no one would suggest that God has said such a thing when put in these direct terms. However, when spread out and described in “theological” terms, this is the belief of many Christians. These Christians would agree that God has given many commands in the Bible. Those who know the Bible better might remember that Romans 13:8-10 suggests that “love is the fulfilling of all law.” It is an easy step from this point to believe that all God asks of us is love. (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28; John 13:35)

Many Bible students look at Genesis 2:17 as a very serious threat from God. They believe that the soul is immortal and that in this verse God is threatening us with “hell.” While polls show that very few Christians think that they will ever go to hell, they still believe in hell. Since, in their minds, the soul is immortal and God cannot take the wicked to heaven, He is caught in a bind and has to do something with them and hell is the answer. Thus, we come to the idea that if we do not love God (which is the fulfilling of His law), then He must throw us into hell.

On the other hand, some other Christians including many Seventh-day Adventists have a shortened version of hell. They believe that the soul is indeed mortal, and thus, it can die; but they believe that God will raise to life all the wicked at the third coming at the end of the millennium. At the conclusion of the events described as being a part of the third coming, the wicked are to receive their reward. Passages like Ecclesiastes 12:13,14 and Revelation 20:12 seem to suggest that all our works will be brought into judgment. They believe that there needs to be a graduated punishment based on the amount or seriousness of one’s sins before one finally dies. They believe that is what is suggested by Luke 12:47,48. They do not see how eternal death as a single punishment for all sinners can be considered “graduated punishment;” and so for God to be “just,” they believe that He must punish—burn—each sinner according to his sins for an appropriate period of time before he dies.

Most of those who believe that have not considered what it implies about God. They are suggesting that God will raise people to life, and then keep them alive in the fires of “hell” until they have suffered adequately for their sins. Then, they will perish forever. This cannot be considered discipline—which, by definition, is supposed to teach the person something—because the sinner is dead when it is over. The sinner could not possibly learn anything from it that might benefit him in the future! Thus, to keep someone alive in the fires of hell to suffer “for an appropriate length of time” would be torture!

The Anglican Church has recently conducted a council to study this matter and has

come to the following conclusions:

In our discussion, we encounter particular difficulty because the dualist assumptions about human beings, body and soul, which underline much of traditional Christian thinking on these subjects, are not commonly held these days.

They recognize that Calvin was the origin of much of this kind of thinking.

In the past the imagery of hell-fire and eternal torment and punishment, often sadistically expressed, **has been used to frighten men and women into believing**. Christians have professed appalling theologies which made God into a sadistic monster and left searing psychological scars on many...**Hell is not eternal torment, but it is the final and irrevocable choosing of that which is opposed to God so completely and so absolutely that the only end is total non-being**. *The Mystery of Salvation*, p. 199. (emphasis supplied)

What would the Anglicans have to say to each of us about our beliefs? Did Jesus go through the second death on the cross? Was He tortured by God? Did Jesus burn on the cross? Or, did the Father “give Him up”? Is that why Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why did you abandon me?” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34, *GNB*)

14. Some have suggested that just as in Adam, all died, so in Christ, all have been made alive; (see Romans 5 & 6) and thus, a sort of mystical union exists between Christ and His people. Through this mystical union, sinners, in fact, die with Christ and thus, are able to rise with Him. In what sense could this be true? If this is all that is required to save sinners, why can't He save all sinners?

This “mystical” understanding of the atonement has been much more widely accepted in the eastern portions of Christianity than in the west. It does not lend itself to any logical analysis. The basic idea is that somehow, by becoming Christians, or perhaps even without becoming Christians, we are “joined” to Christ, and thus we live His life and die His death with Him. There is, of course, no discussion of how that actually happens, or how one can tell if it has happened to him. If Christ does this for everyone and if it is all that is required for salvation, God should be able to save everyone. This view is not very widely accepted today in western Christianity. What do you think of these ideas?

15. The widely accepted theory of forensic atonement suggests that “justice” demands the death of the sinner. In that view, in order to save sinners, God the Father agreed to accept the death of His Son in payment of the price of sin, and pronounced that justice was satisfied, thus removing the legal barrier so that He can accept sinners back again. Wouldn't a human judge be worthy of condemnation if He condemned the Innocent in order to free the guilty? As asked by the literary character Bozo/Boso in Anselm's (c. 1033-1109) *Cur Deus Homo*, if God could only save sinners by condemning the Innocent, is He truly omnipotent? If, on the other hand, He could, but is not willing to do so, how are we to think of Him as wise and just? What justice could there possibly be in accepting the death of the most innocent Man who ever lived in place of the guilty? No human legal system would accept that, so how can God do such a thing? And if this “legal” transaction makes

it possible for God to save sinners because they are “covered with the righteousness of Christ,” would that suggest that we are brought into heaven without God the Father realizing that we are still sinners?

As stated in *You Can Go Home Again*, by Dr. Jack Provonsha:

The Reformation atonement theory goes under various names: penal, legal, forensic, sometimes governmental (although the latter introduces a slightly different thought). Forensic is probably the most common term. In many ways it depended on Anselm’s satisfaction theory, but its presuppositions are sufficiently different that it qualifies for independent existence.

Hints of the forensic theory existed before the Reformation. At least some of the Reformers themselves seemed to think that they were simply restating Anselm. His formula and language appear frequently in their writings. But the political scene had changed and the feudal principle had given place to a concept of abstract law and particularly an abstract notion of justice requiring punishment. The death of Jesus now fulfilled a legal requirement. A crime had been committed (sin) for which the just penalty was death. Justice demanded payment for the penalty, which Jesus met, since no man’s life is of sufficient worth to compensate for more than his own individual crimes.

We now find no trace here of Anselm’s punishment or satisfaction alternative. It is not God who requires satisfaction so much as it is abstract justice. The dictates of justice bind even God Himself. A just God can do no other. Jesus’ death adequately substitutes for the requirements of justice. (Anselm’s literary character Bozo would probably ask again, ‘For what justice is there in giving up the most just Man of all to death on behalf of the sinner?’ But Bozo’s question seems not to have disturbed most of the Reformers, mainly because they did not appear to realize that the forensic solution involved a legal confusion—that between civil and criminal law. Civil law permits substitute reparation. Your insurance company may make payment for your wrongful act. But criminal law demands that the perpetrator of the crime also receive the punishment for it.)

The weakness of the theory lies, of course, in its underlying retributive concept of justice—which we shall discuss later...

We owe to Melancthon (1497-1560) the most precise Reformation statement of the forensic theory of justification. He defined it as

To justify, in accordance with forensic usage, here signified to acquit the accused and to pronounce him righteous, but on account of the righteousness of another, namely of Christ, which righteousness of another is communicated to us by faith. (See L. W. Grensted, *The Doctrine of the Atonement*, p. 169)

Melancthon wrote in the Augsburg Confession of 1530 (the principle creed of Lutheranism and both historically and doctrinally the most important statement of the beliefs of the Reformation—the Protestant potentates signed

it, though Luther said he himself ‘could not tread so gently and softly’):

Also they teach that men cannot be justified [obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness] before God by their own powers, merits, or works, but are justified freely [of grace] for Christ’s sake through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and their sins forgiven for Christ’s sake, who by his death hath satisfied for our sins. This faith doth God impute for righteousness before him. (Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877). Vol. III, p. 10

The Augsburg Confession in a phrase more pertinent to our question, Why did Christ have to die? also reoriented the Pauline ‘reconcile. . . unto God’ (Ephesians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:19,20) when it talked of

. . . one Christ, true God and true man; who was born of the virgin Mary, truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, that he might *reconcile the Father unto us* [italics supplied. Could they also have said ‘angry’ Father?], and might be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men. *Ibid*, p. 9

Luther said of Christ’s sacrifice for sin:

Who has and bears in His own body all the sins of all men—not in that He committed them, but in that He took upon His own body the things committed by us, to make satisfaction for them with His own blood.

If the sins of the whole world are upon that one man, Jesus Christ, then are they not upon the world. . . . if Christ Himself was made guilty of all the sins which we have committed, then are we absolved from all sins, yet not through ourselves, our own works or merits, but through Him. (Quoted in Grensted, *op. cit*, p. 200)

The concept seems in keeping with Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.” But the Reformation position, at least as stated by its systematic spokesman, Melancthon, takes us immediately into deep water as it asks why God had to do this. **For Melancthon as for many another troubled Christian—and he seems less troubled than some—the love of God is never as powerful a motif as His wrath against sin.**

God’s wondrous plan is set forth, that though He is just and is horribly angry at sin, yet at last He will be willing that His most just wrath should be placated, because His Son is made a suppliant for us and has drawn down the wrath upon Him, and is made an expiation and a victim for us. *Ibid*, p. 206

Again, in his expansion of the Augsburg Confession for the Saxon churches, Melancthon wrote:

Such is the severity of His justice that reconciliation would not be made unless the penalty were utterly paid. Such is the greatness of His wrath that the eternal Father would not be placated save by the entreaty and death of the Son. Such is His mercy, that the Son was given for us. Such love was in the Son toward us that He drew down this true and great wrath upon Himself. *Ibid.*

Christ's benefits are these: to bear guilt and eternal death, that is, to placate the great wrath of God. (*Ibid*, p. 207)

Here a subjective element on man's part creeps in:

For the heart, truly feeling that God is angry, cannot love God, unless He is shown to be placated. While He terrifies us and seems to be casting us into eternal death, human nature cannot raise itself up to love Him that is angry, that judges and punishes. (*Ibid*)

[This entire section quoted from *You Can Go Home Again*, by Jack Provonsha, pp. 35-38]

Why is it that so few people seem to understand why Jesus had to die? Is it partially because the three human representatives who were invited to pray with Jesus and to watch what was going on in the Garden of Gethsemane slept through most of it? Are we still sleeping?

If the price of sin is to die and stay dead for ever or to burn in hell forever, we are not paid up! Jesus died, but He rose again on Sunday!

How do we know when justice is "satisfied"? Because God says so? If all we need is a statement from God, then why was it necessary for God to go through that terrible demonstration? Do we mean that if Jesus had not died, God would not forgive us? Would someone stop Him from forgiving us? Why was it necessary for blood to be shed for our sins to be forgiven? Does our understanding about why Jesus had to die come from theologians or from Scripture? Does God want us to understand why there is no other way? If we do not need to understand, wouldn't it have been easier for God to do His demonstration far away—somewhere without going through all this hassle? Then, He could just assure us that everything has been taken care of; and since we do not need to understand anyway, there is no problem! So, why has God invited us to understand? Our evangelists invite people to come and stand at the foot of the cross. That is actually a little late! We should go to Gethsemane first. Why was it necessary for the angel to strengthen Him? (Luke 22:43; John 18:6) Does that mean that the Father killed His Son? Did the Jews kill Jesus? Can "justice" kill anyone? Can "separation" kill somebody? Who was watching all of that, and who understood what was happening? The disciples slept through it all! But the angels saw all sides and all the events. They could look into the face of the Father. They could see what the Devil was doing! Christ's death on this earth was for their benefit as much as for ours. (Ephesians 1:7-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19,20)

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice--its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man--the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto [69] Me." John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin. {PP 68.2}

16. Was the life of Christ and His death primarily a "moral influence" on humans to convince us to live better lives? Was Christ's death not really "necessary" at all? Was Christ's death necessary for God to be able to forgive us? If so, why?

Quoted from *You Can Go Home Again*, by Dr. Jack Provonsa:

Peter Abelard (1079-1142) became famous for a quite different kind of notion about why Christ had to die, somewhat erroneously called the moral influence theory. Abelard saw the death of Christ as unnecessary as far as it concerned God's forgiveness. God had been able to forgive before Christ's death and could continue to forgive whomever He chose. For Abelard the death of Christ remained primarily a profound demonstration of God's love designed to awaken a love response in us.

He wrote in his commentary on Romans:

We have been justified by the blood of Christ and reconciled to God in this way, through this unique act of grace manifested to us--in that His Son has taken upon Himself our nature and preserved therein in teaching us by word and example even unto death--he has more fully bound us to himself by love; with the result that our hearts should be enkindled by such a gift of divine grace, and true charity should not now shrink from enduring anything for him. . . . Yet everyone becomes more righteous--by which we mean a greater lover of the Lord--after the Passion of Christ than before, since a realized gift inspires greater love than one which is only hoped for. Wherefore, our redemption through Christ's suffering is that deeper affection in us which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but also wins for us the true liberty of sons of God, so that we do all things out of love rather than fear. [Peter Abelard, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956). Vol X, pp. 283,284]



[Quoted from *You Can Go Home Again*, by Jack Provonsha, pp. 30,31]

Does God need to kill at least one of us so the rest of us will line up? Unfortunately, the reformers were so concerned with the terrible vision of the flames of “hell” that they only worried about how they could escape those flames. Since they believed that the “soul” was immortal and that God would have to punish sinners somehow, they assumed that He must send them to some very unpleasant place for the rest of eternity. With that in mind, it seemed that the most important goal for Christians was to be forgiven by God so that He would no longer feel that it was necessary to send them to those flames! They always assumed that God was ultimately responsible for those flames and that placating His wrath was the only possible way to escape them. There seemed to be no discussion at all of what this might say to us about God!

But, Christ’s death on the cross was about God and not about us. We tend to have such an egocentric view of things that all we can think about is how the universe relates to us! There are several things that should be very clear to us. First of all, if God were the kind of tyrant that Satan has made Him out to be, would you really want to live for eternity with such a Person? What makes heaven a place of bliss is that the God who is in charge of the place is really the kind of Person that His Son has shown Him to be and not as Satan has claimed.

Furthermore, in the Bible when it speaks of why Jesus had to die, three times in a row it says that it was to demonstrate “God’s righteousness.” (How this is translated may depend on your version—See Romans 3:25-27) No one would deny that the life and death of Jesus should have a “good moral influence” on us! In the great controversy, Satan has made many accusations against God. Among them, are the accusations that God is arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. The Devil began his work on humans by directly contradicting God’s statement that sin leads to death. (Compare Genesis 2:17 and 3:1-4) He called God a liar! To answer those accusations and many others that Satan made, Christ came and died. For more information on this see *Conversations About God* tape #8 by A. Graham Maxwell. (<http://www.pineknoll.org/conversations>)

17. What is the meaning of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? (Luke 16:19-31)

First of all, this parable clearly teaches that our eternal destiny is determined by what we do in this life. There is no second chance for salvation. This “parable” was spoken to a population who were mostly heathen and who believed in “hell-fire.” There were no hospitals or public or national welfare programs in Jesus’ day. God entrusted riches to some human beings so they could benefit their fellow humans by sharing to meet the needs of the poor.

During these last few months of His life on earth, Jesus was ministering to the people of Perea—on the other side of the Jordan. The people of Samaria, Perea, and Decapolis were mostly non-Jews. They were of many nationalities including Greeks. Jesus spent the last six months of His life ministering mostly to those people. Luke is the only Gospel writer that speaks about Jesus’ extensive ministry to those areas. (Luke 9:51-19:10) Ten of the most prominent cities in the area had been so influenced by Greek culture that they were considered Greek cities. Most of the people that Jesus was speaking to at that time were

pagan and had many pagan beliefs. Therefore, Jesus used one of their common beliefs as the framework for an important truth He wished to teach.

This rich man claimed to be a descendant of Abraham and depended on that for his salvation. He even prayed to Abraham. He spent his life on earth pleasing self. In the story when he was represented as ending up in “hell,” he realized his mistake and asked at least for some additional warning to be sent to his brothers. In doing that, he was implying that God had not provided sufficient warning! Proof of the correctness of Abraham’s response to the rich man came a short time later when Lazarus of Bethany was indeed raised after being dead four days. It only made the Jews more angry.

God has provided the truth to us through His Word. All the evidence we need is available from this inspired source. We do not need miracles of any kind to establish our faith. Furthermore, most miracles can be easily counterfeited by the Devil.

There are many things about this “parable” that show that it is not a true story! Is it possible for people from heaven and “hell” to speak back and forth to each other? If so, what could there be that separates those two “locations” that would be impossible for even God to cross? The only thing that can separate us from God permanently is our own sinful choices and the character that develops as a result. This is not a physical barrier. Jesus was not here suggesting that we should believe in the doctrine of “hell-fire.” He was using a common belief among the people to whom He was talking as a way of teaching some important truths. The idea that “souls” go directly to heaven or “hell” is in direct contradiction with the rest of Scripture.

18. How would things have been different if the Father had come instead of the Son? Could you march through the golden streets of heaven and go up to the Father and spit in His face? What would He do? Jesus claimed that He and the Father are one. What does that mean? He told the disciples that if they had seen Him, they had seen the Father. (John 14:9)

If we are going to be among God’s true people—the few remnant that are left—at the end of time, we are supposed to bear the testimony of Jesus. (Revelation 12:17; 14:12) Jesus’ testimony was the truth about His Father. Do we understand it and teach it correctly? Ellen White made it very clear how she understood the relationship between the Son and the Father:

**Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, veiling His glory and humbling Himself, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed in unfolding its record of His own condescending grace. In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father.--Letter 83, 1895; TMK 338.4**

19. How did Luke know that Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter? (Luke 22:61) If you were asked to paint the face of Jesus at that moment, what would you show? As Peter understood Jesus up to that point, what did he expect to see? Wouldn’t he, like James and John, have wanted to call fire down on the Samaritans? (Luke 9:54) He wanted to know

who sinned so that the man was born blind! (John 9:2) Peter stumbled out to Gethsemane and wept and became a changed man. Judas went in before the Jewish leaders and threw down the coins. Then, he went out and committed suicide. Would it be correct to say, "Thus, God slew Judas"? (See 1 Chronicles 10:13,14)

This is a thought question. How do you interpret the Bible?

20. Luke gives us a marvelous picture of God through the life and death of Christ. We would lose so much without it. What parts of Luke's Gospel are you most thankful for? What has he taught us about God?

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