

# Chapter Summary: Luke - Acts

The longest story in the New Testament, one that fills a quarter of its pages, was originally addressed to one person. The author dedicates this two-volume series, covering the life of Jesus and the early church, to the "most honorable Theophilus." This Greek name shows that he was a Gentile (non-Jewish), and his title suggests he was likely a Roman official.

This history of the early Christian movement was written in the mid-60s AD, right around the time when the Roman government first became hostile to Jesus' followers. Theophilus may have been facing pressure to forsake his allegiance to Jesus. At the same time, some Jewish believers were questioning the place of Gentiles in a movement devoted to a Jewish Messiah. So Theophilus would no doubt welcome the reassurance that what he'd heard about Jesus was genuine and that the Good News really was intended for Gentiles like himself.

Luke was in a unique position to answer these questions. He had worked closely with Paul, who brought the message of Jesus to Gentiles living throughout much of the Roman Empire. Luke was able to tell important parts of the story from firsthand experience. And since he was educated and literate, he could also research and record the movement's history.

The Good News of Jesus invited Jews and Gentiles to unite into a single new family. So, believers from all backgrounds benefited from Luke's account of God's story of salvation for the whole world, which had come to surprising fulfillment in Jesus.

The first volume – Luke – begins with a prologue about the remarkable circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth and early days. From its start, the story shows how Jesus was sent as both the long-promised King of Israel and the Savior of the whole world.

After the introduction, Luke is divided into three main parts:

- The first section describes Jesus' early ministry in Israel's northern region of Galilee, where He announces "the Good News of the Kingdom of God."
- Luke then portrays Jesus taking the journey south toward Jerusalem, where He fulfills His calling and destiny. Along the way, Jesus continues to show how the coming of God's reign on earth means freedom for the oppressed and a welcome for outsiders.
- The third section shows Jesus' mission coming to its climax in Israel's ancient capital of Jerusalem. During the Jewish Passover festival, His enemies conspire to have Him executed on a Roman cross. But Jesus then rises from the dead with royal authority, winning God's great battle against sin and death.

The second volume (Acts) describes how the first community of Jesus' followers brought the message about Him to all nations. In six different phases, the Good News about Jesus breaks through some significant barrier as it advances. Each phase ends with a version of the summary statement: "God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased."

- Phase one: The message breaks through a linguistic barrier as the Jerusalem community welcomes Greek speakers (Acts 6:7).
- Phase two: The message breaks through a geographic barrier by spreading into Judea and Samaria (Acts 9:31).
- Phase three: A significant religious and ethnic barrier is broken when the community welcomes Gentiles (Acts 12:24).
- Phase four: Another geographic barrier is broken when the Good News moves into Asia Minor (Acts 16:5).
- Phase five: Yet another geographic barrier is broken when the Good News spreads into Greece, the cultural center of the ancient Mediterranean world (Acts 19:20).
- Phase six: The Good News about Jesus the Messiah reaches all the way to Rome - the very heart of the empire (Acts 28:31).

In this way, Luke-Acts completes its twofold movement. First, Jesus went to Jerusalem to complete His great work through his suffering, death and resurrection. Second, the persecution of His followers brought the Good News about Jesus from Jerusalem to Rome. In this combined story, it is revealed that Jesus is Israel's promised King and the world's true Ruler.