

EXCERPT

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A Bird's-Eye View of Luke and Acts *Context, Story, and Themes*

November 21, 2023 | \$36, 320 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0809-6

This accessible and compelling introduction draws us into the wide-ranging narrative of Luke–Acts to discover how Luke frames the life of Jesus and of the first disciples. These two books, when read together, tell a cohesive narrative about Jesus, the Church, and the mission of God—with implications for the whole of our lives today.

Six Reasons to Study Luke and Acts

Often when I'm thinking about a holiday destination, I must convince my family that we should journey to a particular place, especially if they are not familiar with it. After all, what is there to see in the Bunya Mountains, in northern Tasmania, in the mountains of Colorado, or the seaside of Cornwall? This volume is about a journey, a journey into the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles (i.e., Luke–Acts). Maybe you are already up for it, maybe you think it will be boring, maybe you think it will be just cute stories about Jesus and quaint tales about the apostles. Well, as your tour-guide-in-chief through Luke–Acts, I want you to know that there are several reasons why Luke–Acts is a great read, a terrific study, and a sumptuous feast of history, theology, and biblical insights. I offer six reasons why you should make Luke–Acts one of your top destinations for biblical study:

First, Luke–Acts forms a distinct corpus within the New Testament. Both books are written by “Luke,” an evangelist and the church’s first historian. Luke–Acts comprises a unified two-volume work with a distinctive approach to telling the story of Jesus, and it is one of our best sources about first-century Christianity.

Second, Luke–Acts makes up 28 percent of the New Testament. That is significant because Paul’s epistles are only 24 percent of the New Testament, while John’s Gospel, epistles, and apocalypse comprise 20 percent of the New Testament. Luke, then, is by far the biggest contributor to the New Testament.

Third, by marrying a biography of Jesus to the history of the early church, Luke has effectively written a New Testament in miniature. His two-volume work is the story of Jesus and the mission of the apostles. Luke–Acts is the New Testament in a nutshell (C. K. Barrett, “The First New Testament?,” *NovT*, 38).

Fourth, Luke–Acts contains some unique materials and unforgettable stories. Luke provides famous passages such as Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), Zechariah’s Benedictus (Luke 1:67-79), Jesus’ Nazareth sermon (Luke 4:16-31), the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:1-32), the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), the ascension (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-11), the beginning of the church at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47), the division between the Hebrews and Hellenists (Acts 6:1-6), Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:1-30; 22:1-21; 26:2-23), and the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-33). And that is just the tip of the iceberg.

Fifth, Luke–Acts emphasizes several key things:

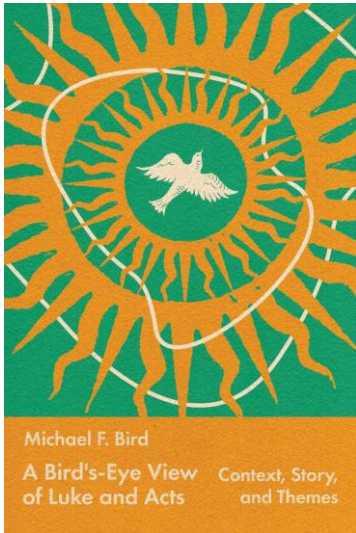
- Jesus’ concern for the poor and outcasts
- the rigorous nature of discipleship
- the importance of prayer and attitudes toward possessions
- the place of women among Jesus’ disciples
- an emphasis on Israel’s hopes fulfilled in Jesus
- the identity of Jesus as the messianic Lord
- the importance of the Holy Spirit in the mission of the Church
- the apostolic preaching of Jesus
- the beginnings of the Christian mission to the nations
- the beginnings of Paul’s apostolic ministry
- the Church’s contentious relationship with the Jews and the Roman Empire



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Sixth, Luke–Acts is valuable for your devotional life and in a church's preaching cycle. For a start, the Gospel of Luke shows what it means to be a follower of Jesus. The Lukan travel narrative (Luke 9:51–19:44) contains most of Luke's teaching about discipleship and urges disciples to a manner of life that separates the followers from the fans (see esp. Luke 9:57–62 about three would-be disciples). The book of Acts tells us of the beginnings of the church and gives an ideal picture of the church as committed "to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

All this is to say, going deeper into Luke–Acts is a great way to be reminded of authentic discipleship and a terrific refresher on the church's mission.

—Taken from chapter one, "What's So Special About Luke–Acts?"



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