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THEOPHILUS AND THE CENTURIONS: ROMAN OFFICIALS  
AS THE “MOST EXCELLENT” PROPONENTS OF  
THE GOSPEL IN LUKE-ACTS

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A Thesis  
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by  
Christopher Sun Young Chen  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

THEOPHILUS AND THE CENTURIONS: ROMAN OFFICIALS  
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Christopher Sun Young Chen

Read and Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jonathan T. Pennington (Faculty Advisor)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

To my brothers and sisters across the world who daily navigate the tensions of  
Jesus's command to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,  
and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:25 ESV)

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ANF*      *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 10 vols. 1885–1887 Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature
- Ant.*      Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish Antiquities*
- Apion*     Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*
- FJTC      Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary
- LCL      Loeb Classical Library
- NPNF*<sup>1</sup>     *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Edited by Philip Schaff. Series 1. 14 vols. 1886–1889. Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature
- NPNF*<sup>2</sup>     *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Series 2. 14 vols. 1890–1900. Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature



## PREFACE

In March 2020, as COVID-related lockdowns were starting in my county, I submitted my application to Southern, hoping that the coming months at home would provide a unique opportunity to pursue further studies. I thoroughly enjoyed being a Southern student for these past three years, which proved to be a productive use of my time during a global pandemic. While I expected this degree program to further my theological training, what I did not expect was the new relationships that would forge in the process. By his grace, the Lord brought along wonderful friends like Timothy Ingram and Zachary Hess to journey with me in this program. Along the way, the Lord also graciously gave me a wife who is now pregnant with our first child. As I reflect upon all that God provided over these three years, I cannot help but echo the words of Jacob's prayer, "I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant" (Gen 32:10 ESV).

I would especially like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Jonathan Pennington, for crafting the modular ThM program, guiding my research and writing, and modeling the life of a scholar who loves God, family, and the church. I would like to thank Morgan Johnson for providing timely feedback and pointing me to helpful resources at each stage of my research and writing. I would also like to express thanks to brothers and sisters who read my thesis and provided helpful feedback: Kevin Chen, Aaron and Melinda Yakligian, Anthony Baldwin, Jennifer Stec, and Torey Teer.

This thesis represents the culmination of years of reflection on Luke and Acts alongside brothers and sisters in Christ in the local church. The initial ideas for this thesis came while leading small group Bible studies in Luke-Acts. Many thanks to my brothers and sisters over the years at Pathway Bible Church and South Bay Agape Christian

Church. Thanks are also due to the local churches who regularly invited me to preach: Central Chinese Christian Church, Friendship Agape Church, Christ Centered Community Church, Home of Christ 7, and several others. Your generous honorariums funded my education at Southern. May you enjoy the fruits of your kind support.

I would like to thank my family for their unceasing support of my academic pursuits. Dad, thanks for teaching me to appreciate details and to value continuous learning. Mom, thank you for praying for me and cheering me on in my development as a writer. Kevin, thanks for encouraging me to pursue further theological training and for being both a role model and conversation partner in all areas of life. Finally, thank you to my dear wife Jacqueline for your kind support, encouragement, and eagerness to discuss and share in the things that I have been learning through my studies. May God receive all the glory for the great things he has done.

Chris Chen

San Jose, California

December 2022

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

What attitude should Christians have towards representatives of a state system that is ostensibly hostile towards God’s people? Could government officials perform their duties while also honoring God? Believers across the ages from all over the world have grappled with these issues.<sup>1</sup> Thankfully, Scripture has much to say about the complex relationship between Christians and the state. This thesis will approach the broader topic of the Gospel and the Roman Empire by focusing on Theophilus and the centurions in Luke-Acts.

#### **Thesis**

In this work, I will argue that the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts portray Roman centurions as supporters of the gospel to show that it is possible, and even respectable, for Romans to be faithful citizens in the kingdom of God while also holding positions of status within the Roman Empire. The propagation of the gospel through individual Roman officials would have been a topic of great interest to Luke’s reader, Theophilus, a high-ranking Roman official who was drawn to the gospel. To put a play on Theophilus’s honorific title, I have subtitled this work: Roman officials as the “most excellent” proponents of the gospel in Luke-Acts.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Daniel in Babylon was confronted with the question of how to remain faithful while serving within a government that antagonized believers. In a different context, Dietrich Bonhoeffer took up employment in the German government in an effort to bring down a tyrannical regime that had allied itself with the church. Brian Watson, “The Political Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Ethical Problem of Tyrannicide” (MA thesis, Louisiana State University, 2015).

## Methodology

This thesis will use a narrative approach to exegesis, while drawing upon historical backgrounds to support my exegetical claims and to determine applications of Luke's message. In other words, I will employ a dual pronged approach: (1) narrative criticism to uncover authorially intended meaning and (2) historical reconstruction to develop the implications of Luke's message for both his original and modern audiences.<sup>2</sup>

In broad terms, narrative criticism “attends to the literary and storied qualities of a biblical narrative.”<sup>3</sup> Priority will be placed on understanding Luke and Acts as a literary whole, rather than on historical reconstructions based on parallel Gospel accounts.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, I will treat Luke-Acts as “comprehensive applied narrative theology” respecting both the historical accuracy and theological richness of the text.<sup>5</sup> I will seek to uncover the meaning of the narrative on two levels: the story level (consisting of the elements most readers would easily notice) and the discourse level (seeing the narrative through a wide angle lens).<sup>6</sup> The most relevant historical

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<sup>2</sup> This dual pronged approach is analogous to E. D. Hirsch's helpful distinction between meaning and significance. Hirsch argues that while the meaning of a text does not change, its significance to a particular reader may change. “*Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable.” E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, *The Gospels as Stories: A Narrative Approach to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 11. See also Jeannine K. Brown, “Narrative Criticism,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, IVP Bible Dictionary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Pennington explains that we must prioritize “vertical” over “horizontal” readings of the Gospels. For Pennington, a “vertical reading focuses on reading the individual Gospel accounts as wholes, following their narrative structure and development, as one reads from top to bottom on the page of a book.” In contrast, “to read horizontally is to always have an eye toward parallel passages from the other Gospel accounts.” Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 149. Mark Strauss describes a similar approach: “Gospel comparisons (horizontal reading) will be done in the service of a narrative and theological analysis of the text (vertical reading).” Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 84.

<sup>5</sup> Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 153.

<sup>6</sup> Jeannine Brown credits Seymour Chatman for coming up with these “two levels” of meaning. See Brown, *The Gospels as Stories*, 11–14. Drawing upon the work of R. T. France, Pennington describes these two levels of meaning as “surface meaning” and “bonus meaning.” See Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 117–19.

background is assumed to be found within the text, thus allowing the reader to focus on Luke-Acts as the locus of divine revelation, while paying careful attention to the historical details mentioned by the author.<sup>7</sup>

### Summary of Argument

Among the four canonical Gospels, Luke's Gospel is unique because it addresses an individual reader, Theophilus, and it belongs to the two-volume set of Luke-Acts.<sup>8</sup> It is significant that Luke addresses his reader as "most excellent" (Luke 1:3) since elsewhere in Acts he uses this title exclusively to refer to high ranking Roman officials (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25).<sup>9</sup> If, as this honorific title suggests, Theophilus was a Roman official, we should expect Luke to speak elsewhere about the Roman Empire.<sup>10</sup>

Many scholars have written on the complex nature of Luke's portrayal of the Roman Empire.<sup>11</sup> In this thesis, I will focus on the role of Roman centurions in Luke-

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout this thesis, I uphold the historical reliability of the biblical text. For example, when Luke describes Cornelius as a centurion of the Italian Cohort who fears God (Acts 10:1–2), I accept the truth of his description even if it goes against stereotypes of centurions based on extrabiblical historical sources. Though some may question the possibility of a centurion of the Italian cohort being in Caesarea at the time, there are reasons to believe Luke's account was historically accurate. Craig S. Keener, "Acts 10: Were Troops Stationed in Caesarea During Agrippa's Rule?," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 7 (2010): 164–76.

<sup>8</sup> This does not necessarily preclude the possibility that Luke's Gospel was also meant to be circulated. Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Isak J du Plessis, "The Lukan Audience—Rediscovered? Some Reactions to Bauckham's Theory," *Neotestamentica* 34, no. 2 (2000): 243–61.

The opening lines of the sequel explicitly frame Acts as a companion volume to "the first book" (Acts 1:1). Some have proposed that Luke and Acts originally belonged together as a single composition, based on the arrangement of Codex Bezae. Jenny Read-Heimerdinger and Josep Rius-Camps, eds., *Luke's Demonstration to Theophilus: The Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles According to Codex Bezae*, trans. Helen Dunn and Jenny Read-Heimerdinger (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

<sup>10</sup> The Gospel of Luke traces the geographical movement of the good news starting from Jerusalem (1:9; 2:22), to Galilee (4:14–9:50), and back to Jerusalem (9:51–24:53). The driving force of Acts is the spread of the gospel through Spirit-empowered witnesses from Jerusalem, to Judea, to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Figuratively speaking, the gospel reaches the "end of the earth" when Paul arrives in Rome and preaches the gospel unhindered for two years (Acts 28:16–31).

<sup>11</sup> Steve Walton, "The State They Were In: Luke's View of the Roman Empire," in *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*, ed. Peter Oakes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 1–41; C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Karl Allen Kuhn, *The Kingdom According to Luke and Acts: A Social, Literary, and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); Kazuhiko Yamazaki-Ransom, "God, People, and

Acts. Centurions appear at critical junctures in the narrative and each centurion plays a positive role in the advance of the gospel. Devout centurions are the first Gentiles to be saved in both the Gospel of Luke (7:1–10) and Acts (10:1–48).<sup>12</sup> A centurion is the first person to proclaim Jesus’s righteousness at the cross (Luke 23:47).<sup>13</sup> Various centurions protect Paul by: escorting him away from the violent Jerusalem mob (Acts 21:32), asserting his citizenship rights before the tribune (22:26), ensuring safe passage to his trial in Caesarea (23:23), granting liberty to see friends under Felix’s orders (24:23), and facilitating a safe journey despite shipwreck (27:1, 6, 11, 31, 43). While Luke-Acts features many Roman officials (Luke 2:1–2; 3:1; 13:1; 23:1–25; Acts 12:1–6, 20–23; 18:12–15; 21:31–40; 22:24–27; 23:13–26:32), the role of centurions is significant because they appear frequently as representatives of the empire at the “ground level” of the average citizen.

Writing to Theophilus, Luke shows that the gospel message is for all types of people: lowly and influential; rich and poor; men and women; tax collectors and sinners; Jews and Romans; civilians and soldiers. Far from being the enemy, the Roman centurions often function as the “good guys.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the conversions of two key centurions show that the gospel could subvert an ostensibly anti-Christian establishment.

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Empire: Anti-Imperial Theology of Luke-Acts in Light of Jewish Portrayals of Gentile Rulers” (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2006); Ho Sung Kim, “Collusion and Subversion: Luke’s Representation of the Roman Empire” (PhD diss., Drew University, 2009). Ho Sung Kim argues that Luke has a complex relationship with the Roman Empire, sometimes portraying it positively and other times portraying it negatively.

<sup>12</sup> Oleksandr Kyrychenko argues that Luke portrays Roman centurions as “prototypical Gentile believers in anticipation of the Christian mission to the Empire.” Oleksandr Kyrychenko, *The Roman Army and the Expansion of the Gospel: The Role of the Centurion in Luke-Acts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 8. See also Kenneth Wayne Yates, “Centurions in Luke/Acts” (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Matthew C. Easter, “‘Certainly This Man Was Righteous’ Highlighting a Messianic Reading of the Centurion’s Confession in Luke 23:47,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 63, no. 1 (2012): 35–51.

<sup>14</sup> Laurena Brink argues that Luke portrays centurions in ways that break from stereotypical characterizations of soldiers in Greco-Roman literature. Laurena Ann Brink, “Unmet Expectations: The Literary Portrayal of Soldiers in Luke-Acts” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2009), 270–89. Brink focuses on literary analysis and suggests that the Roman soldiers in the narrative were “not necessarily meant to be historical figures” (61).

Centurions who supported the advance of the gospel would have served as positive role models for Theophilus, who himself was in a position of power in the Roman Empire. The centurions also convey a positive message for us today, in a world where authorities may be hostile towards Christians. Luke's portrayal of supportive centurions in Luke-Acts encourages us to pray for favor from and conversion of low-level officials who enforce regulations. Seen in this way, the conversion and cooperation of centurions encourages believers to "pray for those who abuse you" (Luke 6:28; cf. 23:34).

Before continuing further, I will provide a brief outline of the rest of this work. In chapter 2, I will first examine the identity of Theophilus as the primary recipient of Luke's writings. After surveying the various views of Luke's audience, I will argue that Theophilus was most likely a high-ranking Roman official. In chapter 3, I will provide an overview of major themes in Luke-Acts before discussing the role of centurions in Luke-Acts. Special attention will be given to the centurions in Luke 7:1–10 and Acts 10:1–11:18. In chapter 4, I will explore the significance of centurions for our understanding of Luke's purposes for writing to Theophilus. Finally, I will draw conclusions and briefly relate my topic to Christians today.

## CHAPTER 2

### LUKE AND HIS AUDIENCE

Who was Theophilus? On the one hand, this may seem like an inconsequential question. After all, Theophilus' name appears only twice in the entire New Testament (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). As such, most readers gloss over his name when reading Luke and Acts. Loveday Alexander laments the indifference Christians have held towards Luke's reader: "Christian tradition has never, so far as I can tell, taken Theophilus seriously at all, even as a reader: there is no Saint Theophilus, no attempt to discover sanctified bones or to find him a place (like Onesimus) in the hierarchies of church history."<sup>1</sup> Since Christians have paid such little attention to Theophilus, some may question whether it is worth considering his identity. Yet, to read Luke-Acts well, the thoughtful reader ought to consider how the references to Theophilus shape our understanding of Luke's intended audience, the overall message of Luke-Acts, and the implications of Luke's message for Christians today.

This chapter will focus on Luke and his audience. The first section will discuss the prefaces to Luke and Acts and their significance for ascertaining Luke's audience. The second section will discuss the identity of Theophilus to whom Luke dedicated his writings. The third section will discuss the intended audiences of the Luke-Acts, arguing that Luke wrote for both a broad and narrow audience. In the fourth section, I will summarize my findings and explore the implications of Luke's audience for readers of Luke-Acts.

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<sup>1</sup> Loveday Alexander, "What If Luke Had Never Met Theophilus?," *Biblical Interpretation* 8, nos. 1-2 (2000): 164.



## Prefaces to Luke and Acts

Each of the four canonical Gospels begins in a unique way. Matthew recounts Jesus's genealogy, Mark portrays Jesus in action, and John exalts Jesus as the eternal Word of God. Luke's Gospel begins with a preface (Luke 1:1–4) which is written in excellent Greek. The preface employs a careful sentence structure which stands in contrast to the more ordinary writing style of the rest of the book.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the book of Acts begins with a brief preface (Acts 1:1) that connects back to the preface of Luke's Gospel. In this section, I will briefly examine the prefaces to Luke and Acts.

### Similarities to Historical Documents

Scholars have long noted that Luke's prefaces show remarkable similarities to those of contemporary extrabiblical writers.<sup>3</sup> One notable example is Josephus's two-volume work *Against Apion*.<sup>4</sup> Josephus's first volume of *Against Apion* begins with a longer preface that introduces both the first book and the entire two-volume work. Although the preface to *Against Apion I* is significantly longer than Luke's preface, it contains several remarkable similarities, such as the naming of his recipient as "most excellent [κράτιστε] among men, Epaphroditus" which bears striking resemblance to Luke's address to "most excellent [κράτιστε] Theophilus" (Luke 1:3).<sup>5</sup>

In a manner analogous to Acts 1:1, Josephus' *Against Apion II* begins with a brief recapitulation that connects his reader back to the preface of the first volume.

Compare the opening lines of Josephus's and Luke's second volumes below:

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<sup>2</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 39.

<sup>3</sup> H. J. Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," in *The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, vol. 2, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1920), 489–510.

<sup>4</sup> In *Against Apion*, Josephus defends the long history of the Jews against critics.

<sup>5</sup> Josephus, *Apion* 1.1 (Thackeray, LCL). See John Barclay's commentary in Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion: Translation and Commentary*, trans. John M. G. Barclay, FJTC 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 3n3.

In the first volume of this work, my most esteemed [τιμιώτατέ] Epaphroditus, I demonstrated the antiquity of our race. (*Apion* 2.1, [Thackeray, LCL])

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach. (Acts 1:1)

Both Josephus and Luke address their recipient in a different way compared to the prefaces to their respective first volumes, where both authors used *κράτιστε*. Josephus shifts his adjective to *τιμιώτατέ* while Luke drops the adjective for the simple vocative. It is likely that Josephus changes the epithet for the sake of variety, as he does once again at the end of *Against Apion II*, where he addresses his reader simply by the name Epaphroditus without an adjectival modifier.<sup>6</sup> Luke, however, does not change his adjectival modifier for Theophilus, instead opting for variety by dropping the adjective altogether.

### Similarities to Technical Literature

Since H. J. Cadbury's 1922 publication of a twenty page commentary on Luke 1:1–4, scholars have emphasized the continuity between Luke's preface and the prefaces to contemporary secular historical works such as Josephus's *Against Apion*.<sup>7</sup> In her republished doctoral dissertation, Alexander challenged the consensus view by suggesting that Luke's preface more closely resembles the prefaces of contemporary technical (or "scientific") literature than the prefaces of historical documents.<sup>8</sup> In making this comparison, Alexander drew attention to technical treatises that would be commonly used in schools of philosophy, medicine, rhetoric, mathematics, or a broad variety of

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<sup>6</sup> Josephus, *Apion* 2.296 (Thackeray, LCL). See Barclay's translation note in Josephus, *Against Apion: Translation and Commentary*, 169n1.

<sup>7</sup> Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke."

<sup>8</sup> Loveday Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1.1–4 and Acts 1.1*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 78 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). In her 1993 book, Alexander uses the terminology "scientific tradition" to refer to these technical treatises. In a later work, she clarifies that "technical literature" would have been a more suitable term. Loveday Alexander, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context*, Library of New Testament Studies 298 (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 3.

other topics.<sup>9</sup> While technical treatises could be written in a variety of forms to cover a broad range of subject matter, what set them apart was their function. Such literature would often function as a treatise for presentation in a lecture hall, or as a handbook to systematically present a body of knowledge on a particular subject.<sup>10</sup>

By following the conventions of prefaces to technical literature, Luke 1:1–4 prepares the reader for what would come in the rest of his Gospel.<sup>11</sup> Like contemporary technical literature, Luke’s Gospel shares a respect for tradition, continuity with previous writers, and a lack of concern for originality.<sup>12</sup> By briefly mentioning his careful investigation of sources, Luke reassures his reader of the trustworthiness of his account (Luke 1:3–4).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Luke’s writing style was appropriate for the social and educational levels of most early Christians.<sup>14</sup> While some works of literature, such as epics or didactic poetry, were written in a high literary style, the Gospel of Luke and most of the New Testament were written in a “literate but not literary” style.<sup>15</sup> Alexander argues that these similarities to contemporary technical literature show that Luke wrote from within a Christian social context that resembled the philosophical “schools” of Greco-Roman society.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 21–22, 211. See for example, Galen, *Method of Medicine, Volume I: Books 1–4*, trans. Ian Johnston and G. H. R. Horsley, LCL 516 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 42–43.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander questions whether Luke envisioned writing Acts as a companion volume at the time of composing his preface to Luke. Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 145–46. For a defense of the unity of Luke and Acts, see Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 6–10.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 205.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 206.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 210.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 48, 169–71, 210.

<sup>16</sup> For Alexander, the realm of technical literature also may also help to shed light on the relationship between the text of the canonical Gospels and its preceding oral tradition. Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 211–12.

In the late second century, Galen would attack the rational basis for Christianity as a rival

In response to Alexander's landmark work, scholars pointed out similarities between ancient historical works such as Josephus's *Against Apion* and the technical literature studied by Alexander.<sup>17</sup> Thus, while Alexander astutely notices parallels between the prefaces to Luke's Gospel and technical treatises, others suggest that these features are also present in prefaces to historical documents. Moreover, as David Aune points out, Alexander's conclusions did not adequately account for the limited sample size of extant Greek manuscripts which may not represent the entire genre of historical literature during Luke's day.<sup>18</sup> Thus, while there is much to commend about Alexander's detailed study, her argument may draw too sharp of a distinction between the prefaces to historical and technical documents. Instead, it seems that Luke's preface may share similarities with both genres.

The similarities between Luke 1:1–4 and ancient technical literature would also corroborate the traditional view that the author was indeed “Luke the beloved physician” (Col 4:14; cf. 2 Tim 4:11; Phlm 24).<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that, for Alexander, “technical literature” could be used to communicate historically accurate accounts.<sup>20</sup> In fact, technical literature was meant to distill and convey true knowledge, including accurate biographical information about key individuals, to a broad range of people who

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philosophical school that brought with it not only a body of traditional teachings, but also an entire way of life. Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 72–83.

<sup>17</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion: Translation and Commentary*, 3n1.

<sup>18</sup> David E. Aune, “Luke 1.1–4: Historical or Scientific Prooimion?,” in *Paul, Luke and the Graeco-Roman World: Essays in Honour of Alexander J.M. Wedderburn*, ed. Alf Christophersen et al., *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 217 (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 138–48.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, 177. This point is also highlighted in Marshall's review of Alexander's work. I. Howard Marshall, Review of *The Preface to Luke's Gospel: Literary Convention and Social Context in Luke 1:1–4 and Acts 1:1*, by Loveday Alexander, *Evangelical Quarterly* 66 (1994): 373–76. For a defense of Luke the physician as the author of Luke-Acts, see Karl Allen Kuhn, *Luke: The Elite Evangelist* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 1–9; Karl Allen Kuhn, *The Kingdom According to Luke and Acts: A Social, Literary, and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), xviii–xix.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, 200–201.

were interested in a particular school of thought.<sup>21</sup> By following the literary practices of technical literature, Luke shows that his work was meant for broad dissemination among a wide range of readers, as was typically the case for literature belonging to a particular school of thought.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, as this chapter unfolds, I will argue that Luke had in mind a dual audience that encompassed both the elite of Roman society and a more general audience.

### **Luke's Stated Purpose for Writing**

Aside from any similarities to contemporary literature, Luke's preface introduces his purpose for writing (Luke 1:1–4). Luke was aware of many existing narratives on the life of Jesus, including the accounts of eyewitnesses and ministers of the word (1:1–2). After following these things closely for some time, he set out to write an “orderly account” for “most excellent Theophilus” (1:3) so that his reader might “have certainty concerning the things [he] had been taught” (1:4). Thus, Luke's purpose was to craft a historically accurate account so that Theophilus would have certainty regarding what he had previously learned about Jesus.<sup>23</sup> Luke's naming of his recipient sets his work apart amongst the four canonical Gospels and invites the reader to explore the significance of Luke's first audience. In chapter 4, I will show how identifying Luke's recipient can shape how we understand the message of Luke and Acts.

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<sup>21</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, 202–4.

<sup>22</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, 168–86; Alexander, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context*, 3–4, 231–52. Commenting on Luke's writing style, Alexander observes that Luke wrote in “educated standard *Koine*” rather than atticized Greek and that this “linguistic choice itself very clearly identifies Luke's writings as not belonging to the prestige literary registers for which atticizing (or at least classicizing) Greek was fast becoming the norm” during this period. Alexander, *Acts in Its Ancient Literary Context*, 250–51.

<sup>23</sup> Acts was likewise written as an accurate account of history. On the historical reliability of Acts, see Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. Conrad H. Gempf, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament* 49 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 101–58.

## Who Was Theophilus?

While many readers give little thought to Theophilus's identity, scholars have made various attempts at identifying Theophilus. The various opinions can be grouped into two broad categories of viewing Theophilus as either a prototypical reader or a historical individual.

### Theophilus as a Prototypical Reader

As early as Origen (AD 185–254) some have proposed that Theophilus was a symbolic name meant to represent any Christian reader. According to Origen's *Homilies on Luke*, "Someone might think that Luke addressed the Gospel to a specific man named Theophilus. But, if you are the sort of people God can love, then all of you who hear us speaking are Theophiluses, and the Gospel is addressed to you."<sup>24</sup> Etymologically, "Theophilus" (θεόφιλος) combines the two Greek words for "God" (θεός) and "friend" or "lover" (φίλος), leading Origen and others to take the name as representative of an individual "friend of God" or "lover of God."<sup>25</sup> Ambrose, thus, believed that Luke's Gospel was written to all who love God. In his *Exposition on the Gospel of Luke*, Ambrose explains, "So the Gospel was written to Theophilus, that is, to him whom God loves. If you love God, it was written to you."<sup>26</sup> Such a meaning would not be out of place in Luke, since the word φίλος appears to be one of his favorites. As Hart points out, φίλος appears in Luke more frequently than in any other New Testament book.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke*, 1.6. For an English translation, see Origen, *Homilies on Luke and Fragments on Luke*, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard, Fathers of the Church 94 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 9.

<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Alexander argues that if the name Theophilus was meant to represent a typical Christian, the correct adjective would have been *theophiles* (θεοφιλής). Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, 188. For more on the adverbial form, see Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," 507–8.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur A. Just Jr., ed., *Luke*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 4. Interestingly, while Ambrose served as a Roman official before being elected bishop of Milan, he did not seem to make much of Theophilus's "most excellent" title.

<sup>27</sup> T. Hart, "The Gospel of Luke: Year of Faith, Year of Mercy," *Bible Today* 50, no. 6 (2012): 337. The word φίλος appears 29 times in the New Testament including 15 times in Luke (7:6, 34; 11:5 [twice], 6, 8; 12:4; 14:10, 12; 15:6, 9, 29; 16:9; 21:16; 23:12) and 3 times in Acts (10:24; 19:31; 27:3).

Naming theories abound, with others seeing Theophilus as a representative reader among Luke's target audience. The Greek etymology and Luke's emphasis on Gentile inclusion have led some to conclude that Theophilus represented a Gentile reader. While Theophilus was a common name that appeared in the papyri to refer to real people, some believe Luke used Theophilus as a generic name to represent his intended Gentile audience.<sup>28</sup> J. J. Kilgallen, for example, suggests that Theophilus was a foil to represent a prototypical reader living in Rome.<sup>29</sup> Halvor Moxnes argues that Luke's intent was to reach an urban audience of mixed ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds.<sup>30</sup> More recently, Robert Beck contends that Theophilus was a symbolic name given to a Gentile who feared God and was sympathetic to Judaism, much like the "God-fearing" centurions described in Luke's text.<sup>31</sup> These views share a common feature that Theophilus was not the real name of a historical individual.

### **Theophilus as a Historical Person**

Others argue that Theophilus was a historical person.<sup>32</sup> In favor of this view, Alexander points out that the name Theophilus was used by historical individuals and the ancient evidence suggests that texts were generally dedicated to real people, although

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(Note that the word appears twice in Luke 11:5.) The rest of the appearances are in John (6 times), 3 John (2 times), James (2 times), and Matthew (1 time).

<sup>28</sup> Cadbury points out that the name Theophilus appears in a range of papyri including a first century papyrus that refers to a politarch in Egypt (*P.Oxy.* 4.745) and third century BC papyri referring to a Pisidian (*P.Lille* 27) and a Thessalian (*P.Petrie* 1.19.30). Cadbury, "Commentary on the Preface of Luke," 507. Peter M. Head et al., "Papyrological Perspectives on Luke's Predecessors (Luke 1:1)," in *The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of B.W. Winter on His 65th Birthday*, ed. P. J. Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 34.

<sup>29</sup> J. J. Kilgallen, "Luke Wrote to Rome—A Suggestion," *Biblica* 88, no. 2 (2007): 251–55.

<sup>30</sup> Halvor Moxnes, "The Social Context of Luke's Community," *Interpretation* 48, no. 4 (1994): 379–89.

<sup>31</sup> Robert R. Beck, *A Light to the Centurions: Reading Luke-Acts in the Empire* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 1–24.

<sup>32</sup> Commenting on Luke 1:3, Erasmus takes Theophilus as "a person's proper name." Beth Kreitzer, ed., *Luke*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 5.

whether the dedicatee actually read the texts was another question. Moreover, the existence of some fictional dedications in ancient texts does not mean that all dedicatees were fictitious; rather, the fictional cases were imitations of the common practice of dedicating texts to real people.<sup>33</sup>

Many hold that Theophilus was a historical individual while disagreeing on his identity. Allen Brent argues that Theophilus lived in a context that exalted the imperial cult.<sup>34</sup> Arthur A. Just Jr. proposes that Theophilus was a catechumen from Philippi.<sup>35</sup> Others, following the tradition that Luke came from Antioch, believe that he wrote to a wealthy Christian named Theophilus of Antioch. An even bolder proposal comes from B. H. Streeter, who argues that Theophilus may have been a secret name for Titus Flavius Clemens, cousin of Emperor Domitian, who would have been interested in the faith of his Christian wife Domitilla. Streeter suggests that Luke-Acts was written as a defense of Christianity to the Roman aristocracy.<sup>36</sup>

Scholars who view Theophilus as a historical person typically describe him using three categories: literary patron, Jewish reader, or Roman official. These three categories, while not mutually exclusive, will be described next.

**Theophilus as a literary patron.** Many recent scholars view Theophilus as Luke's literary patron.<sup>37</sup> As Harry Gamble points out, the ancient world knew nothing of

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<sup>33</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke's Gospel*, 188.

<sup>34</sup> Allen Brent, "Luke-Acts and the Imperial Cult in Asia Minor," *Journal of Theological Studies* 48, no. 2 (1997): 411–38.

<sup>35</sup> Arthur A. Just Jr., "Luke's Canonical Criterion," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 79, no. 3–4 (2015): 245–60.

<sup>36</sup> Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 534–39. Several of the aforementioned views, and a few others, are summarized in Werner G. Marx, "A New Theophilus," *Evangelical Quarterly* 52 (1980): 18.

<sup>37</sup> David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 56; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 43; James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 10; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 63.



copyright laws that would provide financial benefit for authors. Thus, it was customary for ancient authors to finance their books through the “patronage of wealthy or influential persons.”<sup>38</sup> Alexander notes, however, that “the relationship between dedication and patronage is complex; not all dedicatees are patrons, and not all patrons receive a dedication.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, while the dedication to Theophilus does not require him to be a patron, Alexander suggests that it is plausible that “Theophilus could well be such a patron” for Luke.<sup>40</sup>

**Theophilus as a Jewish reader.** Others propose that Theophilus was Jewish. In support of this view, Alexander points out that while Theophilus was not a Roman name, the name was commonly used by Hellenized Jews.<sup>41</sup> J. A. Bengel suggests that the name “Theophilus” is a Greek translation of the Hebrew name תְּפִילִּיּוֹס (‘‘beloved of Yahweh’’). Bengel then proposes that Theophilus was none other than the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, whose Hebrew name תְּפִילִּיּוֹס could have been translated into Greek as ‘‘Theophilus.’’<sup>42</sup>

It is possible that Theophilus was a Jewish reader since ‘‘the name Theophilus occurs frequently from the third century B.C. on for both Jews and Greeks.’’<sup>43</sup> One notable example is Josephus’s *Jewish Antiquities* which mentions a Jewish high priest named Theophilus.<sup>44</sup> Citing Josephus, R. H. Anderson identifies Luke’s reader with the

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<sup>38</sup> Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 83.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 190.

<sup>40</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 191.

<sup>41</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 133. Among the examples cited by Alexander is the *Letter of Aristeas* 49. Benjamin G. Wright III, *Letter of Aristeas*, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature 8 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 166.

<sup>42</sup> Marx, ‘‘A New Theophilus,’’ 18. Marx cites Bengel’s *Ordo Temporum*.

<sup>43</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary 35A (Dallas: Word, 1989), 10.

<sup>44</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 18.123–24; 19.297 (Thackeray, LCL).

Theophilus who served as Jewish high priest between the years AD 37 to 41.<sup>45</sup> For Anderson, identifying Theophilus as high priest would suggest that Luke’s Gospel was meant to be circulated among a Jewish audience. While Anderson’s view is not the majority view, the existence of a high priest named Theophilus has been corroborated by archaeological evidence.<sup>46</sup>

**Theophilus as a Roman official.** So far, none of the views mentioned above have dealt with a critical clue that Luke provides regarding Theophilus. Luke addresses his reader as “most excellent” (κράτιστε, Luke 1:3), choosing a title that he uses elsewhere in Acts to address high ranking officials. In Acts 23:26, the term appears in official correspondence from Claudius Lysias to “most excellent [κράτιστω] governor Felix.” During Paul’s trial, the spokesman Tertullus addresses the governor as “most excellent [κράτιστε] Felix” (Acts 24:3). The title appears for the third time on the lips of Paul, while on trial before Felix’s successor, Porcius Festus. Standing before the governor, Paul employs the “most excellent [κράτιστε] Festus” (Acts 26:25). Thus, although the title κράτιστος occurs only once in Luke, it appears three times in Acts, each time as an honorific title for a Roman governor.

Writing in the eleventh century, the Greek archbishop Theophylact of Ohrid argues that Theophilus was most likely a senator or ruler (based on the title κράτιστε) and that any God-loving reader was also a “Theophilus” (see Origen’s view above).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> R. H. Anderson, “Theophilus: A Proposal,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (1997): 195–215.

<sup>46</sup> Dan Barag and David Flusser, “The Ossuary of Yehoḥanah Granddaughter of the High Priest Theophilus,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 36, no. 1/2 (1986): 39–44.

<sup>47</sup> Hermann Freiherr Von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments in ihrer Ältesten erreichbaren Textgestalt hergestellt auf grund ihrer Textgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1911), 324; Margaret M. Mitchell, “Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim That ‘The Gospels Were Written for All Christians,’” *New Testament Studies* 51, no. 1 (2005): 60–61.

On the significance of Theophylact’s commentaries, Brown writes, “Despite their eleventh-century date, the commentaries of Theophylact have often been accorded the same degree of respect as the writings of the earlier Greek fathers. Based on the commentaries of Chrysostom, but at the same time more concise and accessible, the work of Theophylact exercised a wide influence.” Andrew J. Brown, “The

Theophylact combines two of the theories on Theophilus, suggesting that he was a Roman official and that his name could also represent a prototypical reader. In his article in 1721, C. A. Heumann also contends that Theophilus was a Roman magistrate.<sup>48</sup> More recently, James Dunn suggests that Theophilus was “a man of some rank and influence.”<sup>49</sup> Werner Marx goes even further to speculate that Theophilus was none other than King Agrippa II and that Acts was written in an effort to persuade Agrippa to become a Christian (cf. Acts 26:28).<sup>50</sup> Since Agrippa II was Jewish, Marx’s suggestion combines the three views that Theophilus was a historical person, a Jewish reader, and a Roman official. Still others maintain that Theophilus was a Roman official, without specifically identifying him. Viewing Theophilus as a Roman official has the benefit of relying upon a clear literary argument based on the use of the word *κράτιστος* within the narrative of Luke-Acts. While the exact identity of Theophilus may not be possible to determine with absolute certainty, each of the proposals discussed above lends interesting insights into reading Luke-Acts.

In this thesis, I take the view that Theophilus was a high-ranking Roman official who may have also functioned as Luke’s literary patron. The attractiveness of this view is that it takes seriously the narrative context of Luke-Acts and assigns one consistent meaning to the word “most excellent” (*κράτιστος*) in all four of its occurrences in Luke-Acts.<sup>51</sup> If the honorific designation refers to Roman officials in the latter chapters of Acts (23:26; 24:3; 26:25) then the most natural reading would be to assign the same

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Gospel Commentary of Theophylact, and a Neglected Manuscript in Oxford,” *Novum Testamentum* 49, no. 2 (2007): 194.

<sup>48</sup> C. A. Heumann, “Dissertatio de Theophilo, cui Lucas historiam sacram inscripsit,” in *Bibliotheca Historico-Philologico-Theologica*, Classis IV, Fasciculus 3 (Bremen, 1721), 483–505.

<sup>49</sup> Dunn, *Acts*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Marx, “A New Theophilus.”

<sup>51</sup> Apart from these instances, the word is not used elsewhere in the entire New Testament.

meaning to its appearance in Luke 1:3 to describe Theophilus.<sup>52</sup> As a member of the Roman government, Theophilus was likely “either a Christian or a strong sympathizer” who had been previously taught about Jesus (Luke 1:4).<sup>53</sup> Although I take Theophilus to be a historical person, the name may have been a pseudonym to mask his true identity as an official. As will become clear later, this conclusion would lead to significant insights regarding Luke’s purposes for writing.

### Answering Objections

Admittedly, this interpretation is not without its problems. Alexander points out three significant objections to the view that Theophilus was a Roman official. Before concluding this section, I will respond to her three strongest objections.

**Objection 1: *κράτιστος* does not always refer to a superior.** Based on her survey of prefaces in ancient Greek literature, Alexander points out that the adjective *κράτιστος* does not always refer to a superior. For example, in his fourteen-volume work *Method of Medicine*, Galen (AD 129 to 216/217) uses various descriptors to address his reader Hieron. In the opening lines of the first three volumes, Galen addresses his reader as: “my dearest [*φίλτατε*] Hieron” (1.1), “most excellent [*κράτιστε*] Hieron” (2.1), and “O Hieron” (3.1).<sup>54</sup> Since the term *φίλτατε* (1.1) is “often used in letters to address a person lower in rank than oneself,” Alexander claims that Galen’s use of *κράτιστε* (2.1) does not necessarily imply that Hieron was Galen’s superior.<sup>55</sup> However, just because Galen used

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<sup>52</sup> It is worth noting that Luke does not use the “most excellent” title in the opening of Acts. This could be due to variations in writing style, similar to the variations observed in the ways Galen addresses his reader in the three volumes of his *Method of Medicine* (see discussion below). Alternatively, Bengel suggests, “The same title is not given to the same Theophilus in Acts i. 1, either because he was then in private life, or because his excellence and Luke’s intimacy with him had increased.” John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, ed. Andrew R. Fausset, 7th ed., vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1887), 4.

<sup>53</sup> Dunn, *Acts*, 10.

<sup>54</sup> Galen, *Method of Medicine*, 1.1; 2.1; 3.1 (Johnston and Horsley, LCL).

<sup>55</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 133.

φίλτατε and κράτιστε interchangeably does not mean that Luke also used his terms with such flexibility. In other words, just because κράτιστος “is not a strict indicator of rank” does not mean that it can never function as an indicator of rank.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the internal evidence of Luke-Acts shows consistent usage of κράτιστος to refer to a superior in all three of its appearances in Acts. Thus, without strong reason to think otherwise, the biblical reader would naturally expect κράτιστε to also refer to a superior in Luke 1:3.

**Objection 2: Theophilus was not a Roman name.** Alexander mentions a second reason for rejecting the assumption that Theophilus was a Roman. Her second objection is that Theophilus was a Greek name, rather than a Roman name, used among Hellenistic Jews.<sup>57</sup> If Theophilus was not a Roman name, then how could Theophilus have been a Roman official? Since Alexander rightly insists that Theophilus was a historical person, the Greek name would seem to rule out the possibility that Luke’s dedicatee was a Roman.<sup>58</sup> However, another possibility is that Luke used a pseudonym to address his reader. If Theophilus was indeed a Roman official who was sympathetic towards Christianity, it would be reasonable that he would want to mask his identity. As David Garland suggests, “it is possible that Theophilus, the friend of God, is an alias for a prominent Roman who needed to remain incognito.”<sup>59</sup>

**Objection 3: No evidence of Theophilus’s conversion.** Alexander’s final argument against identifying Theophilus as a Roman official is that early Christian tradition does not mention the conversion of such a prominent person. In Alexander’s view, this objection is a “more significant” issue than the prior two objections. Since

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<sup>56</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 188.

<sup>57</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 133.

<sup>58</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 188. Garland notes that if Theophilus was a fictitious reader, the adjective “most excellent” would seem out of place. Garland, *Luke*, 56.

<sup>59</sup> Garland, *Luke*, 56.

early Christians delighted in recounting “the conversion of prominent members of society,” Alexander thinks it unlikely that the historical records would have been silent on Theophilus’s conversion.<sup>60</sup> However, the lack of historical evidence does not rule out the possibility of an unnamed Roman official who was covertly considering the Christian faith.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, it was very common for Christians in the early church to write to their civil authorities. Luke’s address to a Roman official could have been a predecessor to the works of the second century apologists.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, my argument does not require that Theophilus was the real name of a public figure who was openly Christian. He could have been an official who was considering the claims of Christ, or a covert believer who chose to conceal his Christian identity for political or safety reasons.<sup>63</sup>

### **Luke’s Audiences**

The question of Theophilus’s identity falls within the broader discussion of the intended audiences of the Gospels. Did Luke write to a specific community, a general audience, or an individual? It turns out that not all of these categories are mutually exclusive.

### **Luke’s Broad Audience**

In his introductory essay to *The Gospels for All Christians*, Richard Bauckham argues that the Gospels were written for circulation among a general Christian audience. In this book, Bauckham and his colleagues refute the prevailing view (since the 1960s)

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<sup>60</sup> Alexander, *Preface to Luke’s Gospel*, 188.

<sup>61</sup> During the third century, Tertullian describes unnamed Christian men and women who were known to Scapula (proconsul of Carthage) and other Roman officials. Tertullian, *To Scapula* 4–5 (*ANF*, 3:107–8).

<sup>62</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4:3:1–3 (*NPNF*<sup>2</sup>, 1:175); Aristides, *Apology* (*ANF*, 9:263); Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 1 (*ANF*, 1:163); Justin Martyr, *2 Apology* 1 (*ANF*, 1:188); Tertullian, *To Scapula* (*ANF*, 3:105); Tertullian, *Apology* 1.1 (*ANF*, 3:17).

<sup>63</sup> Jennifer M. Creamer, Aida B. Spencer, and Francois P. Viljoen, “Who Is Theophilus? Discovering the Original Reader of Luke-Acts,” *In Die Skriflig* 48, no. 1 (2014): 3.

that each Gospel author wrote to address the specific concerns of his own local Christian community.<sup>64</sup> In one article, Michael Thompson argues that although early Christians lived in local communities, frequent travel and communication across communities would have facilitated rapid distribution of Christian literature to new localities.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, the Gospel writers would have expected such distribution since their own ministries probably spanned many geographical regions.<sup>66</sup> Rather than being written for a so-called “Lukan community” it is more probable that Luke-Acts was intended for broad circulation amongst all Christians.

### **Luke’s Narrow Audience**

By affirming Bauckham’s thesis that the Gospels were written for distribution among all Christians, it is not necessary to rule out the possibility of a Gospel also being addressed to a specific recipient. In the case of Luke’s Gospel, the identification of a broad or narrow audience is not an either-or decision. As Isak du Plessis points out, Luke’s Gospel should be treated somewhat differently than the other three canonical Gospels because Luke explicitly addresses an individual, Theophilus. In other words, while Luke’s Gospel was likely intended to be circulated among a general audience, it was first addressed to an individual.<sup>67</sup> Thus, while Bauckham is right that the third Gospel was not addressed to a so-called “Lukan community,” it is still important to

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<sup>64</sup> Richard Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?,” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 10–11. For examples of the “community audience” view of Luke, see Moxnes, “The Social Context of Luke’s Community”; Kilgallen, “Luke Wrote to Rome—A Suggestion.”

<sup>65</sup> Michael B. Thompson, “The Holy Internet: Communication Between Churches in the First Christian Generation,” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 49–70.

<sup>66</sup> Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?,” 44.

<sup>67</sup> “As far as Luke is concerned one need, therefore, not really ‘reconstruct’ his first audience. . . Even though it is most probable that Luke’s Gospel was meant for a wider public/audience, it was in the first place directed to an individual – different from the other three Gospels.” Isak J du Plessis, “The Lukan Audience—Rediscovered? Some Reactions to Bauckham’s Theory,” *Neotestamentica* 34, no. 2 (2000): 259. See also Mitchell, “Patristic Counter-Evidence,” 60–61.

recognize that Luke addressed his work to Theophilus. Luke evidently wrote first to Theophilus; however, the very fact that he took the time to write a *book* suggests that he expected his work to be circulated to “Greek-speaking Christians everywhere.”<sup>68</sup>

### **Luke’s Dual Audience**

Luke wrote to a dual audience: first to Theophilus, and second to the wider Christian world.<sup>69</sup> The notion of a dual audience is consistent with what we know of book production in the ancient world. It was common for a recipient of a book to provide personal copies to friends who would then make their copy available to others who would make further copies.<sup>70</sup> The publication and circulation of a book would typically proceed among the social networks of people interested in literature, who were typically upper class individuals with the time and leisure to read.<sup>71</sup> If Theophilus was indeed Luke’s patron, he would be expected to disseminate the work to a broader audience of readers.<sup>72</sup> In other words, the dedication to Theophilus would have likely provided a “more elevated audience for the book in addition to its normal networks of communication.”<sup>73</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Who was Theophilus? Although the answer to this question is admittedly speculative, internal evidence within Luke-Acts suggests that Theophilus was a high-ranking Roman official who was considering the claims of Christianity. At the same time,

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<sup>68</sup> Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?,” 30.

<sup>69</sup> Craig Keener sees the audience of Acts as both Theophilus (Luke’s literary patron) and the broader audiences who would gather to hear the reading of the book. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2015), 1:424.

<sup>70</sup> Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, 84–85.

<sup>71</sup> Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, 85.

<sup>72</sup> Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, 102.

<sup>73</sup> Loveday Alexander, “Ancient Book Production and the Gospels,” in *The Gospels for All Christians*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 104.



there is sufficient evidence that Luke-Acts was meant for more than just Theophilus's eyes alone. Instead, as Bauckham argues, Luke would have assumed that his text would be disseminated to a broad Christian readership. Theophilus would have been expected to serve as a patron, whether officially or otherwise, who could initiate the circulation of the book to a broader Christian audience, including those among the "literate or governing classes in some parts of the Empire."<sup>74</sup>

Despite the objections raised by Alexander, a close reading of Luke-Acts points towards identifying Theophilus as a high-ranking Roman official. Although the existence of conflicting historical evidence presents serious challenges to this view, I am choosing to weigh the internal evidence of Luke-Acts more heavily than the external evidence of ancient Greco-Roman literature. Not only are there valid answers to each of Alexander's objections, but the internal evidence of Luke-Acts also reveals a strong emphasis upon the Roman Empire and its centurions, among other officials. Such an emphasis is consistent with Luke's dedication to a Roman official. In the next chapter, I will look more closely at each of these centurions.

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<sup>74</sup> Dunn, *Acts*, 10.

### CHAPTER 3

#### CENTURIONS IN LUKE-ACTS

In the previous chapter, I argued that Theophilus was a high-ranking Roman official who was either a Christian sympathizer or convert. In this chapter, I will examine every instance where centurions appear in Luke-Acts. I will show that centurions play critical roles in Luke's narrative and represent the entryway for the gospel to reach the Gentiles. At key junctures in the narrative, centurions facilitate the spread of the gospel across ethnic and geographic boundaries from Jerusalem to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Although some recent works on Luke-Acts have dealt with the role of centurions and soldiers, most authors give only passing attention to centurions. Given the relative paucity of scholarship on centurions in Luke-Acts, readers may be surprised to discover that centurions appear at five points in the narrative. Perhaps even more striking is that each of these centurions plays a positive role in the gospel's advance among all types of people. For example, centurions are the first Gentile converts in both Luke's Gospel (Luke 7:1–10) and the book of Acts (Acts 10). Throughout the rest of Luke-Acts, centurions are unexpected proponents of the gospel during the crucifixion of Jesus and in the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to the end of the earth. The positive role of so many centurions in Luke-Acts would have piqued the interest of the Roman official Theophilus, and we will look to potential implications of this in the next chapter. Before looking to the centurions in the present chapter, I will briefly situate this discussion within the broader conversation on Luke-Acts. I will consider three key areas: literary themes, prior work on centurions, and historical background related to centurions.

## Themes of Luke-Acts

As a two-volume work, Luke and Acts exhibit a narrative unity around a common message.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have attempted to summarize the theology of Luke-Acts under an overarching theme such as salvation through Jesus (Marshall), the purpose of God (Tannehill), or Gentile inclusion (Bock).<sup>2</sup> Since many have written on the theology of Luke and Acts, I will provide only a brief summary of two key themes relating to our study on Roman officials.<sup>3</sup> The two themes I will discuss in this section are (1) Jesus, the Savior for all kinds of people and (2) geographical movement in Luke-Acts.

### Jesus, the Savior for All Kinds of People

The Gospel of Luke is known for its emphasis on Gentile inclusion. Luke's account highlights many instances where the gospel transcends ethnic boundaries and socioeconomic classes. From the outset of his account, Luke's Gospel consistently emphasizes the inclusion of the marginalized, including women (1:26–56; 2:36–38; 7:11–17; 8:1–3); shepherds (2:8–20); tax collectors (3:12–13; 5:27–32; 15:1–2; 18:9–14; 19:1–10); Roman soldiers (3:14); the poor (4:18; 6:20; 7:22); and the sick (4:18, 38–41; 6:17–19). Luke purposefully shows that the gospel is for *all* kinds of people—whether Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, male or female, young or old, outsider or insider. One way Luke makes this emphasis is by constructing pairs of adjacent narratives that focus upon

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<sup>1</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), xiii–xiv, 1–12.

<sup>2</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 19; Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1986, 1:xiii; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 1.

Others, such as Robert H. Stein, suggest that there is no single purpose that explains why Luke wrote his two-volume work. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary 24 (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 35.

Drawing the themes of Luke-Acts into a Trinitarian shape, Patrick Schreiner views the two-volume work as unfolding the Father's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Patrick Schreiner, *The Mission of the Triune God: A Theology of Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 16.

<sup>3</sup> For a helpful study on the theology of Luke-Acts, see Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

opposite types of people. For example, Luke’s birth narrative interweaves angelic announcements to Mary (1:26–56; 2:1ff.) and Zechariah (1:5–25; 2:57–80). While Stein points out Luke’s tendency to pair narratives that juxtapose men and women, I would argue that this pattern extends to other categories besides male and female.<sup>4</sup> For example, Mary is not only a woman, but she is also a young person of unknown socioeconomic background (1:27). In contrast, Zechariah is an older man who is described as righteous, blameless, and of Aaronic lineage (1:5–7). By interweaving their birth accounts, Luke shows that the gospel is for all types of people regardless of social status.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, while Luke’s Gospel is known for its emphasis on the marginalized, it also features salvation of the wealthy (19:1–10; cf. Acts 4:36–37) and people of high social status (8:3; 23:50).<sup>6</sup> As we will see, the gospel is also for Roman officials.

### **Geographical Movement in Luke-Acts**

Geographical movement is another important theme that unites Luke and Acts. While Luke’s Gospel emphasizes movement towards Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), the movement in Acts proceeds outward from Jerusalem to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Indeed, Luke’s account of Jesus and the church is “a story full of purposeful movement.”<sup>7</sup> To follow Jesus entails joining God’s mission and going wherever he leads.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Stein, *Luke*, 376n156. Stein lists the following pairs of narratives: Luke 1:5–25 and 1:26–38; 2:25–35 and 2:36–38; 4:31–37 and 4:38–39; 7:1–10 and 7:11–17; 8:26–39 and 8:40–56; 15:4–7 and 15:8–10. To Stein’s list, I would also add Luke 7:36–49 which is a single narrative that juxtaposes the forgiven woman and Simon the Pharisee.

<sup>5</sup> For more examples of paired narratives featuring opposite types of people, compare: the prayers of the persistent widow (18:2–7) and the penitent tax collector (18:9–14); the blind beggar (18:35–43) and rich Zacchaeus (19:1–10); the widow-devouring scribes (20:45–47) and the generous poor widow (21:1–4); and the resurrection sightings by the women (24:1–12) and the male disciples (24:13–35).

<sup>6</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 510.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Joel B. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts: Divine Action, Human Cognition, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 68–69.

**Luke's Gospel: From Jerusalem to Jerusalem.** Luke's narrative begins and ends in Jerusalem. At the beginning of the Gospel, Zechariah receives a prophetic message while fulfilling his priestly duties at the temple (Luke 1:5–25). The Gospel ends with the disciples “continually in the temple blessing God” (24:53). In the retelling of Jesus's childhood journey to Jerusalem, the highlight of the story is that Jesus remained in the temple after his family left (2:41–51). Indeed, Jesus's desire to remain “in [his] Father's house” (2:49) foreshadows his later journey where he resolutely “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (9:51).<sup>9</sup> A significant portion of the Gospel narrative (9:51–19:27) describes Jesus's journey towards the city where he would suffer, die, and be raised to life. In Jerusalem, Jesus would elucidate his stance towards Caesar (20:19–26) before standing on trial before Jewish and Roman officials (22:47–23:49).

**Acts: From Jerusalem to the end of the earth.** Like its prequel, the book of Acts also begins in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4). Following his resurrection, Jesus commands his disciples to remain in the city until the Holy Spirit would empower them to be his “witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (1:8). Figuratively speaking, the gospel reaches “the end of the earth” when Paul arrives in Rome and preaches unhindered for two years (Acts 28:16–31). As is commonly recognized, Acts 1:8 forms the theme verse of the entire book. The geographical movement of the gospel would bring the good news to the Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire (cf. Luke 2:32). At various stages of geographical expansion, the gospel would encounter a mixed response of opposition and reception from the established leadership of that region. The final move towards Rome is initiated at Caesarea, when Paul appeals to the most powerful official of the empire, Caesar (Acts 25:8–12; 26:32).

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<sup>9</sup> As Richard Hays points out, the Jerusalem journey motif shows that Jesus is on a journey that is “neither aimless nor unmapped.” Moreover, Luke calls his audience “to understand itself as *participating in a journey*, an exodus to a promised destination not yet reached. Such a journey entails suffering, risk, and sacrifice.” Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 134.

Despite being offered a chance to return to Jerusalem, Paul insists upon standing before Caesar (25:9–11). Later in this chapter, I will demonstrate the important roles of Roman centurions in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles and to the heart of the Roman Empire.

### **Prior Work on Centurions in Luke-Acts**

Most scholars of Luke-Acts have paid relatively little attention to centurions. Perhaps it is because the Lukan corpus is so rich in theological themes that most general works on Luke-Acts make only passing references to centurions.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, some scholars have pointed out the unexpected positive role of centurions in Luke-Acts. Daniel Marguerat, for example, cites the “chain of centurions” as an example of Luke’s use of narrative chains to show “the continuity and progression of the narrative.”<sup>11</sup> Though Marguerat is right to point out the positive roles of centurions as men of exemplary faith and protectors of the apostle Paul, his discussion is limited to just one paragraph. In the conclusion to his article on God-fearers in Luke-Acts, Martinus de Boer points out that the God-fearers in Luke 7 and Acts 10 are both centurions and suggests that more work is needed to elucidate the significance of this observation.<sup>12</sup>

Fortunately, some Lukan scholars have begun to pay more attention to centurions. One natural place where centurions have been discussed is within the context of studies on Gentiles or God-fearers within Luke-Acts.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in recent years, a

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<sup>10</sup> Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*; Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*; Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts*; Steve Walton, “The State They Were In: Luke’s View of the Roman Empire,” in *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*, ed. Peter Oakes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 19–23.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Marguerat, *The First Christian Historian: Writing the “Acts of the Apostles,”* Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 121 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 52.

<sup>12</sup> Martinus C. de Boer, “God-Fearers in Luke-Acts,” in *Luke’s Literary Achievement: Collected Essays*, ed. C. M. Tuckett, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 116 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 68.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Henry Madison Gerstmyer, “The Gentiles in Luke-Acts: Characterization and Allusion in the Lukan Narrative” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1995); de Boer, “God-Fearers in Luke-Acts,” 51–52. Robert R. Beck, *A Light to the Centurions: Reading Luke-Acts in the Empire* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 23.

growing number of articles, monographs, and dissertations have focused upon centurions or soldiers in Luke-Acts. Some of these works focus on one or two specific passages (typically Luke 7:1–10; 23:47; or Acts 10:1–11:18).<sup>14</sup> Others situate centurions within the broader theme of the Roman Empire in Luke-Acts.<sup>15</sup>

I will briefly survey a few representative works before placing my contribution within the context of these prior works. Focusing especially upon Luke 7:1–10 and Acts 10:1–11:18, Oleksandr Kyrychenko argues that centurions were viewed as the principal representatives of Roman power and that Luke portrays centurions as prototypical Gentile believers in anticipation of Christian mission to the empire.<sup>16</sup> In her study on soldiers in Luke-Acts, Laurena Brink argues that Luke characterizes soldiers according to stereotypes but then contradicts those stereotypes by presenting the centurion of Capernaum (Luke 7:1–10) and Cornelius (Acts 10) as examples of military characters who were capable of repentance and discipleship.<sup>17</sup> Bonnie Flessen studies Cornelius as a model male figure and argues for his importance in the author’s rhetoric regarding gender and empire.<sup>18</sup> Justin Howell sees Luke’s “seemingly” positive portrayal of Cornelius as “rhetorical irony (i.e., applying to a character traits that are contrary to reality)” and stresses that his confession of Jesus as “Lord of All” (Acts 10:34) points Luke’s reader

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<sup>14</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, “Luke’s Motives for Redaction in the Account of the Double Delegation in Luke 7:1–10,” *Novum Testamentum* 36, no. 2 (1994): 122–45; Matthew C. Easter, “‘Certainly This Man Was Righteous’ Highlighting a Messianic Reading of the Centurion’s Confession in Luke 23:47,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 63, no. 1 (2012): 35–51; Justin R. Howell, “The Imperial Authority and Benefaction of Centurions and Acts 10.34–43: A Response to C. Kavin Rowe,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31, no. 1 (2008): 25–51; Bonnie J. Flessen, *An Exemplary Man: Cornelius and Characterization in Acts 10* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Oleksandr Kyrychenko, *The Roman Army and the Expansion of the Gospel: The Role of the Centurion in Luke-Acts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Kenneth Wayne Yates, “Centurions in Luke/Acts” (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2014); Laurena Ann Brink, “Unmet Expectations: The Literary Portrayal of Soldiers in Luke-Acts” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2009); Beck, *Light to the Centurions*.

<sup>16</sup> Kyrychenko, *Roman Army and the Expansion of the Gospel*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Brink, “Unmet Expectations,” 63–64. Brink focuses on the role of soldiers in the narrative and does not necessarily believe these soldiers were historical figures.

<sup>18</sup> Flessen, *An Exemplary Man*.

(presumably a Gentile authority or benefactor) to give allegiance to Jesus over the emperor.<sup>19</sup> As a final example, Christopher Zeichmann provides a helpful historical overview of the Roman military while identifying the positive role of soldiers in his discussion on Luke-Acts.<sup>20</sup> Despite making helpful observations on the roles of centurions in the narrative, some of these scholars either believe Luke is covertly criticizing Rome (Howell) or do not hold firmly to the historical accuracy of Luke's accounts (Brink, Zeichmann).

Though each makes their own unique contributions, none of the above works focuses on the significance of the centurions for Luke's reader, Theophilus.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, even scholars who make this connection are not necessarily convinced that Theophilus was a Roman official.<sup>22</sup> While drawing upon earlier works, I aim to make a new contribution by explicitly pulling together (1) the motif of centurions in Luke-Acts, (2) the significance of these centurions for Theophilus as a Roman official, and (3)

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<sup>19</sup> Howell, "Imperial Authority and Benefaction of Centurions," 25, 45–46. Although Howell makes many helpful points, I remain unconvinced that Luke's positive characterization of Cornelius was meant as a veiled criticism of the centurion. While I agree with Howell that Luke's image of a "centurion noted for his generosity directly counters depictions of centurions in other literary texts," I disagree that "this must represent another instance of Lukan irony" that is intended as a "covert criticism" of Roman authorities (Howell, "Imperial Authority and Benefaction of Centurions," 42–43.). However, even if I grant Howell's argument, the text emphasizes that Cornelius becomes a disciple regardless of his background prior to conversion (Acts 10:15, 44–48; 11:17–18).

<sup>20</sup> Christopher B. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018), 75–92. Like Brink, Zeichmann at times too easily concedes Luke's historical accuracy. For example, he suggests that Luke fabricated certain details, such as Cornelius's and Julius's identification with the Italian and Augustan cohorts (Acts 10:1; 27:1) and Paul's Roman citizenship (21:39). Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 84, 86, 90. In Zeichmann's view, "Acts defies a 'realistic' reading" and instead shows signs of literary embellishment. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 91.

<sup>21</sup> Howell's article seems to make this connection, though his discussion is naturally limited in scope due to length constraints of a typical journal article.

<sup>22</sup> Witherington mentions that Theophilus would perhaps connect the centurion accounts of Luke 7 and Acts 10. However, while Witherington believes Theophilus was a person of high social status, he remains unconvinced that Theophilus was a Roman official. Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 13–14, 347.



implications for reading Luke-Acts in relation to the Roman Empire.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, I will uphold the historical reliability of Luke's accounts as I bring these three themes together.

### **Centurions in Luke-Acts: A Historical Sketch**

The New Testament's portrayal of the military is complex and varied. This is due in part to the intricacies of the Roman Empire and the different administrative statuses granted to Galilee and Judaea during the times of Luke-Acts. Moreover, the military did not always consist of Roman citizens and sometimes included regional natives (such as Jews) who were working towards Roman citizenship. In this section, I will provide a brief overview of the military with a focus upon the regions of Galilee and Judaea featured in Luke-Acts. Along the way, I will argue that the centurions in Luke-Acts were most likely Gentiles.<sup>24</sup>

#### **Overview of the Military**

Before we look more specifically at centurions, it is helpful to get an overview of the types of military forces who served in the Roman East during the New Testament period. The military can be classified into four broad categories: legionaries, auxiliaries, royal forces, and the praetorian guard.<sup>25</sup> Of these categories, auxiliaries and royal forces are most relevant for our study of the types of soldiers that appear in Luke-Acts. To aid in understanding these soldiers, it is helpful to briefly describe all four groups.

Legionary soldiers were directly employed by Rome and were loyal to the emperor rather than any local kingdom. Legionaries were Roman citizens prior to their

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<sup>23</sup> The current chapter focuses on centurions in Luke-Acts while the next chapter will cover the significance to Theophilus and implications for reading Luke-Acts in relation to the Roman Empire.

<sup>24</sup> At first glance, one might think all Roman soldiers were Gentiles. However, the military often included locals. Thus, in the regions of Galilee and Judaea, it was at least possible that some soldiers would be Jewish.

<sup>25</sup> My descriptions of these four categories are largely based on Zeichmann's very helpful work. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 1–3.

recruitment to the military and were generally stationed in major Roman provinces. Since Judaea was not a major province until after the Jewish War, there were no Roman legionaries stationed in Judaea until around AD 66.

Auxiliary soldiers also served Rome, although auxiliaries were mostly non-citizens who would receive Roman citizenship as a reward for military service. Until around AD 70, most auxiliary soldiers were locals serving within their home province.<sup>26</sup> Auxiliaries were significantly less Romanized than legionaries, and would speak local languages, such as Aramaic, in addition to Greek and some Latin. Auxiliaries could either be stationed in major provinces alongside legionaries or in minor provinces such as pre-war Judaea which did not have legionaries.

Royal forces did not directly serve Rome but were loyal to their local client king, for example, Antipas in Galilee and, prior to him, Herod the Great in Judaea. Though not official provinces of the empire, client kingdoms were allies of Rome located at the fringes of the empire. Soldiers in the royal forces would help secure the boundaries of the empire, but their client kings lacked the authority to award them with Roman citizenship. Royal forces spoke the local languages of their region and had little vested interest in Roman culture.

The praetorian guard was a final group of elite soldiers who served as the emperor's personal military. They were a smaller group of soldiers and the only military group that served in the region of Italia.

A centurion would lead the basic subunit of soldiers in the legionaries and auxiliaries. Centurions also served in the Herodian royal armies, which were organized in a similar manner as the Roman military.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> After a series of uprisings (including the Jewish War of AD 66 to 73), there was a concerted effort to relocate soldiers away from their home areas to mitigate ethnic uprisings. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 13.

## **Administrative Regions and the Military**

In Luke-Acts, centurions appear in Capernaum, Jerusalem, and Caesarea. Within this geographical region, different cities fell under different administrative jurisdictions.<sup>28</sup> During the time of Jesus's ministry, Capernaum belonged to the client kingdom of Galilee. Meanwhile, Jerusalem and Caesarea were part of Judaea, which was officially part of Rome (as an equestrian sub-province of Roman Syria) during much of the period covered by Luke-Acts.

**Galilee.** During the years of Jesus's ministry, the region of Galilee was a client kingdom under the tetrarch Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great. The royal army of Galilee included a small number of troops inherited from the royal troops of Herod the Great, who had ruled the client kingdom of Judaea (which at the time included Galilee) from 37 BC to 4 BC. Roman auxiliaries did not serve in Galilee until AD 44.<sup>29</sup>

**Judaea.**<sup>30</sup> Judaea was annexed by the Roman province of Syria and became an equestrian sub-province of Rome from AD 6 to 70 (except between AD 41–44 when Agrippa I ruled as a client king).<sup>31</sup> When Judaea was annexed by Rome in AD 6, the Judaeans auxiliaries were formed from the royal forces of Herod Archelaus, whose army came from Herod the Great's royal forces. These forces included a mixture of Roman

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<sup>28</sup> In this section, I lean heavily upon Zeichmann's helpful chart which presents a timeline of the military in Palestine from 66 BC to AD 135, with a special focus on Capernaum. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 32–33.

<sup>29</sup> A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, Sarum Lectures 1960–1961 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 123–24.

<sup>30</sup> I use the Roman spelling "Judaea" to refer to the administrative region covering Judea, Idumaea, and Samaria (which included the cities of Jerusalem, Joppa, Caesarea, and Sebaste/Samaria) that came under Roman rule in AD 6. Hannah M. Cotton, "Some Aspects of the Roman Administration of Judaea/Syria-Palaestina," in *Lokale Autonomie Und Ordnungsmacht in Den Kaiserzeitlichen Provinzen Vom 1. Bis 3. Jahrhundert*, ed. Werner Eck (Berlin: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2009), 75.

<sup>31</sup> Judaea briefly returned to being a client kingdom from AD 41–44 when Galilee and Betanaea were reunified with the Judaeans kingdom under King Agrippa I. In AD 70, Judaea became a Praetorian Roman province. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 32–33.

citizens and non-citizens, including some who served in exchange for citizenship rights.<sup>32</sup> The Judaeen auxiliaries were comprised of five *cohortes* (infantry units) and one *ala* (cavalry unit).<sup>33</sup> These troops bore the name *Sebastenorum* because they were mainly recruited out of the Roman cities of Sebaste (formerly Samaria) and Caesarea. Since many ethnic Syrians lived in these cities, over time, most of the Judaeen auxiliaries were ethnic Syrians who were culturally Hellenized.<sup>34</sup> The ethnic makeup of the auxiliaries is debated and seemed to include both Gentiles and Jews. To complicate the ethnicity question even further, some of the Jewish auxiliaries apparently took Roman names upon enlisting, even if they were not citizens.<sup>35</sup> Judaeen auxiliary soldiers held a wide variety of non-combat job duties, including civic construction (cf. Luke 7:4–5) and arbitrating justice among local civilians (cf. Luke 23:47).<sup>36</sup> Though there is evidence of extortion by soldiers (cf. Luke 3:14), there are also reports of low-level officers serving as benefactors for their local communities (cf. Luke 7:4–5).<sup>37</sup>

### Centurions in the Military

Centurions were officers in charge of about eighty soldiers who together formed the basic subunit of the legionaries or auxiliaries.<sup>38</sup> In pre-war Judaea, centurions

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<sup>32</sup> Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 10–11.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher B. Zeichmann, “Military Forces in Judaea 6–130 CE: The Status Quaestionis and Relevance for New Testament Studies,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 17, no. 1 (2018): 95.

<sup>34</sup> Josephus repeatedly suggests that the Judaeen auxiliaries were mostly of Syrian descent. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 5; Zeichmann, “Military Forces in Judaea 6–130 CE,” 95. In opposition to Josephus, Steve Mason, Jonathan Roth, and others suggest that the Judaeen auxiliaries were mainly comprised of Jews and Samaritans. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 16n1.

<sup>35</sup> Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 6–7.

<sup>36</sup> Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 19–41.

<sup>37</sup> Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 28–29, 39.

<sup>38</sup> Zeichmann points out that though a centurion’s subunit nominally consisted of one hundred men, in practice they often included around eighty soldiers. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 13.

would be expected to communicate in the local languages of their troops (Aramaic or Greek) and their superiors (Latin or Greek). A centurion would have typically climbed the ranks through personal achievement over a period of ten to twenty years, although a man of high social status could sometimes be directly appointed as a centurion. For most centurions, the promotion process was based on a variety of factors including personality, education, linguistic ability, relational skills, and socioeconomic background.<sup>39</sup>

In his description of Herod the Great's funeral service, Josephus indicates that soldiers came from various ethnicities.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, since Luke-Acts describes centurions from various regions (Galilee, Jerusalem, Caesarea), we cannot automatically infer their Gentile ethnicity based on their position as centurions. However, by combining historical studies with textual information within Luke-Acts, we have good reasons to believe that although some soldiers in the region were Jewish, the centurions portrayed in Luke-Acts were most likely Gentiles. I will discuss their Gentile identity on a case-by-case basis as we look to each centurion.

### **Convert at Capernaum (Luke 7:1–10)**

The centurion at Capernaum is the first Gentile convert described in the Gospel of Luke. Up to this point in Luke's account, Jesus's ministry has been centered around the Galilee region where he preached in synagogues (Luke 4:15–37, 44; 6:6–11), exorcised demons (4:33–37, 41), healed the sick (4:37–40; 5:12–15, 17–26; 6:6–11), and called his first disciples (5:1–11, 27–32). Although Jesus's ministry began to draw people from as far as Tyre and Sidon (6:17), there have been no descriptions so far of individual

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<sup>39</sup> Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 13–15.

<sup>40</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 17.198–99 (Thackeray, LCL).

Gentile converts.<sup>41</sup> The centurion at Capernaum plays a critical role in the narrative as the firstfruit of the fulfillment of Simeon's prophecy of salvation to the Gentiles (2:32).<sup>42</sup>

Luke indicates that the centurion is a Gentile even though historians suggest that the Romans did not serve in Galilee until AD 44. Though there were probably few Gentiles serving in Antipas's royal army in pre-war Galilee, nevertheless, Zeichmann affirms that "the situation is not difficult to imagine" and argues for the plausibility of a Gentile centurion serving in Capernaum, which was located at an international border.<sup>43</sup> The centurion's non-Jewish ethnicity is emphasized by the Jewish elders, who attest that the centurion is "worthy" of Jesus's attention because "he loves our nation and . . . built us our synagogue" (7:4–5). The Jewish elders' emphasis on "our nation" implies that this centurion was not Jewish.<sup>44</sup> Despite being a Gentile, the centurion had good rapport with the Jews and held sufficient social status to send a group of their leaders as his messengers.<sup>45</sup> The Jewish elders lauded the centurion for his role as a benefactor of their local synagogue.<sup>46</sup> While these local synagogue leaders claimed that the centurion was worthy of Jesus's help (7:4–5), the centurion's second envoy of friends pleaded his unworthiness to have Jesus come under his roof (7:6).<sup>47</sup> The narrative presents a contrast

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<sup>41</sup> In Joel Green's study of conversion in Luke-Acts, he chooses to begin with the call of the disciples in Luke 5:1–11, 27–32. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts*, 88–91.

<sup>42</sup> Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 213.

<sup>43</sup> Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 67–68. While Zeichmann believes the interaction between Jesus and the centurion probably did occur, he nevertheless suggests that Luke may have fabricated parts of the story. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 78.

<sup>44</sup> Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1986, 1:114.

<sup>45</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson points out that these were local Galilean elders (not elders who sat in the Sanhedrin) and that they were not sent under compulsion but as grateful patrons of the centurion. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina 3 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 117. Darrell Bock emphasizes the centurion as an exemplar of respectful Jew-Gentile relationships, an important theme in Lukan theology. Bock, *Luke*, 1:637.

<sup>46</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 280; Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 117.

<sup>47</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 280.

between the Jews' works-based approach to Jesus, and the centurion's awareness that salvation is by grace. While the Jews point to the centurion's good works, Jesus points to the centurion's underlying faith as the matter of utmost importance.<sup>48</sup> The humble Gentile centurion recognizes Jesus's authority (7:7–8), demonstrating a level of faith that Jesus had not found in Israel (7:9). Moreover, the centurion is an example of one who believes in Jesus without having seen him (cf. 1 Pet 1:8; John 20:29).<sup>49</sup>

The conversion of the centurion parallels Elisha's cleansing of Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:27; cf. 2 Kgs 5:1–27). Like the centurion, Naaman was a commander of a foreign army who was highly regarded by others. In addition to several similarities cited by James Edwards (both are Gentiles, both have servants, both send emissaries, both change their minds), the centurion at Capernaum represents a striking contrast to Naaman.<sup>50</sup> In contrast to Naaman who became angry at Elisha for not coming to him, the centurion expressed his unworthiness for Jesus to come to him. Whereas Naaman sought to repay the prophet for his miraculous healing, the centurion approached Jesus in humble faith rather than relying on his own merits.

Such exemplary faith is unexpectedly found in a Gentile centurion. As Edwards points out, a centurion loyal to Herod Antipas would not automatically be considered a safe inquirer of Jesus (cf. Luke 3:19–20; 9:9; 13:31; 23:11).<sup>51</sup> While the centurion is the first Gentile convert in Luke's Gospel, he is not the first soldier to appear

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<sup>48</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 277.

<sup>49</sup> "Clearly this would encourage members of the Gentile churches who had not seen Jesus, but had received the gospel through Jewish messengers." Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 155. See also Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 278; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the New Testament (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 82.

<sup>50</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 278. Marshall cites 2 Kings 5:10 and Naaman's faith prior to seeing Elisha but does not draw out further parallels to the centurion. Although Edwards and Talbert point out similarities between Jesus's ministry and the Elijah/Elisha tradition, the analysis of contrasts is my own. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 217; Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 81.

<sup>51</sup> Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 210.

in the narrative. In fact, soldiers have already been portrayed positively, albeit indirectly. During John the Baptist’s ministry, Luke points out that soldiers came to repent and were exhorted to change their lifestyle by not extorting others and being content with their wages (3:14).<sup>52</sup> Thus, the centurion represents one example of a soldier who embodied a repentant lifestyle.<sup>53</sup> Luke portrays him as a moral and sensitive man who cared for his “dear” or “esteemed” servant (7:2).<sup>54</sup> The centurion is respected by others in his local community, and his financial generosity towards the Jewish synagogue suggests that contentment—rather than extortion—was the pattern of his life. Like Jesus’s first disciples, the centurion was a convert to the way of Christ, even if Luke did not explicitly narrate the exact moment of his repentance. The centurion at Capernaum is just the first among several centurions to appear in Luke’s narrative.

### **Confession at Calvary (Luke 23:47)**

The second centurion in Luke’s Gospel appears at Jesus’s crucifixion. It is plausible that the centurion at the cross would be a Gentile since Roman auxiliaries had been in Judaea since AD 6.<sup>55</sup> As was the case in Luke 7:1–10, this centurion is not the first soldier to appear in the immediate context (cf. 3:14). Just before his crucifixion, Jesus stood on trial and was mocked by Herod’s soldiers (23:11). Moreover, as Jesus hung upon the cross, the soldiers mocked him, saying, “If you are the King of the Jews,

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<sup>52</sup> Beck, *Light to the Centurions*, 170.

<sup>53</sup> Green suggests that the centurion was converted prior to Luke 7:1–10 since he already embodied faithful beliefs and practices consistent with Jesus’s message. Whether the centurion was converted before or during the encounter described in Luke 7:1–10 does not affect my argument that he was the first Gentile convert presented in Luke’s Gospel. See Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts*, 49.

<sup>54</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 1:636. Some have even suggested that the centurion had a homosexual relationship with his “dear” servant. For a helpful rebuttal from a historical perspective, see Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 68–70, 78.

<sup>55</sup> Kyrychenko, *Roman Army and the Expansion of the Gospel*, 144. Even if we admit a mixed military consisting of Jews, Samaritans, and Syrians, the military was becoming increasingly Syrian between the years of AD 6 to 70. Zeichmann, who believes that Jews and Samaritans likely formed the majority of Herod’s royal army, also points out the increased Syrian presence in the Judaeian auxiliaries during the time period leading up to the Jewish War (which began in AD 66). Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 3–4.



save yourself!” (23:37). Based on these verses, it is likely that the centurion in charge of the crucifixion either participated in (or was at least complicit with) the ridicule of Jesus. The mockery of the soldiers called into question Jesus’s messianic identity in ways that echoed Satan’s wilderness temptations (cf. 4:3, 9). Given the circumstances, the reader would not expect to find support for Jesus in the centurion who oversaw the crucifixion.

Surprisingly, upon Jesus’s death, it is the centurion who first recognizes Jesus’s identity, declaring, “Certainly this man was righteous!” (δικαιος, 23:47).<sup>56</sup> Though the word δικαιος could be translated “innocent” (RSV), in this context, δικαιος conveys the more theologically weighty notion of righteousness, which nonetheless includes innocence.<sup>57</sup> Thus, Luke portrays the centurion as the one who casts the final word on Jesus’s life, declaring him to be righteous.<sup>58</sup> The centurion’s words are significant because Jesus’s righteousness becomes an important motif in the early church’s evangelistic preaching in Acts. The centurion at the cross is the forerunner for Peter (Acts 3:14), Stephen (7:52), and Paul (22:14), who will also proclaim Jesus as “the righteous one.”<sup>59</sup> The centurion’s confession is important because it is the first instance in Luke-Acts where Jesus is called δικαιος.<sup>60</sup>

The centurion’s confession demonstrates a dramatic turn from mockery to faith. The centurion’s response of praise (δοξάζω, Luke 23:47) is one of Luke’s favorite

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<sup>56</sup> David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 929.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 382; François Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 328.

Robert Karris helpfully points out that nowhere else in Luke-Acts does the word δικαιος mean “innocent.” For example, in the surrounding context, the *dikai*-root is used twice, both times meaning “righteous” (cf. “justly” in 23:41, “righteous” in 23:50). Robert J. Karris, “Luke 23:47 and the Lucan View of Jesus’ Death,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 1 (1986): 66.

<sup>58</sup> Kyrychenko, *Roman Army and the Expansion of the Gospel*, 149.

<sup>59</sup> Easter, “Certainly This Man Was Righteous,” 43–45. These verses account for three of the six of the occurrences of δικαιος in Acts.

<sup>60</sup> Easter, “Certainly This Man Was Righteous,” 39.

ways of describing a person's positive response to divine activity and can be viewed here as the centurion's realization of Jesus's divine identity. While the reader might expect one of Jesus's friends (cf. 23:49) to be the first to recognize the theological significance of the crucifixion, Luke instead shows that the centurion was the first person to give "praise to God for the way in which Jesus died."<sup>61</sup> As Garland suggests, the centurion's change of heart was an answer to Jesus's prayer on behalf of his executioners (23:34; cf. 6:28).<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, the centurion's confession is the precursor for a movement of mourning among the crowd (Luke 23:47–48).<sup>63</sup> However, scholars dispute whether the crowds were repentant or merely remorseful.<sup>64</sup> In favor of the former view, the phrase "beating their breasts" (τύπτοντες τὰ στήθη, 23:48) is used elsewhere to indicate humble repentance (cf. 18:13).<sup>65</sup> Bock aptly suggests that the crowd was moved to contrition and that at least some among them may have been seeking gracious forgiveness for what they had done.<sup>66</sup> In response to Jesus's prayer and the centurion's declaration, the onlookers were moved toward a similar confession of Jesus's righteousness. Thus, the Roman centurion at the cross is significant because he is "one of the first characters to recognize this crucified Jesus as the Messiah."<sup>67</sup> The official at the cross exhibits the same type of faith as the centurion at Capernaum and becomes the first among many in Luke-Acts

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<sup>61</sup> On *δοξάζω*, see Luke 2:20; 4:15; 5:25, 26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43; Acts 4:21; 11:18; 13:48; 21:20. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 876; Easter, "Certainly This Man Was Righteous," 51.

<sup>62</sup> Garland, *Luke*, 929.

<sup>63</sup> Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1986, 1:273.

<sup>64</sup> Marshall believes that the crowds were remorseful but not repentant (Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 877.). Others see the remorse of the Jerusalem crowd as a precursor for their repentance at Pentecost (Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 382.).

<sup>65</sup> Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 877; Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 382.

<sup>66</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1865.

<sup>67</sup> Easter, "Certainly This Man Was Righteous," 51.

whose verbal proclamation would lead others to believe in Jesus, the crucified (and soon to be risen) Lord.

### **Conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10:1–11:18)**

Among the centurions in Luke-Acts, Cornelius receives the most attention in the narrative. As the first Gentile convert in Acts, Cornelius plays a pivotal role in the spread of the gospel across geographic and ethnic boundaries (Acts 11:1, 18; cf. 1:8).<sup>68</sup> In the prior chapters of Acts, the early church had begun in Jerusalem before persecution forced believers to scatter and bring the gospel to Judea and Samaria (8:1–25; 9:31). After the Holy Spirit's outpouring in Jerusalem (2:1–11) and Samaria (8:14–17), Cornelius and his family are the first Gentiles to receive the Holy Spirit (10:45). Cornelius is the only Gentile to receive a vision in Luke-Acts, and his conversion reflects the sovereign hand of God to break through the resistance of both Peter and the Jerusalem church towards the acceptance of Gentiles.<sup>69</sup>

The significance of Cornelius's conversion is attested in the way that Luke draws out the story through reiteration.<sup>70</sup> No other Gentile conversion account in Luke-Acts is told with such deliberate detail and repetition.<sup>71</sup> Similar to Luke's recounting of Paul's conversion, Cornelius's conversion is initially narrated from two perspectives

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<sup>68</sup> As Barrett points out, the Ethiopian eunuch was an earlier Christian convert who was not ethnically Jewish. However, the eunuch was not a Gentile since he had already converted to Judaism and "had come to Jerusalem to worship" (Acts 8:27). C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 491.

While Tannehill does not see Cornelius as the first Gentile convert in Acts, he nevertheless considers Cornelius's conversion a "breakthrough for Gentile mission" because "the conversion of the Ethiopian was a private and isolated event" that did not have as much of an impact on the following narrative (as Acts 15 makes clear). Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), 137.

<sup>69</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 162, 164.

<sup>70</sup> Gaventa, *Acts*, 162–63. Gaventa helpfully outlines Acts 10:1–11:18 as a sequence of parallel scenes.

<sup>71</sup> Stephen G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 23 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 177.

(Peter's and Cornelius's, Acts 10:1–48) before being retold (11:4–18).<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the Cornelius account forms a “narrative chain” with the centurions at Capernaum (Luke 7:1–10) and Calvary (Luke 23:47).<sup>73</sup> Like the centurion at Capernaum, Cornelius's non-Jewish background is implied by his messengers who describe their master as “well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation” (Acts 10:22; cf. Luke 7:5). Peter likewise implies that Cornelius is from “another nation” (10:28). Cornelius's Gentile background is consistent with his residence at Caesarea, a Roman outpost whose populace was primarily Gentile.<sup>74</sup> Though some Caesarean Jews served as Roman auxiliary soldiers, Luke repeatedly emphasizes that Cornelius was a Gentile.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, as a centurion belonging to the “Italian cohort” (10:1), Cornelius is portrayed as a representative of Rome.<sup>76</sup>

As we saw with the centurion at Capernaum (Luke 7:5), Cornelius's generosity towards “the people” (Acts 10:2) is consistent with the repentance and eschewal of

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<sup>72</sup> Luke uses a similar scheme to emphasize the importance of Paul's conversion (Acts 9:1–19) which he initially narrates from two perspectives (Paul's and Ananias's) and later repeats two more times (22:6–21; 26:12–18). Both Paul's and Cornelius's conversions also feature the literary device of a double vision. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 182.

Ronald Witherup provides an insightful discussion on the use of repetition in the accounts of Cornelius's conversion. Ronald D. Witherup, “Cornelius Over and Over and Over Again: ‘Functional Redundancy’ in the Acts of the Apostles,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 15, no. 49 (1993): 45–66.

<sup>73</sup> Marguerat, *First Christian Historian*, 52–53.

<sup>74</sup> Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 191.

<sup>75</sup> Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 5.

<sup>76</sup> Although some scholars question whether Cornelius could have belonged to the “Italian cohort” (10:1), others have put forth plausible explanations for how either the entire cohort (or just their centurion) could be present in Caesarea at this time. Michael P. Speidel, “The Roman Army in Judaea Under the Procurators: The Italian and Augustan Cohort in the Acts of the Apostles,” *Ancient Society* 13/14 (1982–1983): 237; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2015), 2:1737–42; Witherington III, *Acts*, 347.

Zeichmann, on the other hand, is not convinced that the Italian cohort was present in the region prior to AD 69 (when we have evidence of their presence in nearby Syria). Zeichmann suggests that Luke fabricated the details about the Italian cohort (10:1) and the Augustan cohort (27:1). Despite many strengths, one weakness of Zeichmann's work is his readiness to compromise at times on historical accuracy even when plausible alternative explanations exist. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 84, 90.

extortion preached by John the Baptist (Luke 3:14).<sup>77</sup> Cornelius is described as a “devout man who feared God” and “prayed continually to God” (Acts 10:2). Though a Gentile, Cornelius followed some Jewish practices, even if he was not circumcised (Acts 11:3) or converted to Judaism.<sup>78</sup> Cornelius is in fact the first among many Christian sympathizers whom Luke describes variously as God fearers (cf. 13:16, 26), devout people (cf. 13:50; 17:4, 17), or worshipers of God (cf. 16:14; 18:7).<sup>79</sup> Thus, Cornelius is the forerunner for a particular type of Gentile whose sympathies towards Judaism have prepared them to receive the gospel message.<sup>80</sup>

The account of Acts 10 describes the conversion of Cornelius and not merely the Holy Spirit’s coming upon one who had previously converted. Although Cornelius was a devout man, several features of the account point towards conversion, including Peter’s evangelistic sermon (10:34–43), the response of water baptism (10:47–48), and the threefold emphasis on forgiveness (10:43), repentance (11:18), and salvation (11:14). Moreover, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius, his relatives, and his close friends (cf. 10:24) echoes Pentecost (10:47; cf. 2:17).<sup>81</sup> This was a watershed moment that Joseph Fitzmyer aptly termed a “Pentecost of the Gentiles.”<sup>82</sup> In this case, the outpouring of the Spirit coincided with the moment of conversion.

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<sup>77</sup> Both Johnson and Gaventa suggest that “the people” refers to Israel (cf. 2:47; 3:9; 6:8). Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 182; Gaventa, *Acts*, 164.

<sup>78</sup> Luke uses the word “proselytes” to refer to converts to Judaism (cf. 2:11; 6:5; 13:43). Gerstmyer, “Gentiles in Luke-Acts,” 333; de Boer, “God-Fearers in Luke-Acts,” 54–55.

<sup>79</sup> Gaventa, *Acts*, 164; de Boer, “God-Fearers in Luke-Acts,” 52–53. Scholars debate whether “God fearer” was a technical term referring to Gentiles who were sympathetic towards Judaism. In any case, as de Boer points out, Gentile sympathizers are also attested by Philo and Josephus. de Boer, “God-Fearers in Luke-Acts,” 58–59.

<sup>80</sup> Gerstmyer, “Gentiles in Luke-Acts,” 349.

<sup>81</sup> Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1990, 2:142–43.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 31 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 460.

The conversion of Cornelius also helps to mark a transition where Luke shifts his focus from Peter to Paul. Peter would soon be imprisoned (Acts 12:1–19) and would fade into the background of the narrative. The next time Peter appears is at the Jerusalem Council where he affirms Gentile inclusion by once again alluding to Cornelius’s conversion (Acts 15:7–11). Starting in Acts 13, however, the focus of the narrative shifts towards Paul’s ministry.

### **Conflict and Citizenship (Acts 21:27–23:35; 24:23)**

After the conversion of Cornelius, the gospel continued to find reception amongst Gentiles, including some who were previously sympathetic towards Judaism (Acts 13:12, 46–49; 14:1, 27; 16:14–15, 30–34; 17:12, 34). Nevertheless, people tended to have a polarized response to the gospel, and it was often the Jews (though sometimes Gentiles also) who opposed the gospel (Acts 13:45; 14:2, 5, 19; 17:5; 18:12). As was the case with Jesus and the Jews (Luke 23:18–23), the mounting tensions between Paul and the Jews would reach a tipping point as the scene shifts towards one final trip to Jerusalem.<sup>83</sup> Upon completing his missionary journeys throughout Asia Minor, Paul determined to go to Jerusalem, even if imprisonment and death should await him there (Acts 21:13; cf. Luke 9:51). The gospel had reached people from many nations in Asia Minor, but before it could truly reach “the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8), Paul would need to pass through Jerusalem one final time.

It was during Paul’s tense visit to Jerusalem that we encounter a collection of pericopes containing centurions (Acts 21:27–23:35; 24:23; 27:1–44).<sup>84</sup> Since some of these pericopes may deal with the same centurions, I will treat them together as a group. The auxiliary soldiers at Jerusalem would have been garrisoned at the Antonia Fortress

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<sup>83</sup> Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 382.

<sup>84</sup> Regarding Acts 21:31, Johnson comments, “From this point on in the narrative Paul will have almost constant contact with the Roman military.” Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 382.

near the northwest corner of the temple complex.<sup>85</sup> As in the case of the centurion at the cross (Luke 23:47), it is plausible that the centurions who interacted with Paul in Jerusalem would be Gentiles (Acts 21:27–36; 23:17, 23–35). Since Judaea was annexed by the Roman province of Syria in AD 6, the Roman auxiliaries in major cities like Jerusalem and Caesarea would have likely become increasingly Romanized (cf. Acts 22:28) in the ensuing decades. These ostensibly non-Jewish centurions each play important protective roles for Paul, and we will now briefly look at each pericope in order.

### **Rescue by Binding (Acts 21:27–36)**

Paul spent about one week in Jerusalem before the Jews from Asia came to stir up the crowds against him (Acts 21:27). The whole city was stirred up, and an angry mob dragged Paul out of the temple and was seeking to kill him (21:30–31). When the commander of the military heard this, he took soldiers and centurions to stop the crowds from beating Paul (21:32). The commander, whom we later learn is named Claudius Lysias (23:26), and his centurions play an important role in protecting Paul’s life from the Jews throughout his time in Jerusalem (cf. 23:10).

Ironically, the way the centurions save Paul’s life is by binding (δεθῆναι) him in chains and removing him from the mob (21:33). The actions of the centurions are significant because the verb “to bind” (δέομαι) plays an important role in the overall narrative of Paul’s final visit to Jerusalem. At Ephesus, Paul informed the elders that he was “bound [δεδεμένος] by the Spirit” (20:22) to go to Jerusalem even though he knew that imprisonment awaited him there. During Paul’s final stop in Caesarea, the local believers and Agabus dramatically attempted to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem, where he would be bound and delivered up to the Gentiles (21:11, where δέομαι appears

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<sup>85</sup> Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 86; Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 382.

twice). Yet, Paul reaffirmed that he was “ready not only to be bound [δεθῆναι], but even to die” (21:13) in Jerusalem for the sake of Christ. The binding of Paul by the centurions enables the fulfillment of Agabus’s prophecy and creates an opportunity for Paul to preach the gospel in Aramaic to the Jews at Jerusalem (22:1–21). Paul’s defense, however, is cut short when the mob is incited again and the tribune orders Paul to be brought back to the barracks where he would be examined by flogging (22:22–24).

### **Asserting Citizenship Rights (Acts 22:25–26)**

As the soldiers prepare to punish him, Paul initiates a conversation with their centurion supervisor (Acts 22:25). This centurion would have been among the centurions who had earlier rescued Paul from the mob (21:32). Since we did not hear the voices of any of the centurions in the prior pericope, Acts 22:25–26 is the first instance where we hear directly from one of them. The conversation centers upon Paul’s status as a Roman citizen, a point to which Paul had alluded in his earlier conversation with the commander (21:39; cf. 16:37–39).<sup>86</sup> In contrast with his commander who ordered Paul to be flogged despite knowing that he was a citizen of Tarsus, the centurion immediately recognizes the impropriety of such punishment and raises the issue of Paul’s citizenship to his commander (22:26). Lysias’s subsequent letter to Felix conveniently omits Paul’s near flogging, and Lysias claims that he rescued Paul upon learning of his Roman citizenship.<sup>87</sup> Unlike Lysias, who demonstrates the common “tendency of those in political power structures to shade the truth for self-protection,” the centurion is portrayed in a wholly positive light.<sup>88</sup> Similar to the centurion at the cross who declared

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<sup>86</sup> Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 391–92.

<sup>87</sup> Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1990, 2:295. Later in the narrative, the commander will also evade direct responsibility by punting Paul’s case to the governor (Acts 23:23–30). In Keener’s view, Claudius Lysias is sympathetic, but ultimately prefers politics over justice. Keener, *Acts*, 3:3339.

<sup>88</sup> Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1990, 2:295.



Jesus was righteous (Luke 23:47), this centurion testifies that Paul is a Roman citizen.<sup>89</sup> The centurion's move triggered his commander to stop the flogging and to ensure a proper trial for Paul (Acts 22:27–30).<sup>90</sup> The centurion thus plays an important role in asserting Paul's citizenship rights, initiating a process that would culminate in Paul's appeal to Caesar and his trip to the heart of the empire (Acts 25:11–12).

### **Thwarting and Escorting (Acts 23:17, 23; 24:23)**

In Acts 23:12–35, Paul's life is once again in danger. The narrative focuses upon the actions of unexpected characters—including a centurion—who rescue Paul yet again.<sup>91</sup> After learning that Paul is a Roman citizen, the commander allows Paul to address the Jewish high priests and council (22:30). Paul's speech to the council leads to another uproar and, once again, the commander and his soldiers rescue the apostle (23:10). While Paul is protected in the barracks, the Jews hatch a murder plot involving forty men (23:12–15). When Paul's nephew discovers the plot to murder Paul, the apostle calls a centurion to bring the young informant to Lysias the commander (23:17). Without knowing the reason for approaching the commander, the centurion complies with Paul's request.<sup>92</sup> Consistent with the rest of the centurions in Luke-Acts, this centurion responds favorably by escorting Paul's nephew to his commander.<sup>93</sup> Lysias responds by immediately dispatching two of his centurions along with hundreds of troops to escort Paul towards Caesarea by night (23:23).<sup>94</sup> Due to the volatility of Paul's situation, Lysias

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<sup>89</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:3250.

<sup>90</sup> In the ensuing conversation, we learn that the commander purchased his citizenship while Paul was born a citizen (Acts 22:28).

<sup>91</sup> Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1990, 2:293.

<sup>92</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 3:3316.

<sup>93</sup> Throughout this account, Paul's status was gradually being elevated to the point where he could now dispatch a centurion despite being a prisoner. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 404.

<sup>94</sup> Zeichmann suggests that the number of troops would represent nearly half of the troops

sends an entire entourage by night to discreetly escort Paul to safety in Antipatris before some of the troops would continue with Paul to complete their journey to Caesarea on the following day (23:31–32).<sup>95</sup>

After Paul's stay in Caesarea was extended, Felix put him in custody under yet another centurion. Under orders from Felix, the centurion facilitates Paul's liberty to host visitors who would provide for his needs (24:23; cf. 21:7–14). As was the case with the previous centurions in Luke-Acts, this centurion plays a positive role in the narrative by granting Paul significant freedom while in custody. After two years in Caesarea under Felix (24:27), Paul stands before the new governor Festus who offers to send Paul back to Jerusalem (25:9). Rather than return to Jerusalem, Paul appeals to Caesar (25:11–12) and is heard by Agrippa (26:1–32) before being sent by boat towards Italy.

### **Capitulate or Capsize (Acts 27:1–44)**

As in the pericope of Paul's rescue from ambush (Acts 23:12–35), Paul plays a less prominent role in Luke's description of his sea voyage. While Paul appears at critical moments in the narrative, other characters, including a centurion, play important roles in this pericope.<sup>96</sup> At the start of the sea voyage, Julius, a centurion of the Augustan cohort (σπείρης Σεβαστῆς), assumes custody over Paul and some other prisoners (27:1).<sup>97</sup> Julius's importance in the narrative is suggested by the fact that he is one of only two

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under Claudius Lysias's charge. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 89. Keener summarizes the case for the plausibility of this number of troops, and suggests that the absence of the soldiers at Antonia would hardly be felt since they would only be away for one night. Keener, *Acts*, 3:3321–23.

<sup>95</sup> Witherington III, *Acts*, 697. Antipatris (Acts 23:31) was a site of Roman auxiliary barracks and would have been the logical place for the troops to stop to spend the night midway between Jerusalem and Caesarea. Located in predominately Gentile territory, it would be a safe place to leave behind the infantry. Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. Conrad H. Gempf, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 49 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 128. Keener, *Acts*, 1:205.

<sup>96</sup> Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1990, 2:330.

<sup>97</sup> The Augustan cohort is attested in Syria during the first century, though an auxiliary cohort could also bear the name as an honorific title. Another possibility is that Σεβαστῆς refers to a cohort under Agrippa I who derived its name from the city of Sebaste (Samaria). Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 445.

centurions (the other being Cornelius) who is named in Luke-Acts. Though we cannot be certain of his ethnicity, Julius's name and position would be fitting for a Roman.<sup>98</sup>

We quickly learn that "Julius treated Paul kindly" (φιλανθρώπως, 27:3), indicating that he is a person of good character. As Johnson points out, the adverb φιλανθρώπως and its cognate φιλανθρωπία (cf. Titus 3:4) were used rarely in the New Testament, although in Hellenistic literature the words frequently refer to people known for high ethics and civilized behavior.<sup>99</sup> Like the previous centurion at Caesarea (Acts 24:23), Julius permits Paul to visit his friends while their ship was at port in Sidon (27:3). A few stops later, the centurion transfers Paul, his travel companions (cf. 27:2), and the rest of the prisoners (cf. 27:1, 42) to another boat headed for Italy (27:6). As Paul advises the centurion, this latter part of their sea voyage would become dangerous (27:10). The friendly relationship of trust between Julius and Paul will play a vital role in keeping their ship from capsizing.<sup>100</sup>

Julius's favorable disposition towards Paul is consistent throughout the voyage, with one exception where he listens to the owner of the ship rather than trusting Paul's guidance (27:11).<sup>101</sup> Eventually, Paul's prediction would prove true, and the centurion would change his demeanor and listen to Paul. At a critical moment when the boat approaches a rocky shore, the situation becomes so dire that some sailors seek to escape in a smaller boat (27:30). At Paul's word, however, the centurion and soldiers remain in the boat, trusting that their lives would be spared by their capitulation to Paul

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<sup>98</sup> The name "Julius" was common both to emperor Tiberius (whose name included "Julius" and who died in AD 16) and Gaius Caligula (also Julius, who died in AD 41). Keener, *Acts*, 4:357In138. Despite Julius's name, some scholars remain unconvinced that he was Roman. While I tend to think Julius was a Roman, there is, nevertheless, evidence that some Jews served in the Roman army at Caesarea. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament*, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 445.

<sup>100</sup> Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1990, 2:331.

<sup>101</sup> Among the centurions in Luke-Acts, Julius is the only one to be portrayed negatively, albeit briefly.

(27:31–32). Finally, after the boat shipwrecks upon the shore, Julius stops the soldiers from killing the prisoners because he wants to save Paul (27:43). Although Julius previously doubted Paul’s predictions, by the end of the journey, the centurion trusts Paul and takes risky actions to save Paul’s life.

“Salvation” (σώζω in 27:20, 31 and σωτηρία in 27:34) is a key motif throughout the sea voyage narrative. Although referring to physical safety in this context, the motif ties the sea voyage into the broader theme of salvation in Luke-Acts.<sup>102</sup> For this reason, Tannehill sees a spiritual metaphor played out in the sea narrative. Paul and his companions comprise a small Christian contingent on the boat, but there is hope for all on the boat to be saved if they would trust God’s Word spoken through Paul (27:25). The centurion plays a critical leadership role by ensuring different parties on the ship—soldiers, sailors, prisoners, and Christians—work together so that “dangers would be avoided and the ship would be finally saved.”<sup>103</sup> In this way, Julius demonstrates how a Roman official could enable cooperation for the greater good in situations where Christians form a small minority of the overall population. Moreover, Julius facilitates Paul’s safe journey towards Rome where he would fulfill the Lord’s promise that his followers would be his witnesses to “the end of the earth” (1:8).

### Conclusion

Centurions serve as proponents of the gospel throughout Luke-Acts. The centurion at Capernaum (Luke 7:1–10) is a forerunner for Gentiles who would humbly recognize their need for Jesus’s salvation. By declaring “surely this man was righteous” (Luke 23:47), the centurion at the cross initiates a movement of repentant mourning

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<sup>102</sup> Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 455; Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 94–102. Throughout Luke-Acts σώζω and σωτηρία can refer to either physical healing or salvation from sin through repentance and faith in Jesus (Luke 1:77; Acts 2:21; 4:12; 16:30–31). The verb σώζω often refers to physical healing in ways that are often closely related to spiritual salvation by faith (Luke 7:50; 8:12, 48, 40; Acts 4:9).

<sup>103</sup> Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1990, 2:338.

among the crowds and becomes a forerunner of Peter, Stephen, and Paul, who preached Jesus as the “righteous one” during key sermons in Acts. Cornelius (Acts 10:1ff.) is a precursor of subsequent Gentile God-fearers in Acts who would also profess faith in Jesus.

Upon Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem, centurions frequently serve as his protectors. These centurions help to thwart a murder plot and serve as an armed guard to escort Paul safely to his trial in Caesarea. Their presence in the narrative helps to show God’s providential hand in leading Paul to “testify also in Rome” (Acts 23:11). By repeatedly saving Paul’s life and asserting his citizenship rights, the Jerusalem centurions are instrumental to moving Paul along towards testifying before the “highest religious and political authorities of the region.”<sup>104</sup> At Caesarea, the centurion in charge of Paul facilitates his liberty to receive guests (Acts 24:23). Finally, Julius plays a key role in preserving Paul’s life and leading him safely to Rome while ensuring that both believers and the non-Christian majority work together for the common good (Acts 27:1–28).

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<sup>104</sup> Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 1990, 2:285.

## CHAPTER 4

### ROMAN OFFICIALS AS THE “MOST EXCELLENT” PROONENTS OF THE GOSPEL

In the previous two chapters, I argued that (1) Luke’s first reader Theophilus was most likely a high-ranking Roman official who was at least sympathetic to the gospel and (2) Luke-Acts consistently portrays centurions as supporters of the gospel’s advance amongst Gentiles in general, and especially amongst Roman officials. In this chapter, I will draw these two strands together to explore Luke’s motives for emphasizing centurions in his account to Theophilus.

My thesis is that one of Luke’s purposes is to show the appropriateness of a Roman official becoming a proponent of the gospel. For Theophilus and other Roman officials who might read Luke-Acts, the centurions would serve as excellent models for how one might become a proponent of the gospel while remaining embedded in the Roman establishment. The clearest way to advocate for the gospel would be to become a follower of Jesus, as some centurions do (Luke 7:1–10; 23:47; Acts 10:1–11:18). However, even a non-believing official could become a proponent of the gospel by treating Christians fairly and facilitating the spread of the gospel “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). As we saw in Acts, centurions protect Paul from danger, assert his citizenship rights, and escort him towards Rome (Acts 21:27–36; 22:25–26; 23:17, 23; 24:23)—while encouraging believers and non-believers to work together for their common good (27:1–44).

Besides the centurions described in chapter 3, where else can we find examples of government officials as proponents of the gospel? What tensions would be felt by a Christian who was embedded within the Roman establishment? In this chapter, I will

present additional evidence from the rest of Luke-Acts and early church history. Before turning to the evidence, I will begin the chapter by surveying the broader theme of the Roman Empire in Luke-Acts. I will give a brief overview of major views and present my view within the context of a broader scholarly conversation.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Roman Empire in Luke-Acts**

Among the four Gospels, Luke's Gospel is the only one to mention a Roman emperor by name. Early in the narrative, Luke presents Jesus's birth in the context of Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1), who ruled as emperor from 31 BC to AD 14. The beginning of John the Baptist's ministry is likewise placed during the rule of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1; AD 14–37).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the book of Acts mentions Emperor Claudius by name (Acts 11:28; 18:2; AD 41–54) and alludes to Emperors Caligula (AD 37–41) and Nero (AD 54–68) using the titles "Augustus" (25:21, 25; cf. 27:1) and "Caesar" (17:7; 25:8, 10, 11, 12, 21; 26:32; 27:24; 28:19).<sup>3</sup> Viewed as a whole, the entire narrative of Luke-Acts is framed in reference to the Roman emperors who appear at both the beginning (Luke 2:1; 3:1) and end (Acts 27:24; 28:19) of the two-volume work.

Along with the emperor, Luke's Gospel also mentions several other representatives of Rome. In some instances, representatives of Rome are portrayed

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<sup>1</sup> For helpful surveys of major views see Steve Walton, "The State They Were In: Luke's View of the Roman Empire," in *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*, ed. Peter Oakes (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 1–41; Dean Pinter, "The Gospel of Luke and the Roman Empire," in *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies*, ed. Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 101–15; C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3–4.

<sup>2</sup> Pinter, "The Gospel of Luke and the Roman Empire," 104–5; Walton, "The State They Were In," 16. Each of the synoptic Gospels mentions Caesar in the encounter regarding taxes (Matt 22:17–21; Mark 12:14–17; Luke 20:22–25). The Gospels of Luke and John both mention Caesar on the lips of the Jews who accuse Jesus of being disloyal to Rome (Luke 23:2; John 19:12–15).

<sup>3</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, "Luke-Acts A Mixed Population Seeks a Home in the Roman Empire," in *Images of Empire*, ed. Loveday Alexander, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 206–7; Walton, "The State They Were In," 16.

positively, while other cases seem to show that Rome was at odds with the early church.<sup>4</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, Roman centurions are consistently portrayed positively (Luke 7:1–10; 23:47) despite the poor reputation of Roman soldiers (3:14, 23:11). Similarly, we find positive examples of Roman tax collectors (5:27–28; 18:9–14; 19:1–10) despite their bad reputation (3:12; 5:30; 15:1; 18:11; 19:7). Among those in the empire’s higher ranks, Herod the Tetrarch is hostile toward John the Baptist and Jesus (3:19–20; 9:7–9; 13:31) and Pilate is violent towards the Galileans (13:1; 23:1–25). While Roman officials are often depicted as neutral or positive, the Herodians in particular are portrayed more negatively.<sup>5</sup>

In Luke’s Gospel, the most ambivalent portrayal of Roman rule occurs in Jesus’s trial narrative. The trial shows both Roman support and opposition toward Jesus within a single passage. Pontius Pilate provides a powerful picture of one Roman governor who finds no fault with Jesus. After sending Jesus to be tried by Herod Antipas, Pilate proposes three times to the Jews that he would flog Jesus and send him away (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). Earlier in the narrative, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, who likewise found no fault in Jesus (23:15). Thus, on the one hand, Pilate sees Jesus’s innocence and seeks to acquit him (23:4, 14, 22). On the other hand, Herod and his soldiers mock Jesus, and Pilate ultimately hands over Jesus for execution (23:24–25). While it is true that Pilate acted under pressure from the Jews, a legal system that punishes the innocent could hardly be worthy of endorsement.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Pinter, “The Gospel of Luke and the Roman Empire,” 104.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Rackham points out an exception to Luke’s negative portrayal of the Herods. “Of all these Herods, Agrippa II comes out the best.” Richard Belward Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen, 1919), 458. Based on Rackham’s comment, Marx argues that “Theophilus” was a pseudonym for Agrippa II. Werner G. Marx, “A New Theophilus,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 52 (1980): 19.

<sup>6</sup> Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 149; Walton, “The State They Were In,” 20, 22–23.



Such ambivalence towards Roman representatives continues in the narrative of Paul's trial described in the book of Acts.<sup>7</sup> After hearing Paul's defense, Felix is indecisive (Acts 24:22), fearful (24:25), and wants a bribe (24:26). Similarly, Festus is passive (25:26–27) and, along with Agrippa, declares that Paul had done nothing wrong (26:31–32). In the end, Paul appeals to Caesar because he realizes that he has little chance for a fair trial before the Roman governors.<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere in Acts, Herod Agrippa I fiercely persecutes early Christian leaders (12:1–23), consistent with the antagonism of Herod Antipas in Luke's Gospel. Despite these negative examples, the book of Acts also presents several positive examples of Roman officials including Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Paphos who becomes a believer (13:7), as well as the various centurions discussed in chapter 2 (10:1–11:18; 21:27–23:35; 24:23; 27:1–44).

### Major Scholarly Views

Given the mixed portrayal of Rome in Luke-Acts, it is not surprising that scholars have debated the relationship between the church and the Roman Empire in Luke-Acts. Until the late twentieth century, most scholars followed C. A. Heumann's view that Luke-Acts was written to a Roman official (Theophilus) as an *apologia pro ecclesia* to show that Christianity was politically harmless and to defend Christians against their Roman accusers.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Paul Walaskay turned the apologetic view

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<sup>7</sup> Harry Tajra explains the complexity of Luke's portrayal of Roman and Jewish authorities. "Luke tries hard to cast the Roman authorities in as favourable a light as possible. He can thereby demonstrate the inherent justice of the Roman system of law, which he sharply contrasts to the basic injustice and violence of Paul's Jewish foes (especially the Sadducean wing of the Sanhedrin)." Harry W. Tajra, *The Trial of St. Paul: A Juridical Exegesis of the Second Half of the Acts of the Apostles*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2, Reihe 35 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 199.

<sup>8</sup> In Tajra's view, "The appeal to Caesar is the central event on which Luke's whole account of Paul's legal history turns." Tajra, *Trial of St. Paul*, 197.

<sup>9</sup> C. A. Heumann, "Dissertatio de Theophilo, cui Lucas historiam sacram inscripsit," in *Bibliotheca Historico-Philologico-Theologica*, Classis IV, Fasciculus 3 (Bremen, 1721), 483–505. For a brief summary of Heumann's argument, see Alexandru Neagoe, *The Trial of the Gospel: An Apologetic*

upside down by arguing that Luke wrote Luke-Acts as a pro-Roman document to teach Christians to integrate with the empire.<sup>10</sup> C. Kavin Rowe, on the other hand, argues that Luke intended to write neither an apology for or against Rome, but instead sought to subvert the empire by presenting Christianity as an entirely different way of life. In Rowe's words, "Christianity is not a governmental takeover but an alternative and salvific way of life" that calls people to view the world based on Jesus's lordship.<sup>11</sup>

Steve Walton helpfully summarizes five major perspectives on Luke's depiction of the relationship between Christians and the state.<sup>12</sup> Different scholars view Luke-Acts as either: (1) a political apology on behalf of the church addressed to Roman officials (Heumann), (2) an apology for Rome addressed to believers (Walaskay, Robbins), (3) legitimation for Romans to believe in Jesus (Esler, Witherington), (4) guidance for believers on trial for their beliefs (Cassidy), or (5) an apolitical work (Jervell).<sup>13</sup> To Walton's five views, one might add a sixth view: that Luke-Acts calls for allegiance to Jesus as Lord and subverts the Roman way of life (Rowe). The reason for such disparate views is that the evidence presents a mixed picture of the Roman Empire.

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*Reading of Luke's Trial Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 10.

Indeed, the Roman governor Pliny the Younger, writing around the year AD 112, provides evidence for accusations against Christians near Pontus (cf. 1 Pet 2:12). Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 1–30.

<sup>10</sup> Paul W. Walaskay, "And So We Came to Rome": *The Political Perspective of St. Luke*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 49 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 15–37.

<sup>11</sup> Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 136.

<sup>12</sup> Walton, "The State They Were In," 2–12.

<sup>13</sup> Heumann, "Dissertatio de Theophilo"; Walaskay, *And So We Came to Rome*; Robbins, "Luke-Acts A Mixed Population Seeks a Home in the Roman Empire"; Philip Francis Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 57 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 37, 809–12; Richard J. Cassidy, *Society and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 145–70; Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15–16, 100–106.

## **A Proposal**

I agree with Rowe that Luke wrote to present an alternative way of life where Jesus is honored as Lord of all. However, while Rowe seems to make little of Theophilus, I believe that Luke-Acts was addressed to a Roman official to demonstrate how he could become a proponent for the gospel.<sup>14</sup> In this regard, my proposal resembles Philip Esler's "legitimation" view. However, I also differ from Esler in at least two areas. First, I hold to the historicity of Cornelius's conversion.<sup>15</sup> Second, I find it difficult to embrace Esler's view that Luke wrote to a target community that included Roman soldiers and administrators. As Bauckham points out, each Gospel was likely written for broad dissemination rather than for targeted communities of the early church.<sup>16</sup> Earlier, I argued that Luke wrote to a dual audience: first to Theophilus, and second to a general population of Christian readers. Thus, I find it reasonable to affirm (with Esler) that Luke wrote to a Roman administrator (Theophilus) without necessarily requiring the existence of a Lukan community (with Bauckham). Writing to a dual audience, Luke presents Jesus as the Savior for all types of people, including the poor and rich, the sick and marginalized, and even Roman administrators and soldiers.

## **Roman Officials and Loyalty to Jesus**

As Joel Green argues, conversion in Luke-Acts entails an entire change of life direction.<sup>17</sup> However, such a change does not necessarily entail jettisoning all aspects of one's pre-Christian life. For example, when the tax collectors and soldiers come to

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<sup>14</sup> In Rowe's view, "Acts is best read as a document intended for Christians" rather than an apology for the church (Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 10.). Rowe does not make much of Theophilus, but remains agnostic about the reader, explaining: "we have no idea where Acts was written, or for whom, or at what particular time, or where it was to be sent" (Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 11.).

<sup>15</sup> Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts*, 95–96. See Steve Walton's rebuttal of Esler's view. Walton, "The State They Were In," 8n18.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Bauckham, "For Whom Were Gospels Written?," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 9–13.

<sup>17</sup> Joel B. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts: Divine Action, Human Cognition, and the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 87–88.

repent, John the Baptist instructs them not to leave their occupations, but rather to remain in their roles while upholding God's righteous moral standards (Luke 3:12–14).<sup>18</sup> For these individuals, conversion entailed declaring loyalty to Jesus without necessarily leaving their positions within the Roman establishment. Such a choice would inevitably involve tension in the lives of Roman officials who turned to faith in Christ.

How could a Roman official remain loyal to Caesar while also serving God? This question is perhaps most succinctly addressed by Jesus's instructions to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Luke 20:25). In his insightful response to the question of taxes, Jesus called for both respecting Rome ("render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's") while reserving ultimate loyalties for God ("and to God the things that are God's").<sup>19</sup> This teaching would provide a helpful framework for an individual embedded within the Roman establishment. Such a framework would be applicable for officials of all types, including those in higher ranks (like Theophilus), the lower ranking centurions, and others in positions of authority within a non-Christian establishment.

### **The Gospel for Political Leaders in Luke-Acts**

Throughout Acts, the gospel is brought in contact with the establishment in various ways. Robert Tannehill explains:

The narrator is not content to present the powerful effect of the Christian mission in the private lives of individuals. Its cultural and political effect is also important. This aspect comes to the fore as Paul confronts high authorities of Judaism and Rome. Those who control religious and political institutions must listen to Paul and respond in some way to him.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Walton, "The State They Were In," 20–21.

<sup>19</sup> Walton, "The State They Were In," 18–19.

<sup>20</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), 285.

To expand on Tannehill's point, the gospel reaches Jewish and Roman authorities throughout Luke-Acts.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the importance of the gospel for political leaders is an important theme in Luke-Acts. Jesus hints at the necessity of testifying before rulers when he foretells that his disciples would be led away to testify to kings and governors on account of his name (Luke 21:12–13). This prediction is fulfilled in Acts when Peter and John (4:1–22, 17–42), Stephen (7:1–60), and Paul (23:1–26:32) testify before Jewish and Roman rulers.<sup>22</sup>

Was it enough for such rulers to hear the testimony of believers, or was conversion the end goal of such encounters? Several strands of evidence in Luke-Acts suggest that faithfulness to Christ was an appropriate, though not universal, response of high-ranking officials. I will now present these strands of evidence in order. If the gospel is indeed meant for all types of people—including rulers—we might expect Luke to mention believers demonstrating loyalty to God while holding positions of government office. While my focus so far has been on the Roman government, does Luke provide any evidence for believing officials serving in the governments of other nations? It turns out that he does. I will now discuss examples of believing officials from outside of the Roman Empire before citing examples of believers embedded within the empire.

### **Stephen's Speech (Acts 7:1–60)**

When studying the theme of government in Luke-Acts, it is common to focus on the Roman Empire. However, it is also worth noting that Luke describes officials from other nations, especially through the lens of Old Testament history. If Luke indeed cares

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<sup>21</sup> For example, in Luke's Gospel, the account of the centurion in Luke 7:1–10 is echoed just one chapter later through Jesus's encounter with Jairus, a Jewish synagogue ruler. On behalf of his sick servant, the Gentile centurion sends Jewish elders who proclaim his worthiness for having built their synagogue. Similarly, Jairus the synagogue ruler comes to ask Jesus to heal his sick daughter (Luke 8:41–42). Both Jairus and the centurion are men in positions of authority. Both are associated with the Jewish synagogue. Both request Jesus to heal someone dear to them. These parallels point to the necessity for those in authority (like Theophilus) to come to Jesus.

<sup>22</sup> Tannehill, *Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2:290–91.

about the spread of the gospel among government officials, what hints might we see in his retelling of Old Testament narratives? In Luke-Acts, the lengthiest summary of Old Testament narratives is found in Stephen's speech (Acts 7:1–60). While Stephen focuses on the theme of rejection of God's chosen servants, it is also noteworthy that Stephen cites examples of believers who held positions in the Egyptian government. Stephen's first example is Joseph, whom the patriarchs sold into slavery in Egypt, where God "gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household" (7:10). Despite opposition, "God was with him" (7:10) and Joseph remained faithful to God and leveraged his governmental office to work for the good of others (7:11–14).

Stephen's second example is Moses. Like Joseph, Moses also held a privileged position within the Egyptian establishment. After escaping persecution as an infant, Moses was adopted into the home of the daughter of Pharaoh who "brought him up as her own son" (7:21). Young Moses was "instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in words and deeds" (7:22). Like Joseph, Moses overcame the rejection of others and used his position of leadership as "ruler and judge" (7:35) to bring about deliverance for many (7:35–36). Though Stephen's speech primarily emphasizes the rejection of the Lord's chosen servants, the point stands that since the days of the patriarchs and Moses, God has placed faithful believers in positions of political power for the sake of the common good.

### **The Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26–40)**

The next example also focuses on an individual embedded within an African government. In Acts 8:26–40, Luke takes great care to identify the desert traveler in several different ways. He was "an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all of her treasure" (8:27). The eunuch was apparently a Jewish proselyte who "had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning"

to Ethiopia (8:28). According to Luke, the eunuch was a government official, holding a high rank in Candace's court. The Gaza Road encounter is important because it shows an early example of how the gospel's spread to "the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8) impacted those in the upper echelons of other nations.

### **Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6–12)**

Acts 13:6–12 describes an important example of the gospel's advance into the Roman establishment. It is significant that the first episode during Paul's first missionary journey involves a Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus. Just as Luke presented centurions as the first Gentile converts in both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, so now he introduces the proconsul as the first convert in Paul's missionary journeys.<sup>23</sup> Luke describes the proconsul as "a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God" (13:7). Sergius Paulus is associated with "a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus" who is also known as "Elymas the magician" (13:8). Faced with the choice between false prophecy and the gospel message, Sergius Paulus "sought to hear the word of God" despite the magician's attempts "to turn the proconsul away from the faith" (13:8).

Paul's rebuke of Elymas is remarkable. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul speaks against the false prophet, causing the man to experience temporary blindness. Upon seeing what had happened, the proconsul believes, "for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord" (13:12). While we have previously seen lower ranking centurions convert to the faith, Sergius Paulus represents the first convert among the upper echelon of the Roman government. As a noteworthy leader and "a man of intelligence" (13:7), Sergius Paulus would lend credibility to the notion of a Roman official converting to the faith. His conversion would be of supreme interest to Theophilus, a fellow Roman official. The

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<sup>23</sup> Sergius Paulus also holds the distinction of being the first named convert in Paul's ministry.

gospel was not just for the Jews; it was also for the Romans. Furthermore, the gospel was not just for the common people of the empire; it was also for those who shared the ranks of centurions and proconsuls.

### **Believers Associated with Roman Officials**

For Roman officials who were sympathetic towards the gospel, it would be reassuring to know that they were not the only ones in their social circles who considered converting to Christianity. Thus, it is worth noting that Luke also pays special attention to the conversions of believers among the inner circles of those in positions of authority. For example, Luke is the only evangelist who points out “Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager” (Luke 8:3) among the women who supported Jesus’s ministry. Joanna would have had close access to the household manager of Herod the Tetrarch, who executed John and, after hearing about Jesus’s ministry, “sought to see him” (9:9).

In Acts 13, we see additional evidence that the gospel made inroads into the Roman establishment. Among the prophets and teachers at Antioch is a man named Manaen who is described as “a lifelong friend” (σύντροφος) of Herod the Tetrarch (13:1). The term σύντροφος could also indicate that Manaen is a member of Herod’s court.<sup>24</sup> Manaen serves as an early example of a faithful Christian who is either a close associate of Herod, or an individual serving in the upper ranks of the Roman Empire. Like the Ethiopian eunuch, Manaen remains steadfast to his Christian faith while also having special access to a ruler. If σύντροφος identifies Manaen as a member of Herod’s court, then he would illustrate the fittingness of a Christian serving in dual leadership roles within the church and the state.

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<sup>24</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 439.



## The “Most Excellent” Proponents of the Gospel

Writing about Acts, Jennifer Creamer highlights the conversions of several people of influence including: Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Paphos (Acts 13:7); Lydia, a businesswoman in Philippi (16:14–15); Greeks of high standing in Berea (17:12); and Dionysius the Areopagite (17:34). Throughout Acts, several leaders also play important roles to “protect unjustly accused Christians from harm” including: the town clerk in Ephesus who ends a riot (19:35–41), a tribune who saves Paul’s life (21:31–32), Festus who makes a reasonable assessment of Paul’s case (25:25–27), Agrippa who reaffirms Paul’s innocence (26:31–32), and a centurion who saves Paul’s life (27:42–43).<sup>25</sup> Why would Luke devote such attention to leaders doing the right thing in his carefully crafted account? Such attention to Roman leaders (and other people of high social status) would fit quite naturally with the view that Luke was writing to a Roman official.

More specifically, Luke wrote to demonstrate that Roman officials can serve as proponents of the gospel in two ways: (1) treating Christians justly and (2) converting to the gospel. To play on the word *κράτιστε* (Luke 1:3), I suggest that these Roman officials serve as the “most excellent” proponents of the gospel in Luke-Acts. The officials who protect Christians demonstrate that one could serve in the Roman government while also treating Christians with dignity. As Julius the centurion epitomizes, it was fitting for officials to seek the common good for all people, including Christians. By protecting Christians from undue harm, these officials, though not necessarily believers, become proponents of the gospel by ensuring believers would have rights to practice and proclaim their faith. However, not all Roman officials act justly in Luke-Acts.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Jennifer M. Creamer, Aida B. Spencer, and Francois P. Viljoen, “Who Is Theophilus? Discovering the Original Reader of Luke-Acts,” *In Die Skriflig* 48, no. 1 (2014): 2–3.

<sup>26</sup> See earlier discussion on the trial narratives of Jesus and Paul.

Nevertheless, the many positive examples of Roman officials would serve as role models for Theophilus to consider.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to treating Christians justly, conversion was another viable option for Roman officials. At several points in the narrative, Luke draws attention to believers who hold positions of influence. John the Baptist’s instructions for Roman soldiers commend repentance and moral living without condemning military service (Luke 3:14).<sup>28</sup> To elaborate upon John’s teaching, Luke recounts the conversions of morally upright centurions who were not asked to leave the military upon conversion. For example, the centurion convert at Capernaum is praised by the Jews as a “worthy” man who “loves our nation” and “built us our synagogue” (Luke 7:4–5). Likewise, Cornelius is described as a “devout man who feared God,” “gave alms generously to the people,” and “prayed continually to God” (Acts 10:2). Far from being immoral, converts like Cornelius and Sergius Paulus (13:7) are examples of reasonable and intelligent Roman officials who believe the gospel. These men set a precedent for other officials, like Theophilus, to consider the rationality of the Christian message. Additionally, the examples of Joseph, Moses, and the Ethiopian eunuch show that other believers held official positions in governments, both in the past and as contemporaries of Theophilus. Moreover, the descriptions of Joanna (Luke 8:3) and Manaen (Acts 13:1) show that believers were among the inner circles of some government officials.

Fittingly, the book of Acts ends with Paul preaching the gospel unhindered in the heart of the empire, Rome (28:30–31).<sup>29</sup> Though in house arrest, Paul has freedom to

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<sup>27</sup> John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, ed. Andrew R. Fausset, 7th ed., vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1887), 4.

<sup>28</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries*, trans. David McInnes Gracie (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 70–71.

<sup>29</sup> For more on the ending of Acts, see Troy M. Troftgruben, *A Conclusion Unhindered: A Study of the Ending of Acts Within Its Literary Environment*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2, Reihe 280 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 114–43; Charles B. Puskas, *The Conclusion of Luke-Acts: The Significance of Acts 28:16–31* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 106–35.

share the gospel with visitors while awaiting his opportunity to stand before the most powerful official of all, Caesar (cf. 25:11–12; 26:32). In the next section, we will turn our attention to the relationship between the gospel and Roman officials beyond Luke-Acts.

### **The Early Church and the Roman Establishment**

If the gospel is meant for all people, including government officials, we would expect to find evidence of Roman officials converting outside of Luke-Acts. Outside of the Gospels and Acts, the only other mention of Caesar in the New Testament is in Philippians 4:22, where Paul sends greetings to Philippi from believers from the household of Caesar. The reference to believers within Caesar's household provides important evidence that the gospel made significant inroads among the Roman establishment. These unnamed converts within Caesar's household demonstrate that some elites in the empire were turning to Christ. If Caesar had people in his inner circle who were Christians, it is likely that he would have heard the gospel as well. Indeed, the gospel was not only for Theophilus and the centurions, but for Caesar, and everyone else in the Roman establishment.

### **Roman Perspectives on Christians**

What would a Roman official think about early Christians? Outside of the New Testament, the earliest glimpse of Christianity from the perspective of a Roman official comes through the letters of Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor in Asia Minor during the early second century. Writing in the year AD 112, Pliny's comments on Christians come to us in the form of a letter (*Epistle* 10.96) that he sent to Emperor Trajan. Pliny was writing in response to the emperor's request for the governor to investigate the financial woes of Bithynia and Pontus. Looking for potential political unrest, Trajan tasked Pliny with the job of dissolving any political clubs in the region.<sup>30</sup> When Pliny

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<sup>30</sup> Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 10.

arrived in coastal Pontus, he was approached by local citizens who complained that Christians had stopped making sacrifices, bringing economic loss upon local merchants.<sup>31</sup> Pliny reports to Trajan that he does not know why Christians are being charged, other than for bearing “the mere name of Christian.”<sup>32</sup> He found no guilt in them, since all they did was gather for worship and live virtuous lives.<sup>33</sup> In response, Trajan counsels Pliny to not seek out Christians, but to test any Christian brought forth by forcing them to make offerings to Roman gods. Any Christian who agrees to sacrifice could be released from punishment.<sup>34</sup>

Opponents of Christianity often caricatured it as a religion for the uneducated, rather than the Roman elite. Writing around AD 185, the Greek philosopher Celsus argues that Christianity is popular “in the lower classes . . . because of its vulgarity and the illiteracy of its adherents.”<sup>35</sup> According to Celsus, Christianity thrived among the “ignorant” and there were “few moderate, reasonable, and intelligent people” who believed in the message of Jesus.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Celsus argued that if everyone became Christians, then the Roman Empire would be overturned because Christians shunned civic duty.<sup>37</sup> As I showed earlier, Luke-Acts offers a powerful defense against Celsus’s critiques by detailing the conversions of intelligent Roman officials such as the centurion at Capernaum, Cornelius, and Sergius Paulus. Nevertheless, though Celsus overstates his case at times, he rightly identifies the tension that early Christians faced as dual citizens

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<sup>31</sup> Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Pliny the Younger, *Epistle* 10.96, cited in Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 22.

<sup>34</sup> Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 28.

<sup>35</sup> Celsus, *On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians*, trans. R. Joseph Hoffmann (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 29, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, 57.

<sup>37</sup> Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, 124–26.

of the Roman Empire and the kingdom of God.<sup>38</sup> How would early Christians deal with the difficulties raised by their critics?

### A “Most Excellent” Way of Life

The early church showed great interest in presenting the reasonableness of the gospel. In response to their critics, Christians would often write letters to appeal to Roman officials to provide protection. Starting in the early second century, Quadratus and Aristides addressed their apologies to Emperor Hadrian.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Athenagoras’s *Plea for Christians* (ca. AD 177) was addressed to Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus.<sup>40</sup> Justin Martyr addressed his *First Apology* to Emperor Antoninus Pius, while his *Second Apology* was written to the Roman senate.<sup>41</sup> Writing in northern Africa, Tertullian addressed his work *To Scapula* to the local proconsul while his *Apology* was addressed to the senatorial class.<sup>42</sup>

Though not always explicitly seeking to convert their government leaders, the early Christian apologists would make a rational defense for the gospel. The writings of the apologists would implicitly exhort Roman officials to consider the rationality of the Christian faith. Justin Martyr argues that Christians were known for upright behavior, despite being wrongfully accused as evildoers.<sup>43</sup> Thus, Christians, “more than all other men” ought to be viewed as “helpers and allies in promoting peace” because of their

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<sup>38</sup> Harnack, *Militia Christi*, 72–73.

<sup>39</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4:3:1–3 (NPNF<sup>2</sup>, 1:175); Aristides, *Apology* (ANF, 9:263).

<sup>40</sup> Athenagoras, *Plea for Christians* (ANF, 2:129). Louis J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, Message of the Fathers of the Church 19 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 35.

<sup>41</sup> Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 1 (ANF, 1:163); Justin Martyr, *2 Apology* 1 (ANF, 1:188).

<sup>42</sup> Tertullian, *Apology 1* (ANF, 3:17).

<sup>43</sup> Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 7 (ANF, 1:165). Later in this work, Justin uses the testimony of life change as a powerful apologetic. For example, “we who formerly delighted in fornication . . . now embrace chastity alone” and “we who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock, and communicate to everyone in need.” Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 14 (ANF, 1:167).

moral lifestyles.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Christians were taught to pay taxes to Caesar, while rendering to God the worship he alone deserved (cf. Luke 20:25). In Justin's words, Christians worship God alone while "in other things we gladly serve you, acknowledging you as kings and rulers of men."<sup>45</sup> In practice, a Christian who served within the Roman establishment would face constant tension.

### **Military Service and the Limits of Loyalty**

In this section, I will demonstrate the types of tensions that any Christian would face while serving within the Roman establishment. One area where this tension would appear was when Christians served in the Roman military.<sup>46</sup> Thus, I will now return to the topic of the Roman military for two reasons: (1) for continuity with the theme of centurions in Luke-Acts and (2) to understand how the early church understood their relationship to the Roman Empire. While the church fathers held varying positions regarding military service, they were generally seeking to navigate the tensions inherent in Jesus's twofold exhortation to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Luke 20:25).<sup>47</sup> The tension between Caesar and God was certainly not something that Christians could escape if they were to engage with Roman society.<sup>48</sup> Thus, when we look at early church history, we find Christians of each generation considering to what degree one could serve Rome while remaining faithful to Christ. I will begin with two historical accounts to demonstrate the positive impact of Christian

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<sup>44</sup> Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 12 (ANF, 1:166).

<sup>45</sup> Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 17 (ANF, 1:168).

<sup>46</sup> The Roman military was a symbol of the emperor's power. Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 107.

<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere in the New Testament, this dual command is framed as a call to "fear God" and "honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17).

<sup>48</sup> In Tertullian's day, soldiers were expected to participate in idolatry and burn incense to the emperor. See Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 17 (ANF, 3:71–72) and Tertullian, *On the Crown* 11 (ANF, 3:100). With the rise of Constantine, military service was no longer intertwined with emperor worship. However, even after the issue of idolatry was resolved, the tension between serving God and empire still remained. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, 25.

soldiers and the limits of their loyalty to Rome. Then I will look to representatives of two major Christian views on military service: (1) Tertullian, who steered Christians away from military service and (2) Augustine, who sought to help Christian soldiers remain faithful to both Rome and Christ.

**The positive impact of Christian soldiers.** One of the most significant early reports of Christians serving in the Roman military comes from the account of the Twelfth Legion (*Legio XII fulminata*) who served during the rule of Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180).<sup>49</sup> While fighting against the Quadi, a group of Christian soldiers prayed for divine help and received a miraculous answer. A thunderstorm arose, providing much-needed hydration to the beleaguered Roman troops and scattering opposing forces.<sup>50</sup> According to Tertullian, this “well known” event was one of many examples of the positive impact that faithful Christians had on Roman society.<sup>51</sup>

In Tertullian’s *Apology* to the senate, he mentions that Marcus Aurelius was a “protector” of Christians, partly because he remembered the effective prayers of his Christian soldiers.<sup>52</sup> In his list of Christian contributions to Roman society, Tertullian includes, “we serve with you in the army!”<sup>53</sup> Writing to Scapula proconsul of Carthage, Tertullian explains: “A Christian is enemy to none, least of all to the Emperor of Rome,

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<sup>49</sup> The account of the “thundering legion” was recorded by Tertullian and the fourth century church historian Eusebius. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.5 (NPNF<sup>2</sup>, 1:220).

<sup>50</sup> For this reason, the Twelfth Legion was also known as the “Thundering Legion.”

<sup>51</sup> Tertullian, *To Scapula* 4 (ANF, 3:107). Though some dispute the details of the miraculous account, what is not disputed is the existence of a sizeable group of Christians serving in the Twelfth Legion. The presence of Christians in the Twelfth is supported by the fact that this legion was based in Melitene, which was near the Christian center of Edessa. Though we cannot be certain whether the soldiers converted while serving in the army or prior to enlisting, it is plausible that the soldiers would have heard the gospel through Christians living in the region of Edessa. Harnack points out that “the royal house of Edessa became Christian around the year 200, and already in the course of the third century, Christianity had penetrated Armenia.” Harnack, *Militia Christi*, 74n8.

<sup>52</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 5 (ANF, 3:22).

<sup>53</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 42 (ANF, 3:49). Harnack, *Militia Christi*, 75. I am using Harnack’s rendering of the phrase that Schaff translates “we fight with you” in ANF.

whom he knows to be appointed by his God, and so cannot but love and honor.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the Twelfth Legion caused the emperor to hold a more positive view of Christianity. While Tertullian was not always in favor of Christians serving in the military, his writings show the positive impact Christian soldiers could have upon the Roman establishment. Though not necessarily officials, these soldiers show one way that Christians could remain loyal to Rome while also giving their highest allegiance to God.

**The limits of loyalty to Rome.** While the Thundering Legion showed the positive impact Christian soldiers could have on the emperor, there would inevitably be times when believers needed to dissent. In his treatise *On Idolatry*, Tertullian argues that loyalty to Christ would preclude Christian service in the military.<sup>55</sup> In Tertullian’s *On the Crown*, he makes a biblical and cultural argument to defend a Christian soldier who was persecuted for refusing to wear the laurel crown that the rest of his colleagues wore.<sup>56</sup> For

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<sup>54</sup> Tertullian, *To Scapula 2* (ANF, 3:105). In this letter, Tertullian defends his fellow believers against state persecution by demonstrating that Christians were upright citizens. His letter suggests that some of the Christians at Carthage held high positions and were personally known to Scapula. If the proconsul would execute all Christians of Carthage, he would be decimating “a multitude” of good people including his own “relatives and companions” and “men of your own order, and noble ladies, and all the leading persons of the city.” Indeed, Tertullian argued, “Spare yourself, if not us poor Christians! Spare Carthage, if not yourself!” Tertullian, *To Scapula 5* (ANF, 3:107–8).

<sup>55</sup> Tertullian, *On Idolatry 19* (ANF, 3:73). For Tertullian, Jesus’s command at Gethsemane to “Put away the sword” (Matt 26:52) set a pacifistic paradigm for the entire Christian life. Tertullian explains, “the Lord, by taking away Peter’s sword, disarmed every soldier thereafter. We are not allowed to wear any uniform that symbolizes a sinful act.”

Often tailoring his arguments to the needs of the moment, Tertullian’s writings were polemical, while at times seemingly inconsistent and ambiguous. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, 38.

For a brief overview of Tertullian’s life, see Tertullian and Minucius Felix, *Apologetical Works and Octavius*, trans. Rudolph Arbesmann, Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, *Fathers of the Church 10* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), vii.

<sup>56</sup> Tertullian’s *On the Crown* is also called also called *The Chaplet* or *De Corona*. Drawing upon Greek literature, Tertullian demonstrates that crowns were often worn by mythological gods. For Tertullian, these cultural associations meant that a Christian must never wear an earthly crown because “this attire belongs to idols, both from the history of its origins and from its use by false religion.” Tertullian, *On the Crown 10* (ANF, 3:99).

Turning to the Bible, Tertullian argues that the people of God did not wear earthly crowns. “What patriarch, what prophet, what Levite, or priest, or ruler, or at a later period what apostle, or preacher of the gospel, or bishop, do you ever find the wearer of a crown?” Tertullian, *On the Crown 9* (ANF, 3:98). Indeed, only Jesus wore an earthly crown, and that was a crown of thorns designed by Roman soldiers to mock the Messiah. Tertullian, *On the Crown 14* (ANF, 3:102). For Tertullian, the Bible prescribes believers to remove their crowns through the image of the elders who cast their crowns before the throne of God (Rev 4:10).



Tertullian, wearing the crown symbolized complicity with idolatrous practices, such as burning incense to the emperor, that were expected of Roman soldiers.<sup>57</sup>

At times, Christian soldiers found themselves under orders to persecute fellow believers. Eusebius describes two such incidents during the Decian persecution in Alexandria. In one case, a Christian soldier named Besas was executed after he opposed the persecution of a group of believers.<sup>58</sup> In another instance, a squad of soldiers sided with Christians who were on trial for their faith.<sup>59</sup> According to Adolf von Harnack, “it is certain that the whole little band of soldiers were Christians, or sympathizers, who in the critical moment came forth on the side of the Christians” who were being persecuted. These episodes suggest Christianity had spread widely among the Alexandrian unit as early as AD 250 and show “how determined these Christian soldiers were to place their religion above military discipline.”<sup>60</sup> Such loyalty is indeed what we might expect of a follower of Christ embedded in the Roman military.

**Augustine’s dual citizenship model.** How would a Christian work out the tensions of serving in the Roman establishment? Augustine’s *City of God* provides a

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Tertullian’s pacifist reading of the New Testament also precludes military service. Tertullian’s pacifism is reflected in his rhetorical question, “Shall it be held lawful to make an occupation of the sword, when the Lord proclaims that he who uses the sword shall perish by the sword?” Tertullian, *On the Crown* 11 (*ANF* 3:100).

For Tertullian, Jesus’s command at Gethsemane to “put away the sword” (Matt 26:52) set a paradigm for the entire Christian life. In his treatise *On Idolatry*, Tertullian explains: “the Lord, by taking away Peter’s sword, disarmed every soldier thereafter. We are not allowed to wear any uniform that symbolizes a sinful act.” Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 19 (*ANF*, 3:73).

Thus, Tertullian argues that a Christian soldier must not “take part in the battle” or commit violence using “the chain, and the prison, and the torture, and the punishment” of Rome. Tertullian, *On the Crown* 11 (*ANF*, 3:100).

<sup>57</sup> Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 17 (*ANF*, 3:71–72). Tertullian points out that a soldier’s duty included several responsibilities that a Christian could not fulfill while maintaining loyalty to Christ. For instance, a Christian soldier would be punished for refusing “to burn incense to an idol.”

Burning incense to the emperor was just one among “many other offenses . . . involved in the performances of camp offices, which we must hold to involve a transgression of God’s law.” Tertullian, *On the Crown* 11 (*ANF*, 3:100).

<sup>58</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.41.16 (*NPNF*<sup>2</sup>, 1:284).

<sup>59</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.41.22 (*NPNF*<sup>2</sup>, 1:285).

<sup>60</sup> Harnack, *Militia Christi*, 90–91.

vision for how Christians ought to relate to the state based on the framework of two cities: the earthly city of man and the heavenly city of God. As dual citizens, Christians belong to the city of God even though they presently live embedded within the earthly city of man. Since the welfare of the two cities is inextricably linked during the present age, Christians ought to seek the peace of the earthly city where they now dwell (cf. Jer 29:7).<sup>61</sup> This means that Christians, though living as exiles in the world (1 Pet 1:1), ought to strive for a well-ordered government that promotes the common good of all people.<sup>62</sup>

How might Augustine's dual citizenship framework apply more specifically to the life of a soldier? To answer this question, we look to Augustine's *Letter 189* addressed to Boniface, a Christian who served as a Roman general and administrator.<sup>63</sup> In this letter, Augustine encourages his friend to honor God through his occupation within the Roman establishment. Augustine sees biblical precedent for serving God and government in the examples of King David, the centurion converts in Luke-Acts (Luke 7:1–10; Acts 10:1ff.), and John the Baptist's instructions to the soldiers (Luke 3:14).<sup>64</sup>

According to Augustine, a Christian soldier must be a peacemaker above all, who wages war not out of a desire to dominate others, but only as a last resort to promote

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<sup>61</sup> “Thus the things necessary for this mortal life are used by both kinds of men and families alike, but each has its own peculiar and widely different aim in using them. The earthly city, which does not live by faith, seeks an earthly peace, and the end it proposes, in the well-ordered concord of civic obedience and rule, is the combination of men's wills to attain the things which are helpful to this life. The heavenly city, or rather the part of it which sojourns on earth and lives by faith, makes use of this peace only because it must, until this mortal condition which necessitates it shall pass away.” Augustine, *The City of God* 19.17 (NPNF<sup>1</sup>, 2:412).

“But it is our interest that it enjoy this peace meanwhile in this life; for as long as the two cities are commingled, we also enjoy the peace of Babylon.” Augustine, *The City of God*, 19.26 (NPNF<sup>1</sup>, 2:419).

<sup>62</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* 15.4 (NPNF<sup>1</sup>, 2:286). Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, 112–13.

<sup>63</sup> Augustine, *Letters* 220.7 (NPNF<sup>1</sup>, 1:574). Swift identifies Boniface as a Roman general. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, 114. Parsons identifies Boniface as a “Count or Governor in Africa under Honorius and Placidia.” Augustine, *Letters, Volume IV, (165–203)*, trans. Wilfrid Parsons, Fathers of the Church 30 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1981), 266n1.

<sup>64</sup> Augustine summarizes, “Do not think that it is impossible for any one to please God while engaged in active military service.” Augustine, *Letters* 189.4 (NPNF<sup>1</sup>, 1:553).

the cause of peace.<sup>65</sup> A Christian soldier ought to be a man of integrity, even dealing with his enemies with honesty and mercy.<sup>66</sup> The integrity of a Christian soldier involved not only his combat life, but also his inner life of sobriety, moderation, and freedom from greed. These virtues, said Augustine, were the mark of “the manly and Christian spirit.”<sup>67</sup> The conclusion to Augustine’s letter portrays his recipient Boniface as an exemplar of the above traits. Indeed, Augustine viewed Boniface as a faithful Christian who served in the military, akin to a fourth century Cornelius.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I situated the discussion on Theophilus and the centurions within the broader theme of the Roman Empire in Luke-Acts. Besides presenting centurions as proponents of the gospel, Luke also presents several other believers who either served in political leadership or were closely associated with those in such positions. As Rowe points out, the gospel was not so much about government takeover, as it was about an alternative way of life marked by loyalty to Christ above all.<sup>68</sup>

Christians who served in the Roman establishment would inevitably face tensions between their loyalties to Christ and the Roman Empire. The early church demonstrated thoughtful interactions regarding both the positive impact of Christians embedded within the Roman military and the limits of loyalty to Rome. In the fourth century, Augustine’s *City of God* and *Letter 189* presented a dual citizenship model where

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<sup>65</sup> Augustine, *Letters* 189.6 (NPNF<sup>1</sup>, 1:554). Lust for domination is a common theme in Augustine’s writings. “This lust of sovereignty disturbs and consumes the human race with frightful ills.” Augustine, *The City of God* 3.14 (NPNF<sup>1</sup>, 2:50). In another letter, Augustine describes that war is to be used as a last resort, while diplomatic conflict resolution is to be preferred. “But it is a higher glory still to stay war itself with a word, than to slay men with the sword, and to procure or maintain peace by peace, not by war.” Augustine, *Letters* 229.2 (NPNF<sup>1</sup>, 1:581–82). Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, 115.

<sup>66</sup> Augustine, *Letters* 189.6 (NPNF<sup>1</sup>, 1:554).

<sup>67</sup> Augustine, *Letters* 189.7 (NPNF<sup>1</sup>, 1:554).

<sup>68</sup> Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 136.

an individual could remain faithful to Christ while also serving in positions of political leadership. Without downplaying the tensions involved in serving God and Rome, Augustine's dual citizenship model charts a course for how a government official might serve as a proponent of the gospel.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I argued for the importance of paying attention to Theophilus as the first recipient of Luke-Acts. Based on the usage of *κράτιστος* in Luke-Acts, I suggested that Theophilus was most likely a Roman official, even if Luke used a pseudonym to protect his recipient's identity. As he wrote to this official, Luke drew special attention to centurions as proponents of the gospel. Most notably, centurions are the first Gentile converts in both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. A centurion is the first to declare Jesus's identity following his crucifixion. Centurions appear at various points in Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome, facilitating the spread of the gospel to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Luke shows that the gospel is for all kinds of people, including government officials who could use their positions to serve as proponents for the gospel. The centurion's confession at the cross initiates a movement of repentance among the onlookers. During Paul's time in Jerusalem, centurions serve critical roles in rescuing Paul, asserting his citizenship rights, thwarting a murder plot, and escorting him towards Rome. During Paul's sea voyage, Julius demonstrates leadership over a mixed group where Christians are the minority. Julius tactfully ensures all people on board work together for the common good, while sparing Paul's life so that he could evangelize in Rome. In his letter *To Scapula*, Tertullian contends that non-believing Roman officials who are proponents of the gospel benefit from treating Christians justly. Tertullian urges

his local proconsul to treat Christians fairly, arguing that even officials of poor reputation had given fair treatment to Christians.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the ideal way to become a proponent of the gospel would be to become a believer. At several key points in Luke-Acts, we find Roman officials who convert, including: the centurion at Capernaum (Luke 7:1–10), the centurion at the cross (Luke 23:47), Cornelius (Acts 10:1–11:18), and Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6–12). These morally upright men demonstrate the fittingness for a Roman official to believe the gospel. In the early centuries of church history, Christianity would continue to spread among the ranks of government officials. The fourth century provides two clear examples of such officials. In Milan, Ambrose was elected bishop while serving as governor in northern Italy.<sup>2</sup> With the rise of Constantine in the same century, the gospel reached all the way to the Roman emperor himself.

If Roman officials could become proponents of the gospel, believers today should likewise work to present a rational case for their faith to government officials. Both Scripture and church history demonstrate that even in administrations that are ostensibly hostile to Christianity, there can be officials of lower and upper ranks who are sympathetic to the spread of the gospel message. Because of their positions of authority, such officials can serve as the “most excellent” proponents of the gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *To Scapula* 4 (*ANF*, 3:107).

<sup>2</sup> Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, 97.

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## ABSTRACT

### THEOPHILUS AND THE CENTURIONS: ROMAN OFFICIALS AS THE “MOST EXCELLENT” PROPONENTS OF THE GOSPEL IN LUKE-ACTS

Christopher Sun Young Chen, ThM  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jonathan T. Pennington

This thesis explores the intersection and implications of two key findings in Luke-Acts. The first is that Luke wrote his two-volume work to Theophilus, a high-ranking Roman official who was sympathetic towards Christianity. The second is that centurions serve as proponents of the gospel at crucial points in the narrative. These centurions would demonstrate to Theophilus that the Christian message had already made inroads at the grassroots level of the Roman establishment. Chapter 1 provides an overview of my topic. Chapter 2 discusses Luke’s audience and the identity of Theophilus. Chapter 3 examines every appearance of centurions in Luke-Acts, highlighting their roles as proponents for the gospel. Chapter 4 shows that both Luke and the church fathers demonstrate the reasonableness of Christianity for political leaders. Chapter 5 provides an overall summary of my argument and explores implications for Christians and government leaders today.



## VITA

Christopher Sun Young Chen

### EDUCATION

BS, University of California, Berkeley, 2004  
MS, University of California, Los Angeles, 2006  
MA, Western Seminary, 2014

### ORGANIZATIONS

Evangelical Theological Society  
Evangelical Missiological Society  
Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers

### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pulpit Supply, Central Chinese Christian Church, San Jose, California, 2008–  
2019  
Pulpit Supply, Friendship Agape Church, San Jose, California, 2015–  
Pulpit Supply, The Home of Christ Church, Morgan Hill, California, 2015–  
2020  
Pulpit Supply, Christ Centered Community Church, Castro Valley, California,  
2017–2021