



Luke

All That Jesus Accomplished

BY JEFF REED

A 6-SESSION STUDY FOR DIALOGUE IN
COMMUNITY AROUND THE SCRIPTURES



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THE INTENTION OF LUKE–ACTS

1

Having completed Mark and Matthew, we now turn our attention to Luke. Luke set out to write his Gospel for very different reasons. He wrote it specifically for a prominent Greek believer of some sort, which points us more toward Gentile churches than Jewish churches, although both would be strengthened by Luke’s account. Therefore, we would expect many things to be written to give Gentile churches confidence in what unfolded and to help them think clearly in the midst of the loss of Paul and constant Jewish pressures. The pressures were from Jews and some in the Jewish churches to contain the expansion of the Gentiles and to return the new believers to the Jewish fold.

Luke’s Gospel is similar to Mark’s and Matthew’s Gospels in the sense that the Gospel itself is shaped around the “kerygmatic framework.” But it is very different in the sense that it is just the first of two volumes by Luke, and the two volumes make up one story. In this section we will explore Luke’s intention for writing his Gospel and the implications of it being part of a two-volume set. We will explore whether the Gospel of Luke can stand alone and be understood without Acts, possessing its own intent, or whether Luke must be tied with Acts to be fully understood and interpreted accurately.



Study the Scriptures

READ THE PASSAGE: LUKE 1:1–4; 4:14–19; 24:44–49; ACTS 1:1–2; 1:6–8

Think Through the Questions:

1. What do you learn in Luke 1:1–4 about Luke’s intention in writing? Who was the audience he seemed to primarily have in mind?
2. How does Luke describe both his decision to write and the process he went through in writing his Gospel? How does this help shape his intention in writing?

3. What does Acts 1:1–2 add to the picture of Luke's intent for writing his Gospel? for writing a second volume?
4. Should writing an intention statement for Luke include just Luke, or should it cover both volumes? Is Luke's Gospel only able to be fully understood by including his second volume, Acts? In what sense are they one piece of literature?

Summarize the Core Teaching of the Passage.

Write a paragraph below that summarizes Luke's intention in writing his Gospel and how he accomplished that intention in the way he shaped the story. Show how Acts shapes our understanding of Luke's Gospel and what the overall intention of the two volumes is.

Record your summary below.



Consult the Scholars

The following comments are designed to help you better understand the passage and to stimulate your thinking on the implications of the teaching.

Read and Reflect on this Brief Commentary on the Intention of Matthew.

The first thing to notice is that Luke uses the same kerygmatic narrative framework as Mark and Matthew. Again, this is demonstrated in Burrige's work *What Are the Gospels?: A Comparison with Greco-Roman Biography*. In it we see Luke's Gospel taking the shape of a Greco-Roman biography, but also the shape of a kerygma story. Burrige's outline is as follows:

<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Percentage of Work</i>
1.1–4	Preface	0.4
1.5–2.52	Infancy Narratives	11.1
3–4:13	Preparation and beginnings	4.4
4.14–9.50	Ministry in Galilee	23.9
9.51–19:27	Journey to Jerusalem	35.3
19.28–21.38	Ministry in Jerusalem	9.3
22–24	Last Supper, Passion, and Resurrection	15.6

Just as with Mark and Matthew, Luke’s Gospel begins with Jesus’ birth; looks at His ministry of doing good and teaching; and ends with His death, burial, and resurrection. However, the primary audience is very different for Luke’s Gospel.

Also unique to the Gospel of Luke is the fact that it is the first of a two-volume set, all apparently under a single intent of the author, Luke. He adds the second volume to describe all that was accomplished in the churches to that point. Luke begins with a clear statement of his intent in Luke 1:1–4.

‘Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ²just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed. Luke 1:1–4

His intent is more focused on the Gentile churches, which can be seen because he addressed the volumes to Theophilus, evidently a key Greek convert of noble status. Also, the very fact that Luke was a traveling companion to Paul shapes our understanding of his intent. The following is sort of an annotated set of definitions of Luke’s carefully chosen Greek words, that he packed into this very dense explanation of his intent for writing, found in Luke 1:1–4. The definitions are based on the “semantic range” of the words.

- “Many have undertaken”—to go about collecting, to embark on an enterprise, to undertake a project.
- “To set down an orderly account of events accomplished”—to compile, to organize in a series, to set in order.
- “Events that have been fulfilled among us”—events or deeds that have taken place, accomplished, proclaimed.
- “Handed down”—transmit, give over to another, entrust.
- “From the beginning were eyewitnesses”—from the source, the authority (primary source) who were eyewitness; implies had detailed accounts (autopsy).

- “After investigating everything carefully from the beginning”—to follow closely, accompany, to follow with the mind, to understand; from top to bottom, the whole picture; precisely, accurately, completely.
- “Write an orderly account”—from place to place, point by point; to write down, record, compose.
- “So that you may know the truth”—experientially.
- “About which you have been instructed”—catecheo, from which we get the word catechism.

Luke is setting out to tell the whole story of all that has been accomplished (thus two volumes)—all the key events and accomplishments, the entire picture, including what was proclaimed and what happened. He wants Theophilus to understand what happened these last 40 plus years since Jesus arrived on the scene and how it all unfolded. He wants Theophilus to understand it accurately. It takes Luke two volumes to do it.

Luke’s second volume also begins with a further development of his intention in writing. It is actually more of an allusion back to his first intent, but it is written in a way that connects the two and provides a transition to the second volume.

‘In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. Acts 1:1–2 (NEB)

The phrase “began to do and teach” is a present, active infinitive. That means it is an action in process or a state of being with no assessment of the action’s completion (GMSDT—Glossary of Morpho-Syntactic Database Terminology). This is true of both verbs—“do” and “teach.” Volume one is what Jesus began to do and teach. Volume two is what Jesus continued to do and teach. This is all one story. It is one teaching. Jesus opened the Apostles’ minds at the end of Luke. They were not to move until the Spirit came. Jesus would continue the process He began; He would teach them through the Spirit. The Apostles were stewards of this story, of this teaching. And they understood this.

There are two other clues that point to Luke’s overall intent. Just as Mark and Matthew did in their Gospels, Luke introduces Jesus’ background and preparation, and at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, Luke gives a summary of the message Jesus is preaching. While using the phrases “proclaim” and “good news,” just as Mark and Matthew did, Luke focuses on the Gentiles. We will look at this more extensively in session two, “the Proclamation Nuanced by Luke.” It is important to mention here, though, because it strengthens our understanding of the primary audience Luke had in mind.

The remaining major clue to Luke’s intent in writing his two volumes is to note a very important hinge connecting the two books. This can be seen by comparing Luke 24:44–49 with Acts 1:6–8. In Luke 24, Jesus states that the Apostles are to proclaim repentance

and forgiveness of sin, in His name, to the nations. He then states that this is to begin in Jerusalem. He states the same thing in Acts 1:6–8 when He states that they are to be His witnesses “in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Here we see the two volumes hinged together. This is one story. Luke must be read in light of the whole story. This is what Theophilus was taught. This is the truth. This is what the churches were taught.

Building off our three previous studies—Jesus to the Gospels, Mark, and Matthew—and these clues from Luke–Acts, including the direct explanation of his intent in Luke 1:1–4, we can conclude the following about Luke’s intent in writing his two volumes. It is something like this:

To write a two-volume account of all the things Jesus accomplished from the beginning until the time of his writing, intended initially for Paul’s empire-wide network of Gentile churches, giving them the entire account of everything handed down to them by the Apostles, including Paul, that they might think clearly about the continuation of the spontaneous progress of that gospel worldwide, in this time of great transition.

In this context, volume one (Luke) focuses on the first chapter of the plan that unfolded—what Jesus began to do and teach on earth. The second volume (Acts) focuses on what Jesus continued to do and teach through the Apostles. It is all integrated together into one story. This would have tremendously affected the confidence of these new Gentile believers and churches. In turn, it would be valuable for the Jewish churches to help them see very clearly into the future, to grasp the entire plan that has now unfolded, as well as to help them understand that not only was it in Jesus’ mind from the inauguration of His ministry, but it was not about to turn around, as some of the Jewish churches were still clinging to.

One of the important implications for us today, is to recognize that there is no separation between Jesus and the Apostles or, more specifically, between Jesus and Paul. What unfolded in Acts is what Jesus continued to do. While it is called the Apostles’ teaching in Acts chapter two, it is really what Jesus continued to do and teach—through the Holy Spirit. It is all integrated. Today, many churches in the 21st century worldwide separate the two volumes and, therefore, ignore the big unfolding plan described by Luke in his two volumes. They replace it with an individualistic, corporate “discipleship plan,” which not only distorts the intent of volume one, but truncates the two-volume plan, essentially leaving out the churches. This will be explored in the next section.

Read and Reflect on Key Quotes.

This quote is from *The Theology of Luke and Acts*, by Darrell Bock.¹ It begins to deal with implications of the fact that Luke and Acts are a unified work that together make the emerging plan of God very clear.

“3.1 Is Luke–Acts a Unified Work?”

“Before one can work with Luke and Acts and present their theology as a unified whole, one must make the case that these volumes were intended to be seen as a literary unit and can be read as such. This idea was lost in the logical division of the canon along the lines of the gospel and early church history. It was recovered in the early twentieth century when NT scholars began to speak of Luke–Acts, using a hyphen to tie together these two NT books. Lately, however, some have renewed a challenge to treat these works as part of one story. So we must look at this debate if we intend to treat a theology of these two volumes as reflecting one message.

“It is important to be clear about what is intended in saying that Luke–Acts is a unity. The idea is that Luke wrote his gospel with the goal of writing Acts later in order to tell one basic story. Was Acts an afterthought, or was it intended to be volume 2 from early on? Is Luke–Acts one essential story, a relationship between two books, or a kind of mix of the two?

“The idea that Luke–Acts should be read as a single unity gained great momentum from the work of H. J. Cadbury, especially his volume *The Making of Luke–Acts*. He argued that Acts was not an afterthought, but part of one continuous work. Key to his presentation were the prologues, especially Luke 1:1–4. The phrase about fulfillment in verse 1, along with the note about reassuring Theophilus, has in mind events in both Luke and Acts. Important here is the time spent on Gentile inclusion because Theophilus, in Cadbury’s view, was not yet a Christian. Rather, he was someone with social influence who might be hostile to Christianity. Cadbury believed these two volumes were an apologetic made in defense of the new faith.


“Although one may question Cadbury’s understanding of Theophilus as potentially hostile and Acts as an apology in that light, the idea that the prologue looks forward to the themes of both volumes has garnered support from C. K. Barrett, who argued for some forty-one examples from within Luke’s gospel that have an eye on Acts. Among the important examples here are the parable of Luke 14:15–24, which looks ahead to Gentile mission, and the themes of persecution as seen in Luke 21:12–19. Texts such as these are a clue that the design of the third gospel includes preparation to continue the story.

“A full narratological study of the two volumes by Robert Tannehill also sees a fundamental unity in the account of Luke–Acts. Luke presents Israel’s reaction to Jesus and his new community as a tragic story—not as a rejection of Israel but more as an account of regret for how she has responded to the note of hope Jesus brought. Tannehill’s account keeps a careful eye on how Luke–Acts speaks to Jewish issues and concerns in the midst of telling the story of how Gentiles came to be included in the community of the new era.

“Another clue in this direction is in the way Luke 24 ties into Acts 1. This was studied in detail by J. Dupont. Clearly there is an interlocking connection between the two volumes by the way Acts 1 ties back into Luke 24.

“Still another clue appears in the parallels that exist between Jesus, Peter and Paul in their activity. Charles Talbert has the key study on this feature of the two volumes. In his view, Luke presents Peter and Paul as replicating certain miracles Jesus performed to show continuity in how God is acting through leaders of the new community Jesus initiated.

“Other clues exist as well. The way in which the Spirit is handled in Luke–Acts shows a story line running from John the Baptist in Luke 3:15–17 through the inclusion of Gentiles in Acts 15. Christology develops along lines that build from Jesus as the Christ to seeing him as Lord. We will trace these themes in detail in our study. All of this suggests an intentional design by Luke for the two volumes.”¹



Record any insights from the brief commentary and quotes.



Think Through the Issues

Today, in our churches worldwide, there is a very significant misunderstanding of the unified, unfolding plan of God. We separate Jesus and Paul, and we separate the Gospels and the Epistles. Some attempt to build a plan out of just the Gospels, not truncating and reshaping the plan as seen in Luke's two volumes, but distorting the Gospels themselves, wandering far from their intent. We have replaced the spontaneous multiplication of simple, authentic communities of faith that grow into complex networks of churches led by the Spirit, with a highly individualistic, global, Western, often corporate strategy of discipleship, which is far from the original design of God's plan.

In this section, we will explore the importance of having a grasp of both of Luke's volumes in understanding the Gospel of Luke, in understanding Jesus' ministry on earth, and in understanding what Jesus continues to do through His churches today. We will reflect on the fragmentation and distortion of God's unified, unfolding plan if Luke and Acts are unhinged. This is so common in our contemporary treatment of discipleship, as well as in the global evangelism strategies carried out by many of our massive para-church organizations, mission agencies, and Western Christian NGOs (non-governmental organizations). This is one of the most foundational ministry discussions needed by the 21st century Church, as we think through the issues.

ISSUE: The importance of both of Luke's volumes in understanding Luke's Gospel and Jesus' ministry

Think Through the Issue Before Discussion:

1. How do Luke's two volumes and introductions integrate Jesus and the Apostles, especially Paul, into one unfolding plan? Why do we separate the two in Western discipleship models today?
2. What value would this two-volume document have to the early Gentile churches? to the Jewish churches around the time of Luke's writing? to our churches today?
3. How might unhinging Luke and Acts lead to a misunderstanding of the Gospel of Luke? of the unfolding plan of God?
4. In what sense does the whole picture of Jesus' ministry and the 30 years that followed become clear through Luke's two volumes?



Record your initial thoughts on the issue before discussion.

Discuss the Issue in Your Small Group.

Record your initial thoughts on the issue after discussion.



Apply the Principles

It is now time to respond to what you have studied and discussed. Take your time on this section.

Think Back Through the First Three Steps.

Design an Application for Your Life.

Think through Luke's intention in writing his Gospel and in including his second volume Acts, as studied in this session. Reflect on its value. How can it be used more fully in your life and ministry? What do you need to do to ensure you are using it correctly?

Evaluate your own understanding and valuing of Luke. List how to get to the point of using it effectively in your life and ministry.