



The Two Treatises

**The Gospel Of Luke
The Acts Of The
Apostles**

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“The Two Treatises”

Biblical Studies In Luke & Acts

Lesson 1 – General Introduction

Overview

A great masterpiece has been written. You obtain a copy and begin to read it. Its thrilling narratives of the dominant character (“hero”) and his adventures have absolutely peaked your interest. The book is full of both drama and suspense. There are joys of anticipated victory as well as heartaches of apparent defeat. His enemies stop at nothing to undermine him. His followers travel their own journeys from initial doubt to eventual belief. You cannot wait to read what happens next as you turn the pages. You even see yourself caught up in this story as you begin to associate with what he says as well as what he does. The old adage is true...you cannot put the book down.

When you come to the end, it “leaves you hanging.” The plot, carefully manufactured throughout, is left unfulfilled. You feel the author did not complete the story. The story ended with the “hero” encouraging his followers to “carry on” after he is gone. However, it doesn’t tell how they fared. Were they able to accomplish all they were told to do? How did it all turn out?

Not to worry!! A “sequel” has been written!! Now, you are able to continue reading about the followers and their mission to carry out the work of the “hero.”

Some literary works can be described with the scenario above. Would it surprise you to view two books from the Bible with this same “script?” We believe that to be so...*Luke’s “Two Treatises.”* The gospel of **Luke** is the “first treatise” and the “second treatise” or “sequel” is the book of **Acts**.

- ◆ Luke begins his “first volume” by stating his purpose. He writes a “...*narrative of those things which are most surely believed among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us*” (**Lk. 1:1-2**). Based upon this eyewitness testimony, he thought it best, “...*having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed*” (**Lk. 1:3-4**).
- ◆ Luke begins his “sequel,” as translated in the **KJV**: “*The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen: To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion (suffering) by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*” (**Acts 1:1-3**).

Thus, we have the “two volume set”...the “first” and “second” treatises. Luke’s “first treatise” is like the other gospel accounts...a record of Jesus’ earthly ministry and how He continually spoke concerning the coming kingdom. He prepared His disciples for their great work...even promising help for their labors in the gospel after His departure (**cp. Jn. 14-16**). Looking at the gospels collectively, they end with Jesus giving His disciples their “marching orders” or a “commission” to preach unto all the world.

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Only Mark records a brief description of them carrying out their work (**Mk. 16:20**). Luke himself only mentions the apostles returning to Jerusalem and actively serving God in the temple (**Lk. 24:52-53**). However, these verses can hardly be called a “sequel.” So, the gospel accounts conclude with Jesus and His 11 disciples on a Galilee mountaintop. After spending more than 3 years with them, it is time for them to part ways. He speaks His final words with them and they watch Him ascend back to heaven to be exalted once again at the right hand of His Father.

If the story ended here, the Bible would truly be incomplete. Readers would have no way of knowing how and when the promised kingdom would come. We would not know if this kingdom ever succeeded. Up until then, it had only been prophesied of and promised. Luke’s “sequel” completes the story by recording its emergence and existence. It shows how this kingdom spread in the first century as well as how one gains admission into it. The “second treatise” is the history book of the N.T., *especially* when one considers the epistles and tries to factor them into the apostolic journeys recorded in **Acts**. We will do our best to accomplish this after we complete the “first volume.”

Luke composes his “first treatise” to a *Greek* audience (**Matthew** to *Jews*; **Mark** to *Romans*; and **John** to *all the world*). It is a very orderly, chronological account of the 3 years Jesus walks among men. It is in the gospel record that one reads about Jesus...His entrance into the human world, His travels, His teachings, and most importantly, His death, burial, and resurrection to save man from sin.

Acts can be divided into two main sections, each focusing on the labors of an specific apostle.

- ◆ Peter → the focus of the early chapters.
The church, in its early stages of existence and development, is only in Jerusalem. It eventually spreads to the outlying areas of Judea and Samaria, and then to the Gentiles. Peter played a major role in all these activities, recorded in 8 of the book’s first 12 chapters.
- ◆ Paul → the focus of the later chapters.
The gospel now actively spreads westward toward Asia, Macedonia, Greece, and Rome. The travels and labors of Paul among the Gentiles, and his epistles to churches he started as well as to certain individuals, dominate 17 of the book’s final 20 chapters.

The Author

The *ultimate* Author is the Holy Spirit (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**). The human penman chosen for this “2-volume set” was Luke. While knowing little about him, we can say the following:

- ✓ His name is mentioned 3 times in the N.T....all from letters we classify as “prison epistles” (**Col. 4:14**; **Phlm. 24**; **2 Tim. 4:11**).
- ✓ He appears to have been a Gentile. We conclude this from Paul’s closing comments in his letter to the church at Colossae (**Col. 4:10-14**). Luke is not included in the list of the apostle’s “*fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision.*”
- ✓ He was a faithful traveling companion of Paul. He first joins the apostle on his 2nd journey when Paul comes to Troas – *the pronouns switch from “they” to “we” and “us”* (**Acts 16:8-10**). They come to Philippi together. Following all the events that took place in that city, apparently Luke

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remained there while Paul ventured on, and they do not reunite until Paul comes back through Macedonia on his return trip to Jerusalem during his 3rd journey – *pronouns switch back to “they,” then again to “we” (Acts 20:5)*. From then on Luke seems to be with Paul, even through imprisonments...not only the Jewish one in Caesarea (**Acts 20:5-6; 21:8, 17; 27:1**) but also both Roman imprisonments (**Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11**). At the very end of Paul’s noble life, he records, *“Only Luke is with me.”* How this man must have meant so much to Paul, even in his last days!

- ✓ He was a physician (**Col. 4:14**). He no doubt was a source of comfort and help during Paul’s illnesses, excessive hardships and beatings for the cause of Christ. It surely would not be overly speculative to imagine Paul being “doctored” and aided by Luke’s medical skills. Luke’s medical background even seems to “come through” in his writings. He writes with a “preciseness” that befits one trained in medicine, doing so in both “treatises” (**cp. Lk. 4:38; 8:43; Acts 1:18**).

Audience

Both “treatises” are written to one named Theophilus (**Lk. 1:3; Acts 1:1**). His name means “Lover of God,” and we know even less about him than we do about the author. Whoever he was, we do know he had been taught. Luke wrote the “first treatise” so that this man might *“...know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed” (Lk. 1:4)*.

He is described in the gospel as *“most excellent.”* Various ideas exist as to what this means. Some say it indicates an affection by Luke. Others say it is a title, referring to a political position. Nothing can be argued with certainty. The only statement we can offer with certainty is this same expression *“most excellent”* is used in the Scripture with reference to a politician...Felix, the governor of Judea, and his successor Festus (**Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25**). Whether that proves Theophilus was also some sort of governing official is only speculative.

We also see that Theophilus is no longer *“most excellent”* when Luke writes the “second treatise.” If *“most excellent”* refers to his political position, and if Theophilus had become a believer because he had been taught, then his belief in Christ may have led to him losing his political position. While offering this only as a possibility, there is Biblical precedent for such occurrences (**cp. Acts 18:8, 17; 1 Cor. 1:14**).

Obviously, we cannot limit these 2 books only to this 1st century individual. They have been written and preserved for all humanity, as has been all the Scripture.

Time Of Writing

It is clear that Luke wrote the “first treatise” before he penned the “second treatise” (**cp. Acts 1:1**). However, it may be helpful to know as best as we can when he wrote each one. Bob & Sandra Waldron offer strong arguments that should be considered in their book, *“Go Tell The Good News” (p. 4)*.

- ◆ Re: the gospel account, Luke acknowledges others’ efforts in setting forth a “narrative” of the ministry of Jesus. He also mentions eyewitnesses “from the beginning” and how they had delivered their testimony to others. Implied in all this is research one would have done in composing his own “treatise.” Not being an eyewitness himself, the question that immediately

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comes to mind is: when would Luke have had ample opportunity to talk to those who possessed first-hand knowledge of Jesus and His work? The best argument that can be made is when Luke was in Caesarea with Paul during that two-year imprisonment by the Jews (**Acts 24:27**). Luke was with Paul when he came to Caesarea and on into Jerusalem after the third journey (**Acts 21:8, 17**). We also know he was with Paul after the apostle made his appeal to Caesar and departed for Rome (**Acts 27:1**). The surrounding regions of Judea & Galilee would have had several “witnesses” of Jesus’ life and work that could be “interviewed” during that time frame. This would have been roughly *58-60 A.D.*

- ◆ Re: the record in **Acts**, Luke most likely would have begun writing this “treatise” shortly after he completed the “first treatise.” Several possibilities exist here:
 - He could have begun writing it before they left Caesarea for Rome...the early chapters are concerned with the history of the church in Jerusalem.
 - He could have composed some of this record during the winter when they were shipwrecked on the island of Malta (**Acts 27:6 – 28:11**).
 - He could have completed the work after they arrived in Rome and spent another two years imprisoned there (**Acts 28:30**).

We can say with certainty that Luke concluded the “second treatise” after Paul’s release from the 1st Roman imprisonment. That is where the **Acts** record concludes. All this was before the persecution from Nero began (*64 A.D.*). Therefore, **Acts** was written between *60-64 A.D.*

When looking at the “two treatises” that Luke authored, they comprise the largest amount of the New Testament. Often, students will say Paul wrote the most. However, when one considers page for page...chapter for chapter...verse for verse, Luke’s writings outdistance those of Paul.

Not only this, but Luke’s “two treatises” *completely* record the history of God’s ultimate plan to redeem man. For centuries, God promised to send the answer to man’s problem of sin. “When the fullness of time came” Christ emerges on the scene. His earthly sojourn is recorded by the gospel writers, Luke being one of them. Upon completion of Christ’s ministry, the story is still not finished. Had no one recorded the “sequel,” we would not know the history of the final unveiling of God’s redemptive plan. We would not know about the start of the N.T. church and the important role it was to play in God’s great redemptive scheme. Luke again is the one chosen to write the conclusion and bring to an end the revelation of God’s plan to save man.