

The Gospel of Luke

Introduction

The Gospel of Luke was written by a Dr. Luke, a Gentile traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. It was written to Theophilus, lover of God as a way of encouraging “certainty” in the spoken word delivered by the eyewitness of Jesus. From the prologue we read:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. –Luke 1:1-4

The Author

The author of the Gospel is not directly named. We know from the prologue of the book of Acts we can determine that the author is the same person:

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. –Acts 1:1-3

So the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts form a two-part work with the aim of telling an “orderly account” of all of the things related to the beginning of Jesus ministry through the apostolic “acts” of the early church.

The Tradition of the early church

The early church fathers were unanimous in ascribing authorship to the Gentile physician, Luke; Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and the Muratorian Canon all ascribed authorship of Luke-Acts to Luke. Neither Eusebius of Caesarea nor any other ancient writer mentions another tradition about authorship.

A Travelling Companion of Paul

As the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul are recorded in the book of Acts there is a grammatical change of voice regarding the members of Paul’s party moving from 3rd person plural (“they”) to 1st person plural (“we”): (See Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28.) It is widely believed that these are the times when the author of Luke-Acts joins the missionary party in person and participating in the events he is describing. In the prologue of the Gospel quoted above, he alludes to the “many who have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished **among us**”. The “among

us” would seem to imply that the author personally took up this narrative undertaking with the book of Acts, following his completion of his narrative of Jesus’.

If we take this to be the case, he would be one of the many traveling companions of Paul on his several missionary journeys.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul describes a “thorn in the flesh”. This was quite possibly a chronic medical condition that required the assistance of a physician. Certainly, the accompaniment of a physician to help in times of persecutions, ship wrecks, wild animal bites, etc. (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-28) would have been very helpful to the missionary team and Paul. Luke was described by Paul as 'the beloved physician.' He is three times mentioned by name in Paul’s letters: Philemon 24; Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11.

Original Audience

Luke specifically addressed his Gospel to “Theophilus” or God-lover. While it is likely that this was a particular person. Luke may have had in mind **any** individual who wanted to be in a personal relationship with God. The motivation of the gospel was to encourage “certainty” in Theophilus’ own journey in learning about Jesus and the teachings he had received from the “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.”

The narrative of Luke-Acts records nothing of the destruction of the Temple or the martyrdom of any of the Apostles other than Stephen. Events which certainly would have figured prominently in any narrative about the Acts of the Apostles. So, so it likely that these works were both completed prior to 70 AD and sometime after the completion of the Gospel of Mark as that Gospel seems to be a source for some of Luke’s material.

His purpose in writing is to get across the great message of Salvation.

As one commentator puts it,

“For Luke, the God of Israel is the Great Benefactor whose redemptive purpose is manifest in the career of Jesus, whose message is that this benefaction enables and inspires new ways of living in the world.”²²

²² Joel Green, Luke 1997.