

The Gospel According to Luke, Introduction

Luke - an abbreviation for Lucanus as Silas is for Silvanus. He is not named but unbroken tradition has associated the third Gospel and Acts to him. He is styled as the 'beloved physician' in Col. 4:14 and the use of certain medical terms seems to reinforce that description. It is conjectured that he had been a slave, which many doctors were. He was a Gentile - excluded from the circumcised Col. 4:10,11, but he had great familiarity with Jewish customs and thinking. His Classical style of Greek writing indicates that he was of Greek rather than Roman origin.

Historical Evidence.

a. **Irenaeus** – born c. 130 but some say much earlier. His bishop was Pothinus (87-177), whom he succeeded and who was ninety years of age when martyred and who must have known many hearers of the Apostles. Irenaeus must have received information concerning the first century Church from his bishop and was witness to the early traditions in Asia Minor, Rome and Gaul. From: *Adversus Haereses* III,1,1. *graece apud* Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, V 2.2-4.

καὶ Λουκᾶς δέ, ὁ ἀκόλουθος Παύλου, τὸ ὑπ' ἐκείνου κηρυσσόμενον εὐαγγέλιον ἐν βίβλῳ κατέθετο.

'and Luke, the follower of Paul, set forth in a book the gospel that was preached by him.'

By the time Irenaeus was writing there was already variant versions as a result of copying in various parts of the Empire. He noted the four Gospels and quoted from them calling them Scripture. The modern fashion of pushing the Gospels later and later in date ignores the fact that Irenaeus could have been as certain of the authorship of Luke as we can be of say 'Mein Kampf' by Hitler.

b. **Justin Martyr**. Converted in c 130-135 - he says that the memoirs of the Lord which are called Gospels by Apostles Matthew and John and by disciples of the Apostles, Mark and Luke. He cites verses from Luke and makes numerous quotations from all four Gospels.¹ Again he was close enough to the source date to be certain of origin. Passages from the Gospels were read in churches on Sunday and were given a status equal to that of the Old Testament.

c. The **Muratorian Canon**. The existing document is an 8th century copy in poor Latin of a Greek text from the second century :- *The third book of the gospel is that according to Luke. Luke, the physician, when, after the Ascension of Christ Paul had taken him to himself as one studious of right wrote in his own name what he had been told, although he had not himself seen the Lord in the flesh. He set down events as far as he could ascertain them, and began his story with the birth of John.*²

d. **Origen** c. 182-251

καὶ τρίτον τὸ κατὰ Λουκᾶν, τὸ ὑπὸ Παύλου ἐπαινούμενον εὐαγγέλιον τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν ἔθνῶν πεποιηκότα·

'and third, Luke, who has composed for those from the Gentiles the Gospel praised by Paul;'

e. Perhaps the most useful external evidence is the anti-Christian propaganda of **Celsus**. This writer produced a 'True Discourse' around 177 in which he accuses Christians of being in secret and illegal association, the origins of Christianity were derived from secondary sources, some even barbarous, Jesus could not be proved from his miracles which could be the mere tricks of a

1 Catholic Encyclopaedia, 1913.

2 Documents of the Christian Church, Henry Bettenson, 1962.

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juggler etc. From his attack on Christianity it can be deduced that he had read the synoptic Gospels and had read the genealogy of Jesus in Luke.³

f. **Augustine of Hippo** - De Consensu Evangelistarum - c. 400

I.3. So these four evangelists, well-known throughout the entire world (and perhaps they are four because of this, since there are four parts of the world, through the whole of which, they have proclaimed, in a certain manner by the very sacrament of their own number, that the church of Christ has spread) **are regarded to have written in this order: first Matthew, then Mark, third Luke, and last John**. Hence, there is one order to them in learning and preaching, and another in writing.

Luke, however, appears to be more occupied with the priestly lineage and character of the Lord. For he also goes back to David himself, following not the kingly pedigree but through those who were not kings. He diverges at Nathan son of David, who was also not a king, unlike Matthew, who descends from Solomon the king and goes through the other kings in turn, keeping a mystical number among them which we will speak about later.

g. **Jerome** - Ad Hebridos, Epistula 120, 11 - c. 406/7

Lucas, medicus Antiochensis, ut ejus scripta indicant Graeci sermonis non ignarus fuit, sectator apostoli Pauli et omnis ejus peregrinationis comes, scripsit Evangelium, de quo idem Paulus: misimus, inquit, com illo fratrem cujus laus est in evangelio per omnes ecclesias. [2 Cor. 8:18], et ad Colossenses, salutat vos Lucas medicus carissimus [4:14], et ad Timotheum, Lucas est mecum solus [2 Tim. 4:11].

Luke, an Antiochene physician, was not ignorant of the Greek speech as his writings indicate. A follower of the apostle Paul and companion on all his journeying, he wrote a gospel about which Paul said: *we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches. [2 Cor. 8:18], and to the Colossians, Luke the dearest physician greets you [4:14], and to Timothy, Luke alone is with me [2 Tim. 4:11].*

Aliud quoque edidit volumen egregium quod titulo Apostolicorum praxewn praenotatur, cujus historia usque ad biennium Romae commorantis Pauli pervenit, id est usque ad quartum Neronis annum. Ex quo intelligimus in eadem urbe librum esse compositum. Igitur περιόδους Pauli et Theclae et totam baptizati leonis fabulam inter apocryphas scripturas computemus. Quale enim est, ut individuus comes apostoli inter ceteras ejus res hoc solum ignoravit? Sed et Tertullianus, vicinus illorum temporem, refert presbyterum quendam in Asia, σπουδαστην apostoli Pauli, convictum apud Johannem quod auctor esset libri, et confessum se hoc Pauli amore fecisse, loco excidisse.

He also published another excellent volume which is known by the title Acts of Apostles, whose story reaches up to Paul's two-year stay in Rome, that is until the fourth year of Nero. From which we understand that the book was composed in the same city. Therefore, the Journeys of Paul and Thecla and the entire tale about the baptized lion we reckon among the apocryphal scriptures. For how is it that the inseparable companion of the apostle among his other things be unaware of just this? But Tertullian too, close to those times, reports that a certain presbyter in Asia, a fan of the apostle Paul, convicted by John to be the author of the book and confessed that he did it for the love of Paul, left his position.

3 New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Christian Knowledge.

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Quidam suspicantur, quotiescumque Paulus in epistulis suis dicat juxta evangelium meum [Rom. 16:23], de Lucae significare volumine et Lucam non solum ab apostolo Paulo didicisse evangelium, qui cum Domino in carne non fuerat, sed et a ceteris apostolis. Quod ipse quoque in principi voluminis sui declarat dicens: sicut tradiderunt nobis qui a principio ipsi viderunt et ministeri fuerant sermonis [Luke 1:2]. Igitur Evangelium, sicut audierat scripsit, Acta vero apostolorum, sicut viderat ipse, composuit.

Certain people suspect that whenever Paul says according to my gospel in his letters [Rom 16:23], he means the volume of Luke's and that Luke was taught the gospel not only by Paul, who had not been with the Lord in the flesh, but also by the other apostles. As he himself also declared in the beginning of his volume, just as those who themselves saw from the beginning and were ministers of the word, handed down to us [Luke 1:2] Therefore, he wrote the gospel just as he heard and composed the acts just as he himself saw.

Sepultus est Constantinopolim, ad quam urbem, vicesimo Constantii anno, ossa ejus, cum reliquiis Andreae apostoli, translata sunt.

He was buried in Constantinople, into which city, in twentieth year of Constantius [II, emperor 337-61], his bones with the relics of the apostle Andrew were translated.

Prologus Quattuor Evangeliorum

Tertius **Lucas** medicus, natione Syrus Antiochensis, cujus laus in evangelio, qui et ipse discipulus apostoli Pauli in Achaiae Boeotiaeque partibus volumen condidit, quaedam altius repetens et, ut ipse in prohemio confitetur, audita **omnibus** quam visa describens.

Third was Luke, physician, Antiochene Syrian by birth, whose praise is in the gospel. He, also a disciple of the apostle Paul, put together the volume in the regions of Achaia and Boeotia, repeating certain things more deeply and, as he acknowledged in his preface, describing what he heard rather than saw.

Jerome, Eusebius and Origen were men who testified not only to their own belief concerning the existence and authorship of Luke's Gospel but also to the belief of earlier times. Jerome and Origen travelled widely and would not have been swayed by a local opinion or prejudice. All three had available to them the total Christian writings of the previous centuries.

It is not fashionable today to assert that the Gospels were written by their traditional authors at the traditional times. German scholarship, beginning with Weisse⁴ in 1838, overturned traditional thinking and replaced it with a study based entirely on the analysis of Scriptural texts and it totally ignored the powerful historical evidence. Such opinions which do not take all the available evidence into account cannot be said to be scientific. They are the product of academic deduction and have no basis in historical fact.

h. The Prologue to the Gospel

It has been noted that Papias (died c 120) did not make any mention of the Gospel of Luke in his description of the gospels - he did not have to - the way in which Luke's Gospel came into being was described by Luke himself.

4 Weisse, C.H. (1838) Die evangelische Geschichte, Leipzig.

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The Prologue

The Dedication to Theophilus

1 Ἐπειδήπερ πολλοὶ ἐπεχείρησαν ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν περὶ τῶν
Seeing that⁵ many undertook to put together in order⁶ a narrative⁷ concerning the
πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων,
having been fulfilled amongst us matters,
2 καθὼς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρέται γενόμενοι τοῦ
just as they delivered to us the from beginning eye-witnesses⁸ and servants having become of the
λόγου,
word,
3 ἔδοξεν κάμοι παρηκολουθηκóτι ἄνωθεν πᾶσιν ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοι
it seemed good also to me having followed closely from the first all things exactly in order to you
γράψαι, κράτιστε Θεόφιλε,
to write, most excellent⁹ Theophilus,
4 ἵνα ἐπιγνῶς περὶ ὧν κατήχηθης λόγων τὴν ἀσφάλειαν.
that you might know concerning which you were instructed of accounts the undoubted truth.

Date of Composition

There are two schools of thought regarding the date of composition - there is the one that favours a date prior to 70 AD and the other that prefers a later date putting the second volume - Acts as late as 120 AD.

a. Evidence for the earlier date.

The Catholic Encyclopaedia considers that the Didache derives from around 70 AD and this opinion is based on the primitive nature of the Liturgies described. The Didache contains the combined version of the Lord's Prayer so if we accept this dating for the Didache the both Matthew's and Luke's Gospel were in existence by 70 AD.

If we turn now to Acts - the second volume of Luke's work - we find that Acts gives the history of the Church from the Ascension until around 64 AD. If we accept that the purpose of Acts was to be a history and an apologetic then this latter indication would be pointless after 70 AD when the Jewish revolt was put down and Christians were regarded as a troublesome Jewish sect.

It follows that since Acts was the second volume of Luke's account of the beginning and spread of Christianity and was written after 64 - then the gospel was earlier than that date. There is an opinion that Luke wrote the gospel and the Acts to conciliate the Roman Authorities - and objective which would have been futile after 70 AD.

b. Evidence for a later date.

5 ἐπειδήπερ, conj., seeing that, for as much, - only here in the NT.

6 ἀνατάξασθαι, v., put together in order, aorist, middle, infinitive, - only here in the NT.

7 διήγησιν, n.f. narrative, - only here in the NT.

8 αὐτόπται, n.m., eye witness, - only here in the NT.

9 κράτιστε, most excellent, m. illustrious, - a Lukan word also in Acts 23:26, 24:3, 26:5.

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One of the reasons for attempting to place the writing to a later date lies in the concept that Luke used Josephus as an historical source. However, Luke often is at variance with the Josephus and must have had a separate source.

Another is that Luke shows a great knowledge and uses the text from Mark's gospel. This depends on the fashionable hypothesis that Mark's gospel was the earliest. The historical evidence is that Matthew's gospel was the earliest and was available to both Mark and Luke. The Q hypothesis requires an unknown source for the narrative passages in Matthew and Luke - if one accepts the historical evidence then Matthew is the principal source for the other two gospels. If one looks at the problem from an alternative viewpoint - Mark's gospel consists of 51% Matthew, 40% Luke and only around 9% is peculiar to Mark so was Mark's gospel the last to be written? The Q hypothesis has no existence in reality but only in the minds of academics.

Characteristics of the Gospel

Luke's Gospel has been called "the Gospel of the nations, full of mercy and hope, assured to the world by the love of a suffering Saviour;" "the Gospel of the saintly life;" "the Gospel for the Greeks; the Gospel of the future; the Gospel of progressive Christianity, of the universality and gratuitousness of the gospel; the historic Gospel; the Gospel of Jesus as the good Physician and the Saviour of mankind;" the "Gospel of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man;" "the Gospel of womanhood;" "the Gospel of the outcast, of the Samaritan, the publican, the harlot, and the prodigal;" "the Gospel of tolerance." The main characteristic of this Gospel is fitly expressed in the motto, "Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38; comp. Luke 4:18). Luke wrote for the "Hellenic world." This Gospel is indeed "rich and precious."

"Out of a total of 1151 verses, Luke has 389 in common with Matthew and Mark, 176 in common with Matthew alone, 41 in common with Mark alone, leaving 544 peculiar to himself. In many instances all three use identical language." There are seventeen of our Lord's parables peculiar to this Gospel. Luke also records seven of our Lord's miracles which are omitted by Matthew and Mark. The synoptical Gospels are related to each other after the following scheme. If the contents of each Gospel be represented by 100, then when compared this result is obtained:

Mark has 7 peculiarities, 93 coincidences. Matthew 42 peculiarities, 58 coincidences. Luke 59 peculiarities, 41 coincidences.

That is, thirteen-fourteenths of Mark, four-sevenths of Matthew, and two-fifths of Luke are taken up in describing the same things in very similar language.

Luke's style is more finished and classical than that of Matthew and Mark. There is less in it of the Hebrew idiom. He uses a few Latin words (Luke 12:6; 7:41; 8:30; 11:33; 19:20), but no Syriac or Hebrew words except sikera, an exciting drink of the nature of wine, but not made of grapes (from Heb. shakar, "he is intoxicated", Lev. 10:9), probably palm wine.

This Gospel contains twenty-eight distinct references to the Old Testament.

It is commonly supposed that Luke wrote under the direction, if not at the dictation of Paul. Many words and phrases are common to both; e.g., compare:

Luke 4:22; with Col. 4:6. Luke 4:32; with 1 Cor. 2:4. Luke 6:36; with 2 Cor. 1:3. Luke 6:39; with Rom. 2:19. Luke 9:56; with 2 Cor. 10:8. Luke 10:8; with 1 Cor. 10:27. Luke 11:41; with Titus 1:15.

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Luke 18:1; with 2 Thess. 1:11. Luke 21:36; with Eph. 6:18. Luke 22:19, 20; with 1 Cor. 11:23-29.
Luke 24:46; with Acts 17:3. Luke 24:34; with 1 Cor. 15:5.