

BIB203 NT1 Life of Christ

Unit 2c Luke as Author

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We come now to the chronological and historical setting for the gospel of Luke. Luke's gospel is the longest document in the New Testament. It introduces a lot of material that you don't find in Matthew or Mark. We call it L material. So with respect to authorship for Luke, it is generally agreed that Luke and Acts were written by the same person. So Luke writes a two-volume work that we now call Luke-Acts. There are prologues in both books in the first chapters and they connect both books. We've got theology, we've got language, and we've got style, and these demonstrate similarity of expression by the same author. So they are tightly linked in terms of theology, the theology of the author, the language that the author uses, which is relatively advanced Greek in relation to the rest of the Koine in the New Testament, with the exception of the letter to the Hebrews. We have style. The style is consistent across the board in Luke and in Acts.

So there is strong support for the identification of the author of this particular gospel as Luke. Now, Luke was not an eyewitness to the ministry of Christ, but he had access to those who were. There are a lot of "we" sections in the missionary journeys section of the Book of Acts where Luke clearly includes himself in Paul's apostolic party, as an observer and as a participant. So we have oral testimony for the composition of his gospel because he knew people who were eyewitnesses to the ministry of Christ. Certainly not Paul, but others. And he would have talked to them and he would have gotten oral testimony and he would have been aware of written documentation as we see in the prologue to Luke in chapter 1. There was written material there depicting the fact that there were actually written sources. There were others who had undertaken to write an orderly account.

Almost all of Luke's material for the composition of his gospel is secondhand. That doesn't militate against its value. Luke's gospel has a prominent emphasis on Gentile issues. The Greek, as I've said before, is refined. There are flashes of vulgarity. What I mean by that is you have common Koine expressions in the midst of refined Greek. So he is deft in terms of his switching back and forth between those. The writing is quite good overall, as we've said. You have compelling internal evidence for the latter portion of the Book of Acts. You have several passages that are written in the first person plural, the "we," leading to the supposition that the author was one of the members of Paul's apostolic party. The Greek style is similar for both books. The external evidence, though, is far more forceful where Luke is concerned. We have Marcion, Irenaeus, the anti-Marcionite prologue to the gospel of Luke. You have Tertullian, another Latin church father who lived from 160 to 220. Marcion is a 2nd century father. So is Irenaeus. Irenaeus lived from 120 to about 202. They all testify to the authorship of the gospel as being by Luke. This sheer identification is due to the fact probably that books were hardly ever in circulation without a name attachment in that era. In other words, the time between the composition of a book or a document and the ascription of a name was quite short, and it always started with oral acknowledgment by the community that the document was written to, that so and so wrote this. And then after a while, a short while, there would be an ascription of authorship semi-formally. There would be the writing of a name, "according to."

There are other considerations. The author is not an apostle. Luke is not an apostle, but he is definitively attested by these church fathers: Marcion, Tertullian, Irenaeus, the anti-Marcionite prologue, as being the author of Luke's gospel. So this is also an argument for ascription of authorship to the doctor known as Luke. According to Colossians 4:10-14, he was probably a Gentile physician and a God-fearer, although there is a historical tradition that says that he was a proselyte from Antioch. The term proselyte meaning a Gentile who underwent circumcision and learned the Law of Moses and then offered sacrifice to be formally inducted within Judaism. He appears to have had substantial knowledge

of the Old Testament, in Greek, that is. So he would have been familiar with the LXX. He also appears to be familiar with Judaism.

There is no certain provenance or place of writing for the composition of Luke. It's been suggested that Luke was from Antioch by scholars who hold to the historical blurb as being valid. And I think that we should hold to that historical tradition as being valid. Luke is from Antioch. Another suggestion of place of writing is Achaëa where you have Greece. It's contiguous with the province of Greece, according to the Greco-Roman figuring. So you're looking at maybe he wrote it from Corinth, but there's no consensus on that. That's not a very strong argument. It seems best to state that Luke is from Antioch, but we don't know where he wrote the gospel of Luke from, Luke-Acts.

Consensus opinion holds to the composition of the third gospel after Mark. It's normally dated in the 60s, but you have some who suggest a date range from 75 to 85. We argue for a date range in the 60s because there is no mention of Nero's persecution of Christians or the destruction of Jerusalem or the deaths of Peter and Paul. The second reason: Acts ends with Paul's imprisonment in Rome. Third reason: There is no mention of Jerusalem's destruction, and so the inference is that that event hasn't occurred yet at the time of Luke's composition of his two-volume work. Fourth reason: The pastoral letters reflect a later visit by Paul to Ephesus, and that wasn't recorded in the Book of Acts. And fifth, the Pauline corpus as a whole is not given any treatment in the Book of Acts. So if we date Luke late, that presents a problem. It's better to date Luke earlier, so hence the 60s and not 75 to 85.

The later date range is based on a reading of Luke's rendition of Jesus' prediction of the fall of Jerusalem. So again, that's leading back into. And so the scholars would take the fall of Jerusalem as depicted in Luke as an actual event and not prediction. Secondly, Luke uses Mark, and so if Mark is assigned to the mid-60s or later, then you have to ascribe a later date, say the 70s, to Luke. And Luke would have only used a canonical form of Mark. And then you have Luke's prologue with respect to the number of accounts that were existent prior to his composition, and those accounts may well have required a measurable amount of time for them to be viable as sources for his gospel. The fourth part of this argument concerns Luke's eschatology, his doctrine of the last days. There is no imminence in Luke like you find in Mark and Matthew. When you take these two arguments together, one for the 60s, one for 75 to 85, it seems best to take a date in the 60s as the day of composition. We cannot substantiate the dating for Luke's gospel with the dating for the Book of Acts because there is no solid consensus for the date of Acts. So this is about Luke's gospel. We can date reasonably Luke's gospel to the 60s.