

SDA Bible Commentary

The Gospel According to St. Luke

1. Title. The earliest manuscripts having the title of this Gospel read, "According to Luke." Later manuscripts read, "The Gospel According to Luke," or, "The Holy Gospel According to Luke."

2. Authorship. The ancient and unanimous consensus of Christian Tradition points to Luke as the author of the Gospel that bears his name. In his *Ecclesiastical History* (iii. 4. 6) Eusebius (died c. 340) specifically designates Luke as the author of this gospel. A Century earlier Tertullian (died c. 230) spoke of Paul as the "illuminator" of Luke, that is, the one who encourage Luke and provided him with much of the information contained in Luke's writings. About the year A.D. 185 Iraneous wrote: "Luke, the follower of Paul, put in a book the gospel that was preached by him." The famous Muratorian Fragment, a portion of a document written toward the close of the 2nd century, agrees with Iraneous, stating that the third Gospel was written by Luke the physician, a companion of Paul. Early tradition thus unanimously favors Luke as the author of the Gospel that bears his name. There is no evidence that points to anyone other than Luke as the author.

Luke and the Acts may be considered as volumes 1 and 2 of a work that might appropriately be entitled "The Origin and Early Development of Christianity." The introduction to the book of Acts (ch. 1:1) clearly points to the common authorship of the two books. Literary style and diction are manifestly the same in both. Both are dedicated to the same man, Theophilus (see Luke 1:3). The section in the book of Acts where the author uses personal pronoun "we" indicate that he was a close companion of Paul, particularly during his closing years of ministry. From Troas, it appears that the author was associated with Paul during the pioneer days of the gospel in Greece (Acts 16:10-18), was with him on his final visit to Palestine (chs. 20:5 to 21:18), and accompanied him on his voyage to Rome (chs. 27:1 o 28:16). In Col 4:14 and Philemon 23, 24, Luke, as a colaborer with Paul, sends greetings to those to whom these epistles are addressed. Toward the close of his final imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote Timothy, "Only Luke is with me" (2 Timothy 4:11). The apostle's other companions had either been dispatched on missions to one or another of the churches or had forsaken him. Amid the gathering shadows of his last days, Paul must have felt a profound appreciation for the tender and competent ministry of a man such as the "beloved physician." This man, it seems clear was the author of Acts and the Gospel that bears his name.

The context of Col. 4:11-14 seems to imply Luke was not a Jew but a Gentile, for he is listed not among men of the circumcision, but with others who are known to have been gentiles. The book of Luke is generally considered to be the one of the literary of the NT, and in many respects most nearly like the style of the Greek writers. This is particularly true of the introduction to Luke (vs. 1-4).

Eusebius (ibid) describes Luke as “by race an Antiochian and a physician by profession.” He was, presumably, a native of Antioch, and some have thought that it was there that he wrote. Others have suggested Rome as the place of writing. Luke and Paul are the two most voluminous contributors to the NT. The place and manner of Luke’s death are unknown, though tradition states that Luke was martyred in Greece, explaining that he was nailed to a living olive tree.

Conservative scholars generally date the book of Luke not later than the year A.D. 63, for the following reason: the book of Luke was apparently written before the book of Acts (see Acts 1:1). The abrupt ending of the book of Acts is generally considered to be the evidence that the book was written during the time Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome, about A.D. 61-63, probably soon after his arrival in that city. The simplest explanation for the abrupt ending is that Luke told no more in the book of Acts because, at the time, there was no more to tell. It is extremely unlikely the trial, release, rearrest, conviction and execution of Paul would have been omitted from the record of Acts had these events already taken place at the time of the composition of the book. There is no evidence that these events were part of the original text of Acts or that they were lost from it at some later time. In view of these facts it is safe to assume that the book of Acts was written about A.D. 63 and the Gospel of Luke even earlier (see Acts 1:1)—how much earlier cannot be said. For a further discussion on the chronology of the writing of the Gospels see pp. 178, 179. For various theories on the origin of the Gospels see pp. 175-177.

3. Historical Setting. For a brief outline of the historical background of the life and mission of Jesus see p. 272. For a more complete discussion see pp. 41-67.

4. Theme. Matthew presents Jesus as the great Teacher, the exponent of divine truth. Mark presents Him as the Man of action, and gives emphasis in His miracles as a manifestation of divine power attesting His Messiahship. Luke brings Jesus into close contact with human needs, emphasizing His human side of His nature, and presents Him as the Friend of humanity. John presents Jesus as the Divine Son of God.

As Matthew is believed to have written primarily for readers of Jewish birth, and Mark for those of a Latin background, so Luke is thought to have written especially for Greek readers. His diction suggests that he addressed himself to the cultured and educated men of his day. He was evidently a man of intelligence and culture, acquainted with contemporary literary style. This is evident from his prefaces of Luke and Acts, his dating of events in terms of the tenure of various officials, and his use of, and references to, the sources of information on which he relied.

As Matthew, writing primarily for men of Jewish ancestry, traces the genealogy of Jesus back to the founder of their nation, so Luke, writing for men of all races, traces the

ancestry of Jesus back to Adam, the father of all mankind. More than any other evangelist, Luke takes note of incidents that reveal Jesus interest in, and ministry for, Gentiles. More than any other gospel writer he refers to Roman centurions, and always in a favorable light. The world view of Luke is also evident in his record of Paul's appeals to the Gentiles (see Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31). In Luke there is scarcely a trace of Jewish exclusiveness, which may be detected occasionally in Mathew and Mark.

Further evidence that Luke was the writer of the Gospel that bears his name is to be found in the medical terms appearing frequently in the book (Luke 4:38; 5:12; 8:43; etc.). These are thought to indicate that the author was a physician (see Col. 4:14).