

INTRODUCTORY NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE¹

AUTHORSHIP: Luke (Luke 1:1-4 cf. Acts 1:1-5). “Since Sir William Ramsay wrote his epoch-making books on Paul and his world, increasingly fewer critics have called into question the Lucan authorship of the Third Gospel. Adolph Harnack, who at first was opposed to it, became one of the most powerful advocates of it. Witness is born to Luke’s authorship of this writing by Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement, Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus, Jerome, and Eusebius... Plummer says, ‘**the voice of the first eight centuries pronounces strongly for him and for no one else as the author of the Third Gospel and the Acts...** In both are the same general vocabulary and style; in both it is evident that the author is a man of considerable culture; in both there is reason to believe that the author is a medical doctor, and both make reference to a man named Theophilus (Luke 1:1; Acts 1:1). Luke alone of anyone known answers to the requirements of these two books.”²

“**The Muratorian Fragment, the oldest list of New Testament books that has been found, records Luke and Acts as by Luke the physician** (end of second century A.D.). In later centuries there is a uniform tradition of Lucan authorship for Luke/Acts. No alternative is suggested... **Luke is the only Gentile author of the New Testament.** Paul clearly distinguishes him from the Jews (Col. 4:10-14).”³

“Luke, the ‘beloved physician’ (Col. 4:14), close friend and companion of Paul, was probably the only Gentile author of any part of the New Testament. We know nothing about his early life or conversion except that he was not an eyewitness of the life of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:2). Though a physician... he was primarily an evangelist... accompanying Paul in missionary work. He was with Paul at the time of the apostle’s martyrdom (2 Tim. 4:11), but of his later life we have no certain facts.”⁴

“It is practically certain that Luke was a Gentile. In Col. 4:10-14, six persons send greetings, and they are divided into three and three. The first three, Aristarchus, Marcus, and Justus, are, Paul says, ‘of the circumcision’ (11). The second three are mentioned separately, and almost all critics are agreed that the implication is that Luke was not a Jew. The affirmation in Scofield’s Bible that he was a Jew is not accompanied by any proof.”⁵

DATE: A.D. 60-61 “There are three main theories which circle around the dates, respectively, A.D. 100, A.D. 80, and A.D. 60. The late date... is claimed on the assumption that Luke made use of the Antiquities of Josephus, which was written in A.D. 94. Of this, however, there is no certain proof, and this theory must be abandoned. The intermediate date, A.D. 75-80, is influentially supported, but there are strong considerations against it... The Acts was written after the Gospel (Acts 1:1), and the history of the Acts does not take us beyond A.D. 63 when Paul was a prisoner in ‘his own hired house’ in Rome (28:30). **Between A.D. 63 and A.D. 75 great events occurred...** the burning of Rome in A.D. 64, the martyrdom of Paul, about A.D. 68, and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70... Luke 21:24 more than implies that Jerusalem was still standing. The simplest explanation of Luke’s silence in the Acts about all these events is that he finished the Book in A.D. 63, before they took place. That being so, his Gospel must have been written before this date (Acts 1:1), and probably a year or two earlier, sometime between A.D. 58 and A.D. 62.”⁶

PLACE OF WRITING: The two legitimate possibilities are **Caesarea or Rome**. “Luke was with Paul during the latter’s captivity in Caesarea, A.D. 58-60, for the ‘we,’ ‘us,’ and ‘our,’ in Acts 27, following on the Caesarean trial of xxiii. 33- xxvi, as also in xxi. 8, include the writer of the Book, who was Luke, who also was with Paul at Rome in A.D. 61-63 (Acts xxviii. 16). The Gospel, then, could have been written either at Caesarea or at Rome, or commenced at Caesarea and finished at Rome between A.D. 58 and A.D. 63.”⁷

ANTICIPATED AUDIENCE: Gentiles, particularly Greeks. “Explanations of Jewish customs and localities are given, which Jews would not have needed, such as, ‘Capernaum, a city of Galilee’ (iv. 31); ‘the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee’ (viii. 26) ... The genealogy of Jesus is traced to Adam, the father of the human

¹ Compiled by Mike Edwards, October, 1999, Greenville, SC (revised Dec., 2007 & Apr., 2013, St. Vincent, West Indies & Sept. 2017, Madison, Ohio). All material in parentheses () appears thus in the original sources. Anything bolded or in brackets [] has been added. -mwe

² W. Graham Scroggie, “*Guide to the Gospels*” (Kregel Publications: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995), pp. 134-135

³ Stewart Custer, “*Witness to Christ-A Commentary on Acts*” (BJU Press: Greenville, SC, 2000), p. xv

⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, “*The Ryrie Study Bible*” (Moody Press: Chicago, Illinois, 1994), p. 1541.

⁵ Scroggie, p. 334

⁶ Ibid, pp. 339-340

⁷ Ibid, p. 340

race, and not, as in Matthew, to Abraham only, the father of the Hebrews (Matt. i. 1; Luke iii. 38). The reigns of Roman Emperors are employed for marking the date of Jesus' birth, and of John's preaching (ii. 1; iii. 1) ...References to the Old Testament are only about thirty fewer than in Matthew, but the difference lies in the character and purpose of the references... It is worthy of note, also, that Luke characterizes demons as 'unclean,' or 'wicked' (iv. 33; viii. 2), because Gentiles believed in good demons, whereas to Jews, all demons were evil... Another evidence that Luke wrote for Gentiles is the noticeable absence of many Hebrew or Aramaic words which are found in the other Gospels..."⁸

“Luke pays special attention to women, children, and the oppressed in his Gospel (1:7, 27-46; 2:5, 19, 36, 48; 7:12, 37; 8:43-56; 10:38-42; 13:11; 15:8-10; 18:2-6; 21:1-4) as he does in Acts also (1:14; 5:1-10; 9:36-43; 12:13-15; 13:50; 16:1, 14-15; 17:12, 34; 18:2-3, 26; 21:8-9; 24:24; 25:13, 23).”⁹

THEME: *Christ as the perfect man.* “The Jew was characterized by deep religious feeling, the Roman by strength of will for action, and the Greek by great intellectual power... (The Greeks) were the representatives of universal humanity, and the great ideal towards which they worked was the perfect man. But they deified vice as well as virtue, and so their religion was unspiritual and debasing, and their hearts were restless and despairing (Acts xvii. 16, 21, 23). The presentation of Christ in Luke's Gospel has in view these characteristics and needs. **The human perfection which they sought is here manifested, their intellectual hunger could here be satisfied, and their religious aspirations may now be purified and realized.**”¹⁰

GENERAL PURPOSE & OUTLINE: “...Luke declared that he was writing so that Theophilus might know the certainty of the things he had been taught (Luke 1:1-4). Thus he intends to instruct the reader in the faith, that he might have a solid foundation for his belief... [A. B.] Bruce writes, ‘From the prefaces of the third Gospel and the book of Acts we learn that the author wrote for the immediate benefit of a single individual, a man of rank.’ He also notes that the works assume a wider circle of readers as well (Expositor's Greek Testament, I, p. 50). Those prefaces also show us that **he was writing as a historian, recounting events of recent history, not just pious or entertaining stories.** Ben Witherington maintains that Luke is the only ancient historian who presented the social changes of his time as an actual improvement... Luke deliberately prepared the way for the writing of Acts by statements in his Gospel concerning Gentiles (Luke 2:32; 3:6; 4:24-30).”¹¹

“The design of Luke in writing this Gospel may be regarded as twofold, *immediate* and *ultimate*. He tells us in his Preface that his immediate design was that Theophilus might know the certainty of the things concerning which he was instructed (i. 4); but his ultimate design was to convey these truths to those who had no instruction.”¹²

Ryrie breaks the Gospel of Luke down into several general sections:

“1) Introductory Background Material – 1:1-4:13

“2) Christ's Ministry – 4:14-9:50 &

“3) Christ's Repudiation (9:51-19:27) ...Condemnation (19:28-23:56) & Vindication (24:1-53) (*‘triumph’*-Scroggie).”¹³

MISCELLANEOUS: “Luke himself tells us that he had at his disposal ‘many’ narratives relating to Jesus' life and ministry (i. 4) ...It is certain [*?-mwe*] that Luke used Mark's Gospel, nearly, if not altogether, in the form in which we have it. It is estimated that about 320 of Mark's 661 verses (R.V.) are found in Luke, that is, nearly half of Mark.”¹⁴

“What is of general interest and should be carefully considered is the richness of Luke's vocabulary. In the Grimm-Thayer Lexicon it is shown that 312 words are found in this Gospel only in all the New Testament... There are another 61 words which occur in this Gospel and the Acts only...”¹⁵ In Luke's combined works of the Gospel that bears his name and Acts, **“He uses over 700 Greek words that no other New Testament writer uses** (Vincent, Word Studies, I, p. 601). Only the writer of Hebrews can come anywhere near the clear literary Koine Greek that Luke

⁸ Ibid, pp. 337-339

⁹ Custer, p. xv

¹⁰ Scroggie, p. 344

¹¹ Custer, p. xviii

¹² Scroggie, p. 344

¹³ Ryrie, p. 1540-41

¹⁴ Scroggie, p. 342

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 346

manifests... there [is] definite evidence for the medical background of Luke. He uses some unique vocabulary...that a physician would be interested in... When Luke refers to a needle, he uses the word for 'surgical needle' (Lk. 18:25). The other writers use the word for a 'household needle' (Mt. 19:24; Mk. 10:25)"¹⁶

"The Old Testament references in Luke may be classified as (a) **direct citations** (25); (b) **direct references**, but not citations (42); and (c) **echoes of Old Testament passages** (28)."¹⁷ "**The Gospel of Luke is the longest [book in the New Testament]** with 1,151 verses and 25, 944 words. In Greek Luke has 19,404 words (a 35-foot scroll). Acts [the 2nd longest book in the NT-also authored by Luke] has 1,007 verses and 24,250 words in English. In Greek, Acts has 18,374 words (a 32-foot scroll, Witherington, p. 6)."¹⁸

¹⁶ Custer, pp. xv, xvi. Cf. Acts 3:7 (feet & ankle bones), 4:22, 30 (healing), 9:18 (scales) 28:6 (swollen), 28:8 (dysentery)

¹⁷ Scroggie, pp. 363-365

¹⁸ Custer, p. xix