

A Guide to Luke, the ‘Beloved Physician’ Who Wrote Luke and Acts

“Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you” (Col. 4:14).

Luke is mentioned three times in the New Testament, each time by his close friend Paul. Scholars have noted the amount of medical language used in Luke-Acts as an indicator that Dr. Luke was the author. Paul refers to Luke in Philemon 24 as his “fellow laborer.” Luke spent lots of time traveling and laboring side-by-side with Paul in the work of the gospel. While many of Paul’s companions deserted him as he neared the end of his life, it appears Luke remained steadfast. Paul writes to Timothy in his last known epistle, “Only Luke is with me” (2 Tim. 4:11). In light of his medical background, Luke may have also been Paul’s physician tending to his various ailments and injuries in their travels together.

Paul does not include Luke in the group referenced in Colossians 4:11b: “These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision. They have been a comfort to me.” Therefore, most commentators have concluded that Luke was probably a Gentile and not a Jew.

Throughout the book of Acts, which is also written by Luke, there are numerous “we” passages indicating that someone was traveling with Paul on his various missionary journeys (Acts 16:10–17, 20:5–15, 21:1–11, 27:1–28:16). Many Bible scholars have concluded that Luke was the traveling companion of Paul mentioned in the “we” passages, which meant he had firsthand knowledge of and access to people who were at the center of Jesus’ life and movement of early Christianity. This would have provided Luke incredible opportunities to conduct his

historical research.

We do not know a lot about Luke's personal life, but an early historical account outside of Scripture says, "Indeed Luke was an Antiochene Syrian, a doctor by profession, a disciple of the apostles: later however he followed Paul until his martyrdom, serving the Lord blamelessly. He never had a wife, he never fathered children, and died at the age of eighty-four, full of the Holy Spirit, in Boetia [Greece]."

Luke's name (*Lucas*) is a Greek word, indicating his non-Jewish Gentile background. Scholars have pointed out that his written language and style are distinctively Greek, displaying a high level of sophistication similar to classic Greek writers. This is due to the fact that Luke is well-educated as a medical doctor. Bible commentator I. Howard Marshall writes:

The literary style of Luke and Acts demonstrates that their author was a well-educated person with considerable gifts of expression. The traces of medical language and the interest in medical matters displayed in them are consistent with authorship by the "beloved physician." Luke's gifts as a historian have been recognized by many scholars who have viewed his work against its classical background and compared him favorably with the best of ancient historians.

It is clear from the opening of Luke's Gospel (1:1–4) that he was not personally an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus. Rather, he personally investigated the life and ministry of Jesus Christ by interviewing those who were eyewitnesses. He writes that "those things which are most surely believed among us" were delivered or handed down to us from "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word" (1:1–2).

Archaeologists and historians who have studied Luke's works have only confirmed the accuracy of his methodical research. For example, Sir William Ramsay, former professor of classical

art at Oxford University, was at one time very opposed to Luke being considered an accurate historian. But after undertaking his archaeological research in Asia Minor, Professor Ramsay was convinced that he was wrong and Luke was right on the points where they had disagreed. Recanting his previous statements that Luke got some things wrong, Ramsay said:

Luke is an historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historical sense; he fixes his mind on the idea and plan that rules in the evolution of history, and proportions the scale of his treatment of the importance of each incident. He seizes the important and critical events and shows their true nature at greater length, while he touches lightly or omits entirely much that was valueless for his purpose. In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.

Luke's goal was to follow the truth wherever it led, and it led to Jesus Christ. In studying Luke, we should aim to likewise follow the truth wherever it leads.

Do you regard Luke's Gospel as a credible source for the truth about Jesus? If not, why not? {eoa}

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