

Book of Luke

Ancient testimony is unanimous that Luke (“the beloved physician,” Col. 4:14) penned the third Gospel.

Modern scholarship has rightly drawn attention to Luke as the companion volume to Acts; the two works were certainly written by the same author.

Some modern interpreters discount Luke’s authorship, but they fall short of proposing a convincing alternative to the ancient witnesses.

These scholars feel that Luke’s outlook is so different from Paul’s that no companion of Paul (see Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24), and the “we” sections of (Acts: 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16), could have written Luke and Acts.

Such arguments are by no means convincing.

The reader of the New Testament is not compelled to choose between Luke and Paul.

Differences in outlook may as easily count in favor of Luke’s authorship as against.

While Luke was not himself an eyewitness of the gospel events (1:2), he had access to writings about, and eyewitnesses to, them.

He had sifted sources carefully.

Many feel that he must have made use of Mark’s gospel.

Some have accordingly stressed his contribution as a historian, a discoverer and also a preserver of facts.

Others see in him primarily a theologian, an expositor of the meaning of facts.

He is really both.

He presents both the meaning of the gospel saga and its factual ground.

He produces what is, by the reckoning of many, the gospel most attractive in style and poignant in message that we possess.

Luke implies that he wrote his gospel prior to writing Acts (Acts 1:1).

Acts ends with Paul in prison, about A.D. 62.

A number of scholars thus agree on a date near A.D. 60-62 for writing of Luke.

Those who date it much later (A.D. 80-90, or even in the second century) do so for reasons that fail to overturn the likelihood of an earlier date.

Luke's language: He uses 266 words (not counting proper names) found nowhere else in the New Testament.

He is capable of elevated literary style (1:1-4).

He often writes in a manner reminiscent of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

If he was a Gentile, as many think, he nonetheless knew and loved the Old Testament well.

Luke's accuracy: For many, of course, accuracy in a biblical writing is assumed.

But Luke has been a prominent battleground (one scholar calls Lucan studies a "storm center") for those probing the New Testament's reliability, since it so clearly places itself in the context of ancient history (e.g., 3:1-2).

The historian and classical scholar Sir William Ramsay (1852–1916), began by assuming Luke's inaccuracy, but became convinced rather of the opposite.

In this Ramsay is hardly alone.

Where Luke can be tested, he shows a remarkable command of often obscure facts, and a determination not to distort those facts in the telling.

Luke stresses the overarching plan of God in human history as revealed through Israel, Christ, and the church.

He puts special emphasis on "salvation" as such (the word, though not the idea, is absent from Matthew and Mark, and appears once in John).

He is concerned with individuals (Zechariah, Elisabeth, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary and Martha, and Zaccheus, to name a few), shows the importance of women, and calls special attention to children, the poor, and the disreputable.

He stresses the Holy Spirit, both in the life of Jesus and in the early church.

Finally, as in all the gospels, Jesus' suffering and death find lengthy and detailed treatment.

Luke's gospel is a careful and engrossing presentation of God's saving will and work in the world, preeminently through His Son.