In my previous post I gave the logic that can be adduced for thinking that the Third Gospel was probably written by Luke, the gentile physician who was a companion of Paul for part of his missionary journeys. The short story, in sum: the author of Luke also wrote the book of Acts; the book of Acts in four places talks about what “we” (companions with Paul) were doing; both books were therefore written by one of Paul’s companions; Acts and Luke appear to have a gentile bias; only three of Paul’s companions were known to be gentiles (Colossians 4:7-14); Luke there is a gentile physician; Luke-Acts appears to have an enhanced interest in medical terminology; therefore Luke the gentile physician was probably its author.

Now, for a couple of posts or so, I’ll try to explain why, in my opinion, this logic is flawed.

In this post and the next (at least) I’ll deal with a lynchpin of the argument, that we know that Luke the gentile physician was a travelling companion of Paul.

The name “Luke” is mentioned three times in the New Testament (I’m still a firm believer in using a concordance; I think there is absolutely nothing better for helping one interpret the NT): Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; and Philemon 24. In all three Luke is named as a companion of Paul’s. But only in the Colossians passage is he called a gentile; and only there is he said to have been a physician. The problem – some of you will have guessed this by now – is that Paul almost certainly did not write either 2 Timothy or Colossians. That means that the only reference to Luke in one of Paul’s own writings is Philemon, where along with Demas he is said to be one of Paul’s fellow workers, but is not called a gentile physician. So why should anyone thing that *this* person, in particular, of all Paul’s acquaintances, wrote Luke-Acts??

It may be useful to show why most critical scholars (leaving aside fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals, who think that there cannot be forgeries in the NT) agree that Paul did not write Colossians. Rather than reinvent the wheel (or rewrite the book), I give here the evidence that I cite in my more popular book Forged (I make a much more detailed assessment in Forgery and Counter-Forgery; maybe tomorrow I’ll cite that discussion to show how scholarship works differently when directed toward scholars and when it is directed toward lay people. Or maybe not! J):

I include here, at the outset, the concluding paragraph of my discussion of Ephesians, which I also argued was not by Paul.:

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In point after point, when you look carefully at Ephesians, it stands at odds with Paul himself. This book was apparently written by a later Christian in one of Paul’s churches who wanted to deal with a big issue of his own day: the relation of Jews and Gentiles in the church. He did so by claiming to be Paul, knowing full well that he wasn’t Paul. He accomplished his goal, that is, by producing a forgery.

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Not for the Faint of Heart (Authorship of Colossians)
Why Luke is Thought To Have Written Luke