

I started this thread over a week ago on the authorship of the Third Gospe and its accompanying volume, the book of Acts, and would like now simply to bring some closure to it before moving on to other things. To sum up: there is a kind of interpretive logic that can lead one to think that the books were written by Luke, a Gentile physician who was a traveling companion of Paul. This is what I myself thought for years, and it was based on this logic, that:

- The author of Acts also wrote the Gospel of Luke
- That the author of Acts, and therefore of Luke, must have been a traveling companion of Paul (since he speaks of himself in the first person on four occasions)
- That this author was probably a Gentile because he was so concerned with the spread of the Christian movement among Gentiles (the whole point of the book of Acts)
- Paul himself speaks of a Gentile among his traveling companions in Colossians 4, naming him as Luke the beloved physician.
- Therefore this person was likely the traveling companion of Paul.

After laying out the logic of that position I tried to dismantle it by showing its very weak links, as I will summarize in a second. But first I should say that I completely agree, still, that whoever wrote Acts also wrote Luke. Not only does the beginning of Acts show this (compare it to the first four verses of Luke), but so does the similarity of writing style, vocabulary, theological perspectives, major themes, parallel incidents and just about everything else about the two books. Moreover, I tend to think a Gentile probably wrote these books.

I do not think the fact that he was concerned about a Gentile mission in and of itself shows this - Paul, for example, was *\*particularly\** concerned about the mission, and he was a Jew. No reason that this author couldn't be as well. But the the books are not particularly interested in Judaism per se; they instead want to stress that faith in Christ originated in a Jewish matrix as part of the plan of God, but that was just the starting point. For these books, that gentiles were not merely allowed into the faith (as many Jewish followers of Jesus would allow), it's that gentiles were the entire *\*objective\** of Jesus' and Paul's missions. The Jewish religion had, as a result, been more or less left behind.

But there's little reason to think the author was Paul's traveling companion and virtually no reason, in my opinion, to think that he was a physician named Luke. (I should point out, even by the time the books were written, near the end of the second century, *\*most\** followers of Jesus were gentile. So it's not at all weird that this author would be, but rather it would be expected.) It is important to stress: no one - not a solitary author - claims that it *\*was\** Luke until Irenaeus, writing in 180 CE. If the Gospel was written around 80 CE, that means the first time *\*anyone\** of record indicates that the author was Luke was a full century after it had been placed in circulation. Earlier authors quote the book (e.g., Justin); none of them gives the authors name.

The evidence from Paul is not good evidence, since Paul in fact did not write Colossians, the one book that mentions Luke as a gentile physician.

And the evidence that a traveling companion of Paul did not write the book is found in the circumstance that at virtually every point where what Acts says about Paul can be compared with what Paul says about Paul, one can find discrepancies. Some of these are minor matters, but some of them are BIG and important - such as whether Paul preached about the importance of Jesus' crucifixion (in Paul's letters it is clear this is the one thing that mattered to him; in Acts, as it turns out, he never indicates in any of his speeches or words

that Jesus' death brought about an atonement for sin!); whether he never deviated from the Jewish Law (Paul straightforwardly claims he did; Acts emphatically insists that he did not); whether he thought pagans worshiped idols knowing full well that there was really only one God and that as a result God was punishing them with damnation (Paul's clearly stated view) or instead whether he thought that they worshiped idols because they simply didn't know any better and so God overlooked their ignorance (the view put on Paul's lips in Acts); and ... well lots of other things.

As a result, I think it's relatively clear that Luke, the gentile physician who was a traveling companion of Paul, did not write the book of Acts (and so, the book of Luke).

I should emphasize that if anyone thinks that Luke \*did\* write the Gospel of Luke he/she bears a very heavy burden of proof. On what grounds would one want to take that stand?? About the only piece of evidence is a tradition that arose a hundred years after the book was placed in circulation, a tradition spread about among people who were not directly associated with the author or his community, so far as we can tell, living many years and long distances away.

In any event, my conclusion itself leads to two very important questions, though, which I have not touched on here but which I'll put off for a while, since I'm getting a sense that some of my fellow travelers on this blog are getting restless and would prefer I move on to other things. But still, there are two residual questions: (1) if the "we-passages" do not indicate that the author was a companion of Paul, how do we explain them? What are they doing there? and (2) relatedly, is it possible that the author \*wanted\* his readers to think he was a part-time companion of Paul, even though he wasn't? And if so, should we consider that a false authorial claim? That is, should we think of Acts as a forgery?

If that's the case, Luke itself would not be a forgery, since the author makes no claims about his identity and does not give any "hints" to make his readers suspect that he is anyone in particular. That's not true of Acts though. So for my money, the Third Gospel is anonymous. But is the book of Acts forged? If so, it's one of those books — we have others — that is forged by someone who doesn't tell us his name. That is, he wants you to think he is someone he wasn't (Paul's traveling companion), but he doesn't identify himself. In my book I called this an instance of non-pseudepigraphic forgery, i.e., a forgery that ironically is not written under a false name.

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