

Authorship of Luke's Gospel

What Is Generally Accepted

The author of Luke is also the author of the book of Acts.

The author of Luke is not an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus but rather depends on those who were (1:2).

The author of Luke is a well-educated person who is acquainted with both Old Testament literary tradition (especially the Septuagint) and Hellenistic literary techniques.

What Is Disputed

Was the Author "Luke the Physician" a Companion of Paul?

Evidence in favor: The writer refers to himself as a companion of Paul in what are called the "we passages" of Acts (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16).

However, this is taken by some as a literary device or as a carryover from the author's source, rather than as evidence that the author himself was present with Paul.

Evidence in favor: Church tradition identifies the author as "Luke the physician," whom Paul refers to in Colossians 4:14 as being among his companions (see also Rom. 16:21; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11). The earliest such witness is the Muratorian Canon, dated

170–180. It is unlikely that the church would invent a tradition attributing authorship to a relatively unknown and unimportant figure.

However, this identification may be based on a prior assumption (deduced from the “we passages”) that the author is Paul’s companion and so cannot be used as evidence for that point.

Evidence in favor: Luke’s Gospel and Acts use a relatively high proportion of “medical” terms.

However, it has been shown that Luke’s so-called medical vocabulary is used by nonmedical writers and is evidence only of a well-educated author rather than of one who is necessarily a physician.

Evidence against: The theology of Luke’s Gospel and Acts differs from that of Paul in important areas. First, a “theology of glory” replaces Paul’s “theology of the cross.” The death of Jesus is not expiatory (Mark 10:45 is omitted) but rather is viewed as a martyr’s death (Luke 23:47; cf. Mark 15:39). Second, Paul’s imminent eschatology is replaced by a concept of salvation history that allows for an extended era of “the church.”

However, the validity of these and other distinctions is debated.

Numerous points of contact between the theology of Luke/Acts and the theology of Paul may also be pointed out. Moreover, the author could have been a companion of Paul without being his disciple and so would not necessarily conform to his theology.

Evidence against: The picture of Paul presented in the book of Acts is historically inconsistent with that presented by Paul himself in his own letters.

- The account of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 is quite different from that given by Paul in Galatians 2.
- Acts does not usually call Paul an “apostle,” a title that was very important for Paul (but see Acts 14:4, 14).
- Acts presents Paul as a mighty miracle worker, but Paul’s own letters make no mention of the miracles he is said to have performed.
- Acts 17 reports Paul as saying that gentile pagans may worship God without knowing him, but Paul himself says just the opposite in Romans 1:21: “Though they knew God, they did not honor him as God.”
- In Acts, Paul does not preach justification by faith or proclaim freedom from the law for gentiles, although these are two of the most important recurring themes in his letters.
- Acts reports neither the several floggings and shipwrecks that Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 11:24–25 nor the sojourn in Arabia that he mentions in Galatians 1:17–22. It leaves out other information basic to his biography: he wrote letters to his churches; he planned to visit Spain; the collection for

Jerusalem was the motive for his fatal return to that city; he was executed in Rome.

However, on the one hand, all of these discrepancies may be interpreted as Luke's idealization of Paul in the interests of making him serve the author's own theological purpose; on the other hand, there is enough reliable historical information to infer that the author might have had limited contact with Paul and some knowledge of his travels.

Was the Author Jewish or Gentile?

Evidence that he was Jewish: Luke's Gospel and Acts show a strong interest in the Old Testament and its phraseology. The infancy narrative (Luke 1–2) seems to be consciously written in a style that imitates the Old Testament, and the speech of Stephen (Acts 7) rehearses the salvation history of the Old Testament.

However, these and other portions of Luke's writings that reflect Jewish heritage could be drawn from sources not written by the evangelist himself; furthermore, it is not unlikely that an educated gentile Christian could be interested and well versed in Jewish Scripture.

Evidence that he was Jewish: If the author is identified as "Luke the physician," it may be that Paul refers to him as among his "relatives" in Romans 16:21.

However, it is not certain that the *Loukios* of Romans 16:21 is the same person as the *Loukas* of Colossians 4:14; also, it is not clear whether Luke is here referred to as the kinsman of Paul or of Tertius (Rom. 16:22).

Evidence that he was gentile: Luke's Gospel and Acts avoid the use of Semitic words (except *Amen*), and transform certain Palestinian details into Hellenistic counterparts.

However, these aspects of Luke's Gospel could be accommodations for Hellenistic and gentile readers that do not reflect the ethnic character of the author.

Evidence that he was gentile: If the author is identified as "Luke the physician," it may be that Paul distinguishes him from his companions who are "of the circumcision" in Colossians 4:14 (cf. Col. 4:10–11).

However, it is not certain that the phrase "the circumcision" refers to all Jews or simply to a party within Judaism to which Luke does not belong.