

BIB203 NT1 Life of Christ

Unit 2 Reading 3

JFB, “The Gospel According to Luke”

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The Gospel According to Luke
Commentary by DAVID BROWN

THE writer of this Gospel is universally allowed to have been Lucas (an abbreviated form of Lucanus, as Silas of Silvanus), though he is not expressly named either in the Gospel or in the Acts. From Col 4:14 we learn that he was a "physician"; and by comparing that verse with Col 4:10-11 --in which the apostle enumerates all those of the circumcision who were then with him, but does not mention Luke, though he immediately afterwards sends a salutation from him--we gather that Luke was not a born Jew. Some have thought he was a freed-man (libertinus), as the Romans devolved the healing art on persons of this class and on their slaves, as an occupation beneath themselves. His intimate acquaintance with Jewish customs, and his facility in Hebraic Greek, seem to show that he was an early convert to the Jewish faith; and this is curiously confirmed by Act 21:27-29, where we find the Jews enraged at Paul's supposed introduction of Greeks into the temple, because they had seen "Trophimus the Ephesian" with him; and as we know that Luke was with Paul on that occasion, it would seem that they had taken him for a Jew, as they made no mention of him. On the other hand, his fluency in classical Greek confirms his Gentile origin. The time when he joined Paul's company is clearly indicated in the Acts by his changing (at Act 16:10) from the third person singular ("he") to the first person plural ("we"). From that time he hardly ever left the apostle till near the period of his martyrdom (2Ti 4:11). EUSEBIUS makes him a native of Antioch. If so, he would have every advantage for cultivating the literature of Greece and such medical knowledge as was then possessed. That he died a natural death is generally agreed among the ancients; GREGORY NAZIANZEN alone affirming that he died a martyr.

The time and place of the publication of his Gospel are alike uncertain. But we can approximate to it. It must at any rate have been issued before the Acts, for there the 'Gospel' is expressly referred to as the same author's "former treatise" (Act 1:1). Now the Book of the Acts was not published for two whole years after Paul's arrival as a prisoner at Rome, for it concludes with a reference to this period; but probably it was published soon after that, which would appear to have been early in the year 63. Before that time, then, we have reason to believe that the Gospel of Luke was in circulation, though the majority of critics make it later. If we date it somewhere between A.D. 50 and 60, we shall probably be near the truth; but nearer it we cannot with any certainty come. Conjectures as to the place of publication are too uncertain to be mentioned here.

That it was addressed, in the first instance, to Gentile readers, is beyond doubt. This is no more, as DAVIDSON remarks [Introduction to the New Testament, p. 186], than was to have been expected from the companion of an "apostle of the Gentiles," who had witnessed marvellous changes in the condition of many heathens by the reception of the Gospel. But the explanations in his Gospel of things known to every Jew, and which could only be intended for Gentile readers, make this quite plain--see Luk 1:26; 4:31; 8:26; 21:37; 22:1; 24:13. A number of other minute particulars, both of things inserted and of things omitted, confirm the conclusion that it was Gentiles whom this Evangelist had in the first instance in view.

We have already adverted to the classical style of Greek which this Evangelist writes--just what might have been expected from an educated Greek and travelled physician. But we have also observed that along with this he shows a wonderful flexibility of style, so much so, that when he comes to relate transactions wholly Jewish, where the speakers and actors and incidents are all Jewish, he writes in such Jewish Greek as one would do who had never been out of Palestine or mixed with any but Jews. In DA COSTA'S'S Four Witnesses will be found some traces of "the beloved physician" in this Gospel. But far more striking and important are the traces in it of his intimate connection with the apostle of the Gentiles. That one who was so long and so constantly in the society of that master mind has in such a work as this shown no traces of that connection, no stamp of that mind, is hardly to be believed. Writers of Introductions seem not to see it, and take no notice of it. But those who look into the interior of it will soon discover evidences enough in it of a Pauline cast of mind. Referring for a number of details to DA COSTA, we notice here only two examples: In 1Cr 11:23, Paul ascribes to an express revelation from Christ Himself the account of the Institution of the Lord's Supper which he there gives. Now, if we find this account differing in small yet striking particulars from the accounts given by Matthew and Mark, but agreeing to the letter with Luke's account, it can hardly admit of a doubt that the one had it from the other; and in that case, of course, it was Luke that had it from Paul. Now Matthew and Mark both say of the Cup, "This is my blood of the New Testament"; while Paul and Luke say, in identical terms, "This cup is the New Testament in My blood" (1Cr 11:25; Luk 22:20). Further, Luke says, "Likewise also the cup after supper, saying," &c.; while Paul says, "After the same manner He took the cup when He had supped, saying," &c.; whereas neither Matthew nor Mark mention that this was after supper. But still more striking is another point of coincidence in this case. Matthew and Mark both say of the Bread merely this: "Take, eat; this is My body" (Mat 26:26; Mar 14:22); whereas Paul says, "Take, eat, this is My body, which is broken for you" (1Cr 11:24), and Luke, "This is My body, which is given for you" (Luk 22:19). And while Paul adds the precious clause, "This do in remembrance of Me," Luke does the same, in identical terms. How can one who reflects on this resist the conviction of a Pauline stamp in this Gospel? The other proof of this to which we ask the reader's attention is in the fact that Paul, in enumerating the parties by whom Christ was seen after His resurrection, begins, singularly enough, with Peter--"And that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the Twelve" (1Cr 15:4-5) --coupled with the remarkable fact, that Luke is the only one of the Evangelists who mentions that Christ appeared to Peter at all. When the disciples had returned from Emmaus to tell their brethren how the Lord had appeared to them in the way, and how He had made Himself known to them in the breaking of bread, they were met, as Luke relates, ere they had time to utter a word, with this wonderful piece of news, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon" (Luk 24:34).

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