

# THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN

By Richard Jordan

Sometime ago a pastor friend gave us a mild surprise as he related the fact that when someone asks which of the Gospel records they should read first, he always suggests the book of Luke. Since the most usual suggestion is the book of John, this brought the question, “Why Luke?” My friend thoughtfully pointed out that since Luke wrote both the book that bears his name *and* the book of Acts, it is only natural to read them *together*—as Volume I and Volume II.

Our dear brother is surely correct, for it does seem certain that Luke intended his writings to be read in this manner since he starts Acts reminding the reader of “the former treatise” which he obviously assumes has been read.”

Our New Testament contains two important books from the “practiced pen” of Dr. Luke and when we couple this fact with the deep friendship that existed between Luke and Paul, we should feel a very great interest in Luke’s writings for we surely owe him, under God, a very deep debt. The fact is that without Luke’s aid we could not have fully known Paul and it is especially helpful that the portrait is drawn not simply by the hand of a master but also by that of a friend.

## PAUL’S LOYAL COMPANION

Most likely it was Luke’s professional life that occasioned his coming into contact with Paul and it is quite evident that their relationship developed into one of warm and devoted friendship.

They probably first met at Troas in Acts 16. Notice how the narrative in Acts 16:8-11 changes from “and when they had gone through” the cities to “loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia,” indicating that the *writer* now joins the company of travelers as they go into Macedonia and travels with them as far as Philippi.

Several years later when Paul returned to Macedonia, the use of the first person plural again appears, thus linking Luke with this geographical area as the probable location of his residence. From this point on he appears to have remained in close companionship with the Apostle until the end of Acts and even afterward (See Colossians 4:4; II Timothy 4:9-11; Philemon 24). With the gradual withdrawal of the sign gifts, miraculous healings, etc., Paul would more and more need his “beloved physician” and Luke proved to be one of his most loyal companions.

We should not fail to notice that it was at the historic point of the extending of the gospel of grace into Europe that Luke was enrolled among the companions of the Apostle Paul. This is the more noteworthy in that even though his writings demonstrate his intimate familiarity with the nation Israel, Luke himself was most likely a Gentile.<sup>1</sup> This makes him quite unique among Bible writers and probably explains why he *wrote* to and for a Gentile reader, one Theophilus.

Luke was a writer of first-rate skill. He was a scientist and as such a very laborious and conscientious student and he at once takes us into his confidence as to his motives and methods:

“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,  
“Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;

“It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,

“That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed” (Luke 1:1-4).

Clearly Luke had functioned as a good historian, checking and documenting the details he was to relate.<sup>ii</sup> As one writer puts it, his goal was “exhaustive inquiry, scrupulous accuracy, the most skillful and careful work.” In this connection touching indications of Luke’s endearing nature come to the surface. Take, for example, Mary.

The first two chapters of Luke make it clear that she opened her heart to Luke in a way she had seldom done with others. What was it that so endeared him to her? Whatever it was, the result is that we have in Luke’s Gospel as nowhere else the otherwise hidden story of Mary’s espousal, Gabriel’s announcement, her trip to Zacharias and Elizabeth, Mary’s Magnificat—a host of things she had only before “pondered in her heart” as far as Scripture is concerned. Little wonder Paul would later give Luke the title ‘beloved.’

## THE SCOPE OF HIS WRITINGS

The *scope* of Luke’s Gospel has long been recognized as the most “universal” of the four. That there are four is, of course, no accident. Each of the Gospel writers writes from a particular perspective and with a special focus—and Luke is no exception. His is especially the Gentile viewpoint, taking a much broader view than does, say, Matthew.

It has been assumed by some that this broader perspective is intended to be a hint at and a fore view of the mystery later revealed to Paul. This cannot be the case, however, else in what sense could the mystery truly have been “kept secret” and “hidden” (Romans 16:25,26; Ephesians 3:1-9)? Once we recognize that the mystery revealed to Paul is not found—or even hinted at—in Luke, we are free to appreciate just what it was Luke sought to bring before our eyes in his portrait of the Saviour.

Matthew writes from the *Jewish* perspective, viewing Messiah and His kingdom from Israel’s point of view. Just so, Luke writes from the *Gentile* perspective, showing the Gentile view of these same things and using every opportunity to remind his readers that the Gentiles too were to have a place in the purposes of God for Israel.

The *genealogy* of Christ in Matthew traces His lineage to David and Abraham—the starting points of the purpose of God for Israel as a nation and a kingdom, but Luke goes back beyond David and Abraham to Christ as “the son of Adam, which was the son of God” (3:38), thus widening the view of God’s purpose in Christ to all men.

Matthew dates his account of the *birth* of Christ, “in the days of Herod the king” (Luke 2:1) but Luke dates his from “a decree from Caesar Augustus” (2:1). The first is local, the latter is world-wide.

Matthew insists that the Lord is “the King of the Jews” (2:2); Luke speaks of Him as “Saviour” of men (2:10,11).

Matthew records Messiah’s forerunner’s stress upon “the kingdom” and gives the briefest excerpt from Isaiah 40:3 to identify Him (Matthew 3:1-3). Luke, on the other hand, stresses “remission of sins” and extends the quote from Isaiah 40 to include the words “all flesh” (Luke 3:2-6).

Examples could be multiplied to show that the Holy Spirit has an obvious selective process at work governing what is included in these accounts. Matthew is focusing on the kingdom and its dispensational aspects. Luke on the other hand is seen using every opportunity to announce the news that the Gentile was to have a place in Messiah’s kingdom—that the salvation of God was to extend to them, too, through the channel of God’s favored nation.

Luke's Gospel points to the fact that while Israel was indeed in the favored position to receive the blessings and salvation of God they were also by that very position to become the channel of blessing to the nations—a fact which precluded the idea that only Israel mattered and revealed the larger purpose of the kingdom program.

This selective principle continues as Luke writes the sequel to his Gospel record, his “Volume II” of the story—the Book of Acts.

While Luke does not in any way fail to clearly present the ministry of Peter and the Little Flock in early Acts, his Gentile perspective is still apparent for it is an almost irresistible conclusion that Acts was written with the underlying purpose of settling once and for all the question of the *authority* and *independence of Paul* as “the Apostle of the Gentiles.” It is almost as if Peter's words and works are not recorded simply for their own sake as much as for the sake of their relationship to the word and works of Paul.

While we do not seek to press this thought beyond proper bounds, the parallel elaborated between the two apostles and their ministries is so striking that its design seems undeniable. From some two dozen such parallels, consider these few which demonstrate Paul's clear replacement of Peter as God's spokesman:

#### PETER

Baptized with the Spirit (2)  
First Sermon (2)  
First miracle a dispensational foreshadowing (3)  
A mid-day vision and voice (10)  
Raised the dead (9)  
Laying on hands (8)  
Imprisoned (12)

#### PAUL

Separated by the Spirit (13)  
First Sermon (13)  
First miracle a dispensational foreshadowing (13)  
A mid-day vision and voice (10)  
Raises the dead (20)  
Laying on hands (19)  
Imprisoned (28)

Remarkably there is an even deeper, more subtle comparison that bears on this design, namely the parallel between the earthly ministry of the Lord Himself and that of His servant Paul in his “filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ” (Colossians 1:24). Consider how Luke sets forth the Lord's working:

#### IN PERSON

“As his custom was” enters the synagogue to read Scripture (Luke 4: 16)

Healed all that were sick (4:40)

Enraged hearers by referring to blessing of Gentiles (4:20-29)

Life plotted against (20:1,2)

Stands before Herod (23:7)

“Away with him” (23:18)

“This man hath done nothing amiss” (23:41)

#### IN PAUL

“As his manner was” enters the synagogue (Acts 17:1-3;18:4)

Healed all that were sick (28:8-10)

Enraged hearers by referring to blessing of Gentiles (22:21,22)

Life plotted against (23:34,35;26)

Stands before Agrippa (26:1)

“Away with such a fellow” (22:22)

“This man doeth nothing worthy of death or bonds” (26:31)

Thus Luke traces the echo of the Saviour's sufferings and testimony as He works in and through the Apostle Paul.

### LUKE'S IMPORTANCE TO US

The close association between Luke and Paul, and more notably between their writings,<sup>iii</sup> has led some to suggest that perhaps Paul is the real author of the books attributed to Luke. While we reject this as unwarranted and unfounded, we cannot avoid the conclusion that the writings of Luke were intimately connected with the personal ministry of the Apostle Paul and had that ministry continually in mind.

Thus the third Gospel holds special interest for us for it would be the one Paul would have known best. How fitting for the Apostle of the Gentiles to have a record of the earthly ministry of Christ written by one who was himself a Gentile, and one so obviously under the guidance of the Holy Spirit so as to include features peculiarly appropriate to the viewpoint. And how appropriate that Luke should add a *second volume* explaining why the program begun in its early chapters has since passed away and confirming the declaration of Paul's epistles that the fulfillment of prophecy has for the present given way to the unfolding of God's purpose and grace revealed *in the mystery*.

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<sup>i</sup> See Colossians 4:11 and 14 where Paul lists Luke *separately* from the circumcision.

<sup>ii</sup>This in no way calls into question the divine inspiration of his writings. Rather it points to their *historical accuracy*.

<sup>iii</sup> e.g. one commentator suggests as many as 1,750 words and phrases used distinctly by Luke, 875 of which are found in Paul's epistles, along with 249 words used by no other writers except Luke and Paul.