

The First of Two Volumes.

By the time Nero ascended to the title of Caesar over an increasingly troubled realm, the Christian movement had spread to most of the Roman Empire's major cities. Yet the authorities did not at first view the new religion as a significant threat. Indeed, they still regarded it as a minor sect of Judaism. Nevertheless, the Christians' insistence on the divinity of Jesus Christ and their refusal to pay homage to the emperors eventually brought state supported persecution.

Against this backdrop Luke wrote his Gospel and the Book of Acts. The two-part narrative could have been intended as a legal document for the apostle Paul, who awaited trial at Rome (**Acts 25:11; 28:30-31**). In his Gospel, Luke presents "all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (**Acts 1:1**). In Acts, he goes on to describe how Jesus' followers continued their Lord's work.

The key link between these two accounts is the Holy Spirit. While John's Gospel has much to say about the person of the Spirit, Luke-Acts emphasizes the **activity** of the Spirit in the ministry of Jesus and the early church. In the Gospel, John the Baptist and his parents are filled with the Spirit (**Luke 1:15, 41, 67**), as is Simeon (**2:25-35**). Jesus begins His ministry "In the power of the Spirit" (**4:14; also 4:1, 18; 10:21**), and He promises the Spirit of His disciples in their hour of need (**12:12**). Jesus is not alone; the Spirit is always with Him, within Him, empowering Him to accomplish God's purpose.

Personality Profile: Luke

Also known as: the "beloved physician" (Col. 4:14)

Home: Possible Antioch of Syria, later Philippi and other cities where Christian communities were started.

Background: Born into a cultured, educated Gentile family.

Profession: Primarily a physician, though he became a historian and author, and even did some evangelism.

Best known today for: Writing about one-fourth of the New Testament (Luke and Acts). His works emphasize the impact of the gospel on people considered "second class" in Jewish culture at the time – Gentiles, women, the poor – as well as the topics of prayer and work of the Holy Spirit.

Author and Setting

The Gospel of Luke does not name its author, but as early as a.d. 175, the church leaders were identifying the writer as Luke, a physician from Antioch in Syria and a traveling companion of Paul (**Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11**). Luke is also believed to be the writer of Acts, and together the books of Luke and Acts form a two-part account.

Luke was not an eyewitness of the events of Jesus' life, but he gathered material for his Gospel from many who were. Apparently he took great care to produce an accurate, orderly account of the Lord's life for someone named Theophilus (**Luke 1:1-4**).

Luke tells us that he drew upon earlier written accounts. One of these may have been the Gospel of Mark, which is believed to have been written during the a.d. 50's. If so, it would suggest the Luke's Gospel was produced sometime around a.d. 60's.

The date of Acts must be considered along with that of Luke, for the gospel cannot be later than its second volume. Some considerations favour a date for the gospel in the early 60's.

1. In Acts there is no mention of the Neronian persecution or events such as the destruction of Jerusalem or the deaths of Paul or James (A.D. 62). No event later than 62 is mentioned.
2. Luke would probably have mentioned Paul's release or execution if it had happened. But he leaves the apostle in prison in Rome at the end of Acts.
3. It is recorded that Agabus's prophecy was fulfilled (Acts 11:28), but not Jesus' prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20). The inference is that it had not yet taken place.
4. 2 Timothy 1:18 records a visit of Paul to Ephesus, but Acts 20:25, 38 records Paul's words that he would not see the Ephesians again. It is argued that if this later visit had taken place, Luke would have made a suitable comment.
5. The Pauline Epistles were evidently treasured in the early church, but they are ignored in Acts. The later we put Acts, the more difficult it is to account for this.
6. It is unlikely that a Christian writer would give as friendly a picture of Rome as we find in Luke-Acts after the Neronian persecution.