

## **Luke was not a Gentile – Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.**

Contrary to nearly all modern scholarship, Luke was *not* a Gentile. The Romans 3:1–2 citation is in itself absolutely conclusive and serves to correct any and all who instruct otherwise: “What advantage then hath the Jew? ... Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.” Luke penned more text than any other NT writer – more than either Paul or John. Were Luke indeed non-Jewish, the Lord not only failed to honor His testimony in Romans 3, He also entrusted more of the NT revelation into the hands of a Gentile than those of His “chosen people”.

The contrary evidence foremost in the mind of the scholars, is gleaned from the 4th chapter of Colossians. Here, Paul closes his letter by listing the various people that are with him as he writes (Col. 4:7–13) as well as the names of several of those to whom the letter is addressed (Col. 4:15–17). Among those whom Paul lists as being at his side, some are said to be “of the circumcision” (i.e., Jewish, vs. 11). It is generally acknowledged from the syntax and context etc. (and probably correctly so) that they are the 3 mentioned immediately before the “circumcision” reference in verse 11: Aristarchus, Marcus, and Jesus called Justus. As Paul mentions Luke (vs. 14) after the “circumcision” allusion (vs. 11), it is deduced that he must not be Jewish.

However, this argument has little force. A careful reading of the Colossian passages discloses that verses 7–8 are introducing Tychicus, the letter bearer, to the Church. They also give commendation and new status to his travel companion, Onesimus, whom they have known in the past as a runaway slave who seems to have stolen from Philemon, a wealthy member of their congregation (Philemon 10–21). Clearly then from the context, Aristarchus, Marcus, and Justus are grouped and introduced next – not because they are Jews, but rather because they are the only three with Paul (other than Tychicus whom they now behold) that the church at Colosse does not already know. Their nationality is thereby not given for the purpose of ethnic grouping, but for the purpose of identification and information concerning the three.

The proof of this is straightforward, for as we read verses 12–14 it becomes abundantly clear that the Colossians already know Epaphras, Luke, and Demas. This is what they have in common and is the reason for the positioning of their names. Thus, Tychicus and Onesimus are listed together because they are the bearers of Paul’s letter to the church; Aristarchus, Marcus, and Justus are grouped together because they are not known by those of Colosse; Epaphras, Luke, and Demas are so placed because, being already known by that local church, they need no introduction. This is the obvious correct and true reason for the arrangement of the names in the fourth chapter of Colossians.

Hence, we see there are reasons other than that of merely racial or national background involved as to why Luke was not included among those of the “circumcision”. From this it may be seen how imprudent it is to erect a tenet on such trivial, flimsy evidence. Yet this is the strongest offered by those who would have us accept that Luke was indeed a Gentile – and that against the clear testimony of Romans 3!

The lame argument that “Luke” (or Lucas, Philemon 24) is a Gentile name and not Jewish is of no force. Not only is it common practice today in countries throughout the world to give children non-ethnic names and even those of famous people from any place or any time frame (e.g., African-Americans naming sons “Washington” or “Roosevelt” and Hispanics naming sons “Jesus”) – the Scriptures furnish similar examples. “Alexander” is manifestly a Greek or Macedonian name, yet Acts 19:33–34 mentions an “Alexander” and states that he is a Jew! “Apollon” is unmistakably a Greek designation but Acts 18:24 records that he is Jewish.

Moreover, Aristarchus, Marcus, and Justus – the very names given in Colossians 4 and said to be “of the circumcision” – are all Gentile designations!

Throughout his ministry among the Gentiles, Paul used his Roman name rather than his Hebrew (i.e., Saul) as did Peter (Hebrew name = Simon). In fact, most Jews who lived in the *Diaspora* (Greek = the time-span from when Jews were exiled to Babylonia in the 6th century BC until now) used two names: the Jewish was used in the synagogue, and the Gentile in business dealings. Thus, “Luke” could well have been the public or professional (as a Doctor) name of a Jew who lived among the Gentiles. More examples could be furnished but what need; the mouth of two or more witnesses have spoken – the matter is incontestable and closed.

Their third proof is similar; namely, that Luke’s profession as a physician is evidence that he was non-Jewish, yet on several occasions Christ referred to physicians; hence the practice existed in Israel at that time (Luk. 4:23; Mat. 9:12). Thus, we have seen that the arguments used to support the opinion that Luke was a Gentile are neither compelling nor well founded.

To the contrary, Romans 3:1–2 straightforwardly states that the chief advantage of being a Jew was that they were the God chosen national vehicle through which He gave revelation to the human race. Therefore the burden of proof is on those who claim that Luke was somehow an exception to this Biblical decree. Yet we have already seen that the evidence from the names listed in Colossians etc. is far too vague, inconsequential, and inconclusive for us to accept as justification to override the Romans testimony. Moreover the Romans 3:1–2 statement is so clear and unambiguous, a later written Scripture of equal or superior clarity must be found and offered to overwhelm its witness. But the Holy Writ has never indicated that God ever changed His established rule of using only the Hebrews to record His revelation.

Furthermore, Luke was with Paul on his last trip to Jerusalem and seems to have been an eyewitness to Paul’s arrest at the Temple as recorded in Acts 21. The crowd was aroused by Jews from Asia who charged, among other things, that Paul had brought Gentiles into the Temple area. Luke records that Paul had not so done, but as these Asian Jews had earlier seen Paul in the city with Trophimus the Ephesian, they had assumed Paul had brought that outsider into the Temple grounds with him. The false accusation aroused the populace into a frenzy which resulted in Paul’s arrest at the Temple Mount by several hundred Roman soldiers under the command of Claudius Lysias (21:32, cp. 23:26). The point is that when the Jews accused Paul of polluting the Temple by bringing Gentiles therein, why did they only allude to Trophimus? Why did they not include Luke who was also with Paul in the streets of Jerusalem (21:15–18, e.g., “we”, “us”)?

The fact that Luke was not mentioned in the accusation is a most convincing indication that he was not a Gentile. Indeed, after joining the second missionary journey at Troas (Acts 16:10, the change here of the personal pronoun “they” in vv. 6–8 to “we” indicates that Luke, the narrator, had joined Paul’s company), Luke accompanied Paul on several trips back to Jerusalem at which time they reported on their travels to the apostolic church (here and Acts 18:21), yet the issue was never raised over his being a Gentile. It is therefore concluded Luke was not named in the accusation when Paul was arrested because it was well known that he was a Hebrew, and this should be acknowledged as confirming evidence to our thesis.

As stated initially, it must be concluded that Luke was a Hebrew. The notion that he was a Gentile is based on little more than tradition. The Biblical account strongly evinces his Jewishness, and we must always hold to the Scriptures over tradition when the two conflict. The infallible Word of God is the source and fountain for all real wisdom and scholarship.