

THE BEST ANSWER OF HEBREWS' AUTHORSHIP: LUKE THE PHYSICIAN¹

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Introduction

Perhaps there is very little at stake if the author of Hebrews is not known, but there are certain questions that arise such as, "How do we settle the canonicity of the book of Hebrews if authorship is unknown?" Others do not struggle with whether certain books belong within the canon, yet the tests of orthodoxy, antiquity, authorship, and affect as applied by the early church for canonicity are not intact if, in fact, the authorship is not known. In the 300's A.D., Eusebius named Paul as its author, but he also wrote that the Western church was not convinced of this authorship—thus questioning its validity as Scripture.² Tertullian, on the other hand, ascribed Hebrews to Barnabas, but this was highly doubted shortly thereafter.³

While there are many proposed arguments against Lukan authorship,⁴ the purpose for writing this paper is to present evidence in favor of Lukan authorship. Defending the "Jewish-ness" of Luke, his writing style,⁵ clarifying textual variants, etc..., have their places, but they do not have their place in this paper. None of these are, by themselves, clinchers anyway.⁶

The following is an attempt to answer this issue chiefly from the perspective of "Jesus the High Priest in the Lukan Narratives." The reader finds things like medical terminology⁷ which would be expected from a "physician,"⁸ nautical terminology⁹ which would be reminiscent of months on a vessel with Paul,¹⁰ impending temple destruction language¹¹ which would remind a reader of Jesus' words found in Luke's Gospel,¹² ascension verbiage¹³ which would remind the reader that Luke was the only evangelist who recorded Jesus' ascension,¹⁴ and exaltation to the right hand of God¹⁵ which greatly resembles Peter's preaching recorded by Luke.¹⁶ Moreover, there is an amazing amount of "covenant" talk in both Acts and Hebrews.¹⁷ If that is not

¹ A paper originally submitted during the course of "The Epistle of Hebrews," Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary.

² Allen, David L. *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2010), 20.

³ Frederic Gardiner, "Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle to the Hebrews: Introduction," in Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and Epistle to the Hebrews, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 14, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 341.

⁴ One of which is the reference in Hebrews 10:34 to the author being in "bonds." One would wonder when this occurred. It should be pointed out that, although Luke is not known to have ever been in prison (under chains), this is also a textual variant.

⁵ Allen, NAC, 51.

⁶ Allen, Lukan, 20.

⁷ Hebrews 4:12-13; 5:12-14; 12:11-13.

⁸ Colossians 4:14.

⁹ Hebrews 2:1; 6:19.

¹⁰ One finds that Luke was actually with Paul for a greater part of his ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).¹⁰ His involvement is further established with an exchange of the "we" and "they" statements found in the book of Acts. On Paul's 2nd missionary journey, Luke joins him at Troas (Acts 16:8) and separates from him at Philippi (Acts 16:40). On Paul's 3rd missionary journey, Luke joins him at Philippi (Acts 20:6) and they are separated at Jerusalem (Acts 21:17). On Paul's 4th missionary journey (from Jerusalem to Rome), Luke joins him at Caesarea (Acts 23:33; 27:1) and continues with him to Rome (Acts 28:16)—all of which was aboard a ship.

¹¹ Hebrews 10:25.

¹² In Luke 19:42-44, Jesus wept over Jerusalem because of the impending judgment which they would face from the hands of the Romans. He describes the "trenches," the "compassing" about from the enemy, and the razing of the city to the ground. He seems to be saying that this is taking place because of their rejection of the kingdom and her King (19:11 and 19:44). Further in Luke 21:24, one gets the idea that the razing of the temple inquired of in Matthew, Mark, and Luke is placed within a local fulfillment when he describes a certain "leading away." Certainly there is an immediate fulfillment in the understanding of these Scriptures. Luke 21:32 leaves no option for a distant "end-times" feeling to the Olivet Discourse. En route to the cross, Jesus addresses a group of women and says again that impending judgment was that with which they needed to be concerned (24:28-31).

¹³ Hebrews 1:3.

¹⁴ If one calls into question Mark's account of Jesus' ascension (as many do today) then this means Luke is the only Gospel writer who records His ascension.

¹⁵ Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:14; 12:2.

¹⁶ Acts 2:30.

¹⁷ Consider the comparison so boldly in Acts 2 and Hebrews 8: The recipient is the House of Israel (Acts 2:22, 36; Hebrews 8:10). The aim was their hearts (Acts 2:37; Hebrews 8:10). Sins were the issue (Acts 2:38; Hebrews 8:12). This was fulfillment to God's promises (Acts 2:39; Hebrews 8:6).

enough, one sees linkage between “learning obedience as a son”¹⁸ and “increasing in favor with God and man;”¹⁹ between angels “praising God” from the sky²⁰ and their worshipping Him when He “was brought into the world;”²¹ between “ministering angels”²² and angels ministering to Jesus;²³ and between prayers with “strong crying and tears”²⁴ and “agony” in the blood sweat^{25,26} Lastly, consider the similarities of how the authors of Acts and Hebrews describe those who suffered “shame” and “loss.”²⁷

Historical References to Luke’s Involvement in Hebrews

The earliest reference to Luke’s involvement comes from Clement of Alexandria²⁸ and then later from Thomas Aquinas who believed that Luke translated the book from Hebrew into Greek.²⁹ There is even a reference from Clement of Alexandria that argues against Pauline involvement at all—making the translation for Luke unnecessary.³⁰ Moreover, the very clear quotations from the Septuagint argue against a Hebrew-to-Greek translation.³¹ Even in his 3rd century existence, Origen knew of Lukan theories which were at least plausible given his perception of Pauline thoughts given in non-Pauline phraseology and verbiage.³² Moreover, even Pauline influence does not mean he should be credited with the thoughts which it contained.³³

Less than two hundred years after Origen, the theories of Lukan authorship still existed according to Jerome.³⁴ From Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 155-220) into the middle ages, Paul was considered the author—but not without Lukan involvement for either pen-ship or translation.³⁵ Later, people like Calvin and Grotius started arguing for independent authorship by Luke.³⁶ Into the times of the 18th-19th centuries, notable commentators vied for Lukan authorship.³⁷ Just shy of the 20th century, W. Lewis gave a viewpoint as to when Luke actually wrote it within the chronology of Acts³⁸ while G. Campbell Morgan agreed.³⁹

Internal Qualifiers

Certainly, one method of saying “the writer was Luke” is drawing attention to the texts which say “it was not Paul.” Think of Hebrews 2:3: Certainly, in light of passages like Galatians 1:16-18 and 1 Corinthians

¹⁸ Hebrews 5:8.

¹⁹ Luke 2:52.

²⁰ Luke 2:13-14.

²¹ Hebrews 1:5-6.

²² Hebrews 1:14.

²³ Luke 22:43.

²⁴ Hebrews 5:7.

²⁵ Luke 22:44.

²⁶ Allen, *Lukan Authorship*, 203.

²⁷ Acts 5:41; Hebrews 10:34.

²⁸ Daniel J. Theron, ed. *The Evidence of Tradition*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 84; According to Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria affirmed, “He says that the Epistle to the Hebrews is also of Paul, but that, it was written for the Hebrews in the Hebrew tongue, but that Luke translated it carefully [and] published it for the Greeks; hence [he say], due to the translation, the same style is found both [in] the Epistle and [in] the Acts.”

²⁹ F. F. Bruce. *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 17.

³⁰ David Allen. *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (Volume 35-Hebrews)* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2010), 47.

³¹ Allen, *Lukan Authorship*, 12.

³² Allen, *Lukan*, 16.

³³ *Ibid*, 17.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 20.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 21-22.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 23.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 24.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 32.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 36.

11:23 & 15:8, Paul would never have said “I have not seen the Lord.” He would have rather identified with those who had been with the Lord.⁴⁰

Similar Prologues

The Gospel of Luke was written to reinforce to Theophilus that which was already instructed.⁴¹ These Christological preoccupations are unique to Luke,⁴² except for Hebrews⁴³ where the truth of the Gospel confirmed by God through acts of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ One need only read Hebrews from the first hint of intercession⁴⁵ through the “blood of sprinkling”⁴⁶ to know that the main thesis of the Hebrews author is “Christ is the High Priest,”⁴⁷ or “Jesus is the Anointed High Priest.”⁴⁸ Stedman writes:

No other New Testament book deals as fully as Hebrews with the present priesthood of Jesus. No other book traces both the comparison and contrast of that Melchizedek priesthood with the ancient Aaronic or Levitical priesthood. None other urges believers with such passion and confidence to call upon their great high priest for help in daily pressures and trials.⁴⁹

The book of Hebrews makes no break in its treatment of this theme of the priesthood of Christ. Even the comparison with Moses in chapter three is in keeping with the theme as Moses is a chief intercessor in his time as the nation’s leader.⁵⁰

Priesthood Terminology

Given the “priesthood” backdrop, the next area of consideration would be the obvious interest Luke has in this same theme in his Gospel. One need not travel far into Luke’s Gospel to find his account of Zacharias. The other three Gospels speak of John the Baptist as well, but certainly not to this extent as to describe his familial ties. He even speaks of his being in the “course of Abia”—a reference to one of the 24 sets of Levites which David set in place to service the temple⁵¹.⁵² Not only does the reader find out that Zacharias was a Levite, but his wife, Elisabeth, a kinsmen of Jesus’ mother Mary⁵³ is also identified in Luke 1:5 as a Levite.⁵⁴ He wrote

⁴⁰ Frederic Gardiner, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle to the Hebrews: Introduction,” in Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and Epistle to the Hebrews, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 14, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 342.

⁴¹ Luke 1:4.

⁴² Allen, *Lukan Authorship*, 181; Allen alludes to Hebrews 2:3-4 and the 1960 work of W.C. Van Unnik who makes the connection.

⁴³ Hebrews 2:3-4.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 182; By the way, it is interesting to note, speaking of the Holy Spirit, that the Psalmist’s and the Holy Spirit’s words are one and the same in both Luke 1:16 and Hebrews 3:7 (and only here).

⁴⁵ Hebrews 2:17.

⁴⁶ Hebrews 12:24.

⁴⁷ Ray C. Stedman. *Hebrews: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1992), 14; Calvin is quoted as saying that no other book “so clearly speaks of the priesthood of Christ, which so highly exalts the virtue and dignity of that only true sacrifice which He offered by His death.”

⁴⁸ William L. Lane. *Word Biblical Commentary Volumes 47A: Hebrews 1-8* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), cxxvii; Lane holds to a theme that deals with “the importance of listening to the voice of God in Scripture and in...Christian preaching.”

⁴⁹ Stedman, 14.

⁵⁰ Peter T. O’Brien. *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 24; it is a wonder that O’Brien sees a break in the theme at this point (2:17 and 4:13). Certainly he recognizes that one from the tribe of Levi who so adamantly stood in the gap for the Hebrew people would qualify as an example of a high priest—his lack of official title notwithstanding.

⁵¹ Luke 1:5; Luke 1:23.

⁵² William Barclay. *The Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 10; Barclay points out that the mandatory feasts throughout the year were the only times the some 20,000 priests were all called upon to serve simultaneously.

⁵³ Luke 1:36.

⁵⁴ Ibid; it was especially admirable for a priest to marry a daughter of Aaron—which is what Elisabeth is (Luke 1:5).

of Levite piety in describing the “commandments” and “ordinances” in which they were “blameless.”⁵⁵ He wrote of the work of the priest in “burning incense.”⁵⁶

Then Luke speaks of those things that happen in the temple. There are many things that happen in a home, but when those in the Jewish home acknowledge the authority of the temple system in their lives, it is noteworthy that Luke, so versed as is the Hebrews’ author the temple, mentions the sacrifice required by Moses in the Law when the child was just over 40 days old.⁵⁷ While it is true that any Jew could know about this requirement, it is noteworthy that He is the only one of the four Gospel writers who speaks of Simeon and Anna in the temple.⁵⁸ Even the mention of Anna, one who “departed not from the temple, but served God...night and day”⁵⁹ is indicative of one who is interested in temple affairs. Moreover, only one of the Gospel writers writes of Jesus in His teen-age years: He finds Jesus in the temple.⁶⁰ In the physical sense of temple involvement, Luke is the only identified New Testament author that writes about it with such interest.

Knowing Jesus’ age at the time of His crucifixion is, in part, because of Luke’s assertion that Jesus was 30 years old at His baptism⁶¹ which qualified Levites in the Old Testament for priestly service.⁶² Luke was most certainly communicating to the reader that Jesus’ earthly, priestly ministry had begun.

The “anointing” that Jesus received at His baptism⁶³ and gained power from both during and after His temptation⁶⁴ was the topic at the synagogue in Nazareth.⁶⁵ This is reminiscent of the anointing of oil the High Priest and his sons received in Moses’ day⁶⁶ prior to the days of their ministry. The only other New Testament writer who refers to Jesus’ anointing is that of Hebrews⁶⁷.

The book of life is alluded to in Luke 10:20 and it reminds the reader of Exodus 32:32 and how Moses demanded his own blotting out in the event that God would blot out the names of those written in the book during that time. Why is he the only writer who makes mention of this other than John⁶⁸ and the Hebrews writer?⁶⁹ It was a priestly prayer Moses prayed. Moses was standing in the gap for the people of Israel—not only as a Levite—but as a type of Christ.⁷⁰ Even greater priestly significance arises when Daniel 12:1 is considered in light of the Day of Atonement liturgy and the prayers of the high priest that “the names of the people should be written” therein.⁷¹

The well-known Parable of the Good Samaritan is mentioned only by Luke.⁷² This parable puts the hypocritical lives of a certain priest and also a certain Levite in alarming perspective from the opportunity to minister to a man who was badly beaten in a ditch. Why was Luke interested in this? It should have been the priest or the Levite who had poured oil and wine in the wounds of this man.⁷³ It is significant that Luke is the only Gospel writer who pens this parable indicting the priesthood to such a degree.

Luke is the only author who discusses the affairs of Pilate outside of Passion Week within the New Testament.⁷⁴ What interest did Luke have in this occurrence? This episode—along with being a horrible

⁵⁵ Luke 1:6.

⁵⁶ Luke 1:9-11.

⁵⁷ Luke 2:23-27.

⁵⁸ The first Bible example of “baby dedication.”

⁵⁹ Luke 2:37.

⁶⁰ Luke 2:46.

⁶¹ Luke 3:23.

⁶² Numbers 4:3.

⁶³ Luke 3:22.

⁶⁴ Luke 4:14.

⁶⁵ Luke 4:18-21.

⁶⁶ Exodus 28:41-29:7.

⁶⁷ Hebrews 1:9.

⁶⁸ Revelation 3:5 and 20:13-15.

⁶⁹ Hebrews 12:23.

⁷⁰ Deuteronomy 18:15-20.

⁷¹ Allen, *Lukan Authorship*, 206.

⁷² Luke 10:30-36.

⁷³ Luke 10:34.

⁷⁴ Luke 13:1-3.

national crisis—was blasphemy of the sacrifices.⁷⁵ Again, the reader should see an interest in these things by the writer Luke. Moreover, one should notice the priesthood theme ever developing.

Luke 17 records the cleansing of the ten lepers. In verse 14 there are instructions to show themselves to the priests. This, of course, follows the instructions given in Leviticus, and reflects an author that has special interest in the priesthood. From the Lucan perspective (given the priesthood pattern), it seems the main thrust is not the “one who returned” (who was a Samaritan according to verse 16 and not allowed in temple worship), but rather the nine who did not return because they were “showing themselves to the priest.”

Luke 18 describes an occurrence in the temple relayed by Jesus and recorded only by Luke. It is the dual prayers by the publican and the Pharisee where one “leaves justified.” Why an occurrence in the temple? Why did Luke pick this episode? He had special interest for the temple.

Luke 22:31 records Jesus’ prayer to the Father on behalf of Peter (who was sought by Satan). This great priestly act of intercession is recorded only by Luke. Luke 23:34 also records the utterance of Christ from the cross wherein He pleads for the corporate forgiveness of the Romans—and presumably the Jews. Again, this is priestly intercession making reference to (or rather, fulfilling) Numbers 15:25-26 where the High Priest, while making atonement, makes pleas for the people for their acts of sinful ignorance foreshadowing Hebrews 5:2.⁷⁶

Numbers 6:22-27 introduces the reader to the High Priest’s God-given duty of blessing the people. The language of “blessing” begins with Gabriel toward Mary,⁷⁷ continues with Elisabeth toward Mary and future “believers,”⁷⁸ Zacharias the priest toward God,⁷⁹ and Simeon to Jesus and His parents.⁸⁰ Then, Christ ascends in priestly fashion with His “hands raised”—“blessing them”⁸¹. Genesis 14:19 gives the foundational precedence of Melchizedek’s “blessing” to Abraham, and therefore shows the reader that Luke was already trying to link Melchizedek to Christ (pre-Hebrews). This is the main thrust of Hebrews 5-10, and provides Luke as the best candidate of Hebrews’ authorship.⁸² For as Luke begins with the priestly actions of one man, he ends with the High Priestly actions of the man Christ Jesus.⁸³

Lastly, at the closing of the book Luke speaks of the daily activity of the church at the temple.⁸⁴ This theme is several times in the early chapters of Acts⁸⁵ and so it is of special interest to Luke. It should be obvious to the readers of Luke’s Gospel and Acts that Luke had an intense interest in the early church activities which occurred in the temple significantly more than that which took place “in every house.”⁸⁶

Conclusion

It is hard to imagine, with all the textual proofs set before the reader in Luke-Acts and Hebrews, why one would make even scientific guesses for those who are, at best, sparsely mentioned in closing sections of epistles or a few verses of narrative in the book of Acts? The foregoing information in this short paper has shown that there is a strategy to “Hebrews” which was foreshadowed in the Gospel narrative of Luke.

⁷⁵Perhaps one is thinking, “Yes, but isn’t the point of this episode to show that there is no variance of wickedness between those who experience calamity and those who do not?” Perhaps, but one should also take note that there were many episodes that could have been addressed by Jesus and recorded by Luke. Why this one?

⁷⁶Allen, *Lukan Authorship*, 206.

⁷⁷Luke 1:28.

⁷⁸Luke 1:42-45.

⁷⁹Luke 1:68.

⁸⁰Luke 2:34.

⁸¹Luke 24:51.

⁸²Calvin, John. *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, and Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1998), 51; Calvin points out Hebrews 7:7 and its application to Christ’s blessing His apostles as the “better”—their Master and the One sends them out preach a “Gospel of blessing” (Galatians 3:8).

⁸³Allen, *Lukan Authorship*, 207.

⁸⁴Luke 24:35.

⁸⁵Acts 3:1 & 5:42 for example.

⁸⁶Acts 5:42 & 20:20.