THE RELATIONSHIPS OF PAUL AND LUKE:
LUKE, PAUL’S LETTERS, AND THE “WE” PASSAGES OF ACTS

Sean A. Adams
University of Edinburgh, UK

When attempting to map Pauline relationships, one of the most fundamental is that between Paul and Luke. Although it is clear from the references within the Pauline corpus that a certain Luke and Paul knew each other, the extent of this relationship is unclear. Furthermore, understanding this relationship is complicated by the narrative of Acts and whether or not the portrayal of Paul in Acts is derived from the author’s personal relationship with the apostle and whether or not this author is the historical/Pauline Luke. Accordingly, this paper seeks to discuss some of the key areas of connection between Paul and Luke. Beginning with a short introduction to the references to Luke in the Pauline corpus, we will evaluate briefly the theory that Luke was Paul’s amanuensis. Following this, the remainder of the paper will focus on Paul in Acts and associated issues. Commencing with a discussion on the unity of Luke and Acts, and the comments from the church fathers regarding Luke and Paul, the body of the paper will interact with the major theories regarding the “we” passages. Throughout all of these sections it will become apparent that there is lack of clarity in discussions of Luke-Paul relations. This article does not argue for a specific relationship between Paul and Luke, but rather claims that there are multiple relationships for Luke and Paul. This claim highlights the need for scholars to nuance their discussions and to recognise explicitly the inherent limitations of the evidence.

Luke in Paul’s Letters

There are very few references to Luke within the New Testament. Although having both a Gospel and Acts attributed to him, “Luke” is not mentioned in either of these works, but is only explicitly mentioned in three of Paul’s

1 In order to avoid confusion in this paper, I will use Luke to refer to the historical/Pauline Luke, GLuke to refer to the Gospel of Luke, and “luke” to refer to the purported author of Luke-Acts.
letters: Col 4:14; Phlm 24; 2 Tim 4:11. These references in the Pauline corpus form the extent of canonical knowledge of Luke, suggesting that a certain Luke knew Paul and that he accompanied him at various times in his missionary work. From Col 4:14 we are told that Luke was a physician by trade; through the reference in Phlm 24 we understand Luke to be one of Paul's "fellow workers" (συνεργοί μου); and in 2 Tim 4:11 we are informed that Luke was the only one with Paul at the time that the letter was written. Other than these paltry facts, the New Testament is silent regarding the person of Luke.

To further undermine the scanty evidence, one has to deal with the question of Pauline authorship of certain letters and whether the comments regarding Luke are genuinely Pauline. Although this may not have been an historical problem, it is important to note at the outset some of the assumptions taken for granted when modern scholars posit a relationship between Paul and Luke. A similar assumption that is rarely discussed is that all these passages refer to the same Luke. Although it is likely the case, it is one more level of ambiguity. These uncertainties erode some of the fundamental confidence placed in these passages and undermine the strength of the alleged Paul-Luke relation that is based on these three references.

Luke as Paul's Amanuensis?

One of the recurring suggestions for a relationship between Paul and Luke is that Luke was Paul's amanuensis or secretary and assisted in the writing of some of his letters, most notably the Pastoral Epistles. Although not a new proposal, this view regained scholarly attention after C.F.D. Moule's

---

2 Some scholars have suggested that there might be a fourth reference to Luke within the New Testament. Ellis proposes that Luke might have been a Hellenistic Jew, which, if that were the case, might allow Luke to have a Latin name "Lucius" (possibly Paul's cousin?) mentioned in Rom 16:21. E.E. Ellis, The Gospel of Luke (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 53.

3 From the testimony of some of the church fathers we understand Luke to have hailed from Antioch (Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3.4.6; Jerome, De Viris Illustribus 7; and the anti-Marcionite prologue).

4 Although Philemon is accepted as authentically Pauline, there is greater dispute over the authorship of Colossians and 2 Timothy. For initial discussions, see G.W. Knight III, The Pastoral Epistles (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 21–22. Also, for questions regarding pseudepigraphy and the nature of canon, see S.E. Porter, “Pauline Authorship and the Pastoral Epistles: Implications for Canon,” BBR 5 (1995): 105–23.

5 This is only one of a number of possible solutions to the "Pastorals Problem." For an outline of six possible explanations, see I.H. Marshall and P.H. Towner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles (ICC; T&T Clark, 1999), 63–66.