

New Testament Exegesis Paper

Luke 4:1-14

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Structure

Plot Structure

- A) (v.1) Jesus, led by the Spirit, goes to the Wilderness. (Intro)
- B) (v.2a) Jesus is tempted by the Devil for 40 days.
 - a. (v.2b) Jesus fasts in the desert
- C) (v.3) Test 1 – Provision
 - a. (v.4) Jesus responds
- D) (vv.5-7) Test 2 – Power
 - a. (v.8) Jesus responds
- E) (vv. 9-11) Test 3 – Protection
 - a. (v.12) Jesus responds
- F) (v.13) The Devil departs from Jesus until “opportune time.”
- G) (v.14) Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returns to Galilee. (Inclusio)

Text Criticism

Only one variant exists in the Lukan temptation account. The best manuscripts support the text as we have it today. In v.4, Jesus responds to Satan’s test with a passage from Deuteronomy 8:3. In the Lukan text, Jesus only quotes the first half of the passage: “One does not live by bread alone.” Some manuscripts complete this passage by adding, “but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” Along with most scholars, I am convinced that the original text did not complete the passage from Deuteronomy. Manuscripts that support this include Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

Content

Vocabulary

The phrase “full of the Holy Spirit” is an important phrase in the Lukan text because it signifies the author’s designation of Jesus as a prophetic figure.¹ In addition, the Greek word here is ‘pleres,’ which also means ‘basketfuls.’ It may be that the author is communicating to the reader that while Jesus is hungry for food (v.2), he is ‘full’ from the Spirit.

Immediately after identifying the presence of the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ life, the author reports that Jesus has been “led by the Spirit in the wilderness.”² Jesus’ time in the wilderness is presented as an intentional time of testing by the devil, on behalf of God. The passage also serves to remind the reader of God’s leadership of the Israelites in the

¹ See v.1:15, 41, 67; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:3,5; 7:55; 11:24; 13:9

² Luke 4:1

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wilderness. Indeed, the author reports that Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, symbolic of the Israelites' forty years.

In v.5, the instantaneous vision of the world is meant to reflect the supernatural character of this experience. In the Greek, the words *stigma* and *chronos* are used and literally mean "an instant of time." Only one who is under the control of God could literally see the whole "inhabited world" in an instant. Further, the author uses the word *oikoumene*, which means 'inhabited world,' and given the politically charged nature of the text probably means "empire."³

The three tests are marked by a repetition of these phrases: "the devil said to him," followed by, "Jesus answered him." Further, in the first two of Jesus' responses, he says, "It is written," and quotes a passage from the Hebrew Bible. In the third test, Jesus says, "It is said," and quotes again from the Hebrew Scriptures.

Traditionally, the temptation account ends with v.13; however, I believe the passage is best ended after v.14. An *inclusio* is formed between vv.1 and 14 with the accounts of the presence of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' life. The reader hears the echo of v.1, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan," in v.14, "Jesus, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, returned to Galilee..." I believe the temptation account serves as the key moment in the Lukan Gospel when Jesus' ministry is fully activated. Returning from his baptism, Jesus is "full of the Holy Spirit," but it is not until Jesus has 'passed the test' that Jesus becomes "filled with the power of the Holy Spirit." As was the case for the Israelites, the wilderness serves as the training ground for God's chosen.

Literary Context

The temptation account follows the account of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist. At his baptism, "the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'"⁴ Between the baptism account and the temptation account, the author gives a genealogy that traces Jesus back to God, through his father Joseph, David, Abraham, Noah and Adam.

Immediately following the temptation account, there is an account of Jesus teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath. Jesus reads from Isaiah 61, and proclaims

³ Sacra Pagina 74

⁴ Luke 3:22

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that the words of the prophet have been fulfilled in him. Jesus immediately begins to teach about the exclusivity of his message and the listeners become enraged with him. They drive him out of the city, intending to kill him, but he escapes to Capernaum.

The literary context here is important because it sets the stage for the sort of ministry Jesus will have in the Lukan gospel. The baptism scene marks Jesus' significance as God's son and one who carries the presence of the Holy Spirit. Immediately following the temptation account, Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming the fulfillment of the prophets in his life, and the exclusivity of his message. The temptation account not only serves to 'activate' the power of the Holy Spirit within Jesus, but also serves to remind the reader that Jesus has already passed the most difficult test, the one ordained by God, and that no human resistance will prosper against him.

Formal Context

The tradition of Jesus' testing was widespread among early Christians. For example, Hebrews 2:18 says, "Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested." The three synoptic gospels contain a temptation account, and "John sprinkles references to testings throughout Jesus' active ministry (John 6:14-15; 7:1-9; 12:27-28)."⁵ The synoptic gospels emphasize Jesus' responses to the devil "as a means of revealing the inner character of Jesus' sonship as one of simple obedience."⁶ On a further note, it has been suggested that the three-fold categories of the temptation account would have been familiar to a Hellenistic audience as the three categories of vice: love of pleasure, love of possessions, love of glory.⁷

Redaction Criticism

Each of the synoptic gospels begins the temptation account by telling the audience that Jesus is in the wilderness because the Spirit led him there. Mark begins, "And the Spirit immediately drove [Jesus] out into the wilderness." Matthew begins, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness..." Luke begins, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness..." Matthew is the only gospel that says explicitly that the purpose of Jesus' time in the wilderness is to be tested, though the Divine origin of the testing is implied in both Mark and Luke.

⁵ Sacra Pagina, 75.

⁶ Ibid., 75.

⁷ Ibid., 77.

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The Markan gospel gives a very brief account of Jesus' temptation, and so one might presume that the specific details of the temptation come from the *Q* document. On the whole, the accounts in Matthew and Luke are very similar, differing mainly in the ordering of the temptations. However, some subtle differences exist. In the Matthean account, the author completes the passage from Deuteronomy in Jesus' response to the first temptation. The author of Luke concludes the Deuteronomic passage: "One does not live by bread alone."⁸ At the end of the temptation account, both Mark and Matthew conclude by saying that angels waited on Jesus. At the end of the Lukan gospel, the author says, "[the devil] departed from [Jesus] until an opportune time."

The second temptation in the Matthean gospel places Jesus atop the Temple in Jerusalem and tempts Jesus to throw himself down upon the rocks, while the second temptation in the Lukan gospel is set in a 'high place' and tempts Jesus to worship Satan in exchange for earthly power. It may have been important for the author of Matthew to conclude the temptation account atop a mountain, as the Matthean gospel concludes. The author of Luke may have placed the climatic temptation at the Temple as a way of centralizing Jerusalem in the account and foreshadowing Jesus' coming death and resurrection in Jerusalem.

Historical Context

The Lukan gospel was written to a largely Gentile community, and is highly charged politically. Even still, the temptation account is extremely accessible and meaningful to a Jewish reader. Many have suggested that the author of Luke means to connect the early Christian community with the ancient Jewish community so as to secure the same protection from Roman oppression that the Jewish community enjoyed. Indeed, the genealogy that comes just before the temptation account serves to connect Jesus, and thereby his followers, to the Jewish community, and the temptation account clearly demonstrates Jesus' connection to the Jewish community as one tested in the wilderness.

Scholars also suggest that the author is encouraging members of the Christian community to take "a non-apocalyptic and cooperative stance toward Rome."⁹ The author's decision in v.5 to use the word 'oikoumene,' which can be translated as 'empire' or '(Roman) world,' might commend to the reader the fact that Jesus, even when faced with the

⁸ Deuteronomy 8:3

⁹ Sacra Pagina, 8.

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opportunity to overtake the Roman authorities, chose rather the role of a peaceful leader and acknowledged the fact that honoring God did not necessarily mean overthrowing this earthly authority.

Canonical Context

The influence of canonical texts in the Lukan temptation account is extensive. The temptation account begins by placing Jesus in the wilderness for forty days, which would immediately remind a Jewish reader of the forty years the Israelites spent in the wilderness after their deliverance from Egypt. In a sense then, Jesus is a new Moses; however, where Moses failed the test in the wilderness and was not able to enter the Promised Land, Jesus succeeds.

The use of the devil (*diabolos*) to tempt Jesus in the wilderness reminds readers of the story of Job. In Job, the devil was a tempter who tested the faithfulness of humanity on behalf of the LORD. Again, the devil is presented as the one who tests the faithfulness of humanity; only this time, the subject is Jesus. While never stated explicitly, it is understood that the Spirit has led Jesus into the wilderness for the express purpose of being tested by the devil, presumably on God's behalf.

Each time Jesus responds to the devil's temptations, he quotes a passage from the Hebrew Scriptures. The first test, in which Jesus is tempted to turn stones into bread in order to feed himself, reminds Jewish readers of the provision of manna for the Israelites in the wilderness. This memory is reinforced when Jesus responds to the devil by quoting a passage from Deuteronomy 8:3. To the second test, in which Jesus is tempted with earthly power, Jesus responds with a quote from Deuteronomy 10:20. Again, the reader's memory of the Israelites' wilderness experience is reinforced. In the third test, Jesus is tempted to abuse God's power and promise. This third test is unique because the devil uses scripture to test Jesus by quoting Psalm 91:11-12. Here, the devil tempts Jesus to put God's promises to the test. Jesus responds with a quote from Deuteronomy 6:16. In his resistance of the devil's third temptation, Jesus proves that he is superior to Moses, who failed to remain faithful to God's promise in the wilderness.

Finally, v.14 sets the stage for the power of the Holy Spirit revealed in the apostles in Acts. In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells the disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The power of the Holy Spirit that fills Jesus in Luke

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4:14 and causes a report to spread about him “through all the surrounding country” is the same power that will enable the apostles to bear witness about Jesus through all the world.

Themes

Exegetical Focus

The thrust of the Lukan temptation account is found in Jesus’ identity with his own Hebrew heritage, as evidenced through his responses to each temptation. Not only is Jesus identifiable as a Moses-like character, Jesus gives Gentile readers examples of faithful responses to temptation. Both Hebrew and Gentile readers alike could look to the account as a model for response to the looming threat of Roman persecution and also an example of one who looked to God for his provision, even in the face of extreme sacrifice and trial. Readers see in Jesus the example of humble authority. Jesus did not draw his strength from the overthrow of earthly powers; rather, Jesus drew his authority from God and calls readers to do the same.

Exposition

For modern readers, the difficulty with the temptation account is that we seldom face temptations that present themselves so clearly. In the Lukan account, the temptations are clearly presented to Jesus, and his response is obvious. This is not to say that the original readers did not also experience the complexities of life, but as cultures in the modern world grow increasingly diverse, we struggle to find the answers to life’s trials that will both honor God and respect the diversity of our social landscape.

For the modern reader, resisting the “devil” may manifest itself in a resistance of unethical business practices, corrupt justice systems and unequal distribution of wealth. However, so many of these cultural dynamics are intimately related to religious, national and racial identity. Modern readers must struggle, as Jesus did, to articulate responses to the evils of the world that will honor God, be faithful to one’s own heritage and yet recognize the value and beauty of diversity.

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