Matthew 4:4 and the KJV Report

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(Note - This is part one of a two-part essay on Matthew 4:4. The second part can be found here. A fuller form of this essay, with footnotes, is available here. Comments, as ever, can be found here.)

Matthew 4:4 And Its Relation To The Doctrine Of Preservation

Introduction

Jesus statement in Mark 14: Mean shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God' has often been cited as support for the doctrine of preservation. Specifically, the phrase "every word" has been frequently capitalized so to suggest not only that the passage teaches some form of providence but also that God's Scripture must be a form of providence in itself. But "every word" of the text, in other words, it has been asserted that we have here a promise of the verbal plenary preservation of Scripture in particular. Is this a valid use of this passage? Is it proper to take this text and to be copied and passed down through the centuries, God will supernaturally supernaturally superintend his will so that it will be preserved? Or, is this a misuse of the text? Does the context of Matthew 4 and the Gospel of Matthew in which the saying of Jesus is recorded, lend itself to such a reading? In this short essay, I will argue that that, that, that,

gospel is predominated by concern for the Gentile mission and the evangelization of the world. Gentile inclusion colors almost all that he writes.

This distinction between them can be illustrated by their handling of the genealogical material (which in turn colors their handling of the temptation narrative). In Matthew, the genealogy of Jesus is treated at the beginning (Matt. 1:1-17), following a typical Jewish pattern. Further, he has structured it to strongly make the Jewish connections, especially that of the Davidic messiah. He arranges the genealogy of Jesus into three sets of "fourteen generations" (Matt. 1:17). He does this because it allows him to subtly make a point beyond merely the recounting of a "royal lineage" for Jesus. Hebrew numbers are written with the normal letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Thus, many names in Hebrew have a sort of numerical equivalent, known to every Hebrew reader, a practice called, gematria. The number fourteen, and the name "David" are written in exactly the same way in Hebrew. Thus, a threefold repetition of "14" in the genealogy structure is also a three-fold repetition of David. It is as though Matthew says, "He's David – here's proof; He's David – here's proof; He's David! – Here's proof." While some have pointed out that this might have been lost on a Greek speaking readership in a Greek text,[15] many hold that it would still be perceived.

But Luke does something entirely different with his genealogy. He flips the order around, so that his genealogy goes backwards from the normal order. Thus, rather than ancestor-to-descendant, his moves descendant-to-ancestor. But further, Matthew begins his gemology (out of order) by moving first Jesus to David, then develops it beginning with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. For Matthew, Jesus is preeminently the King of the Jews. However, Luke traces his genealogy all the way back to the first man, Adam, the father of the Human race. For him, Jesus is Lord of the entire Human race, and all are invited into God's mission. This becomes patently evident in where he places the genealogy. Moving it from its place near the beginning in Matthew, he places it just before the temptation narrative. And he reverses the order of the genealogy so that it ends with Adam, and the reader is left with Adam on his mind just before he reads the temptation of Jesus.

Thus, while Matthew intends his Jewish readers primarily to see Jesus as fulfilling where Israel failed, Luke wants Theophilus to see Jesus as succeeding where Adam failed. The arrangement immediately evokes the image of the temptation in the garden. Satan's presence as tempter, and the failure of Adam are paramount then on the minds of the reader. But where Adam failed, plunging the human race into sin, Jesus succeeds, bringing victory and forgiveness for all who will accept it. He is presenting Jesus as the "second Adam." This is regularly known as a distinctly Pauline theme (see Romans five), but Luke has developed it with just as much skill, only in a more subtle way. Their long friendship and regular travels together might well have involved conversations about Jesus as the second Adam who delivers the human race, and they have each developed it in different ways. Paul is familiar with Luke's work (and even regards it as equal in authority to OT scripture), so one might suggestively conjecture that the theme originated with Luke, and was picked up and developed by Paul. Regardless of conclusions on the particulars it is clear that, for Matthew, as Jesus is tempted, Israel in the wilderness stands in the background; for Luke, while Jesus is being tempted, Adam in the garden stands paramount in the background. While every other human has failed to obey God, Jesus alone has remained obedient to the Father, and he alone can atone for the sins of others upon the cross.

A note should be said also about the historical origin of these comparisons. Accepting both Matthew and Luke as inspired biblical writes lends Divine authority to these comparisons (most specifically of Jesus-to-Israel) as part of Divine Writ, regardless of their historical origins. However, exegetically, one still must ask whether this analogy is drawn by the Evangelists themselves (as inspired writers) or whether they are merely repeating a tradition which they had received. Recognizing that they employ a shared source, and noting some of the shared features of that source (see the blue sections above, and note a fuller synopsis for the broader text in parallel), reveals that this connection is not an innovation on the part of one of the Evangelists. Each Evangelist borrows the "into the wilderness" language of Mark, suggesting that the connection goes back at least to him (and a "second exodus" theme in Mark, with Jesus as the new Israel, is commonly noted in the literature). But in the material independent of Mark (the three temptations shared by Matthew and Luke), the same three quotations of the Deuteronomy material occur. Both have Jesus quoting in each temptation from the same section of Deuteronomy, drawing out the connection of his wilderness temptations to the wilderness wonderings of Israel. To make a historical jump from Mark and "Q" to the historical Jesus (which I will presume here rather than defend)[16] shows that this connection goes back to Jesus himself. In other words, seeing in Jesus and his temptations the wonderings of Israel, and seeing Jesus as succeeding where Israel failed is not a later innovation of Matthew, Luke, or even Mark as inspired authors. It's source is rather Jesus himself. He quotes from these passages precisely because he saw himself as succeeding where Israel had failed. Contrary to many skeptics who wish to maintain that Jesus himself saw no redemptive or salvation-historical intent behind his life and actions (claiming that these are later innovations of the authors of our gospel accounts), Jesus from the very outset of his ministry understood himself as obeying the Father where Israel (and as Luke would note, all of humanity as well) had failed to do so. At stake in the wilderness is not simply a battle between Jesus and Satan – at stake is the very eternal destiny of the world. If Jesus fails, redemption is lost, and mankind's very redemption is thwarted.

[Note - This exegetical study of Matthew 4:4 is resumed and concluded in a second post here.]

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