Matthew 4.4 and the KJV Bible Part 1

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[Note - This post resumes and concludes an exegetical study of Matthew 4.4 that was began here. A fuller form of the study with references, citations, and footnotes, can be found here.]

Matthew 4.4 – Looking closely at "Every Word"

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It is apparent that the OT story and Deuteronomy in particular, are essential for interpreting this passage. In the mind of Deuteronomy and of Jesus in the passage, Israel's journey, described in the one verse from Deuteronomy, is essential to understanding Jesus' own experience in the wilderness. In each of the three temptations, Jesus is quoting from Deuteronomy 8 and 6 and 10 and 13 and 18 and 30 and 32 and 33 and 34. Occasionally, an allusion will be taken from the previous context interpretation of the passage. Jesus' point, then, is that this is a "model" for how to fight temptation from Satan. But while there is some significance to the number of times Jesus quotes or alludes to Deuteronomy, it is not as if he is just using some a model for those called to "follow-up." – Mark 2.19), it is clearly not the primary intent of the biblical writer. Such an interpretation does not do justice to the text. Much of the fault lies with the idea that each temptation that is left to see that the significance of this is not likely to be "therefore, you should be like Jesus." Such a view is not supported by the context. Jesus is not the "model" for how to be like the pattern it Mosaic Law, but he is the pattern(Phil) Thus, from the text itself, we should not read the text in connection with the OT references weighing, then such a broad generalization might be appropriate (Jesus quotes repeatedly Deuteronomy, Israel's history, Israel's thoughts/ideas/ etc). Rather, the text's intent is to emphasis, that Jesus is leading, and using, the Bible in its context, in accordance with the OT Scriptures, to fight the temptations. Jesus's interpretation of the OT is not the same as the Jewish one, the OT passages from such quotes, he is not just using Scripture's words or the more tactical three-fold interpretation.

Deuteronomy in his historical context

Deuteronomy is the final book of the five books of Moses, known as the Pentateuch. While few subjects have been more accepted and critically scrutinized as have been supposed by Moses and the authorship and dating of the Pentateuch, we will ponder some of the Deuteronomy's historical context. Deuteronomy is a book of Moses's farewell speeches, and it is a book of covenant renewal. Deuteronomy emphasizes the covenant God of the Israelites, who provides the land, instructs the people, and promises to forget the lessons God has taught them (4:1-40). Building upon the first, the second discourse (introduced in 4:44-49) gives instructions for life in the land, through some (24 of 34) chapters. Deuteronomy 5 (the Decalogue) is the central part of the book, falling naturally into two basic sections. The first section of this discourse (5-11) emphasizes the past, the second (12-26) the present and future. Deuteronomy 27-28 concludes the covenant that forms the core of the book. The concluding section (chapters 27-30) contains the blessings and curses (obedience/ disobedience) and the Israelites' Moses' third sermon completes the material in 29-30. The book concludes with three more sections, the first (31) prepares for Israel's future, the second (32) contains the song which Moses spoke units and of Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, " the reader is drawn back to time in that moment, speaking, Moses's farewell.

The book's content revolves around three "sermons" of Moses that are delivered to the children of Israel in the brink of Canaan just before they enter the land.(Ch1 After a brief introduction-1-5), the book consists of three sermons (1:6-4:40; 5:1-26:19; 27:1-30:20) and a concluding section (31-34). Deuteronomy emphasizes the covenant God of the people, who provides the land, instructs the people, and promises to forget the lessons God has taught them (4:1-40). Building upon the first, the second discourse (introduced in 4:44-49) gives instructions for life in the land, through some (24 of 34) chapters. Deuteronomy 5 (the Decalogue) is the central part of the book, falling naturally into two basic sections. The first section of this discourse (5-11) emphasizes the past, the second (12-26) the present and future. Deuteronomy 27-28 concludes the covenant that forms the core of the book. The concluding section (chapters 27-30) contains the blessings and curses (obedience/ disobedience) and the Israelites' Moses' third sermon completes the material in 29-30. The book concludes with three more sections, the first (31) prepares for Israel's future, the second (32) contains the song which Moses spoke units and of Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, " the reader is drawn back to time that moment, speaking, Moses's farewell.

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Deuteronomy 8:1-3

In chapter 8, Moses' sermon continues to emphasize the covenant principles relating to God's provision. The point of chapter 8 is that God is the source of all blessings. Israel should be in fear, obey and trust God for their provision. He is alone the one on whom they should depend. The wilderness wanderings were God's means of testing and teaching the people. The wilderness was a place of testing, and God was using Pharaoh and disposition in the wilderness provided the context in which the lesson could be learned. The provision was tested in their past, wilderness and blessing in the promised land would provide the context in which they would be tested. Deuteronomy 8 is a reminder to the Israelites of God's provision in the lesson learned from the wilderness, and reinforces to them that they must depend on God as they have learned. Its does this by illustrating the teaching of God through the covenant blessings and curses. Its also by this obedience is to be motivated by a remembrance of how God has already provided for them. This, in 8:2 he contrasts what God has done in the wilderness from Deuteronomy 8:1. Thus, a closer look at the context of Deuteronomy 8:1-3.

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Deuteronomy 8:1-3

"All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God has these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, what was in your heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no."

verse 2-5, he proves that this testing by God had taught them people turn his heart to God (in charity), clothing (in garment that wound not old), and health (in their feet not swelling).

"And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD does man live. Thy garment wound not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years. Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that as a man chastens his son, so the LORD thy God chastens you."

In verse 6-9, he reminds them of the great blessings the God had will bring to them when they enter the promised land.

"For the LORD thy God brings you into a good land, a land of brooks, of fountains and depths that springs out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive, and honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass."

And in verse 10 he warns them that when they have eaten and are satisfied they have an occasion where they dependence upon God as the source of blessings was tested, so in a very different way that dependence in the promised land would be tested. Moses is reminding them of the lesson they learned in the wilderness, that they were dependent upon him for food. In their wilderness they were dependent upon him for clothing. In the promised land they would be tested in a very different way, but the lesson they learned would be tested. Moses's point is that God's provision and blessings are God's means to test the heart of the people.

The Quotation Itself in its Contexts - Deut. 8:3

Having looked more broadly at the OT context from which the quotation of Deut. 8:3 springs, we can now examine more deeply the specific context of Deuteronomy 8 from which the quotation is taken. Jesus's use of Deut. 8:3 is utilized as support for a doctrine of verbal plenary preservation, that is, "every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD." Specifically, the phrase, "every word" is used to support the doctrine of verbal plenary preservation. Moses's sermon in Deuteronomy 8 focuses on much less basic matter of this phrase than this issue (in its context in Deuteronomy especially) it is well worth looking at in more detail.

Duet. 8:3 in the NT

The Hebrew of the Masoretic text here involves two phrases:

מוֹצָא שְׂפָתֶיךָ

The first phrase has three elements, a preposition (מ) followed by two nouns. Or literally, "מ + מוֹצָא + שְׂפָתֶיךָ" – "מ" – "מוֹצָא" – "שְׂפָתֶיךָ" The preposition מ is the most "motion" in the construct. Literally, it means "from." The first noun, מוֹצָא, is a masculine noun, meaning "a place of going out." The Hebrew noun "שְׂפָתֶיךָ" literally means "of lying out." It is used two ways: it is used to refer to a "lip" and refers to a "lying out" which can relate in turn to any of three basic notions: to a place of going out (in which case it is used to refer to an out of lying or a way of lying out), to a place of lying out (in which case it is used to refer to a "lip"), or to a "lip." The phrase, מוֹצָא שְׂפָתֶיךָ, literally means "a place of going out of your lips

mission, despite the suffering it would bring, and to fully represent humanity by being fully and totally human for every step of his chosen path. Matthew is showing that Jesus is our representative. What does Matthew intend for this story to accomplish in his readers? Most likely, he intends their adoration and respect for Jesus to grow as they realize that he has succeeded where they had failed. Yet despite that successfully lived life of perfect conformity to the Father's will, he would bear the suffering of a Servant punished for iniquities not his own, even to the point of the cross. He would fully represent them. In what way could this intent have to do with the verbal preservation of Scripture? That Scripture, (specifically the OT passage of Duet. 6-8), plays some role in the account is obvious on even a cursory reading. But to suggest that Matthew has some kind of bibliological intent instead of the clear Christological and salvation-historical one is surely to miss Mathew's point altogether.

Thirdly, one must reckon with the context and intent of the OT passage which is here quoted. Our phrase is undeniably a quote by Jesus of the text in Duet. 8:3. To suggest that the phrase is teaching preservation of any kind is to ignore the context of the Old Testament passage itself (Deut. 6-8 specifically, and all of 5-11 as well). The intent of Moses there is clearly to teach that God's people should be dependent upon him for their provision. As we have seen, this is the point not only of the entire section which is so dominant in the temptation narrative, it is the point of the historical event of the wilderness wanderings of Israel, and it is the clear intent of Moses in retelling that narrative in the passage at hand. Further, this is clearly how the text is understood in Jesus own time, as we have seen from the usage of the text in second temple literature. It is clear that Jesus understands the text this way, which is what makes the text the perfect response to Satan's temptation. To suggest that Matthew is using that passage to teach something which is contrary to what Moses intended is to suggest that Matthew is mishandling Scripture. This might in theory be possible, however far this usage might be removed from authorial intent. But if this is the case here, because the usage of Scripture is placed on Jesus' lips as his own response to Satan, and because we accept Matthew's account as historically accurate, we cannot say that Matthew is ignoring the historical context of Scripture here unless we are willing to charge Jesus with the same. Matthew is simply recounting Jesus' own statement. Surely, whatever one thinks about Matthew's use of Scripture, this is less acceptable to anyone who holds together both a high view of Jesus, and high view of Jesus' own attitude towards Scripture.

But finally, to suggest that the passage is teaching some kind of verbal preservation based on the phrase "every word" in Mat. 4:4 is to fundamentally miss the point that this word of the phrase is not itself a part of the Hebrew text of Deut. 8:3. It is an addition from the LXX translation of the Hebrew text into Greek. To take an instance where the OT Hebrew text has been changed in translation, which translation is then quoted in the NT, and then to use that very change itself as the basis of a doctrine which asserts that the text
could never be changed is beyond absurd. Absurd is probably too kind a word. It is in fact the very definition of shooting oneself in the foot.

To summarize, taking the phrase "but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" in Matthew 4:4 as a promise of the verbal preservation of Scripture is to ignore the historical context of the temptation itself, or perhaps even to assert that Jesus was less than successful in thwarting Satan. It is to ignore the intent of Jesus in recounting the story to his disciples, and to contradict Matthew's intent in recounting the temptation of Jesus. It is to ignore or contravene the context of the OT text of Duet. 8:3, and to suggest that either Moses, Jesus, or Matthew poorly misuses that text here. It is to argue quite oxymoronically that a change in the wording of the OT text is proof that the wording of the OT text has never been changed. It is not all that different in character or result from promising a jury that you will produce proof that no murder weapon ever existed, only to uncover in their sight nothing less than the proverbial smoking gun itself.

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