

Preparation Paper Two
Western Heritage II: Classical Christian Era
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Donald R. Clowers
Colorado Christian University
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The Gospels contain a tremendous wealth of information that can provide spiritual guidance as well as perspectives on Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. This paper will discuss a few of these areas starting with a biographical sketch of Luke, one of the four writers of the Gospels, and an exegetical study of his prologue. The spiritual significance of Jesus' temptations will be discussed as well as Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John chapter seventeen. This paper will conclude with John's purpose in writing his account of the Gospel of Christ and how his is different from the other three.

Not much is known about Luke, one of the writers of the four Gospels and the only gentile writer in the New Testament (Halley, 1965). Luke was probably born in Antioch, Syria, and grew to be a humble man, not even mentioning himself by name in either of his two writings, the books of Luke and Acts (Lockyer, 1986). He was well educated for his day, with knowledge of medicine acknowledged by Paul (Colossians 4:14, NIV), and master of the languages of Hebrew and Classical Greek (Halley, 1965). Over the course of his ministry, Luke was a leader in the Philippian Church for its first six years and was a companion of both Mark and Paul (Halley, 1965). Paul refers to him as "My fellow worker..." (Philemon 24, NIV) and attests to his loyalty in II Timothy 4:11 (NIV).

From Luke's prologue in his book, one can see he was a careful historian as well. Written first to Theophilus (Luke 1:4), the book of Luke is useful for every reader. Verse 1 of Luke (NIV) indicates that many individuals have tried to gather up information regarding Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Verse 2 (NIV) explains how the information came to Luke of the events that transpired during the life of Jesus. These sources include oral testimonies from eyewitnesses as well as documented sources like the books of Mark and Matthew (Gundry, 1994). Luke then explains that since he has "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" (Luke 1:3a, NIV), that he too should "write an orderly account"

(Luke 1:3b, NIV). This is so Theophilus, and today's reader, will be able to know with certainty, what has been taught them regarding Jesus (Luke 1:4). No doubt, Theophilus and Luke must have been good friends in the faith, or at least there was a significant degree of trust between them.

One aspect of the life of Christ that Luke wrote about is that of the temptation by the Devil at the dawn of his ministry. The Devil uses three areas to tempt people today just as he tempted Jesus back then. John described these areas well when he said, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 John 2:16, KJV). The world, and all that is in it, can be an overwhelming temptation, even to those that have the Father in them.

It is interesting that the Devil does not tempt Jesus when he is at his strongest during the forty days in the wilderness, but instead he tempts Jesus when he is at his weakest, at the end of his fast in the wilderness. Luke tells the reader that "He (Jesus) ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry" (Luke 4:2, NIV). The Devil uses this opportunity to try to exploit what John called the "lust of the flesh" (1 John 2:16, KJV). He proposes to Jesus that if he is the Son of God, then he can cure his hunger by turning a stone into bread (Luke 4:3, NIV). Jesus could have done so of course, but the point of coming to earth was to reach man on man's terms by living, being tempted, and suffering as man does. Jesus responds by quoting the scripture, "...man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 8:3, NIV). Scripture is still the greatest tool a believer today can rely on as well.

The Devil then turns to the next tool in his arsenal, that of lust of the eyes. The Devil takes Jesus to a high place where he shows him "all the kingdoms of the world" (Luke 4:5, NIV). He offers this to Jesus in exchange for a change in loyalty away from God (Luke 4:6, NIV).

Jesus again responds with the scripture, “Fear the Lord your God, serve him only...” (Deuteronomy 6:13, NIV). Ironically, Jesus will one day rule over all the kingdoms, but this will be in God’s time, not the Devil’s.

But the Devil has one last tool in his arsenal, that of the pride of life. The Devil takes Jesus to the highest point in Jerusalem and tells him that “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here” (Luke 4:9, NIV). For the next two verses, the Devil quotes the Psalms indicating that God will protect Jesus with the angels of Heaven (Luke 4:10-11, NIV). This is interesting because one would not expect the Devil to be a reader of scripture. He intends to turn Jesus’ weapon against him but he fails in doing so. It is not that what he quoted was false, God would send angels to Jesus’ aid if he asked for it. But Jesus did not come to save himself, but others. Jesus gives his final response saying, “Do not test the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 6:16, NIV). The Devil then leaves Jesus alone for a time (Luke 4:13, NIV).

In this discourse, Jesus uses scripture for guidance in dealing with the Devil’s temptations, and each time, this strategy is successful. Jesus exemplifies in this scene, by not falling back on supernatural abilities, that even man can thwart the will of the Devil by turning to scripture.

While Jesus did not fear for himself where the Devil is concerned, he did fear for his disciples and future believers in general when it came to dealing with the Devil and his temptations. After all, if the Devil is willing to tempt the Son of God, what more will he do to man. His concern is evident in chapter seventeen of the book of John. This chapter is a prayer, by Jesus, for protection of those he leaves behind after his ascension.

Jesus starts his prayer by reminding God that the time has come for His son to be glorified, by completing the work for which he was sent. That is, his death on the cross and the resurrection. He then prays for his disciples and reminds God of how they were taught and why.

Jesus is not praying for the entire world, but those that have come to trust in him. He tells God that while here on earth, he protected them. But after he leaves, the disciples will need God's protection. Jesus then prays for those believers reached by the disciples in time to come. He concludes by indicating that he wants those that have come to him to see him in his glory where he is, fully understanding the glory of his service on earth (John 17, NIV).

John included this prayer, as well as many other details in his book of the same name. While it may have been written to correct some heresy and to document details not found in the other accounts, John provided his primary reason within the book. That reason was so that, "you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31, NIV).

The book of John is different from the other three Gospels in that it is not a synoptic book. The books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are considered synoptic because they reveal in similar language, the same material, order of events, and sayings of Christ (NIV), suggesting that they may draw on the same source material. For example, as a rule the synoptic books discuss miracles to show Jesus' power. John uses miracles as teaching signs followed by a message (KJV).

These synoptic books were primarily written for different purposes as well. Matthew was written to prove to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah (Gundry, 1994). Mark was written as an apology, or explanation, of the crucifixion and Luke was written to strengthen the faith of believers and counter arguments by non-believers (Gundry, 1994).

This paper has discussed Luke from a biographical point of view, the spiritual significance of Jesus' temptations as well as Jesus' High Priestly prayer in John chapter seventeen. It concluded with John's purpose in writing his Gospel and how it is different from the other three.

References

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