

All Saints' Bible Study – August 29, 2008

Can we be sure the text we have is the text Luke wrote?

None of the original documents of New Testament texts exist. We rely on copies of copies. We compared the documentation of the New Testament texts with the documentation for other historical texts.

Julius Caesar wrote in 1st century BC, fewer than a dozen manuscripts of his works survive, the oldest of which was written around AD800-900, almost 1000 years after his time.

In contrast there are many New Testament manuscripts dating from the period between AD200 and AD300 and scraps of manuscripts dated earlier. e.g. almost 70 papyrus documents mostly from Egypt including the Rylands papyrus dated AD130 which contains a tiny scrap of John's gospel (less than 50 years after originally written) and the Chester Beatty Papyrus I dated AD200-250 containing bits of 4 gospels and Acts. In the several thousand manuscripts of various kinds that exist there is less than a 1% variation of text and most variations are small such as skipping a line or spelling mistakes.

We Read Luke 3:1-19

and compared it to:

Mark 1:1-8, Matthew 3:1-12 and John 1:19-28

- Luke has historical and geographical detail missing in the others – Luke uses detail to situate the events and substantiate truth. Much of his detail is being corroborated by other evidence.
- Luke's quotation from Isaiah 40 is longer ending on 'all mankind will see God's salvation' – Luke's gentile audience needs to know the message is for them. Look out for theme of salvation in Luke.
- Both Matthew and Luke have the same polemic addressed to 'you brood of vipers', not in Mark – some of Jesus' teaching later repeats some of John's words.
- Luke has individualised teaching addressed to ordinary people – soldiers and tax-collectors – Luke focuses his story towards the 'common' man or woman
- Luke adds at this point that John the Baptist was imprisoned – Luke likes to round off his tale before moving to the next episode.
- Luke doesn't contain John the Baptist's personal description
- In Luke and John, John the Baptist's identity is questioned. Is he the Christ? Builds expectancy – general expectancy among Jews that messiah/Elijah would come. Malachi 4:5

Baptism

Baptism was known in Jewish world as initiation for non-Jews into Judaism and also repeated ritual washing known. This baptism for all for repentance seems to be unique to John – a prophetic act.

We read Luke 3:21-22

Was Jesus really baptised by John?

This was an embarrassment to the early church because it could indicate that Jesus was not pure, so it wouldn't be included unless writers convinced of veracity.

Why did Jesus need to be baptised? It symbolises his identification with humanity.

We read Luke 3:23-38

The point of the genealogy:

- Jesus not a demigod from pagan mythology, but real man
- Credentials of divinity – not upstart like the Caesars who have just now started declaring themselves Gods
- Ancestry goes back to Adam therefore his mission not just to Israel but to all mankind
- Son of God – see Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1

Possible reasons proposed for differences with Matthew's genealogy include rules for legal adoption if a man dies childless or if a woman who has no brothers marries, and a suggestion that Mary's father was Heli, so this may be Mary's genealogy.