

BRIEF NOTE

LUKE 3:22-38 IN CODEX BEZAE: THE MESSIANIC KING

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The work of the textual critic has long centered in the task of collating manuscripts, counting variants, and computing the results for the purpose of placing manuscripts in their proper text-types. This process is essential for building a critical text. However, as important as this work may be, dealing statistically with variant readings can result in a neglect of the contribution the variants make to the meaning of the text. The contribution of a variant reading can be fully appreciated only when the degree of difference it brings to the text is evaluated. As K. W. Clark says:

Counting words is a meaningless measure of textual variation, and all such estimates fail to convey the theological significance of variable readings. Rather it is required to evaluate the thought rather than to compute the verbiage. How shall we measure the theological clarification derived from textual emendation where a single word altered affects the major concept in a passage? . . . By calculating words it is impossible to appreciate the spiritual insights that depend upon the words.¹

It is only when one realizes that many variant readings resulted from theological biases that textual criticism becomes exciting. The textual critic then finds himself discontented with collating three or four scattered chapters of a book for purposes of placing a manuscript in its proper text-type. Three or four chapters of one of the gospels, e.g., are not sufficient to isolate a pattern of theological biases that may lie behind variant readings. The entire book must be collated, and then whatever patterns exist can be seen.

Westcott and Hort believed that alterations of the text were not motivated by theological interests,² but this view has now been recognized as fallacious.³ Frederic Kenyon, e.g., points out that anyone who

¹K. W. Clark, "The Theological Relevance of Textual Variations in Current Criticism of the Greek New Testament," *JBL* 85 (1966): 4-5.

²Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *Introduction, Appendix*, vol. 2 of *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1896), p. 282.

³Cf. Friedrich Blass, *Philology of the Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1898), p. 89; Clark, pp. 4-7; Eldon Jay Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts* (Cambridge: University Press, 1966), pp. 1-3; Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn, *A Survey of the Researches into the Western Text of the Gospels and Acts* (Utrecht: Kemink, 1949), pp. 163-164; Kirsopp Lake, *The Influence of Textual Criticism on the Exegesis of*

compares the text of Codex D with Codex B will see that no theory of accident will account for the omissions and additions which become apparent.⁴

One advantage of collating an entire book is the opportunity thereby provided for observing the contributions made to a developing pattern by less obvious variants. Although the more obvious variants may be seen quickly, the total picture cannot be appreciated until all variants are evaluated. Indeed, it is sometimes the minor changes that place the more obvious variants in their proper perspective within the developing theological pattern. K. Lake says that a "small amount of evidence is sufficient to establish the claim to consideration of readings which are likely to have been obnoxious to early doctrine."⁵ And Clark comments that the "amount of textual change that involves theological alteration is a small proportion but it is a nugget of essential importance for interpretation."⁶

1. *The Variant in Codex Bezae and Jesus' Baptism*

Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D) is a manuscript that makes this type of study rewarding. The unique readings of this manuscript have long been recognized by textual scholars. E. J. Epp's work, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts*, has shown the existence of definite biases lying behind the variant readings in Acts.⁷ A similar study of Luke indicates that theological biases promoted variant readings in this book as well.⁸

By an examination of the variant readings that relate to Jesus and his ministry throughout Luke, we can see that D works for a magnification of Jesus. In the present study we will examine two of these variants that strengthen the identification of Jesus as the Messianic King. They stand side by side in Luke 3:22 and Luke 3:23-38: the heavenly voice that was heard at Jesus' baptism, and the genealogy of Jesus, respectively.

The alteration made in the words of the heavenly voice has occasioned a lively discussion by almost every commentator and scholar

the New Testament (Oxford: University Press, 1904), pp. 10-11; C. S. C. Williams, *Alterations to the Text of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1951), pp. 5-6.

⁴Frederic Kenyon, "The Western Text in the Gospels and Acts," *The Proceedings of the British Academy* 24 (1938): 307.

⁵Lake, pp. 10-11.

⁶Clark, p. 15.

⁷See n. 3, above.

⁸George E. Rice, *The Alteration of Luke's Tradition by the Textual Variants in Codex Bezae* (Ph. D. dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 1974).

interested in the textual problems of the NT. In addition, the differences between the genealogies found in the normal text of Matthew and Luke have stirred their share of interest. D's alterations add still another dimension to this discussion.

The three Synoptics present an almost identical account of the words spoken by the heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism. D makes the following alteration in Luke's account:

Luke 3:22

Codex B⁹

και φωνην εξ ουρανου
γενεσθαι συ ει ο υιος μου
ο αγαπητος εν σοι ευδοκησα

"And a voice came from
heaven, You are my beloved
son, in you I am pleased."

Codex D

και φωνην εκ του ουρανου
γενεσθαι υιος μου ει συ
εγω σημερον γεγεννηκα σε

"And a voice came from
heaven, You are my
son, Today I have begotten you."¹⁰

This reading in D is supported by Old Latin manuscripts and a number of church fathers. The presence of this reading in D and Old Latin manuscripts indicates that it is a part of the Western Text.

There are various opinions as to the import of the words in this alteration. B. H. Streeter considers the reading of the Western Text as the original,¹¹ as did A. Harnack,¹² who thought that the B reading in Luke was assimilated from the reading of Matthew and Mark because the Western reading was open to doctrinal objections.¹³ B. S. Easton says that this reading may "represent the original (pre-Markan) form of the words, transmitted by oral or non-canonical written tradition."¹⁴ Friedrich Blass favors the idea that the Western reading is original because it fits in logically with the genealogy that immediately follows in the normal text.¹⁵

⁹The ideal standard would be the original text which Luke himself wrote, but since this is obviously not extant, some other standard for comparison must be chosen. I have selected a real text, B, rather than using a critical edition (which, of course, gives a text which never existed in manuscript form).

¹⁰The variant, *εγω σημερον γεγεννηκα σε*, is attested by D it^a-b, c, d, ff², l, r¹, Justin, Origen, Diognetus, Gospel of the Ebionites, (Clement), *Didascalia*, Methodius, Juvencus, (Ambrosiaster), Hilary, *Apostolic Constitutions*, Faustinus, (Tyconius), Augustine.

¹¹Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 143.

¹²Adolf Harnack, *The Sayings of Jesus: The Second Source of St. Matthew and St. Luke*, trans. J. R. Wilkinson (London: Williams and Norgate, 1908), pp. 310-314.

¹³It is of interest to note that D makes this alteration in Luke's text alone; the normal readings in Matthew and Mark remain unchanged.

¹⁴Burton Scott Easton, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), pp. 43-44.

¹⁵Blass, pp. 169-170.

F. Godet, W. H. P. Hatch, and C. S. C. Williams are among those who do not accept this reading as original.¹⁶ Commenting on Luke 3:22 in the Western text, C. G. Montefiore says; "If this, as some think, is the true original reading, it would show that Luke, in its original form, knew nothing of the miraculous birth. To the divine Son the Baptism could bring no new, special relation to God."¹⁷

However, there are those, such as Easton, who disagree with Montefiore's conclusion: "The theological difficulty caused by this reading is quite needless; Messiahship (equals "sonship" here) was an office of Christ's humanity and was by no means necessarily involved in the Incarnation."¹⁸

Michael Mees thinks that the Western reading grew out of the catechetical instruction of the early church. Luke, he feels, has applied Ps 2:7 (from which "You are my son, today I have begotten you" is taken) to the resurrection (Acts 13:33), and because the heavenly voice at the baptism suggested Ps 2:7, the church saw "the redemption as a powerful Epiphany of God upon earth, which manifested itself by the baptism for the first time and has been surpassed in the resurrection."¹⁹

The normal reaction is to view the expression "You are my son, today I have begotten you" as an Adoptionist reading. Streeter, e.g., suggests that the Western text gave an original Adoptionist account of the baptism.²⁰ Lake favored this theory of a primitive Adoptionism.²¹ Such a reaction to the Western reading can be readily understood, for it appears in the Gospel of the Ebionites: *και φωνη εκ του ουρανου λεγουσα• συ μου ει ο υιος αγαπητος, εν σοι ηυδοκησα, και παλιν εγω σημερον γεγεννηκα σε*²² ("and a voice from heaven saying, You are my beloved son, in you I am pleased, and again, Today I have begotten you").

Justin Martyr uses this reading in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (88.8). However, Williams says that when Justin used it he knew that he was

¹⁶F. Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, trans. E. W. Shalders (New York: I. K. Funk, 1881), p. 126; William Henry Paine Hatch, *The "Western" Text of the Gospels* (Evanston: Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 1937), pp. 24-25; Williams, pp. 45-46.

¹⁷C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 2d ed., 2 (London: Macmillan, 1927): 143.

¹⁸Easton, pp. 43-44.

¹⁹Michael Mees, "Sinn und Bedeutung literarischer Formen für die Textgestalt des Codex Bezae in Lukas 10-11," *Vetera Christianorum* 7 (1970): 66-67.

²⁰Streeter, p. 143.

²¹Kirsopp Lake, *Landmarks in the History of Early Christianity* (London: Macmillan, 1920), p. 120.

²²Kurt Aland, *Synopsis Quatuor Evangeliorum*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt Stuttgart, 1968), p. 27.

quoting Ps 2:7, and that he loved to combine the OT with the NT. Williams then concludes, following M.-J. Lagrange, that Justin may have originated this reading and that Tatian borrowed it from Justin.²³ If so, "Justin and possibly Tatian could have popularized the variant, so that it passed on to Clement of Alexandria and to Origen: from them Methodius of Olympus, Hilary and Augustine may have derived their knowledge of it."²⁴

2. *The Variant in Codex Bezae and the Genealogy of Jesus*

The main points of this discussion which revolve around the Western variant do not, however, answer the immediate question with which we are concerned, What was the thinking behind D's use of this variant? To settle this question properly we must first look at the variant presented by D alone in the next several verses.

Beginning with vs. 23, Luke presents his version of Jesus' genealogy. There has been a great deal of debate over whether the genealogy belongs to Joseph or to Mary. It is possible, as we shall see, that D saw in the genealogy a convenient vehicle through which he could express his theological bias.

Space prohibits a comparison of the text of Codex B and D at this point. All that needs to be said is that D sets aside the genealogy of the normal tradition of Luke between Joseph and David and incorporates Matthew's kingly line with some corrections. Matthew says that Uzziah was the son of Joram. D corrects this by adding three names, Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah, making the list agree with the OT accounts. (The first chapter of Matthew in D is lost, so we do not know if D made these corrections there as well.) Other than noting what D has done to Luke's genealogy, very little is said by scholars as to possible reasons for this change.²⁵

What follows is a suggested solution to the variants in Luke 3: 22-38. D received the variant reading at Luke 3:22 (the heavenly voice) from his Western source so that this verse was now a direct quote of Ps 2:7, "You are my son, today I have begotten you." Since this Psalm is a royal Psalm of a king of Judah, it was logical for D in the development of his theological bias to supply Jesus with the royal line (borrowed from Matthew) in Luke's genealogy. Concerning Ps 2, E. W. Heaton says

²³Williams, pp. 46-47.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Charles Cutler Torrey (*Documents of the Primitive Church* [New York: Harper, 1941], pp. 129-131) does propose, however, that D is a Greek translation of an Aramaic version in which the genealogical corrections were made for the benefit of Aramaic-speaking Jews.

that this psalm "was composed, like Psalm 110, for the coronation of a Davidic king in Jerusalem" and that it "probably continued to be used on the official anniversary of the king's accession throughout the period of the monarchy and subsequently it was reinterpreted as a prophecy of the coming Messiah."²⁶

At the anointing of the king, he was admitted to a unique relationship with God, which is described as an adoption.²⁷ According to *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, "the anointing of the king made him Meshiah YHWH, placed him in a special relationship to God, and established him as the one chosen by God to represent His rulership in Israel and to bear witness to His glory before the nations."²⁸

Christians, of course, saw in this Psalm a prophecy pointing to Jesus, and used it as such in their discussion with Jews (Justin Martyr is a case in point). Although Jews themselves once saw Messianic implications in this Psalm, their views changed, probably as a reaction to the Christian use of the Psalm: "'Meshiah' (anointed one of God) in Psalms ii. 7, which was formerly thought to have messianic reference, is now taken as referring either to a Hasmonean king or to Israel. The latter interpretation is that prevailing in the Midrash."²⁹

3. Summary

In summary, then, the process which led to D's distinctive use of these variant readings was probably as follows: D received the variant reading at Luke 3:22 (the heavenly voice) from his Western source. Because of the royal significance of Ps 2, and because the Church saw in this Psalm a prophecy of the Messiah, D quite naturally sees Messianic implications for Jesus. Because this variant appears in connection with the baptism of Jesus, D views this baptism as the anointing of Jesus as the Messianic King.

Thus Ps 2:7, indicating that the newly anointed king of Judah now becomes God's son in a unique way, which he was not previous to the anointing, is applied to God's Son as he takes upon himself a phase of this sonship he had not previously occupied, i.e. the role of the "Messiah" King. D logically alters the adjoining genealogy to support this position and ascribes to the newly anointed King the royal line of David.

²⁶E. W. Heaton, *The Hebrew Kingdoms* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 151.

²⁷Cf. Heaton, p. 152; Charles Augustus and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927): 15-16; and H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1959), pp. 50-51.

²⁸Isidore Singer, ed., *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 8 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904): 505.

²⁹Ibid., p. 506.