

STONES, CROWINGS, AND KINGDOMS

A help to Rightly Divide

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The harmony of the Gospels provides a multiplicity of testimony as to the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the multiplicity of witnesses the truth is known: “This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established” (2 Corinthians 13:1).

In the gospels, God gave four eternal writings as to the life, death, and resurrection of our Saviour. It is as though God records the works of our Saviour from four different viewpoints. [Conversely, there are about thirty non-inspired “gospels” (gnostic and non-canonical), which are not trustworthy – see this author’s paper entitled *New Testament Apocrypha*.]

Now, considering the harmony of the four inspired gospels, we will find some – as some would say – apparent “discrepancies” in wording, of which I give three examples; each showing a variance in revelation from God. This also applies to other portions of scripture. However, for this paper I want to use some familiar passages revolving around our Saviour, and help the reader to understand that when things don’t match, there are reasons.

But before giving the three examples, I should like first to make some important observations that a true student of the Bible would do well to follow.

- 1 To rightly divide **we need a Book we can trust and believe in**. Going to the original languages is indeed a step in due diligent study, but it is not a perquisite to knowing and understanding the truth – especially in these three instances I am presenting below. What we need is an accurate and perfect translation in our language that among its many benefits, settles a lot of translational questions. For those who have researched this issue, we know the King James Version (AV 1611) is that translation for the English-speaking people. In fact, for students of any language, I would recommend using the King James Version as a guide to better understanding of the Bible.

Why is this? Allow me to provide a few reasons: First, the manuscripts used as a basis for this translation are the right ones. They represent the pure line of accurate manuscripts associated with the infallible word of God. Second, the translators themselves were many and experts in their field. They translated the scriptures the right way, with the right motives, and with checks and balances. Today’s modern versions are the product of one or a few biased persons, for the wrong reason; and usually based on corrupt manuscripts. Third, the accuracy and scholarship found in the KJV makes it above all other translations the perfect revelation of God’s complete word to mankind.

- 2 Having the right Book, **it is then a necessity to believe that the words, order of words, and the punctuation therein as recorded are perfectly meant to be**. When God in his wisdom determined the words to be as they are, a man cannot second-guess God and simply change them so they make sense to him. Some have done that, but in so doing they have created a corruption and have shut off light to their souls. In a simpler sense, the student has to know in his heart the words he reads are supposed to be that way. The words are accurately translated from manuscripts that accurately and exactly copied the original writings. Consequently, if God approved of the “originals,” he also approves of the accurate “copies.”

This author is convinced God puts these little puzzles in his word to constantly provoke the reader to accept his word as true regardless if the reader fully understands it or not. No one has the right to change God's word.

- 3 When a person identifies a supposed contradiction or discrepancy, **he should be provoked to first pray for the understanding** as to why God chose to record those words that way, and not first suppose there is an error that needs correcting. These challenges we find when reading God's word is actually God pointing to an opportunity for the reader to gain a greater understanding of God and increase his faith. It is a signal to provoke the reader to further study.
- 4 **The reader will need patience, prayer, study, meditation, and some critical** thinking to get to the place of understanding why things are written the way they are.
- 5 **The reader should know God's word is alive (quick) and powerful**, and because of this it has personality, depth, and an infinite number of applications. The Bible is not a stale, technical textbook that is written with only one layer of information, speaking on just one particular detail with one object. Its power is multi-functional and the meaning of its words, phrases, verses, and chapters changes the way a man thinks, pulls down strongholds in his mind, revealing ultimate truth that affects all areas of his life. It uses the experiences and styles of each writer in their own special way to spiritually feed the hungry, give light to the blind, comfort to the afflicted, and health to the bones. The mind of God is past finding out, and the Bible reveals the mind of God to us. Only with God's help and the faith to believe what God said will we have the opportunity to truly know God.

This being said, I will illustrate three examples showing the reasons why similar passages may not match.

Difference between a paraphrase and an exact quote

Let's compare the "stone" versus "stones" in the temptation of our Saviour (emphasis added):

Matthew 4:3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these **stones** be made bread.

Luke 4:3 And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this **stone** that it be made bread.

So, what is going on here? Were there two who came to the Lord when he hungered, one a tempter and one the devil, both using similar temptations? Obviously not. Matthew and Luke are both recording the same event. Matthew simply refers to the devil as the tempter – which he no doubt is. But now the stones, or was it just a stone? Or was it he said both?

I think the context shows us Matthew paraphrases as to how the devil tempted Jesus, and Luke records the exact words. Matthew likely dictated the gospel to an amanuenses, and thinking back on what he was told (for neither Matthew nor Luke was present at that temptation), spoke of the event as to how the Lord was tempted. Luke, in contrast, wrote his gospel having had *perfect understanding* (Luke 1:3). To him it was also revealed, but by whom we do not know. Was it the Lord by personal visitation? Was it through the Holy Ghost revelation? Was it passed down from another person who was informed? God knows. But the reasons abound why it was likely a singular stone (please keep in mind I am speculating here): 1) The Lord being a moderate man with self control needed only one loaf of bread. 2) The temptation was even more so if Jesus just had to command *one* stone in contrast to more than one stone. 3) The devil

could have likely been holding the stone out to the Lord as opposed to pointing to the ground, making it a greater temptation.

Matthew, when recounting his understanding, spoke as he understood it, God accepting this and putting his seal upon it by preserving it forever. In actuality, no person actually knows for sure whether it was a stone or the plural of it that the devil spoke. We will have to wait and ask the Lord when we see him, if it is at all important at that time. However, we have to accept that one is a paraphrase and one is specific, as it is the most reasonable answer.

This reasoning applies also to Old Testament verses quoted in the New Testament. Many times the author is recording what someone quoted or quoting a verse himself, and it is not always a perfect match to the Old Testament reading. It does not make one right and one wrong. It is simply showing accurately a paraphrase, which is accepted of God.

This reasoning also applies to accurate records of when someone is lying. A testimony is true when it truthfully records what a person said, although what they said is a lie. God's word is always true – even when it records a lie (i.e., “Ye shall not surely die” – Genesis 3:4). It is still true that the devil said what he said.

Differences between generalities and details

Now let's compare Peter's denial of Christ. Did Jesus say the cock would crow twice or not?

Mathew 26:34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

Mark 14:30 And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

Luke 22:34 And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.

John 13:38 Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.

Indeed the Lord said “twice,” because that is what Mark said. The other evangelists omitted this word. But the omission of the word does not preclude Jesus from using it. John said all the books could not contain all the things Jesus did (John 21:25). This of course would include many of the teachings of the Lord. God saw fit to record enough of Jesus' works so we could have all we needed. Mark goes into detail to say that Jesus used the word “twice.” The others did not. Through the study of the four Gospels we get the picture God wanted us to have.

We see that comparison of scripture with scripture is necessary to glean the “whole truth.” The separate pieces have to be sought out in order to be placed together to form an accurate picture. That is God's way. It shows a diligence and a desire, and God does not cast his pearls before swine. He honors the diligence to study. Error comes from an over-emphasis of one small portion of scripture. Be wary of people who only show one side (or a side) of the whole truth. Our emphasis in teaching should be the same emphasis Jesus had. Using the Gospels is a calibration of our emphasis. If we stick with Jesus we will not be unbalanced one way or the other.

Summaries of certain events are not incorrect although they may not go into all detail. There are reasons why God does what he does. The extent of detail is determined by God. We have what he wants us to

have, and that is plenty. We should not go beyond what is written. If we speculate, we should make sure people know it is speculation, and not the gospel truth.

Actual differences that reveal actual differences

The third example shows that some variations are actually showing a difference on purpose. I shall use the teaching of the kingdoms for this example.

Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Mark 1:14, 15 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew alone uses both phrases, the *kingdom of heaven* and the *kingdom of God*. The other three evangelists do not use the phrase *kingdom of Heaven*, although alluded to.

How do we know these are different kingdoms? I have heard authors say they are the same, and Matthew refers to it one way, and the Mark, Luke, and John refer to it using a different name. But this cannot be true, for Matthew uses both terms, quoting the Savior.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches on the kingdom of heaven. It is obvious the teaching on this kingdom speaks of how to live our lives on this earth, and how to treat our neighbors. In the middle of the Lord's discourse, he says we are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. This is an obvious deviation in focus. Lest the Lord give the impression we gain God's favor based on works alone, he makes sure to command us to seek first a spiritual kingdom. John chapter 3 quotes the Saviour as saying, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). One kingdom is an earthly kingdom, one is a spiritual kingdom. One is physical, one is invisible.

Jesus is King over all. He is King over this earthly kingdom. We as his subjects live according to his laws. Our churches are his embassies. We are his ambassadors. We preach the gospel, baptize the believers, and teach them to observe his commandments. We have the keys to this kingdom. When the Lord returns he will purge out from this kingdom all tares and set up this everlasting kingdom in righteousness. He will rule from Jerusalem and over all the world. This kingdom is that which the Jews sought after. That is the kingdom they hoped Jesus would restore during his earthly ministry.

The kingdom of God is spiritual. Only those who are truly born again enter into this kingdom. It is righteousness in the Holy Ghost. People enter in through faith in Jesus Christ. Their names are written in the lamb's book of life.

Conclusion

Do not let the study of God's word take on a monumental effort. We read it daily, slowly, carefully, patiently, prayerfully, and with faith. As we do this, God's Spirit will lead us to all truth.