

TRUTH B-P CHURCH
Adult Sunday School

**DOCTRINE OF THE VERBAL PLENARY PRESERVATION
OF GOD'S WORD IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGES**

LESSON ELEVEN: APPARENT DISCREPANCIES IN THE BIBLE (PART 4)

I. INTRODUCTION

Apostle Paul testified of the godly attitude of the faithful Christians from Thessalonica with these words "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). This should be the godly attitude we Christians today must learn from the believers of church in Thessalonica.

For if we say the Bible has mistakes, are we not implying that these are the words of men and not the word of God? Under the same argument, if there are really mistakes in the Bible, how can we still believe the gospel truth is without any mistake at all? Is not such a belief, dangerous and evil? However, if our belief is that this is indeed the perfect Word of God, then it means there is no error or discrepancy at all. Whatever discrepancies or errors detected are only apparent, they are not real and actual at all.

Whenever we find "things hard to be understood" in the Bible, the fault does not lie with the Bible. It is always man's fault. "Let God be true, but every man a liar" must always serve as the biblical principle in our approach towards all Bible difficulties. In this lesson, we conclude with the remaining verses and passages on apparent discrepancies in the New Testament.

II. MATTHEW 21:18-22 COMPARING WITH MARK 11:12-14,20-25

Matthew 21:18-22, "18 Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. 19 And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. 20 And when the disciples saw *it*, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! 21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this *which is done* to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. 22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

Mark 11:12-14, 20-25, "12 And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: 13 And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not *yet*. 14 And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard *it*. 20 And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. 21 And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. 22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. 23 For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. 24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*. 25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

Problem: When did the fig tree which Jesus cursed withered, on the same day or the next day?

Answer: In the studying of the Scriptures, it must be noted that some accounts are topically arranged at some points rather than conforming to the chronological sequence. According to Matthew 21:19, Jesus cursed the fig tree on Monday, and it seems to imply it withered away right there and then. However, according to Mark 11:12-14,20, Jesus cursed the fig tree on Monday, but the tree withered away only on Tuesday which is the next day.

How do we harmonise these two accounts? First, it is without a doubt that this incident happened over the course of two days – Monday and Tuesday. Jesus cursed the tree on Monday, though the effects of the curse has already started but was completed only on Tuesday. The fig tree did begin to rot after Jesus cursed it on Monday. This rotting process was fully ended and completed on Tuesday. By this time the tree had rotted to its very roots.

Matthew's account combined the "cursing" of the fig tree as well as the subsequent discussion that the Lord Jesus had with His disciples on the withered fig tree, without affirming that all these happened on the same day. Mark's account on the fig tree took two days accordingly. Matthew's account was based on topical arrangement while Mark's account was based on chronological arrangement.

William Hendricksen in his commentary on the gospel of Matthew, wrote: "That the Gospel writers were not mere copyists but independent authors, each using his own method, appears very clearly in the present instance [21:18-22]. Since part of the Fig Tree story occurred on Monday and part on Tuesday (Mark 11:11,12,19,20), with the cleansing of the temple taking place (on Monday) between these two parts, it is clear that this story could be handled in two ways: (a) chronologically or; (b) topically. Mark follows the first method, describing the first part of the Fig Tree story, the part that took place on Monday morning, in 11:12-14; then, the cleansing of the temple, later that same day, in 11:15-19; and finally, the second part of the Fig Tree story, the part that happened on Tuesday morning, in 11:20-24. Matthew, on the other hand, uses the second method. He wishes to tell the entire story all at once, in one connected and uninterrupted account. In doing this he does not come into real conflict with Mark, for his (Matthew's) time indications are very indefinite" (p. 773).

With this explanation, the problem is solved and there is no contradiction at all.

III. MATTHEW 27:3-8 COMPARING WITH ACTS 1:16-19

Matthew 27:3-8, “³ Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, ⁴ Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What *is that* to us? see thou *to that*. ⁵ And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. ⁶ And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. ⁷ And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. ⁸ Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.”

Acts 1:16-19, “¹⁶ Men *and* brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. ¹⁷ For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. ¹⁸ Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹ And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.”

There are two distinct problems found in these two passages centering on Judas Iscariot.

First problem: How did Judas Iscariot die, by hanging or falling down?

Answer: According to what had been recorded, Judas Iscariot died by two acts combined together: 1) Hanging (Matthew 27:3-8); 2) Falling (Acts 1:16-19). There is no contradiction here at all because both acts are true. A contradiction occurs when one statement excludes the possibility of another. In fact, what happened here is that Judas went and hung himself, and then his body later fell and split open. In other words, the rope or branch of the tree (likely to be situated next to a cliff) probably broke due to the weight and his body fell down and his bowels spilled out.

Also, notice that Matthew 27:3-8 tells us specifically how Judas died, by hanging. Acts 1:16-19 merely tells us that he fell headlong and his bowels gushed out. Acts does not tell us that this is the means of his death where Matthew does. By this solution of harmonizing both accounts, there is no contradiction at all.

Second problem: According to Matthew's account, Judas threw the 30 pieces of silver into the temple. This seems to contradict Acts' account. It was recorded that Judas purchased a field with the same money. How to reconcile this discrepancy?

Answer: The way to answer this problem is that Judas "indirectly" purchased the field with the 30 pieces of silver. This money was labeled as a "reward of iniquity" (Acts 1:18). But Judas called it "innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4). Indeed, it was because the Lord Jesus did no iniquity. He was sinless throughout, and therefore not deserving at all to be crucified on the cross. But the betrayal was already done and the Lord was taken, though Judas regretted it very much in the end. He thought his conscience will feel better by returning the "reward of iniquity," but it didn't and that was why he took his own life after that.

After Judas threw this "reward of iniquity" into the temple, the priests dared not accept it because "it is the price of the blood" (Matthew 27:6). They decided to use it to purchase a field. That is why it was rightly called "Aceldama, the field of blood" (Matthew 27:8; Acts 1:19).

The field called "Aceldama" was purchased directly by the priests, and indirectly by Judas Iscariot with the "reward of iniquity." Since this money was not accepted by the priests, literally it still belonged to Judas Iscariot. Though he was dead, the field was purchased under his name. There is no discrepancy at all.

IV. MATTHEW 27:34,48 COMPARING WITH JOHN 19:28-30

Matthew 27:34,48, "34 They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. 48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink."

John 19:28-30, "28 After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. 29 Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost."

Problem: Did Christ accept the vinegar drink on the cross, or not?

Answer: John's account clearly revealed Jesus did receive the vinegar. But how to explain Matthew's account since it clearly recorded Jesus "would not drink" the vinegar? When we compare Matthew 27:34 with verse 48 of the same chapter, it becomes evident that Christ was twice offered to drink while hanging on the cross.

The difficulty is resolved this way: the first time, Jesus refused the vinegar, being drugged with bitter narcotics, the effect of which would be to numb or lessen the unbearable pain on the cross. Afterward, a different vinegar free from drugs was given Him, which He accepted, for He Himself had cried out for it. Note that the word rendered "vinegar" means simply a cheap brand of wine, such as was used by the poorer classes of people in those days.

What one author mentions does not necessarily cover the whole series of events. He might legitimately mention one thing and disregard another (which might be mentioned by another author). Such are not contradictions: they give the fuller or complete picture, when taken together.

V. LUKE 23:47 COMPARING WITH MATTHEW 27:54 & MARK 15:39

Luke 23:47, "Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man."

Matthew 27:54, "Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God."

Mark 15:39, "And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God."

Problem: What did the centurion actually say? Why all three accounts record the centurion's confession differently?

Answer: The centurion's confession recorded by Matthew and Mark is essentially the same, with the slight variant on the word "man." Matthew's account was generally written to the Jews who knew about God's promise of the Messiah. Therefore, Matthew merely focused on Christ as the Son of God based on the centurion's confession. Mark's account was written to the Gentiles, though presented Christ as a man but portrayed Him as the Son of God by His many miracles and divine teachings.

How about Luke's account which was completely different from Matthew's and Mark's accounts? The solution to this problem is that the centurion's confession needs not be limited to one statement recorded by the gospel writers. He could have said more, in other words.

Luke's account was written to prove Christ as the perfect man who walked on this planet earth. His account was a detailed and orderly account of the life of Christ. Therefore, Luke's account could have focused on this phrase "Certainly this was a righteous man" rather than both Matthew's and Mark's accounts. There is no contradiction at all. All these gospel accounts put together give a fuller and complete picture of what has been confessed by the centurion.

VI. LUKE 24:4 COMPARING WITH MARK 16:5

Luke 24:4, "And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments."

Mark 16:5, "And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted."

Problem: How many angels were there, one or two at Christ's tomb?

Answer: This problem is similar to the two demon-possessed men who came out to meet Jesus. Likewise, the solution is also similar. Based on Luke's account, there were definitely two angels. However, Mark's account chose to focus on the one who actually spoke. As such, there is no contradiction at all.

VII. SUMMARY

The doctrine of VPP promotes God and His Word to the highest degree and honour. This is without dispute. It is not blind belief nor using gullible conjecture. It is based on logical faith upon the perfect God who has given His perfect Word, fully inspired and fully preserved for His people today.

What do we have, if we do not have God's perfect Word today? A Bible with mistakes but no serious concern since the gospel truth remains perfect? Let us not speak like the devil does. He always speaks with a fork tongue, saying one thing but meaning another. He always tells lies and never fails to undermine God's Word. He is laughing his way when God's people start to doubt and believe there are mistakes in the Bible. Why let the devil get his way when we as God's people should always trust in God's 100% perfect inspired and preserved Word?

Though we may try to reconcile, harmonise and explain Bible difficulties to the best of our abilities, sometimes it may not be possible to do so but to simply leave the reading as it was. That is as far as we can go and not beyond. We must never end up saying, 'the Bible is wrong and there is error over here.' God forbid! Our confidence is never based on our own wisdom and understanding but upon God and His infallible, inerrant, inspired and preserved Word of everlasting life. May God help us. Amen.