

TRUTH B-P CHURCH
Adult Sunday School

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

LESSON EIGHT: APPARENT DISCREPANCIES IN THE BIBLE (PART 1)

I. INTRODUCTION

What happens when you spot a mistake after you completed your essay? Will you correct it or leave it? The answer is obvious. A responsible student will ensure his/ her essay be as “perfect” as possible with no mistakes before submission in the end. How much more when it is for the Bible that we must be concerned with? If we cannot have confidence in the perfection of God’s Word in our hands today, then our faith is resting on shaky ground.

How can there be perfect salvation from the “imperfect” Word of God? Whatever mistakes or scribal errors would have been corrected in the inspired and preserved Apographs. This is what we firmly believe in the providential preservation of the Holy Scriptures. What about the apparent mistakes or discrepancies in the Bible? This is what we are going to study for the next four lessons.

The list of apparent discrepancies that we are going to study is not going to be comprehensive but selective. We pray and hope to find out the answer to the problem so that we may know indeed there is no mistake in the Bible. Whatever “discrepancies” we find are only apparent and not actual mistakes. Even if we end up with no clear answer to the problem, we will not conclude it is a mistake. We pray that we will learn to be humble and seek the Holy Spirit’s illumination. I believe this is the right approach to God’s Word from a child of God.

II. NUMBERS 25:9 COMPARING WITH 1 CORINTHIANS 10:8

Numbers 25:9, “And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.”

1 Corinthians 10:8, “Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.”

Problem: Numbers 25:9 records 24,000 people died while 1 Corinthians 10:8 records 23,000 people died. Where is the missing 1,000 people who died?

Answer: The context of Numbers 25:9 was that God was punishing the sons of Israel who had committed whoredom leading to idolatry with the daughters of Moab. The context of 1 Corinthians 10:8 was that Apostle Paul was warning the Corinthian believers against fornication and idolatry.

The following is Albert Barnes’ explanation based on his commentary of 1 Corinthians 10:8. He wrote “In order to reconcile these statements, it may be observed that perhaps 23,000 fell directly by the plague, and 1,000 were slain by Phinehas and his companions (Grotius); or it may be that the number was between 23,000 and 24,000, and it might be expressed in round numbers by either (Macknight). At all events, Paul has not exceeded the truth. There were at least 23,000 that fell, though there might have been more. The probable supposition is, that the 23,000 fell immediately by the hand of God in the plague, and the other thousand by the judges; and as Paul’s design was particularly to mention the proofs of the immediate divine displeasure, he refers only to those who fell by that, in illustration of his subject - There was a particular reason for this caution in respect to licentiousness.”

III. JUDGES 18:30

“And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.”

Problem: Is there a scribal error in Judges 18:30 where it reads "Manasseh" (KJV) instead of "Moses" (as found in NIV and many other modern versions)? There are two possible answers.

Answer: According to the Hebrew Masoretic text, "Manasseh" is the correct reading. Looking at the context, it is not difficult to understand why it is written as Manasseh and not Moses. The Jews knew Gershom is the son of Moses (Exodus 2:22; 18:3). It was in such idolatrous times in which this verse is penned. In order not to render dishonour to the name of Moses, so as not to associate his name to idolatry, Manasseh was named instead. It described well of Manasseh as the worst king ever in the southern kingdom in biblical history.

There was an elevated N in Manasseh (M^{NSH} ; מנישה). The Jewish scribes did this for emphasis. This shows that this word of the sentence is to be taken note; written form is Manasseh but understood as Moses. This is the first possible answer.

The second possible answer is to simply leave the reading as it is. The names “Jonathan,” “Gershom” and “Manasseh” were common names in the Old Testament period. This verse could have stood alone and there is no reference or any detail given to identify who these individuals are. This could possibly be another way to understand this verse, not as a scribal error but simply unknown as of now to the seekers of God’s Word.

IV. 1 SAMUEL 21:1 COMPARING WITH MARK 2:26

1 Samuel 21:1, “Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Why *art* thou alone, and no man with thee?”

Mark 2:26, “How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?”

Problem: Ahimelech, who was Abiathar’s father, was the high priest when David asked for bread. Why then did the Lord says “in the days of Abiathar the high priest” under the same context as 1 Samuel 21? Is there not a contradiction here?

Answer: David Cloud provided the solution to the problem: [A careful reading reveals there is no contradiction. Abiathar was the high priest in the “days” (plural) in which the events occurred in a general sense, though not on that exact day (singular). Christ does not say that it was Abiathar who gave David the bread. He simply says that these things happened “in the days of Abiathar the high priest.” This is true.

There are three points which should be noted here. First, Christ possibly uses Abiathar because he assumed his father’s office and was better known than his father. Abiathar was high priest for many years during David’s rule (2 Samuel 15:24-29; 19:11; 20:25). Second, it is possible that Christ used Abiathar rather than Ahimelech lest someone protest that Ahimelech was killed for the irregularity of offering the shew-bread to David. Third, it is possible that both Ahimelech and Abiathar were considered the high priests. 2 Samuel 19:11 and other passages speak of two priests holding the highest position simultaneously.

Barnes says, “The son of the high priest was regarded as his successor, and was often associated with him in the duties of his office. It was not improper, therefore, to designate him as high priest even during the life of his father, especially as that was the name by which he was afterward known.”] (David Cloud, *Things Hard to be Understood*, pg 149). As such, based on the above explanation, there is no contradiction at all.

V. 2 SAMUEL 8:4 COMPARING WITH 1 CHRONICLES 18:4

2 Samuel 8:4, “And David took from him a thousand *chariots*, and seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: and David houghed all the chariot *horses*, but reserved of them *for* an hundred chariots.”

1 Chronicles 18:4, “And David took from him a thousand chariots, and seven thousand horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: David also houghed all the chariot *horses*, but reserved of them an hundred chariots.”

Problem: 2 Samuel 8:4 reflects 700 horsemen while 1 Chronicles 18:4 reflects 7000 horsemen. Is there not a scribal error over here?

Answer: The reason why it is easily construed as an error because of the common argument that there is a stroke which some scribes had overlooked or “mislooked.” Can this really happen? The “hundred” in 2 Samuel 8:4 looks like this **מֵאוֹת**. The “thousand” in 1 Chronicles 18:4 looks like this **אַלְפִים**. From the look of both Hebrew words, they are completely different. Where is the stroke which the scribe has overlooked? It is nowhere to be seen!

What is the solution to such a contrast in both readings since both verses referred to the same event? We can reconcile by explaining that these 700 horsemen represented 700 ranks or companies of horses David took. Each company consists of 10 horsemen and that will make up a total of 7000 horsemen. This is one possible way of reconciling the two texts. As such, there is no contradiction here.

VI. 2 SAMUEL 24:1 COMPARING WITH 1 CHRONICLES 21:1

2 Samuel 24:1, “And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.”

1 Chronicles 21:1, “And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.”

Problem: In 2 Samuel 24, God was said to move David to number Israel and Judah while in 1 Chronicles 21, Satan was the one who did it. Is there a contradiction here?

Answer: There is no contradiction. It is interesting to note the word “moved” in 2 Samuel 24:1 and the word “provoked” in 1 Chronicles 21:1 are the same verb. Though the same word, the King James translators distinguished the use of the word. To the Lord, it is “moved” while to Satan, it is “provoked.” This is significant because it draws the picture of intent of the act over here.

In 2 Samuel 24, God moved David to number Israel because God was angry with Israel. When David was moved by God to number the people, it was the result of the pride that was found in David. Therefore, there is a higher purpose which God is intending to fulfill which He will punish Israel through the sin of David for numbering the people based on his own pride. This is God’s sovereign control and hand in the affairs of men, without being culpable to the acts of sins which men are responsible for.

In 1 Chronicles 21 (in light of 2 Samuel 24), it must be understood that Satan was a tool which God used to move David. However, from Satan's perspective, he went with the intent to provoke David to number Israel. Satan's intent was not to fulfill God's purpose but to his own evil purpose which is unknown to us. He cared not for the glory of God but his own glory. The conclusion is both passages are correct and there is no contradiction at all.

VII. 2 SAMUEL 24:9 COMPARING WITH 1 CHRONICLES 21:5

2 Samuel 24:9, "And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men."

1 Chronicles 21:5, "And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all *they* of Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah was four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword."

Problem: 2 Samuel 24 records 800,000 valiant men and 500,000 men of Judah while 1 Chronicles 21 records 1,100,000 swordsmen and 470,000 swordsmen of Judah. This was the same event but two different records. Are there contradictions here?

Answer: David Cloud has provided the possible solution to the problem: [It is probable that the discrepancy is explained by the words "valiant men" in Samuel. Chronicles relates the complete number of swordsmen, whereas Samuel relates only the valiant ones.

Quoting from Robert Sargent, he wrote, "Also, remember that Joab really 'bucked' at this order from David (2 Samuel 24:3; 1 Chron.21:3) – so it is quite likely he reported the numbers to David on two occasions. Perhaps one number was a preliminary count, the other a final count. Counting 1.5 million men in 233 working days meant tallying over 6,400 men per day! In fact, the account in 2 Samuel (which gives the larger numbers) details the sequence of the census in verses 5-8, and this includes the area south of Judah – indicating a thorough census." (David Cloud, *Things Hard to be Understood*, pg 59). As such, based on the above explanation, there is no contradiction at all.

To be continued ...