

Harmony of the Gospels

Comparing and Contrasting the
Accounts of Christ

How to view the gospels

- One ultimate author, the Holy Spirit (2Ti 3:16; 2Pe 1:21), communicating one account.
- Four varied perspectives accurately relating the details of that account.
- Your task is to consider the significance of...
 - **Writer** – What is the background of the human author?
 - **Audience** – To whom is the gospel originally written?
 - **Style** – What is the literary nature of the gospel?
 - **Purpose** – Why was this gospel written?

How to view the gospels

Book	Occupation	Audience	Christ as	Answers	Stresses
Matthew	Tax Collector	Jews	King	What did Jesus say?	Reliability of Prophecy
Mark	Friend of Peter	Romans	Servant	What did Jesus do?	Rapid relating of events
Luke	Doctor	Greeks	Man	Who followed Jesus?	Rationality of believing
John	Beloved Disciple	World	God	Who is Jesus?	Relationship with God

Example: Soldiers Divide the Garments of Christ

Matt 27:35-36

And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.
(36) And sitting down they watched him there;

Basic facts

Mark 15:24

And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

Motivation of Roman guards for casting lots for robe

Example: Soldiers Divide the Garments of Christ

Luke 23:34
Then said
Jesus, Father,
forgive them;
for they know
not what they
do. And they
parted his
raiment, and
cast lots.

only one to
record the
“Father, forgive
them”

John 19:23-24 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. (24) They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did.

adds the most detail, even going so far as to describe the seamless nature of the garment and to comment on the fulfilled prophecy.

Handling the differences

- Does this gospel account have an equivalent in another gospel?
 - There should be substantial correlative details that link the accounts.
 - Some incidents are similar but not equivalent. The feeding of 5,000 (Mk 6:44) and 4,000 (Matt 15:38) are clearly unique events (Matt 16:9-10).
- There is never a contradiction. Different gospels include different material.

Handling the differences

- When multiple gospels include an account, that means something.
- When only one Gospel includes an account, that means something.
- The differences in how the writers related the sequence of events comes from the combination of following a chronological order along topical presentations.
- There are occasional flashbacks as in Matt 14.
1-2 Present, 3 Back, 4 Back, 5 Ahead, 6 Ahead

Consider the Sermon on the Mount

- Matthew presents it as a one-time event (Matt. 5:1-7:29)
- Luke records many of the same words as sayings of Jesus scattered throughout chapters 6, 11, 12, 14 and 16.
- The Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4) Matthew as part of the Sermon on the Mount. Luke when Jesus was "praying in a certain place" and the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1).
- Does Luke actually quote from the Sermon on the Mount here and in his other examples of Jesus' sayings? Or, does his gospel refer to other occasions when Jesus spoke the same words to different audiences? We can't really know for sure.

Handling the differences

- A disciple in the garden of Gethsemane cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant according to all four gospels. But only John tells us the servant's name, and that it was Peter who wielded the sword. And only Luke tells us that Jesus healed the wound.
- Matthew, Mark and Luke all record Jesus' words concerning sin against the Holy Spirit, but only Mark explains that Jesus said this, "because..." (Mk 3:30). Three gospels warn against "the leaven (yeast) of the Pharisees," but only one of them explains what it is. (Lk 12:1). So, there is much that can be learned by reading the gospels in parallel.

Sample Study Observations

- Look at your handout on “After the departure of Judas...”
- Look for those items that differ from one account to the next.
- Look for the similarities.
- What might be significance of these?
- What practical application might we personally make to our lives from these insights?