

Biblical “Problems”
The Revelation of God - Week 7 - Summer 2019

- **“Problems of Order”**

- People often say “the Bible records events ‘out of order’ and is, thus, wrong”.
 - ▶ *Classic example 1: Christ’s Cleansing of the Temple*
 - ❖ Matthew, Mark, and Luke put it at the *end* of Jesus’ ministry.
 - ❖ John has it at the *beginning*.
 - ❖ Is this a hopeless contradiction, demanding we admit a Biblical error? No!
 - John’s Gospel is far more stylistic and theological than the others (not straight biography).
 - Also, John never says, “The other Gospel writers were wrong. Jesus did this at the beginning not the end.”
 - Or, the most likely explanation is that Jesus cleansed the temple *twice*!
 - ★ John never says his time was the only time.
 - ★ Matthew, Mark, and Luke don’t say that either.
 - ▶ *Classic Example #2: The Order of Christ’s Temptations*
 - ❖ Matthew’s temptation (Matt. 4) order goes bread/temple/kingdoms.
 - ❖ Luke’s temptation (Luke 4) order goes bread/kingdoms/temple.
 - ❖ Hopeless error? Not at all.
 - First, only Luke claims to be writing his Gospel in consecutive order.
 - Second, Matthew’s ordering language is very ambiguous.
 - ★ It’s not as if he says, “first, second, third...”
 - ★ Or “this, then this, and after that...”
- Matthew 4:8–9 - ⁸ Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the*

kingdoms of the world and their glory; ⁹ and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."

- Also note: The Gospels are not biographies in the modern sense of the word.

- **"Problems of Differing Accounts"**

- The story of the Gerasene demoniac (Matt 8; Mark 5; Luke 8) is a classic example.
 - Matthew says two demon possessed guys were healed. Luke and Mark recount one.
 - Is this a hopeless contradiction and, thus, an error? No.
 - ❖ If there were two, there definitely was one.
 - ❖ Luke and Mark never say there was "only one".
 - ❖ Matthew had his own purposes in recounting the two; Luke and Mark had theirs in focusing on the one.
 - ❖ Eyewitness accounts always differ from one another on details and focus.
 - ❖ No one person can tell the "whole story". We should expect variety in the Gospels' accounts of the same event.
 - The above follows for parallel historical accounts in the Old Testament.

- **"Scientific Problems"**

- The scriptures regularly speak about the sun rising and setting...
 - Assuming a Copernican universe, the sun doesn't *actually* rise or set.
 - The earth rotates and revolves.
 - Yet the Bible never claims to be an astronomical journal.
 - It speaks conventionally like we do.
- Is the mustard seed really the smallest seed?

- ▶ In Matt. 13:32, Jesus says the mustard seed is the smallest of all the seeds.
- ▶ Technically that is not true. Was Jesus wrong? Is this a botanical error?
- ▶ No, Jesus was using the image of 1st century farmers in Israel.
 - ❖ Of the seeds that were sown in that day, in that part of the world, the mustard seed was the smallest.
 - ❖ To say that Jesus was talking about anything beyond that is absurd.

- **“Manuscript problems”**

- This challenge to inerrancy deals with the less-than-100% uniformity between existing ancient Biblical manuscripts.
 - ▶ It is said, “Where is your inerrant Bible if the manuscripts don’t agree with each other?”
- First, it’s a simple fact that the Bible is the most historically attested ancient work via manuscript evidence, by a mile!
- Consider the following chart on the next page:

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Approximate Time Span between original & copy	Number of Copies	Accuracy of Copies
Lucretius	died 55 or 53 B.C.		1100 yrs	2	----
Pliny	A.D. 61-113	A.D. 850	750 yrs	7	----
Plato	427-347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200 yrs	7	----
Demosthenes	4th Cent. B.C.	A.D. 1100	800 yrs	8	----
Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300 yrs	8	----
Suetonius	A.D. 75-160	A.D. 950	800 yrs	8	----
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300 yrs	8	----
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1300 yrs	9	----
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200	10	----
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1000	10	----
Livy	59 BC-AD 17	----	???	20	----
Tacitus	circa A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1000 yrs	20	----
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1400	49	----
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	A.D. 1000	1400 yrs	193	----
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs	643	95%
New Testament	1st Cent. A.D. (A.D. 50-100)	2nd Cent. A.D. (c. A.D. 130 f.)	less than 100 years	5600	99.5%

- The manuscript variation that does exist is inconsequential:
 - ▶ The vast majority have to do with a single letter.
 - ▶ None involve a major doctrine.
 - ▶ None call into question a scriptural event.
- The few semi-significant variations (significant only for their size and popularity):
 - ▶ John 7:53-8:11 - The Woman caught in Adultery.
 - ❖ Not found in the earliest manuscript copies of John prior to the 5th century.
 - ❖ When it does show up, it shows up in 4 different places in John, and once in Luke!
 - ❖ Not cited by the early church fathers
 - ❖ The vast majority of English translations today call attention to its probable lack of original inclusion.
 - ❖ This passage does not exclusively address a single important doctrine or aspect of our Lord's merciful character.
 - ▶ Mark 16:9-20 - The Long-Ending of Mark
 - ❖ The earliest Mark manuscripts do not have it.
 - ❖ The language is very non-Mark
 - ❖ It has strange claims like that all of Christ's followers will be able to endure snake bites or drink poison.
 - ▶ 1 John 5:7-8 - The Trinitarian Agreement
 - ❖ Some later manuscripts read: *in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one And there are three that testify on earth, the Spirit*
 - ❖ But the original is almost certainly what all your Bibles now say:

1 John 5:7-8 - ⁷ For there are three that testify [to Christ's real body]: ⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

- ❖ We don't need the almost certainly erroneous version to prove the doctrine of the Trinity.
 - ❖ There are a mountain of other passages that already do so.
- Our starting point and ending point when it comes to these discussions are Christ's words:

Matthew 5:18 - For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

Mark 13:31 - ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

- ▶ Jesus didn't promise a 100% consistent manuscript record.
- ▶ Nor did he promise his words would not be added-to on occasion (like those out-of-place additions above).
- ▶ But He did promise that His actual words would always be with us.
- ▶ We saw that's God's whole point in giving a written word, so that future generations of His people have access to His Words and Actions.
- ▶ We can trust that the Holy Spirit has gone on preserving that word for millennia.
- ▶ We can be confident the English Bibles we possess today are a completely reliable representation of the inspired autographs given so long ago.