

## CHAPTER 1 -- INTRODUCTION

The Christian world has long been fired with the ambition to take the Gospel to every inhabited corner of the earth. This zeal has inspired a countless number of men to devote much of their entire lives serving as missionaries, ministers and teachers. Many theologians have devoted years to produce Bible helps for their fellow man. Witness the fantastic man-hours required to assemble the concordances, and the life-long studies to write complete commentaries on the scriptures. Then there are Bible handbooks, lexicons, Biblical encyclopedias plus hundreds and hundreds of Bible translations!

Perhaps we should give thanks more often to these men, though (mostly) not converted nor possessing God's Holy Spirit as we understand it, yet who still gave their every effort to produce these helps for Christians today.

Certainly one of the most profitable works ever accomplished for us -- and especially for new "babes" in Christ -- is the harmony of the life of Christ. Jesus Christ should be the center and the focal point of every new convert's life. The harmonies help the student grasp readily the life of our Savior in a way that a strong impact is made on his life. The harmony helps make Jesus very real!

The ink on the first autographs of the Apostolic writers was only 100 years old when Tatian wrote his Diatessaron in the Syraic language ca. 173-175 A.D. Tatian blended the four Gospels into one narrative with a certain amount of freedom as shown by Hobson.<sup>1</sup>

Since then, many scholars have constructed harmonies. Of the modern editions the one by Edward Robinson in 1845 has had the most influence on harmony development. Riddle revised Robinson's harmony in 1889. Clark, using the Authorized Version of the Bible, divided the life of Christ according to the Feasts. Waddy produced a harmony in 1887 using the Canterbury Revision.

Then in June, 1893, Broadus broke away from the traditional division by Feasts and showed the historical development of Jesus's life. He too used the Canterbury Revision. Stevens and Burton followed suit in December of 1893. These latter two harmonies were the major ones used by students of the English Gospels for some 35 years.

Kerr produced one in 1903 following the American Standard Version of the Scriptures, and harmonies in Greek continued to published as well. Then in 1919 Van Kirk published a partial harmony, *The Source Book of the Life of Christ*, which was the first to place Mark in the first

column instead of Matthew.

The publishers of Ambassador College's Freshman Church History textbook, A. T. Robertson's *Harmony*, tell us on the front cover of the book's jacket the brief history of this harmony:

For more than a generation John A. Broadus' great work has been the standard *Harmony of the Gospels*. It has gone through many editions. Professor Robertson, famous the world over as a New Testament scholar, has rewritten and rearranged Broadus' book, using for his text the Revised Version, and bringing to bear on it all the light of the latest findings, in the field of New Testament research. College and Seminary Students, Sunday School Teachers and Pupils, Preachers and all Bible students will find this new *Harmony* unequaled for study purposes.

Besides Robertson's *Harmony*, I have in my possession for this study harmonies by Burton and Goodspeed, Greswell (four volumes of dissertations on selected harmony subjects), Mimpriss (an exhaustive work based on Greswell's *Harmonica Evangelica*), Riddle, Stevens and Burton, and Strong.<sup>2</sup> Mimpriss' work is the most comprehensive harmony I have ever seen: 1,022 pages, 8" x 11" in size, with analytical introductions, scripture illustrations, notes selected from various commentators, practical reflections, geographical notices, copious addenda and indexes.

Since harmonists do not totally agree on how the Gospels should be divided and organized to produce an accurate harmony, we need to establish certain basic premises on which to build such an accurate four-fold portrait of Christ. This harmony will then attempt to solve certain problems in Robertson's *Harmony* based on these established premises.

## **FIRST PREMISE**

There are two ways of life--that of giving and that of getting. God's Word shows that the former leads to real happiness, peace and contentment, but sadly this world has chosen the latter. As a result we have chaos and confusion today! Man has never been so mixed up, goalless, unhappy! What's the reason?

Most Christians still accept the Bible as God's Word. But more and more theologians question the infallibility of the scriptures, even question the divinity of Christ! To many, the Bible has become a mere collection of uninspired (supernaturally) writings, ramblings of bewhiskered, old "white-haired" prophets, the "acts" of Apostles who had followed a Nazarene "do-gooder" who traveled around Galilee and Judea performing wonderful healings (or so His followers claimed), and Who was finally killed and buried. Critics have a hard time explaining why His following and faith grew by leap and bounds, of course!

"Truth" has become relative, depending on circumstances. Sociologists and psychologists term it "situation ethics" today. But Jesus said "Thy Word is Truth"! (John 17:17). Fortunately, in this

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country to be a “Christian” is still considered honorable. But to obey the scriptures implicitly, to try to follow the teachings of Jesus, to live as He did, to accept all the Bible as a guide book of life, is considered being just a bit “way out,” “odd,” “different,” “fanatical.” Yet many of this world’s problems could be solved if mankind would only “. . . earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

The Apostles did not have to recall from memory all the myriad events, conversations, parables, miracles of Jesus without some special assistance. Jesus promised that:

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

In his letter to Timothy Paul said that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God [God breathed], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (II Tim. 3:16).

The truth is that God inspired the four Gospel writers to record exactly what He wanted. This is further supported by Luke who wrote: “It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first . . .” (Luke 1:3). Actually Luke is telling us that he received his Gospel “from above”--from God in heaven by direct inspiration! Urquhart explains:

Luke is made to say both in the Revised and Authorized Versions that he has “had perfect understanding of all things from the very first:” whereas what he does really say is that he has “had perfect understanding of all things from on high. . . .” The [Greek] word *anōthen*, which is here in our Version rendered “from the very first,” is used in the sense of “from above” again and again in the New Testament itself. “Every good and every perfect gift,” says James (1:17), “is *anōthen*,” that is, “is from above.” Twice again he used the word, and both times in the same sense. He speaks of the “wisdom which is *anōthen*--from above.” It occurs twice in John’s Gospel with the same meaning: “He that cometh *anōthen*--from above -- is above all” (3:31); and “Jesus answered, thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee *anōthen*--from above” (19:11). It is quite true that the word is used in the sense of “from the beginning” in Acts 24:5, but why should we deny to it its more usual sense here (in Luke)--a sense which is demanded by the plain intention of the words?<sup>3</sup> (emphasis mine).

So, Premise #1 is that God’s Word--the Bible--has been inspired by Him and Jesus Christ His Son, and therefore if properly translated from the original autographs or official copies, the scriptures are totally true and are God’s instructions to mankind on how to live a happy, prosperous life!

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## SECOND PREMISE

The Apostle Paul said in I Cor. 14:33: “For God is not the author of confusion, ...” Rather, He is the author of perfection, harmony, agreement! “Let all things be done decently and in order” adds Paul in verse 40.

If we have accepted the first premise, then the second follows automatically. It is that God not only inspired the scriptures but did so accurately, in total agreement with each other! (John 10:35).

By the time Luke was writing his Gospel, the Christian world was filled with fables and false gospels. Even Peter realized this when God was inspiring him to prepare portions of the New Testament for canonization: “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (II Peter 1:16). Seeing this diversity of gospels being circulated, Luke records:

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,

Even as they delivered them unto use, which were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word (Luke 1:1-2).

Luke not only wanted to declare the truth of what the Gospel really was but wanted to record it in order:

It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus (Luke 1:3).

The Greek for “perfect. . .in order” is ἀκριβῶς . . . καθεξῆς according to the Greek New Testament.<sup>4</sup> Thayer’s Lexicon<sup>5</sup> lists these definitions for ἀκριβῶς: “to know accurately, to do exactly,” “to investigate diligently” and “to learn exactly, ascertain.” .” καθεξῆς is defined as : “one after another, successively, in order.” This same Greek word καθεξῆς is also used in Acts 11:4: “But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order to them, . . .” Luke was going to research carefully his material so that he could write a perfect, orderly Gospel!

Godet adds this comment on Luke 1:3:

. . . , the author hopes he shall be qualified to draw a consecutive picture, reproducing the actual course of events: . . . It is impossible in this connection to understand the phrase in order in the sense of a systematic classification, as Ebrard prefers; here the term must stand for a chronological order.<sup>6</sup> (First emphasis mine.)

A close examination of the Book of Acts supports Luke's style of accurately, chronologically recording approximately thirty years of New Testament Church history. Luke was no illiterate writer, but a highly skilled scholar. He is referred to as a "physician" in Col. 4:14 which shows he must have had some (!) formal training and education. In fact, Godet says this about Luke:

The Circumstances that his profession was that of a physician is not unimportant; for it implies that he must have possessed a certain amount of scientific knowledge, and belonged to the class of educated men. . . . For these reasons, Luke must have possessed an amount of scientific and literary culture above that of most of the other evangelists and apostles . . . .

Not only is it {Luke's Gospel} written in most classical Greek, but it reminds us by its contents of the similar preambles of the most illustrious Greek historians, especially those of Herodotus and Thucydides.<sup>7</sup>

Should we not expect to find Luke's Gospel recorded accurately, logically, 'in order'?! Godet gives his literal translation of Luke 1:3 as follows: "I have thought good also myself, after carefully informing myself of all these facts from their commencement, to write a consecutive account of them for thee, most excellent Theophilus"<sup>7</sup> (emphasis mine).

Actually, should we not expect to find all the Gospels "in order," rather than arranged in a hodgepodge of disconnected, illogical, contradictory fashions. Premise #2 states that the chronological and historical portions of the Gospels are in order.

### **THIRD PREMISE**

Since Luke and John give most of the chronological indications--which now can be absolutely dated--these Gospels can be used as a framework into which we can place the different events. Wieseler supports this premise too:

When we take a general view of the chronological character of the four Gospels, there can be no doubt, indeed it is generally admitted, that the most numerous or at least the most exact chronological dates and fulcra are furnished by John and Luke. John, as is well known, narrates the whole period of our Lord's public ministry in connection with His journeys to Jerusalem for the purpose of keeping the different Feasts, omitting no single Passover occurring during this period, and even mentioning the one which was not kept by Him in Jerusalem {John 6:4}. He has therefore, by the very form of his narrative, furnished us with just such a scheme as we should most desire, in which to arrange the individual Gospel facts. While Luke not only supplies us with several special dates of the greatest importance . . . , but has in his preface expressly stated his intention of narrating the events he as about to record in this chronological order (καθεξής).<sup>8</sup>

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On the other hand Matthew is acknowledged as having some portions of his work a collection of parables, miracles and sayings. And Mark has few chronological indications. This will be revealed more in detail as we study the Harmony itself.

Premise #3 is, then, that we will use Luke and John (especially Luke) as the basic chronological framework to build solutions to harmony problems. Of course, both Matthew and Mark will certainly help fill the “gap” in some areas of Christ’s ministry. All four Gospels are needed to tell the whole story! As Robertson said: “. . . The whole is infinitely richer than the picture given by any one of the Four Gospels.”

## CONCLUSION

These premises combine to form the basis for the solutions to the harmony problems discussed in this Harmony. The key to applying these premises is to let the scriptures guide us into a complete understanding. We must not read into the scriptures what is not there. Pet theories, speculations and ideas must remain just that--theories, speculations and ideas -- at least until they are proven to be absolutely true! Therefore, I present my suggested solutions to the reader for close examination and consideration.

It IS possible to construct a totally accurate harmony! Any verses out of order should have tangible, explainable reasons for their alternate order. Perhaps someday we will be able to publish such a harmony!

## Bibliography Notes

1 A. August Hobson, “The Diatessaron of Tatian and the Synoptic Problem,” *Historical and Linguistic Studies, Second Series Linguistic and Exegetical Studies, Vol. I, Part III*, pp. 40-45,48.

2 Ernest De Witt Burton and Edgar Johnson Goodspeed, *A Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels in Greek*; Edward Greswell, *Dissertations upon the Principles and Arrangement of an Harmony of the Gospels* (hereafter referred to as Dissertations); Robert Mimpres, *The Gospel Treasury and Expository Harmony of the Four Evangelists* (hereafter referred to as Gospel Treasury); M. B. Riddle, *A Harmony of the Four Gospels in English* (hereafter referred to as Harmony in English); Wm. Arnold Stevens, and Earnest De Witt Burton. *A Harmony of the Gospels*; and James Strong, *A New Harmony and Exposition of the Gospels*.

3 John Urquhart, *The Bible: Whence It Came, What It Contains, How to Read It, How to Use It*; pp. 68-69. Also See Ernest Martin, *Design and Development of the Holy Scriptures*, Rev. Ed., pp. 303-304; J. H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 52, on Greek word ἀνωθεν, *The Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*, pp. 86-87.

4 The Englishman's Greek New Testament (hereafter referred to as Englishman's Greek, p. 145.

5 Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (hereafter referred to as Greek Lexicon), pp. 24, 313.

6 F. Godet, A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, (hereafter referred to as Commentary on Luke), p. 38.

7 Ibid., pp. 11, 38, 33-34.

8 Karl Wieseler, A Chronological Synopsis of the Four Gospels, (hereafter referred to as Chronological Synopsis), p. 25.