

# Knowing God in the Word

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Philippians 3:10.

## Contradictions in Scripture: Storms at Sea

I have been attempting to show through my messages on “Contradictions in Scripture” that we have to use great care in proclaiming various stories in the different gospels as being “the same story.” God may have seen fit to repeat a story more than once for the most solemn emphasis, and certainly stories like that of the crucifixion are examples of this. Yet note that in many of the different gospels, the stories of the crucifixion give different details of events leading up to that event and taking place at that time. Each of the viewpoints of the different gospel writers differs, and each offers us a different glimpse of the cosmic events that took place at that supreme moment in history.

Therefore, we should not be surprised when the Bible tells similar stories in various gospels and yet gives different details. This does not surprise us. We would expect God to act in this way, not wasting time and space by tiredly repeating the same facts He had already mentioned in another gospel. I say, this should not surprise us when God does this. What should surprise us, however, is when the details appear to be not just different, but rather contradictory. This is the point at which those who judge hastily immediately speak up and proclaim, “See, the Bible is full of errors.” Yet for those of us who believe that the Bible is the written Word of the Living God, such a snap judgment is not acceptable. And indeed, when we look further, we see that these contradictions signal not a mistake on the part of the writers, but a mistake on the part of those interpreting them.

For example, let us examine the story of Christ calming the sea. This story is well known to many, yet few have acknowledged that the various accounts in the different gospels clearly differ in detail. Let us examine the story in each of the gospels in order.

1. In Matthew 8:23-28, Jesus, BEFORE calling His twelve disciples (Matthew 10:1,) enters into a boat, and His disciples follow Him. While they are in the boat, a great earthquake (Greek “seismos”) arises, and the boat is covered with waves (and thus is a decked boat.) The Lord is asleep, and the disciples come to Him and say, “Lord, save us! We are perishing.” He rebukes them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arises and rebukes the wind and the sea, and there is a great calm. The response of the disciples is to marvel, saying, “Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?” Then, they landed at the country of the Gergesenes.

2. In Mark 4:35-42, Jesus, AFTER calling His twelve disciples (Mark 3:14,) says to His disciples, “Let us cross over to the other side.” The disciples take Him along in the boat and begin crossing the sea with other, little boats. While they are crossing, a great windstorm (Greek “lailaps”) arises, and the waves beat into the boat, and are filling it (and thus it was an open boat.) The Lord is asleep in the stern on a pillow, and the disciples awake Him and say, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” He arises and rebukes the wind and says to the sea, “Peace, be still,” and the wind ceases and there is a great calm. Then He rebukes the disciples, “Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” The response of the disciples is to fear exceedingly, saying to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” Then, they land at the country of the Gadarenes.

3. In Luke 8:22-26, Jesus, AFTER calling His twelve disciples (Luke 6:13,) goes into a boat with His disciples, saying to them, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." They launch, and as they sail He falls asleep. A windstorm (Greek "lailaps") comes down on the lake, and the boat is filling with water (and thus is an open boat.) The disciples come to the Lord and awake Him, saying, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" He arises and rebukes the wind and the raging of the water, and they cease and there is a calm. Then He rebukes the disciples, "Where is your faith?" The response of the disciples is to be afraid, saying to one another, "Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!" Then, they sail to the country of the Gadarenes.

Thus we can see how these various accounts are set up. In Matthew, we have an earlier event wherein the Lord Jesus and His disciples were sailing in a boat with a deck, whereas in Mark and Luke they were sailing in an open boat without a deck, and other little boats were sailing with them. In Matthew a great earthquake arises, likely in an attempt by Satan to destroy the Lord, and huge waves threaten to swamp the boat along with a great wind (both caused by the earthquake.) In Mark and Luke, a storm descends on the lake, again probably caused by the Evil One in an attempt to slay the Lord, and the wind and waves threaten to fill the boat. In Matthew, the disciples wake Jesus, and He first rebukes them for their lack of faith, as the danger to the boat is not great, before He rebukes the wind and waves and puts a stop to them. In Mark and Luke, however, He first rebukes the wind and waves, the danger to the boat being great, and then rebukes the disciples for their lack of faith. In Matthew, after the disciples marvel, they arrive at the country of the Gergesenes. In Mark and Luke, however, their arrival is at the country of the Gadarenes. Thus we see the differences between the two stories, and that two storms and two miracles are recorded in the two different accounts.

But what of the minor differences between Mark and Luke? These are easily explained. First of all, Luke does not mention the other, little boats that sailed with them, but the omission of such a detail is certainly not a contradiction, as Luke never indicates that such boats weren't with them. Then, the exact words that the disciples used to wake the Lord are recorded differently. But, in their excitement, they no doubt were yelling many things, and the words recorded in the different gospels could easily just be the excited exclamation of two different disciples, both of whom were waking Him at the same time. The words of the Lord in rebuking them are different, and yet how do we know that He did not say much more than is recorded in either account, of which these two quotations are just an excerpt?

Thus we see the difference between "contradictions" merely caused by the recording of different details of an event, which are not really contradictions at all but rather complementing accounts, and the "contradictions" caused by the fact that two different events are being recorded. We must not be guilty of assuming that two different events are the same thing when Scripture would clearly indicate that they are different.

Thus, we see how the gospels harmonize in the accounts of the calming of the storms. In the three gospels we have three accounts of two different events, one gospel giving us its own unique account of an earlier storm that threatened the life of our Lord and His disciples, and the other two gospels giving us complementary accounts of a second such attack. Thus the gospels remain in perfect harmony, and the wisdom of our Lord in His careful selection of accounts in each is shown forth. Let us thank God for the perfect record He has given us in His Word both of His Son and the great miracles that He worked!

Nathan C. Johnson