



July 30, 2018

I come from a big family with seven children. We are all adults now; and when we get together and talk about childhood events, it is extremely interesting to hear an identical event as narrated by each individual. Each person adds different details and insights to the same incident. And for the most part, the accounts agree with and augment one another. Anyone listening would have the “full story” by the time they heard each one.

The Word of God has many different writers, some of whom relate identical incidents in the Scriptures. Each passage relating to the same incident may not contain the same details, but the passages *will* complement and agree with one another. The writers of the Bible do not disagree! Each writer used his own vocabulary, but the Word has only one Author, God. Every truth in God’s Word was recorded as He desired it to be.

II Peter 1:21:

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost [by holy spirit].

God told these “holy men” what to write, and they wrote using their vocabulary and understanding. This is how identical situations or events recorded in the Word of God may have different yet complementary details. They will augment, not contradict, each other. When the same incident or subject is handled at different places in the Word, we can use what is called scripture build-up, or narrative development, to get the full story. This is one of the ways that the Scripture interprets itself in the verse. By simply reading all of the verses which relate to a certain incident or subject, we can enhance our understanding of God’s Word.

There are several examples of narrative development in the Gospels where an identical record is handled in more than one Gospel. The miracle of the loaves and fishes, or the feeding of the about five thousand, is an event that is recorded in all

four Gospels. This event occurred toward the end of a day when Jesus had taught a multitude of people many things to satisfy their hunger for the truth.

Luke 9:12-17:

And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto him [Jesus], Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place.

But he [Jesus] said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people.

For they were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company.

And they did so, and made them all sit down.

Then he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude.

And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.

The account in the Gospel of Mark is similar, but adds the detail in verse 40 that they sat down “in ranks.”

Mark 6:35-44:

And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed:

Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat.

He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?

He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes.

And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass.

And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.

And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his

disciples to sit before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all.

And they did all eat, and were filled.

And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes.

And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.

To sit down in ranks means they sat down in different square-like divisions, forming separate parties of people. Jesus had put the disciples in charge over specific portions of the crowd, instructing that the people be seated in orderly groups. He then had the disciples serve them.

What can we learn in the Gospel of Matthew about this event?

Matthew 14:15-21:

And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.

But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.

And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.

He said, Bring them hither to me.

And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.

And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.

The Gospel of Matthew adds that those fed included not only five thousand men but also women and children. In Biblical culture, the count normally included only the men, so there were many more than five thousand people present for that meal.

This record in the Gospel of John gives us a few more details. See if you can find them.

John 6:5-13:

When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?

And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

The Gospel of John adds the interesting detail that Jesus questioned Philip in order to prove him, or to test in a good sense to see what he thought. Jesus was training his disciples. This Gospel also shows that it was Andrew who informed Jesus of the five barley loaves and two small fishes. And it is also here that we learn the endearing detail that it was a lad, a little boy, who made those food items available.

By simply reading about the loaves and the fishes in all four Gospels, we've seen an example of how the Word interprets itself in the verse by way of scripture build-up, or narrative development. We allowed the verses to speak for themselves as we systematically built our understanding by reading each record.

Why not try this for yourself? Choose an event in the Gospels with more than one passage relating to that event. Enjoy seeing the Word unfold as you apply the principle of scripture build-up, or narrative development!

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