

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
M. Handling Theological Confusion By Trusting God's Word
(Matthew 11:2-6; Luke 7:18-23)

I. Introduction

- A. Old Testament believers like John the Baptist expected that when the Messiah appeared, He would then set up His Messianic Kingdom (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words And Works Of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 198).
- B. Thus, after presenting Christ as the Messiah to Israel only to face a long imprisonment, John became confused, wondering how his prolonged imprisonment could possibly fit into the establishment of the blessed Kingdom.
- C. Christ's response to John's confusion instructs us on handling theological confusion that we might face:

II. Handling Theological Confusion By Trusting God's Word, Matthew 11:2-6; Luke 7:18-23.

- A. When John the Baptist who had been imprisoned by Herod Antipas heard in prison from his disciples about Christ's miraculous works, he sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the One that should come, or if he should look for another, Matthew 11:2-3; Luke 7:18-19. The phrase "the One who was to come" (NIV) is a reference to the Messiah "based on Psalms 40:7 and 118:26" (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 43).
- B. One might think that John's faith was failing since Jesus' ministry did not seem to align with what John Himself had foretold of Jesus being the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) and "the Son of God" (John 1:34), a clear claim to Christ's deity (Ibid., Pentecost, citing Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew, 1928, p. 159) However, if John doubted that Jesus was the Messiah, he would not have sent his disciples to Jesus to ask Him if He was an impostor, for an impostor would not admit that he was an impostor (Ibid.)! Rather, John was likely impatient, aiming to get Jesus to explain why He was not then establishing His Kingdom that John might get out of prison (Ibid.).
- C. When John's disciples asked Jesus John's question, they witnessed Christ healing many people of their diseases, plagues and evil spirits, and many blind people were gaining eyesight, Luke 7:20-21 ESV. These miracles were typical of Messiah's care and concern for the needy, but John needed something more definitive and authoritative than the fact that Jesus performed helpful miracles: after all, he knew about Jesus' miracles, so he had sent two of his disciples to Jesus upon having heard of Christ's miracles, cf. Matthew 11:2.
- D. We note that Jesus did not answer John's disciples with a direct yes or no answer, but He told them to return to John and report what they had seen when they came to meet Jesus, Matthew 11:4.
- E. Significantly, what they had seen, and that to which Jesus specifically referred, were His miracles that fulfilled Old Testament prophecies that foretold those works by the Messiah, Matthew 11:5:
 - 1. Jesus told John's disciples of His giving sight to the blind as foretold in Isaiah 35:5a.
 - 2. Christ added that He was causing the lame to walk as foretold in Isaiah 35:6a.
 - 3. Jesus explained that the deaf were made to hear as foretold in Isaiah 35:5b.
 - 4. Christ noted that the poor had the gospel preached to them as foretold in Isaiah 61:1.
 - 5. Other miracles Jesus performed that were not particularly cited in the Old Testament but were typical of Messiah's edifying work in His arrival were the cleansing of lepers and the raising of the dead.
- F. Having alluded to His fulfillment of prophecies that John the Baptist would have known so well, Jesus then added that whoever was not offended in Him would be blessed, Matthew 11:6. In other words, though John would not understand why Jesus was not then establishing His Messianic Kingdom, he would have realized from Scripture that Jesus was indeed fulfilling Biblical prophecy as to His messianic works. That being so, John was to trust the testimony of God's Word about Jesus to handle the confusion John faced in his beliefs!
- G. John did not then know that Jesus would postpone His Kingdom due to Israel's rejection of Him at His first Advent (Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 44), that John would not get out of prison, but be beheaded there (Matthew 14:10) and later be raised to enter Christ's Kingdom (Rev. 20:4; Daniel 12:13). Thus, Jesus called John to do what many Old Testament prophets before him were led of God to do – to leave their questions about the future with God to handle and to trust the revelation God had given to them (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Lesson: *When John the Baptist faced confusion over his long imprisonment when he expected Jesus soon to establish His Kingdom with John's soon release, John was called by Christ to trust what he knew God's Word predicted about Jesus, and what Jesus fulfilled of that Word, leaving his confusing thoughts with God to handle.*

Application: *If we face theological confusion in some way, may we adhere to what we know Scripture reveals about God's truth and trust the Lord to reveal to us what He chooses to reveal in His time (John 16:13-15).*