

Staff or No Staff?



This passage is one of the most difficult in the Scriptures. The problem centers on the difference between Mark's "take nothing with you except a staff" statement with those recorded in Matthew 10:9-10 and Luke 9:3. As stated in my "Note from the Pastor," the majorities of commentaries do not confront the issue, but rather treat it as if it doesn't exist. This is unacceptable given the fact that the Christian church believes the Scriptures are divinely inspired by God and is infallible in its presentation. So, this concern must be addressed.

First, we should note that one didn't go anywhere in the hills of Palestine without a walking staff. This is generally understood by all Bible scholars and those who live in the region. But, now we'll look for a more specific answer to the problem. Reconciling the issue between Mark's account with those of Matthew and Luke comes down to an understanding of the original language and how it was used by the three disciples.

So, we must begin with Mark's use of the word "take." The Greek word Mark uses is the word "*airo*" which means to pick up and carry. The force is in the sense of immediacy or acting without delay. He uses this word several times in his gospel:

2:9 "Rise, take (*airo*=pick up and carry) up your bed and walk.

6:29 "they came and took (*airo*=pick up and carry) his body and laid it in a tomb"

11:23 "whoever says to this mountain, be taken (*airo*=pick up and carry) up and thrown in the sea..."

- Note, that Mark uses the same word in three different tenses, but with the same meaning.

Now we'll examine Matthew's use of the word "take." Well, actually Matthew doesn't use the word "take," but instead uses the Greek word *ktaomai* which means to locate. The English Standard Version does a fair job by translating the word to mean "Acquire."

Matthew 10:9 "Acquire (*ktaomai*=to locate) no gold or silver...or staff."

The word *ktaomai* is a transitive verb and carries the force of without delay. Therefore, the prohibition is not against having a staff, or gold or silver, but rather taking the time to look for or to locate a staff, or gold or silver. The mission is too urgent and you must leave immediately with what you have on hand.

Luke, however, uses the word *bastazo* for the word "take," but again, this word is similar to the word *ktaomai* used by Matthew. The Greek word *bastazo* means to locate and hold. The prohibition is the same as Matthew's word. The disciples were not to take the time to find these items, but were to leave immediately.

I believe this reconciles the issue between Mark, Matthew and Luke--at least it does for me. I could have said much more, but I think this captures the essence of the argument.