



Why the Gospels Disagree on Walking Sticks

One of the passages frequently raised as an alleged contradiction in the Gospel accounts concerns the instructions Jesus gave His disciples when He sent them out to minister. In Mark 6:8, the command reads, “And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse.” Yet in Matthew 10:9–10, the instruction appears stricter: “Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves.” Luke 9:3 adds, “Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece.” At a superficial level, the texts appear to conflict. One passage allows a staff, while two others forbid staves. Critics often stop at that point and conclude that the Gospel writers cannot be reconciled. However, that conclusion is reached too quickly and without sufficient attention to context, language, purpose, and the larger biblical pattern of dependence upon God.

This issue matters for more than apologetic reasons. It matters because it tests whether Scripture can be read with the precision it deserves. The Gospels do not present careless reporting. They present complementary testimony. Differences in wording often reveal differences in emphasis rather than contradiction in fact. When Jesus sent out the Twelve, He was not merely giving them travel advice. He was establishing a pattern of ministry. He was training them to depend on the Lord rather than earthly preparation, to move with urgency rather than comfort, and to learn that the work of God is sustained by God Himself. The question is not simply whether a walking stick was permitted. The deeper issue is what kind of ministry Jesus was forming in them.