

Resolving difficulties in the translation of Luke 24:34

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1 Abstract

In ICor 15:5 Paul writes that the resurrected Christ was seen of Cephas and then by the twelve. Many Bible commentators have taken this Cephas to be Simon Peter, resulting in incongruous translations of Luke 24:34 that do not fit in with the story flow. This paper shows that the Cephas mentioned by Paul in his letters is not Simon Peter but Cleopas who was walking with an unknown disciple on the road to Emmaus.

2 Introduction

Luke 24:34 reads 'Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon' (KJV).

In the verses preceding Luke 24:34 we learn that Cleopas and another disciple who were walking to Emmaus, saw and spoke with the resurrected Christ and were hurrying back to the disciples to inform them of the wonderful news. The two came upon the eleven¹, who must have included Peter since Judas Iscariot was not yet replaced, and other disciples. One would expect the Emmaus duo to excitedly communicate their encounter with the risen Christ and we do see that in Luke 24:35, but stuck in the narrative is the incongruous statement in Luke 24:34. An individual prior encounter with Peter and the resurrected Christ is never followed up or substantiated, either in that chapter or elsewhere in the Bible.

If Peter had in fact seen the risen Christ before and discussed it with the disciples, then their response when Christ appeared among them in Luke 24:37 did not reflect this because they were 'terrified and affrighted'. Mark 16:12 ~ 13 reinforces their sense of disbelief, which further discredits a previous sighting by Peter.

3 Traditional handling of the translation of Luke 24:34

The discrepancy presented in Luke 24:34 has not been unnoted. There has been some suspicion that Luke 24:34 is one of a number of statements of creed that existed before being incorporated into the text². Not all statements of creed can be accepted as inspired. Origen³ uses the verse to suggest that the unknown disciple accompanying Cleopas was

¹ John 20:24 shows that Thomas was not present. The use of the term 'eleven' conveys that Thomas was staying at the location with the rest, but had temporarily left on some chore.

² Habermas, Gary. "Jesus' Resurrection and Contemporary Criticism: an Apologetic (part II)." Faculty Publications and Presentations (1990): 25.

³ Origen, Contra Celsum 2.62. *New Advent*. Edited by Kevin Knight (2009).

Simon related to Cleopas. This is likely based on the work of Eusebius⁴ who references Hegesippus in claiming that Cleopas was Joseph's brother and hence Jesus' uncle and that Simon or Symeon was the son of this Cleopas. This Symeon was later appointed bishop of Jerusalem after the martyrdom of James the Just, the brother of Jesus⁵.

Matthew Henry⁶ dealt with a view that Peter was the other disciple with Cleopas by pointing out, firstly that the eleven that the Emmaus duo came to had to include Peter, and secondly that if Peter was one of the Emmaus disciples, he would have been the chief speaker on the way to Emmaus and not Cleopas. He and other prominent commentators then had to manufacture an unreported account of Peter having an individual encounter with the resurrected Christ to explain Luke 24:34 and used Paul's comment in ICor 15:5 to transform Cephas into Simon Peter.

The widespread use of ICor15:5 to fictionalize an individual encounter with Peter and the risen Christ can be attributable to a church hierarchy attempting to shore up the authority and office of the papacy.

4 Is the Cephas of ICor 15:5 Peter?

In ICor 15:5 Paul relates that Christ was first seen by Cephas and then the twelve. Some have equated this Cephas with Peter but in ICor 9:5 Paul clearly distinguishes Cephas from the apostles and also another group who were the brethren of the Lord.

It should be noted that though Christ had given Simon the name Cephas (John 1:42), he was never addressed by the name 'Cephas' but by its equivalent 'Peter' (Mark 3:16). The New Testament uses the name 'Peter' one hundred and sixty two times but the name 'Cephas' only six times, five of which were by Paul. The instances where Cephas were used in the New Testament are as follows:

- a) John 1:42. Here Christ names Simon 'Cephas' meaning a 'stone', otherwise translated as 'Peter'.

⁴ Eusebius, Church History 3:11. *New Advent*. Edited by Kevin Knight (2009).

⁵ Eusebius, Church History 4:22.4. *New Advent*. Edited by Kevin Knight(2009) .

⁶ Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible (Complete)*. Hendrickson Pub; Box Una edition (June 9, 2009), 1710.

- b) ICor 1:12. Cephas is identified as a church leader with some following. The comparison with Paul and Apollos places him as active in the gentile churches. The New Testament does not show Peter predominantly operating in the gentile areas, except as a visitor (Gal 2:7 ~14).
- c) ICor 3:22. This is similar in context to ICor 1:12.
- d) I Cor 9:5. As mentioned earlier in this section, Cephas is placed in a different group from the apostles as well as the brethren of the Lord. The apostles naturally include Peter, while the brethren of the Lord would include his step brothers and other kinsmen.
- e) ICor15:5. Paul recounts the appearance of Christ to Cephas before he manifested himself to the twelve apostles, thus showing Cephas as separate from the twelve.
- f) Gal 2:9. James, Cephas and John agree to henceforth go to the Jews, leaving the gentile ministry to Paul and Barnabas. This verse places James before Cephas and John, which is unlikely if Cephas was Simon Peter. Gal 2:7 ~14 is instructive as Paul uses Peter's name four times and Cephas once. Why use different names when talking about the same person?

In Gal 1 and 2, Paul repeatedly uses the name Peter and not Cephas to identify the leading apostle (Gal 2:7).

5 Inferences from Luke 24:34 and ICor 15:5

- a) Cephas is likely a Jewish church leader of sufficient status to sit with James and John. This James is believed to be the Lord's brother and the first bishop of Jerusalem (Acts 12:2)⁷. Cephas did some initial evangelizing outside Israel but later withdrew to serve the Jews, leaving the gentile congregations to Paul and Barnabas.
- b) ICor 15:5 shows that Cephas met the resurrected Jesus before the Twelve. Timewise this corresponds exactly to the journey of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, one of whom we know to be Cleopas.

If the accounts in Luke 24:34 and ICor 15:5 are to be reconciled, then Cephas (Κηφᾶς) and Cleopas (Κλεόπας) must be the same person, with Cephas being a shortened vocal of

⁷ Eusebius, Church History 2.1.2 ~ 4. *New Advent*. Edited by Kevin Knight (2009).

Cleopas. The bible has many examples of the use of phonetic nicknames or abbreviations⁸ and this should not be surprising as it has been a common practice in all human societies.

6 Did Luke refer to Simon in Luke 24:34?

One of the difficulties in the translations of Luke 24:34 is that only one person 'Simon' is referred to, rather than both of the disciples. The KJV translates the subsequent verse as, '--- he was known of *them* in breaking of bread', which is the expected response if two persons shared the experience on the road to Emmaus. Throughout the recounting of the affair from Luke 24:19 ~ 35, the collective words 'they', 'them', 'we' and 'our' are used to represent the two disciples except for the one verse in Luke 24:34 which only mentions Simon.

A possible explanation of this discrepancy is that the name 'Simon' used in Luke 24:34 is in fact a modification of the original and introduced by activist scholars or clergy. A hierarchy seeking to concentrate power in a papacy based on the lineage of Peter would frown on a 'nonentity' like Cleopas honored by a visit by the resurrected Christ while Peter was shown no such special preference. The Greek *Simon* (Σίμων) (Strong's G4613) differs by the starting letters only from 'ημων' (Strong's G2257) commonly translated 'us'. A translation of Luke 24:34 using this variant will therefore read,

'Saying the Lord is risen indeed and was seen *of us*', which fits in perfectly with the story flow.

7 Reconciling Cleopas and Cephas?

The risen Christ appeared first to Mary Magdelene and the ladies with her (Matt 28:9; John 20:16) and then to Cleopas and his companion. That Christ would single out Cleopas for this honor shows that Christ held Cleopas in some regard. One would expect that Christ's judgment would not be groundless and that Cleopas would subsequently play some role in the work of the gospel. What does history say about Cleopas and Cephas?

Cleopas is accredited as being one of the seventy disciples sent out by Christ and became a bishop of Jerusalem⁹.

⁸ Some examples are: Solomon/Jedidiah (IChron 22:5/IISam 12:25); Abia/Abijah (IChron 3:10/IICron 12/16); Josaphat/Jehoshaphat (Matt 1:8 /IChron3:10); Joram/Jehoram (IChron 3:11/IKings 22:50); Ozias/Azariah/Uzziah (Matt 1:8/IKings 15:1 /IICron 26:1); Jehioakim/Eliakim (IChron 3:15/IICron 36:4); Joses/Barnabas (Acts 4:36).

Cephas, as discussed in section 4 and 5, was active initially in gentile areas and then concentrated on ministering to the Jews. Eusebius confirms the identity of a Cephas that was not Simon Peter, but one of the seventy disciples, based on the letters of Clement¹⁰. We see therefore that there is congruence as follows:

- Both Cephas and Cleopas were of the seventy disciples sent out by Christ.
- Cephas was in some position of authority in the church to sit with James and John (Gal 2:9). Cleopas became a bishop of Jerusalem.
- Reconciliation of Paul's sequence of the appearances of the risen Christ (1Cor 15:3 ~8) and the Emmaus incident (Luke 24:13 ~51) dictates that Cleopas is Cephas.

8 Conclusion

1. Cleopas (Luke 24:13 ~51) and Cephas (1Cor 15:3 ~8) are one and the same.
2. Luke 24:34 has likely been tampered with. One possibility is that the whole verse was stuck in to validate an existing statement of creed from one group. Another possibility is that some letters were changed to enhance the standing of Simon by a hierarchy invested in the authority of the papacy.
3. A reading of Luke 24:34 that fits in with the story flow is 'Saying the Lord is risen indeed and was seen *of us*'.

⁹ J.H. MacMahon, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 5, 'On the Apostles and Disciples': Revised and edited by Kevin Knight- New Advent. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0524.htm>>.

¹⁰ Eusebius, Church History 1.12.2 ~ 4. *New Advent*. Edited by Kevin Knight.

9 Bibliography

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