The Alleged Contradictions in the Gospels

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Text:

Introduction:

# How many people have you known who have left the LORD because of unanswered apologetic questions like these? We need to have genuine care for others. This involves digging into things that may not even bother us personally.

# Shortly after my conversion, I was made to watch Bart Ehrman lectures by my family. These lectures troubled me, but God’s people helped me find answers that resolved my struggles.

# Goals of lecture. (1) Show there are reasonable answers to apparent contradictions, allowing us to have confidence in the Gospels. (2) Consider what is often behind the questions skeptics ask.

Body:

# **Understanding the Problem**

## “You can be physically in New York right now and mentally three thousand miles away in San Francisco. But you cannot right now be physically… both in New York and in San Francisco. Two statements are in contradiction if what one says completely negates what the other says… Both of these statements cannot be true. If one is true, the other must be false, and vice versa.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Types of Contradictions

### Historical Contradictions (“There is No Evidence in History”)

### Horizontal Contradictions (Reading Parallel Accounts Side-by-Side)

## What is at Stake – “Contradictions Call Into Account Trustworthiness of All Scripture”

# Answering the Problem

## *Principle #1* – Complimentary Accounts: “When comparing two eyewitness accounts, I am more concerned about unresolvable contradictions than complimentary details. In fact, I have come to expect some degree of resolvable variation in true, reliable eyewitness accounts.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

### Judas’ Death (Matthew 27:5-7; Acts 1:18-19)

#### “However mysterious it may be to say that he fell headlong and burst open, at the least that is not ‘hanging’ oneself."[[3]](#footnote-3)

#### When we look at these accounts as complimentary, we can see each account is telling different details about the same event. The clear part of this is Judas hung himself. Evidently, as he hung on the tree, the rope eventually snapped, causing his decaying body to burst open. Each account is telling a complimentary part of the story. Both things can be true at the same time and therefore do not constitute a contradiction.

### Number of Angels/Women at Tomb

#### One or Two Angels? (Mark 16:5 vs. John 20:12)

#### “Mary Magdalene.” (John 20:1); “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.” (Matthew 28:1); “Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome.” (Mark 16:1); “Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women.” (Luke 24:10).

#### Mark and Matthew are only recording one of the two angels. They are not saying, “there was one and only one angel.” In like manner, it wasn’t “only Mary Magdalene.” They each have their own emphasis. Additionally, it could be the Gospels were also recording different instances of women coming to the Tomb. At the same time, the gospels have their own points of emphasis on the women at the tomb. Luke, for example, emphasizes women more than any other Gospel. It would stand to reason he would give the fuller account of the number of women.

### Jerusalem or Galilee (Luke 24:49; Matthew 28:16)

#### “In Matthew’s version the disciples are told to go to Galilee to meet Jesus, and they immediately do so. He appears to them there and gives them their final instruction. But in Luke the disciples are not told to go to Galilee… And they never leave Jerusalem – in the southern part of Israel, a different region from Galilee, in the north.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

#### Which is it? Luke emphasizes the Temple from the beginning to end of his gospel. Luke hasn’t talked about the Galilee appearances; he doesn’t need to for his purposes. Evidently during the 40 days Jesus was with His apostles before His ascension they were also in Galilee for some of that time. Luke has his purposes in writing and Matthew has his. Evidently there was a time, when in Jerusalem, that Jesus finally told them to stay in Jerusalem. That doesn’t mean they needed to remain there the entire time prior.

### Jesus & Passover Meal (Mark 14:12; John 18:28)

#### Continue Passover Festivities? (Luke 22:1)

#### “Jesus held his Passover meal not on the official day, but deliberately one day earlier.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

## *Principle #2* – Respecting Ancient Writing Styles: “The more we learn about ancient historians (Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius), and about Greco-Roman biographies (of which the Gospels are likely an example), the more we learn how ancient practices were different from our own. In the ancient world, for instance, it was common to tell stories out of order (for thematic reasons), paraphrase and reword quotations, conflate and abridge material, streamline the timeline of events, and so on.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

### Inscription Above Cross (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19)

### The Curtain Ripping (Mark 15:37-38; Luke 23:45-46)

### Timing of Crucifixion (Mark 15:25; John 19:14)

#### Roman vs. Jewish Time?

#### “The reckoning of time for most people, who could not very well carry sundials and astronomical charts, was necessarily approximate. If the sun was moving toward mid-heaven, two different observers might well have glanced up and decided, respectively, that it was ‘the third hour’ or ‘about the sixth hour’. Mark’s concern is to set a time frame in which the three hours of darkness occur (Mk. 15:25, 33).”[[7]](#footnote-7)

# Suggestions for Discussions

## Kindness (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

## Ask Questions

### “Are There Things in the Bible You Don’t Like?”

### “What is the Best Answer You Could Imagine?”

### “What is the Best Answer You’ve Heard?”

## Consider Even If There Were Contradictions…

Conclusion:

# What we have seen in these passages shows that if the Gospel writers were conspiring and creating a story, they wouldn’t have had these things that appear to have contradictions. Rather, they would have cross checked everything and made sure people wouldn’t need to have conversations like what we are doing right now. Isn’t this evidence that these accounts are telling events that really happened and that this isn’t a fabricated story?

# We have good reasons to trust that Jesus died, was buried, and rose from the dead.

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1. McInerny, D.Q.. Being Logical: A Guide to Good Thinking (28). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/rules-to-evaluate-alleged-bible-contradictions-and-difficulties-free-bible-insert/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. R. T. France, The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 561. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/apparent-contradictions-gospels/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Carson, D. A.. The Gospel according to John (The Pillar New Testament Commentary (PNTC)) (605). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)