

ALLEGED CHRONOLOGICAL CONTRADICTIONS

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Since the Bible begins at the Creation with Genesis—the book of beginnings—and ends with the book of Revelation (which many scholars believe was the last recorded book of the Bible), students of the Scriptures often assume that the Bible was compiled chronologically. Many students approach their reading of the Bible with the mind-set that everything in Scripture is arranged “from A to Z.” Since Genesis records what took place at the beginning of time, and it is the first book of the Bible, then the rest of the Bible follows suit, right? Actually, what the diligent student eventually finds is that the Bible is **not** a book of strict chronology. All sixty-six books of the Bible are not arranged in the order in which they were written. Furthermore, all of the events contained within each book also are not necessarily recorded chronologically.

Consider the following arrangement of some of the books in the Bible:

- Although the books of Haggai and Zechariah have been placed near the end of the Old Testament, these men prophesied during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Twenty books separate Haggai and Zechariah from the book of Ezra, yet the events recorded in each book were occurring at the same time. Obviously, these books are not arranged in chronological order.
- Even though 2 Chronicles appears before the book of Job, the events recorded in Job took place long

before those that are recorded in 2 Chronicles. In fact, if the Bible were a book of strict chronology, the events recorded in Job would be placed somewhere within the book of Genesis, likely somewhere after chapter nine (cf. Job 22:15-16; 42:16-17).

- In the New Testament, one might assume that since 1 Thessalonians comes after the book of Acts, that Luke penned Acts earlier than Paul penned his first letter to the church at Thessalonica. The truth is, however, 1 Thessalonians was written years before the book of Acts was completed.

In addition to the sixty-six books of the Bible not being arranged chronologically, inspired writers did not always record information in a strictly chronological sequence within each book. Making the assumption that the entire Bible was written chronologically hinders a proper understanding of the text. As you will see throughout this article, several alleged contradictions are resolved simply by acknowledging that many times Bible writers did not record events in a strict sequential order.

ONLY ONE LANGUAGE BEFORE BABEL?

According to some skeptics, Genesis 10 verses 5, 20, and 31 contradict what is stated in Genesis 11:1. Supposedly, since Moses recorded that the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth spoke different languages in Genesis 10, and yet he indi-

cated that “the whole earth had one language and one speech” in Genesis 11:1, then a discrepancy exists. Obviously, before the dispersion of man at Babel, the whole Earth could not have both **many** languages and **only one** language at the same time.

The explanation to this “problem” is that the events recorded in Genesis 10-11 were not written chronologically. Genesis 10 is more of an overview, while Genesis 11 speaks of one event within Genesis 10. Some of the things recorded in chapter 10 occurred before the tower of Babel,

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while others occurred sometime later. Consider that Genesis 2:5-25 does not pick up where chapter 1 left off; rather, it provides more detailed information about some of the events mentioned in chapter 1. (Whereas Genesis 1 is arranged chronologically, Genesis 2 is organized topically.) Several of the events in Genesis 38 involving Judah and Tamar occurred while the things recorded in chapter 39 (and those that follow) took place. Similar to a teacher who is telling her class a story, and inserts information about something the main character did in the past or will do in the future, Moses “jumped” ahead of himself at times by inserting parenthetical material like that found in Genesis 10.

Aside from the languages mentioned in Genesis 10, there is another “clue” in the text that reveals the events recorded in chapter 11 occurred **before** the descendants of Noah began speaking different languages and spreading throughout the Earth. Genesis 10:25 mentions a man named Peleg (meaning “division”) who received such a name because “in his days the earth was divided.” More than likely, this is a reference to the confusion of languages at the tower of Babel described in chapter 11. The “Earth” (i.e., people; cf. 11:1) divided when God confused the languages (11:7-8). Thus, the division in Peleg’s day is linked contextually to the linguistic segregation at Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

When Genesis 10 and 11 are read with the understanding that not all events are recorded chronologically, one sees clearly

how the events revealed in these chapters are entwined tightly with one another—so tightly in fact that those who seek contradictions are doomed to fail. Linguistically speaking, there was no pre-Babel confusion; only one language was in existence (Genesis 11:1).

DID SAUL KNOW DAVID PRIOR TO GOLIATH’S DEATH?

Following the account of Samuel’s visit to Bethlehem to anoint David as the future king of Israel, the book of 1 Samuel indicates that David became the harp player and armor bearer for King Saul (16:14-23). Subsequent to this information, the reader is told of David’s magnificent triumph over Goliath (1 Samuel 17), which then is followed by an “interrogation” by King Saul, who asked David, “Whose son are you, young man?” (17:58). A general reading through the text of 1 Samuel 16-17 has led some Bible believers to question why Saul (it seems) knew David, then did not know David, and then got to know him again. Skeptics, likewise, have inquired about the consistency of this story (see Morgan, 2003; Wells, 2001; “Inerrancy,” n.d.). Paul Tobin, in an article titled “Internal Contradictions in the Bible,” summed up the skeptic’s argument by stating that 1 Samuel 16 “clearly shows that David... was known to Saul. Yet a little later, after David’s fight with Goliath, Saul is made to inquire from his chief captain as to the identity of the giant slayer (1 Samuel

17:56). And he is again made to inquire from David who he is, when he should have known this all along” (2000). Allegedly, the Bible’s portrayal of Saul’s ignorance of David **after** Goliath’s death is proof of the Bible writers’ imperfection when penning the Scriptures.

First, it is imperative for one to recognize that, as with other Bible passages, nowhere in 1 Samuel 16-17 are we told that all of these events occurred in chronological order. Although throughout 1 Samuel, there is a general, sequential progression, such does not demand that **every** event recorded in the book must be laid out chronologically. In fact, within chapter 17 there is evidence that this is not the case. For example, the events recorded in 17:54 (i.e., David putting his armor in his tent, and taking the head of Goliath to Jerusalem) postdate the conversations mentioned in verses 55-58 (as verse 57 makes clear). More precisely, verses 55-56 synchronize with verse 40, while events recorded in verses 57-58 correlate well with the end of verse 51 (Youngblood, 1992, 3:703). And, regarding chapter 16, who can say for certain that David was not already playing the harp for Saul before Samuel anointed him? First Samuel 17:15 indicates that “David occasionally went and returned from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem.” Perhaps it was during one of these furloughs that he was anointed as the future king of Israel (16:1-13). Unless the text clearly distinguishes one event as occurring before or after another, a person cannot conclude for certain the exact chronology of those events. Just because one historical event recorded in the Bible precedes another, does not mean that it could not have occurred at a later time (or vice versa). Truly, the ancients were not as concerned about chronology as is the average person in twenty-first-century America.

Aside from the fact that one cannot be certain about the exact sequence of events recorded in 1 Samuel 16-17, several possible explanations exist as to why Saul appeared not to recognize David after his triumphal victory over Goliath. First, enough time could have lapsed so that David’s appearance changed significantly since the last time he appeared before King Saul. William M. Thomson, a missionary in Syria and Palestine for nearly half of the nineteenth century, once described the sudden changes in the physical development of Eastern youths in his book titled *The Land and the Book*.

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They not only spring into full-grown manhood as if by magic, but all their former beauty disappears; their complexion becomes dark; their features hard and angular.... I have often been accosted by such persons, formerly intimate acquaintances, but who had suddenly grown entirely out of my knowledge, nor could I without difficulty recognize them (1859, 2:366).

Few would deny that young men can change quickly over a relatively short period of time. Facial hair, increased height and weight, larger, more defined muscles, darker skin, a deeper voice, as well as the wearing of different apparel, may all factor into why a person may say to someone that he or she knows, but has not seen for some time, "I hardly recognized you. You've changed." Surely, it is more than possible that between the time David served Saul as a harpist, and the time he slew Goliath, he could have experienced many physical changes that prevented a "distressed" king from recognizing his former harpist.

A second reason Saul might have failed to recognize David is because he may have lapsed into another unreliable mental state. Saul's intermittent deviation from normalcy is seen throughout the book of 1 Samuel (cf. 16:14-23; 18:9-12; 19:22-24; 22:6-19), and it is possible 17:54-58 is another allusion to his defective perception. In his discussion of 1 Samuel 17, biblical commentator Robert Jamieson mentioned this possibility, saying, "The king's moody temper, not to say frequent fits of insanity, would alone be sufficient to explain the circumstance of his not recognizing a youth who, during the time of his mental aberration, had been much near him, trying to soothe his distempered soul" (1997).

Third, it could be that Saul did, in fact, remember David, but because of jealousy over David's momentous victory (cf. 1 Samuel 18:8-11), and perhaps on hearing that Samuel had been to Bethlehem to anoint him as the next king (1 Samuel 16:1-13), Saul simply wanted to **act** like he did not know David. Such a scenario is not difficult to envision. Today, a teacher or coach might inquire about a student whom he or she already knows, yet in hopes of instilling more submission into the arrogant teen, the faculty member acts somewhat aloof. One textual indication that such may be the explanation of 1 Samuel 17:54-58 is that Saul still referred to David, the bear-killing, lion-slaying, Goliath-demolisher, as a "stripling" (Hebrew *'elem*—17:56, ASV) and "young man" (Hebrew *na'ar*—17:55,58). Although these two words do not necessarily carry a belittling

connotation, neither designation seems very appropriate for a man who had just tried on the armor of King Saul—a man once described as "shoulders upward... taller than any of the people" (1 Samuel 9:2)—and had just killed one of the fiercest enemies of Israel. Truly, Saul's supposed ignorance of David and his family may well have been a "performance" instigated by what physician Herman van Praag once called, "haughtiness fed by envy" (1986, 35:421).

Finally, one must realize that the text does not even actually say that Saul did not know **David**. It only records that Saul asked, "Whose son is this youth?" (1 Samuel 17:55; cf. vss. 56,58). It is an assumption to conclude that Saul did not recognize David. The king simply could have been inquiring about David's family. Since Saul had promised to reward the man who killed Goliath by giving "**his father's house** exemption from taxes in Israel" (17:25), Saul might have been question-

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ing David in order to ensure the identity of David's family. Furthermore, 18:1 seems to presuppose an extended conversation between the two, which would imply that Saul wanted even more information than just the name of David's father.

Truly, any of these possibilities could account for Saul's examination of David. The burden of proof is on the skeptic to show otherwise. As respected law professor Simon Greenleaf concluded regarding the rule of municipal law in relation to ancient writings:

Every document, apparently ancient, coming from the proper repository or custody, and bearing on its face no evident marks of forgery, **the law presumes to be genuine, and devolves on the opposing party the burden of proving it to be otherwise** (1995, p. 16, emp. added).

Until skeptics logically negate the above possible solutions to the questions surrounding 1 Samuel 16-17, and are able to prove beyond doubt that the Bible writer made a genuine mistake, no reason to doubt the integrity of the biblical text exists.

**KINGLY CHRONOLOGY
IN THE BOOK OF EZRA**

As if the spelling and pronunciation of Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes were not problematic enough for the average Bible student, one must also consider these Persian kings in light of the order in which they are mentioned in the book of Ezra. According to history, the Persian kings reigned in the following order: Cyrus (560-530 B.C.), Cambyses (530-522), Smerdis (522), **Darius I** (522-486), Ahasuerus (486-465), **Artaxerxes I** (465-424), Darius II (423-405), and Artaxerxes II (405-358) [see Cook, 1983, p. 350]. The difficulty that presents itself in the book of Ezra is that events surrounding letters which King Artaxerxes received from, and wrote to, the enemies of the Jews (see Ezra 4:7-23) are mentioned **before** the reign of Darius I (Ezra 4:24-6:15). If it is a proven fact that Darius served as king before Artaxerxes, why is the kingship of Darius recorded in the book of Ezra subsequent to the reign of Artaxerxes?

First, it needs to be pointed out that the Darius of the book of Ezra **was** in fact Darius I and not Darius II. The second Darius lived too late in history to have been contemporary with the rebuilding of the temple. Thus, one cannot solve the question at hand simply by suggesting that the Darius cited in Ezra was really Darius II, who lived after Artaxerxes I.

Second, some may attempt to solve this difficulty by alleging that Artaxerxes II was the king who reigned during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem, while Artaxerxes I was the king mentioned prior to Darius' reign (Ezra 4:7-23). This solution is unacceptable, however, since Artaxerxes II lived several years after the events recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah.

So what is the answer? Why is the kingship of Darius recorded in the book of Ezra following events connected with the kingship of Artaxerxes—a king who is thought to have reigned after Darius? One possible solution to this difficulty is that Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:6,7-23 were respectively Cambyses (530-522) and Smerdis (522)—kings of Persia (listed above) who reigned before Darius I. Since

Persian kings frequently had two or more names, it is not unfathomable to think that Cambyses and Smerdis also may have gone by the names Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes (see Wilson, 1996; see also Fausset, 1998).

Another explanation to this perceived dilemma is that the information concerning the kings of Persia in Ezra 4 is grouped according to theme rather than by chronology. Instead of having a record where everything in chapter four is in sequential order, it is reasonable to conclude that verses 6-23 serve as a parenthetical comment and that Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes (4:6-7) are indeed Ahasuerus (486-465) and Artaxerxes I (465-424) of history (rather than the aforementioned Cambyses and Smerdis).

Bible students must keep in mind that just as there is more than one way to write a book in the twenty-first century, ancient writers frequently recorded events chronologically while occasionally inserting necessary non-sequential material. It would have been natural for the writer of the book of Ezra to follow a discussion of the problems related to rebuilding the Jerusalem temple (4:1-5) with information on a similar resistance the Jews encountered while rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (4:6-23). Although the details in verses 6-23 initially may puzzle our chronologically preconditioned mind-set, they actually fit very well in their arrangement with the overall theme of the chapter. In verse 24, the story picks up where it left off in verse 5. The writer then returns to his focus on the problems with the rebuilding of the temple, which lingered until “the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia” (Ezra 4:24).

WHEN DID JESUS CLEANSE THE TEMPLE?

One of the most popular alleged Bible discrepancies pertaining to chronology—and one that skeptics are fond of citing in almost any discussion on the inerrancy of Scripture—is whether or not Jesus cleansed the temple **early** in His ministry, or near the **end**. According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus cleansed the temple during the final week leading up to His death on the cross (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46). John, however, places his record of the temple cleansing in chapter 2 of his gospel account, between Jesus’ first miracle (2:1-12) and His conversation with Nicodemus (3:1-21). How should John’s gospel account be understood in light of the other three

writers placing the event near the end of Jesus’ ministry? Skeptics question, “Did Jesus enter the temple and drive out the money changers early in His ministry, or near the end?”

Most often, it seems, the explanation heard regarding this difficulty is that there was only one temple cleansing—near the end of Jesus’ life—and John’s placement of this event at an earlier time is the result of his “theological,” rather than “chronological,” approach to writing his account of the life and teachings of Jesus. The problem with this explanation is that, although overall John may have been a little less concerned with chronology than were the other writers, a straightforward reading of the text favors the position that this particular clearing of the temple was not something that occurred near the end of Jesus’ life. The record of Jesus’ first miracle, beginning in John 2:1, begins with the phrase, “On the third day....” This section ends with John writing the words, “After this...” (2:12, Greek *meta touto*). Fol-

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lowing verse 12, John then begins his account of the temple cleansing saying, “Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand...” (2:13). It certainly would appear to be “out of the ordinary” for John to jump ahead nearly three years in the life of Jesus to an event that occurred in Jerusalem during the last week of His life, only then to backtrack to a time prior to “the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee” (John 4:54). Admittedly, John would not have erred in writing about the temple cleansing early in his gospel account if the Holy Spirit saw fit to mention the event at that time. (Perhaps this would have been to show from the outset of Jesus’ ministry that He “repudiated what was central to the Temple cults, and further that his death and resurrection were critically important”—Morris, 1995, p. 167.) A better explanation of this alleged contradiction exists, however: There were two temple cleansings.

Why not? Who is to say that Jesus could not have cleansed the temple of money-hungry, hypocritical Jews on two separate occasions—once earlier in His ministry, and again near the end of His life as He entered Jerusalem for the last time? Are we so naïve as to think that the temple could not have been corrupted at two different times during the three years of Jesus’ ministry? Jesus probably visited the temple several times during the last few years of His life on Earth (especially when celebrating the Passover—cf. John 2:13,23; 6:4; 11:55), likely finding inappropriate things going on there more than once. Do churches in the twenty-first century sometimes have problems that recur within a three-year span? Have church leaders ever dealt with these problems in a public manner multiple times and in similar ways? Of course. (“How soon men forget the most solemn reproofs, and return to evil practices”—Barnes, 1956, p. 196.)

What evidence does a person possess, which would force him to conclude that Jesus cleansed the temple only once? There is none. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded a temple cleansing late in Jesus’ ministry, much evidence exists to indicate that John recorded an earlier clearing of the temple. It is logical to conclude that the extra details recorded in John 2 are not simply supplemental facts (even though the writers of the gospels did supplement each others’ writings fairly frequently). Rather, the different details recorded by John likely are due to the fact that we are dealing with two different temple cleansings. Only John mentioned (1) the oxen and sheep, (2) the whip of cords, (3) the scattering of the money, (4) Jesus’ command, “Take these things away,” and (5) the disciples’ remembrance of Psalm 69:9: “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up” (2:17). Furthermore, John did not include Jesus’ quotation of Isaiah 56:7, which is found in all three of the other accounts, and stands as a prominent part of their accounts of the temple cleansing.

In view of the major differences in wording, in setting, and in time, as well as the fact that, apart from the work of John the Baptizer, nothing in the first five chapters of John’s gospel account is found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke, “we will require more evidence than a facile assumption that the two similar narratives must refer to the same event” (Morris, 1995, p. 167). There is no chronological contradiction here.

WHEN DID THE TEMPLE VEIL TEAR?

A few years ago, a journal dedicated to revealing (alleged) Bible errors petitioned its readers to submit their “best” biblical questions and arguments that “they have found through actual experience to be exceptionally effective vis-à-vis biblicists...and they will probably be published for all to see and use” (McKinsey, 1988a, p. 6). The first response printed in the journal (two months later) was from a man who listed among his top five “Bible contradictions” a question of whether or not the veil of the temple was torn in two “before” (Luke 23:44-46) or “after” (Matthew 27:50-51) Jesus died on the cross. The skeptic stated that this question was one of his favorites to ask because it elicited “such ludicrous rebuttals from Christian apologists” (McKinsey, 1988b, p. 6).

Before taking the skeptic’s word at face value as to what these scriptures actually say (or do not say), compare the passages for yourself.

And Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:50-51, ASV; cf. Mark 15:37-38).

And it was now about the sixth hour, and a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, the sun’s light failing: and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit”: and having said this, he gave up the ghost (Luke 23:44-46).

Do you read anything in either Matthew or Luke’s account that says the veil was torn “before” or “after” Jesus died (to use the skeptic’s own words)? Granted, Luke did mention the rending of the veil before he recorded that Jesus died, and Matthew mentioned it after recording His death, but neither made any direct statements that would indicate exactly when the rending took place. Simply because one Bible writer recorded something before, or after, another writer does not mean that either writer is attempting to establish a chronological time line. Unless the skeptic can point to a verse by both writers that says these events occurred in the precise order in which they are recorded, then no case can be made for these two passages being incompatible.

Consider for a moment the “to do list” that many of us make either daily or weekly. If someone peeked at your list and saw where you crossed off the first four things, but the things that you had marked off

were not in the same order in which you accomplished them, would you be guilty of lying (to yourself or to a colleague)? No. Imagine also that you returned home after work one day, and told your children some of the things you had accomplished at the office. Then, you told your spouse the same things you told your children, only in a somewhat different order. Would your children have any right to call you a liar if they overheard this second conversation between you and your spouse? Of course not. The only reason your children might be justified in calling you a liar is if you had told both them and your spouse that every event you rehearsed happened in the precise order in which you mentioned them.

Certain situations simply warrant silence on a subject, rather than an exhaustive detailing of historical facts

The only way a skeptic could prove that Matthew 27:50-51 and Luke 23:44-46 are contradictory is if he or she could establish that both writers claimed to be writing all of these events in precisely the same order in which they occurred. Since, however, the critic cannot prove such intended chronology, he is left with another **alleged** and **unproven** “contradiction.” Interesting, is it not, that this fairly simple “problem” was listed as a “top-five” question with which to “stump” a Christian?

TO GALILEE OR JERUSALEM?

Three times in the gospel of Matthew, the writer recorded where certain disciples of Jesus were instructed to meet the Lord in Galilee after His resurrection. During the Passover meal that Jesus ate the night of His betrayal, He informed His disciples, saying, “After I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee” (Matthew 26:32). Three days later, on the day of Jesus’ resurrection when Mary Magdalene and the other women came to the empty tomb of Jesus, Matthew recorded how an angel told them to notify the disciples of Jesus’ resurrection, and to tell them exactly the same thing they were told three days earlier: “He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him” (28:7). Then, only three verses later, as the women

were on their way to inform the disciples of Jesus’ resurrection and the message given to them by the angel, Matthew recorded how Jesus appeared to them and said: “Rejoice!... Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me” (28:9-10). Sometime thereafter, “the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them,” and “worshiped Him” (28:16-17).

According to Matthew, Jesus unquestionably wanted to meet with His disciples in Galilee following His resurrection. However, some skeptics and sincere Bible students have asked why, according to Luke, Jesus met with His disciples in Jerusalem (24:33-43), and then commanded them to stay there until they were “endued with power from on high” (24:49)? Does Luke’s account contradict Matthew’s? According to one Bible antagonist,

Matthew, Mark, and John have Jesus saying the disciples are to rendezvous with him in Galilee, northern Israel, about three days journey away. In contradiction to this, Luke’s two books—The Gospel of Luke and The Book of Acts, have Jesus planning to rendezvous in Jerusalem....

In the real world, people cannot be in two places at the same time, and to claim otherwise is to be caught up in a contradiction.... The Bible, like the cheating husband, has been caught in a contradiction, exposed as a liar, and therefore can’t be trusted to tell the truth (Smith, 1995).

Is the skeptic right? Is the Bible at fault in this instance? Does it place the same people in two different places “at the same time”? Where exactly did Jesus intend to meet with His disciples—in Galilee or Jerusalem?

The truth is, Jesus met with His disciples in both places, but He did so at **different** times. One of the reasons so many people allege that two or more Bible passages are contradictory is because they fail to recognize that mere differences do not necessitate a contradiction. For there to be a bona fide contradiction, not only must one be referring to the same person, place, or thing in the same sense, but **the same time period** must be under consideration. If a person looks at a single door in the back of a building and says, “That door is shut,” but also says, “That door is open,” has he contradicted himself? Not necessarily. The door may have been shut at one moment, but then opened the next by a strong gust of wind. Time and chrono-

nology are important factors to consider when dealing with alleged errors in the Bible.

Consider another illustration that more closely resembles the alleged problem posed by the skeptic. At the end of every year, the professional and managerial staff members at Apologetics Press travel to Birmingham, Alabama, for a two-day, end-of-the-year meeting. Suppose the Executive Director reminds us of this event three days beforehand, saying, "Don't forget about our meeting in Birmingham beginning Thursday," and then calls our homes on the morning of the meeting as another reminder, saying, "Don't forget about our meeting today in Birmingham." Would someone be justified in concluding that our Executive Director had lied about the meeting if, on that Thursday morning, all of the staff members at Apologetics Press (including the Executive Director) showed up at work in Montgomery, and carried out some of the same tasks performed on any other workday? Not at all. Actually, on the day the staff at Apologetics Press leaves for the end-of-the-year meeting, it is common for everyone to work until about 10:30 a.m., and then depart for the meeting in Birmingham. If someone asked whether we went into work in **Montgomery** on Thursday, one honestly could say, "Yes." If someone else asked if we traveled to **Birmingham** on Thursday for a two-day meeting, again, one could truthfully say, "Yes." Both statements would be true. We met at both places on the same day, only at **different** times.

Similarly, Jesus met with His disciples **both** in Jerusalem and in Galilee, but at different times. On the day of His resurrection, He met with all of the apostles (except Thomas) in Jerusalem, just as both Luke and John recorded (Luke 24:33-43; John 20:19-25). Since Jesus was on the Earth for forty days following His resurrection (cf. Acts 1:3), sometime between this meeting with His apostles in Jerusalem and His ascension more than five weeks later, Jesus met with seven of His disciples at the Sea of Tiberias in Galilee (John 21:1-14), and later with all eleven of the apostles on a mountain in Galilee that Jesus earlier had appointed for them (Matthew 28:16). Sometime following these meetings in Galilee, Jesus and His disciples traveled back to Judea, where He ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives near Bethany (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12).

None of the accounts of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances contradicts another. Rather, each writer supplemented what another left out. Jesus may have appeared to the disciples a number of times during the forty days on Earth after His resurrection (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-7), while the New Testament writers mentioned only the more prominent instances in order to substantiate the fact of His resurrection.

But, one may ask, "Why did Jesus command His apostles to 'tarry in the city of Jerusalem' **on the day of His resurrection** until they were 'endued with power from on high' (Luke 24:49), if He really wanted them to meet Him in Galilee?" Actually, it is an assumption to assert that Jesus made the above statement on the

same day that He arose from the grave. As has been shown throughout this article, Bible writers frequently moved from one subject to the next without giving the actual time or the exact order in which something was done or taught (cf. Luke 4:1-3; Matthew 4:1-11). In Luke 24, the writer omitted the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in Galilee (mentioned by both Matthew and John). However, notice that he never stated that Jesus remained **only** in Jerusalem from the day He rose from the grave until the day He ascended into heaven.

According to Luke 24 verses 1,13,21,29, and 33, the events recorded in the first forty-three verses of that chapter all took place on the very day of Jesus' resurrection. The last four verses of Luke 24 (vss. 50-53), however, took place (according to Luke) more than five weeks later (cf. Acts 1:1-12). But what about verses 44-49? When were these statements made? The truth is, no one can know for sure. Luke gives no indication (as he did in the preceding verses) that this particular section took place "on the first day of the week" (24:1), or on "the third day" since Jesus' crucifixion (24:21). All we know is that verses 44-49 took place sometime before He ascended into heaven (vss. 50-51). Simply because Luke used the Greek conjunctive particle *de* [translated "and" (ASV), "then" (NKJV), and "now" (NASV)] to begin verse 44, does not necessarily denote a close connection between the two verses, but only a general continuation of the account and a brief statement of what Jesus said. Even though many twenty-first-century readers assume that the events recorded in Luke 24:44-49 occurred on the very day Jesus rose from the grave, the text actually is silent on the matter.

WHEN DID PAUL GO TO JERUSALEM?

Three times in the book of Acts, the Bible student is informed that after Saul's conversion to Christ in Damascus, he departed for Jerusalem. According to Acts chapter 9, Saul (also called Paul) "increased all the more in strength" following his baptism into Christ, and "confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus" (vs. 22). Then, when "many days were past... the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket" for fear of the Jews (vss. 23,25). Immediately following these verses, the text reads: "**And when Saul had come to Jerusalem**, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that

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he was a disciple” (vs. 26, emp. added). Add to these verses Paul’s respective statements to the Jerusalem mob (Acts 22:17) and to King Agrippa (Acts 26:20) regarding his journey from Damascus to Jerusalem, and Bible students get the impression that shortly after Paul’s conversion in Damascus, he journeyed to Jerusalem. The problem with this reasoning is that Paul later wrote to the churches of Galatia, and indicated that he “did not immediately...go up to Jerusalem” following his conversion to Christ (Galatians 1:16). Rather, he went to Arabia, back to Damascus, and then **after three years** he went up to Jerusalem (1:17-18). [NOTE: “Arabia” generally is taken as a reference to the vast peninsula which bears that name. Its northwestern boundaries reached almost to Damascus—Pfeiffer, 1979, p. 203.] Concerned Bible students want to know how these passages are harmonized? Did Paul go straight to Jerusalem shortly after his conversion, or three years later?

Although Acts chapters 9, 22, and 26 all indicate that Paul went from Damascus to Jerusalem after he became a Christian, one must realize that none of these passages specifically says that Paul went **straight** from Damascus to Jerusalem. It only says, “And **when** Saul had come to Jerusalem....” The writer of Acts gives no time limitations here. In fact, nowhere in the New Testament will a person find a statement denying that three years expired between Paul’s conversion and his first trip to Jerusalem as a Christian. Although rarely emphasized, what the Bible does **not** say regarding Paul’s journeys is very important—it proves that the alleged contradiction is based only on speculation, and not on a fair representation of the Scriptures.

Some question why Paul did not mention his trip to Arabia to preach among the Gentiles when he spoke to the Jewish mob in Jerusalem, and later to King Agrippa. Was it not a vital piece of information? Did he just “forget” about this part of his life? Actually, Paul had a good reason for not mentioning his trip to Arabia—he was speaking to Jews who were “seeking to kill him” because of his dealings with Gentiles (Acts 21:28-31). As a way of comparison, we can understand why a college football player who transferred from a rival school may not talk to his current teammates about his former college experiences, or why a new sales representative who transferred from a competing company may refrain from talking to current customers and/or coworkers about the three years he spent with the rival company. In a sim-

ilar way, it did not aid Paul’s cause to mention at the very outset of his speech that some of his first work for the Lord was done among the Gentiles. (The Jews hated Paul for his dealings with the Gentiles. The events recorded in Acts 21 alone are proof of such hatred.) Certain situations simply warrant silence on a subject, rather than an exhaustive detailing of historical facts. Paul did not lie (to the Jerusalem mob or to King Agrippa) about his past experience working with the Gentiles for a time; he merely **omitted** this piece of information in his efforts to show his fellow Jews that the very people among whom he had been a loyal persecutor were those to whom he now preached.

The twenty-first-century reader must remember that a Bible writer (or a speaker whom a Bible writer quotes) may be writing/speaking from one point of view, and raise a point that may not be made in another situation. Neither Paul in his speeches, nor Luke in penning the book of Acts to Theophilus, saw a need to mention Paul’s journey to Arabia. In his letter to the churches of Galatia, however, Paul was dealing with Judaizers who taught that one had to keep the Law of Moses to be saved, and who wished to discredit Paul as an apostle. Paul thus wrote to tell them that after his conversion, he preached among the Gentiles for an extended amount of time **before ever meeting with another apostle**. Paul did not hurry off to Jerusalem to get instruction and approval from the Twelve. In defense of his apostolic credentials to the churches of Galatia, Paul mentioned his delayed journey to Jerusalem in order to emphasize (among other things) his genuine apostleship, whose message and authority came from Almighty God, and not from the twelve apostles, or any other person.

CONCLUSION

The burden of proof is on the Bible critic to verify his allegations. Although one of the skeptics quoted earlier compared the Bible to a “cheating husband” who “has been caught in a contradiction,” one must remember how equally deplorable it is to draw up charges of marital unfaithfulness when there is no proof of such. In reality, the Bible should be likened to a faithful husband who has been wrongfully accused of infidelity by prejudiced, overbearing skeptics whose case is based upon unproven assumptions.

The apologist does not have to know the exact solution to an alleged contra-

diction; he need only show one or more possibilities of harmonization. We act by this principle in the courtroom, in our treatment of various historical books, as well as in everyday-life situations. It is only fair, then, that we show the Bible the same courtesy by exhausting the search for possible harmony between passages before pronouncing one or both accounts false.

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