



Messenger Project Newsletter

The Messenger

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A NONPROFIT CORPORATION PROMOTING THE BIBLE THROUGH THE ARTS

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Messenger Notes

Messenger Project received good news in December when Pastor **David Massie** from **Calvary Chapel Living Water** in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, called. He had seen us perform at the Lighthouse Café of Huntington Beach in the late 1990s and purchased our *Holy Bible* CD. He felt blessed by our songs from Scripture and wants to share our music with his congregation.

Gospel Discrepancies

Time of Jesus' Crucifixion:

Mark 15:25- "It was the third hour when they crucified him."

John 19:14- "It was the Day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. 'Here is your king,' Pilate said to the Jews."

Some apologists argue that John was referencing from midnight while Mark was referencing from daybreak. The problem with this argument is that John referenced at least two other passages to daybreak and it wouldn't make sense for him to reference the crucifixion differently. Other apologists argue that Pilate offered Jesus to be crucified a day before his execution, but the events in Mark 15:13-24 dispute that argument. Some apologists argue that since John wrote "about the sixth hour," he was giving a ball-park figure. This argument is better, but a three-hour time difference is quite a gap. The best argument is that the writers did not agree on various details of the Gospel tradition. This brings up questions that are difficult to answer. If "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Titus 3:16), how can there be discrepancies in the gospel accounts? Perhaps the "Scripture" Titus was referring to was the Torah or the Old Testament? The New Testament wasn't codified until the fourth century. Christian tradition states that the Gospels were written with help from the Holy Spirit. How else could Luke have known what Jesus prayed while he was

alone in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42)? There is a possibility that some conflicting gospel accounts are due to copying errors. It is also possible that the Holy Spirit allowed the writers to disagree on details (and thus mixed the human element of error with divinely inerrant Scripture). Note the following examples of conflicting gospel accounts:

Jesus' Triumphant Entry. Matthew records that Jesus sent his disciples for a donkey and a colt (Matthew 21:1). Mark and Luke both record that Jesus sent his disciples for a colt (Mark 11:2, Luke 19:30). John records that Jesus found a donkey and sat on it.

Peter's Denial. In John's gospel account, Jesus tells Peter "before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." (John 13:38) In Mark's account, Peter remembers Jesus saying "before the rooster crows twice, you will disown me three times." (Mark 14:72) Some early manuscripts from Mark also record a rooster crowing after Peter's first denial.

Jesus curses the fig tree. Mark's gospel records that Jesus cursed a fig tree before chasing merchants from the Temple and that the fig tree was withered the following morning. (Mark 11:12-15). Matthew's account states that Jesus cursed the fig tree on the morning after chasing the merchants from the Temple and it withered instantly (Matthew 21:12-18). Note that both gospels agree to the time when the tree withered, but not to when it was cursed by Jesus.

Visiting Jesus' tomb. In Matthew's account, Mary Magdalene and another Mary visit Jesus' tomb on Sunday at dawn and find an angel sitting on the burial stone who tells them that Jesus has risen. They hurry from the tomb and suddenly meet Jesus who tells them to tell the disciples that he will meet them in Galilee (Matthew 28:1-10). In John's account, Mary visits the tomb by herself and discovers it empty. She then runs to tell the disciples that someone stole Jesus' body. The disciples run to the empty tomb and leave, but Mary stays at the tomb and is greeted by an angel and Jesus (John 20:1-18).

Judas' death. Matthew records that Judas hung himself after tossing his reward of thirty pieces of silver into the Temple (Matthew 27:5). Luke

records that Judas bought a field with his reward money and fell on the field headlong, causing his body to burst open and his intestines to spill out. Some apologists reconcile these differing accounts by stating that Judas hung himself, then his dead body fell headlong and burst open. But that argument doesn't account for the different versions of what Judas did with his reward money.

Staves and sandals. Mark records that Jesus sent out his disciples and told them "take nothing for the journey except a staff- no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic" (Mark 6:8-9). Matthew records that Jesus said "Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff" (Matthew 10:9-10). Luke records that Jesus said, "Take nothing for the journey- no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic" (Luke 9:3).

These conflicting accounts show us that either the Gospel authors had different recollections of historical details in Jesus' life or that some early manuscripts were copied in error (or a mixture of both possibilities). These conflicting accounts are referred to as the "Synoptic Problem" (Matthew, Mark Luke and John do not agree on some details of the Gospel tradition while other times they match word for word). Although details vary between Gospel accounts, the stories are grounded in actual historical events. Our faith in the Bible need not be shaken by human error.

Critics point to these gospel discrepancies as proof that the Bible is unreliable. This stems from the modern idea of absolute biblical inerrancy, which contends that the Bible must be 100% accurate in order to be true. But a careful study of the Gospel shows that the writers arranged and ordered the material of Gospel traditions in order to emphasize different aspects of Jesus' life. The primary purpose of the Gospel writers was not historical or chronological, but theological. The historical details served the theological purpose of the writers. The details were not as important as the message. This doesn't mean that the stories were fabricated, but that minute details were not important in conveying the theological truth that "there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)