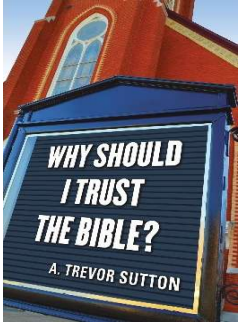


Christ the King Lutheran Church



Why Should I Trust the Bible?

A. Trevor Sutton

Session Four – *Claim: The Gospels disagree*

Elder, Gary Gollenberg, presenting with Pastor Rob Morris

Previous claim: none of Biblical history can be trusted

Tests of context, content, and archaeological evidence

Claim: The Gospels disagree on even the most basic events in the life of Jesus

The blind men and the elephant – a good analogy?

Different authors wrote the Gospels in order to address different audiences. It is woefully naïve to argue that their reports are incorrect simply because they pick up on different events and teachings of the life of Jesus... These unique men had different cares and concerns. Their perspectives were not monochromatic. Their social networks were not the same; the followers of Jesus came from different communities and had ties to extremely different groups of people... To call these differences “inaccuracies” or “mistakes” is an inaccurate mistake. (80-81)

Matthew... places an emphasis on Jewish religious practices and on Jesus fulfilling numerous Old Testament prophecies... Matthew appears to have written his Gospel to the Jewish community in order to proclaim that the long-awaited Messiah had arrived in the person of Jesus.

Mark... Early Church writings connect the text to a colleague of Peter named Mark... the audience of Mark was primarily Greek-speaking and unfamiliar with Jewish practices; the text often explains Jewish customs and translates Aramaic terms.

Luke... Luke states that the genre in which he intends to write is an orderly narrative; readers are instructed to approach this text as an orderly narrative depicting the life and teachings of Jesus.

[Note: don't forget that Luke is the first Volume and Acts is Volume II. – RM]

John... The Gospel of John is not considered to be one of the Synoptic Gospels. The word *synoptic* means similar or same view. The Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – view the life and ministry of Jesus in the same way. The Gospel of John clearly has a different aim, placing a higher emphasis on the eternal truths of Jesus rather than linear history. The audience for the Gospel of John was less concerned with knowing exactly when events happened in the life of Jesus; rather, they were far more concerned with knowing why things happened in the life of Jesus. (81-82)

Refuting the Supposed Inaccuracies

Skeptics have pored over the Gospels and attempted to find as many disagreements and discrepancies as possible. All they have really found, however, are situations in which different authors have arranged material in ways that are appropriate for their different audiences and purposes...



Temptation of Jesus: A careful reading of how Matthew (4:1-11) and Luke (4:1-13) depict the temptation of Jesus will reveal a difference in the ordering of events... this difference in the ordering of the last two temptations is often cited as proof that the Gospels do not accurately capture what happened in the life and ministry of Jesus.

There is, however, a rather obvious response to this claim that is found right in the text. Matthew connects the sequence of temptations with a conjunctive adverb (“then”), indicating an emphasis on sequence of events... Luke connects the various temptations of Jesus with a coordinating conjunction (“and”), indicating a list in no particular order... Matthew places an emphasis on the chronological ordering of the events; Luke makes no indication that the list is supposed to be understood chronologically. Furthermore, Jerusalem is a reoccurring theme in the Gospel of Luke; it is no mistake that the final temptation of Jesus takes place in the holy city of Jerusalem. (83-84)

- You also have to ask: if it's a fiction, why didn't they spot and correct this difference?

The Lord's Prayer: Matthew and Luke present slightly different versions of the Lord's Prayer as well [cf. Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4]... skeptics pounce on these differences and claim that this foundational prayer is built on shaky ground.

This false claim is undone with one simple question: do you think Jesus taught on prayer only once? No! Jesus taught extensively on the topic of prayer... It should also be noted that biblical prayers are not fixed incantations or formulaic statements. Ancient Jewish prayers... were abstracts or guides for how to pray. Jesus likely taught multiple versions of the Lord's Prayer to the disciples. Even if they were not identical, they were all guides given by Jesus for how to pray.

- Again, if it's made up, wouldn't you agree word-for-word on the prayer Jesus himself gave?

Holy Week: The final days of Jesus' life and ministry are the most highly scrutinized days of His entire life... many have concluded that the Gospels epically failed in their attempt to recount the events of Holy Week.

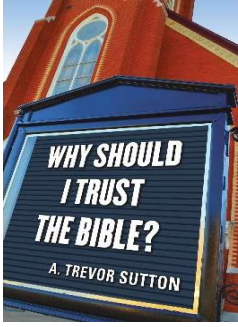
The argument is that the pieces do not fit when you try to put together the events of Holy Week as reported in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. There is agreement about what happened up until about Wednesday of Holy Week. The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) report that the Last Supper occurred around this time, while Jesus was celebrating a Passover meal (Luke 22:7)... The Gospel of John, however, reports that the Last Supper occurred before the Feast of the Passover (John 13:1)... This makes it unclear not only on which day the Last Supper happened, but also when the subsequent trial and crucifixion of Jesus took place. Furthermore, many scholars are skeptical as to how both Jewish and Roman trials could take place between Thursday evening and Friday morning. These are commonly cited as inconsistencies and proof that the Gospels cannot be trusted.

This is quite troubling. That is to say, it is quite troubling until you know something about ancient calendars... There were no atomic clocks during the time of Jesus. Determining days and times was a local approximation rather than an exact science. Furthermore, there was not a universally accepted calendar to govern the days... It is reasonable to think that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were referencing one calendar while John was referencing an entirely different calendar... There is evidence that various Jewish groups (Samaritans, Zealots, and the Essenes) used different calendars during the first century in Jerusalem. If the Gospels are referencing different calendars to suggest when the Last Supper occurred, then there is no real disagreement.

- Also, Jewish days start at sundown, thus preparation happens Wednesday and meal Thursday.



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