

AN EXAMINATION OF ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS IN THE GOSPELS

by

F. Furman Kearley, Ph.D.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM

The problem raised concerning alleged contradictions in the Gospels, or for that matter, anywhere within the Bible, is a most serious one and deserves careful consideration. First, the doctrine of full or complete inspiration is at stake. How can the material be inspired of the Holy Spirit and at the same time contain contradictions? Second, the authority and credibility of the Bible are being weighed in the balances. If there are some errors that are apparent, there may be many others that are not. If the Bible contains contradictions, then one could not trust the accounts recorded therein. Third, if the Gospels are not inspired and cannot be relied upon for accuracy, there is no way that men today can know with any certainty what Jesus did, what He said, or if indeed He is Who He claimed to be. Fourth, if the Gospels are not inspired, and are not accurate historically, then the foundation of Christianity is destroyed since one would be unable to distinguish between what is of man and what is of God. L. Gaussen emphasized the importance of the problem when he wrote: "First of all, we acknowledge that, were it true that there were, as they tell us, erroneous facts and contradictory narratives in the Holy Scriptures, one must renounce any attempt to maintain their plenary inspiration. But we are not reduced to this: These alleged errors do not exist" (1949, p. 207).

THE FAILURE OF ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS IN HISTORY

The first evidence to support Gaussen's assertion that alleged errors do not exist is the fact that opponents of Christianity from the very earliest times have attempted to find contradictions in the Bible—with Christian apologists in every age having met and refuted their arguments. The critics' lack of success may be seen by noting the spread of Christianity and the increased circulation of the Bible in more than fifteen hundred languages, while the critics have died and their arguments now sit covered with dust on the shelves of libraries. Every now and then, some critic revives an old alleged contradiction, but all have been answered at one time or another. Gaussen briefly traced this conflict:

The Scriptures have in all ages had their adversaries and their defenders—their Celsuses as well as their Origenes—their Porphyries as well as their Eusebiuses—their Castellios, and their Calvins, their Strausses and their Hengstenbergs. It is now sixteen hundred years since Malchus Porphyry, that learned and spiteful Syrian, who lived in Sicily under the reign of Diocletian, and whom Jerome calls *radibum adversus Christum canem*, wrote fifteen books—the fourth of which was directed against the Pentateuch, the twelfth and the thirteenth against Daniel—there was one (the first) entirely devoted to the bringing together of all the contradictions which, he maintained, he had found in the Scriptures (1949, p. 208).

Arguments concerning alleged contradictions in the Bible were advanced in the past history of the United States by men like Thomas Paine and Robert Ingersoll. Dynamic preaching and debating refuted them, with the result being the “Great Awakening.” Modern critics continue to document contradictions in the Bible, but these contradictions are being refuted just as those throughout history have been.

ATTITUDE IS THE KEY

Whether contradictions are seen in the Gospels, or whether harmony is observed among the four Gospels, is involved almost completely in the attitude of the individual reader toward the material. If one is seeking to find contradictions, he can create them where they do not exist. An example will make this clear. One critic wrote:

Ask yourself, did Judas kiss Jesus to betray him or not? Mark-Matthew say that Judas kissed Jesus. But Luke says that Judas tried to kiss Jesus and did not make it. For John, there was no betrayal kiss at all. And, John underlines his point of view by adding that Judas kept standing with the crowd (Lewis, 1972, p. 3).

Listen to what Luke actually records, “But Jesus said unto him, ‘Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?’” (Luke 22:48). Luke nowhere says that Judas tried to kiss Jesus but failed. The critic is so desirous of finding a contradiction that he is blind to what Luke said and puts other words into his mouth. The truth is that Luke does not record the completion of the act, but this in no way contradicts Matthew and Mark and in no way infers that the kiss did not take place. The critic again blindly inferred that John said there was no kiss. In truth, John simply omitted the entire matter and did not mention this act of betrayal. His omission of this detail in no way contradicts the other gospels any more than his omission to record the Sermon on the Mount constitutes a denial that the Sermon on the Mount was delivered. In truth, none of the Gospel writers records anywhere near **all** of the details of the Lord’s ministry. However, critics seize upon any imagined variation and cry, “Contradiction!” This is simply because

they **want** to find a contradiction, for they cannot stand the message of the Gospel and must attempt to overthrow its authority.

In everyday life, one can observe how significant attitude is in approaching the evaluation of other men's words. If one person is hostile toward another, he constantly is picking over everything he says or does, and infers flaws and contradictions repeatedly when such really do not exist. On the other hand, if one is favorably disposed toward another, he attempts to find harmony in everything the other person says or does. The sincere and honest method of approaching any such matters is to assume harmony and to grant honesty and credibility to others until the opposite is proved beyond a shadow of a doubt. The critics, however, not only attempt to magnify slight variations in the Gospel accounts into contradictions, but frequently create problems where there are none by making or inferring statements that are not present in the text. Another example might illustrate the matter even more clearly. One critic affirmed: "Mark-Matthew say that Jesus prayed three times and each time came again to find his friends asleep. Luke says this happened only once John has no praying, no watching, no sleeping and no waking at all" (Lewis, 1972, p. 4).

A careful examination of Luke 22:39-46 indicates that Luke never said "This happened only once." What Luke does do is to abbreviate the account of the event in the garden. He records a part of Jesus' prayer in verse 42, then clearly seems to indicate that Jesus prayed further by using the phrase (in verse 44), "he prayed more earnestly." Simply because Luke abbreviates the account of this event and does not give all of the details that the other writers give in no way indicates that he is contradicting them. Luke never said "Jesus prayed only once." Further, John certainly does not contradict the other Gospel writers. John simply omits the entire incident in the Garden of Gethsemane. Certainly **an omission does not constitute a contradiction**. The above critic felt so compelled to find a contradiction, in order to escape the authority of the Gospel, that he created one by his own inferences. I would not want such an illogical person as this critic on a jury that was to decide my fate.

In approaching a study of the alleged contradictions in the Gospels we must ask ourselves, "Am I desirous of finding a contradiction or am I desirous of finding harmony and solutions to problems?" Many

problems in the local church are stirred up and intensified by people who constantly see flaws and contradictions where there are none. Churches have peace and harmony because people are willing to give others the benefit of the doubt instead of immediately calling them liars because two different statements do not exactly coincide.

HIGH ETHICS ASSURE HARMONY

Practically everyone acquainted with the Bible acknowledges that the Gospels present the highest ethical standards known to mankind. Even those who do not accept the divine authority of the Gospels recognize the high ethical value of the material. Yet critics have alleged well over 100 contradictions between various parts of the Gospels. How is it possible for these books to have the highest quality as true witnesses and be telling the truth, while at the same time constituting the height of folly in being false witnesses to the things of which they testify. If four witnesses should be placed on the witness stand in a court of law and more than 100 contradictions were found between their testimonies, they would be laughed to scorn, regarded as liars, and prosecuted for perjury. Certainly the Gospel writers were competent men who were capable of knowing what they had seen and heard and capable of relating it accurately. There are no contradictions between their testimony—only problems created by enemies who want to destroy that testimony.

REASONS FOR ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS

First, the most basic reason for the allegation of contradictions in the Gospels is the antisupernatural/anti-Christian bias that seeks to discredit the deity of Christ, His vicarious death, His bodily resurrection, His miracles, and the authority of His teaching.

Second, some allege contradictions in the Gospels because they fail to study carefully the Gospel accounts themselves. Rather they listen to critics and then parrot what critics have said the Gospels contain instead of examining what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John actually stated.

Third, some seem to find contradictions in the Gospels because they fail to arrange in a careful and chronological sequence the events and teachings recorded in the Gospels.

Fourth, the failure to recognize the nature of the Gospels causes some to find supposed contradictions. Critics assume that each Gospel is a rather complete biography of the life of Christ. Therefore, they assume that an omission constitutes a contradiction. However, the Gospels are not complete biographies. The Gospels are limited in the days, and in the events, of the life of Christ with which they deal. Some have estimated the Gospels contain events from only about 35 days in the life of Christ. His ministry alone, of three-and-one-half years, would have covered more than 1200 days. Truly John indicated that Jesus did many more signs than were recorded and that if everything Jesus did **was** recorded the world itself would not contain the books that should be written (John 20:30,32; 21:25). In such abbreviated accounts, no one should expect to find the same exact details in one account as in the others. Certainly, one should expect to find many omissions between the accounts, as well as some events recorded more fully by one or more briefly by another.

Fifth, many critics fail to realize the repetitive nature of the activities and the teaching of Christ and, therefore, they see a contradiction in an account or in a quotation when really two different occasions are under consideration. It is only logical that Jesus would have repeated the same type of activities in village after village. He would have repeated the same basic lessons many times. It is quite possible that He would have delivered the Sermon on the Mount in various forms more than 100 times during His ministry. Consider the political oratory that occurs in our country. If one should examine the speeches of Ronald Reagan, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, or other political candidates, he would find them repeating the same basic messages in various forms. While our Lord was not in a political campaign in the ordinary sense of those words, He was in a campaign against the devil and for the souls of men. Everywhere He went He did and said the things needful to prepare men for the coming of the kingdom. Therefore, one cannot prove a contradiction simply because there is some slight variation in the way some great principle is stated. There is no doubt the Lord's disciples heard Him utter the same great truths, with several variations in wording, during the course of their time with Him.

THE DEFINITION OF A CONTRADICTION

The main problem in the discussion concerning alleged contradictions is the understanding of exactly what constitutes a contradiction. It is essential that the term “contradiction” be defined properly. J.W. McGarvey commented on this point as follows:

Two statements are contradictory not when they differ, but when they cannot both be true. If, on any rational hypothesis, we may suppose them both to be true, we cannot rightfully pronounce them contradictory. We are not bound to show the truth of the given hypothesis; but only that it may be true. If it is at all possible, then it is possible that no contradiction exists; if it is probable, then it is probable that no contradiction exists; and the degree of the latter probability is measured by that of the former. This being true, it follows that an omission by one writer of a fact which in a full account would have been mentioned, and is mentioned by another, is not a contradiction. It shows that the writer who makes the omission does not give a full account; but throws no suspicion on the author by whom the fact is mentioned. It follows, also, that when there is an appearance of contradiction between two writers, common justice requires that before we pronounce one or both of them false we should exhaust our ingenuity in searching for some probable supposition on the ground of which they may both be true. The better the general reputation of the writers, the more imperative is this obligation, lest we condemn as false those who are entitled to respectful consideration (1886, part 2, p. 32).

McGarvey set forth four principles that should guide the examination of each alleged contradiction.

(1) Is it possible or probable for both statements to be true at the same time? (2) An omission is not a contradiction. (3) Common justice requires that one exhaust the search for possible harmony before pronouncing one or both accounts false. (4) The general reputation of the writer for integrity should be highly respected and not tarnished unless there is absolute proof of a contradiction. It also is quite possible for terms to be used in completely different senses by the same author or by different authors. R.A. Torrey wrote concerning this point:

We must remember first of all that two statements which in terms flatly contradict one another may be both of them absolutely true, for the reason that the terms are not used in the same sense in the two statements. For example, if any man should ask me if I ever saw the back of my head, I might answer, “No, I never saw the back of my head,” and this statement would be strictly true. Or, I might answer, “Yes, I have seen the back of my head,” and this statement would also be true, though the two statements appear to flatly contradict one another. The back of my head I have never seen, but more than once when looking into a glass with another glass back of me, I have seen the back of my head. It depends entirely upon what the man means when he asks me the question if I ever saw the back of my head, what I should answer him. If he means one thing, I answer “No,” and that is true. If he means another thing, I answer “Yes, I have seen the back of my head,” and that is equally true (1907, pp. 80-81).

An example of the difference in the use of terminology may be seen in the contrast between John 1:18 and Exodus 24:10. The passage in Exodus affirms that the leaders of Israel **saw God**. The passage in John, on the other hand, states that **no man has seen God**. The critic, anxious to find a contradiction,

immediately sees one. However, a careful and honest student of God's Word knows that many times in the Bible God allowed different people to see a **manifestation** of Him. Yet the diligent student of the Bible also knows that throughout God's Word, He is presented as invisible and omnipresent. Therefore, it is utterly impossible for man to see a spiritual, invisible, omnipresent God. But man can see a **form** of God when God chooses to manifest such a form to him. It is certain there is no contradiction in these statements except to the man who is determined to find one. Indeed, John and Paul were thoroughly familiar with the many instances in which men were allowed to see some manifestation of God. Yet, they saw no contradiction in still affirming that God is a Spirit, that He is invisible, and that no man has seen Him, understanding by this that no man has seen Him **in His fullness**.

SPECIFIC TYPES AND EXAMPLES OF ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS

Contradictions Alleged on the Basis of Difference in Structure Between the Gospels

Some critics contend that there is a contradiction between the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and John concerning the length of the Lord's ministry. The critics charge that the synoptic Gospels represent the length of His ministry as being limited to a single year, but that John represents it as extending over at least three years (McGarvey, 1886, part 1, p. 149). There is, however, certainly no basis for such a charge. There is no indication within the first three Gospels that they intended to limit the ministry of Jesus to one year. They simply did not attempt to deal with the length, and passing, of time and placed no stress on it. A careful study of these Gospels clearly presents evidence of the passage of more than one year. John, on the other hand, specifically mentions three, and perhaps four, Passover feasts so that it is an easy matter to note the passage of time. Yet there is no contradiction in the Gospels on the length of the Lord's ministry.

Contradictions Alleged on the Basis of Differences in Style

Some critics contend that the spirit, form, terminology, and style of the discourses by Jesus as recorded in the synoptic Gospels are diametrically opposed to the spirit, form, and terminology of His discourses as recorded in John (McGarvey, 1886, part 1, p. 149). In reply, any argument based on style is a most subjective argument. A study of such arguments indicates that critics rarely ever agree among them-

selves in evaluating style. Certainly, such an argument is too subjective a basis to support the charge of a contradiction. Furthermore, such a charge has the effect of accusing either John or the synoptic authors of deliberately creating speeches and putting them in the mouth of Jesus. Such an act would be grossly unethical. Yet the general reputation of the writers, and the thrust of their material, stresses that they were men of the highest principle. Further, even human authors can vary their style and form depending upon the audience and situation. Certainly, the divine Son of God was not limited in any way by style and form.

Contradictions Alleged on the Basis of Differences in Quotations

Critics attempt to make much concerning the variation of quotations recorded in the Gospels. One critic charged: "Mark-Matthew say the Centurion confessed that Jesus was 'A (the) son of God.' Luke changes this to: 'He was innocent.' What did the Centurion say?" (Lewis, 1972, p. 5).

In response to the alleged contradictions based on variations in quotations, several points need to be made. First, the quotations may be completely different statements made by the same person at the same time or at different times. There is absolutely no reason why the Centurion could not have made two, five, or ten different statements concerning Christ at the point of his realization of the true nature of Christ and the significance of the events in which he was caught up. If the Centurion concluded that Jesus was the Son of God, it indeed follows that he would conclude as Luke records him saying, "Certainly this was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47).

Second, it should be noted that the quotations recorded in the Gospels are translations by four different authors from the Aramaic language, most likely, into Greek. It generally is agreed by scholars that the language used by Jesus, His disciples, and the people with whom they conversed in Palestine was Aramaic. Since the Gospels were written in Greek, the writers had to translate from Aramaic into Greek. This would result in some variation within the quotations and terminology. For example, in the quotations concerning the camel and the eye of the needle, each different synoptic writer used a slightly different word

for eye. Matthew and Mark use the same word for needle, but Luke used a different word (Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25).*

Third, it must be remembered in dealing with Christ's quotations that He may have repeated the same concept many times in many different situations, although using slightly different wording. This would easily explain, for example, the supposed conflicts between the phraseology of the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5-7 and the similar statements recorded in Luke but found scattered throughout the book. Gausson's comment on this point is significant:

It does not appear, on close examination, that the sermon called that of **the mount** (Matthew v. vi. vii), and that given by St. Luke in the latter half of his sixth chapter, were delivered on the same occasion. In fact, **first**, St. Luke omits many of the sentences reported by St. Matthew, and he alone adds some others (vi. 24-26); **secondly**, Matthew lets us know, that the sermon which he reports preceded the healing of the leprous person (viii.3), and Luke that his followed it (Luke v. 12); **thirdly**, Luke puts Matthew in the number of those whom Jesus called to the apostleship, and who came down with him from the mountain, before he addressed to them his discourse; whereas Matthew himself tells us, that the sermon of which he speaks, long preceded his vocation; **fourthly**, one of those discourses was delivered **on the mountain**, while Jesus, who had sat down, had his disciples ranged around him; the other, on the contrary, was delivered on the plain, and with other circumstances attending it. We pause at this remark, in order to reassure such persons as may have heard adduced against the doctrine of inspiration, the alleged contradiction of the sentence in which Matthew (v. 40) makes Jesus say, "if any man will take away thy coat let him have thy cloak also"; and of that in which, according to Luke, he has said, "Him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also." One can no more, then, we say, make an objection of this diversity, seeing these two sentences were pronounced on different days (1949, p. 245, emp. in orig.).

Fourth, one must recognize the possibility that some quotations are condensations or paraphrases of longer and more complicated conversations. The Gospel writers were highly selective, and condensed to a great degree the tremendous life, teaching, and ministry of Christ. They omitted many of the events in His life, as John indicated. Further, they must have condensed many of the accounts that are recorded, moving in the process to the important aspects. We recognize the journalistic practice of the news media attempt to condense matters and to get to the heart of a situation quickly. Certainly, the four Gospel writers with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, could carry out such a task. Such a condition may explain the alleged contradictions concerning the variations recorded in the statements by Jairus, or the angels at the tomb. Matthew recorded Jairus as saying, "My daughter is even now dead," (9:18). Mark recorded him as saying, "My little daughter is now at the point of death" (5:23). In such an abbreviated account, Jairus may

* Note also difference in text between the Nestle Greek Text and the Bible Society or Aland Greek Text.

have made both statements. He could have said she was at the point of death when he first came to Jesus, and then upon arriving at the house with Jesus and learning more exactly concerning the situation, he could have said that she was dead. There certainly is not enough variation in this situation (having no more knowledge than we do) to charge that a contradiction has been made. [The same principles govern the problem concerning the statements made by the angels at the tomb of Jesus in Matthew 28:5-8, Mark 16:5-8, and Luke 24:4-8 (John 20:12-13 was spoken by an angel at a completely separate time).]

Contradictions Alleged Due to Variation in the Use of Language and Terminology

An example of this type of contradiction might be the charge that John contradicts the synoptic Gospels on the time of the Passover Feast. This charge is based on the fact that the synoptic Gospels represent Jesus and His disciples as eating the Passover Feast **before** His arrest and crucifixion. Critics have charged that John represents the Passover Feast as being in the future at the time of the trial of Jesus. This charge is based on the statement in John 18:28 that members of the Sanhedrin did not enter into the Praetorium “that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.” However, John seems quite plainly to represent Jesus and His disciples as eating the Passover Feast on the night before (John 13:1-20). Furthermore, there was no Old Testament law making one unclean by entering the house of a Gentile, and the general law concerning uncleanness provided that if one became unclean during the day he should ceremoniously wash himself and be unclean until the evening (Leviticus 15:1-24; 16:23-28). Thus these Jews could have cleansed themselves before the next day began at sunset. If these Jews were mainly priests, it is possible that they were using the term Passover to refer to special offerings that the priests were to make (and of which they were to eat—Numbers 28:16-25). Also, there seems to be evidence that the term Passover was used in a general way for the entire feast of unleavened bread. Thus the term Passover possibly is used in three different ways.

Contradictions Alleged on the Basis of Omissions

In many instances, critics charge that there is a contradiction when the problem simply is a matter of one source omitting what another source records. These occurrences fall into two categories. First, critics assume the omission of a complete event by one Gospel author constitutes the denial that this event took

place. Examples include the miracle of Christ healing the man born blind in John 9, and the raising of Lazarus in John 11. Critics charge that if such notable miracles really took place, then surely the other Gospel writers would have mentioned them. This is a ridiculous charge. Jesus did many notable things that are omitted by **all** of the Gospel writers.

A somewhat more serious example might be involved in the case where Matthew recorded the visit by the wise men and the flight to Egypt. Luke omitted these two events, but recorded the circumcision and the presentation at the temple that Matthew left out. Then Luke mentioned that the family returned to live at Nazareth (Matthew 2:1-18; Luke 2:21-39). Critics charge that the two directly conflict with each other. However, this is not true, for all of the events recorded by both writers can be arranged in sequence so that all of them may be true. The critic cannot prove these contradictions, and in fairness must recognize a sequence that admits all of the accounts. According to many scholars, Luke was aware of Matthew's account. If there had been the slightest thought of contradiction, he would have written so as to avoid this. Also, the earliest Christians accepted Matthew and Luke and saw absolutely no contradiction in the accounts. Otherwise, they would have dealt with the problem in some manner. These early Christians certainly knew more about the matter than any critics who have come along centuries later.

Another type of omission that critics assume constitutes a contradiction involves one author mentioning two or more parties to an event while another mentions only one. One example involves the healing of blind Bartimaeus at Jericho (Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43). Matthew specifically mentioned two blind men and their cure, but gave no personal names. Mark mentioned only one blind man, and gave his name as Bartimaeus. However, he did not say that there was not another blind man. Luke simply said there was "a certain blind man." But he did not deny that there was another. There is no contradiction. A contradiction could be established only if one author said there was **only one** blind man while another said there were **two** blind men. An exact parallel example also is seen in the case of the number of the angels mentioned above (Matthew 28:5-8; Mark 16:2-8; Luke 24:1-8; John 20:11-18).

Contradictions Alleged on the Basis of Misunderstanding Progression in the Narrative

Such a case is illustrated by the critics' charge of contradictions between the narratives concerning the behavior of the thieves crucified with Jesus (Matthew 27:35-44; Mark 15:24-32; Luke 23:33-43; John 19:18-27). All four writers agree there were two thieves. Matthew and Mark stated that state the robbers reproached him. John said nothing of their behavior. Luke specifically mentioned that one of the malefactors railed on Christ, but went into detail as to how the other asked to be remembered by Him. A contradiction could be proved here only if both incidents could not be true. However, it is possible (and even probable) that both thieves at first were insolent and reproachful. Later, one of the thieves became more sober-minded and recognized the unique nature of Christ, even as the Centurion did while the crucifixion progressed.

Contradictions Alleged on the Basis of Variations in Specific Instances

Two examples may serve as illustrations. First, many critics have urged that the two genealogical accounts in Matthew and in Luke are totally irreconcilable. However, Christian apologists from the very earliest times have presented several plausible explanations. The word "son" was used by the Hebrews in at least four different senses—an immediate son, a descendant several generations removed, a Levirate son, or a son by in-law relationship. The two genealogies may be harmonized by accepting one as the legal genealogy including Levirate relationships, and the other as the physical genealogy. On the other hand, one account may be of Joseph's genealogy, while the other account is the genealogy of Mary. At any rate, since there are several possible explanations **a contradiction cannot be proven.**

Second, critics contend that the statements recorded by the different Gospel writers of the superscription over the cross cannot be harmonized. Notice this exact comparison of the statements:

Matthew 27:37	This is Jesus the King of the Jews
Mark 15:26	The King of the Jews
Luke 23:38	This is the King of the Jews
John 19:19	Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews

The accusation is the same in all four narratives—"the King of the Jews." The only variation is in the personal name of Jesus. This seems easily explained by acknowledging that John records the full inscription, while the other writers assume all to understand the personal name and simply focus on the accusation upon which the crucifixion was based. Also involved in the problem is the fact that since the super-
scription was written in three different languages, translation may have been involved in some instances.

JUST APPROACHES IN EXAMINING ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS

If one is sincere in his attempts to examine problems or alleged contradictions in the Gospels and also desires to be fair and just in working with the material, he should follow at least these basic steps:

1. Assume the honesty, integrity, and capability of the Gospel writers.
2. Accept that the writers had more specific and general knowledge about the events than others living centuries later and therefore knew more about what they were writing than critics do about what they are criticizing.
3. Study the material carefully and look for a harmonious arrangement and possible agreement.
4. Recognize the possibility of repeated occurrences of similar events and statements.
5. Recognize the possibility of variation due to (translations from Aramaic to) Greek and from quotations of similar statements under different circumstances.
6. Recognize the Holy Spirit's power to guide the writers in accurately condensing the narratives and stating the heart of the matter.
7. Recognize that our inability to solve a difficulty does not mean that it cannot be solved. We simply may not have enough information at present.

THE STRENGTHS AND ASSETS OF ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS

On the positive side, the alleged contradictions actually add strength to the independent testimony of the Gospel writers.

1. These surface differences clearly show that there was no collusion between the writers. If there had been any apparent problems, they would have been smoothed over. Thus, each writer's testimony is independent (Torrey, 1907, pp. 87-88).
2. These supposed contradictions really bring forth the strong testimony of the early church that the Gospels were in harmony. Had the earliest Christians, who had a more exact knowledge of these matters than any later critics, felt there were any contradictions in the Gospel accounts they would have done one of three things: (a) rejected their testimony and denied Christianity; (b) corrected and harmonized the contradictions; or (c) rejected the

contradicting books as non-canonical. However, the early Christians saw no contradictions and accepted the testimony of the Gospels.

3. These problems cause a more careful study and examination of the Gospels and lead to a more complete picture of the life and teachings of Christ than might be true otherwise.
4. The overall effect is a deeper faith because the testimony of the evangelists has been tried in the fire of controversy and proven accurate.

REFERENCES

Gausson, L. (1949), *The Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*, trans. David D. Scott (Chicago, IL: Moody).

Lewis, Warren (1972), "Every Scripture Breathed of God is Profitable," *Mission*, January.

McGarvey, J.W. (1886), *Evidences of Christianity* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard).

Torrey, R.A. (1907), *Difficulties and Alleged Errors and Contradictions in the Bible* (New York: Revell).