

Eight is Not Enough

On your Mark, get ready, get set, go figure. Here's the gospel truth about Jesus. Just listen to what he said. Surely you Christians can't object to that.

To debunk the fundagelical claim that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible word of God, one need only look at the last chapter of Mark. If we accept that the Christian God is not the God of disorder or confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), then God cannot possibly be the co-author of Mark 16, because disorder and confusion abound there. There are so many variations in the manuscripts after verse 8 that it is impossible to say for sure what is a legitimate part of the Bible and what isn't.

The problem begins where the oldest (and most reliable) version of Mark ends – 16:8. But let's pick up at the beginning of the chapter to see what's going on.

Mark 16:1-8 (NIV)

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

It's clear that early Christians weren't happy with the abrupt ending of Mark. Mark was the first gospel written (around 70 CE),

and that didn't leave those who were trying to craft a new religion much to work with. So, they began to tinker with the text. Their first effort resulted in this appurtenance some 300 years later:

And all that had been commanded them they told briefly to those around Peter. And afterward Jesus himself sent out through them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.

That certainly gave those inventors of the new religion (Christianity) something to hang their hat on. But, it also had the unfortunate effect of directly contradicting verse 8, which gave skeptics something to hang their hat on. So, more tinkering was required, resulting in verses 9-20. Here is one of the most fascinating passages of the entire New Testament.

Mark 16:17-18

And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

The novelist who came up with that gem got just a bit carried away. Anyone with an active brain cell knows from experience (although not necessarily personal experience) that this claim is not true today, and most likely never was. Jesus himself most likely never encouraged believers to pick up poisonous snakes or drink poison. If these verses were anything but fiction, surely Jesus would have done such things himself. If disciples were able to do such things in Jesus' day, why aren't Christians able to do such things today? There are a few people today who are stupid enough to interpret these verses literally and actually give it a go. They quickly become candidates for the Darwin Awards.

So, why would the inerrant, infallible, inspired Word of God say something that is so obviously not true? Watching fundagelicals tie themselves in knots in a pathetic, chimerical attempt to explain it away is rather entertaining. The truth is that it isn't true. It is merely the product of a man with an overabundance of enthusiasm and imagination. He desperately wanted to capture the attention of prospective converts to the new faith. He did apparently capture the attention of Luke (or whoever the author really was).

Luke 10:19

See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you.

The author of Luke got that idea from the author of Mark. And that is how lies, distortions, and exaggerations take on a life of their own. It makes it difficult to separate the things that Jesus actually said and did from the things writers invented about him decades after his death. But it isn't impossible. We can use some of the same methods we use today to determine whether or not someone is lying to us. For example, is the claim something a person would be likely to make up and lie about? In this case, yes. Absolutely. By way of contrast, consider the incident of the cursed fig tree (Mark 11:12-14). Is that something the author of Mark would have likely made up? No. It makes Jesus seem temperamental, emotional, hotheaded, capricious, and vindictive.

There was a recent report of a believer who was bitten by a poisonous snake. He interpreted verses 17 and 18 literally, and he had faith. So much faith that he refused medical treatment, believing that God would miraculously intervene and prevent his premature death. By the time he came to his senses, it was too late. Had he studied the Bible closely, he would have realized that Jesus himself was not the source of the hoax. The author of the phony extension of Mark 16 made it all up.

The Bible is full of errors, inconsistencies, contradictions, conundrums, and absurdities. This just happens to be one of the more obvious. Therefore, clearly the Bible is not inerrant or infallible. And once we realize that, we can start to see that it is not a reliable source of what Jesus said or what he did. And then we cannot escape the obvious conclusion that the entire Christian religion has no foundation other than lies, distortions, imagination, and propaganda.

Does that mean the Bible has no value? No. It certainly has literary value. And there probably is some accurate information concerning Jesus, other characters, and historical events.

There is no historical or archeological proof that Jesus existed. However, I don't take that as proof that he didn't exist. Instead, I take that as proof that, if he did exist, he was a nobody. He wasn't worthy of mention by Roman historians of that era. So, what can

we reliably determine about who Jesus was, what he said, and what he did? Quite a bit, it seems to me. But, how does one go about filtering through the clutter and getting down to what Jesus actually said and did, as opposed to what others made up about him (as the authors of the expanded Mark 16 obviously did).

That's exactly what Thomas Jefferson set out to do, in a project so secret that even his immediate family was totally unaware of it prior to his death. He found it to be a challenging project, and so do I. But I simply start with the gospel of Mark, since it was the first one written, and therefore, closest to the events it describes. That gives it the most authenticity. Next on the reliability scale are Matthew and Luke, both written 10 to 15 years later, and based, in part, on Mark. I don't consider the gospel of John, because it was written almost a century after Jesus died, and because it starts right off with stuff that obviously came from the author, not from Jesus.

I also don't consider Paul's writings, even though Paul began writing about the same time or maybe earlier than Mark. I exclude all his works because they are not based on what Jesus said and did. They are based strictly on Paul. How do I know that? Because Paul said so. He deliberately avoided meeting with any of the disciples for three years. Even then he met briefly with only a couple of them. He had obviously never met Jesus, either. So why would he not eagerly seek out the apostles to get as much first-hand information about Jesus as possible? Because Paul wanted his followers to know that what he taught them came from Paul, not from the apostles. He (foolishly) thought that gave him more credibility. It gives him less. It gives him none.

So, what do we learn about Jesus from the synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew, and Luke)? We learn that Jesus was a Jewish apocalyptic prophet. He adhered to Jewish law, even though he emphasized the spirit of the Law, rather than insincere, mechanical, ostentatious devotion to the Law which he saw being practiced by the Pharisees and Sadducees.

If we pay close attention to Jesus' own words, as presented in the synoptic gospels, we find that he is not the Christian savior at all. He saw himself as the Jewish Messiah. He was chosen by God to be the man who would usher in the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven. And what did Jesus mean by that? His concept of the kingdom of heaven was an earthly kingdom, not the

heavenly version hawked by Christians today. We see proof of that scattered throughout the synoptics.

Matthew 8:11

I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,

It will be a place where people eat, and where people have physical bodies that can be recognized. In Jesus' concept of heaven, people will be people, not ethereal echoes of their former selves.

Matthew 10:5-6

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Jesus was sent to save the Jews, not the whole world. So, it would be primarily Jews in Jesus' concept of the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 10:34

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

Jesus didn't come to secure the status quo. He came to shake things up. But what things, and why? He came to restore Israel as the sovereign nation that rules over the world in the kingdom of heaven. He was the Jewish Messiah.

Matthew 11:12

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.

The kingdom of heaven referred to Israel. It had been subdued and oppressed by foreign powers for a long time, and Jesus was here to fix that by establishing a sovereign, all-powerful Israel.

Matthew 15:24

He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Again, Jesus was here to save the Jews, not the whole world. He encountered a few Gentiles worthy of the kingdom of heaven, but it was to be a Jewish heaven.

Matthew 19:27-29

Then Peter said in reply, “Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life.

Jesus had just finished explaining to the disciples how difficult it was for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Yet, he immediately follows that with this promise of wealth to the disciples. Jesus had taught his disciples to not worry about what they would eat or wear from day to day. Yet now he is promising them large families, plenty of land, and prosperity beyond their wildest dreams. How does that make sense?

It doesn't unless you understand that the kingdom was to be an earthly kingdom, with the disciples sitting as judges over the twelve tribes of Israel. Wealth made it almost impossible to enter the kingdom, because it diverted attention and devotion away from that very kingdom. But, Jesus promised wealth to his disciples because they had already jumped that hurdle. They had already shown their devotion to Jesus and the kingdom. Therefore, they would be richly rewarded with large families and fertile, productive land. Those are things that make sense only in an earthly kingdom of heaven, not the modern Christian nebulous concept of heaven.

Matthew 25:31-33

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

In the final judgment, people were to be judged by their conduct. Those who had obeyed Jewish law would enter the kingdom of heaven, and those who had not obeyed Jewish law would not

enter. That's why Jesus said he had come to minister to Jews, not gentiles. Jewish law was meant for Jews, not gentiles.

Luke 13:29

Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.

Again, eating makes sense in an earthly kingdom, but it makes no sense in the modern Christian paradigm.

Luke 17:21

nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."

What could that mean? The kingdom was already among them? But Israel was still under the thumb of the Romans. Yes, but Jesus had been very busy healing and performing other miracles. He was giving the Jews (primarily) a little taste of what his kingdom of heaven would be like. There would be no disease or hunger in that kingdom. Jesus was giving his followers and prospective followers an idea of what to expect if they followed him and earned their place in the kingdom of heaven. So, a little bit of that kingdom of heaven was already there in the form of Jesus' miracles. (And not just Jesus' healing. The disciples also went around healing people. And not just the 12 apostles. Jesus also commissioned the 70, who went out healing, casting out demons, and doing other supernatural deeds. (Luke 10:1-12, 17-20))

Luke 22:28-30

"You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Again, eating. Again, judging the twelve tribes. That makes sense only in an earthly kingdom of heaven.

And just when was that kingdom of heaven going to be in place? Jesus talked about that quite a bit. He stressed the fact that nobody, including himself, knew the exact date or time of day. But Jesus could and did narrow it down considerably. He said it would happen during his generation. It would arrive while many of his

followers were still alive. It was not some murky promise of something at least 2000 years into the future. It was imminent.

Mark 9:1

And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.”

Mark 13:30

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.

Matthew 16:28

Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Matthew 10:23

When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Matthew 24:34

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.

Luke 9:27

But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”

Mark 13:32:

“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Matthew 24:44

Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Luke 21:32

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.

It is obvious that Jesus was wrong. The kingdom of heaven he expected never materialized. When Jesus died, Jews had to rethink the whole concept of the messiah. As people died, it became ever more painfully clear that Jesus had been wrong, not just in his timing, but his entire portrait of the kingdom of heaven. Paul, aware of the problem, said that Jesus had just been slightly off on his timing, but the kingdom would come during **his** lifetime. But that was wrong as well. What were Jews to make of it?

Their solution was to reinvent the idea of the messiah and to give Jesus a radical makeover. They would transform him from the failed Jewish apocalyptic prophet that he had actually been into the fictional Jesus that formed the foundation of Christianity. We see evidence of it in the synoptics. The most striking example is Mark chapter 16. By the time the gospel of John was written, the transformation had progressed by leaps and bounds. No longer was Jesus who and what he said he was. Now Jesus was the product of imagination. Pure imagination.

Christianity was conceived and constructed from layers of lies. Early Christians couldn't accept the fact that Jesus ended with Mark 16:8. So, they created their own Jesus. It has been successfully marketed for over 2000 years. How could they fool so many people so completely for so long? Because Christians, for the most part, do not read the Bible for themselves. They depend on what others (particularly their pastor or priest) tell them about what the Bible says. And what they tell them is not what the Bible really says at all.

Sure, they have Bible study groups and Sunday School lessons. But those simply reinforce the Christian propaganda. Virtually nobody tries to independently study the Bible and understand what it really says. When they do read it, they see only what they already think they know it says. Reinforcement is the only reason for reading the Bible for them. They read sections at a time, and they see what they want to see.

To truly know what the Bible says, one must abandon that devotional approach and adopt the critical-historical approach to understanding the Bible. Free your mind as much as possible from the indoctrination and propaganda that the Christian community plants there. Read it as though you've never heard anything about it before. And don't just read one book at a time. Compare what the different synoptic gospels say about the same event.

That's what I have done. That's why I now understand that Jesus, if he existed at all, was merely a failed Jewish apocalyptic prophet. He is not the savior of the world. He didn't come to earth to save us from our sins. The whole idea of original sin is a fairy tale. The whole idea of the resurrection is a hoax. Christianity is a fraud. All you need to do to prove that to yourself is read what Jesus himself said. Surely you consider **him** a reliable source.

Suddenly, in this context, so many things that didn't make sense before (in the Christian paradigm) now make sense. Unfortunately, many (probably the vast majority of) Christians will not be able or willing to give up their delusions. They would rather live a comfortable lie than accept the painful truth. I know how difficult it is, because I have experienced it myself. But it can be done. I'm proof of that. That was about 40 years ago, and I've never regretted it. I've never been happier or more free.

One true thing Christians say is that the truth shall set you free. Yes it will, if you let it. But Christianity is not freedom. The last thing Christian leaders want is for you to be free.