

Points to Ponder

Is That Your Final Answer?

What, exactly, did Jesus say in response to the question: “Are you the messiah?”

Mark 14:60-62:

Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” “I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven”.

Luke 22:67-70:

“If you are the Messiah,” they said, “tell us.” Jesus answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.” They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You say that I am”.

What’s the difference? In Mark, Jesus claims that the high priest would live to see the event described. In Luke, that claim disappears. Why? Mark was the first Gospel written. It appears that by the time Luke was written, the high

priest had died, and the author wanted to hide the fact that Jesus’ prediction had not come true.

This is one of many examples showing that Bible authors were not fastidious about facts. They considered it their responsibility to make sure (their idea of) the correct message was conveyed, even if that required them to rewrite history.

Hardened Hearts

This verse comes right after Jesus fed 5000 hungry people and walked on the water.

Mark 6:52:

for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Why were the disciples’ hearts hardened? What does that mean? There is a similar incident in 8:17. We get some idea of what Jesus meant in Mark 3:5-6 and 10:5. Only on those occasions, it was Pharisees who had hardened hearts. Mark 6:52 is the first time Jesus says that about his disciples.

The Greek word (*peporomena, porosai*) means *to harden; to make the heart dull; to grow callous; to lose the power of understanding*. It may be used in the sense of covering with thick skin or a callous. It seems to indicate both a lack of ability to understand and a lack of desire to understand. But clearly the disciples were trying to understand what Jesus did and said. Otherwise, they wouldn’t be his disciples. Putting them

at the same level as Pharisees seems harsh coming from Jesus.

Especially when we consider Mark 10:15:

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.

Jesus' Popularity

John 12:37:

Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him.

If we had only the gospel of John, we'd be left with the impression that Jesus was ignored or rejected by most Jews. We'd think his ministry had been a failure, that he was pretty much wasting his time on his own hard-hearted people. But that's not what we find in the other (synoptic) gospels. There, Jesus attracts so many followers that he can hardly get a moment's rest. There he tries to escape to an isolated area once in a while, but the crowds still find him and beg to be healed. There he tells them not to tell anybody else about his miracles for fear that even more people will seek him out.

Which is right? John or . . .

Matthew 15:29-31:

After Jesus had left that place, he passed along the Sea of Galilee, and he went up the mountain, where he sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute, and many others. They put them at his

feet, and he cured them, so that the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

The author of John has no credibility at all. He is not telling us about his first-hand knowledge of Jesus' life and teachings. He is more of a carnival hawker, selling the embryonic Christian religion. He does that in two ways. First, he claims to be the mysterious disciple whom Jesus loved. That is a blatant fraud.

Second, he frequently makes reference to the many OT prophecies that Jesus purportedly fulfilled. Jesus didn't actually fulfill any OT prophecies, but it was fairly easy to trick early Christians (and modern Christians, unfortunately) into believing he did. All he had to do was write the story of Jesus in such a way that it would appear that Jesus had fulfilled all those prophecies. It wasn't much of a challenge, because John's gospel is mostly fiction, so John could tell the story any way he wanted to. And what John wanted was to win new converts to the new religion. So what if he lied in the process. The end justified the means as far as he and many other early Christians were concerned.

The other gospel authors did the same thing, so they are fraudulent as well. But at least they made an effort to appear as though they are genuine accounts of what Jesus said and did. And they didn't claim to be Jesus' disciples / apostles in the gospels themselves. John alone did that.

Unfortunately, the Bible is our primary source of information about Jesus' life and teachings. There were a number of other writings, including the apocrypha, but if we have any hope of getting to the truth about what Jesus said and did, it is in the NT books of the canonical Christian Bible. John exposes himself as a liar and a fraud. Paul is not a reliable source, because he didn't know Jesus or his disciples. Paul's ideas come from Paul, not Jesus. That leaves us with the synoptic gospels: Mark, Matthew, and Luke.

Yahweh or Nahweh?

Exodus 6:3:

I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord [Yahweh] I did not make myself fully known to them.

Genesis 15:7:

He also said to him [Abraham], "I am the Lord [Yahweh] who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it".

Which is it? Did God identify himself to Abraham as Yahweh, or did he not?

Torn Curtain

Mark 15:37-38:

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

What's the significance of the torn curtain? It's apparently symbolic, since

there is no evidence that the curtain was torn or destroyed prior to the war with the Romans 40 years later in which the temple was burned to the ground. The curtain separated the "holy of holies" from the rest of the temple. It's where God was thought to dwell on earth, as well as in heaven. No one was allowed in there except during the annual Day of Atonement (now called Yom Kippur). Only the high priest could get past the curtain. There he would offer a sacrifice for the sins of himself and the people.

Mark's message, widely accepted, is that after Jesus' death (and because of it), such temple sacrifices are no longer necessary. Now people have direct access to God for the first time. Atonement means at-one-ment in Mark's narrative. Nice and tidy theology. Except . . .

Luke 23:44-46:

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

According to Luke, the curtain is torn before Jesus dies. That contradicts Mark, and it really steps all over Mark's symbolism. Since Mark was written first, it appears Luke must have had a pretty good reason for changing Mark's version. In fact, Mark and Luke are different in many respects, and this is just one example. Luke's message seems to be that God is harshly judging the Jewish people in general, and he is

rejecting their system of worship, of which the temple and the curtain are symbolic.

Christians base their entire marketing campaign on Mark's version. That's not a very strong foundation, since it is merely symbolic, and not even all of the Bible's authors buy into it. Rightly understood, the timing of the torn curtain isn't a contradiction, since it wasn't a literal event. As symbolism, we can all find our own meaning. And that is how the whole Bible is to be understood. It is not an accurate record of historical events, but a collection of stories, myths, traditions, folklore, and symbols. Those who insist on treating it as historically accurate and infallible are fools, because they put themselves in the humiliating position of pretending that obvious contradictions aren't contradictions.

You Have the Right to Remain Silent

Mark 5:18-19:

As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you."

This is the only time in Mark that Jesus encourages someone to talk about his encounter with Jesus. Other times he tells his disciples and those he has healed to keep their mouths shut.

Why? Why wouldn't Jesus want everyone to know that he considered himself the messiah? Wasn't that what he was there on earth for? Wasn't that the point of all his miracles? One possible answer is that he knew he would be subject to arrest once the word got out that he was the messiah, or that he thought he was, and he wanted to delay that as long as possible. But, if that's the case, why did he tell the man in 5:18-19 to go home and tell everyone?

There is no such reticence expressed in John. There, the whole idea of the miracles is to prove who Jesus was. Only John doesn't call them *miracles*. He calls them *signs*. In Matthew, Jesus refuses to perform a miracle or sign to prove himself. There, his miracles are performed to show that the Kingdom of God is soon to come.

Which is it? Jesus either wanted people to understand who he was, and he showed them by performing miracles, or he didn't want people to know and specifically instructed people to stay quiet.

Mark 8:25-27:

Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village."

Mark 8:29-30:

He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly

ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Mark 9:8-9:

Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Zombies in the Bible

Did you know there are zombies in the Bible? Yes indeedy.

Matthew 27:50-53:

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.

Wonder what happened to them? Did they eventually die again? Are they still alive and walking among us? Could be.

The Dozing Disciples

In the story of Jesus praying at Gethsemane, (Matthew 26:36-46), on three separate occasions the disciples all fall asleep while Jesus prays. Yet the author (purportedly Matthew) records in

detail the words of Jesus' prayers. How did Matthew hear what Jesus prayed if he was asleep?

What's Up with the Architecture?

From the time of Constantine, Christian architecture has been more about glorifying Rome and less about glorifying God. What was it that Jesus said or did that makes Christians believe God is impressed with majestic Roman architecture?

God Says the Darndest Things

Malachi 2:3:

I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and I will put you out of my presence.

Boy, when God gets pissed, He doesn't mess around. Spread dung on their faces? Really? That from the God of love? What kind of example is that for God to set? Does that mean we should go around smearing dung on the faces of people we don't like? If God did it, how bad can it be?

But a more important question is why does God rebuke the offspring of the offenders? Why make children pay for their parents' crimes? It happens over and over again in the Old Testament.

Matthew's Miracles vs John's Signs

We don't see Jesus' miracles in John as we do in Matthew. The difference is not what Jesus does, but what his acts are

called and what Jesus tries to accomplish by them.

In Matthew, Jesus performs miracles to help others, not himself. When skeptics ask Jesus to prove that his authority comes from God, Jesus refuses. Jesus tells them that the only sign they will get from him is the sign of the prophet Jonah. Just as Jonah spent three days in the belly of the huge fish before being spit out on the beach, so Jesus will spend three days in the tomb before his resurrection.

In John, on the other hand, Jesus does not hesitate to prove his authority to the skeptics. That's what his miracles are all about. Only John doesn't call them *miracles*, he calls them *signs*.

Matthew tells us about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. After fasting for 40 days, Jesus is tempted to turn the stones into bread. That, however, would be a sin, because it would be for Jesus' own sake, not to help others. In the third temptation, Jesus is tempted to worship Satan and own the world. Of course, Jesus doesn't fall for that old trick. In the second temptation, Jesus is tempted to jump off the top of the Temple, and angels will catch him before he hurts himself in a crash landing. What Satan thinks is tempting about that is the chance for all the people around the Temple to see that Jesus is the real deal. In other words, in Matthew's thinking, such miracles would be a sin.

But for John, the whole idea of performing the signs is to prove his identity. For Matthew it is a matter of satanic temptation. For John it is a

divine calling. John doesn't mention the Temptation, because it doesn't fit with his narrative. Once again, John is not on the same page as the synoptic gospels.

It is difficult to understand how the Holy Spirit could inspire John to write something so utterly different from the other gospel authors. The simple truth of the matter is that the Holy Spirit didn't inspire any of the Bible authors. The Bible is the work of men. Very different men, with different experiences, ideas, opinions, perspectives, and agendas. Trying to blend them into a consistent, coherent narrative leads to all sorts of silly and bizarre conclusions that have no basis in the Bible at all.

Where's Jesus?

The day after Jesus' baptism, where was he?

Matthew 4:1:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Mark 1:12-13:

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.

Luke 4:1:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, . . .

According to the synoptic gospels, immediately after being baptized, Jesus was led into the wilderness to be

tempted for 40 days. But John tells a completely different story. There, the very next day after Jesus' baptism, Jesus is talking with John the Baptist, disciples, and others, presumably in the area of Bethany where Jesus was baptized. John doesn't mention the 40 days of temptation in the wilderness at all. (John 1:26-42) (John also doesn't say in so many words that John the Baptist baptized Jesus, but it is implied.)

So, where was Jesus the day after his baptism? Maybe Jesus is like MasterCard: he's everywhere you want him to be.

By the way, what is the point of the Temptation? Why would Jesus / God allow himself to be tempted by Satan? What was he trying to prove? How could the omniscient, omnipotent God, even in the human form, be truly tempted by anyone or anything? There was never the slightest chance Jesus would yield. Were they just trying to prove that to Satan? Didn't work too well, did it? And how did the gospel authors know what happened in the wilderness? They weren't there.

What the Hail?

In the Book of Exodus we find the story of how God intervened in Egypt on behalf of Moses and the Israelites. Most of us are familiar with the story of the ten plagues Moses, with God's help, visited upon the recalcitrant Pharaoh. (Or maybe I should say God with Moses' help.)

Here's the dramatic description of the seventh plague. (Exodus 9:19-26):

19 Give an order now to bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter, because the hail will fall on every person and animal that has not been brought in and is still out in the field, and they will die.

20 Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the Lord hurried to bring their slaves and their livestock inside.

21 But those who ignored the word of the Lord left their slaves and livestock in the field.

22 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that hail will fall all over Egypt – on people and animals and on everything growing in the fields of Egypt".

23 When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the Lord sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt;

24 hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation.

25 Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields – both people and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree.

26 The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were.

And here's the story that had happened a few days earlier, the fifth plague. (Exodus 9:1-6):

1 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.

2 If you refuse to let them go and continue to hold them back,

3 the hand of the Lord will bring a terrible plague on our livestock in the field – on your horses, donkeys and camels and on your cattle, sheep and goats.

4 But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt, so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die".

5 The Lord set a time and said, "Tomorrow the Lord will do this in the land".

6 And the next day the Lord did it: All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died.

Here's the problem. How could God have killed all the Egyptian livestock in the seventh plague (hail) when he had already killed them in the fifth plague (pestilence)?

What Do You Really Know about Lucifer?

Christians make a huge deal out of Lucifer, the purportedly fallen angel that morphs into the Devil himself. It turns out to be much ado about nothing.

The word *Lucifer* is found in only one verse in the entire Bible, Isaiah 14:12. And only in the King James Version, where he is also called *son of the morning*. Other translations are: *day star* and *son of dawn*. Lucifer means *light bearer*, and it refers to an ancient sun god. It was not originally considered evil. The Dutch refer to a simple household match as a *lucifer*.

It is clear from the context of Isaiah 14:12 that Lucifer is not Satan, but the King of Babylon. So how did the whole myth about the fallen angel turned Satan get started? Early Christians had a very difficult time getting the pagans all around them to accept their new religion. There was, in spite of propaganda to the contrary, tremendous resistance and competition. Christians simply needed a really bad guy to make their really good guy, Jesus, look better. Lucifer the Devil was needed for contrast.

Since both Lucifer and Jesus are called the day star or morning star, they really have a lot in common. In fact, they may be considered one and the same. Lucifer is not Satan at all. Christians just made it all up. They are experts at that sort of thing. That's how Christianity was invented.