

CONTRADICTIONS IN THE RESURRECTION ACCOUNTS

The gospels say that a miracle healing man called Jesus Christ lived. They say he died by crucifixion and three days later he rose again. The tomb he was placed in was found wide open with the stone that had been across the entrance moved back and the tomb was mysteriously empty. His body was gone. Certain witnesses claimed that Jesus appeared to them as a resurrected being.

All we have really got to go on to verify or otherwise the Christian claim that Jesus Christ rose from the dead are the four gospels. Each of them ends in a suspiciously brief account of the empty tomb of Jesus and his resurrection appearances. Paul in his epistles says that Jesus appeared but we can't just take his word for it for he gives no details. A person who saw a ghost is not to be listened to until he or she gives details. Otherwise we can say that they could have been mistaken. Perhaps they were out walking at night and saw marsh gas in human type shape?

We find some blatant contradictions in the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus though not as many as we would like. But they are only brief accounts anyway and they do tend to deal with different parts of the story so the extent to which they fit can be naturally explained. Christian fundamentalists have done a lot of work trying to show that the gospels fit together and there is no contraction in them. They claim that this alleged agreement of one gospel with another is proof of divine inspiration. But as we have said, there is no reason to go that far. Moreover if the gospels seem to fit that does not mean they actually do fit for it is possible they were never meant to. If the gospel writers had been honest they would have taken a huge risk and wrote pages and pages about the resurrection - it would be the most important event in history if it happened. A claim is more likely to be true the more there is said about it for then it is easier for it to slip up if it is not true. But the gossellers were crafty and kept it short despite the importance they pretended to place on the resurrection.

Critics disagree on whether these conflicts refute the resurrection or support it. To refute, they would have to be very serious and render the evidence useless. To support they would have to be minor and just different recollections of the same event – they would normally be proof that there is no collusion among the witnesses. While nobody expects accounts of miracles to be exactly the same it is obvious that if there are any contradictions in them then the miracle never happened. Why? Because it is wiser to believe that a mistake was made than to believe that a man rose from the dead. And we can believe that this was a mistake when we have evidence that other mistakes were made. Jesus for example in Luke 13:33 says he is going to Jerusalem to die for no prophet can die outside of it. Yet he was put to death outside the walls. To agree with Christians that he only meant the general vicinity of Jerusalem and not the city is just to make a tricky fortune-teller of him not a prophet.

Christians say that if the gospels were easy to reconcile it would show collusion among those telling the resurrection story of Jesus. But if the gospels were indeed easy to reconcile the Christians would be saying that it was a miracle of God that they looked like they were colluding to keep their stories straight. In fact, they would say he gave them a remarkable wisdom and memory. Jesus promised that his disciples would have a miraculous eloquence - a gift from God that would shut their enemies who contradicted their claims up. We certainly do not see any evidence of that in the resurrection tales! The Christians just rationalise and make excuses all the time. If the gospels seem too good to be true they have an answer. If they are not they still have an answer! We would be misled all the time if we thought like that!

We must remember that since the early Church was focused on the death and resurrection of Jesus as salvific events that the passion and the resurrection accounts is where we should expect the gospels to agree the best. So if they contradict themselves in these more than anywhere else it is a bad sign. And that is exactly what they do. The absurdities and conflicts are unbelievable.

Mark says it was dawn when the women arrived at the tomb while John says it was still night. The Christian solution is that Mark is speaking of their arrival at the tomb and John of their departure from their homes. This solution is disproved by reading John. He does not say that they set out when it was still dark meaning that it could have been dawn when they arrived at the tomb. John says that it was dark when the women came to the tomb while the other three gossellers said the sun had come up (Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?). Christians say that John just means it was dark when the women set out for the tomb which is just a perverse rationalisation. It denies the most likely meaning of John and contradicts what he wrote so it is not acceptable.

In John, Peter and the beloved disciple inspect the empty tomb. Luke mentions only Peter. Christians say that is okay because Luke does not say that Peter was literally on his own, but why mention Peter alone when there was enough time and space to mention any companions? If Luke knew only of Peter then he was lying when he said he was an expert on what had happened in his prologue. It would be very strange if he did not know all that happened that most important morning for the Church needed to preserve all the evidence it could hold. So we know Luke is saying that there was nobody else there but Peter. Luke said that the apostles “did not believe the women. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb”. The but

is very important. It shows that Peter went alone. He did not take the beloved disciple (assumed to be the apostle John) with him though John gospel says he did.

Mary and the others went with joy to tell the others that Jesus had risen (Matthew) after they departed from the tomb and seen Jesus on their first visit. In John, Mary comes to the tomb when it is dark and sees the stone removed. She goes away to the disciples and returns to the tomb. John says that Mary was still falling apart with grief and was fuming because she thought the body was stolen on her second visit to the tomb. She told Peter Jesus was stolen contradicting Luke who said she told Peter Jesus had risen. Christians try to make out that she was hysterical and did not know what she was doing. They will say anything to cover up a contradiction for there is no evidence she was off her head then. As an alternative they say that Matthew only says that the women, including Magdalene, went to the tomb first thing and saw Jesus and could have seen Jesus later on another visit. So they suppose that Matthew was just giving all the main points he wanted to outline which was why you could get the impression they saw Jesus on the first visit. You could reconcile any contradiction with that logic and Matthew never indicated that he was doing anything other than saying that the women saw Jesus on the first visit.

Mark and Luke have the women entering the tomb before the angel told them Jesus was risen while Matthew says it was after. The Christian solution is that they were told twice! So if John marries Ann on 25 September 2016 and another record says it was 14 August 2016 then they married twice!

We know that minor discrepancies between two witness accounts do not always make them both liars. But it does not make them truthful either. But if there is a major contradiction then one or both of them is a liar.

The gospels conflict on whether Jesus' first appearance to the apostles happened in Jerusalem or Galilee. Matthew has the angel telling the women to hurry to Jesus' disciples and tell them to go to Galilee where they will see him and on their way to the disciples Jesus appears with the message that the disciples are to go to Galilee to see him. This indicates urgency. The angel even said that Jesus would be in Galilee before the disciples got there indicating that he would be waiting for them. Matthew says the first appearance was in Galilee (28:16,17) while Luke and John agree for once and plot the first vision in Jerusalem (Luke 24, John 20) with Luke's Jesus telling them not to leave Jerusalem. John 20:19 is clear that it happened on the day of the resurrection. This appearance is important both because it was the first and because of what Jesus said during it. Christians give solutions for the conflict but you still don't know if the solutions are right – there could still have been a contradiction. Even if you cannot be sure if it is a contradiction or not it still means you cannot put your faith in the gospel story. When the gospels do not authorise attempts to harmonise them it follows that the harmonisation is artificial.

Haley says the solution to the contradiction is that Matthew just never bothered mentioning the first appearance in Jerusalem (Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, page 367). But if you read Matthew without listening to Haley's prejudices you will see that he is lying. The gospel itself says that the women were told on resurrection morn to get the apostles to Galilee for them to meet Jesus. Jesus himself told them that and he added that the purpose was that they might see him. Evidently, then the first appearance was to be in Galilee. When they were told that day to go to Galilee to meet Jesus that would be enough by itself to show that Jesus planned to appear there for the first time.

Many ancient manuscripts omit the references in Luke 23 and 24 to a stone rolled to the front of the tomb and to Jesus showing his hands and his feet and the words, "He is not here but has been raised". This is so strange considering that Christians wanted to make the story more convincing and these references are necessary to do that. It is a clear witness that these things have been added on and were recognised as interferences which was why many copyists had no time for them.

By far the most serious problem is that Matthew has one resurrection appearance and John has two. The appendix to John, and the Book of Acts state that there were a lot more. Matthew knew that his gospel might be the only one that could survive or be a success. So when he has one appearance, then one it is: especially when he wrote so much short yet boring drivel about Jesus when he could have used the space to write more about Jesus' appearances. What supports this even better is the fact that Christians would have been eager to know exactly all that Jesus got up to after his resurrection and the fact that there was nothing done to fulfil this need shows that the gossellers were out of touch with the people and were not evangelists and pastors themselves. In a court of law, if a foursome were trying to convince the judge that a man rose from the dead, to simplify things one major vision would be singled out and each witness would be questioned in depth on that. This is not what we have in the gospels. The details are sparing which makes some of the "solutions" for the contradictions easier to appear valid – it makes it easier to speculate the solutions into existence when there is nothing but a skeleton service there.

The resurrection stories in the gospels would need to be actually written by eyewitnesses in order for the argument that the differences and contradictions show they were sincere to have any chance. They are not. Nor do they claim to be anything more than hearsay.

The bottom line is: if we are not talking about eyewitness accounts then minor errors could be a sign that the stories are

contrived or they could be a sign that they are not. You need external evidence. Christians need external evidence for the resurrection and there is none. And what if the stories are not eyewitness accounts? Then they are automatically weaker to start with. The errors could be a giveaway or they might not be. Nobody knows but the authors and it is not our place to say if they are or not.

The similarity between the four gospels supposedly overrides the errors and thus makes fabrication unlikely. But the gospels are not as similar as supposed when it comes to the resurrection. Each gospel obviously hoped to become the only standard account so they are just four different records artificially treated as dovetailing one another while they repel each other.

A lot of the material in the resurrection accounts has been harmonised by those cranks who pretend to believe there is no contradiction in the Bible. But the books never claim to be complementary and that is the way they treat them in order to reconcile them which is an abuse. So the Christians use a tactic that they have no evidence to justify to create evidence for Christ and the Bible. That is totally dishonest.

Miracles are also hauled in as explanations. For example, when one gospel says one angel was seen and another says there were more it is said that one angel may have been visible to some of the party though there were other angels there. So the miracle appearance of another angel is brought in or the miracle of invisibility. That totally contradicts Christianity's own doctrine that God respects nature in doing miracles and thus will always give us the gift of sensible and good evidence for the miracle.

Any contradiction at all can be "explained" when miracles are assumed. They say that God invites all into the Church and offers the gift of faith which means they accuse us of heresy and blasphemy and resisting God if we have an opinion unfavourable to their treatment of scripture. Their foisting their views on us is uncharitable.

Some say that the gospel writer of Mark knew of only one angel and Luke knew of two (24:4). They say this was not a contradiction. They say if you see Peter and Andrew and say hello to them and then you tell your wife that you said hello to Peter you are not denying that you met Andrew. They say you are not lying. But that depends. You could be lying this way. It depends on your intention. So Mark and Luke could be contradicting each other. Christians can't criticise the view that they are contradicting each other. If they do they are just being bigoted and dogmatic and want everybody to assume what they assume. If there were two angels Mark would have known. If you wish to say he probably knew then you are saying there is probably a contradiction. If you were giving evidence and your wife was a policewoman it would certainly be a lie to tell her that you said hello to Peter and not mention Andrew. The gospels claim to be giving evidence that the resurrection of Jesus really happened. Mark and Luke then are in contradiction.

Christians say that it is good to have seeming conflicts in the gospel stories though the conflicts can be resolved. This is nonsense. And yet these are the people who say that if testimonies from people match up too well something suspicious is happening. What could happen is you could have some witnesses learning off a story to tell and them all telling parts of it and not all they have learned off. That way you would have to match everything up and reconcile it all to get the full story.

Others don't worry about the contradictions and say that contradictions show that there is nothing contrived about the testimonies. They also say that if testimonies from different people match up too well something dodgy is happening. If so then the contradictions only show that the witnesses are sincere not that they are right. And it is simply untrue that contradictions mean the witnesses were necessarily sincere. What if some error was made that made the whole story accidentally seem better? For example, the gospel says that no body was seen in the tomb the morning Jesus rose. What if there was somebody who did see a body and that person was ignored as unreliable? You need to be talking to the witnesses to see what role the contradictions take, to see if they are signs of sincerity or signs of lying. We can't run this check so for Christians to say that differences or contradictions are signs of truthfulness is for them to make an unjustified assumption. If we are going to just assume then we don't need the testimonies at all for we are assuming anyway. We may as well just assume Jesus rose without even caring if there is evidence or not. In that case the gospels attempt to fill a need and fail and cannot be regarded as the word of God.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:51, "See I tell you a mystery a secret! We will not all sleep at death but we shall all be changed." A mystery in the original Greek means that this is a secret being disclosed to the initiated. The word was picked out of the Greek mystery schools and fraternities. Was the secret that we will not all die? No. Christianity always taught that there would be Christians alive for the second coming of Jesus. The secret was the change. Here Paul is speaking as if the body that goes to Heaven is dramatically changed. He speaks as if it was not heard before that the resurrection is not a mere resuscitation but a transformation. That contradicts the gospels if they claim that Jesus had a spirit like ghostly body that could materialise and de-materialise and so on.

Conclusion

Consistency in a witness or among witnesses is a negative test not a positive one. It does not mean that what they say is probably true. It only says, "No problems with consistency so we must now look to see if the reason for the consistency is that the tale is true. That involves looking for new data." If it was some obscure religion going about with contradictory scriptures, Christians would not take it seriously. They would say the contradictions disproved the religion. Uncharitably, they are applying a double-standard for their own scriptures are incoherent. They pay homage to bigotry in doing that. We will not be part of it. So we declare that the contradictions in the resurrection story show that the resurrection is not very believable. We do not believe. Contradictory beliefs are really not beliefs at all. They are just fighting each other. They are proof that one only imagines one believes.

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