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"Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"
Galatians 4:16

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Interrupting Ehrman: Are there Biblical contradictions?

By L.L. (Don) Veinot

Watching a court jury trial and watching a debate have a number of similarities. In both cases, you have one set of evidence, but you have two opposing sides that attempt to explain the evidence in such a way that they will persuade the audience or jury to view their story as more credible. The underlying idea is to get at the truth, but that does not necessarily happen. Sometimes, the side that wins is not the side that had a better understanding and grasp of the truth, but rather the one that manages to poison the jury against the evidence. This was essentially the case in the O.J. Simpson trial.¹ The case was fairly straightforward. Nicole, Simpson's ex-wife, was brutally murdered. There was a fair amount of incriminating evidence, some of which the jury was able to see and some of which the presiding judge allowed to be hidden from the jury. This sometimes happens in pre-trial negotiations.

Just reviewing the evidence and the history between O.J. and Nicole Simpson, the jury would likely have come to the verdict he was guilty. After all, he had been abusive toward her. The police had been called in on a number of occasions, and he came across as very jealous and possessive even though they were divorced. All this was more than sufficient to establish a motive, which is, in turn, crucial for establishing intent.

The defense did not spend a great deal of time explaining how such evidence did not demonstrate Simpson was motivated to kill his ex-wife. Instead, they put forth the idea that the lead detective, Mark Fuhrman, was a racist. This was a remarkably effective salvo—implying the evidence and all who were involved in collecting and examining it were tainted—and completely dis-

tracted the jury from the compellingly-established motive. Now, it may be true Fuhrman was a racist, I have no idea, but the assertion stuck well enough that there was no need for the defense to prove their claim. All they needed was to instill this idea in the mind of the jury with a few well-placed assertions and comments that could at least sound as though he was a racist. I suppose I would have to ask, even if he was a racist, does that necessarily mean evidence was fabricated and/or tampered with? Is it possible even a racist could take pride in doing their job well and professionally? However, as it was, there was no need to prove their point. All Simpson's "Dream Team" of defense attorneys had to do was create doubt in the minds of the jury in order to get an acquittal. By conjecturing that a racist handled the case, all of the evidence became questionable; and the prosecutor, Marcia Clark, was not able to overcome that issue throughout the balance of the case.

I thought about this as I sat in the audience during the debate between Dr. Bart Ehrman* and Dr. Craig Evans at the Dead Sea Scrolls/EMNR² Conference at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in March of 2010. I understand it is easy to take pot shots from the pew. There was no pressure on me or the rest of the audience as we observed, took notes, and agreed or disagreed with the points made. However, being in front of the audience who are, in this case, functioning as the jury, puts enormous pressure on the debaters. Dr. Evans is an accomplished scholar, but I think he suffered a similar fate as that of Marcia Clark. Bart Ehrman did not really try to explain the evidence or

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make a positive case for his position. Instead, he employed the same tactic used against Mark Fuhrman: One cannot trust the evidence, because it was gathered by biased people. Ehrman’s approach was fundamentally a three-step process.

First, he spent some time outlining what he called a **“wish list”** that he contends are all the things historians would like to have when doing their historical research. He then mentioned the Gospel accounts do not contain all the criteria of that wish list.

Second, he painted a picture of the stories contained in the Gospels traveling across continents, people groups and languages for 35 to 70 years before any of the Gospel accounts were written. He asserted that none of the eyewitnesses or anyone who personally knew the eyewitnesses were still living when the accounts were penned. According to his claim, the long period of time, many languages, cultures, and continents corrupted, added to, expanded up and even invented material in the story which never actually occurred in history. In this setting, the Gospels are little more than myth and fable fabricated to feed the religious proclivities of naïve, uneducated Christians and to guide public thinking about the claims of the church.

Third, Ehrman then put forth examples of what he claimed were contradictions, **“some major, some minor”** but in his view, contradictions nonetheless. These, according to him, demonstrate the texts are unreliable. Needless to say, I was unconvinced.

In the first place, just because historians may have a wish list they would *like* to have fulfilled, it is rare that this occurs. In truth, historians work with what they have and make the best case they can with what is available. Even though he may not have his “wish list” fulfilled in this case, that does not mean there is not good, historical evidence demonstrating the reliability of the Gospel accounts and their claims. What he has done is try to eliminate or poison the evidence. He has done that by simply asserting the Gospels are the product of writers who were far removed from the events the Gospel accounts record. My first question would be, what is the evidence *his* claim is true? He did not provide any. Simply making the assertion does nothing to support the assertion. In fact, it really appears this long period of time is necessary for his view to have any credibility. On the other hand, the evidence *we do have* shows this claim is either misinformed or worse, it is false.

An Unusual Starting Point

Simply making an assertion does not make a case. The onus is on Ehrman to prove his claim and make a case for late dating beyond his own desire for it to be so. Conversely, it is also insufficient for me to simply assert he is wrong. I need to demonstrate why I would hold to an earlier date for the writing of the Gospels that is plausible and has evidence to support it. The starting point for this might seem to some to be unusual, but bear with me as I work through the reasoning and what I believe is the evidence for affirming early dating.

In a sense, we will be starting with evidence outside the documents in question, the Gospels, and work back into them. We can get a good idea of when things were written by starting with the end of the Book of Acts. This work ends with the Apostle Paul under house arrest in Rome awaiting trial before Caesar. He had yet to be set free, rearrested, tried and executed. If Acts had been written after Paul’s death, something about his death would have been included. Paul died in the mid-60s.³ This would place the timing of the writing of the book of Acts in the early 60s—perhaps AD 60 or 61.⁴ We can even tell when the writer, Luke, was present for some of the events in the book of Acts but not for others, because he switches between **“we”** statements and **“they”** statements throughout the book.

Acts is the second work of the same author: Dr. Luke.⁵ His first work is, the Gospel According to Luke. Just to note the obvious, first works generally are written prior to second works. Luke confirms this progression in the first two verses of Acts as well: **“The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.”** (NASB) Acts was written in the early 60s, Luke was written before that, so it would be dated mid-50s to early 60s.⁶ This would be merely 27 years after the events recorded in the Gospels, and it *is not* the 35 to 70 years Ehrman needs to allow for “Jesus myths” to develop. But the problem regarding the evidence gets worse.

Ehrman insists some of the material in Luke came from the Gospel According to Mark. That is very likely true and further weakens his case. In order to borrow from Mark, *that* Gospel would have had to have existed at least long enough for Luke to be aware of it. So, these considerations date Acts to the early 60s, Luke to the mid-50s to early 60s, Mark to at least the 50s. Now, the available time for the Jesus myths to develop is shorter yet. But his dilemma gets worse and interrupting Ehrman's assertion grows easier. A scholarly slip is rearing its head.

We have an early church creed contained in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. The Apostle recites this early church creed which he informs his readers *was passed down to him* (1 Cor. 15:3). The creed is early, generally dated to the 30s. The interesting thing about creeds is: They need time to develop. First, a need for a creed arises. Creeds were and are statements of belief which are easily memorized and recited by the average person. It is a sort of theological shorthand. Paul would have received this when he was in Jerusalem—most likely in the late 30's AD. It is a little time for the need and then the development of creeds and several critical scholars believe the creed was extant in the 30's and that Paul received it within three to eight years of its existence. That would be the late 30's or early 40's. Dr. Gary Habermas points out:

In examining the cause of the disciple's faith, I pointed out earlier that the Resurrection was proclaimed by the earliest eyewitnesses. This is especially based, for instance, on 1 Cor. 15:3ff, where all scholars agree that Paul recorded an ancient creed concerning Jesus' death and Resurrection. That means this material is traditional and pre-Pauline is evident from the technical terms *delivered and received*, the parallelism and somewhat stylized content, the proper names of Cephas and James, the non-Pauline words, and the possibility of an Aramaic original.

Concerning the date of this creed, critical scholars almost always agree that has a very early origin, usually placing it in the AD 30s. Paul most likely received this material during his first visit in Jerusalem with Peter and James, who are included in the first appearances (1 Cor. 15:5,7). In fact, Fuller, Hunter, and Pannenberg are examples of critical scholars who date Paul's receiving of this creed from three to eight years after the Crucifixion itself. And if Paul received it at such an early date, the creed itself would have been earlier because it would have existed before the time he was told. And the facts upon which the creed was originally based would be earlier still. We are, for all practical purposes, back to the original events. So we may now realize how this data is much earlier than the ten to twenty years after the Crucifixion as postulated by Dr. Flew. Paul also adds that the other eyewitnesses had likewise been testifying concerning their own appearances of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:11, 14, 15).⁸

The creed was extant in the 30s AD, and Paul received it within 3 to 8 years. Ehrman not only does not have the 35 to 70 years for the Gospel myths to develop, but also the creed about the Resurrection of Jesus was in use within a few years of the event in the city in which it actually occurred. Not only is the historical evidence for the Resurrection here, but it also meets nearly all of Ehrman's wish list criteria.

Did Mark Believe in the Resurrection?

Ehrman and others who wish to "poison the evidence" often appeal to the Gospel of Mark in an attempt to claim the early church did not believe in the Resurrection and the Resurrection portion was a later addition. According to this claim, the bulk of Mark 16 (after v. 8) was not in the original and was added later. Therefore, the reasoning goes, Mark did not believe in the Resurrection. I have a two-part response. First, we do know what the early church believed about the Resurrection through the creed which was in use within 3 to 8 years of the event as previously noted. Second, even if the last portion of Mark was added, we still do know what Mark believed about the Resurrection when he wrote his account.

We start with a couple of questions: Did Mark think Jesus was a true prophet or a false prophet? Maybe not God and, perhaps, not resurrected, but He certainly was a true prophet. Next question, was the Gospel written before or after the Crucifixion? Well, obviously after. Once this is established we need to take a walk through the Gospel According to Mark, keeping in mind Mark wrote his Gospel believing Jesus was, at the very least, a true prophet. Writing *after* the events had occurred, it would have been written in such a way so as to have any prophecies contained in it reflect his idea of Jesus as being a true prophet.

In Mark 8:31, we read: "*And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suf-*

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**HAVE NOTHING
TO DO WITH THE
FRUITLESS DEEDS
OF DARKNESS, BUT
RATHER EXPOSE
THEM.**

~EPHESIANS 5:11~



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fer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”

This seems to be a clear prophecy presented by One Whom Mark considered to be a true prophet. If Mark did not believe in the Resurrection, he would not have included this information. But there is more.

In Mark 9:9, he records: **“And as they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man should rise from the dead.”** A few verses later, in Mark 9:31 we read: **“For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, ‘The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and will kill Him; and when He is killed, He will rise three days later.’”**

In the next chapter, Mark 10:34, he reports: **“And they will mock Him and spit upon Him, and scourge Him, and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again.”** Additionally, in Mark 14:28, Jesus tells his followers: **“But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.”**

Then there is the account of non-believers who were hostile witnesses in Mark 14:58: **“We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’”** By the way, this confirms what Jesus *did* say, which is documented in John 2:19-21.

Lastly, we have His detractors at the Crucifixion who used His prophetic words against Him in Mark 15:29: **“And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, ‘Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days ...’”**

Evidence that Mark believed in the Resurrection is actually found *throughout his eyewitness account.*

There is a great deal of information which Bart Ehrman and others in his school of thought must address. Dr. Gary Habermas made note of a number of them in his book *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?*:

At least eleven events are considered to be knowable history by virtually all scholars, and a twelfth event is considered to be knowable history by many scholars.

(1) Jesus died due to the rigors of crucifixion and (2) was buried. (3) Jesus’ death caused the disciples to despair and lose hope. (4) Although not as frequently recognized, many scholars hold that Jesus was buried in a tomb that was discovered to be empty just a few days later.

Critical scholars even agree that (5) at this time the disciples had real experiences that they believed were literal appearances of the risen Jesus. Because of these experiences, (6) the disciples were transformed from doubters who were afraid to identify themselves with Jesus to bold proclaimers of his death and Resurrection, even being willing to die for this belief. (7) This message was central in the early church preaching and (8) was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem, where Jesus had died shortly before.

As a result of this message, (9) the church was born and grew, (10) with Sunday as the primary day of worship. (11) James, the brother of Jesus and a skeptic, was converted to the faith when he also believed he saw the resurrected Jesus. (12) A few years later Paul the persecutor of the Christians was also converted by an experience that he, similarly, believed to be an appearance of the risen Jesus.⁹

A fair-minded treatment of the evidence and way to explain these 12 historic events seems to lead conclusively to accept the Gospel accounts are what they claim to be: Writings by the eyewitnesses and/or individuals close to the eyewitnesses documenting the truthfulness of the claims of the early church. Simply trying to “poison the evidence” does little *to prove* it is myth, and it *does nothing* to substantiate an opposing view is true. A positive case for the alternate position must also be built. Ehrman simply did not attempt to carry this out.

What of the Seeming Contradictions?

Although we can credibly establish the Gospel accounts were written early by followers of Jesus or others who were close to them, this does not mean the accounts are necessarily trustworthy. His claims there are contradictions must also be addressed. Ehrman simply asserting there are contradictions does not mean there are; nor does my asserting there are not contradictions mean there are not.

Ehrman set up this proposed dilemma in an interesting way. His claim was that Evangelicals tend to read the Gospels from beginning to end. They read them with a start, middle, and conclude with the Resurrection. He claimed we needed to read them across by comparing each section with the same sections of the other Gospels. It is there, he contends, the contradictions surface most clearly. He went on to claim that if we try to put the stories together to answer the charges, we are then creating yet another Gospel or somehow changing the **“BIG Picture.”** This is a case of **“special pleading”** or **“stacking the deck.”**¹⁰

Simply because all of the accounts do not contain the exact same details in exactly the same way does not mean nor prove there are actual contradictions.¹¹ By assembling or comparing the accounts as Ehrman started off challenging the audience to do, we are not by definition creating yet another Gospel. This was used as a way to discourage an actual response. As we approach this alleged dilemma, an example of seeming contradictions by reliable sources may be helpful. From time to time, the late Kenneth Kantzer¹² told a story of a personal experience where seeming contradictions turned out not to be contradictions once *all of the facts* were assembled and compared.

One day he received a phone call from a reliable friend. He was told a young lady they both knew had been standing on a corner waiting for the light to change, was struck by a car, but she was not seriously injured. A little while later, he received another call from another trusted friend who communicated that the same young lady had been riding in a car which was broadsided by a truck, and she was instantly killed. Both witnesses were reliable, but there clearly seemed to be contradictions in their stories. Kantzer later learned that, indeed, the young lady had been standing on a corner waiting for the light to change when a vehicle struck her. She was injured but not seriously. The driver got her in the car and was taking her to the hospital to get her checked out. On the way to the hospital, they were driving through an intersection, and a truck ran the red light and broadsided the car—killing the girl instantly. Combining all of the facts of both accounts did not create an entirely *new* story; they simply cleared up seeming inconsistencies and told the *entire* story. Most of Ehrman’s alleged contradictions fall into this category. His main examples were:

1) Who went to the tomb: Was it Mary Magdalene and another Mary; was it the two Marys and Salome? Was it Mary

Magdalene, Joanna, another Mary? Was it Mary Magdalene by herself? It depends which Gospel you read.

2) Was the stone already rolled away by the time they got there, or did it roll away when they arrived?

3) Whom did they meet there to tell them that Jesus was raised? An angel? A man? Two men? Or Jesus himself? (John 20:1: She saw the stone was rolled away and so ran back to tell Simon Peter; later Jesus appears to her.)

4) Do the women assume Jesus has been raised (Synoptics) because that's what they're told, or do they assume He's been buried in some other place (John) since His body is not in the tomb?

5) Who first comes to realize Jesus has been raised? The women (the Synoptics) or Simon Peter and the beloved disciple (John)?

6) Are the women told anything upon first finding the tomb empty (Synoptics: yes; John: no)?

7) What are they told? To tell the disciples to go to Galilee to meet Jesus there, or that Jesus told them while He was still in Galilee that He would rise.

8) Did they tell the disciples? Mark 16:8. The end. Contrast Matthew 28:8 and Luke 24:9.¹³

It seems if we take Ehrman at his challenge and assemble the same accounts from the different authors, either we will see the contradictions, or doing so will eliminate the seeming contradictions. I believe it will be the latter.

1) Who went to the tomb: Was it Mary Magdalene and another Mary; was it the two Marys and Salome? Was it Mary Magdalene, Joanna, another Mary? Was it Mary Magdalene by herself? It depends which Gospel you read.

Matthew 28:1 tells us it was: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Mark 16:1 names Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James [the other Mary] and Salome. Luke informs us in Luke 23:55 that just prior to the beginning of the Sabbath the *“women who had come with Him out of Galilee”* had gone to the tomb to see where it was and then returned to prepare the burial spices. This would be a larger group than the three so far named, but it would have included them. In Luke 24:1, he references this group when he continued this account: *“But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb...”* The *“they”* here is the same *“they”* as in the previous two verses, Luke 23:55 and 56. Lastly, John 20:1 names Mary Magdalene.

The problem here is not with any of the texts, but rather it is with Ehrman taking each account as though each writer is giving an exhaustive list of who came to the tomb. We can tell by his question: *“Was it Mary Magdalene by herself?”* But that is simply not the case. Not only does John *not say* “only” Mary Magdalene came to the tomb—something that would have to be included in order for Ehrman’s assumption to hold any validity, but also *none* of the writers make the claim only those they named came to the tomb. The writers keyed in on individuals which were important to them for particular reasons. Three of the accounts name Mary Magdalene: Matthew, Mark and John. Two accounts name *“the other Mary”*: Matthew and Mark. One account, Mark, names Salome. Luke does not name *any* of the women. Using Ehrman’s methodology, that would mean Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, and Salome were not there according to Luke’s account; which is an absurd claim.

So, the answer to the question is a simple one. It was Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, Salome and the rest of the women who followed Him out of Galilee. Ehrman provided *no evidence* to dem-

onstrate this is not the case, and compiling *all* of the evidence from the accounts clears up and answers the supposed contradictions.

2) Was the stone already rolled away by the time they got there, or did it roll away when they arrived?

The account in Matthew 28:2 reports that a *“severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it.”* The word *“had”* indicates something which happened earlier in time—prior to the arrival of the women. Mark describes the discussion the women were having on the way to the tomb about how to get the stone moved. The stone had been rolled away prior to their arrival (Mark 16:3-4). We find the same description in Luke 24:2. The stone had been rolled away prior to their arrival. John agrees with the other narratives in John 20:1 that *“the stone already taken away from the tomb.”* Again, without changing any material facts but simply listing them together, we find no contradiction. In all accounts the stone had been rolled away prior to the arrival of the group of women.

3) Whom did they meet there to tell them that Jesus was raised? An angel? A man? Two men? Or Jesus himself? (John 20:1: She saw the stone was rolled away and so ran back to tell Simon Peter; later Jesus appears to her.)

Matthew writes that the angel who had rolled away the stone told them Jesus had risen and invited them to look inside the tomb (Matt. 28:5-6). They then met Jesus (Matt. 28:9). Mark describes a *“young man ... wearing a white robe”* sitting in the tomb who told them Jesus had risen (Mark 16:5-6). Luke’s account describes two men in *“dazzling apparel”* who told them He had risen (Luke 24:4-6). In John 20:12-13, Mary Magdalene saw two angels; and in 20:16, she saw Jesus. John supplied *additional* but *not contradictory* material. According to the account, this was her second trip to the tomb that morning. She had gone there *“while it was still dark”* (John 20:1), saw the stone rolled away, ran to tell Peter (John 20:2), and then returned (20:11 and following).

A few things here. It is not uncommon for angels to be referred to as “men” or “young men” in both Old and New Testaments. We find this as early as Genesis 18, where angels are referred to as *“men”* in verses 2, 16, 22. One of the *“men”* was *“The LORD”* or YHWH (18:1), and the other two *“men”* are referred to as *“angels”* in 19:1. When angels or the LORD took on physical appearances in Scripture, it was most often as looking like men. The additional information of *“wearing a white robe”* (Mark) and having *“dazzling apparel”* (Luke) helps to clarify that the *“men”* were angels.

When we study any document, including Scripture, it is necessary, honest, and even scholarly to use the historical grammatical understanding of the text and how the culture that wrote and read the text used language. Following that injunction, what we have as an answer to this question is, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb while it was dark—before morning light. She found the stone rolled away, the tomb empty, and ran back to tell Peter. She then returned as morning was dawning, and the other women (all of the women who had followed Jesus from Galilee) were also going to the tomb. Two angels greeted them; the one who told them Jesus had risen was sitting on the stone that had been rolled away. Another angel inside the tomb confirmed Jesus had risen and was then joined by the angel who had been outside the tomb.

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THEOLOGY . . . Moore or Less With Beth

By Sarah Flashing

A prolific writer, speaker, and well-known Southern Baptist, Beth Moore is all the rage among women across denominations. To many, she seems to be everything she portrays: an effective Bible teacher who enthusiastically encourages women to study the Bible and draw closer to God. And like any other popular Christian writer and speaker, she has reaped a share of criticism—some completely undeserved and some well-earned. An inspiring speaker, women throng to her events without hesitation; there have been no reports of women having been duped by a false gospel. She shares the podium with other well-known leaders in women's ministry, receiving no public criticism from their direction either. So, then, what exactly is the apologetic significance of Beth Moore?

Let it first be stated the intention of this article is not to question the motivations of Beth Moore or Living Proof Ministries. There is no doubt in this writer's mind that Beth has committed her life and ministry to the God of biblical Christianity. The core doctrines of the faith are not at issue here. Additionally, this writer makes no assessment of Beth's position before the Lord. But given the significant impact she has on scores of women in the Church, concerns about her method of biblical interpretation and what often appears to be scorn for the task of theology are cause for a closer examination of the teaching ministry of Beth Moore.

Be a Berean

In her book, *To Live is Christ: Joining Paul's Journey of Faith*, Beth reminds her readers she is merely human and, like the rest of us, has the potential to err. She writes:

My most earnest prayer would be that this Bible study, and others like it, be a help in teaching you how to examine Scripture for yourself. Yet I plead with you not to accept my instruction without question. Always check my teaching against a thorough examination of the Word. I would never knowingly mislead you ... I ask you to examine the Scripture every day to see if what I'm saying is true.¹

We would like to take Beth at her word and agree she would never knowingly mislead. Yet to offer any critique of her teachings on "how to examine Scripture," one quickly discovers *her* many defenders. Few, however, defend her method of biblical interpretation but argue instead for more pragmatic outcomes. A typical response from women is that Beth speaks to their hearts or simply encourages them. It is also said she is a great speaker,

and she impresses upon women to go deeper into Scripture on their own, but Beth is rarely credited for her unswerving commitment to the intended message of a given passage. Obviously, Beth cannot be held responsible for how other women regard her, but the degree of devotion women have for this behemoth of Bible study says something about the significant impact she has on their lives. So at Beth's invitation, we need to more closely examine what she teaches and how she arrives at her conclusions.

The Insecure Apostle

Beth's latest book, *So Long, Insecurity: You've Been a Bad Friend to Us (SLI)*, is a prime example of the content on which women are feeding in her studies. In *SLI*, she asserts insecurity is a pesky problem that hinders the lives of most women² as well as some prominent persons in Scripture. In a recent cover article/interview with *Christianity Today*, Beth stated insecurity is the "number one issue" she sees in women right now.³

At various points in *SLI*, she addresses the elements that play into the low view women often have of themselves, including those images of air-brushed perfection culture flaunts in the movies, television, and newsstands. She paints women as victims of our culture by being forced to view these images at every turn, but she eventually gives pride some of the blame as well. After about seven pages of discussing the problem of pride, she finally gets around to calling it by its real name—sin; yet she still somehow displaces accountability.

Our culture has done us no greater injustice than training us to avoid taking responsibility for our own issues. In trying to relieve us of the whole concept of personal sin, our culture's reordered values have cheated us of the right to repentance and sublime restoration. They have hijacked our healing. A clear heart and a clean path are still only one sincere confession away.⁴

Of course, all of this presupposes that insecurity is epidemic and the problem that Beth contends. *SLI* is based, in part, on a survey of less than 1000 women. Because 78% of these women responded that insecurity "is at or above a level that bothers them" Beth concludes this "qualifies as a major cry for healing."⁵ The opinion of this writer is that insecurity is less of a problem than is realized by Beth Moore; we are a society of people who suffer from a very high view of self, a disorder of deep-seated self-adoration, a problem to which the

Church is hardly immune. But I digress.⁶

Not only does Beth suggest insecurity is one of women's greatest problems, she also argues insecurity is where she finds affinity with the Apostle Paul. While the writers of Scripture clearly were human with the same propensity for sin and suffering, it is difficult to agree with Beth's rationale for her claim to Pauline insecurity. In fact, her argument depends on an unpopular understanding of 2 Corinthians.

Beth writes that Paul is one of her **"favorite people in the entire stretch of Scripture"** because:

... he was enormously used of God in spite of himself [emphasis hers]. **Don't think for a moment he didn't fight his own flesh just like the rest of us. Take, for instance, the way he felt the need to affirm his credentials to the people he served in Corinth by using this little twist:**

I do not think I am in the least inferior to those 'super apostles.' I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge.' 2 Corinthians 11:5-6

Tell me that's not insecurity. If you're not convinced, take a look at what blurted from his pen only a chapter later:

I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the 'super-apostles,' even though I am nothing. 2 Corinthians 12:11

Do you think just maybe he protests too much? In all probability, he fought the awful feeling that he wasn't as good as the others who hadn't done nearly so much wrong. I totally grasp that. At the same time, Paul also battled a big, fat ego. He was a complex mound of clay just like the rest of us, belittling and boasting of himself in a dizzying psychological zigzag.⁷

A key criticism of Moore is how she handles Scripture, and then, how she models that approach to her audience. After reading this section of *SLI*, my concern persists as I struggle to understand how she arrives at the conclusion that Paul is going through a **"belittling and boasting of himself in a dizzying psychological zigzag."** The mere assertion that Paul was driven by feelings of insecurity as the reason for defending his apostolic authority ignores the immediate context of the second letter to the Corinthians: The church was involved with false teachers claiming a high degree of authority but lacking true knowledge. But this gets to the heart of the issue: Beth does not explain the meaning of the passage *as derived from the context*, she reads the passage in isolation—an elementary Bible-study error. What she often fails to do, as is the case in this instance, is to explain how in submission to the Scripture she arrives at her conclusions. She admittedly speculates and introduces personal experience and psychologizing of the text to back up her claims. Her assertion that Paul is motivated by insecurity is dependent on a view that equates the "super apostles" with the *true* Apostles—a theory uncommon among theologians and commentators. But sadly, she leaves her readers, many who have become disenchanted with the intellectual nature of the Christian faith, revisioning Paul the apologist as someone whose defense is motivated by self-centered weakness instead of a necessary defense of the Gospel. Following Beth's perspective to its logical conclusion, if Paul did not struggle with insecurity as she claims, perhaps the Bible would contain fewer epistles.

Beth has been working for some time to define Paul as inse-

cure. In *To Live is Christ*, written about Paul's journey of faith, she admits to speculating on what is going on with Paul **"based on hints in the accounts."**⁸ She describes Paul as **"overwhelmed by the polytheistic beliefs of the residents"**⁹ of Athens because few people **"believed and received Christ,"**¹⁰ because they preferred to argue **"rather than consider the truth."**¹¹ On the next page, she continues her speculation by asserting that Paul's ego took a beating in Athens, and that he probably **"felt like a failure."**¹² Continuing to project into the text, she writes that Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:18-19 may have been reflective of his experience with the Athenian philosophers. At the Areopagus, we understand from the text that Paul preached Christ, but certainly not to the contempt of the life of the mind. This kind of speculation paints Paul as being annoyed and fatigued by the intellectual engagement to which he encouraged others.

To get a better grip on Beth's methodology, her book *Believing God* offers more specific detail on her hermeneutical approach. In chapter 14, she discusses the instructions God gave to Joshua in the Old Testament narrative.¹³

*March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in. (Josh 6:3-5)*¹⁴

From this, Beth concludes with what she refers to as a **"figurative application,"** that sometimes **"God requires for us to follow a fair amount of repetition"** in our life before **"He deems a season complete."**¹⁵ While it is true Joshua and his men marched for days around Jericho, and it is also true that, in God's providence, we experience repetition in our lives, it does not logically follow that the goal of that passage from the book of Joshua is to instruct the reader to embrace the mundane as something God would just have us do. While the meaning she infers through this **"figurative application"** is fairly innocuous, we cannot underestimate the impact this faulty method can have on women as they read other areas of Scripture. In this sense, Beth unfortunately encourages women to ignore the intent of a biblical author to focus on a *what-this-verse-means-to-me* approach to understanding the Bible.

Heart vs. the Mind?

Strewn throughout Beth's writings, videos, and audios is a constant dialectic. False dilemmas are established between the heart and mind, faith and reason, systems and doctrines, the academy and the pew, and even between the theological and the practical. Often the theological and the practical are pitted against each other as means for Beth to distance herself from the academic world. In *Believing God*, she writes:

Your Promised Land is the place where God's personalized promises over your life become a living reality rather than a theological theory.¹⁶

Here we see not only more of her **"figurative application"** in this Promised Land reference (which I would argue has the tenor of prosperity teaching), but also an invalid conflation of God's sovereign plan for our lives with our own personal experiences no matter what they may be—potentially leaving

—Continued on page 8

“Moore” Continued from page 7

the reader with a false confidence in a personalized “Promised Land.” Finally, pitting the Christian life against the pursuit of theological understanding undermines the spiritual growth of her readers, because in contemplating the theological, even the theological “theories,” we have the potential to learn so much about who God is and about ourselves. Implicit in statements like this is the idea that theology without immediate practical application is useless.

In *Believing God*, she continues to give the appearance that the task of theology is of little importance to the life of the believer.

Thankfully, many churches and Christian institutes of higher learning teach the God of Scripture, but why do so many others default to a lesser-God theology? ... I believe one reason is our arrogant determination to define God differently than He defines Himself. ... Our pride and desperation to feel smart has made us unwilling to give the only human answer that exists to some theological questions: “I do not know. But I know that what He says is true even when I can’t explain it or reconcile it with what has happened.”¹⁷

Of course, Beth is not wrong here to suggest there are theologians who seek to do away with the mystery of God and try to force Him in the box of limited human reason. But the problem with this and similar statements is that her audience is not likely to be engaged in formal theological studies to understand that the picture she is painting is inaccurate. Their exposure to solid theologians who don’t elevate human reason over the authority of Scripture is limited. For many of these women, Beth Moore is as studious as they will go. Statements like these, then, have the potential to steer women away from the pursuit of theological studies of their own and to actually have a disdain for the theological academy. To be generous, while Beth may not be painting with broad brush strokes, her audience simply may not pick up otherwise. We are left to wonder to what degree a charismatic leader is responsible for the developing mindset of his/her devotees.

It would be one thing if Beth only occasionally presented us with confusing statements about the task of theology. But her books and even her audios provide an ample amount of material to justify the concern that what Beth is modeling to the women devoted to her ministry is problematic. Again, she writes,

I am convinced that the argument the disciples had with the educated, dignified teachers of the law diminished their faith so drastically that they were unable to do one of the very things they had been empowered to do. If you want to be full of faith, don’t argue with a legalist! Love them. Serve side by side with them if God wills. Don’t judge them. And don’t argue with them. Unbelief is highly contagious. Frivolous arguments can dilute spiritual truths into human logic. Nothing is logical about miracles. To the degree that we debate matters of faith, we could find ourselves drained of it. We are not called to debate faith but to do it.¹⁸

Argument for argument’s sake is not the Christian call, but certainly we are called to give an answer for the hope within, to defend the truth of the Christian worldview (cf. 1Pet.3:15). Has Beth limited the scope of the Christian faith to a privatized experience? In this quote, we see her disparaging the intellectual dimensions of the faith. At the very least, she offers the impression that faith can exist without reason. This is detrimental not

only to the lives of women she teaches, but also to the people in their lives they will impact in their ministry and families. Is Beth even correct that **“arguments”** with legalists are **“frivolous?”** Such an endeavor would require, first of all, an intimate knowledge of our belief system. To have a theological debate requires one to be a theologian. Secondly, is it not the responsibility of believers to gently correct those who are walking in error? Debate need not imply a lack of gentleness, but Beth resolutely shuts that door, because according to her, **“unbelief is highly contagious.”**

In the above quote, also note Beth’s declaration **“nothing is logical about miracles.”** In the context of the entire quote, she seems to be referencing the limits of Godless human reason. To rephrase it, she might have better said *Godless* theories of knowledge cannot account for miracles. But to make the blanket statement, **“Nothing is logical about miracles”** is, on its face, erroneous.

The real truth is God is *the* source of logic. While miracles may not be verifiable through the haughty demands of empirical science, there is nothing *illogical* about miracles. One can postulate that if God exists, then extraordinary events can occur. It is, in fact, the existence of God which accounts for the extraordinary events that happen in time and space such as the parting of the waters in the Exodus account or the healings that Jesus performed; naturalism can not explain such events.

The problem here is that while Beth is teaching women there is **“nothing logical about miracles,”** she is ultimately inspiring a robust anti-intellectual sentimentality. We cannot be a church that pits faith against reason when logic is sourced in God and serves Him and the Church on numerous ministry levels. Many of Beth’s devotees will not even think to second guess this statement, and risk remains this idea will take root. The intellectual dimensions of the Christian faith are not intended to be self-serving or to intimidate, but to serve God and others.

If faith does not seek understanding, then this faith has little else than personal experience—a subjectivity difficult for her devotees to identify let alone counter when it challenges their faith. Beth drives this subjectivity home.

My God isn’t just Someone I believe in. He’s Someone I know. I’ve felt His presence. I’ve seen His activity. I’ve experienced His deliverance. I’ve been touched by His healing. I’ve witnessed answered prayer. I’ve ‘heard’ Him speak straight to me through His Word. Yes, I believe, but more than that, I know.¹⁹

Beth has **“felt.”** She has **“seen.”** She has **“experienced.”** She has **“witnessed.”** And she has **“‘heard’ Him speak”** directly to her through Scripture. Theologically, this not an entirely inaccurate statement about ways we experience God. But this strong emphasis on *her* personal experience—something only Beth can speak to because it is hers alone—greatly de-emphasizes the *objective* nature of Christian truth. It plays into the careless theology I constantly observe in Christian women who say that they have prayed about something in particular and believe God has confirmed their course of action. Some of these actions are less critical than others; but when the course of action is, for example, to seek a gestational surrogate because her ability to conceive is compromised, this issue of how we do theology and locate truth becomes more significant. When “Who are you to judge because God has spoken on this matter in this way” is the response, we have discovered the impact of knowledge

of God driven by personal experience. What we *know* of God is *objective* in that it is located in the Scriptures. What we *experience* that is truly of God *will correspond* to the message of Scripture. If Beth's students don't have the same experience as described by Beth, are they left to believe that their relationship with God is lacking? Is her method viewed as the ideal model for how to know God? We have to ask if there is a real difference between Beth's expression of knowledge and belief and the spiritually subjective claims of Oprah Winfrey or a Mormon? Sadly, if this is the message women are hearing, then they are definitely being set up for spiritual insecurity. If we can not rest in the *objective* truth of Christianity, the personal God we seek is untenable. The mystery of our faith is that God has revealed Himself to be known, and we find Him objectively in Scripture. How it all comes together—our studies, prayer, and the work of the Holy Spirit—we don't entirely understand, but it isn't an entire mystery either. We continue to seek understanding of that which is meant to be understood, and enjoy that which our minds may never completely apprehend. When we don't always *feel* His presence, we can still *trust* He is there (Mt.28:20) because we *know* His objective truths contained in Scripture are revealed to us as true by His Holy Spirit (1Cor.2:10). But if we use Beth's experience as the measuring rod for how to know God, we will be severely disappointed.

One notable fact about Beth as you read through her corpus of writings is that she is not a systematic theologian—not that she ever claimed to be. But much of what troubles her teachings is a consequence of that fact. She is a gifted story-teller, understands the central themes and stories of Scripture, and is quite adept at communicating these stories to others. But Beth stumbles in both interpretation and application in some very crucial areas. We proceed from here.

Assumptions Behind the Method

To clarify the suggestion that Beth has anti-intellectual tendencies, a closer look at her own words reveals the lack of importance she places on biblical interpretation, opting for more of an 'anything goes' perspective.

We tend to compare Christian leaders and fall into camps behind our choices. We must make a concerted effort to avoid doing so. Each of us could cite an example, but one readily comes to mind. Every branch of in-depth bible study has loyal supporters who swear by that particular method or teacher. Some would rather fight than switch. God is wooing people to his table for the meat of His Word like never before. He is joyfully using many different methods and styles to accomplish His goal of equipping His church to be effective and holy during difficult days.²⁰

Here, the implication is there is inherent divisiveness of methodological distinction. The basis for her argument is God can use anything, and in her experience she perceives this to be the case. This is a moral argument on her part in that she states clearly the comparing of leaders and methodologies is something we should *avoid*, and that doing so is far worse than giving people the wrong tools to study Scripture. This elevation of unity is potentially at the expense of spiritual maturation, and we need to take discipleship much more seriously than this. Beth makes the fatal error of supposing methodology has little to do with interpretive outcomes, even suggesting that simply coming to the

table is sufficient. We can agree with Beth that God is wooing people, but we as a Church must be responsible in how we teach and equip them to feed themselves.

Proceed with Caution

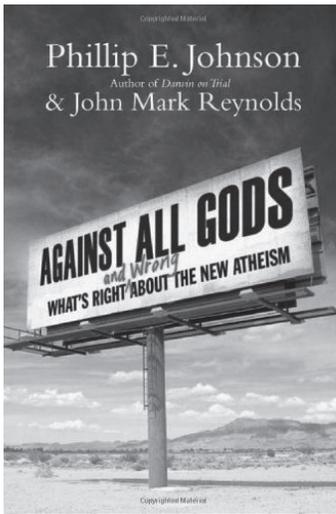
Beth does seem to endorse questionable New Age practices—for example the *Be Still* DVD²¹—but nowhere in any of her writings, audios, or conferences is there any record of Beth Moore teaching a false Gospel, or knowingly misleading her audience. But there is still a danger in what she models to other women. She is not effectively teaching how to study the Bible from a historical-grammatical methodology, but rather is modeling one that depends mostly on private insight and experience. Her apparent disdain for the theological academy and for what it produces will prevent women from discovering the rich writings of men and women serving God in this sphere. Whether she knows it or not, Beth is doing theology—we all do theology. The question is: How well are we doing it? Clearly, Beth Moore is a Christ follower, but this along with a gift of communication is not sufficient for the task before her. It is my contention that as Beth continues to misplace experience as pre-eminent over theological knowledge, her readers will take from her that the life of the mind is of little importance in the Christian life. Women need more, but I do not think they can get it from Beth. ☐



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ENDNOTES:

- 1 Moore, Beth. *To Live is Christ: Joining Paul's Journey of Faith*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001) p. 123.
- 2 Moore, Beth. *So Long Insecurity: You've Been a Bad Friend to Us*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2010) p. 16.
- 3 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/august/18.21.html>
- 4 *So Long*, p. 107.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 6 Additional reading on this topic: "The Great Self-Esteem Crisis" <http://www.midwestoutreach.org/Pdf%20Journals/2000/00sum.pdf>
- 7 *So Long*, p. 56-57.
- 8 *To Live*, p. 132.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- 13 I was initially alerted to Beth Moore's use of "figurative application" by Craig Johnson at Café Biblia. His concerns about her employment of "figurative application" can be read here: <http://cafebiblia.com/?p=159>
- 14 Moore, Beth. *Believing God*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004) p. 211.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 212.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 48-49.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- 20 *To Live*, p. 207.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 144.
- 21 See "An Ode to Silence" <http://www.midwestoutreach.org/Pdf%20Journals/2006/spring%20summer%202006.pdf>, Marcia Montenegro, p. 12.



AGAINST ALL GODS: WHAT'S RIGHT AND WRONG ABOUT THE NEW ATHEISM

By Phillip E. Johnson and John Mark Reynolds
IVP Books, Downers Grove, Illinois, ©2010, 118 pages, \$15.00
Review by G. Richard Fisher

Phillip Johnson is a leading spokesman and apologist for the Intelligent Design movement, and John Reynolds is a PhD and author of *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*. They have teamed up in this cutting-edge new book.

Books promoting Atheism are proliferating like toadstools. The newer books on Atheism are not quite like the old ones, and they are aggressive, “evangelistic,” and written in a “take-no-prisoners” fashion. Make no mistake; they are clearly an attempt to “convert” others to Atheism or badger the uninformed Christian into silence.

Johnson and Reynolds have a must-read (and easy-to-read) response to the current onslaught. The new breed of Atheists desire to be seen as intellectual, scientific Atheists, but they are at heart Darwinian and naturalistic. They want all religious belief discarded, as these beliefs are seen to be delusional and harmful. Johnson and Reynolds show the war is on! Like the old western movies (black and white films, of course), there is always a good guy who comes charging in on a white horse. In some fashion, Johnson and Reynolds are the guys on the white horses in their stand against the destructive New Atheism.

The authors of *Against All Gods* introduce us to Richard Dawkins who penned *The God Delusion*. Dawkins argues against Intelligent Design, that is, that the universe had an intelligent Designer. Dawkins’ arguments seem to be more philosophical *speculation* rather than hard *science*.

Consider some of the chapter titles to grasp more of the flavor of Johnson and Reynolds book:

1. **Introducing the New Atheists**
2. **Harvard’s Aborted Requirement in Reason and Faith**
3. **Earth’s Distinction**
4. **The Darwinian Worldview**
5. **The God Hypothesis in Physics**
6. **The Obstacle of Old Books**
7. **A Wonderful Education**
8. **Christianity And Beauty**

Believers everywhere need to wake up to the fact the New Atheism is like the war on terror. There is an avowed enemy thirsty for our destruction. Their agenda is articulated and clear on their end, and they are relentless. Johnson and Reynolds understand that.

Consider that Dawkins says to teach children about God is a “**form of child abuse**” (*Against All Gods*, p.18). However, in

doing this, Dawkins really invites a God debate. Rather than ignore something he says does not exist, he simply fires up the other side. Is this an unintended consequence?

Dawkins is strident, harsh, and offers no pluralism in his anti-God crusade. He is frontal and in-your-face.

The authors Johnson and Reynolds state the purpose for their new book as follows: “... **to explore how the issues raised by the new wave of scientific Atheism can and should be addressed in higher education and scholarship, ...**” They succeed admirably.

One of the ways they confront the issue is by asking relevant questions of scientific Atheists like Steven Pinker. For instance:

Dr. Pinker did not say whether the mind and its thoughts, including his own thoughts are nothing but the product of such physiochemical processes. If that were the case, we would have to wonder whether our vaunted rationality is an illusion produced by brain chemistry.¹

Johnson and Reynolds get us to stretch our thinking. They have us consider that *faith* is not the sole domain of Bible believers. Many scientists have faith in naturalism and chance. The authors then proceed into a helpful discussion on faith and reason.

How about life on mars? How about life on other planets and the implications if life is ever found on another planet? What about all the other *Star-Trek* speculations and scenarios? On pages 39-47, Johnson and Reynolds offer a fascinating discussion of these questions and much insight. That chapter alone was worth the price of the book at least for me.

Within naturalism and among naturalists, skepticism prevails. The authors point out that though skepticism rules, it has never occurred to the naturalist to be skeptical of Darwin or Darwinism or to be skeptical of their skepticism. What a great thought. There is no equal-opportunity skepticism on the part of the New Atheists; it only runs one way. We used to call this blatant bias.

Darwin’s views are seen by Johnson and Reynolds as “**universal acid**” (p.54). They also point out it is not just the old Darwin that drives the New Atheism, but rather, it is the new “**gene-centered**” (p.55) gene-driven philosophy of Dawkins—genes are supposed to totally control all of us. This presumes we are not simply *influenced* by our make up, but rather, we are determined and driven by it. This new form of genetic predestination is questioned by our authors. If there is some

kind of “**God gene**” (p.52) in our chemistry, might there also be a “**Darwin gene**” predisposing us to believe in evolution. I think though from a biblical perspective, it might rather be seen through the lens of a sin nature that really drives our depravity and God-denial as revealed in Romans 1. Of course, the New Atheists are into polemics and harsh charges rather than substantive discussion

Will the New Atheism last? Johnson and Reynolds question the viability and durability of the new Atheism:

The examples of Marx and Freud show that a theory which is all-powerful in one generation can lose all its magic in the next. Sam Harris wrote *The End of Faith*. Perhaps the Darwinian metanarrative will come to an end instead.²

The *God who does not exist* (according to the New Atheists) is, of course, the God of the Judeo Christians. They say this “**God does not exist**” (p.19, 61) according to science. What is meant by the term *science* is hard to make out according to Johnson and Reynolds. When pressed, scientists have to admit that there is “... **no adequate naturalistic theory to explain, for example, the origin of the first cell.**”³



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So, science is always to be believed even when it deals in *speculation*—especially if that speculation is anti-theistic. Chapter 5 then shows that science today at times may not be so scientific.

In chapter 6, Reynolds shows how communication is corrupted by the New Atheists, because they have so little understanding of the Bible and Christians. They have little understanding of Greek and Hebrew languages as well as lack of any training in hermeneutics. They lack any kind of understanding and appreciation of what the Bible has meant to art, science, literature, and philanthropy for centuries past. Atheists may not agree with the Bible; but with a predisposition to malign and mock Scripture rather than respect it, it is hard for meaningful dialogue to take place.

Dawkins calls the Bible “**weird**” and “**cobbled together**”⁴ which reveals no understanding whatsoever of the respectful handling and meticulous transmission of the ancient Scriptures. He seems totally unaware of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other ancient language keys such as that of Ketef Hinnom (the finding of an 8th century BC Hebrew text from the book of Numbers). Dawkins is totally ignorant and creates straw men and distorted caricatures regarding the transmission of Scripture. Chapter 6 then gives us a crash course on hermeneutics detailing how we can approach the Bible and interpret it properly. This is another great chapter.

Chapter 8 is especially helpful as it deals with the charge that Christians and Christianity have done so much evil in history. The book points out: We must ask if Atheism has done any better? Communism and secular tyranny have slain its *millions*. The history of Russia and China alone are stark and vivid examples of what depravities and atrocities Atheism can produce. In the end, those who call themselves Christians and who do evil in Christ’s name are *false* Christians claiming the Name of One they clearly do not know or possess.

All and all, this is a great read. It breaks down into simple English and understandable vocabulary a number of usually technical arguments and makes it easy for the average reader. Anyone taking the time to digest the book will come away greatly informed and greatly profited with some “ammunition” under his or her apologetic belt ☐.

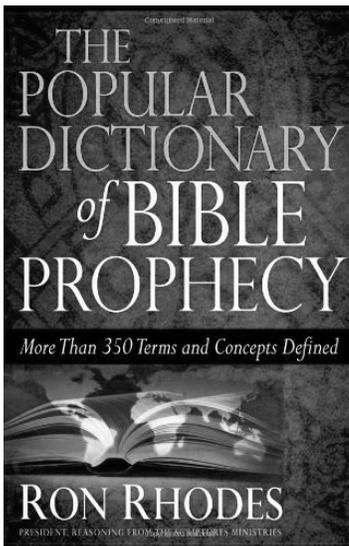


G. Richard Fisher is now retired from pastoral ministry and lives in Pennsylvania and spends his time writing and conference speaking. Richard also serves on the Advisory Board of MCOI.

ENDNOTES:

1 Phillip E. Johnson and John Mark Reynolds *Against All Gods: What’s Right and Wrong About the New Atheism*, IVP Books, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2010, 26-27. 2 *Ibid.*, 56. 3 *Ibid.*, 63. 4 *Ibid.*, 70.





The Popular Dictionary of Bible Prophecy

By Ron Rhodes

Harvest House, Eugene Oregon, ©2010, 340 pages, \$14.99

Review by G. Richard Fisher

Ron Rhodes is incredibly prolific and his book, *The Popular Dictionary of Bible Prophecy*, is a fantastic resource book. Where else can I get over 350 terms and concepts regarding Bible prophecy defined and explained? Would it take a year attending seminary? Not really. Having Ron Rhodes' new book would be the answer. I would suggest reading through it, but it can be consulted as one would consult a small dictionary.

Ron is founder and president of Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries; and over the years, he has proven to be balanced and biblical. He writes on a wide range of biblical topics, as well as, apologetic and cult issues. With such a good track record, we can have confidence in his competent handling of God's Word.

In Ron's "Introduction," he tells us more about the design and scope of the book:

The study of prophecy or the end times is known in theological circles as *eschatology*. This term is derived from two Greek words: *eschatos*, meaning "last" or "last things," and *logos*, meaning "study of." *Eschatology* is the study of last things, or study of the end times.

Eschatology can logically be broken down into two primary fields of study. *Personal eschatology* concerns things such as death, the future judgment, heaven, and hell. (These are matters related to each person.) *General eschatology* concerns more general matters, such as the rapture, the Tribulation, the second coming of Christ, the millennial kingdom, and the eternal state. For your benefit, this dictionary contains common terms related to both personal and general eschatology." (p.5)

We live during days of uncertainty. It is even more confusing, because these also are days of deception. Add to this the extremes we see all around us. There is the extreme of disinterest in the Bible; and then on the opposite pole, there are those who indulge in newspaper eschatology—trying to twist the Scripture to fit into the latest headlines. Within that sub culture, there are date-setters, date-suggesters, and identifiers of the antichrist. What is needed is a sane, sound, balanced, biblical approach to the End Times. Ron's new *The Popular Dictionary of Bible Prophecy* gives us that.

Consider the issue of America in prophecy. It is more and more becoming a topic of discussion as well as conjecture. Some have wandered into extreme wild and unbiblical speculations.

For starters: Is America in prophecy at all? Why, or why not? On pages 18-23 of *The Popular Dictionary of Bible Prophecy*, the issue is treated in detail. It will tell you what you need to know and why.

Some are puzzled by terms such as *Amillennialism*, *Postmillennialism*, and *Preterism*. What do they mean, and what makes them different from each another? Events like the Tribulation are explained. Places that figure into Bible prophecy are described. Even theological words not found in the Bible, but which are terms used to describe concepts regarding future events are handled in understandable ways.

Is there a difference between *Hades* and *Hell*? What about *Tartarus*? Find out when you look up each name in either the "H" or "T" sections of this book. Then there is the Old Testament word *Sheol*, and nuances we should know about that place.

Where there are differences in prophetic viewpoints, they are not side stepped, but rather, explained; and the author is not afraid to share his view, and why he holds to that view. Readers at any level (first timers or schooled reviewers) will easily grasp the explanations.

There are other topics that are nice extras and somewhat related to the major topic of prophecy. For instance, since astrologers claim to divine and forecast the future, there are a little better than four pages on Astrology.

There are entries on *Blasphemy* and *Date Setting*, *Death* and *Demons* as well as *The Elect*. Places often play an important part in the setting of prophecies. *Armageddon*, *Babylon*, *Ephesus*, *Euphrates River*, *Gog*, *Gomer*, *Laodicea*, *Sardis* and so many others are looked at. On pages 281-284, Ron examines *Satan* and all his titles and descriptions.

Another plus of this book is the overview of books of the Bible that figure into prophecy. Brief surveys of books like *Habakkuk*, *Isaiah*, *Joel*, *Zechariah* and *Zephaniah* (and others) are covered. There also are four pages detailing all of the Messianic Prophecies fulfilled by Jesus.

Ron's apologetic skills kick in as he gives us entries on *Ultradispensationalism* and *Universalism*. What about words like *Maranatha* and *Wormwood*? One might decide to teach from portions of this book or use the definitions for sharing with a class. Some of the topics might make for a short Bible study. There are myriad ways to mine the contents. You will be very glad you did. You and others will profit much. 



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“Ehrman” Continued from page 5

As they turned to leave, Mary Magdalene was weeping when she ran into Jesus Who was, indeed, resurrected. Again, a careful review of the accounts in this fashion does not support the claim of contradiction, but instead, it gives a more comprehensive **“BIG Picture,”** as Ehrman refers to it.

4) Do the women assume Jesus has been raised (Synoptics) because that’s what they’re told, or do they assume He’s been buried in some other place (John) since His body is not in the tomb?

This one is a “time” question or “when” question rather than a demonstration of contradictions, because both of the above are true at different times. As previously shown, Mary Magdalene came while it was dark, saw the tomb was empty, and *assumed* His body had been moved (John 20:1-2). Later, she and the all the other women were told He was raised, and they saw Him *after* they were told. These two are not contradictions, but rather, both are true *at different times of the morning* in question.

5) Who first comes to realize Jesus has been raised? The women (the Synoptics) or Simon Peter and the beloved disciple (John)?

Again, the text, in context, answers this one without any contradiction. As Ehrman agrees, Matthew, Mark, and Luke concur that the women “realized” or knew first. John not only does not contradict this, but rather, he agrees. In John 20:3-8, we read that Peter and John ran to the tomb, saw and believed the tomb was empty, but “... *as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise from the dead*” (John 20:9). So, although Peter and John “*saw and believed*” (John 20:8) the tomb was empty, they did not know what it meant at that point in time; whereas the women had been told by the angels and saw the risen Lord.

6) Are the women told anything upon first finding the tomb empty (Synoptics: yes; John: no)?

The answer to both is “yes” and “no,” but this does not result in a contradiction. Why, you ask? Again, the first time Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, while it was dark, she was not told anything. When Mary Magdalene returned and the other women arrived, they all were told that Jesus was raised.

7) What are they told? To tell the disciples to go to Galilee to meet Jesus there, or that Jesus told them while He was still in Galilee that He would rise.

Is there a contradiction here, or are both true? Earlier in this article, we looked at the seven times in the Gospel According to Mark where Jesus clearly stated He would be raised. His *stating* that He would be resurrected is not the same thing as the disciples *understanding* what that meant or that it even registered in their thinking at the time. As early as John 2:22, we find He clearly taught the Resurrection of His body (John 2:19-21), but it was not until *after* the event that the disciples understood, and then they “... *remembered that He had said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.*” So, yes, He told them while He was still in Galilee that He would be raised and sent the women to tell the disciples to go and meet Him in Galilee. No contradiction. Both are true, one is predictive or prophetic (while He was still in Galilee), and the other is confirmation of prophetic fulfillment.

8) Did they tell the disciples? Mark 16:8. The end. Contrast Matthew 28:8 and Luke 24:9.

The answer is ... “no” and “yes.” Mary Magdalene ran and told Peter and John the tomb was empty (John 20:1-2). She re-

turned, and the other women arrived. Being gripped with fear, most of the women fled and said nothing after seeing and hearing the angels. (Mark 16:8) Mary Magdalene and some of the women met up with Jesus (Matthew 28: 8-10; John 20:15-17), and then she and other women went and told the disciples (Luke 24:9-10; John 20:18). Just as in the answer to point four, both are true at *different times* of the Resurrection morning and are, therefore, not contradictory.

Ehrman stated:

You will find dozens of discrepancies in the details. Let me stress: It’s not good enough to say that these are all just minor details. The BIG picture is made up of lots and lots of details; if you change all the details, you change the BIG picture.¹⁴

So, far he has not provided *any* examples of actual contradictions. None of these are minor details. He is correct; the **“BIG Picture”** is made up of lots and lots of details. Cross checking the details—the “when” and “where” of details in historical narrative—is important and builds the **“BIG Picture.”** Each of Ehrman’s above claims demonstrates slips in his research, reading, and teaching on this issue. This raises questions. Is this intentional dishonesty, poor scholarship, or something else? These are questions I cannot answer, but they are worth considering.

One Other Issue

This wasn’t in the debate, but Bart Ehrman claims there are more errors in the New Testament manuscript copies than there are words in the New Testament. His claim is true; they are *copyist’s* errors. However, in the end this is a meaningless and ineffectual claim because of the nature of these copyist’s errors. The reason is two-fold.

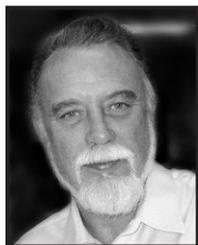
First, the copyist’s errors do not change *any* major or minor doctrine. It is not as though one copy says “Jesus is God,” and another copy says “Jesus is not God.” Or, as we saw earlier, perhaps, the last 12 verses of Mark are not in the original. However, it is still clearly presented in Mark that he believed in the Resurrection, and so it makes no substantial difference in doctrine.

Second, in over 99% of what are called the *variants* (differences or variations in reading), *we do know* what they are *supposed* to say. For example: If I wrote a note that was copied and sent to you which read, “**I will be talking a trip to you’re area in a couple of weeks and plan to see you,**” would you know what the original said? Of course. But, let’s say someone else copied this with a view to correct the errors and wrote, “**I well be taking a trip to your area in a few of weeks and plan to see ewe.**” Would you understand what was meant? The original copyist’s errors have been corrected, but new typos are now there with some word substitutions. In both cases, *the original meaning is discernable*, and comparing the two actually *gives a greater confidence as to what the original said*. Although Ehrman’s claim sounds scary at first, once we understand how the text is analyzed and translated, his claim has virtually no bearing on whether the New Testament is reliable or not. 

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College of Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada. He is the author and editor of more than 60 books and hundreds of articles and reviews and has given lectures at Cambridge, Oxford, Durham, Yale and other universities, colleges, seminaries and museums, such as the Field Museum in Chicago, the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. Along with countless interviews on radio networks across Canada and the US, Evans has been seen on Dateline NBC, CBC, CTV, Day of Discovery, and many documentaries aired on BBC, The Discovery Channel, History Channel, History Television and others. He also has served as a consultant for the National Geographic Society.



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I want to offer appreciation to **Ron Henzel**, Senior Researcher for Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc., for his research assistance and input.

ENDNOTES:

1 For a good overview, see "Famous American Trials: The O.J. Simpson Trial: 1995," <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/simpson/simpson.htm>

2 EMNR is Evangelical Ministries to New Religions; www.emnr.org

3 Cf. the discussion by F.F. Bruce in *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 441ff.

4 D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 296-300. For another discussion of the dating of Acts that demonstrates the role of presuppositions (as opposed to actual evidence) in the dating process, cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed., (Leicester, U.K. and Downers Grove, IL: Apollos and InterVarsity Press, 1990), 355-365.

5 As a matter of course, arguments over the dating of New Testament books are intimately linked to arguments over authorship, but since the Gospels are technically anonymous documents, authorship becomes a secondary question. It cannot be logically argued that Luke could not have written Acts because he was dead by the time it was written. Simply positing a date for a Gospel after the death of its traditional author, and then using that date as an argument against traditional authorship, is an exercise in circular reasoning. Dating each Gospel must proceed on the basis of evidence internal and external to the document itself; and if it can be reasonably concluded that it was written within the lifetime of the traditional author, then that becomes an argument in favor of traditional authorship.

6 "The only really significant reason for dating Luke after AD 70 is the argument that Mark must be dated in the mid-60s at the earliest. But we have seen reason to question the necessity of dating Mark as late as that. And if Mark is dated in the early 60s, then Luke could well have been written in the mid- or late-60s." Carson and Moo, *Ibid.*, 210. This reasoning is based, of course, on the premise of Markan priority, and Luke's dependence upon Mark. However, if it is assumed Luke did not consult Mark, an even earlier date for Luke could be entertained. Cp. Guthrie, *Ibid.*, 125-131.

7 The argument that Mark 13 contains evidence the author actually experienced the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 has been ably challenged by Carson and Moo, who conclude, "A decision between a date in the 50s and one in the 60s is impossible to make. We must be content with dating Mark sometime in the late 50s or the 60s." *Ibid.*, 182. Cp. Guthrie, *Ibid.*, 84-89.

8 Gary Habermas and Antony Flew; *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?: The Resurrection Debate*, Harper & Row, 1987, 23.

9 *Ibid.*, 19-20.

10 "Fallacy of special pleading. (a) Accepting an idea or criticism when applied to an opponent's argument but rejecting it when applied to one's own argument, or (b) rejecting an idea or criticism when applied to an opponent's argument but accepting it when applied to one's own." Peter A. Angeles, *Dictionary of Philosophy*, (New York: Barnes & Noble/Harper & Row, 1981), 99; italics and bold part of original text. Cp. Don Lindsay, "List of Fallacious Arguments," <http://www.don-lindsay-archive.org/skeptic/arguments.html#special>, where "special pleading" is also referred to as "stacking the deck."

11 Perhaps one of the most common grounds for accusing the Gospels of contradicting each other has been the differing sequences in which the writers sometimes portray the events they narrate. But, as a former pupil of Rudolph Bultmann, Eta Linneman, has pointed out, this objection has been answered at least as far back as the second century, when Papias (as attested by Eusebius) asserted that Mark did not intend to provide a chronologically-ordered account. Cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15 and Linneman, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?*, Robert B. Yarbrough, trans., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 168.

12 Kenneth S. Kantzer (1917–2002), was an influential theologian and educator in the evangelical Christian tradition. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_Kantzer.

13 Dr. Craig Evans and Dr. Bart Ehrman *Does the Bible Misquote Jesus?* <http://www.fcc.org/video187.htm>

14 *Ibid.*

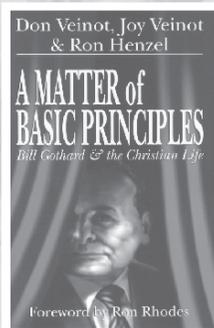
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