

Contradictions in the Gospel?

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[0 : 00] My friend Mike is coming up. He will be speaking to us. And Mike is a very good Christian brother. He's an ordinary man.

And that's not a put-down. He's an ordinary man. And God has put in his heart a desire to develop competencies in ancient languages.

He is now a professor of New Testament at Houston Christian University. He speaks, has been speaking widely for at least two decades, both debating and speaking and lecturing on why it is that we can trust the New Testament documents are reliable, why we can trust that when I say, if you come to this church, you'll often hear me say that when reading Mark, we're reading an ancient biography of Jesus based on eyewitness testimony that tells the true story of Jesus.

And is that something that it's valid for me to say? Well, guys like Mike help to provide the intellectual underpinning to show that, in fact, the most reasonable way to understand the Gospels, and I mean that literally, like in the old-fashioned word of literally, that, in fact, contrary to the opinion of the world, the most reasonable way to understand Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and John, is that you're reading accurate biographies of Jesus based on eyewitness testimony, completed when there were many eyewitnesses around to challenge whether or not it was a true telling of the story.

So it's a great pleasure for me to have Mike come and speak to us. And, brother, if I could just pray for you before you speak, that would be wonderful.

[1 : 46] Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Father, we thank you for the gifts that you have bestowed upon this ordinary man. Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit anoint him as he speaks, that you anoint our ears as we listen.

And we ask, Father, that you would lead us and guide us into all truth. We ask, Father, that you bless him as he speaks, you bless him as he writes, you bless him as he travels, you bless him as a husband and as a dad and a grandfather.

And we ask your blessing upon us as well. And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Welcome, Mike. Thank you, brother. Thank you, George.

I love George. We've known each other for several years now. And I really admire the guy. And he's just an amazing person. And I'm really super impressed that he can do 1,200 push-ups a day.

It's just amazing. I've never met anyone who could do that. He's not shown me. So, you know, I need some evidence. Come on, George. Let's see it. Give me 30, brother. So we're going to ask the question, why are there differences in the Gospels?

[2 : 56] Now, why is that an important question? Well, Gary Habermas is a mentor of mine. And he has said he studied the resurrection of Jesus and what scholars have said about it and what they think about different items related to the resurrection.

He has studied that for about as long as I've been alive. I asked him last week. I'm 61. He's been studying it for about 60 years. So he knows more about it.

In fact, I would say he knows more. There's only one person who knows more about the resurrection of Jesus than Gary Habermas. And that's Jesus. And he says that over the years, the number one objection to the resurrection of Jesus is contradictions in the Gospels.

And you'll have skeptics like Bart Ehrman, who's probably the most influential skeptical New Testament scholar in the world today. And he, I mean, his goal really is to just tear down the faith.

He writes books. He lectures and speaks on this and debates on this. That seems to be his objective. So he has a little shtick that he does in a lot of his lectures.

[4 : 07] He'll say, well, when we come to, let's just say, the crucifixion narratives, what do we have there? Well, was Jesus crucified at 9 a.m., like Mark says, or was it just afternoon, like John says?

Well, it depends which Gospel you read. And he's crucified between two thieves. Did both thieves curse him, as Mark says, or did one thief repent, as Luke says?

Well, it depends which Gospel you read. And did the temple veil split before Jesus died or after? Well, it depends which Gospel you read. And then was Jesus crucified before the Passover meal, like John says, or was it afterward, like Matthew, Mark, and Luke say?

Well, it depends which Gospel you read. And that's just the death of Jesus. When we come to the resurrection of Jesus, how many women went to the tomb? Was it just Mary Magdalene, as John says, or was it multiple women, like the other Gospels?

Well, it depends which Gospel you read. When they got there, how many angels did they see? One or two? It depends which Gospel you read. Where did Jesus first appear to his group of male disciples?

[5 : 13] Was it in Galilee or was it in Jerusalem? It depends which Gospel you read. And by the time he gets through saying all these, every conservative Christian in the audience is thinking, oh, please, that can't be the case.

Well, it is the case, although they're not necessarily contradictions. But it is the case that we have these surface differences, surface discrepancies. So what is going on here?

Well, in my journey to look at this, and I saw a lot of Christians were really troubled by these discrepancies. Now, they used to trouble me, but when you get to the point where you recognize if Jesus rose from the dead and you see the evidence that he actually did, and you're saying it's not just a matter of faith, there's really good historical evidence to suggest that Jesus rose from the dead.

You say, well, if Jesus rose from the dead, it's game, set, match, Christianity's true, period. And once you recognize that, you come to the conclusion that, well, even if there are some actual errors in the Gospels, Christianity is still true.

And the reason being is because if Jesus rose from the dead, it happened in either April of 30 or April of 33. Scholars are split 50-50 on this. If Jesus rose from the dead, Christianity's true.

[6 : 33] Well, the first Gospel isn't written until a minimum of 20 years later. So was Christianity true five years after the Resurrection? Ten years? Fifteen? Nineteen years and eleven months after the Resurrection?

Was it true even one day before Mark published his first Gospel? Well, yeah, of course it is. Well, if Mark actually had some errors in it, would that negate the truth of Christianity?

Well, of course not, because it was true for all those years, the decades prior to Mark even wrote. So I think we put too much in this, and we let the skeptics guide the game and how we're to think.

Like, if there's one error in the Bible, we can't trust it at all. And that's just poor reasoning. It's poor thinking. It's poor logic. But nevertheless, differences in the Gospels is something that does trouble a lot of Christians.

And so I started to look at it and say, well, what's going on here? I wasn't satisfied with a lot of the harmonizations that were taking place. It seemed to me that a lot of them were really stretching it.

[7 : 35] It was like they were subjecting the Gospels to hermeneutical waterboarding until they told the person what they want to hear. And that's not treating the Gospel text with respect.

It's just trying to treat your own view with respect. So what are we to do with these Gospel differences? What's the best way of viewing them? Well, most scholars today recognize...

Well, let me just ask you some questions first. Which genre are the Gospels? Now, if you were going to write an account of an important person, what genre would you use?

Would you use horror fiction, poetry, or biography? Well, obviously you'd use biography. Now, let's say that you are a biographer in the first century, writing about a person who had lived in the first century, and you're writing to people living in the first century.

Would you use the literary conventions in play in the first century, or those that would not come into play until more than a thousand years later? Well, the answer to that is obvious as well.

[8 : 49] You'd use the literary conventions in play in the first century. So I think the problem is that we read the Gospels through a wrong lens. We read them as though they were written in the 21st century.

And we just assume that the rules for writing ancient biography were the same for writing modern biography. It's a fallacy called unbroken historical continuity.

It's kind of like when you look at some medieval paintings of Jesus, and he's wearing medieval clothing, and so are the Roman soldiers and everybody else. They're wearing the kind of clothes that they wore in the 15th century.

And it's like, no, it didn't look like that. And it's like, well, we're assuming that the rules for writing biography were the same in the first century. Well, they weren't. And ancient biographers were allowed a bit of flexibility, a lot of which we use today in our everyday, ordinary conversations.

Sometimes they went further than that. But when we read the Gospels through the lens of ancient biography, we find a lot more comes into focus. So let me give you some reasons for believing the Gospels are ancient biographies.

[9 : 58] I'm going to just come out here a little bit. So in ancient biographies, the focus is on a main character rather than an era, an event, or a government. So if you're going to write on an era, a main event, or a government, that's called a history.

But if you're focusing on a single character, that's going to be a biography. I think we can all understand that. But here's something else, or something that happens in ancient biography that's not in modern biography.

In modern biography, they talk about the birth of the individual, and then things that happened during that person's childhood, and their education, and in their family, that shaped them to become the person that they are.

So that would be like the psychological reasons they became who they are. In antiquity, they didn't do things that way. They didn't try to guess what in their background made them the person they were.

They believed, falsely, but they believed that a person always had that character. They were born with that character, and it was through their life that it became more and more manifested, the kind of person they are.

[11 : 07] So talk about their childhood was irrelevant. And so what we typically find in ancient biographies is it talks about their family ancestry, their family line, and then, boom, it launches right into the inauguration of their public ministry, or public service, be it as a military person, or a politician, or a philosopher, or a religious leader.

It's from their childhood, boom, into the inauguration of their public life. And that is why we don't have a lot about Jesus in his childhood, except for one short story of when he was 12 years old.

We don't know anything about Jesus' childhood. And we wonder why. Well, it's because it's ancient biography. In ancient biographies, they're all about the same length, somewhere between 10,000 to 25,000 words.

Sometimes they're longer. In an autobiography written by Josephus, it's actually 80,000 words. But that was very unusual, and of course we can understand why.

Josephus knew a whole lot more about his own life than we know about the lives of people that aren't ourselves. You're going to be able to write, have a lot more content if you're writing an autobiography than if you're writing a biography of someone else.

[12 : 28] And then here's something different about ancient biographies. The main subject's character is illuminated through their words and deeds.

So you have Plutarch. Let's see if I got that here. Okay, I don't. But in Plutarch, in his life of Alexander the Great, he says that, please don't get upset with me if I'm not mentioning a whole lot of different acts that Alexander did, where battles in which thousands fall, and other great deeds.

He says, because this is not a history, it's a biography. And so he said, I'm going to illuminate who he is, his character through his words and deeds. It's the most famous passage in Plutarch's lives.

This is, and there are other statements like this in other ancient historical literature. So that's going to be the purpose of ancient biography. Now, when we come to the Gospels as ancient biographies, and we view them through that lens, it's amazing what comes into focus.

I remember reading Gospel of Mark and thinking, all right, it's ancient biography, and then things just jumped out at me that I never saw before. For example, Jesus' divinity in Mark.

[13 : 52] Look at how Mark's Gospel starts off. As Isaiah the prophet said, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Well, you'd think it'd be Jesus in that context that is now going to prepare the way of God because the text in Isaiah is talking about prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.

But what Mark is going to go on to discuss is John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. Well, what does that say about who Mark says Jesus is from the very get-go?

He's saying he's divine. He's God. Chapter 2, Jesus forgives sins of the paralytic and heals the paralytic, and the Jewish leaders say, well, that's blasphemy. Why? Because only God forgives sins.

So he's illuminating who Jesus is through the works that he does. Chapter 3, Jesus says, well, you've got Jesus casting out demons, and the Jewish leaders say, well, Satan cast out Satan.

And Jesus says, no, it's like a strong man. If you want to go rob him, his house, you have to bind the strong man, and then you can go plunder his house of his goods.

[15 : 01] And Jesus is saying by that that his exorcisms, he's binding the strong man who is Satan and now is plundering his house of souls. Well, what human can bind Satan?

Chapter 4, Jesus calms the wind and the waves, which the Old Testament says, this is something that God does. Chapter 5, Jesus raises someone from the dead, something Ecclesiastes says, only God does.

Now, of course, we have people like Paul in the New Testament, we have Isaiah, I'm sorry, Elijah and Elijah in the Old Testament, who raises someone from the dead.

So, how's that different? Well, they prayed, they relied on God to do it, whereas Jesus just spoke the word, and it was by the power of his own command that the dead are raised. Chapter 6, Jesus walks on water, something the Old Testament says, only God can do.

That's pretty cool stuff. And then you come to chapter 9, Jesus cast out a demon after his disciples were unable. This is right after the transfiguration. And when his disciples come to him later and say, why couldn't we do that?

[16:10] He says, well, this kind only comes out by prayer. Now, I can just imagine at that point, Andrew turning to Peter and saying, Pete, I don't remember him praying before he cast out that demon.

No, he did it by the word of his own power. Mark chapter 12, you got Jesus is not only David's son, but also his Lord. He pre-exists, David.

Then you got chapters 12 and 13, Jesus stands in a special relationship with God as his son, above all prophets, priests, and kings, and angels.

Chapters 12, 13, and 14, Jesus is the apocalyptic, the future son of man, who will be worshipped and served in a manner that should otherwise be given only to God.

And so we see throughout the entire Gospel of Mark, Mark is just illuminating Jesus' character as deity through his words and deeds. Something I never really observed until I read the Gospel of Mark through its proper lens as an ancient biography.

[17:17] Ancient biographers did take liberties, and the way that I like to put this is the, well, how many of you are married? Okay, quite a few of you. So, we all know the difference between the guy version and the girl version of a story, right?

Girls typically like details, they like lots of details, they want to know what happened, when it happened, where it happened, why it happened, how it happened, who was there, what they were doing, what they were saying, what they were thinking, and how they were feeling.

And then they want to know how you were feeling. That's just the way girls are. I remember my son, when he was growing up, he was quiet for a little bit, my wife's saying to me, what do you think's wrong with Zach?

I said, I don't know. Well, it really bothered her, and so finally she says, well, Zach, what's the matter? And he talked about something that happened in school, and she said, well, how does that make you feel?

How did that make you feel? And he just looked at her like she was an alien from another planet. It's like, what do you mean, how does that make me feel? What difference does it make?

[18:22] You know? And it's just that difference between the way girls and guys think. You know, guys like bullet points. They, you know, get to the bottom line. I don't need these insignificant details.

And sometimes when us guys were hearing a story from someone else, I mean, I can tell you I'm this way. If they're getting to a lot of details, I just want to bang my head against the wall and say, come on, finish this story.

Now, it's not that all the details are bad. It's, it's just that, it's just the difference between the way guys and girls often tell stories. Now, I know that that's a stereotype, and I know guys that, um, I want to bang my head on the, on the wall when they're telling me stories, and I like the way, certain girls tell stories.

So, it's just a stereotype, but it's generally true. Um, now, in antiquity, um, you know, the guys are going to take the, these, these, um, these liberties.

We're, we're going to, when we're talking in our ordinary conversations, and we're giving a guy version, we will bend the details a little bit, so that we can get to the bottom line quicker. We're not trying to deceive.

[19 : 26] Bending the details still allow us to give the essence, the gist of what happened, uh, without distorting the story. It's just, we know our friend doesn't want to hear 10 minutes of background knowledge that they think is totally useless.

They just want to know the bottom line. So, when it comes to, um, how they reported in antiquity, a lot of times they're going to use the same kind of stuff that us guys use when repeating stories.

But let me say this, if you want to read the girl version of the gospel, um, you ladies can go to the gospel of Mark. If you want the guy version, you want to go to Matthew. Um, so, let's talk about some of these, uh, um, ways in which they took liberties.

Now, um, there are compositional devices, um, and we call them compositional devices because they use these when composing ancient historical literature. But you could also call them rhetorical devices because, again, many of us, in fact, I would submit to you, all of us use some of these in our everyday ordinary conversations.

Um, but I'm going to show you from two different sources in antiquity. Um, the first is a guy, uh, or what are called the compositional textbooks. And there was a guy named Elias Theon who wrote in the first century.

[20 : 44] Now, what happened was when a person was wanting to, to, to learn how to write, they're learning in their youth. But when they got into their mid-teens, that is, uh, of wealthy kids and kids who were going to receive a good education, um, they learned, they already knew how to read and write, but now they were going to learn how to write well.

And so in the mid-teens, they would get these compositional textbooks with exercises in them called progymnasmata, or preliminary exercises. And they would learn how to do things like paraphrase.

And so this is what Elias Theon writes. And again, he's writing sometime in the first century, probably. Woo! Okay. Maybe I should have taken that.

I'll be okay, but maybe I should have taken that one. My fault. All right. So here's what Theon writes. Training in exercises, these preliminary exercises, is absolutely useful.

And, uh, not only for those who are going to be orators, but also if anyone wants to be a poet, or historian, or if he wants to acquire facility with some other form of writing.

[21 : 56] These things are, are in effect, the foundation of every form of writing. So Theon says that if, that even historians are going to use these preliminary exercises, um, in learning how to write historical accounts.

Um, and by the way, Theon isn't the only one. You have Quintilian, a Roman who, uh, grammarian who's writing at the end of the first century. He's writing in Latin. Theon is writing in Greek.

Then you had some others who, uh, later on, Athlonius and some others who wrote compositional textbooks. And, and Theon, even in, um, his writing talks about how he's just, uh, giving some exercises that already existed, and he's adding some others and explaining them.

So he's not the first one to do this. He's just the earliest one that we have that has survived. Theon also writes this about paraphrase. Paraphrase consists of changing the form of expression while keeping the thoughts.

I mean, that's what we do today when we paraphrase. But now he's going to talk about how do they paraphrase. There are four main kinds. Variation in syntax. Syntax is grammar.

[23 : 07] By addition, by subtraction, and by substitution, plus combinations of these. Let me give you an example. Syntax, grammatical structure. Suppose we had the statement, you go home and you tell someone, today I heard Mike lecture.

And then later on, you want to say the same statement, but you're going to alter the syntax, or the grammatical structure. So you just say, I heard Mike lecture today. Same words, just different word order.

You change the syntax. That's a way of paraphrasing. Here's another way. How about addition? Today I heard Mike lecture. Now you're going to add to it, you're going to keep the thought going, and what you're saying is going to be accurate, but you're going to add to this.

So if the original is, today I heard Mike lecture. Today I heard Mike lecture on gospel differences. So you explained a little bit more for the listener or reader. Subtraction.

You're going to abbreviate. So instead of saying, today I heard Mike lecture, you say, I heard Mike lecture. So you don't include as much information. You're still paraphrasing through subtraction.

[24 : 14] Substitution. Substitution. So it's like you're going to use a synonym. Instead of saying, today I heard Mike lecture, you say, today I listened to Mike teach. So these are just various ways of doing it.

But there's more. Theon says, since we are accustomed to setting up the facts, sometimes making a straightforward statement, and sometimes is doing something more than making a factual statement, and sometimes in the form of questions, and sometimes as things we seek to learn about, and sometimes as things about which we are in doubt, and sometimes as making a command, sometimes as expressing a wish, and sometimes swearing to something, sometimes addressing the participants, sometimes advancing suppositions, sometimes using dialogue.

It is possible to produce varied narrations in all these ways. This is the way they would vary stories, a narrative. They would do these kinds of things to vary it.

So one author wrote it one way, the other author would paraphrase it and change things a little, like creating a dialogue when no dialogue actually existed. That would be like addition through dialogue.

That's something we probably would not do today, but they did it back then. If we wish to use a dialogue form, we shall suppose some people talking with each other about what has been done, and one teaching the other learning about the occurrences.

[25 : 51] So maybe it would be like George, your pastor, teaches at a seminary, and maybe in one case, if you're writing about it, if you're a student, and you're writing about something he taught on the divinity of Jesus, you would write what he taught, and you'd put it in a form as though he gave the speech, a lecture, if you're trying to recall it.

But maybe you get a little creative, and you're thinking, well, people like dialogue a little better, and so you would take the same thing that you recall George saying, but you would make a dialogue out of it, where a student says, well, professor, why should we believe that Jesus thought he was divine?

And George says, well, let's take a look at the Gospel of Mark as a biography. And then the student says, well, why should we believe it's a biography? And George says, well, let me give you a few reasons why.

And so you create a dialogue. The dialogue didn't exist, actually happened, but you recall the event through using dialogue. So that's what we're looking at there. They would do that in antiquity.

Theon continues, there is nothing to prevent what is imagined from being expressed equally well in all these ways. There is evidence of this in paraphrase by a poet of his own thoughts elsewhere, or paraphrase by another poet, and in the orators and historians.

[27 : 18] Again, this is evidence that this is meant even for historians to do. And in brief, all ancient writers seem to have used paraphrase in the best possible way, rephrasing not only their own writings, but those of each other.

It's pretty interesting to see how ancient writers, what they were prescribed, and how to write. Let me give you some examples of this.

Tell you, yeah, I got to stand here because of the, I'm going to come out a little bit further. All right, so inflection. Inflection occurred in two different ways.

So one way of inflection would be, so I guess some of you know French in here, right? All right, quite a few of you.

Anybody know Greek or, all right, wow, cool. So you know how the way that you determine, like in English, the way something is a subject or a direct object, we can tell, usually by its position in a sentence, but you don't change how something is spelled.

[28 : 32] In Greek, and I'm guessing probably in French, the part of speech that it is, whether it's a subject, a direct object, or indirect object, is determined by how it's spelled.

In Greek, I know, you know, the subject has a certain kind of ending to it, but if it's a direct object, it's the same word, but the ending is spelled a little differently.

Is it that way in French? No? Okay. Well, how about German? Anybody know German in here? All right. Sehr gut. So, you know what I'm talking about then.

It's not necessarily the word order. It is how the ending is spelled that determines what part of speech it is. So, inflection, you would change something, the ending of it, to change the part of speech it is.

You'd communicate the same thing, but instead of it being a subject, it would become a direct object or an indirect object. Another way of doing it would be to change it from being a singular to a plural or a plural to singular.

[29 : 37] Let me just give you an example here. So, this is the three temptations of Jesus in the wilderness we find in both Matthew and in Luke.

Mark mentions it, but he doesn't describe them. He just says Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. So, we see an inversion of the order here. That's not inflection. But, in English, if my wife says to me, hey Mike, would you pick up some bread at the store?

I might say, well, how many loaves? Right? Because bread, the English word for it could be singular or plural. Or, if I say to my wife, hey, when you're in the grocery store, would you get some fruit?

Well, how many pieces do you want? It could be singular or plural, the word fruit. Well, that's, when we read these, some of these things in English, we miss whether it's a singular or plural.

But in Greek, it's plain. And so, you see these things when you read the Gospels in Greek. Well, in Matthew, when Jesus says to turn, Satan tells to turn this bread into stone, he actually uses a plural.

[30 : 50] Turn these stones into bread. Multiple. A plurality of bread. But in Luke, turned this stone into bread, and bread is in the singular. So, one of them has changed, has used inflection, and changed either a singular to a plural, or a plural to a singular.

Here's something. It's just changing the order of something. So, the parable of the sower, Jesus talks about the seed is sown on ground, some on rocky ground, some on shallow ground, some on good ground, and that on good ground produces fruit.

That is, Mark says, 30, 60, and 100-fold. And, but then you have Matthew, inverts those, and say, 100, 60, and 30-fold.

Now, I'm guessing when Jesus taught this, he probably used it as Mark, because you've got a nice rhetoric here, 30, 60, even 100-fold, whereas Matthew's, it's kind of, I don't know, it's a downer here.

Start off with 100, and I'm only going to do 30, you know, later on. So, Matthew probably changed that around. And then you have Luke, what is he doing? Subtraction.

[32 : 06] He's just using 100-fold. All right. Now, here's another example in the Gospels of some, one of these exercises from the compositional textbooks going on.

It's the parable of the vineyard and the wicked tenants. And, you know, there was this farmer, this owner, he buys a vineyard, he fixes it up, prepares it, and then he leases it out to some farmers.

And so, they plant, and then it's the season for the harvest. And then, it was typical back then that the way the owner of the vineyard would be repaid is they get the first fruits of the harvest.

And so, the owner sends some servants to get the first fruits. And here's how it's reported. So, in Matthew, it says he sent three servants.

They beat some, killed, beat one, killed one, stoned another. But Mark and Luke say that he sent one servant whom they beat and sent away.

[33 : 06] Now, they continue. Now, they continue. And in the second phase, Mark and Luke say, well, then he sent another one. And you can see, like Mark says, they struck his head and they treated him shamefully.

Whereas, Luke says, they beat him, treated him shamefully and sent him away. Matthew doesn't have anything here. And then the next phase, the owner sends a servant.

And Mark says, and they kill that servant. Whereas, Luke says, they wound him and cast him out. But Matthew doesn't have any. Well, why not? Well, because Matthew abbreviated.

He simplified it and just had the owner send three the first time. And how do we know that that's the case? Because Matthew then reports, then the owner sent more servants than he did the first time.

And these, they beat, kill, and stone. And Mark just says, they sent many others. Luke doesn't mention this. And then, you have, finally, he sends his son.

[34 : 10] And all three report that they kill the son. Okay, so we can see that what Matthew is doing, we see what even, you know, there's not a real, they are not obsessed with keeping precise details here.

Okay, they're giving us the gist. But Matthew's really simplifying more than the others. Now, this gets interesting. You have Jesus in Mark. He says, what will the owner of the vineyard do?

He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. So, in Mark, Jesus asks and then answers his own question. In Matthew, he creates a dialogue.

So, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? They said to him, this is the Jewish leaders, he will put those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him their fruits and their seasons.

See this little dialogue that Matthew creates? Transferral. Transferral. Transferral. Transferral is when the author takes what one person said or did and attributes it to another person as though they did it.

[35 : 23] Or, a person who receives an action, they transfer that as though another person received it. Now, this is common to do in movies and even in historical literature today.

You conflate or you transfer, so you can simplify it. You conflate two characters together or you simplify it by just having one person.

it's attributed to one person so you don't have to introduce another character in the movie and you save money. Let me give you an example from Plutarch.

Now, Plutarch was the greatest biographer of antiquity and a lot of what we know about the ancient world comes from him. He's talking about General Pompey here.

Now, Pompey, some people will pronounce that as Pompey, but Pompey was actually the city that was destroyed by the volcano. The general's name is pronounced Pompey.

[36 : 23] And so this is, Pompey was involved with Julius Caesar. Caesar, he ends up fighting Pompey and ends up defeating Pompey who commits suicide.

But Pompey was, I mean, none of these ancient Romans were really great people. You didn't want to get on their bad side. But Pompey was one of the most reasonable of them.

And so it got to a point in 53 BC when Rome was in a state of great chaos. And so they said, well, we don't know what we're going to do here.

There's a lot of riots going on. There's all kinds of problems. It kind of reflects what the US looks like today. And so they said, well, here's how our government works.

We have, they didn't have a prime minister. They didn't have a president. They had what was called a consul. And in fact, you had two consuls who served together. And they only served for one year. And there was a new election every year.

[37 : 26] And then they could run again for consul, but they had to wait 10 years before running again. Sometimes I think maybe that's a good way to do things. So anyway, they said, we're in desperate situation right now.

Why don't we just give, we'll elect one person to be consul. There's no co-consul. And we will give that person absolute power. They don't have to get anything approved by the Senate.

What they say is law. And we'll give them one year of this kind of power. And so they said, Pompey is the only one who could, who could accomplish this. And so they give the power to him.

Pompey makes some good laws, but then in, he proceeds to break one of those laws in the, in the year 52. He's now no longer consul, but one of the laws that he made in 53 BC was, if you, if a person was on trial, a friend could not get up and read what was called an encomium, a lavish prayer, a speech giving lavish praise to that person, because it really had no bearing on whether that person was guilty of the crime of which, for which they were being charged.

So Pompey makes this law. It's a good law. But then when his friend Plankus goes on trial, by the way, remember that name. If you're, if you ever have kids, Amy, you know, just remember Plankus.

[38 : 54] That might be a good name for a son. Okay. So Plankus goes on trial. Pompey is his friend. And so it's reported that in Plutarch's life of Cato, the younger, that Pompey writes an encomium, gives it to an emissary who comes into Rome, and he reads it at Plankus's trial before the jury.

Now, in the life of Cato, Cato gets up, and he strenuously objects, because he says that's against the law to do this. The reason Pompey sends the emissary in is because at that point, he's with an army outside the city, and it was Roman law that you could not come in to the city if you were out with your army.

But when the Plutarch tells the same story in his biography of Pompey, he simplifies, and he transfers the act to Pompey himself. So Pompey wrote the encomium, and he narrates it as Pompey coming in and reading it to the jury.

Now, we know Pompey did not do it that way. In fact, this story is also mentioned by two other ancient historians. So we know Pompey sent an emissarian, but would we fault Plutarch, the same author who writes that he sent an emissary, in another one of Plutarch's lives, his biography of Pompey, he just has Pompey coming.

He simplifies it. He transfers the act to Pompey himself. He's given us the essence, though not the precisely accurate details. Now, we find something quite similar in the Gospels.

[40 : 28] It's the story of Jesus healing the centurion servant. Now, the way we find this story in Luke, the Gospel of Luke, is the centurion has this servant, very sick, and he wants to go to Jesus and ask Jesus to heal his servant.

So what he does is he's got some Jewish elders who are friends, and they go to Jesus, and they say, Jesus, there's this centurion. He's really good. He loves our people. He helped us build our synagogue.

He's got a servant who's sick. He's worthy of your help. Please come heal him. And so Jesus says, all right, let's go check it out. And so they start to head back to the centurion's home, which is in Capernaum.

The centurion finds out about it, and he has a change of mind, and he says, oh, and he has some friends go to meet Jesus along the way, and they say, well, the centurion says he's unworthy for you to come into his house, but he says that he knows that you are a man of authority like he is, and he says, look, the centurion says he has a servant that he tells to do this, and he does that, and a soldier, go do this, and he does that.

So since you're a man of authority, just say the word, and my servant will be healed. And Jesus praises the centurion for his faith, and he heals the servant without ever seeing the servant or the centurion.

[41 : 53] That's how Luke tells the story. Now, the way Matthew tells the story, oh, sorry about, oh, I'm going backward. Okay. So that's how Luke tells the story.

Now, Matthew simplifies the story, and rather than having the centurion send the Jews, Jewish elders, and then the servants, the centurion himself goes to Jesus and makes the request in person, and says, please heal my servant.

Jesus says, all right, let's go. And then the centurion says directly to Jesus, wait, I'm a man. I'm unworthy for you to come under my roof, yada, yada. And Jesus praises the centurion for his faith, and heals his servant without seeing the servant.

So Luke, or Matthew communicates, it's the same thing, but he simplifies and transfers the act to Matthew. I'm sorry, to the centurion. By the way, how many of you are watching the chosen?

Okay. Yeah. I love that. Well, as you know, if you've, have you saw season three? Okay. So as you know, they're setting up for this story to happen. And I'm wondering which version they're going to give Luke's or Matthew's.

[43 : 06] My guess is they're going to give Luke's version, but just who's the greatest. So in Mark's gospel, you've got them, Jesus and his disciples.

And at one point, they're walking along the road, and they're arguing with one another about who's the greatest. And then Jesus says to them when they're alone, Hey, what were you guys arguing about along the way?

And they're quiet. They're embarrassed. And then that's when Jesus brings a child and says, you, you got to be, you know, it's the, the least among you, the greatest among you will be servant of all.

That's how Mark tells the story. But in Luke, Matthew, you get the disciples just going to Jesus and saying, Hey, Hey, by the way, which one of us is the greatest? Now, which one do you think really happened?

Well, it's probably Mark's version, but Matthew gives us the guy version. He simplifies and just communicates the gist of what happened by having the disciples themselves ask.

[44 : 08] The baptism. You, Jesus comes out of the water and the God's voice out of heaven says, you are my beloved son in you.

I am well pleased. That's how Mark and Luke have it. But in Matthew's gospel, it's speaking to the crowd. So Matthew has transferred the recipient of the action from Jesus to the crowd.

Now, why would he do this? I think Augustine was probably correct when he said he wanted to make it a little more personal to the readers. The God is speaking to the reader, affirming that Jesus is his son.

Now, some, the gospel, the ancient gospel of the Ebeonites, tried to harmonize this and said, well, God's voice spoke to Jesus.

And then it spoke to the crowd. And it just seems to me that some of that hermeneutical waterboarding that's involved there. I think Augustine was probably correct. And here's another compression and conflation.

[45 : 11] Compression would be to narrate the events as though they occurred over a shorter period of time than they actually had. conflation is when you take two events and you smash them into a single event.

Let me show you this. And it's the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree and, and, um, uh, cleansing the temple. So this is how the story is told in, um, Mark's gospel.

So Palm Sunday, which we'll be celebrating next week, Jesus comes into Jerusalem and rides in there. And then he and his disciples go into the temple.

And Mark says it's toward the end of the day. And, um, so they just go in and Jesus looks around and then they leave. They leave the temple and they go to Bethany and in Bethany, they spend the night.

That's Sunday. Monday, they get up in the morning and they start to head back into Jerusalem. And they come upon a fig tree, uh, on their way back to Jerusalem and Jesus is hungry, but there's no figs on it.

[46 : 21] So he curses it. And then they leave from there and they go into Jerusalem. They go now his second visit into the temple. And when they get into the temple, Jesus sees some acts going on with the merchants and the money changers.

He doesn't like it. And so he overturns the tables and he drives them out. Now, after he does that, um, this is still Monday.

This is Monday. Now they leave the temple area and they go back to Bethany and they're going to spend another night. Now, Tuesday morning comes and now they're going to return to Jerusalem.

And on the way they see the fig tree. And Peter says, Jesus, look, the fig tree you cursed yesterday has withered and died. So that's how the story occurs in Mark.

He gives us the girl version. Matthew gives us the guy version. Sunday, Palm Sunday, they arrive in Jerusalem and, sorry, they arrive in Jerusalem and Jesus goes into the temple.

[47 : 35] Now what he does is Matthew is going to conflate the, the Sunday and the Monday visit. So Jesus is going to cleanse the temple on Sunday instead of Monday.

Monday. Wait for me. Wait for me. Wait for me. Wait for me. Wait for me.

Wait for me. Now, then they're going to leave and they're going to leave the temple area and they're going to go back to Bethany. They're going to spend the night. So he's compressed the event.

He is conflated the event. Monday, they get up and they start heading back to Jerusalem. They come upon the fig tree. Jesus is hungry. There's no figs on it.

And so he curses it and it withers on the spot. Matthew has compressed the account. He has conflated the two events into one. So we see this going on.

[48 : 31] Now, I'm sure Matthew and Mark are talking later. And Mark says to Matthew, Maddie, you know, it didn't happen that way. You combine these two events.

You made it shorter. You know, you, you're deceiving people. And Matthew says, he just looks at Mark and says, Mark, back off. You remind me of my wife. So in summarizing, ancient authors were instructed to vary the details.

The gospel authors followed this practice. The changes occurred in the minor details. The Bible does not inform us about the process of divine inspiration, but we observe that it involved the authors following the literary conventions of their own time.

They followed the literary conventions of their own time. William Lane Craig, a Christian philosopher and theologian, calls this the doctrine of the confluence of scripture.

That scripture has dual authorship. It's both divine and human authorship. And so we see the marks of human authorship in this.

[49 : 41] So that's what we're looking at. Finally, if you want more information, visit my website. www.reasonjesus.com All right.