

Answering a Critic who Reads the Bible with One Eye Closed

By Gary DeMar

EE SALISBURY BELIEVES that fundamentalists “must be challenged to defend their religion and tactics.” He writes this in an article titled “The Fundamentalist Christian Mind-Set and the Problem it Presents for America.”¹ Mr. Salisbury believes he has found the soft underbelly of the Bible by uncovering a number of “contradictions.” There’s nothing new in this approach to undermine the Christian faith.



Shepherds visit Jesus

Skeptics have been doing it for centuries. Most so-called contradictions are easily solved by having an understanding of the whole Bible and its complete redemptive message. It’s obvious from even a cursory reading of the NT that in Christ there is a better priesthood, a better covenant, and a better ministry. What is prelude under the Old Testament is fulfillment under the New Testament. Then there are a number of dif-

ferences that are easily remedied by paying close attention to parallel accounts and noting how different authors describe the same events. Differences in the events are actually evidence of authenticity. No one sees the same event in the same way. This shows that there was not collusion on the part of the authors to concoct an airtight testimony. With this in mind, I decided to take up Mr. Salisbury’s challenge by reviewing two accounts of the same event

that he says are “contradictory” and “irreconcilable.” Here’s how he describes what he considers to be an unsolvable contradiction:

After the wise men worshiped the new born Jesus, *Joseph, following the angel’s instruction, immediately flees with Mary and Jesus to Egypt to avoid King Herod’s death squad* (Mt. 2:13–15). [Compare this to Luke’s account]: After Jesus’ birth, *Mary obediently awaits her 40 days of purification in Bethlehem and then Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus go to Jerusalem*. Herod is indifferent to the celebration in Jerusalem. Jesus is presented to the Lord’s prophets Simeon and Anna. Herod’s death squad is unknown. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus then return to Nazareth where the child grew and waxed strong...and when Jesus was 12 went up to Jerusalem (Lk 2:22–42). Luke and Matthew are contradictory, irreconcilable accounts.

I checked a number of commentaries, and these two accounts aren’t on anyone’s apparent contradiction list. When both accounts are combined, the reader knows more about the sequence of events than if he had just read one account. This is typical of much of the Bible.

Harmonizing the Accounts

Let’s follow the sequence of events by harmonizing the two accounts. In Matthew



Magi visit Jesus

2:1 we learn that “*after* Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem.” It’s clear from what Matthew writes that by the time the magi arrived in Jerusalem and entered Herod’s court, Jesus had already been born. Manger scenes that show the Magi present at the birth of Jesus are inaccurate. This means that the first time Herod hears about Jesus—the “King of the Jews” (2:2)—is when the magi inform him of His birth. It’s only after this information is given to Herod that he is “troubled” enough to “gather together all the chief priests and scribes of the people” (2:4) to ascertain “where the Christ was to be born” (2:4). We’re not told how long this took.

After finding out where the Messiah was to be born, Herod “ascertains” from



Herod orders the killing of children 2 years and under

the magi “the time the star appeared” (2:7). This means that the first appearance of the star indicates when Jesus was born. The magi saw the star when they were still somewhere in “the east” (2:1). Herod calculated the travel time from the date they saw the star and how long it took them to travel to Jerusalem. He figures on taking no chances “and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi” (2:16). Why two years and under if he was looking for a newborn? Enough time must have passed for him to consider such drastic measures to wipe out any potential political usurper.

“They Came Into the House”

Notice where Jesus is when the magi finally meet up with Him: “And they came into the *house* (*oikos*) and saw the Child with Mary His mother” (2:11). Jesus is no longer the “babe in the manger.” He’s now in a house, most probably with relatives. It was only after their visit to this house that the magi had “been warned in a dream not to return to Herod” (2:12) and Joseph had been warned to “take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt” (2:13) where they waited until Herod had died (2:15).

In between the time the magi had seen “His star in the east” (2:2), and the time it took them to travel to Jerusalem to ask Herod where the “King of the Jews” had been born, and found the house where Mary and her family had been lodging, Jesus had been circumcised (Luke 2:21), and the laws regarding purification had been fulfilled (Lev. 12:1–4). There is no contradiction. Everything is in perfect harmony.

The Prophecy Card

Mr. Salisbury offers up another proposed contradiction. He writes that “Jesus failed at prophecy when he told his disciples that some would not taste death until they saw

the Son of man coming in his kingdom (Mt 16:27–28). If Jesus prophesied truthfully, some of Jesus’ disciples would still be alive today since we’re still waiting for his return.” This text is problematic for prophecy writers who believe that every reference to “coming” in the Bible refers to a distant future coming where Jesus will return bodily to earth. Of course, as I’ve argued in *Last Days Madness, End Times Fiction, Is Jesus Coming Soon?*, and in numerous articles and debates, Jesus was not referring to a distant coming but a coming in judgment that would happen before that present generation passed away (Matt. 24:34). The NT is very clear on this point. Jesus did come in judgment before the last disciple died (cf. John 21:18–23, esp. v. 22) just like He promised.

There are a lot of new readers to *Biblical Worldview* magazine who wonder why we deal with eschatology. Mr. Salisbury’s complaint is one of the reasons why we deal with the subject. He is calling the Bible into question on the issue of prophecy. The Bible has very strict requirements on what constitutes a true prophet—a 100% track record (Deut. 18:18–22). If Jesus was wrong

in His prediction about His coming before the last disciple died (Matt. 16:27–28) and that first-century generation passed away, then why trust Him on anything He said? Modern-day prophecy writers, from Tim LaHaye to Hal Lindsey, have not offered cogent and satisfying explanations that do justice to the meaning and logic of the text. Believe me, I’ve heard them all.



Simeon recognizes Jesus at the temple

Notes

1. www.axisoflogic.com/artman/publish/article_16457.shtml