By: Jay Smith, Alex Chowdhry, Toby Jepson, James Schaeffer

"The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him." (Proverbs 18:17)

The Charge of Contradiction

Muslims talk often about the many contradictions in the Bible. The number of contradictions vary depending on whom you are talking to. Kairanvi's Izhar-ul-Haq presents 119 numbered contradictions, while others such as Shabbir Ally have supposedly found 101 contradictions. The problem as they see it concerns their supposition that any religious book claiming absolute divine authority must not include any contradictions, as a message emanating from an Omniscient being must be consistent with itself.

The Muslims quote from the Qur'an (4:82) which says "*do they not consider the Qur'an (with care). Had it been from any other than Allah, they would have found there-in many a discrepancy."*

A Definition of Revelation:

In order to respond to this challenge it is important that we begin by recognizing and understanding clearly the presupposition and thinking that underlies such a challenge. The principle of non-contradiction has been elevated to the status of an absolute criterion, capable of being applied by human beings in judging the authenticity of God's word. This is not a proposition to which Christians can or should give assent. The Christian will gladly admit that scripture is ultimately non-self-contradictory. But the Christian cannot agree that the principle of non-contradiction is given to men as a criterion by which they are to judge God's word. It is this criterion which the Muslims have imposed upon the discussion of revelation.

This is a mistake which many of us fall into; measuring that which is unfamiliar to us by a standard which is more familiar; in this case measuring the Bible with the standard which they have borrowed from the Qur'an. Their book, the Qur'an, is believed to have been 'sent down' (Nazil or Tanzil), from heaven unfettered by the hands of men. It is this belief in scripture as a revelation which has been 'sent down' which they then impose upon the Bible as well. But it is wrong for Muslims to assume that the Bible can be measured using the same criteria as that imposed on the Qur'an.

The Bible is not simply one book compiled by one man as the Muslims claim for their Qur'an, but a compilation of 66 books, written by more than 40 authors, over a period of 1500 years! For that reason Christians have always maintained that the entire Bible shows the imprint of human hands. Evidence of this can be found in the variety of human languages used, the varying styles of writing, the differences in the author's intellects and temperaments, as well as the apparent allusions to the author's contemporary concepts of scientific knowledge, without which the scriptures would not have been understood by the people of that time. That does not mean, however, that the Bible is not authoritative, for each of the writers received their revelation by means of inspiration.

A Definition of Inspiration:

In 2 Timothy 3:16, we are told that all Scripture is inspired. The word used for inspiration is *theopneustos* which means *"God-breathed*," implying that what was written had its origin in God Himself. In 2 Peter 1:21 we read that the writers were *"carried along*" by God. Thus, God used each writer, including his personality to accomplish a divinely authoritative work, for God cannot inspire error.

The Bible speaks many times of its inspiration: In Luke 24:27,44; John 5:39; and Hebrews 10:7, Jesus says that what was written about him in the Old Testament would come to pass. Romans 3:2 and Hebrews 5:12 refer to the Old Testament as the Word of God. We read in 1 Corinthians 2:13, *"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit."* This is corroborated in 2 Timothy 3:16, as we saw above. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul when referring to that which he had written says, *"...you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God..."* Peter speaks of the inspiration of Paul's writings in 2 Peter 3:15-16, where he maintains that, *"...Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters..."* Earlier, in 2 Peter 1:21 Peter writes, *"For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along [moved] by the Holy Spirit."* And then finally in Revelation 22:18,19 the writer John, referring to the book of Revelation states, *"...if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life..."*

Charles Wesley summarizes this high view of inspiration brilliantly when he says, *"The Bible must be the invention either of good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God. However, it was not written by good men, because good men would not tell lies by saying 'Thus saith the Lord;' it was not written by bad men because they would not write about doing good duty, while condemning sin, and themselves to hell; thus, it must be written by divine inspiration"* (McDowell 1990:178).

How does God inspire the writers? Does He simply move the writers by challenging their heart to reach new heights, much like we find in the works of Shakespeare, Milton, Homer and Dickens, all of which are human literary masterpieces? Or does that which He inspire contain the words of God-along with myths, mistakes and legends, thus creating a book in which portions of the Word of God can be found, along with those of finite and fallible men? Or are the scriptures the infallible Word of God in their entirety? In other words, how, Muslims will ask, is this inspiration carried out? Does God use mechanical dictation, similar to that which we find claimed for the Qur'an, or does He use the writers own minds and experiences?

The simple answer is that God's control was always with them in their writings, such that the Bible is nothing more than *"The Word of God in the words of men"* (McDowell 1990:176). This means that God utilized the culture and conventions of his penman's milieu, a milieu that God controls in His sovereign providence. Thus history must be treated as history, poetry as poetry, hyperbole and metaphor as hyperbole and metaphor, generalization and approximation as what they are, and so forth. Differences between literary conventions in Bible times and in ours must also be observed: Since, for instance, nonchronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in Bible writers. When total precision of a particular kind was not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it. Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed.

The truthfulness of Scripture is not negated by the appearance in it of irregularities of grammar or spelling, phenomenal descriptions of nature, reports of false statements (for example, the lies of Satan), or seeming discrepancies between one passage and another. It is not right to set the so-called 'phenomena' of Scripture against the teaching of Scripture about itself. Apparent inconsistencies should not be ignored. Solution of them, where this can be convincingly achieved (as we have attempted in this paper), will encourage our faith. However, where for the present no convincing solution is at hand we shall significantly honor God by trusting His assurance that His Word is true, despite these appearances, and by maintaining our confidence that one day they will be seen to have been illusions.

This is not a blind hope. For instance, a century ago there were about 100 parts of the body whose function were mysterious to doctors, and people would say "This is proof of evolution as these are left over parts which we don't need anymore". However, because of on-going and diligent research we are now left with only one organ in the body which appears to be redundant. In time, perhaps we will find a use for that organ as well. This principle can also be

seen with the Bible. So many 'discrepancies' have also been cleared up due to greater research and understanding. Had Shabbir been around a century or even 25 years ago his list could easily have been 1001 contradictions. As new data is uncovered, we are continually finding answers to many of the historical mysteries. Therefore we have every reason to believe that, in God's time, the rest will be solved as well.

We are fully aware that the Christian criteria for revelation is not acceptable to Muslims, as it is in seeming conflict with their own. Yet, by simply measuring the Bible against the *nazil* or *Tanzil* ('sent down') concept which they claim for their Qur'an, Muslims condemn themselves of duplicity, since they demand of the New Testament that which they do not demand of the previous revelations, the *Taurat* and *Zabuur*, though both are revered as equally inspired revelations by all Muslims. Muslims believe that Moses wrote the *Taurat* and David the *Zabuur*. However, neither claimed to have received their revelations by a means of a *nazil* ('sent down') transmission. So why insist on such for the New Testament, especially since the document makes no such claim itself?

The underlying reason perhaps lies in the belief by Muslims that the Qur'an, because it is the only revelation which came "unfettered" by human intervention, is thus the truest and clearest statement of Allah's word, and therefore supersedes all previous revelations, even annulling those revelations, as they have supposedly been corrupted by the limitations of their human authors.

Left unsaid is the glaring irony that the claim for a *nazil* revelation for the Qur'an comes from one source alone, the man to which it was supposedly revealed, Muhammad. Yet there are no external witnesses both before or at the time who can corroborate Muhammad's testimony. Not even miracles are provided to substantiate his claims, nor are there any known documents of such a Qur'an from the century in which it is claimed to have been revealed (see the paper on the historicity of the Qur'an versus the Bible.)

Even if we were to disregard the historical problems for early Qur'ans, a further problem concerns the numerous Muslim traditions which speak of the many differing copies of Qur'anic codices which were prevalent during the collating of the Uthmanic recension of the Qur'an in the mid-seventh century, and that the conflicting copies were all destroyed, so that we cannot know today whether the Qur'an in our possession was even similar to that which was first revealed.

What Muslims must understand is that Christians have always maintained that the Word of God, the Bible, was indeed written by men, but that these men were always under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Whereas the Qur'an is alleged to be free of any human element, God in the Bible deliberately chose to reveal His Word through individuals who were inspired prophets and apostles, so that His Word would not only be conveyed to humanity correctly, and comprehensively but would be communicated to their understanding and powers of comprehension as well. This the Qur'an cannot do if it has no human element, as is generally alleged.

There are other problems with the contention maintained by Muslims that the Bible is full of contradictions. For instance, what then will Muslims do with the authority which their own Qur'an gives towards the Bible?

The Qur'an gives authority to the Bible:

The Qur'an, itself, the highest authority for all Muslims, gives authority to the Bible, assuming its authenticity at least up to the seventh-ninth Centuries. Consider the following Suras:

Sura Baqara 2:136 points out that there is no difference between the scriptures which preceded and those of the Qur'an, saying, "*...the revelation given to us...and Jesus...we make no difference between one and another of them*." Sura Al-I-Imran 3:2-3 continues, *"Allah...He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus)...as a guide to mankind*." Sura Nisaa 4:136 carries this farther by admonishing the Muslims to, "*...Believe...and the scripture which He sent before him*." In Sura Ma-ida 5:47,49,50,52 we find a direct call to Christians to believe in their scriptures: "*...We sent Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him. We sent him the Gospel... Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein, if any do fail to judge by the light of what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) those who rebel..."* Again, in Sura Ma-ida 5:68 we find a similar call: *"People of the Book!...Stand fast by the law, the Gospel, and all revelation that hath come to you from YOUR LORD. It is the revelation that has come to thee from THY LORD."*

To embolden this idea of the New and Old Testament's authority we find in Sura 10:94 that Muslims are advised to confer with these scriptures if in doubt about their own, saying: *"If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee. The truth had indeed come to thee from thy Lord*." And as if to emphasize this point the advice is repeated in Sura 21:7, stating, "*...the apostles We sent were but men, to whom We granted inspiration. If ye realize this not, Ask of those who possess the message*."

Finally, in Sura Ankabut 29:46 Muslims are asked not to question the authority of the scriptures of the Christians, saying, *"And dispute ye not with the people of the book but say: We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and that which came down to you."*

If there is anything in these Suras which is clear, it is that the Qur'an emphatically endorses the *Torah* and the Gospel as authentic and authoritative revelations from God. This coincides with what Christians believe, as well.

In fact, nowhere is there any warning in the Qur'an that the former scriptures had been corrupted, nor that they were contradictory. If the Qur'an was indeed the final and complete revelation, if it was the seal of all former revelations the Muslims claim, than certainly the author of the Qur'an would have included a warning against that which had been corrupted in the earlier scriptures. But nowhere do we find even a hint that the Bible was contradictory, or indeed that it was corrupted.

There are some Muslims, however, who contend that according to sura 2:140 the Jews and Christians had corrupted their scriptures. This aya says (referring to the Jews), "*...who is more unjust than those who conceal the testimony they have from Allah...?"* Yet, nowhere does this aya state that the Jews and Christians corrupted their scriptures. It merely mentions that certain Jews have concealed "*the testimony they have from Allah."* In other words the testimony is still there (thus the reason the afore-mentioned suras admonish Muslims to respect the former scriptures), though the adherents of that testimony have chosen to conceal it. If anything this aya is a ringing endorsement to the credibility of those former scriptures, as it assumes a testimony from Allah does exist amongst the Jewish community.

God does not change His Word

Furthermore, both the Christian scriptures and the Muslim Qur'an hold to the premise that God does not change His word. He does not change His revelation (despite the law of abrogation found in the Qur'an). Sura Yunus 10:64 says, *"No change can there be in the words of Allah."* This is repeated in Sura Al An'am 6:34: *"There is none that can alter the words of Allah,"* found also in Sura Qaf 50:28,29.

In the Bible we, likewise, have a number of references which speak of the unchangeableness of God's word; such as, Deuteronomy 4:1-2; Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 5:17-18; 24:35; and Revelation 22:18-20.

If this is the recurring theme in both the Bible and the Qur'an, it is hardly likely that we would find a scripture with such a multiplicity of contradictions which Muslims claim are found in the Bible.

What then should we do with the contradictions which the Muslims claim are there?

Contradictions analyzed:

When we look at the contradictions which Muslims point out we find that many of these errors are not errors at all but either a misunderstanding of the context or nothing more then copyist mistakes. The former can easily be explained, while the latter need a little more attention. It is quite clear that the books of the Old Testament were written between the 17th and the 5th century BC on the only parchments available at that time, pieces of Papyrus, which decayed rather quickly, and so needed continual copying. We now know that much of the Old Testament was copied by hand for 3,000 years, while the New Testament was copied for another 1,400 years, in isolated communities in different lands and on different continents, yet they still remain basically unchanged.

Today many older manuscripts have been found which we can use to corroborate those earlier manuscripts. In fact we have an enormous collection of manuscripts available to which we can go to corroborate the textual credibility of our current document. Concerning the New Testament manuscripts (MSS) we have in our possession 5,300 Greek manuscripts or fragments thereof, 10,000 Latin Vulgate manuscripts and at least 9,300 other early translations. In all we now have more than 24,000 manuscript copies or portions of the New Testament from which to use! Obviously this gives us much more material with which to delineate any variant verses which may exist. Where there is a variant reading, these have been identified and expunged and noted as footnotes on the relevant pages of the texts. In no way does this imply any defects with our Bible (as found in the original autographs).

Christians readily admit, however, that there have been 'scribal errors' in the copies of the Old and New Testament. It is beyond the capability of anyone to avoid any and every slip of the pen in copying page after page from any book, sacred or secular. Yet we may be sure that the original manuscript (better known as autograph) of each book of the Bible, being directly inspired by God, was free from all error. Those originals, however, because of the early date of their inception no longer exist.

The individuals responsible for the copying (scribes or copyists) were prone to making two types of scribal errors, well known and documented by those expert in the field of manuscript analysis. One concerned the spelling of proper names (especially unfamiliar foreign names), and the other had to do with numbers. The fact that it is mainly these type of errors in evidence gives credence to the argument for copyist errors. If indeed the originals were in contradiction, we would see evidence of this within the content of the stories themselves. (Archer 1982:221-222)

What is important to remember, however, is that no well-attested variation in the manuscript copies that have come down to us alter any doctrine of the Bible. To this extent, at least, the Holy Spirit has exercised a restraining influence in superintending the transmission of the text.

Since God has nowhere promised an inerrant transmission of Scripture, it is necessary to affirm that only the autographic text of the original documents were inspired. For that reason it is essential that we maintain an ongoing textual criticism as a means of detecting any slips that may have crept into the text in the course of its transmission. The verdict of this science, however, is that the Hebrew and Greek text appears to be amazingly well preserved, so that we are amply justified in affirming, with the Westminster Confession, a singular providence of God in this matter and in declaring that the authority of Scripture is in no way jeopardized by the fact that the copies we possess are not entirely error-free.

Similarly, no translation is or can be perfect, and all translations are an additional step away from the autograph. Yet the verdict of linguistic science is that English-speaking Christians, at least, are exceedingly well served in these days with a host of excellent translations and have no cause for hesitating to conclude that the true Word of God is within their reach. Indeed, in view of the frequent repetition in Scripture of the main matters with which it deals and also of the Holy Spirit's constant witness to and through the Word, no serious translation of Holy Scripture will so destroy its meaning as to render it unable to make its reader "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15)"

With that in mind let's now take a look at the examples forwarded by Shabbir Ally in his pamphlet to better ascertain whether or not the scriptures can stand the test of authority espoused above?

While answering the below challenges it has proven obvious to the four of us that Shabbir made a number of errors in his reasoning which could easily have been rectified had he simply looked at the context. This may offer us an idea as to why Muslims in general seem so fond of looking for, and apparently finding "contradictions" in the Bible - most of which are very easily explained by appealing to the context. When we look at the Qur'an we are struck with the reverse situation, for the Qur'an has very little context as such to refer to. There is little narration, and passages interject other passages with themes which have no connection. A similar theme is picked up and repeated in another Sura, though with variations and even at times contradictory material (i.e. the differing stories of Abraham and the idols found in Suras 21:51-59 and 6:74-83; 19:41-49). It stands to reason, then, that Muslims fail to look in their Holy Book for other passages to derive a context. Is it no wonder that they decline to do the same with the Bible.

On the second page of his booklet "101 Clear Contradictions in the Bible", Shabbir Ally states "Permission Granted! Please copy this booklet and spread the truth."

We, the authors of this paper, have been delighted to fulfil this request of Mr. Ally. Although we have not directly copied all his words, we have reproduced his alleged contradictions in this booklet and replied to them. Therefore, through these rebuttals we are doing what Shabbir has asked, spreading the truth! Showing the firm foundation of the Bible, which is the truth.

Please weigh the words of Mr. Ally against the rebuttals found herein.

You will note that a number of the questions contain more then one answer. This is done to show that there are different ways to understand a seeming problem in the Biblical text.

1. Does God incite David to conduct the census of his people (2 Samuel 4:1), or does Satan (1 Chronicles 21:1)?

(Category: misunderstood how God works in history)

This seems an apparent discrepancy unless of course both statements are true. It was towards the end of David's reign, and David was looking back over his brilliant conquests, which had brought the Canaanite, Syrian, and Phoenician kingdoms into a state of vassalage and dependency on Israel. He had an attitude of pride and self-admiration for his achievements, and was thinking more in terms of armaments and troops than in terms of the mercies of God.

The Lord therefore decided that it was time that David be brought to his knees, where he would once again be cast back onto the mercy of God. So he let him go ahead with his census, in order to find out just how much good it would do him, as the only thing this census would accomplish would be to inflate the national ego (intimated in Joab's warning against carrying out the census in 1 Chronicles 21:3). As soon as the numbering was completed, God intended to chasten the nation with a disastrous plague which would bring about an enormous loss of life (in fact the lives of 70,000 Israelites according to 2 Samuel 24:15).

What about Satan? Why would he get himself involved in this affair (according to 1 Chronicles 21:1) if God had already prompted David to commit the folly he had in mind? It seems his reasons were entirely malicious, knowing that a census would displease the Lord (1 Chronicles 21:7-8), and so he also incited David to carry it through.

Yet this is nothing new, for there are a number of other occurrences in the Bible where both the Lord and Satan were involved in soul-searching testings and trials:

a. In the book of Job, chapters one and two we find a challenge to Satan from God allowing Satan to bring upon Job his calamities. God's purpose was to purify Job's faith, and to strengthen his character by means of discipline through adversity, whereas Satan's purpose was purely malicious, wishing Job as much harm as possible so that he would recant his faith in his God.

b. Similarly both God and Satan are involved in the sufferings of persecuted Christians according to 1 Peter 4:19 and 5:8. God's purpose is to strengthen their faith and to enable them to share in the sufferings of Christ in this life, that they may rejoice with Him in the glories of heaven to come (1 Peter 4:13-14), whereas Satan's purpose is to 'devour' them (1 Peter 5:8), or rather to draw them into self-pity and bitterness, and down to his level.
c. Both God and Satan allowed Jesus the three temptations during his ministry on earth. God's purpose for these temptations was for him to triumph completely over the very tempter who had lured the first Adam to his fall, whereas Satan's purpose was to deflect the saviour from his messianic mission.
d. In the case of Peter's three denials of Jesus in the court of the high priest, it was Jesus himself who points out the purposes of both parties involvement when he says in Luke 22:31-32, "*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.*"
e. And finally the crucifixion itself bears out yet another example where both God and Satan are involved. Satan exposed his purpose when he had the heart of Judas filled with treachery and hate (John 13:27), causing him to betray Jesus. The Lord's reasoning behind the crucifixion, however, was that Jesus, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world should give his life as a ransom for many, so that once again sinful man could relish in the relationship lost at the very beginning, in the garden of Eden, and thereby enter into a relationship which is now eternal.

Thus we have five other examples where both the Lord and Satan were involved together though with entirely different motives. Satan's motive in all these examples, including the census by David was driven by malicious intent, while the Lord in all these cases showed an entirely different motive. His was a benevolent motive with a view to eventual victory, while simultaneously increasing the usefulness of the person tested. In every case Satan's success was limited and transient; while in the end God's purpose was well served furthering His cause substantially.

(Archer 1982:186-188)

2. 2 Samuel 24:9 gives the total population for Israel as 800,000, whereas 1 Chronicles 21:5 says it was 1,100,000.

(Category: misunderstood the historical context or misunderstood the author's intent)

There are a number of ways to understand not only this problem but the next challenge as well, since they both refer to the same passages and to the same census.

It is possible that the differences between the two accounts are related to the unofficial and incomplete nature of the census (which will be discussed later), or that the book of Samuel presents rounded numbers, particularly for Judah.

The more likely answer, however, is that one census includes categories of men that the other excludes. It is quite conceivable that the 1 Chronicles 21:5 figure included all the available men of fighting age, whether battle-seasoned or not, whereas the 2 Samuel 24:9 account is speaking only of those who were ready for battle. Joab's report in 2 Samuel 24 uses the word '*is hayil*, which is translated as "mighty men", or battle-seasoned troops, and refers to them numbering 800,000 veterans. It is reasonable that there were an additional 300,000 men of military age kept in the reserves, but not yet involved in field combat. The two groups would therefore make up the 1,100,000 men in the 1 Chronicles 21 account which does not employ the Hebrew term *'is hayil* to describe them.

(Archer 1982:188-189 and Light of Life II 1992:189-190)

3. 2 Samuel 24:9 gives the round figure Of 500,000 fighting men in Judah, which was 30,000 more than the corresponding item in 1 Chronicles 21:5.

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

Observe that 1 Chronicles 21:6 clearly states that Joab did not complete the numbering, as he had not yet taken a census of the tribe of Benjamin, nor that of Levi's either, due to the fact that David came under conviction about completing the census at all. Thus the different numbers indicate the inclusion or exclusion of particular unspecified groups in the nation. We find another reference to this in 1 Chronicles 27:23-24 where it states that David did not include those twenty years old and younger, and that since Joab did not finish the census the number was not recorded in King David's Chronicle.

The procedure for conducting the census had been to start with the trans-Jordanian tribes (2 Samuel 24:5) and then shift to the northern most tribe of Dan and work southward towards Jerusalem (verse 7). The numbering of Benjamin, therefore, would have come last. Hence Benjamin would not be included with the total for Israel or of that for Judah, either. In the case of 2 Samuel 24, the figure for Judah included the already known figure of 30,000 troops mustered by Benjamin. Hence the total of 500,000 included the Benjamite contingent.

Observe that after the division of the United Kingdom into the North and the South following the death of Solomon in 930 BC, most of the Benjamites remained loyal to the dynasty of David and constituted (along with Simeon to the south) the kingdom of Judah. Hence it was reasonable to include Benjamin with Judah and Simeon in the sub-total figure of 500,000, even though Joab may not have itemized it in the first report he gave to David (1 Chronicles 21:5). Therefore the completed grand total of fighting forces available to David for military service was 1,600,000 (1,100,000 of Israel, 470,000 of Judah-Simeon, and 30,000 of Benjamin).

(Archer 1982:188-189 and Light of Life II 1992:189)

4. 2 Samuel 24:13 mentions that there will be seven years of famine whereas 1 Chronicles 21:12 mentions only three.

(Category: misunderstood the author's intent, and misunderstood the wording)

There are two ways to look at this. The first is to assume that the author of 1 Chronicles emphasized the three-year period in which the famine was to be most intense, whereas the author of 2 Samuel includes the two years prior to and after this period, during which the famine worsened and lessened respectively.

Another solution can be noticed by observing the usage of words in each passage. When you compare the two passages you will note that the wording is significantly different in 1 Chronicles 21 from that found in a 2 Samuel 24. In 2 Samuel 24:13 the question is "shell seven years of famine come to you?" In 1 Chronicles 21:12 we find an alternative imperative, "take for yourself either three years of famine..." From this we may reasonably conclude that 2 Samuel records the first approach of the prophet Gad to David, in which the alternative prospect was seven years; whereas the Chronicles account gives us the second and final approach of Nathan to the King, in which the Lord (doubtless in response to David's earnest entreaty in private prayer) reduced the severity of that grim alternative to three years rather than an entire span of seven. As it turned out, however, David opted for God's third preference, and thereby received three days of severe pestilence, resulting in the deaths of 70,000 men in Israel.

(Archer 1982:189-190 and Light of Life II 1992:190)

5. Was Ahaziah 22 (2 Kings 8:26) or 42 (2 Chronicles 22:2) when he began to rule over Jerusalem?

(Category: copyist error)

Because we are dealing with accounts which were written thousands of years ago, we would not expect to have the originals in our possession today, as they would have disintegrated long ago. We are therefore dependent on the copies taken from copies of those originals, which were in turn continually copied out over a period of centuries. Those who did the copying were prone to making two types of scribal errors. One concerned the spelling of proper names, and the other had to do with numbers.

The two examples of numerical discrepancy here have to do with a decade in the number given. Ahaziah is said to have been 22 in 2 Kings 8:26; while in 2 Chronicles 22:2 Ahaziah is said to have been 42. Fortunately there is enough additional information in the Biblical text to show that the correct number is 22. Earlier in 2 Kings 8:17 the author mentions that Ahaziah's father Joram ben Ahab was 32 when he became King, and he died eight years later, at the age of 40. Therefore Ahaziah could not have been 42 at the time of his father's death at age 40! Such scribal errors do not change Jewish or Christian beliefs in the least. In such a case, another portion of scripture often corrects the mistake (2 Kings 8:26 in this instance). We must also remember that the scribes who were responsible for the copies were meticulously honest in handling Biblical texts. They delivered them as they received them, without changing even obvious mistakes, which are few indeed.

(Refer to the next question for a more in-depth presentation on how scribes could misconstrue numbers within manuscripts)

(Archer 1982:206 and Light of Life II 1992:201)

6. Was Jehoiachin 18 years old (2 Kings 24:8) or 8 years old (2 Chronicles 36:9) when he became king of Jerusalem?

(Category: copyist error)

Once again there is enough information in the context of these two passages to tell us that 8 is wrong and 18 right. The age of 8 is unusually young to assume governmental leadership. However, there are certain commentators who contend that this can be entirely possible. They maintain that when Jehoiachin was eight years old, his father made him co-regent, so that he could be trained in the responsibilities of leading a kingdom. Jehoiachin then became officially a king at the age of eighteen, upon his father's death.

A more likely scenario, however, is that this is yet another case of scribal error, evidenced commonly with numbers. It may be helpful to interject here that there were three known ways of writing numbers in Hebrew. The earliest, a series of notations used by the Jewish settlers in the 5th century BC Elephantine Papyri (described in more detail below) was followed by a system whereby alphabetical letters were used for numbers. A further system was introduced whereby the spelling out of the numbers in full was prescribed by the guild of *so-perim.* Fortunately we have a large file of documents in papyrus from these three sources to which we can refer.

As with many of these numerical discrepancies, it is the decade number that varies. It is instructive to observe that the number notations used by the Jewish settlers in the 5th century BC Elephantine Papyri, during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, from which this passage comes, evidences the earlier form of numerical notation. This consisted of a horizontal stroke ending in a downward hook at its right end to represent the numbers in tens (thus two horizontal strokes one above the other would be 20). Vertical strokes were used to represent anything less than ten. Thus eight would be /III IIII, but eighteen would be /III IIII with the addition of a horizontal line and downward hook above it. Similarly twenty-two would be /I followed by two horizontal hooks, and forty-two would be /I followed by two sets of horizontal hooks (please forgive the deficiencies of my computer; it is not the scholar Dr. Archer is).

If, then, the primary manuscript from which a copy was being carried out was blurred or smudged, one or more of the decadal notations could be missed by the copyist. It is far less

likely that the copyist would have mistakenly seen an extra ten stroke that was not present in his original then that he would have failed to observe one that had been smudged.

In the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible, the corrections have been included in the texts. However, for clarity, footnotes at the bottom of the page mention that earlier Hebrew MSS include the scribal error, while the Septuagint MSS and Syriac as well as one Hebrew MSS include the correct numerals. It only makes sense to correct the numerals once the scribal error has been noted. This, however, in no way negates the authenticity nor the authority of the scriptures which we have.

Confirmation of this type of copyist error is found in various pagan writers as well. For example in the Behistun rock inscription set up by Darius 1, we find that number 38 gives the figure for the slain of the army of Frada as 55,243, with 6,572 prisoners, according to the Babylonian column. Copies of this inscription found in Babylon itself, records the number of prisoners as 6,973. However in the Aramaic translation of this inscription discovered at the Elephantine in Egypt, the number of prisoners was only 6,972.

Similarly in number 31 of the same inscription, the Babylonian column gives 2,045 as the number of slain in the rebellious army of Frawartish, along with 1,558 prisoners, whereas the Aramaic copy has over 1,575 as the prisoner count.

(Archer 1982:206-207, 214-215, 222, 230; Nehls pg.17-18; Light of Life II 1992:204-205)

7. Did king Jehoiachin rule over Jerusalem for three months (2 Kings 24:8), or for three months and ten days (2 Chronicles 36:9)?

(Category: misunderstood the author's intent)

Here again, as we found in challenge number 2 and 4, the author of the Chronicles has been more specific with his numbering, whereas the author of Kings is simply rounding off the number of months, assuming that the additional ten days is not significant enough to mention.

8. Did the chief of the mighty men of David lift up his spear and killed 800 men (2 Samuel 23:8) or only 300 men (1 Chronicles 11:11)?

(Category:misunderstood the historical context or misunderstood the author's intent)

It is quite possible that both authors may have described two different incidents, though by the same man, or one author may have only mentioned in part what the other author mentions in full.

(Light of Life II 1992:187)

9. Did David bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem after defeating the Philistines (2 Samuel 5 and 6), or before (1 Chronicles chapters 13 and 14)?

(Category: didn't read the entire text)

This is not really a problem. Shabbir Ally should have continued reading on further to 1 Chronicles 15, as he would then have seen that David brought the Ark after defeating the Philistines. The reason for this is that the Israelites moved the Ark of the covenant twice. The first time, they moved it from Baal, prior to the defeat of the Philistines, as we see in 2 Samuel 5 and 6 and in 1 Chronicles 15. Once the prophet Samuel narrates David's victory over the Philistines, he tells us about both times when the Ark was moved. However in 1 Chronicles, the order is as follows: the Ark was first moved from baal; then David defeated the Philistines; and finally, the Ark was moved from the House of Obed-Edom.

Therefore the two accounts are not contradictory at all. What we have here is simply one prophet choosing to give us the complete history of the Ark at once (rather than referring to it later) and another presenting the history in a different way. In both cases the timing of events is the same.

The same could be said of the Qur'an. In Sura 2 we are introduced to the fall of Adam, then God's mercy is shown to the Israelites, followed by Pharaoh's drowning, followed by Moses and the Golden calf, followed by the Israelites complaint about food and water, and then we are introduced to the account of the golden calf again. Following this, we read about Moses and Jesus, then we read about Moses and the golden calf, and then about Solomon and Abraham. If one wants to talk about chronology, what does Moses have to do with Jesus, or Solomon with Abraham? Chronologically the sura should have begun with Adam's fall, then moved to Cain and Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Lot, Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Joseph, the sons of Israel and Moses, in that order. If such a blatant chronological mix-up can be found in this sura of the Qur'an, then Shabbir would do well to explain it before criticizing what they deem to be an error in the Bible.

(Light of Life II 1992:176)

10. Was Noah supposed to bring 2 pairs of all living creatures (Genesis 6:19-20), or was he to bring 7 pairs of 'clean' animals (Genesis 7:2; see also Genesis 7:8,9)?

(Category: misquoted the text)

This indeed is an odd question to raise. It is obvious that Shabbir Ally has misquoted the text in the 6th chapter of Genesis, which makes no mention of any 'clean' animals in its figure, while the 7th chapter specifically delineates between the clean and unclean animals. Genesis 7:2 says Noah was to bring in 7 pairs of 'clean' animals and 2 pairs of every kind of 'unclean' animal. Why did Shabbir not mention the second half of this verse which stipulates 2 pairs in his challenge? It is obvious that there is no discrepancy between the two accounts. The problem is the question itself.

Shabbir attempts to back his argument by mentioning that verses 8 and 9 of chapter 7 prove that only two pairs went into the ark. However, these verses say nothing about two pairs entering the ark. They simply say that it was pairs of clean and unclean animals or birds and creatures which entered the ark.

The reason for including seven of the clean species is perfectly evident: they were to be used for sacrificial worship after the flood had receded (as indeed they were, according to Genesis 8:20). Obviously if there had not been more than two of each of these clean species, they would have been rendered extinct by their being sacrificed on the altar. But in the case of the unclean animals and birds, a single pair would suffice, since they would not be needed for blood sacrifice.

(Archer 1982:81-82)

11. Did David capture 1,700 of King Zobah's horsemen (2 Samuel 8:4), or was it 7,000 (1 Chronicles 18:4)?

(Category: copyist error)

There are two possible solutions to these differing figures. The first by Keil and Delitzsh (page 360) is a most convincing solution. They maintain that the word for chariotry (*rekeb*) was inadvertently omitted by the scribe in copying 2 Samuel 8:4, and that the second figure, 7,000 (for the *parasim* "cavalrymen"), was necessarily reduced to 700 from the 7,000 he saw in his *Vorlage* for the simple reason that no one would write 7,000 after he had written 1,000 in the recording the one and the same figure. The omission of rekeb might have occurred with an earlier scribe, and a reduction from 7,000 to 700 would have then continued with the

successive copies by later scribes. But in all probability the Chronicles figure is right and the Samuel numbers should be corrected to agree with that.

A second solution starts from the premise that the number had been reduced to 700 as it refers to 700 rows, each consisting of 10 horse men, making a total of 7,000.

(Archer 1982:184: Keil & Delitzsch 1949:360; Light of Life II 1992:182)

12. Did Solomon have 40,000 stalls for his horses (1 Kings 4:26), or 4,000 stalls (2 Chronicles 9:25)?

(Category: copyist error, or misunderstood the historical context)

There are a number of ways to answer these puzzling differences. The most plausible is analogous to what we found earlier in challenge numbers five and six above, where the decadal number has been rubbed out or distorted due to constant use.

Others believe that the stalls mentioned in 2 Chronicles were large ones that housed 10 horses each (that is, a row of ten stalls). Therefore 4,000 of these large stalls would be equivalent to 40,000 small ones.

Another commentator maintains that the number of stalls recorded in 1 Kings was the number at the beginning of Solomon's reign, whereas the number recorded in 2 Chronicles was the number of stalls at the end of his reign. We know that Solomon reigned for 40 years; no doubt, many changes occurred during this period. It is quite likely that he reduced the size of the military machine his father David had left him.

(Light of Life II 1992:191)

13. According to the author, did Baasha, the king of Israel die in the 26th year of king Asa's reign (1 Kings 15:33), or was he still alive in the 36th year (2 Chronicles 16:1)?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context, or copyist error)

There are two possible solutions to this problem. To begin with, scholars who have looked at these passages have concluded that the 36th year of Asa should be calculated from the withdrawal of the 10 tribes from Judah and Benjamin which brought about the division of the country into Judah and Israel. If we look at it from this perspective, the 36th year of the divided monarchy would be in the 16th year of Asa. This is supported by the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel, as well as contemporary records, which follow this convention. (note: for a fuller explanation of this theory, see Archer, page 225-116).

Keil and Delitzsch (pp. 366-367) preferred to regard the number 36 in 2 Chronicles 16:1 and the number 35 in 15:19 as a copyist's error for 16 and 15, respectively. This problem is similar to question numbers five and six above. In this case, however, the numbers were written using Hebrew alphabetical type (rather than the Egyptian multiple stroke type used in the Elephantine Papyri, referred to in questions 5 and 6). It is therefore quite possible that the number 16 could quite easily be confused with 36. The reason for this is that up through the seventh century BC the letter *yod* (10) greatly resembled the letter *lamed* (30), except for two tiny strokes attached to the left of the main vertical strokes. It required only a smudge from excessive wear on this scroll-column to result in making the *yod* look like a *lamed*. It is possible that this error occurred first in the earlier passage, in 2 Chronicles 15:19 (with its 35 wrongly copied from an original 15); then to make it consistent in 16:1, the same scribe (or perhaps a later one) concluded that 16 must be an error for 36 and changed it accordingly on his copy.

(Archer 1982:226: Keil & Delitzsch 1949:366-367; Light of Life II 1992:194)

14. Did Solomon appoint 3,600 overseers (2 Chronicles 2:2) for the work of building the temple, or was it only 3,300 (1 Kings 5:16)?

(Category: misunderstood the author's intent)

This is not too great a problem. The most likely solution is that the author of 2 Chronicles included the 300 men who were selected as reservists to take the place of any supervisors who would become ill or who had died, while the author of the 1 Kings 5:16 passage includes only the supervisory force. With the group as large as the 3,300, sickness and death certainly did occur, requiring reserves who would be called up as the need arose.

(Light of Life II 1992:192)

15. Did Solomon build a facility containing 2,000 baths (1 Kings 7:26), or over 3,000 baths (2 Chronicles 4:5)?

(Category: misunderstood the author's intent, or copyist error)

The Hebrew verb rendered "contained" and "held" is different from that translated "received"; and the meaning may be that the sea ordinarily contained 2,000 baths. But when filled to its utmost capacity it received and held 3,000 baths. Thus the chronicler simply mentions the amount of water that would make the sea like a flowing spring rather than a still pool. This informs us that 3,000 gallons of water were required to completely fill the sea which usually held 2,000 gallons.

Another solution follows a theme mentioned earlier, that the number in Hebrew lettering for 2000 has been confounded by the scribe with a similar alphabetical number for the number 3,000.

It should be noted that Shabbir (in his debate on 25th February 1998 against Jay Smith in Birmingham, UK) quoted this "contradiction" and added to it saying that if the bath had a diameter of 10 cubits it cannot possibly have had a circumference of 30 cubits as the text says (since 'pi' dictates that it would have a circumference of 31.416 or a 9.549 diameter).

Shabbir made the humorous comment "Find me a bath like that and I will get baptized in it!" But Shabbir did not read the text properly or was just going for a cheap, displaced laugh. Why? Because the text says that it was about 8cm thick and had a rim shaped like a lily. Therefore it depends on where you measure from. The top or bottom of the rim or the inside or outside for the vessel would all give a different diameter; and depending on whether you measure at the top of the rim or at the narrower point, you would get a different circumference.

In other words, Shabbir may well be getting baptized if someone can be bothered to make a replica!

(Haley pg. 382; Light of Life II 1992:192)

16-21. Are the numbers of Israelites freed from Babylonian captivity correct in Ezra (Ezra 2:6, 8, 12, 15, 19, 28) or in Nehemiah (Nehemiah 7:11, 13, 17, 20, 22, 32)?

(note: because numbers 16-21 deal with the same census, I have included them as one)

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

In chapter 2 of Ezra and in chapter 7 of Nehemiah there are about thirty-three family units that appear in both lists of Israelites returning from Babylon to Judea. Of these 33 family units listed in Ezra and Nehemiah, nineteen of the family units are identical, while fourteen show discrepancies in the number of members within the family units (though Shabbir only lists six

of them). Two of the discrepancies differ by 1, one differs by 4, two by 6, two differ by 9, another differs by 11, another two by 100, another by 201, another differs by 105, a further family differs by 300, and the largest difference is the figure for the sons of Azgad, a difference of 1,100 between the accounts of Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7.

How, then, are we to account for the 14 discrepancies? The answer is quite simple, and Shabbir, had he done any study into the history of these two accounts would never have bothered to waste his time in asking these questions. The fact that there are both similarities and discrepancies side-by-side should have pointed him to the solution as well (as you who are reading this are probably even now concluding).

There are two important factors to bear in mind when looking at these discrepancies between the two lists. The first is the probability that though members of the units or families had enrolled their names at first as intending to go; in the interval of preparation, some possibly died, others were prevented by sickness or other insurmountable obstacles, so that the final number who actually went was not the same as those who had intended to go. Anyone who has planned a school-coach trip to the beach can understand how typical a scenario this really is.

A second and more important factor are the different circumstances in which the two registers were taken, an important fact of which Shabbir seems to be acutely unaware. Ezra's register was made up while still in Babylon (in the 450s BC), before the return to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:1-2), whereas Nehemiah's register was drawn up in Judea (around 445 BC), after the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt (Nehemiah 7:4-6). The lapse of so many years between the two lists (between 5-10 years) would certainly make a difference in the numbers of each family through death or by other causes.

Most scholars believe that Nehemiah recorded those people who actually arrived at Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua in 537 or 536 BC (Nehemiah 7:7). Ezra, on the other hand, uses the earlier list of those who originally announced their intention to join the caravan of returning colonists back in Babylon, in the 450s BC.

The discrepancies between these two lists point to the fact that there were new factors which arose to change their minds. Some may have fallen into disagreement, others may have discovered business reasons to delay their departure until later, whereas in some cases there were certainly some illnesses or death, and in other cases there may have been some last-minute recruits from those who first decided to remain in Babylon. Only clans or city-group's came in with a shrunken numbers. All the rest picked up last-minute recruits varying from one to 1,100.

When we look at the names we find that certain names are mentioned in alternate forms. Among the Jews of that time (as well as those living in the East), a person had a name, title, and surname. Thus, the children of Hariph (Nehemiah 7:24) are the children of Jorah (Ezra 2:18), while the children of Sia (Nehemiah 7:47) are also the children of Siaha (Ezra 2:44).

When we take all these factors into consideration, the differences in totals that do appear in these two tallies should occasion no surprise whatsoever. The same sort of arbitration and attrition has featured every large migration in human history.

(Archer 1982:229-230 and Light of Life II 1992:219-220)

22. Both Ezra 2:64 and Nehemiah 7:66 agree that the totals for the whole assembly was 42,360, yet when the totals are added, Ezra - 29,818 and Nehemiah - 31,089?

(Category: copyist error)

There are possibly two answers to this seeming dilemma. The first is that this is most likely a copyist's error. The original texts must have had the correct totals, but somewhere along the

line of transmission, a scribe made an error in one of the lists, and changed the total in the other so that they would match, without first totaling up the numbers for the families in each list. There is the suggestion that a later scribe upon copying out these lists purposely put down the totals for the whole assembly who were in Jerusalem at his time, which because it was later would have been larger.

The other possibility is forwarded by the learned Old Testament scholar R.K. Harrison, who suggests that at any rate the figure of 42,000 may be metaphorical, following "*...the pattern of the Exodus and similar traditions, where the large numbers were employed as symbols of the magnitude of God, and in this particular instance indicating the triumphant deliverance that God achieved for His captive people*" (Harrison 1970:1142-1143).

Such errors do not change the historicity of the account, since in such cases another portion of Scripture usually corrects the mistake (the added totals in this instance). As the well-known commentator, Matthew Henry once wrote, "*Few books are not printed without mistakes; yet, authors do not disown them on account of this, nor are the errors by the press imputed to the author. The candid reader amends them by the context or by comparing them with some other part of the work.*"

(Light of Life II 1992:201, 219)

23. Did 200 singers (Ezra 2:65) or 245 singers (Nehemiah 7:67) accompany the assembly?

(Category: copyist error)

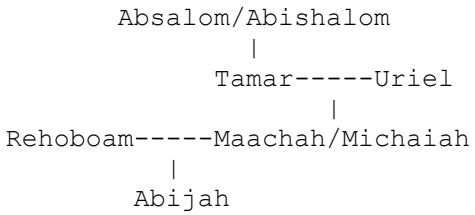
As in question number 7, this is a copyist error, where a scribe copying the numbers in the Ezra account simply rounded off the figure of 245 to 200.

24. Was King Abijah's mother's name Michaiah, daughter of Uriel of Gibeah (2 Chronicles 13:2) or Maachah, daughter of Absalom (2 Chronicles 11:20 & 2 Samuel 13:27)?

(Category: misunderstood the Hebrew usage)

This apparent contradiction rests on the understanding of the Hebrew word *bat*, equivalent to the English *daughter*. Although usually used to denote a first generation female descendant, it can equally refer to more distant kinship. An example of this is 2 Samuel 1:24, which states: 'O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul...' As this is approximately 900 years after Israel (also called Jacob) actually lived, it is clear that this refers to the Israelite women, his distant female descendants.

When seen in this light, the 'contradiction' vanishes. 2 Chronicles 13:2 correctly states that Michaiah is a daughter of Uriel. We can assume that Uriel married Tamar, Absalom's only immediate daughter. Together they had Michaiah who then married king Rehoboam and became the mother of Abijah. 2 Chronicles 11:20 and 1 Kings 15:2, in stating that Maachah was a daughter of Absalom, simply link her back to her more famous grandfather, instead of her lesser known father, to indicate her royal lineage. Abishalom is a variant of Absalom and Michaiah is a variant of Maachah. Therefore, the family tree looks like this:



25. Joshua and the Israelites did (Joshua 10:23,40) or did not (Joshua 15:63) capture Jerusalem?

(Category: misread the text)

The short answer is, not in this campaign. The verses given are in complete harmony and the confusion arises solely from misreading the passage concerned.

In Joshua 10, it is the king of Jerusalem that is killed: his city is not captured (verses 16-18 and 22-26). The five Amorite kings and their armies left their cities and went to attack Gibeon. Joshua and the Israelites routed them and the five kings fled to the cave at Makkedah, from which Joshua's soldiers brought them to Joshua, who killed them all. Concerning their armies, verse 20 states: 'the few who were left reached their fortified cities', which clearly indicates that the cities were not captured. So it was the kings, not their cities, who were captured.

Joshua 10:28-42 records the rest of this particular military campaign. It states that several cities were captured and destroyed, these being: Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron and Debir. All of these cities are south-west of Jerusalem. The king of Gezer and his army were defeated in the field whilst helping Lachish (v.33) and in verse 30 comparison is made to the earlier capture of Jericho, but neither of these last two cities were captured at this time. Verses 40 & 41 delineate the limits of this campaign, all of which took place to the south and west of Jerusalem. Importantly, Gibeon, the eastern limit of this campaign, is still approximately 10 miles to the north-west of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is, therefore, not stated as captured in Joshua 10. This agrees completely with Joshua 15:63, which states that Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites in Jerusalem.

26. Was Jacob (Matthew 1:16) or Heli (Luke 3:23) the father of Joseph and husband of Mary?

(Category: misunderstood the Hebrew usage)

The answer to this is simple but requires some explanation. Most scholars today agree that Matthew gives the genealogy of Joseph and Luke gives that of Mary, making Jacob the father of Joseph and Heli the father of Mary.

This is shown by the two narrations of the virgin birth. Matthew 1:18-25 tells the story only from Joseph's perspective, while Luke 1:26-56 is told wholly from Mary's point of view.

A logical question to ask is why Joseph is mentioned in both genealogies? The answer is again simple. Luke follows strict Hebrew tradition in mentioning only males. Therefore, in this case, Mary is designated by her husband's name.

This reasoning is clearly supported by two lines of evidence. In the first, every name in the Greek text of Luke's genealogy, with the one exception of Joseph, is preceded by the definite article (e.g. 'the' Heli, 'the' Matthat). Although not obvious in English translations, this would strike anyone reading the Greek, who would realize that it was tracing the line of Joseph's wife, even though his name was used.

The second line of evidence is the Jerusalem Talmud, a Jewish source. This recognizes the genealogy to be that of Mary, referring to her as the daughter of Heli (Hagigah 2:4).

(Fruchtenbaum 1993:10-13)

27. Did Jesus descend from Solomon (Matthew 1:6) or from Nathan (Luke 3:31), both of whom are sons of David?

(Category: misunderstood the Hebrew usage)

This is directly linked to 'contradiction' 26. Having shown that Matthew gives Joseph's genealogy and Luke gives that of Mary, it is clear that Joseph was descended from David through Solomon and Mary through Nathan.

28. Was Jechoniah (Matthew 1:12) or Neri (Luke 3:27) the father of Shealtiel?

(Category: misunderstood the Hebrew usage)

Once again, this problem disappears when it is understood that two different genealogies are given from David to Jesus, those of both Mary and Joseph (see #26). Two different genealogies mean two different men named Shealtiel, a common Hebrew name. Therefore, it is not surprising to recognize that they both had different fathers!

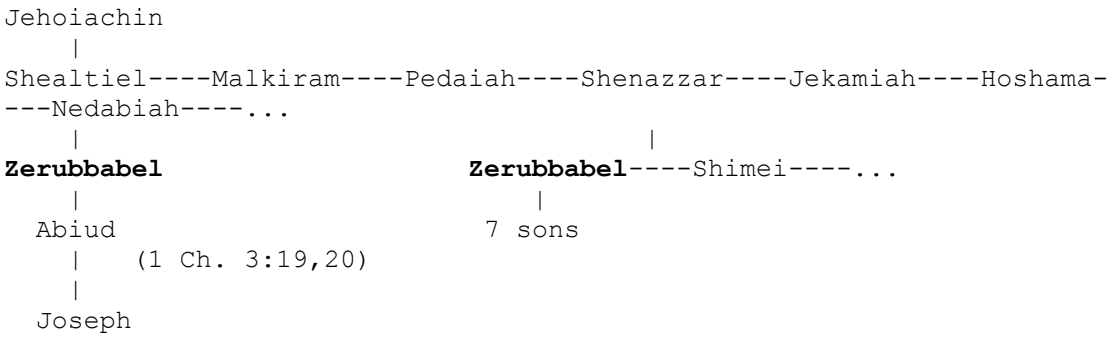
29. Which son of Zerubbabel was an ancestor of Jesus Christ, Abiud (Matthew 1:13) or Rhesa (Luke 3:27), and what about Zerubbabel in (1 Chronicles 3:19-20)?

(Category: misunderstood the Hebrew usage)

As with #28, two different Shealtiels necessitates two different Zerubbabels, so it is no problem that their sons had different names.

It should not surprise us that there was a Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel in both Mary's and Joseph's ancestry. Matthew tells us that Joseph's father was named Jacob. Of course, the Bible records another Joseph son of Jacob, who rose to become the second most powerful ruler in Egypt (Genesis 37-47). We see no need to suggest that these two men are one and the same, so we should have no problem with two men named Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel.

The Zerubbabel mentioned in 1 Chronicles 3:19,20 could easily be a third. Again, this causes no problem: there are several Marys mentioned in the Gospels, because it was a common name. The same may be true here. This Zerubbabel would then be a cousin of the one mentioned in Matthew 1:12,13. A comparison of Matthew and 1 Chronicles gives the following possible family tree:



30. Was Joram (Matthew 1:8) or Amaziah (2 Chronicles 26:1) the father of Uzziah?

(Category: misunderstood the Hebrew usage)

This answer is of a similar nature to that in #24. Just as the Hebrew *bat* (daughter) can be used to denote a more distant descendant, so can the Hebrew *ben* (son). Jesus is referred to in Matthew 1:1 as the son of David, the son of Abraham. Both the genealogies trace Jesus' ancestry through both these men, illustrating the usage of 'son'. Although no Hebrew manuscripts of Matthew's gospel are extant today, it is clear that he was a Jew writing from a Hebrew perspective and therefore completely at home with the Hebrew concept of son ship.

With this in mind, it can easily be shown that Amaziah was the immediate father of Uzziah (also called Azariah). Joram/Jehoram, on the other hand, was Uzziah's great-great-grandfather and a direct ascendant. The line goes Joram/Jehoram - Ahaziah - Joash - Amaziah - Azariah/Uzziah (2 Chronicles 21:4-26:1).

Matthew's telescoping of Joseph's genealogy is quite acceptable, as his purpose is simply to show the route of descent. He comments in 1:17 that there were three sets of fourteen generations. This reveals his fondness for numbers and links in directly with the designation of Jesus as the son of David. In the Hebrew language, each letter is given a value. The total value of the name David is fourteen and this is probably the reason why Matthew only records fourteen generations in each section, to underline Jesus' position as the son of David.

31. Was Josiah (Matthew 1:11) or Jehoiakim (1 Chronicles 3:16) the father of Jechoniah?

(Category: misunderstood the Hebrew usage)

This question is essentially the same as #30. Jehoiakim was Jeconiah's father and Josiah his grandfather. This is quite acceptable and results from Matthew's aesthetic telescoping of the genealogy, not from any error.

32. Were there fourteen (Matthew 1:17) or thirteen (Matthew 1:12-16) generations from the Babylonian exile until Christ?

(Category: misunderstood the Hebrew usage)

As Matthew clearly states (1:17), there were fourteen. In the first section there are fourteen names, in the second fifteen and in the third, fourteen. Perhaps the simplest way of resolving the problem is to suggest that in the first and third sections, the first and last person is included as a generation, whereas not in the second. In any case, as Matthew has clearly telescoped his genealogy with good reason, a mistake on his part is by no means shown conclusively. If by some chance another name or two has been lost from the list in the originals, by scribal error, we cannot know. Whatever the real situation, a simple explanation can be afforded, as above.

33. Who was the father of Shelah; Cainan (Luke 3:35-36) or Arphaxad (Genesis 11:12)?

(Category: misunderstood the Hebrew usage)

Although a conclusive answer is not possible, plausible explanations can be found. The most probable answer to this is that the genealogy in the Masoretic text of Genesis telescopes the generations as does Matthew in his list. When we look at the Septuagint (LXX), we find the name of Cainan included as the father of Shelah, echoing what we find in Luke. Luke, writing in Greek, would have used the Septuagint as his authority.

On that same note, if we refer to the Septuagint, when we look at Genesis 11:12 we find that Apharxad was 135 years old, rather than 35 (which would allow more time for him to be Shelah's grandfather).

34. John the Baptist was (Matthew 11:14; 17:10-13) or was not Elijah to come (John 1:19-21)?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

Matthew records Jesus saying that John the Baptist was the Elijah who was to come, while John seems to record John the Baptist denying it. The reason for this apparent inconsistency is a lack of contextualization by readers.

The priests and Levites came to John the Baptist and asked him if he was Elijah. Quite a funny question to ask someone, unless you know the Jewish Scriptures. For God says through the prophet Malachi that He will send Elijah to the people of Israel before a certain time. Therefore as the Jewish people were expecting Elijah, the question is quite logical.

John was about 30 years when he was asked this question. His parents were already dead; he was the only son of Zechariah from the tribe of Levi. So when asked if he was Elijah who ascended up into heaven about 878 years earlier, the answer was obviously "No, I am not Elijah."

Jesus also testifies, albeit indirectly, to John not being Elijah in Matthew 11:11 where he says that John is greater than all people who have ever been born. Moses was greater than Elijah, but John was greater than them both.

So what did Jesus mean when he says of John "he is the Elijah who was to come"? The angel Gabriel (Jibril in Arabic) speaks to Zechariah of his son, John, who was not yet born, saying "he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous - to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:17)

The Angel refers to two prophecies, Isaiah 40:3-5 (see Luke 3:4-6 to see this applied again to John the Baptist) and Malachi 4:5-6 mentioned above, which says *"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers"*. Gabriel unmistakably says that John is the "Elijah" whom God foretold through Malachi the prophet.

So, was John Elijah? No. But had the priests and Levites asked him, "Are you the one the prophet Malachi speaks of as 'Elijah'?" John would have responded affirmatively.

Jesus in Matthew 17:11-13 says that the prophecy of Malachi is true, but Elijah had already come. He says that this "Elijah" suffered, like he, Jesus will suffer; "*the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist*". Therefore, once we understand the context it is clear; John was not the literal Elijah, but he was the Elijah that the prophecy spoke of, the one who was to (and did) prepare the way for the Messiah, Jesus, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world", John 1:29.

35. Jesus would (Luke 1:32) or would not (Matthew 1:11; 1 Chronicles 3:16 & Jeremiah 36:30) inherit David's throne?

(Category: misunderstood the Hebrew usage)

This answer follows on directly from that to #26. Having shown that Matthew's genealogy is that of Joseph, it is obvious from Jeremiah 36:30 that none of Joseph's physical descendants were qualified to sit on David's throne as he himself was descended from Jeconiah. However, as Matthew makes clear, Jesus was <u>not</u> a physical descendant of Joseph. After having listed Joseph's genealogy with the problem of his descendance from Jeconiah, Matthew narrates the story of the virgin birth. Thus he proves how Jesus avoids the Jeconiah problem and remains able to sit on David's throne. Luke, on the other hand, shows that Jesus' true physical descendance was from David apart from Jeconiah, thus fully qualifying him to inherit the throne of his father David. The announcement of the angel in Luke 1:32 completes the picture: 'the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David'. This divine appointment, together with his physical descendance, make him the only rightful heir to David's throne.

(Fruchtenbaum 1993:12)

36. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on one colt (Mark 11:7; cf. Luke 19:35), or a colt and an ass (Matthew 21:7)?

(Category: misread the text & misunderstood the historical context)

The accusation is that the Gospels contradict about how many donkeys Jesus rode into Jerusalem on. This accusation is based on not reading the text of Matthew properly and ignoring his full point about this event.

It first should be noted that all four Gospel writers refer to this event, the missing reference above being John 12:14-15. Mark, Luke and John are all in agreement that Jesus sat on the colt. Logic shows that there is no "contradiction" as Jesus cannot ride on two animals at once! So, why does Matthew mention two animals? The reason is clear.

Even by looking at Matthew in isolation, we can see from the text that Jesus did not ride on two animals, but only on the colt. For in the two verses preceding the quote in point (b) above by Shabbir, we read Matthew quoting two prophecies from the Old Testament (Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9) together. Matthew says:

"*Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gently and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey'*."

Matthew 21:5

By saying "a donkey" and then "on a colt, the foal of a donkey" Zechariah is using classic Hebrew sentence structure and poetic language known as "parallelism", simply repeating the same thing again in another way, as a parallel statement. This is very common in the Bible (i.e. Psalm 119:105 mentions, "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*," yet says the same thing twice in succession). It is clear that there is only one animal referred to. Therefore Matthew clearly says Jesus rode only on a colt, in agreement with the other three Gospel writers.

So why does Matthew say that the colt and its mother were brought along in verse seven? The reason is simple. Matthew, who was an eyewitness (where as Mark and Luke were quite possibly not) emphasizes the immaturity of the colt, too young to be separated from its mother. As the colt had never been ridden the probability was that it was still dependent on its mother. It would have made the entry to Jerusalem easier if the mother donkey were led along down the road, as the foal would naturally follow her, even though he had never before carried a rider and had not yet been trained to follow a roadway.

Here again we see that there is no contradiction between the synoptic accounts, but only added detail on the part of Matthew as one who viewed the event while it was happening.

This is just one of many of the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. He fulfilled ones that were in his control as well as ones which he could not manipulate, such as the time and place of his birth (Daniel 9:24-26, Micah 5:1-2, Matthew 2:1-6), and his resurrection (Psalm 16:10, Acts 2:24-32) to name but two.

Some Muslims believe that in the Taurat there is reference to the prophecy which the Qur'an speaks of in Sura 7:157 and 61:6 concerning Muhammad. However, these Muslims yet have to come up with one, while Jesus is predicted time and time again.

37. Simon Peter finds out that Jesus was the Christ by a revelation from heaven (Matthew 16:17), or by His brother Andrew (John 1:41)?

(Category: too literalistic an interpretation)

The emphasis of Matthew 16:17 is that Simon did not just hear it from someone else: God had made it clear to him. That does not preclude him being told by other people. Jesus' point is that he was not simply repeating what someone else had said. He had lived and worked with

Jesus and he was now clear in his mind that Jesus was none other than the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the Living God.

Jesus did not ask, "Who have you heard that I am?" but, "Who do you say I am?" There is all the difference in the world between these two questions, and Peter was no longer in any doubt.

38. Jesus first met Simon Peter and Andrew by the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:18-22), or on the banks of the river Jordan (John 1:42-43)?

(Category: misread the text)

The accusation is that one Gospel records Jesus meeting Simon Peter and Andrew by the sea of Galilee, while the other says he met them by the river Jordan. However this accusation falls flat on its face as the different writers pick up the story in different places. Both are true.

John 1:35 onwards says Jesus met them by the river Jordan and that they spent time with him there. Andrew (and probably Peter too) were disciples of John the Baptist. They left this area and went to Galilee, in which region was the village of Cana where Jesus then performed his first recorded miracle. *"After this he went down to Capernaum with his mothers and brothers and disciples. There they stayed for a few days."* John 2:12.

Peter and Andrew were originally from a town named Bethsaida (John 2:44) but now lived in Capernaum (Matthew 8:14-15, Mark 1:30-31, Luke 4:38-39), a few miles from Bethsaida. They were fishermen by trade, so it was perfectly normal for them to fish when they were home during these few days (for at this time Jesus was only just beginning public teaching or healing).

This is where Matthew picks up the story. As Peter and Andrew fish in the Lake of Galilee, Jesus calls them to follow him - to leave all they have behind and become his permanent disciples. Before this took place, he had not asked them, but they had followed him because of John the Baptist's testimony of him (John 1:35-39). Now, because of this testimony, plus the miracle in Cana, as well as the things Jesus said (John 1:47-51), as well as the time spent with the wisest and only perfect man who ever lived etc., it is perfectly understandable for them to leave everything and follow him. It would not be understandable for them to just drop their known lives and follow a stranger who appeared and asked them to, like children after the pied piper! Jesus did not enchant anyone - they followed as they realized who he was - the one all the prophets spoke of, the Messiah the son of God.

39. When Jesus met Jairus, his daughter 'had just died' (Matthew 9:18), or was 'at the point of death' (Mark 5:23)?

(Category: too literalistic an interpretation)

When Jairus left his home, his daughter was very sick, and at the point of death, or he wouldn't have gone to look for Jesus. When he met Jesus he certainly was not sure whether his daughter had already succumbed. Therefore, he could have uttered both statements; Matthew mentioning her death, while Mark speaking about her sickness. However, it must be underlined that this is not a detail of any importance to the story, or to us. The crucial points are clear:

- Jairus's daughter had a fatal illness.
- All that could have been done would already have been: she was as good as dead if not already dead.
- Jairus knew that Jesus could both heal her and bring her back from the dead. As far as he was concerned, there was no difference.

Therefore it is really of no significance whether the girl was actually dead or at the point of death when Jairus reached Jesus.'

40. Jesus allowed (Mark 6:8), or did not allow (Matthew 10:9; Luke 9:3) his disciples to keep a staff on their journey?

(Category: misunderstood the Greek usage)

It is alleged that the Gospel writers contradict each other concerning whether Jesus allowed his disciples to take a staff on their journey or not. The problem is one of translation.

In Matthew we read the English translation of the Greek word "κτεστηε", which is rendered in the King James (Authorized) translation as "*Provide neither gold, nor silver nor yet staves"*. According to a Greek dictionary this word means "to get for oneself, to acquire, to procure, by purchase or otherwise" (Robinson, Lexicon of the New Testament). Therefore in Matthew Jesus is saying "Do not procure anything in addition to what you already have. Just go as you are."

Matthew 10 and Mark 6 agree that Jesus directed his disciples to take along no extra equipment. Luke 9:3 agrees in part with the wording of Mark 6:8, using the verb in Greek, ("*take*"); but then, like Matthew adds "no staff, no bag, no bread, no money". But Matthew 10:10 includes what was apparently a further clarification: they were not to *acquire* a staff as part of their special equipment for the tour. Mark 6:8 seems to indicate that this did not necessarily involve discarding any staff they already had as they traveled the country with Jesus.

However, this is not a definitive answer, only a possible explanation. This trivial difference does not effect the substantial agreement of the Gospels. We would not be troubled if this were, or is, a contradiction, for we do not have the same view of these Gospels as a Muslim is taught about the Qur'an. And if this is the pinnacle of Biblical contradictions when the Bible is said to be "full of contradictions" and "totally corrupted", then such people are obviously deluded. If indeed Christian scribes and translators had wished to alter the original Gospels, this "contradiction" would not have been here. It is a sign of the authenticity of the text as a human account of what took place, and is a clear sign that it has not been deliberately corrupted.

41. Herod did (Matthew 14:2; Mark 6:16) or did not (Luke 9:9) think that Jesus was John the Baptist?

(Category: misread the text)

There is no contradiction here. In Luke 9:9, Herod asks who this incredible person could be, as John was now dead. In Matthew 14:2 and Mark 6:16 he gives his answer: after considering who Jesus could be, he concluded that he must be John the Baptist, raised from the dead. By the time Herod actually met Jesus, at his trial, he may not have still thought that it was John (Luke 23:8-11). If that were the case, he had most probably heard more about him and understood John's claims about preparing for one who was to come (John 1:15-34). He may well have heard that Jesus had been baptised by John, obviously ruling out the possibility that they were the same person.

42. John the Baptist did (Matthew 3:13-14) or did not (John 1:32-33) recognize Jesus before his baptism?

(Category: misunderstood the author's intent)

John's statement in John 1:33 that he would not have known Jesus except for seeing the Holy Spirit alight on him and remain, can be understood to mean that John would not have known *for sure* without this definite sign. John was filled with the Holy Spirit from before his

birth (Luke 1:15) and we have record of an amazing recognition of Jesus even while John was in his mother's womb. Luke 1:41-44 relates that when Mary visited John's mother, the sound of her greeting prompted John, then still in the womb, to leap in recognition of Mary's presence, as the mother of the Lord.

From this passage we can also see that John's mother had some knowledge about who Jesus would be. It is very likely that she told John something of this as he was growing up (even though it seems that she died while he was young).

In the light of this prior knowledge and the witness of the Holy Spirit within John, it is most likely that this sign of the Holy Spirit resting on Jesus was simply a sure confirmation of what he already thought. God removed any doubt so that he could be sure that it was not his imagination or someone else's mistake.

43. John the Baptist did (John 1:32-33) or did not (Matthew 11:2) recognize Jesus after his baptism?

(Category: misread the text)

In the passage of John 1:29-36 it is abundantly clear that John recognised Jesus. We should have no doubt at all about this.

Matthew 11:2 takes place later on, and many things have happened in the interum. John's original knowledge of Jesus was limited and it seems that subsequent events had disillusioned him somewhat. He did not know exactly what form Jesus' ministry would take. We are told from Matthew 3:11,12 some of what John knew: "*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire*." This is the classic portrayal of the Messiah as the conquering king who would bring God's judgement on all those who reject him, bringing peace and justice to those who follow him. John obviously understood this.

However, the Messiah was also portrayed in the scriptures as a suffering servant who would suffer on behalf of God's people. This is shown clearly in Isaiah 53, especially verse 12: *"For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors"*. John also understood this, as shown by his statement in John 1:29: *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

What was sometimes not so well understood was how the two portrayals of the Messiah interacted. Many thought that the Messiah would bring his terrible judgement as soon as he came. In fact, this will occur when he returns again (his return is alluded to in Acts 1:11, for example). Some were confused, therefore, by Jesus' reluctance to act as a military leader and release the nation of Israel from Roman oppression at that time.

This confusion is illustrated by Luke 24:13-33, where Jesus spoke with two of his followers on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection. They were initially kept from recognising him (v.16). They told him how they "*had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel"* (v.21). They were correct in this hope, but failed to understand the first stage in God's redemptive process. Jesus corrected their misunderstanding in v. 25,26: *"How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?*" (emphasis added)

It is most likely that a similar misunderstanding prompted John's question in Matthew 11:2. Despite having been so sure of Jesus' identity as the Messiah of Israel, further events had clouded his certainty. After expecting Jesus to oust the Romans and restore the kingdom of Israel as in the days of king David, instead he had seen Jesus 'teach and preach in the towns of Galilee' (Matthew 11:1), with no mention of a military campaign. John surely wondered what

had gone wrong: had he misunderstood the Messiah's role, or perhaps he had made a bigger mistake in thinking Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus' answer in Matthew 11:4-6 makes it clear:

"Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

These activities were Messianic prerogatives, as foretold by Isaiah 29:18; 35:5,6; 61:1-3. Although John's disillusionment was a natural human reaction, he had been right the first time. Jesus ended his reply with an exhortation to John not to give up hope. The Messiah was here without a doubt and all would be revealed in its proper time.

44. When Jesus bears witness to himself, is his testimony not true (John 5:31) or is his testimony true (John 8:14)?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

"*If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid"* (John 5:31) compared with "*Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid*" (John 8:14). It appears to be a contradiction, but only if the context is ignored.

In John 5 Jesus is speaking about how he cannot claim on his own to be the Messiah nor the Son of God, **unless** he is in line with God's revealed word. That is, without fulfilling the prophecies spoken in the Old Testament. But as Jesus did fulfil them and was proclaimed to be the Messiah by John the Baptist who the prophets also spoke of as heralding the way for the Messiah (see #34), then Jesus was indeed who he claimed to be, the Son of God. Jesus says of the Jewish scriptures which his listeners studied diligently, *"These are the Scriptures that testify about me".*

We read of a somewhat different setting however in John 8. Jesus has just once again claimed to be the Messiah by quoting Old Testament Messianic prophecies and applying them to himself (John 8:12, Isaiah 9:2, Malachi 4:2). *"Then some Pharisees challenged him, 'Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid'."* Verse 13.

It is to this statement that Jesus responds "Yes it is". Why? Because the Pharisees were using a law from Deuteronomy 19:15 which says *"One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If a malicious witness takes the stand."*

Therefore they broadened the law to mean more that it does actually say. Indeed, the testimony of one man was valid - however not enough to convict, but enough when used in defense to bring an acquittal. This law is not speaking about anyone making a claim about himself, only in a court when accused of a crime.

So when Jesus says in reply to them "*Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid*" he is right to do so as what the law referred to did not directly apply. He also says that he knew exactly who he was, whereas they did not. He was not lying to them; he was the sinless Messiah of God. Therefore his word could be trusted.

However, it is a good principle not to believe just anyone who claims to be the Messiah. Any claimant must have proof. Therefore the second thing Jesus goes on to state in John 8 is that he has these witnesses too, the witnesses that the Pharisees were asking for. *"I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father who sent me."* Verse 18. The same proclamation as in John 5 that he was fulfilling the prophecies that they knew (see just before this incident in John 7:42 for further proof of this point).

There is no contradiction, simply clarity and great depth which can be seen when Jesus' is viewed in context, in his fertile Jewish culture and setting.

45. When Jesus entered Jerusalem he cleansed (Matthew 21:12) or did not cleanse (Mark 11:1-17) the temple that same day, but the next day?

(Category: misunderstood the author's intent)

The key to understanding may be found in Matthew's use of narrative. At times he can be seen to arrange his material in topical order rather than strict chronological sequence. See the next question (#46) for more details.

With this in mind, it is probable that Matthew relates the cleansing of the temple along with the triumphal entry, even though the cleansing occurred the next day. Verse 12 states that 'Jesus entered the temple' but does not say clearly that it was immediately following the entry into Jerusalem.. Verse 17 informs us that he left Jerusalem and went to Bethany, where he spent the night. Mark 11:11 also has him going out to Bethany for the night, but this is something that he did each night of that week in Jerusalem.

Matthew 21:23 states: "*Jesus entered the temple courts"* in a similar fashion to verse 12, yet Luke 20:1 says that the following incident occurred *"one day"*, indicating that it may not have been immediately after the fig tree incident.

According to this possible interpretation, Jesus entered the temple on the day of his triumphal entry, looked around and retired to Bethany. The next morning he cursed the fig tree on the way to Jerusalem (at which time it started to wither) and cleansed the temple when he got there. Returning to Bethany that evening, probably as it was getting dark, the withered fig tree may not have been noticed by the disciples. It was only the following morning in the full light of day that they saw what had happened to it.

(Archer 1994:334.335)

46. Matthew 21:19 says that the tree which Jesus cursed withered at once, whereas Mark 11:20 maintains that it withered overnight.

(Category: misunderstood the author's intent)

The differences found between the accounts of Matthew and Mark concerning the fig tree have much to do with the order both Matthew and Mark used in arranging their material. When we study the narrative technique of Matthew in general, we find (as was noted in #45 above) that he sometimes arranges his material in a topical order rather than in the strictly chronological order that is more often characteristic of Mark and Luke.

For instance, if we look at chapters 5-7 of Matthew which deal with the sermon on the Mount, it is quite conceivable that portions of the sermon on the Mount teachings are found some times in other settings, such as in the sermon on the plain in Luke (6:20-49). Matthew's tendency was to group his material in themes according to a logical sequence. We find another example of this exhibited in a series of parables of the kingdom of heaven that make up chapter 13. Once a theme has been broached, Matthew prefers to carry it through to its completion, as a general rule.

When we see it from this perspective it is to Mark that we look to when trying to ascertain the chronology of an event. In Mark's account we find that Jesus went to the temple on both Palm Sunday and the following Monday. But in Mark 11:11-19 it is clearly stated that Jesus did not expel the tradesmen from the temple until Monday, after he had cursed the barren fig tree (verses 12 to 14).

To conclude then, Matthew felt it suited his topical approach more effectively to include the Monday afternoon action with the Sunday afternoon initial observation, whereas Mark preferred to follow a strict chronological sequence. These differences are not contradictory, but show merely a different style in arrangement by each author.

(Archer 1982:334-335 and Light of Life III 1992:96-97)

47. In Matthew 26:48-50 Judas came up and kissed Jesus, whereas in John 18:3-12 Judas could not get close enough to Jesus to kiss him.

(Category: misquoted the text)

This is rather an odd seeming discrepancy by Shabbir, for nowhere in the John account does it say (as Shabbir forthrightly maintains) that Judas could not get close enough to Jesus to kiss him. Not being able to get close to him had nothing, therefore, to do with whether he kissed him or not. It seems that Shabbir imagines this to be the problem and so imposes it onto the text. The fact that John does not mention a kiss does not mean Judas did not use a kiss. Many times we have seen where one of the gospel writers includes a piece of information which another leaves out. That does not imply that either one is wrong, only that, as witnesses, they view an event by different means, and so include into their testimony only that which they deem to be important.

(Light of Life III 1992:107)

48. Did Peter deny Christ three times before the cock crowed (John 13:38), or three times before the cock crowed twice (Mark 14:30, 72)?

(Category: discovery of earlier manuscripts)

This accusation is that Jesus says to Peter *"the cock will not crow till you have denied me three times"* (John 13:38) and also *"Before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times"* (Mark 14:30). However, as the King James translation has it the cock crowed prior to Peter's third denial in Mark, while the prediction in John failed. This problem is one of manuscript evidence.

Matthew 26:33-35, 74-75 "*before the cock crows you will disown me three times*"

Luke 22:31-34, 60-62 "*before the cock crows today, you will deny three times that you know me*"

John 13:38 "*before the cock crows, you will disown me three times*"

Mark is therefore the odd one out. This is probably due to the second crow being a later addition to the original Gospel for some unknown reason. Some early manuscripts of Mark do not have the words "a second time" and "twice" in 14:72, nor the word "twice" in 14:30, or the cock crowing a first time in verse 14:68 as in the King James translation. Therefore an erroneous addition is spotted by the clarity of having 4 accounts of the event and many early manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark.

However, another explanation is plausible if the first crow verse (68 in the King James) was not in the original but the others ("twice" in 30 and 72) were, as in the New International translation. For as a cock can (and often does) crow more than once in a row, there would be no contradiction (the first and second crows being together, with Peter remembering Jesus' prediction on the second crow), for since we may be very sure that if a rooster crows twice, he has at least crowed once. Mark therefore just included more information in his account than the other gospel writers.

Although I am not an expert on the manuscripts used for the King James translation and do not know a great deal about why later, more accurate translators had enough manuscript evidence to omit verse 68 but not the others, I think that the first reason is more likely.

49. Jesus did (John 19:17) or did not (Matthew 27:31-32) bear his own cross?

(Category: misread the text or the texts are compatible with a little thought)

John 19:17 states that he went out carrying his own cross to the place of the skull. Matthew 27:31,32 tells us that he was led out to be crucified and that it was only as they were going out to Golgotha that Simon was forced to carry the cross.

Mark 15:20,21 agrees with Matthew and gives us the additional information that Jesus started out from inside the palace (Praetorium). As Simon was on his way in from the country, it is clear that he was passing by in the street. This implies that Jesus carried his cross for some distance, from the palace into the street. Weak from his floggings and torture, it is likely that he either collapsed under the weight of the cross or was going very slowly. In any case, the soldiers forced Simon to carry the cross for him. Luke 23:26 is in agreement, stating that Simon was seized as they led Jesus away.

Thus the contradiction vanishes. Jesus started out carrying the cross and Simon took over at some point during the journey.

50. Did Jesus die before (Matthew 27:50-51; Mark 15:37-38), or after (Luke 23:45-46) the curtain of the temple was torn?

(Category: misread the text)

After reading the three passages Matthew 27:50-51, Mark 15:37-38 and Luke 23:45-46, it is not clear where the apparent contradictions are that Shabbir has pointed out. All three passages point to the fact that at the time of Jesus' death the curtain in the temple was torn. It does not stand to reason that because both Matthew and Mark mention the event of Christ's death before mentioning the curtain tearing, while Luke mentions it in reverse order, that they are therefore in contradiction, as Matthew states that the two events happened, 'At that moment', and the other two passages nowhere deny this.

They all agree that these two events happened simultaneously for a very good reason; for the curtain was there as a barrier between God and man. Its destruction coincides with the death of the Messiah, thereby allowing man the opportunity for the first time since Adam's expulsion from God's presence at the garden of Eden, to once again be reunited with Him.

51. Did Jesus say everything openly (John 18:20) or did he speak secretly to his disciples (Mark 4:34, Matthew 13:10-11)?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

The reason people say that Jesus contradicts himself about saying things secretly or not, especially in relation to parables, is due to a lack of textual and cultural contextualising.

This answer requires significant background information, some of which I hope to give briefly here.

Firstly, what is a parable? It is a story given in order to clarify, emphasize or illustrate a teaching, not a teaching within itself. Jesus was a Jewish Rabbi. In Rabbinical literature there are approximately 4000 parables recorded. It was thought by Rabbis to be good practice to divide their instruction of the people into three parts, the latter third typically being two parables representative to the first two thirds. Jesus carries on in this tradition with just over one third of his recorded instruction being in the form of parables. He drew upon a wealth of images that the Israelis of his day knew, using common motifs such as plants, animals etc. Therefore the point of each of Jesus' parables was clear to all the listeners, which can be seen from the Gospels too. Parables were so rich and also so subtle that not only could they drive home a clear and simple point to the ordinary listener, but the scholars could turn them over and over in their mind, deriving greater and greater meaning from them. So, Jesus often

expanded on the meaning of a parable to his disciples, his close students, in response to their inquiry or to instruct them further as any Jewish Rabbi would.

This can be seen from reading Mark 4:34 in context. For it says, *"With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them* [the crowds]*, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable* [to clarify, emphasize or illustrate the teaching]. *But when he was alone with his own disciples he explained everything* [taught them more, for they could understand more than the crowds]." Mark 4:33-34.

Therefore parables were not secret teachings. They are not esoteric knowledge given only to the initiated. It makes no sense (nor has any historical basis) to say that Jesus went around confusing people. He went around in order to teach and instruct people. So when Jesus was asked while on trial in court (John 18:20) about his teaching, he says something to the words of "I taught publicly - everyone heard my words. You know I taught. I did not teach in secret." He was right.

As all this is true, what are these "secrets of the kingdom of heaven" which Jesus speaks of? The only 'secret' ("*the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writing by the command of the eternal God, so that the nations might believe and obey him"* (Romans 16:25-26) is that Jesus is Lord!

This secret was that Jesus' mission was foretold by the prophets, that he was the fulfillment of these prophecies and the greatest revelation that would ever be given to mankind. His words were not only for the saving of people, but also for the judging of people because they were *"ever hearing but never understanding, ever seeing but never perceiving"* (Matthew 13:14) as many of the hearers of the parables were unwilling to repent and submit to God.

Many people enjoyed Jesus' teaching, came for the nice moral discourses and the excellent parables, but not many followed him as the cost was too great (see Luke 9:57-61, 14:25-27, 33). But it was these things his disciples were beginning to understand because they truly followed Jesus. The secrets of the kingdom of heaven is what he said to his disciples following (and explaining) Matthew 13:10-11:

"But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear [unlike the crowds]*. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it"* [as they did not live during the lifetime of Jesus - all the prophets were before him].

The secret is Jesus is Lord, Jesus is king, Jesus is Messiah, Jesus is the one all the prophets spoke of, the salvation of mankind, God's greatest revelation, the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 21:6-8, 22:12-16), the only way to be right with God (John 3:36, Romans 6:23).

52. Was Jesus on the cross (Mark 15:23) or in Pilate's court (John 19:14) at the sixth hour on the day of the crucifixion?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

The simple answer to this is that the synoptic writers (Matthew, Mark and Luke) employed a different system of numbering the hours of day to that used by John. The synoptics use the traditional Hebrew system, where the hours were numbered from sunrise (approximately 6:00am in modern reckoning), making the crucifixion about 9:00am, the third hour by this system..

John, on the other hand, uses the Roman civil day. This reckoned the day from midnight to midnight, as we do today. Pliny the Elder (*Natural History 2.77*) and Macrobius (*Saturnalia 1.3*) both tell us as much. Thus, by the Roman system employed by John, Jesus' trial by night was in its end stages by the sixth hour (6:00am), which was the first hour of the Hebrew reckoning used in the synoptics. Between this point and the crucifixion, Jesus underwent a

brutal flogging and was repeatedly mocked and beaten by the soldiers in the Praetorium (Mark 15:16-20). The crucifixion itself occurred at the third hour in the Hebrew reckoning, which is the ninth in the Roman, or 9:00am by our modern thinking.

This is not just a neat twist to escape a problem, as there is every reason to suppose that John used the Roman system, even though he was just as Jewish as Matthew, Mark and Luke. John's gospel was written after the other three, around AD90, while he was living in Ephesus. This was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, so John would have become used to reckoning the day according to the Roman usage. Further evidence of him doing so is found in John 21:19: '*On the evening of that first day of the week*'. This was Sunday evening, which in Hebrew thinking was actually part of the second day, each day beginning at sunset.

(Archer 1994:363-364)

53. The two thieves crucified with Jesus either did (Mark 15:32) or did not (Luke 23:43) mock Jesus?

(Category: too literalistic an interpretation)

This apparent contradiction asks did both thieves crucified with Jesus mock him or just one. Mark 15:23 says both did. Luke 23:43 says one mocked and one defended Jesus. It isn't too difficult to see what it going on here. The obvious conclusion is that both thieves mocked Jesus initially. However after Jesus had said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing," one of the robbers seems to have had a change of heart and repented on the cross, while the other continued in his mocking.

There is a lesson here which shouldn't be overlooked; that the Lord allows us at any time to repent, no matter what crime or sin we have committed. These two thieves are symptomatic of all of us. Some of us when faced with the reality of Christ continue to reject him and mock him, while others accept our sinfulness and ask for forgiveness. The good news is that like the thief on the cross, we can be exonerated from that sin at any time, even while 'looking at death in the face'.

54. Did Jesus ascend to Paradise the same day of the crucifixion (Luke 23:43), or two days later (John 20:17)?

(Category: misunderstood how God works in history)

The idea that Jesus contradicts himself (or the Gospels contradict themselves) concerning whether he had ascended to Paradise or not after his death on the cross is due to assumptions about Paradise as well as the need to contextualize.

Jesus says to the thief on the cross "Today you will be with me in Paradise". This was indeed true. For the thief was to die that same day on earth; but in paradise "today" is any day in this world, as Heaven is outside of time.

Jesus says to Mary Magdalene, according to the rendering of the King James translation, that he had not yet "ascended" to his Father. However, this could also be rendered "returned" to his Father.

Jesus was with God, and was God, before the beginning of the world (John 1 and Philippians 2:6-11). He left all his glory and became fully God, fully man. Later, God did exalt Jesus to the highest place once more, to the right hand of Himself (see Acts 7:56). This had not yet taken place in John 20:17. Jesus saying "for I have not yet returned to the Father" does not rule out the possibility that he was in heaven between his death and resurrection in "our time" (although Heaven is outside of time). By way of parallel (albeit an imperfect one), I do go to my original home and the area where I grew up without returning there. Returning as in myself being restored to what was.

However, a more likely understanding of the text has to do with the context. Another way to say, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not ascended to my Father. Go instead to my brothers...", would be, "Do not hang on to me Mary - I have not left you all yet. You will see me again. But now, I want you to go and tell my disciples that I am going to my Father soon, but not yet".

Both Islam and Christianity believe in the resurrection of the body, and both believe in the intermediate state. In Luke, Jesus dies, and his spirit ascended to Paradise (see vs. 46). In John, Jesus has been bodily resurrected, and in that state, he had not yet ascended to the Father.

The time factor makes this somewhat paradoxical but the texts are not mutually exclusive. There is no contradiction.

55. When Paul was on the road to Damascus he saw a light and heard a voice. Did those who were with him hear the voice (Acts 9:7), or did they not (Acts 22:9)?

(Category: misunderstood the Greek usage or the text is compatible with a little thought)

Although the same Greek word is used in both accounts (*akouo*), it has two distinct meanings: to perceive sound and to understand. Therefore, the explanation is clear: they heard something but did not understand what it was saying. Paul, on the other hand, heard and understood. There is no contradiction.

(Haley p.359)

56. When Paul saw the light and fell to the ground, did his traveling companions fall (Acts 26:14) or did they not fall (Acts 9:7) to the ground?

(Category: misunderstood the Greek usage or the text is compatible with a little thought)

There are two possible explanations of this point. The word rendered 'stood' also means *to be fixed, to be rooted to the spot*. This is something that can be experienced whether standing up or lying down.

An alternative explanation is this: Acts 26:14 states that the initial falling to the ground occurred when the light flashed around, before the voice was heard. Acts 9:7 says that the men 'stood speechless' after the voice had spoken. There would be ample time for them to stand up whilst the voice was speaking to Saul, especially as it had no significance or meaning to them. Saul, on the other hand, understood the voice and was no doubt transfixed with fear as he suddenly realized that for so long he had been persecuting and killing those who were following God. He had in effect been working against the God whom he thought he was serving. This terrible realization evidently kept him on the ground longer than his companions.

(Haley p.359)

57. Did the voice tell Paul what he was to do on the spot (Acts 26:16-18), or was he commanded to go to Damascus to be told what to do (Acts 9:7; 22:10)?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

Paul was told his duties in Damascus as can be seen from Acts 9 and 22. However in Acts 26 the context is different. In this chapter Paul doesn't worry about the chronological or geographical order of events because he is talking to people who have already heard his story.

In Acts 9:1-31 Luke, the author of Acts, narrates the conversion of Saul.

In Acts 22:1-21 Luke narrates Paul speaking to Jews, who knew who Paul was and had actually caused him to be arrested and kept in the Roman Army barracks in Jerusalem. He speaks to the Jews from the steps of the barracks and starts off by giving his credentials as a Jew, before launching into a detailed account of his meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ and his conversion.

In Acts 26:2-23 Luke, however, narrates the speech given by Paul, (who was imprisoned for at least two years after his arrest in Jerusalem and his speech in Acts 22,). This was given to the Roman Governor Festus and King Herod Agrippa, both of whom were already familiar with the case. (Read the preceding Chapters). Therefore they did not require a full blown explanation of Paul's case, but a summary. Which is exactly what Paul gives them. This is further highlighted by Paul reminding them of his Jewish credentials in one part of a sentence, "I lived as a Pharisee," as opposed to two sentences in Acts 22:3. Paul also later in the Chapter is aware that King Agrippa is aware of the things that have happened in verses 25-27.

58. Did 24,000 Israelites die in the plague in 'Shittim' (Numbers 25:1, 9), or was it only 23,000 Israelites who died (1 Corinthians 10:8)?

(Category: confused this incident with another)

This apparent contradiction asks how many people died from the plague that occurred in Shittim (which incidentally is misspelt 'Shittin' in Shabbir's pamphlet). Numbers 25:1-9 and 1 Corinthians 10:8 are contrasted. Shabbir is referring to the wrong plague here.

If he had looked at the context of 1 Corinthians 10, he would have noted that Paul was referring to the plague in Exodus 32:28, which takes place at Mt. Sinai and not to that found in Numbers 25, which takes place in Shittim, amongst the Moabites. If there is any doubt refer to verse 7 of 1 Corinthians 10, which quotes almost exactly from Exodus 32:6, "Afterwards they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry."

Now there are those who may say that the number killed in the Exodus 32 account were 3,000 (Exodus 32:28) another seeming contradiction, but one which is easily rectified once you read the rest of the text. The 3,000 killed in verse 28 account for only those killed by men with swords. This is followed by a plague which the Lord brings against those who had sinned against him in verse 35, which says, "And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made." It is to this plague which Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 10:8.

(Geisler/Howe 1992:458-459)

59. Did 70 members of the house of Jacob come to Egypt (Genesis 46:27), or was it 75 members (Acts 7:14)?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

This apparent contradiction asks how many members of the house of Jacob went to Egypt. The two passages contrasted are Genesis 46:27 and Acts 7:14. However both passages are correct. In the Genesis 46:1-27 the total number of direct descendants that traveled to Egypt with Jacob were 66 in number according to verse 26. This is because Judah was sent on ahead in verse 28 of Chapter 46 and because Joseph and his two sons were already in Egypt. However in verse 27 all the members of the family are included, including Joseph and his sons and Judah making a total number of 70, referring to the total number of Jacob's family that ended up in Egypt not just those that traveled with him to Egypt.

In the older Septuagint and Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts the number given in verse 27 is 75. This is because they also include Joseph's three grandsons and two great grandsons listed in

Numbers 26:28-37, and in at least the Septuagint version their names are listed in Genesis 46:20. Therefore the Acts 7:14 quotation of Stephen's speech before his martyrdom is correct because he was quoting from the Septuagint.

60. Did Judas buy a field (Acts 1:18) with his blood-money for betraying Jesus, or did he throw it into the temple (Matthew 27:5)?

(Category: misunderstood the author's intent)

This apparent contradiction asks, 'What did Judas do with the blood money he received for betraying Jesus?' In Acts 1:18 it is claimed that Judas bought a field. In Matthew 27:5 it was thrown into the Temple from where the priests used it to buy a field. However, upon closer scrutiny it appears one passage is just a summary of the other.

Matthew 27:1-10 describes in detail the events that happened in regard to Judas betrayal of Jesus, and their significance in terms of the fulfillment of the Scriptures. In particular he quotes from the prophet Zechariah 11:12-13 which many think are clarifications of the prophecies found in Jeremiah 19:1-13 and 32:6-9.

In the Acts 1:18-19 passage however, Luke is making a short resume of something that people already knew, as a point of clarification to the speech of Peter, among the believers (the same situation as we found in question number 57 earlier). This is illustrated by the fact that in verse 19 he says, "Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this". Also it is more than probable that the Gospel record was already being circulated amongst the believers at the time of Luke's writing. Luke, therefore, was not required to go into detail about the facts of Judas' death.

61. Did Judas die by hanging himself (Matthew 27:5) or by falling headlong and bursting open with all his bowels gushing out (Acts 1:18)?

(Category: the texts are compatible with a little thought)

This alleged contradiction is related to the fact that Matthew in his Gospel speaks of Judas hanging himself but in Acts 1:18 Luke speaks about Judas falling headlong and his innards gushing out. However both of these statements are true.

Matthew 27:1-10 mentioned the fact that Judas died by hanging himself in order to be strictly factual. Luke, however in his report in Acts1:18-19 wants to cause the feeling of revulsion among his readers, for the field spoken about and for Judas, and nowhere denies that Judas died by hanging. According to tradition, it would seem that Judas hanged himself on the edge of a cliff, above the Valley of Hinnom. Eventually the rope snapped, was cut or untied and Judas fell upon the field below as described by Luke.

62. Is the field called the 'field of blood' because the priest bought it with blood money (Matthew 27:8), or because of Judas's bloody death (Acts 1:19)?

(Category: misunderstood the wording)

Once again, looking at the same two passages as the last two apparent contradictions Shabbir asks why the field where Judas was buried called the Field of Blood? Matthew 27:8 says that it is because it was bought with blood-money, while, according to Shabbir Acts 1:19 says that it was because of the bloody death of Judas.

However both passages agree that it was due to it being bought by blood-money. Acts 1:18-19 starts by saying, "With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field". So it begins with the assumption that the field was bought by the blood-money, and then the author intending to cause revulsion for what had happened describes Judas bloody end on that piece of real estate.

63. How can the ransom which Christ gives for all, which is good (Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:5-6), be the same as the ransom of the wicked (Proverbs 21:18)?

(Category: misunderstood how God works in history)

This contradiction asks, 'Who is a ransom for whom?' Shabbir uses passages from Mark 10:45 and 1 Timothy 2:5-6 to show that it is Jesus that is a ransom for all. This is compared to Proverbs 21:18 which speaks of "The wicked become a ransom for the righteous, and the unfaithful for the upright."

There is no contradiction here as they are talking about two different types of ransom. A ransom is a payment by one party to another. It can be made by a good person for others, as we see Christ does for the world, or it can be made by evil people as payment for the evil they have done, as we see in the Proverbs passage.

The assumption being made by Shabbir in the Mark and 1 Timothy passages is that Jesus was good and could therefore not be a ransom for the unrighteous. In this premise he reflects the Islamic denial that someone can pay for the sins of another, or can be a ransom for another. He must not, however impose this interpretation on the Bible. Christ as a ransom for the many is clearly taught in the Bible. Galatians 3:13-14 and 1 Peter 2:23-25 speak of Jesus becoming a curse for us. Therefore Jesus has fulfilled even this proverb.

Again Shabbir's supposition relies upon quotations being taken out of their context. The Mark 10:45 passage starts off by quoting Jesus as saying, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." This was spoken by Jesus because the disciples had been arguing over the fact that James and John had approached Jesus about sitting at his right and left side when Christ came into his glory. Here Jesus is again prophesying his death which is to come and the reason for that death, that he would be the ransom payment that would atone for all people's sin.

In 1 Timothy 2:5-6 Paul is here speaking, saying,

"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men-the testimony given in its proper time."

This comes in the middle of a passage instructing the Early Church on worshiping God. These two verses give the reason and the meaning of worshiping God. The redemptive ransom given by God, that through this mediator Jesus Christ's atoning work on the Cross, God may once again have that saving relationship with man.

The Proverbs 21:18 passage speaks however of the ransom that God paid through Egypt in the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, as is highlighted in the book of Isaiah, but particularly in Chapter 43:3;

"For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead."

This picture is further heightened in verses 16 and 17 of the same Chapter. This also has some foundation from the book of Exodus 7:5; 8:19; 10:7; 12:33. Chapters 13 and 14 particularly point to this. As history records for us in the Bible it was through this action that the Old Covenant was established between God and the Kingdom of Israel.

64. Is all scripture profitable (2 Timothy 3:16) or not profitable (Hebrews 7:18)?

(Category: misunderstood how God works in history)

The accusation is that the Bible says all scripture is profitable as well as stating that a former commandment is weak and useless, and therein lies the contradiction. This is a contextual problem and arises through ignorance of what God promised to do speaking through the Prophets, concerning the two covenants which He instituted.

Due to space this wonderful issue cannot be looked at in depth here. However, some background information will have to be given in order for a reader, unfamiliar with the Bible, to understand what we are saying here. In order to illustrate I will draw a parallel from question #92 which speaks of the wealth behind many of the Hebrew words used in the Bible; in that particular case the ability we have to interpret the word 'niham' as either changing one's mind, repenting, or to be aggrieved (refer to the question for a further understanding of the context).

God's word obviously originates from Him alone, and is indeed useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training as 2 Timothy states. That is a general statement which refers to all that which comes from God.

Hebrews chapter 7 speaks of a particular commandment given to a particular people at a specific time; the sacrificial system in the Tabernacle and later the Temple in Jerusalem. God established in His covenant with His people Israel a system where they would offer sacrifices, animals to be killed, in order for God to forgive them of their sins; particularly what God calls in Leviticus chapters 4 to 6, the "sin offering" and the "guilt offering".

This concept of substitutional death is foreign to Islam, but is fundamental to Biblical Judaism and Christianity. Atonement must take place for sin. The penalty of sin is death, and someone has to pay that price. There is no forgiveness for sin without the shedding of blood, for God demands justice. He cannot just ignore it for that would not be just.

God indeed established this system of atonement as the Old Testament shows by referring to the need for atonement 79 times! However, it also records God saying "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt" [i.e. at Mount Sinai where He gave the first covenant to the people of Israel just after God saved them from Egypt] (Jeremiah 31:31-33). The reason God gives is that the people did not remain faithful to it. Thus the new covenant will be different as God says, "I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts" (vs. 33). He says also that this new covenant will necessitate a once-for-all payment for their sins, unlike the previous covenant (Jeremiah 31:34, Daniel 9:24-25).

God also speaks in the Old Testament of the Messiah who would bring this about. A Messiah not from the Levitical priesthood, but a perfect man from the tribe of Judah who would be a priest unto God. He, the Messiah would be the sacrifice that would pay for all sin in one go, and approach God not on the merit of his ancestry (as with the Levitical priests), but on his own merit, being like God, perfect. If people follow this Messiah and accept his payment of the penalty for sin for them, then God will write the law on their minds and hearts, and God can be merciful to them as His justice has been satisfied. Then they too can draw near to God, for God wants to be in relationship with His creation (Genesis 3:8-11) and it is only sin which stops that.

Obviously this is quite involved and only a comprehensive reading of the Old Testament will explain it adequately. All scripture is profitable, including that concerning the sacrificial system. However, God also promised in the Bible to make a renewed covenant with His people. In this the original system was replaced with the perfect sacrifice of the Messiah, Jesus.

Many scriptures describe this Messiah who would bring about this new covenant. In this God "makes his life a guilt offering" and we are told "Surely he took up our infirmities [sins] and carried our sorrows, he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace [with God] was upon him." See Isaiah chapter 53.

You can pay the price for your sin if you wish - it will cost you your life eternally. You will die for your own sin and go to hell. Or, because of the love of God, the Messiah can pay that price for you, and be "pierced" in substitution for you, which will bring you peace with God. Then God will permit you to enter heaven for eternity as His justice is satisfied. For as John the Baptist when seeing Jesus mentioned, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the word!" He also said, "Whoever believes in the Son [Jesus] has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." John 1:29, 3:36.

God teaches that He will do this. It was fulfilled in the death and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus, EXACTLY as the Old Testament said it would happen, and the new covenant was established. Sin was paid for once for all by the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" as John the Baptist announced upon seeing Jesus (see #34 and #44). He is the one God promised. So through his death the old system of sacrifices, offering animals over and over again, became unnecessary. God's alternative, which is vastly superior and comprehensive, rendered by God himself the previous system useless (Hebrews 8:7-13).

So, like clarification #92, God did not change His mind on His plan for enabling people to be right with Him. God is not a man that He should change His mind. It was His intention and plan all along to bring in this new covenant as a fulfilment of the old, as the Old Testament shows. A further point needs to be addressed a here. These ceremonial laws were required of the Israelites alone, as they were the ones who operating within the stipulations, ordinances and decrees of the Mosaic covenant. Any Gentile, or non-Israelite, who wished to convert to Judaism, was obligated to observe these covenantal ordinances as well. But Christians are not converts to Judaism. They are believers in Jesus, God's Messiah, the Savior. They operate within the context of a "new covenant," the one established in Jesus' blood by his atoning sacrifice, not the old covenant which God made with Israel at Sinai. Within this new covenant, Christians too have commandments, and in one manner or another they all relate to what was written in the Old Testament, but now in an entirely new context, that of fulfilment. So there is a clear line of continuity, revelation and renewal between the covenants, new and old - because both Israel and Christianity have the Messiah in common, and it was the Hebrew Scriptures that he fulfilled. Therefore all those Scriptures are profitable for studying, to know where we have come from, and where we are going. But not every commandment, ordinance or decree in the Old Testament is applicable to Christians in the same way it was (or is) to Israel. Though we have much in common, we have distinct covenants, a new covenant, which present Jews need to read about and acquiesce to, as it fulfills all that they look for and continue to hope for.

Note: a parallel to this, although an imperfect one, can be draw for the Muslim from the Qur'an. Sura 3:49-50. Jesus comes and says to the people of Israel "I have come to you to affirm the Law which was before me. And to make lawful to you what was before forbidden to you", or "to make halal what was haram". According to this he came and confirmed the law which God had given to them, but he made some things permissible for them which God had previously prohibited. This is not true according to the Bible in the context of this "contradiction" and cannot be said for Judaism and Christianity. It is just a parallel to show that the Qur'an testifies of such things too.

65. Was the exact wording on the cross, as (Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38, and John 19:19) all seem to have different wordings?

(Category: misread the text)

This seeming contradiction takes on the question, 'What was the exact wording on the cross?' It is argued that Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38, and John 19:19 all use different words posted above Jesus's head while hanging on the cross. This can be better understood by looking at John 19:20 which says;

"Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek."

It is interesting that Pilate is said to have written the sign and may have written different things in each of the languages according to Pilate's proficiency in each of the languages. The key charge brought against Jesus in all of the Gospels is that he claimed to be 'King of the Jews'. If this had been missing from any of the accounts then there may have been a possible concern for a contradiction here; but this is not the case. For a further explanation of this see Archer's explanation.

(Archer 1982:345-346).

66. Did Herod want to kill John the Baptist (Matthew 14:5), or was it his wife Herodias (Mark 6:20)?

(Category: misunderstood the author's intent)

The supposed contradiction pointed out by Shabbir is, 'Did Herod want to kill John the Baptist?' The passages used by Shabbir to promote his conjecture are Matthew 14:5 where it appears to say that Herod did and Mark 6:20 where Shabbir suggests that Herod did not want to kill him. However the passages in question are complimentary passages.

When we look at the whole story we see that Matthew 14:1-11 and Mark 6:14-29, as far as I have been able to see nowhere contradict each other. This seems to be a similarly weak attempt to find a contradiction within the Bible to that of contradiction 50. In both passages Herod has John imprisoned because of his wife Herodias. Therefore it is the underlying influence of Herodias on Herod that is the important factor in John's beheading. Mark's account is more detailed than Matthew's, whose Gospel is thought to have been written later, because Matthew does not want to waste time trampling old ground when it is already contained within Mark's Gospel. Notice also that Mark does not anywhere state that Herod did not want to kill John, but does say that Herod was afraid of him, because of John's righteousness and holiness, and, as Matthew adds, the factor of John's influence over the people.

67. Was the tenth disciple of Jesus in the list of twelve Thaddaeus (Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19) or Judas, son of James (Luke 6:12-16)?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

Both can be correct. It was not unusual for people of this time to use more than one name. Simon, or Cephas was also called Peter (Mark 3:16), and Saul was also called Paul (Acts 13:9). In neither case is there a suggestion that either was used exclusively before changing to the other. Their two names were interchangeable.

68. Was the man Jesus saw sitting at the tax collector's office whom he called to be his disciple named Matthew (Matthew 9:9) or Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27)?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

The answer to this question is exactly the same as the previous one in that both scriptures are correct. Matthew was also called Levi, as the scriptures here attest.

It is somewhat amusing to hear Mr Ally drawing so much attention to this legitimate custom. In the run-up to a debate in Birmingham, England in February 1998, he felt free to masquerade under an alternative name (Abdul Abu Saffiyah, meaning 'Abdul, the father of Saffiyah', his daughter's name) in order to gain an unfair advantage over Mr Smith, his opponent. By disguising his identity he denied Mr Smith the preparation to which he was entitled. Now here he finds it a contradictory when persons in the 1st century Palestine either use one or the other of their names, a practice which is neither illegal nor duplicitous.

There are perfectly legitimate reasons for using an alternative name. However, in the light of Mr Ally's unfair and deceitful practice outlined above, there is a ring of hypocrisy to these last two questions raised by him.

69. Was Jesus crucified on the daytime after the Passover meal (Mark 14:12-17) or the daytime before the Passover meal (John 13:1, 30, 29; 18:28; 19:14)?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

Jesus was crucified on the daytime before the Passover meal. The reason why Mark seems to say it was after is one of culture and contextualising.

The evidence from the Gospels that Jesus died on the eve of the Passover, when the Passover meal would be eaten after sunset, is very solid. Before we delve (albeit briefly) into this issue, it is worth noting that Mark 14 records that Jesus does not eat the Passover with his disciples.

Luke 14:12 says it was "the Feast of Unleavened Bread", which is also called "Passover". As the name suggest states, part of the Passover meal was to eat bread without yeast. It is a commandment which Jewish people keep even today for the meal, for God makes it extremely clear, "eat bread without yeast And whoever eats bread with yeast in it must be cut off from the

community of Israel. Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread ". See also Exodus 12:1-20.

The Greek word for "unleavened bread" is 'azymos'. This is the word used by Mark in "the Feast of Unleavened Bread", chapter 14 verse 12. The Greek word for normal bread (with yeast) is 'artos'. All the Gospel writers, including Mark, agree that in this last meal with his disciples the bread they ate was artos, in other words a bread with yeast. "While they were eating, Jesus took bread [artos], gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying Take it; this is my body." Mark 14:22. It is highly probably therefore that this meal was not a Passover meal. The use of the different words in the same passage strongly suggests this. For it would be unthinkable to them to eat something that God had commanded them not to eat (bread with yeast - artos), and not to eat something that they were commanded to eat (unleavened

bread - azymos).

Therefore, as this is true, what does Mark mean in verses 12-17? Firstly, we read, "when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb". Exodus 20:1-8 says that this must happen on the 14th day of the Jewish month of Nisan. However, there was dispute as to when this day was, due to the debate on separate calendars which were used for calculating feast-days. It is possible that separate traditions were in vogue in Jesus life. So, indeed it may have been "customary" to sacrifice the lamb on that day for some, although many, probably most, recognized the Passover as being the next evening.

Secondly, the disciples ask Jesus "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" They had no idea that Jesus was going to give his life for the sins of the world like the Passover lamb of Exodus 20 did to save the Israelites from God's wrath upon Egypt. Jesus had explained to them, but they did not grasp it for many reasons, including the hailing of Jesus by the people as Messiah in the Triumphal Entry, which was still 'ringing in their ears'. He does not state that he would eat it with them. He wanted to, but he knew he would not. There is no room for any dogmatic statement that the Passover must be eaten on the same day the room was hired or prepared. Indeed, Jewish people, because of Exodus 12, thoroughly prepared their houses for the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Thirdly, in some ways the Gospels couch the last supper in terms of fulfillment. i.e. Luke 22 records Jesus saying that he had longed to eat "this" Passover meal with them. So, does Luke say it was the Passover meal? It is doubtful, due to the same use of artos and azymos, amongst other reasons. Jesus did make this last supper a sort of Passover meal (but not the real one). He wanted to have this special fellowship with his disciples, his friends, being painfully aware of the agony he would go through, only a few hours later. He also wanted to show his disciples that the Passover spoke of him; that he was the sacrifice that would bring in the New Covenant God promised (see questions #64 and #34) just like the lambs that was killed 1500 years earlier to save the people if Israel from God's wrath. He illustrated through the meal that he is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" as John the Baptist called Jesus (John 1:29). He wanted to eat it with them for he says, "I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the Kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16). His coming death was its fulfillment, "For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

If this understanding is correct (one of two feasible explanations I opted for due to my current research), then there is no contradiction. Jesus died before the Passover meal.

70. Did Jesus both pray (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42) or not pray (John 12:27) to the Father to prevent the crucifixion?

(Category: misread the text)

This apparent contradiction asks: 'Did Jesus pray to the Father to prevent the crucifixion?' Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36 and Luke 22:42 are supposed to imply that he does. John 12:27, however, seems to say that he doesn't.

This is a rather weak attempt at a contradiction and again wholly relies upon the ignorance of the reader for it's strength. Matthew 26:39, Mark 14:36, and Luke 22:42 are parallel passages which take place in the Garden of Gethsemane just before the arrest of Jesus. In all of these passages Jesus never asks for the Crucifixion to be prevented but does express his fears of the difficulties, pain and suffering that he is going to encounter over the next few hours, in the form of his trials, beatings, whippings, loneliness and alienation from people and God on the Cross, the ordeal of crucifixion itself and the upcoming triumph over Satan. He does, however, more importantly ask for God's will to be carried out over the next few hours knowing that this is the means by which he will die and rise again, and by doing so atone for all the sins of the world.

John 12:27 is from a totally different situation, one which takes place before the circumstances described above. It is said while Jesus is speaking to a crowd of people during the Passover Festival at the Temple in Jerusalem (in fact even before the gathering of the Twelve with Jesus at the Upper Room). On this occasion Jesus again says something very similar to the other passages above;

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father save me from this hour'? No it was for this very reason that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"

Again we are reminded that he is feeling troubled. He knows events are fast unfolding around him. Yet, this statement is said in reply to some Greeks who have just asked something of Jesus through his disciples. Were they there to offer him a way out of his upcoming troubles? Perhaps, but Jesus does not go to meet them and indeed replies to their request to meet him in this way. Is it really conceivable that this man wants to prevent the crucifixion from taking place! I think not!

71. Did Jesus move away three times (Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42) or once (Luke 22:39-46) from his disciples to pray?

(Category: the texts are compatible with a little thought)

Shabbir asks how many times Jesus left the disciples to pray alone at the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of his arrest. Matthew 26:36-46 and Mark 14:32-42, show three but Luke 22:39-46 only speaks of one. However once again there is no contradiction once you realize that the three passages are complementary.

Note that the Luke passage nowhere states that Jesus did not leave the disciples three times to go and pray. Because he does not mention all three times does not imply that Jesus did not do so. Obviously Luke did not consider that fact to be relevant to his account. We must remember that Luke's Gospel is thought of as the third Gospel to have been put to paper chronologically, therefore it would make sense for him not to regurgitate information found in the other two gospels.

72. When Jesus went away to pray, were the words in his two prayers the same (Mark 14:39) or different (Matthew 26:42)?

(Category: imposes his own agenda)

This apparent contradiction comparing Matthew 26:36-46 with Mark 14:32-42, and in particular verses 42 and 39 respectively, is not a contradiction at all. Shabbir asks the question: 'What were the words of the second prayer?' at the Garden of Gethsemane. It relies heavily once again upon the reader of Shabbir's book being ignorant of the texts mentioned, and his wording of the supposed contradiction as contrived and misleading.

Shabbir maintains that in the passage in Mark, "that the words were the same as the first prayer (Mark 14:39)." Let's see what Mark does say of the second prayer in 14:39;

"Once more he went away and prayed the same thing."

Nowhere in this verse does Mark say that Jesus prayed <u>the same words</u> as the previous prayer, but what he does imply by the words used in the sentence is that the gist of the prayer is the same as before, as the passage in Matthew shows. When we compare the first two prayers in Matthew (vss. 39 and 42) we see that they are essentially the same prayer, though not exactly the same wording. Then in verse 44 Matthew says that Christ prayed yet again "saying the same thing!" Yet according to Shabbir's thinking the two prayers were different; so how could Jesus then be saying the same thing the third time?

It seems that Shabbir is simply imposing a Muslim formula of prayer on the passages above which he simply cannot do. You would expect this to be the case if this was a rigidly formulated prayer that had to be repeated daily, as we find in Islam. But these prayers were prayers of the heart that were spoken by Jesus because of the enormity of the situation before him. Ultimately that situation was secondary to the gravity, power, and loving bond that Jesus had with the Father.

73. Did the centurion say that Jesus was innocent (Luke 23:47), or that he was the Son of God (Mark 15:39)?

(Category: the texts are compatible with a little thought)

The question being forwarded is what the centurion at the cross said when Jesus died. The two passages quoted are Mark 15:39 and Luke 23:47. However as has been said before with other apparent contradictions these passages are not contradictory but complementary.

Matthew 27:54 and Mark 15:39 agree that the centurion exclaimed that Jesus, "was the Son of God!". Luke 23:47 however mentions that the centurion refers to Jesus as, "a righteous man." Is it so hard to believe that the centurion said both? Nowhere in any of the Gospel narratives do the writers claim that was all that the centurion had to say. Therefore, let's not impose on the writers what we would have the centurion say.

Matthew and Mark were more interested by the declaration of divinity used by the centurion, whereas Luke is interested in the humanity of Jesus, one of the main themes of his Gospel. Thus he refers to the corresponding statement made by the centurion.

(Archer 1982:346-347).

74. Did Jesus say "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" in Hebrew (Matthew 27:46) or in Aramaic (Mark 15:34)?

(Category: misunderstood the Hebrew usage)

The question of whether Jesus spoke Hebrew or Aramaic on the cross is answerable. However, the reason for Matthew and Mark recording it differently is probably due to the way the event was spoken of in Aramaic after it happened, and due to the recipients of the Gospel. However, the whole issue is not a valid criticism of the Bible.

Mark 15:34 is probably the most quoted Aramaism in the New Testament, being "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabakthani." However, it is doubtful that Jesus spoke in the language that Mark records them in. The reason is simple; the people hearing Jesus' words thought he was calling Elijah (Matthew 27:47 and Mark 15:35-36). In order for the onlookers to have made this mistake, Jesus would have to have cried "Eli, Eli," not "Eloi, Eloi." Why? Because in Hebrew Eli can be either "My God" or the shortened form of Eliyahu which is Hebrew for Elijah. However, in Aramaic Eloi can be only "My God."

It is also worth noting that lama ("why") is the same word in both languages, and sabak is a verb which is found not only in Aramaic, but also in Mishnaic Hebrew.

Therefore Jesus probably spoke it in Hebrew. Why therefore is it recorded in Aramaic as well? Jesus was part of a multilingual society. He most probably spoke Greek (the common language of Greece and Rome), Aramaic (the common language of the Ancient Near East) and Hebrew, the sacred tongue of Judaism, which had been revived in the form of Mishnaic Hebrew in Second Temple times. Hebrew and Aramaic are closely related Semitic languages. That Hebrew and Aramaic terms show up in the Gospels is, therefore, not at all surprising.

That one Gospel writer records it in Hebrew and another in extremely similar Aramaic is no problem to Christians, nor is it a criticism of the Bible. The simple reason for the difference is probably that when one of them remembered and discussed the happening of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, this phrase may well have been repeated in their conversation as Aramaic, which would be perfectly normal. So he wrote it down as such. Secondly, Mark may have written it in Aramaic due to the fact that he was the original recipients of the Gospel.

However, both these reasons are simply speculation. If Mark recorded his words in Arabic, then we would worry!

(Bivin/Blizzard 1994:10)

75. Were the last words that Jesus spook "Father into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46), or "It is finished" (John 19:30)?

(Category: the texts are compatible with a little thought)

'What were the last words of Jesus before he died?' is the question asked by Shabbir in this supposed contradiction. This does not show a contradiction any more than two witnesses to an accident at an intersection will come up with two different scenarios of that accident, depending on where they stood. Neither witness would be incorrect, as they describe the event from a different perspective. Luke was not a witness to the event, and so is dependent on those who were there. John was a witness. What they are both relating, however, is that at the end Jesus gave himself up to death.

It could be said that Luke used the last words that he felt were necessary for his gospel account, which concentrated on the humanity of Christ (noted in the earlier question), while John, as well as quoting the last words of Jesus, was interested in the fulfilment of the salvific message, and so quoted the last phrase "it is finished".

John 17:4 records Jesus' prayer to the Father in the light of Christ's forthcoming crucifixion, stating that He had completed the work of revelation (John 1:18), and since revelation is a particular stress of the Gospel of John, and the cross is the consummation of that commission (John 3:16), it is natural that this Gospel should centre on τετελεσται. At any rate, if Jesus said 'It is finished; Father into your hands I commit my spirit' or vice versa, it would be quite in order to record either clause of this sentence, his last words. Luke-Acts reaches its conclusion without any climax, because the continuing ministry of the exalted Christ through the Holy Spirit and the Church has no ending prior to the Parousia, and to record τετελεσται might have undermined this emphasis, or it could have been taken the wrong way. At any rate, no contradiction is involved; purely a distinction of emphasis.

76. Did the Capernaum centurion come personally to ask Jesus to heal his slave (Matthew 8:5), or did he send elders of the Jews and his friends (Luke 7:3,6)?

(Category: the text is compatible with a little thought & misunderstood the author's intent)

This is not a contradiction but rather a misunderstanding of sequence, as well as a misunderstanding of what the authors intended. The centurion initially delivered his message to Jesus via the elders of the Jews. It is also possible that he came personally to Jesus after he had sent the elders to Jesus. Matthew mentions the centurion because he was the one in need, while Luke mentions the efforts of the Jewish elders because they were the ones who made the initial contact.

We know of other instances where the deed which a person tells others to do is in actuality done through him. A good example is the baptism done by the disciple's of Jesus, yet it was said that Jesus baptized (John 4:1-2).

We can also understand why each author chose to relate it differently by understanding the reason they wrote the event. Matthew's main reason for relating this story is not the factual occurrence but to relate the fact of the importance of all nations to Christ. This is why Matthew speaks of the centurion rather than the messengers of the centurion. It is also the reason why Matthew spends less time relating the actual story and more on the parable of the kingdom of heaven. Matthew wants to show that Jesus relates to all people.

Luke in his telling of the story does not even relate the parable that Jesus told the people, but concentrates on telling the story in more detail, thereby concentrating more on the humanity of Jesus by listening to the messengers, the fact that he is impressed by the faith of the centurion and the reason why he is so impressed; because the centurion does not even consider himself 'worthy' to come before Jesus. Ultimately this leads to the compassion shown by Jesus in healing the centurion's servant without actually going to the home of the centurion.

77. Did Adam die the same day (Genesis 2:17) or did he continue to live to the age of 930 years (Genesis 5:5)?

(Category: misunderstood how God works in history)

The Scriptures describe death in three ways; 1) Physical death which ends our life on earth, 2) spiritual death which is separation from God, and 3) eternal death in hell. The death spoken of in Genesis 2:17 is the second death mentioned in our list, that of complete separation from God, while the death mentioned in Genesis 5:5 is the first death, a physical death which ends our present life.

For obvious reasons Shabbir will see this as a contradiction because he does not understand the significance of spiritual death which is a complete separation from God, since he will not admit that Adam had any relationship with God to begin with in the garden of Eden. The spiritual separation (and thus spiritual death) is shown visibly in Genesis chapter 3 where Adam was thrown out of the Garden of Eden and away from God's presence.

Ironically Adam being thrown out of the garden of Eden is also mentioned in the Qur'an (Sura 2:36), though there is no reason for this to happen, if (as Muslims believe) Adam had been forgiven for his sin. Here is an example of the Qur'an borrowing a story from the earlier scriptures without understanding its meaning or significance, and therein lies the assumption behind the supposed contradiction.

(for a clearer understanding of the significance of spiritual death and how that impinges on nearly every area of disagreement Christians have with Islam, read the paper entitled "The Hermeneutical Key" by Jay Smith.)

78. Did God decide that the lifespan of humans was to be only 120 years (Genesis 6:3), or longer (Genesis 11:12-16)?

(Category: misread the text)

In Genesis 6:3 we read:

"Then the LORD said, 'My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.'"

This is contrasted with ages of people who lived longer than 120 years in Genesis 11:12-16. However this is based, I presume on a misreading or misunderstanding of the text.

The hundred and twenty years spoken of by God in Genesis 6:3 cannot mean the life span of human beings as you do find people older than that mentioned more or less straight away a few Chapters on into the book of Genesis (including Noah himself). The more likely meaning is that the Flood that God had warned Noah about doesn't happen until 120 years after the initial warning to Noah. This is brought out further in 1Peter 3:20 where we read,

"God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built."

Therefore looking at the context of the Genesis 6:3 passage it would agree with what we find in chapter 11 of the same book.

(Geisler/Howe 1992:41)

79. Apart from Jesus there was no-one else (John 3:13) or there were others (2 Kings 2:11) who ascended to heaven?

(Category: misunderstood the wording)

There were others who went to heaven without dying, such as Elijah and Enoch (Genesis 5:24). In John 3:13 Jesus is setting forth his superior knowledge of heavenly things. Essentially what he is saying, "no other human being can speak from first hand knowledge about these things, as I can, since I came down from heaven." he is claiming that no one has ascended to heaven to bring down the message that he brought. In no way is he denying that anyone else is in heaven, such as Elijah and Enoch. Rather, Jesus is simply claiming that no one on earth has gone to heaven and returned with a message such as he offered to them.

80. Was the high priest Abiathar (Mark 2:26), or Ahimelech (1 Samuel 21:1; 22:20) when David went into the house of God and ate the consecrated bread?

(Category: misunderstood the Hebrew usage & misunderstood the historical context)

Jesus states that the event happened 'in the days of Abiathar the high priest' and yet we know from 1 Samuel that Abiathar was not actually the high priest at that time; it was his father, Ahimelech.

If we were to introduce an anecdote by saying, 'When king David was a shepherd-boy...', it would not be incorrect, even though David was not king at that time. In the same way, Abiathar was soon to be high priest and this is what he is most remembered for, hence he is designated by this title. Moreover, the event certainly did happen 'in the days of Abiathar', as he was alive and present during the incident. We know from 1 Samuel 22:20 that he narrowly escaped when his father's whole family and their town was destroyed by Saul's men. Therefore, Jesus' statement is quite acceptable.

(Archer 1994:362)

81. Was Jesus' body wrapped in spices before burial in accordance with Jewish burial customs (John 19:39-40), or did the women come and administer the spices later (Mark 16:1)?

(Category: the texts are compatible with a little thought)

John 19:39,40 clearly states that Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped the body in 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes, along with strips of linen. We also know from the synoptic writers that the body was placed in a large shroud. There need be no contradiction here. The fact that the synoptics do not mention the spices during the burial does not mean that they were not used.

If Mark 16:1 is taken to mean that the women were hoping to do the whole burial process themselves, they would need the strips of linen as well, which are not mentioned. It is likely that they simply wished to perform their last act of devotion to their master by adding extra spices to those used by Joseph.

As Jesus died around the ninth hour (Mark 15:34-37), there would have been time (almost three hours) for Joseph and Nicodemus to perform the burial process quickly before the Sabbath began. We need not suppose that there was only time for them to wrap his body in a shroud and deposit it in the tomb.

82. Did the women buy the spices after (Mark 16:1) or before the Sabbath (Luke 23:55 to 24:1)?

(Category: the texts are compatible with a little thought)

Several details in the accounts of the resurrection suggest that there were in fact two groups of women on their way to the tomb, planning to meet each other there. See question 86 for more details of these two groups.

Now it becomes clear that Mary Magdalene and her group bought their spices after the Sabbath, as recorded by Mark 16:1. On the other hand, Joanna and her group bought their spices before the Sabbath, as recorded by Luke 23:56. It is significant that Joanna is mentioned only by Luke, thereby strengthening the proposition that it was her group mentioned by him in the resurrection account.

83. Did the women visit the tomb "toward the dawn" (Matthew 28:1), or "When the sun had risen" (Mark 16:2)?

(Category: the texts are compatible with a little thought)

A brief look at the four passages concerned will clear up any misunderstanding.

- *Matthew 28:1: 'At dawn...went to look at the tomb'.*
- *Mark 16:2 'Very early...just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb'.*
- *Luke 24:1: 'Very early in the morning...went to the tomb'.*
- *John 20:1: 'Early...while it was still dark...went to the tomb'.*

Thus we see that the four accounts are easily compatible in this respect. It is not even necessary for this point to remember that there were two groups of women, as the harmony is quite simple. From Luke we understand that it was very early when the women set off for the tomb. From Matthew we see that the sun was just dawning, yet John makes it clear that it had not yet done so fully: The darkness was on its way out but had not yet gone. Mark's statement that the sun had risen comes later, when they were on their way. It is perfectly reasonable to assume that the sun had time to rise during their journey across Jerusalem.

84. Did the women go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body with spices (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:55-24:1), or to see the tomb (Matthew 28:1), or for no reason (John 20:1)?

(Category: the texts are compatible with a little thought)

This answer links in with number 81 above. We know that they went to the tomb in order to put further spices on Jesus' body, as Luke and Mark tell us. The fact that Matthew and John do not give a specific reason does not mean that there was not one. They were going to put on spices, whether or not the gospel authors all mention it. We would not expect every detail to be included in all the accounts, otherwise there would be no need for four of them!

85. When the women arrived at the tomb, was the stone "rolled back" (Mark 16:4), "rolled away" (Luke 24:2), "taken away" (John 20:1), or did they see an angel do it (Matthew 28:1-6)?

(Category: misread the text)

Matthew does not say that the women saw the angel roll the stone back. This accusation is indeed trivial. After documenting the women setting off for the tomb, Matthew relates the earthquake, which happened while they were still on their way. Verse 2 begins by saying, 'There was a violent earthquake', the Greek of which carries the sense of, 'now there had been a violent earthquake'. When the women speak to the angel in verse 5, we understand from Mark 16:5 that they had approached the tomb and gone inside, where he was sitting on the ledge where Jesus' body had been. Therefore, the answer to this question is that the stone was rolled away when they arrived: there is no contradiction.

86. In (Matthew 16:2; 28:7; Mark 16:5-6; Luke 24:4-5; 23), the women were told what happened to Jesus' body, while in (John 20:2) Mary was not told.

(Category: the texts are compatible with a little thought)

The angels told the women that Jesus had risen from the dead. Matthew, Mark and Luke are all clear on this. The apparent discrepancy regarding the number of angels is cleared up when we realize that there were two groups of women. Mary Magdalene and her group probably set out from the house of John Mark, where the Last Supper had been held. Joanna and some other unnamed women, on the other hand, probably set out from Herod's residence, in a different part of the city. Joanna was the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household (Luke 8:3) and it is therefore highly probable that she and her companions set out from the royal residence.

With this in mind, it is clear that the first angel (who rolled away the stone and told Mary and Salome where Jesus was) had disappeared by the time Joanna and her companions arrived. When they got there (Luke 24:3-8), two angels appeared and told them the good news, after

which they hurried off to tell the apostles. In Luke 24:10, all the women are mentioned together, as they all went to the apostles in the end.

We are now in a position to see why Mary Magdalene did not see the angels. John 20:1 tells us that Mary came to the tomb and we know from the other accounts that Salome and another Mary were with her. As soon as she saw the stone rolled away, she ran to tell the apostles, assuming that Jesus had been taken away. The other Mary and Salome, on the other hand, satisfied their curiosity by looking inside the tomb, where they found the angel who told them what had happened. So we see that the angels did inform the women, but that Mary Magdalene ran back before she had chance to meet them.

87. Did Mary Magdalene first meet the resurrected Jesus during her first visit (Matthew 28:9) or on her second visit (John 20:11-17)? And how did she react?

(Category: the texts are compatible with a little thought)

We have established in the last answer that Mary Magdalene ran back to the apostles as soon as she saw the stone had been rolled away. Therefore, when Matthew 28:9 records Jesus meeting them, she was not there. In fact, we understand from Mark 16:9 that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene, which was after she, Peter and John had returned to the tomb the first time (John 20:1-18). Here, we see that Peter and John saw the tomb and went home, leaving Mary weeping by the entrance. From here, she saw the two angels inside the tomb and then met Jesus himself.

As all this happened before Jesus appeared to the other women, it appears that there was some delay in them reaching the apostles. We may understand what happened by comparing the complementary accounts. Matthew 28:8 tells us that the women (Mary the mother of James and Salome) ran away 'afraid yet filled with joy...to tell his disciples'. It appears that their fear initially got the better of them, for they 'said nothing to anyone' (Mark 16:8). It was at this time that Jesus suddenly met them (Matthew 28:9,10). Here, he calmed their fears and told them once more to go and tell the apostles.

There are several apparent problems in the harmonization of the resurrection accounts, a few of which have been touched on here. It has not been appropriate to attempt a full harmonization in this short paper, as we have been answering specific points. A complete harmonization has been commendably attempted by John Wenham in 'Easter Enigma' (most recent edition 1996, Paternoster Press). Anyone with further questions is invited to go this book.

It must be admitted that we have in certain places followed explanations or interpretations that are not specifically stated in the text. This is entirely permissible, as the explanations must merely be plausible. It is clear that the gospel authors are writing from different points of view, adding and leaving out different details. This is entirely to be expected from four authors writing independently. Far from casting doubt on their accounts, it gives added credibility, as those details which at first appear to be in conflict can be resolved with some thought, yet are free from the hallmarks of obvious collusion, either by the original authors or any subsequent editors.

88. Did Jesus instruct his disciples to wait for him in Galilee (Matthew 28:10), or that he was ascending to his Father and God (John 20:17)?

(Category: misread the text)

This apparent contradiction asks, 'What was Jesus' instruction for his disciples?' Shabbir uses Matthew 28:10 and John20:17 to demonstrate this apparent contradiction. However the two passages occur at different times on the same day and there is no reason to believe that Jesus would give his disciples only one instruction.

This is another contradiction which depends upon the reader of Shabbir's book being ignorant of the biblical passages and the events surrounding that Sunday morning resurrection. (I say Sunday because it is the first day of the week) The two passages, in fact, are complementary not contradictory. This is because the two passages do not refer to the same point in time. Matthew 28:10 speaks of the group of women encountering the risen Jesus on their way back to tell the disciples of what they had found. An empty tomb!? And then receiving the first set of instructions from him to tell the disciples.

The second passage from John 20:17 occurs some time after the first passage, (to understand the time framework read from the beginning of this Chapter) and takes place when Mary is by herself at the tomb grieving out of bewilderment, due to the events unraveling around about her. She sees Jesus and he gives her another set of instructions to pass on to the disciples.

89. Upon Jesus' instructions, did the disciples return to Galilee immediately (Matthew 28:17), or after at least 40 days (Luke 24:33, 49; Acts 1:3-4)?

(Category: didn't read the entire text and misquoted the text)

This supposed contradiction asks when the disciples returned to Galilee after the crucifixion. It is argued from Matthew 28:17 that they returned immediately, and from Luke 24:33 and 49, and Acts 1:4 that it was after at least 40 days. However both of these assumptions are wrong.

It would appear that Jesus appeared to them many times; sometimes individually, sometimes in groups, and as the whole group gathered together, and also at least to Paul and Stephen after the Ascension (see 1 Corinthians 15:5-8, and Acts 7:55-56). He appeared in Galilee and Jerusalem and other places. Matthew 28:16-20 is a summary of all the appearances of Christ, and it is for this reason that it is not advisable to overstress chronology in this account, as Shabbir seems to have done.

The second argument in this seeming contradiction is an even weaker argument than the one I have responded to above. This is because Shabbir has not fully quoted Acts 1:4 which says;

'On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about."'

Now the author of Acts, Luke in this passage does not specify when Jesus said this. However in his gospel he does the same thing as Matthew and groups together all the appearances so again it would be unwise to read too much chronologically into the passage of Luke 24:36-49. However it is apparent from the Gospels of Matthew and John that some of the disciples at least did go to Galilee and encounter Jesus there; presumably after the first encounter in Jerusalem and certainly before the end of the forty day period before Christ's Ascension into Heaven.

90. Did the Midianites sell Joseph "to the Ishmaelites" (Genesis 37:28), or to Potiphar, an officer of Pharoah (Geneis 37:36)?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

This apparent contradiction is a very strange one because it shows a clear misunderstanding of the text in Genesis 37:25-36. The question is asked, 'To whom did the Midianites sell Joseph?' Verse 28 is used to say the Ishmaelites, and verse 36 Potiphar.

The traveling merchants were comprised of Ishmaelite and Midianite merchants who bought Joseph from his brothers, and they in turn sold him to Potiphar in Egypt. The words Ishmaelite and Midianite are used interchangeably. This would seem obvious once you read verses 27 and 28 together. A clearer usage for these two names can also be found in Judges 8:24.

91. Did the Ishmaelites bring Joseph to Egypt (Genesis 37:28), or was it the Midianites (Genesis 37:36), or was it Joseph's brothers (Genesis 45:4)?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

This supposed contradiction follows on from the last one and again lights up Shabbir's problem with the historical situation, as well as his inability to understand what the text is saying This time the question asked is, 'Who brought Joseph to Egypt?' From the last question we know that both the Ishmaelites and the Midianites were responsible for physically taking him there (as they are one and the same people), while the brother's of Joseph are just as responsible, as it was they who sold him to the merchants, and thus are being blamed for this very thing by Joseph in Genesis 45:4. Consequently, as we saw in the previous question all three parties had a part to play in bringing Joseph to Egypt.

92. Does God change his mind (Genesis 6:7; Exodus 32:14; 1 Samuel 15:10-11, 35), or does he not change his mind (1 Samuel 15:29)?

(Category: misunderstood how God works in history & misunderstood the Hebrew usage)

This "contradiction" generally appears only in older English translations of the Biblical manuscripts. The accusation arises from translation difficulties and is solved by looking at the context of the event.

God knew that Saul would fail in his duty as King of Israel. Nevertheless, God allowed Saul to be king and used him greatly to do His will. Saul was highly effective as leader of Israel, in stirring his people to have courage and take pride in their nation, and in coping with Israel's enemies during times of war.

However, God made it clear long before this time (Genesis 49:8-10) that he would establish the kings that would reign over Israel, from the tribe of Judah. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. Therefore there was no doubt that Saul or his descendants were not God's permanent choice to sit on the throne of Israel. His successor David, however, was from the tribe of Judah, and his line was to continue.

Therefore God, who knows all things, did not 'change his mind' about Saul, for he knew Saul would turn away from Him and that the throne would be given to another.

The word in Hebrew that is used to express what God thought and how God felt concerning the turning of Saul from Him is "niham" which is rendered "repent" in the above. However, as is common in languages, it can mean more than one thing. For example, English has only one word for "love." Greek has at least 4 and Hebrew has more. A Hebrew or Greek word for love cannot always simply be translated "love" in English if more of the original meaning is to be retained. This is a problem that translators have.

Those who translated the Bible under the order of King James (hence the King James translation, which Shabbir quotes from) translated this word niham 41 times as "repent," out of the 108 occurrences of the different forms of niham in the Hebrew manuscripts. These translators were dependent on far fewer manuscripts than were available to the more recent translators; the latter also having access to far older manuscripts as well as a greater understanding of the Biblical Hebrew words contained within. Therefore, the more recent translators have rendered niham far more accurately into English by conveying more of its Hebrew meaning (such as relent, grieve, console, comfort, change His mind, etc. as the context of the Hebrew text communicates).

With that in mind, a more accurate rendering of the Hebrew would be that God was "grieved" that he had made Saul king. God does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man that he should change his mind. God was grieved that he had made Saul king. God shows in the Bible that He has real emotions. He has compassion on people's pain and listens

to people's pleas for help. His anger and wrath are roused when He sees the suffering of people from others' deeds.

As a result of Saul's disobedience pain was caused to God and to the people of Israel. But also, God had it in His plan from the beginning that Saul's family, though not being from the tribe of Judah, would not stay on the throne. Therefore when Saul begs the prophet Samuel in verses 24 to 25 to be put right with God and not be dethroned, Samuel replies that God has said it will be this way - He is not going to change His mind. It was spoken that it would be this way hundreds of years before Saul was king.

There is no contradiction here. The question was "Does God change his mind?" The answer is, "No." But He does respond to peoples situations and conduct, in compassion and in wrath, and therefore can be grieved when they do evil.

(Archer 1994)

93. How could the Egyptian magicians convert water into blood (Exodus 7:22), if all the available water had been already converted by Moses and Aaron (Exodus 7:20-21)?

(Category: didn't read the entire text & Imposes his own agenda)

This is a rather foolish question. To begin with Moses and Aaron did not convert all available water to blood, as Shabbir quotes, but only the water of the Nile (see verse 20). There was plenty of other water for the magicians of Pharaoh to use. We know this because just a few verses later (verse 24) we are told,

"And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river."

So where is the difficulty for the magicians to demonstrate that they could also do this? Not only has Shabbir not read the entire text, he has imposed on the text he has read that which simply is not there.

94. Did David (1 Samuel 17:23, 50) or Elhanan (2 Samuel 21:19) kill Goliath?

(Category: copyist error)

The discrepancy as to who killed Goliath (David or Elhanan) was caused by copyist or scribal error, which can be seen clearly.

The text of 2 Samuel 21:19 reads as follows:

"In another battle with the Philistines at Gob, Elhanan son of Jaare-Oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod."

As this stands in the Hebrew Masoretic text, this is a certainly a clear contradiction to 1 Samuel and its account of David's slaying of Goliath. However, there is a very simple and apparent reason for this contradiction, as in the parallel passage of 1 Chronicles 20:5 shows. It describes the episode as follows:

"In another battle with the Philistines, Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod."

When the Hebrew for these sentences is examined, the reason for the contradiction becomes quite obvious and the latter 1 Chronicles is seen to be the true and correct reading. This is not simply because we know David killed Goliath, but also because of the language.

When the scribe was duplicating the earlier manuscript, it must have been blurred or damaged at this particular verse in 2 Samuel. The result was that he made two or three mistakes (see Gleason L. Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, page 179):

8. *The sign of the direct object in 1 Chronicals was '-t which comes just before "Lahmi" in the sentence order. The scribe mistook it for b-t or b-y-t ("Beth") and thus got BJt hal-Lahmi ("the Bethlehemite") out of it.*
9. *He misread the word for "brother" ('-h , the h having a dot underneath it) as the sign of the direct object ('-t) right before g-l-y-t ("Goliath"). Therefore he made "Goliath" the object of "killed" instead of "brother" of Goliath, as in 1 Chronicles.*
10. *The copyist misplaced the word for "weavers" ('-r-g-ym) so as to put it right after "Elhanan" as his family name (ben Y-'-r-y'-r--g-ym, ben ya'^a^rey 'or^e^-gim, "the son of the forest of weavers", a most improbable name for anyone's father). In Chronicles the or^e^-gim ("weavers") comes straight after m^e^n\r ("a beam of") - thus making perfectly good sense.*

To conclude: the 2 Samuel passage is an entirely traceable error on the part of the copyist in the original wording, which has been preserved in 1 Chronicles 20:5. David killed Goliath.

This testifies to the honesty and openness of the scribes and translators (both Jewish and Christian). Although it would be easy to change this recognized error, this has not been done in favour of remaining true to the manuscripts. Although it leaves the passage open to shallow criticism as Shabbir Ally has shown, it is criticism which we are not afraid of. An excellent example of human copying error resulting from the degeneration of papyrus.

95. Did Saul take his own sword and fall upon it (1 Samuel 31:4-6), or did an Amalekite kill him (2 Samuel 1:1-16)?

(Category: misread the text)

It should be noted that the writer of 1 & 2 Samuel does not place any value on the Amalekite's story. Thus, in all reality it was Saul who killed himself, though it was the Amalekite who took credit for the killing. The writer relates how Saul died and then narrates what the Amalekite said. The Amalekite's statement that he 'happened to be on Mount Gilboa' (2 Samuel 1:6) may not be an innocent one. He had quite possibly come to loot the dead bodies. In any case, he certainly got there before the Philistines, who did not find Saul's body until the next day (1 Samuel 31:8). We have David's own testimony that the Amalekite thought he was bringing good news of Saul's death (2 Samuel 4:10). It is likely, therefore, that he came upon Saul's dead body, took his crown and bracelet and made up the story of Saul's death in order that David might reward him for defeating his enemy. The Amalekite's evil plan, however, backfired dramatically on him.

96. Is it that everyone sins (1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chronicles 6:36; Proverbs 20:9; Ecclesiastes 7:20; 1 John 1:8-10), or do some not sin (1 John 3:1, 8-9; 4:7; 5:1)?

(Category: misunderstood the Greek usage & Imposes his own agenda)

This apparent contradiction asks: 'Does every man sin?' Then a number of Old Testament passages that declare this are listed followed by one New Testament passage from 1 John 1:8-10:

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."

After this it is claimed by Shabbir that: 'True Christians cannot possibly sin, because they are children of God.' This is followed by a number of passages from the First Epistle of John

showing that Christians are children of God. Shabbir is here imposing his view on the text, assuming that those who are children of God, somehow suddenly have no sin. It is true that a person who is born of God should not habitually practice sin (James 2:14ff), but that is not to say that they will not occasionally fall into sin, as we live in a sinful world and impinged by it.

The last of the verses quoted is from 1 John 3:9 which says:

"No-one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God."

Shabbir in his quote uses an older translation for 1 John 3:9 and so states, "No one born of God commits sin...and he cannot sin...," which is not a true translation of the Greek. In the newer translations, such as the NIV they translate correctly using the present continuous in this verse, as it is written that way in the Greek. Thus those born of God will not continue to sin, as they cannot go on sinning..., the idea being that this life of sinning will die out now that he has the help of the Holy Spirit in him or her.

It is interesting how Shabbir jumps around to make his point. He begins with 1 John 1, then moves to 1 John 3-5, then returns to the 1 John 1 passage at the beginning of the Epistle and re-quotes verse 8, which speaks of all men sinning, with the hope of highlighting the seeming contradiction. There is no contradiction in this as Shabbir obviously hasn't understood the apostle's letter or grasped the fact that the letter develops its theme as it goes on. Therefore quoting from the beginning of the letter, then moving to the middle of the letter, and finally returning to the beginning of the letter is not the way to read a letter.

The Scriptures clearly teach that all men have sinned except for one, the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore we have no quarrel with Shabbir on this point. As to Shabbir's second point I am glad he has come to realize that Christians are children of God therefore we have no quarrel with him on this subject.

It is Shabbir's third point, however, which is a contentious one because it does not take on board the development of the themes of the letter, of which the one pointed out here is the call to holiness and righteousness because of the forgiveness of sins by Jesus Christ's atoning death. It is for that reason that we are called not to continue in our sinful ways but to be changed into Christ's sinless likeness. In his attempt to show an apparent contradiction Shabbir has mischievously rearranged the order in which the verses were intended to be read in order to force a contradiction, which doesn't exist.

97. Are we to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), or are we to bear only our own burdens (Galatians 6:5)?

(Category: misread the text)

The question is asked: 'Who will bear whose burden?' Galatians 6:2 and 6:5 are compared, one says each other's, while the other says your own.

There is no contradiction here at all. This is not a case of 'either/or' but of 'both/and'. When you read Galatians 6:1-5 properly you will notice that believers are asked to help each other in times of need, difficulty or temptation; but they are also called to account for their own actions. There is no difficulty or contradiction in this, as the two are mutually inclusive.

98. Did Jesus appear to twelve disciples after his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:5), or was it to eleven (Matthew 27:3-5; 28:16; Mark 16:14; Luke 24:9,33; Acts 1:9-26)?

(Category: misread the text)

There is no contradiction once you notice how the words are being used. In all the references given for eleven disciples, the point of the narrative account is to be accurate at that particular

moment of time being spoken of. After the death of Judas there were only eleven disciples, and this remained so until Matthias was chosen to take Judas' place.

In 1 Corinthians 15:5 the generic term 'the Twelve' is therefore used for the disciples because Matthias is also counted within the Twelve, since he also witnessed the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, as the passage pointed out by Shabbir records in Acts 1:21-22.

99. Did Jesus go immediately to the desert after his baptism (Mark 1:12-13), or did he first go to Galilee, see disciples, and attend a wedding (John 1:35, 43; 2:1-11)?

(Category: misread the text)

This apparent contradiction asks: 'Where was Jesus three days after his baptism?' Mark 1:12-13 says he went to the wilderness for forty days. But John 'appears' to have Jesus the next day at Bethany, the second day at Galilee and the third at Cana (John 1:35; 1:43; 2:1-11), unless you go back and read the entire text starting from John 1:19. The explanation about the baptism of Jesus in John's Gospel is given by John the Baptist himself. It was "John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was" (vs. 19). It is he who is referring to the event of the baptism in the past. If there is any doubt look at the past tense used by John when he sees Jesus coming towards him in verses 29-30 and 32. While watching Jesus he relates to those who were listening the event of the baptism and its significance. There is no reason to believe that the baptism was actually taking place at the time John was speaking, and therefore no reason to imply that this passage contradicts that of Mark's Gospel.

100. Did Joseph flee with the baby Jesus to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-23), or did he calmly present him at the temple in Jerusalem and return to Galilee (Luke 2:21-40)?

(Category: misunderstood the historical context)

This supposed contradiction asks: 'Was baby Jesus's life threatened in Jerusalem?' Matthew 2:13-23 says yes. Luke 2:21-40 appears to say no.

These are complementary accounts of Jesus' early life, and not contradictory at all. It is clear that it would take some time for Herod to realize that he had been outsmarted by the magi. Matthew's Gospel says that he killed all the baby boys that were two years old and under in Bethlehem and its vicinity. That would be enough time to allow Joseph and Mary the opportunity to do their rituals at the temple in Jerusalem and then return to Nazareth in Galilee, from where they went to Egypt, and then returned after the death of Herod

101. When Jesus walked on the water, did his disciples worship him (Matthew 14:33), or were they utterly astounded due to their hardened hearts (Mark 6:51-52)?

(Category: didn't read the entire text)

This seeming contradiction asks: 'When Jesus walked on water how did the disciples respond?' Matthew 14:33 says they worshiped him. Mark 6:51-52 says that they were astounded and hadn't understood from the previous miracle he had done when he fed the 5000.

This again is not a contradiction but two complementary passages. If Shabbir had read the entire passage in Matthew he would have seen that both the Matthew account (verses 26-28) and the Mark account mention that the disciples had initially been astounded, thinking he was a ghost. This was because they had not understood from the previous miracle who he was. But after the initial shock had warn off the Matthew account then explains that they worshiped him.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, once we have weighed the evidence, many if not all of the seeming contradictions posed by Shabbir Ally can be adequately explained.

When we look over the 101 supposed contradictions we find that they fall into 15 broad categories or genres of errors. Listed below are those categories, each explaining in one sentence the errors behind Shabbir's contradictions. Alongside each category is a number informing us how many times he could be blamed for each category. You will note that when you add up the totals they are larger than 101. The reason is that, as you may have already noticed, Shabbir many times makes more than one error in a given question.

Categories of the errors evidenced by Shabbir in his pamphlet:

-he misunderstood the historical context - 25 times
-he misread the text - 15 times
-he misunderstood the Hebrew usage - 13 times
-the texts are compatible with a little thought - 13 times
-he misunderstood the author's intent - 12 times
-these were merely copyist error - 9 times
-he misunderstood how God works in history - 6 times
-he misunderstood the Greek usage - 4 times
-he didn't read the entire text - 4 times
-he misquoted the text - 4 times
-he misunderstood the wording - 3 times
-he had too literalistic an interpretation - 3 times
-he imposed his own agenda - 3 times
-he confused an incident with another - 1 time
-we now have discovered an earlier manuscript - 1 time

It must be admitted that we have in certain places followed explanations or interpretations that are not specifically stated in the text. This is entirely permissible, as the explanations must merely be plausible. It is clear that the gospel authors are writing from different points of view, adding and leaving out different details. This is entirely to be expected when four authors write independently. Far from casting doubt on their accounts, it gives added credibility, as those details which at first appear to be in conflict can be resolved with some thought, yet are free from the hallmarks of obvious collusion, either by the original authors or any subsequent editors.

This testifies to the honesty and openness of the scribes and translators (both Jewish and Christian). Although it would be easy to change this recognized error, this has not been done in favour of remaining true to the manuscripts. Although it leaves the passage open to shallow criticism as Shabbir Ally has shown, it is criticism which we are not afraid of.

In Shabbir's booklet, he puts two verses on the bottom of each page. It would seem appropriate that we give an answer to these quotes, which are:

11. *"God is not the author of confusion..." (1 Corinthians 14:33)*

    True, God is not the author of confusion. There is very little that is confusing in the Bible. When we understand all the original readings and the context behind them, the confusion virtually

    disappears. Of course we need scholarship to understand everything in there, as we are 2,000 - 3,500 years and a translation removed from the original hearers.

    But this is no different to the Qur'an. On first (and tenth) readings of the Qur'an there are many things which are not apparent. Take the mysterious letters at the beginning of the suras. It seems that after 1,400 years of scholarship, people can only take a good guess at what on earth they might be there for. Or take the many historical

Biblical characters whose stories do not parallel the Bible but seem to originate in second century Talmudic apocryphal writings. This is indeed confusing. However, it is because we can go to the historical context of those writings that we now know that they could not have been authored by God, but were created by men, centuries after the authentic revelation of God had been canonized.

12. *"...A house divided against itself falls" (Luke 11:17)*

    The Bible is not divided against itself. Jesus was talking about a major division, i.e. Satan destroying his own demons. This is far removed from the Bible. A book four times the size of the Qur'an, with the remaining problems able to be counted on your fingers and toes, a 99.999% agreement! That indeed is remarkable!

We conclude with two quotes of our own:

"The first to present his case seems right... till another comes forward and questions him" (Proverbs 18:17)

"...our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him....His letters contain some things that are hard to understand which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:15-16)

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