

Understanding Biblical Paradoxes

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INTRODUCTION

How many times have you been confronted with the issue of biblical contradictions? Did that experience leave you disillusioned or uncertain about your faith? Were you prepared to respond with confidence seasoned with grace? Have you heard the following statements? “*The Bible is full of contradictions. It is full of ludicrous statements and events that no rational person could believe.*” Invectives emanate from a narrow range of people and usually with an agenda intended to insult or censor a particular way of thinking. Differences of opinion are natural concerning theology but insinuations of this nature are bereft of serious academic inquiry.

Let us begin with a clear definition of what is at the center of this issue. There are two similar words describing this exercise. It will be helpful to understand how similar yet different is the nature of each. Knowing the fundamental nature of both will enable you to better withstand insincere challenges to your faith.

Contradiction: a situation in which inherent factors are inconsistent without the possibility of resolution.

Paradox: a situation that has the appearance of contradiction yet might actually be true or reasonably explained.

Skeptics come in different categories. Most are good natured people who are, well, skeptical. In other words, they have conclusions that differ from mainstream thinking yet are still open to alternate points of view. But there are too many that use social media to unabashedly discharge their venom on the uninformed. Atheists by nature do not believe in God so their opinions are predictable. Agnostics by definition of the word hold that metaphysical or supernatural entities are unknowable. They trust only the empirical. Regrettably there are some theologians who disdainfully relish the opportunity to elevate themselves by means of scholarly aloofness. For this endeavor I shall attempt to focus on those individuals who scoff and belittle Christians.

The wise biblical researcher will notice a consistent pattern of reasoning among scoffers. Invariably their preferred method will be *Inductive Reasoning* which means to start with a conclusion and search for details which confirm their assumptive premise. Conversely, a true researcher will employ *Deductive Reasoning* which starts with a premise, and then analyzes facts and key elements to arrive at a reasonable conclusion.

EXAMPLES OF REASONING

Deductive Reasoning: Weeping is heard in the backyard. Upon walking into the backyard, someone notices a man weeping over a dead dog of some age with a gun in the grass. Police are called. The man informs the police that the neighbor was tired of the barking, shot the dog, the gun fell from his pocket on the way back to his house, and the entire incident is most probably in the security camera on the back of the house. The police watch the video taken from the security camera, send the gun to forensics for careful analysis, Detectives make the discovery that the neighbor also has a criminal record. The lab report includes fingerprints. There is a match which confirms the video. The neighbor is arrested, pleads guilty, and convicted of cruelty to an animal.

Inductive Reasoning: Weeping is heard in the backyard. Upon walking into the backyard, someone notices a man weeping over a dead dog with a gun in the grass. Assumptions are made without asking the man what really happened. This person runs home and posts on social media that the dog owner shot his dog and then wept over his deplorable action. Eventually the whole world may know of the dog owner’s assumed criminality.

Abductive Reasoning: Weeping is heard in the backyard. Upon walking into the backyard, someone notices a man weeping over a dead dog of some age with a gun laying in the grass. This person walks home believing the aged dog was sick and the man shot the dog out of compassion. He feels the man did the right thing.

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Deductive Reasoning is more trustworthy because many particulars are carefully evaluated before reaching a conclusion. This is the very same process used by police detectives. They gather as much forensic evidence as possible and then formulate a conclusion. No district attorney would dare submit a case for trial based solely on an inductive conclusion. The judge would throw it out. Why? Because defense attorneys love to make appeals especially when an easy outcome will result in a large recovery for both them and their client.

Understanding the difference between paradox and contradiction is extremely important. The Bible is full of paradoxical circumstances and misunderstandings, but a thorough investigation of every aspect will resolve the most difficult situations. Scoffers avoid making honest inquiries to discover truth. Rather, they prefer to search for anything which seems paradoxical and then portray it as a contradiction.


How should you respond to the scoffer? The most prudent way is to first ask for their *BEST* example of a contradiction. It forces the scoffer to be more cautious. Merely requesting *AN* example of contradiction engages them to launch a steady barrage of tenuous assertions that results in *quantity without quality*.

To their less than superior example of contradiction you may confidently respond with, “*That’s your best example? That’s your most convincing argument?*” Keep in mind this very simple concept. All contradictions are paradoxes but not all paradoxes are contradictions. A successful defense needs accomplish nothing more than a *reasonable* explanation.

FAULTY THEOLOGY

Many scoffers lack comprehension of the true attributes of God. They refrain from reading the Bible with an unbiased approach. Rather, they attempt to explain divine attributes with faulty theology. Even sincere and well-educated scoffers fail to evaluate Scripture with the mindset of a true researcher because they hunt and probe for verses which seem to conflict and then incorporate faulty logic resulting in faulty conclusions. Assumptions are their primary guide, not the Holy Spirit. Let us examine several paradoxes that have been touted as prime examples of contradiction to which a *reasonable* explanation will be presented.

DIFFERENCE IN PERCEPTION

On rare occasions it is neither a paradox nor a contradiction. For example. Look at this square.  What color is it? Red? Scarlet? Pink? Mauve? Lavender? Violet? How would you best describe its tone, hue, shade, or tint? Different people will come to different conclusions when viewing the same object. This is precisely the circumstance found in the Gospel accounts of a robe given to Jesus during trial. Some will contend that it is an excellent example of contradiction. “*They stripped him and put on him a scarlet robe,*” Matthew 27:28 whereas John 19:2 states, “*They put on him a purple robe.*” So, which color is it? Scarlet or purple? It cannot be both. Here we are presented with a difference of perception, not contradiction.

Did both Gospel writers have the same eye color? It has been clinically proven that people with brown eyes see the same object differently than someone with blue eyes. Did both writers see the robe at the same moment and from the same location? Reflected light can produce far different hues of color. My brown-eyed wife thinks her sweater is green with a bluish tint. My blue eyes say it’s blue with a greenish tint. Which color is it?

CHARACTER OF GOD

The nature of God is abundantly documented throughout Scripture. A few theologians have skillfully located passages that allow us to look into the inner soul of God, just as one would peer through a window to see the interior of a building such as a department store. God’s inherent character remains the same. His intrinsic character is always good and just. God inspired both Moses, the Prophets, and Gospel writers to record

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these attributes with precision. We see a consistent message of grace. We see an eternal hope as our reward for reconciling ourselves to God by confessing our sins and receiving His forgiveness. Judgement is usually delayed but forgiveness is often immediate. In spite of these God directed repetitions, scoffers willfully and intentionally search for differences which appear to conflict on a first reading without further scrutiny.

Malachi 3:6 “*For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.*” (NASB)

Exodus 32:14 “*So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.*” (NASB)

Which is it, changeable or unchangeable? The scoffer will contend that God is inconsistent, therefore unreliable and your faith is nullified. Believers will insist that each verse actually represents two entirely different concerns. Malachi presents God’s true divine nature. Moses thankfully explains in Exodus that God’s interaction with humankind will adjust or change *according to human behavior*. We are the ones who change, not God. His character remains the same. He is always good and anticipating our goodness (2 Chronicles 16:9).

God is not only consistent but also predictable. God will consistently punish the wicked for their sinful behavior, yet quickly forgive should they repent of their waywardness. Justice and mercy will be unchangingly dispensed according to our behavior. He is just to punish and good to forgive. No contradiction. Just another example of the scoffer’s intentional misrepresentation or vacuous understanding of divinity.

INSCRIPTION ON THE CROSS

Here we see the same pattern of skeptical reasoning. Each of the four Gospel writers report four different word arrangements of the Inscription nailed to the cross of Jesus. To the scoffer with a predilection of discovering fault and error, they see four different phrases which they assume to be an obvious instance of contradiction.

Matthew 27:37 “*And set up over his head his accusation written, ‘This Is Jesus The King of the Jews.’*” (KJV)

Mark 15:26 “*The inscription of the charge written against Him was: ‘The King of the Jews.’*” (HCSB)

Luke 23:38 “*There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’*” (ISV)

John 19:19-20 “*Pilate posted a sign on the cross that read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,’ The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, so that many people could read it.*” (NLT)

Scoffers will vociferously argue that these four conflicting accounts of the Inscription stand as irrefutable evidence of contradiction. They would say, “*Enough said!*” “*End of story!*” Once again, we notice the same pattern of *Inductive Reasoning* which is devoid of a thorough investigation of all relevant particulars. Christians will look beyond the narrow focus of the scoffer and investigate the full story through reliable history, culture, and most of all what the Gospel writers *actually said*.

Romans normally posted an inscription above the head of criminals at the time of execution as a severe warning to all passersby. Succinctly, “*mess with us and this will happen to you.*” Usually their Inscriptions contained three items: **name** of the accused, **city** of residence, and the **accusation** against them. Apostle John gives us the most complete account of the event. He identifies all pertinent information. Inclusion of Pilate’s name signifies official Roman government authorization for the execution. Each of the three items of an inscription are evident. John was an eyewitness to the incident.

- ❖ Name of the accused: Jesus
- ❖ City of origin or residence: Nazareth
- ❖ Accusation: King

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Inscriptions were not mentioned of the two others, but no mention does not mean their inscriptions did not exist. They were thieves. It was known by their inscriptions. John's account is the most exhaustive. It contains all the necessary elements of an execution plus his own commentary. He states the Inscription was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek incorporating the three primary languages of that day. Proximity to the city was important and he explains that many people would be able to read it. The execution was not inside a prison or in the country where few would notice. Why should we be astonished? John was the only Apostle who was at the crucifixion. Jesus spoke directly to him from the cross regarding the future care of His mother.

Most ancient historians included only those details that were important to them, unlike modern authors who are expected to include most if not all prominent details. Mark's account is the shortest. He is not interested in reporting everything. His gospel centers on the deeds of Jesus and the events that affected Jesus. Theology is very sparse in his gospel. Mark may not have been an eyewitness to this event. Nevertheless, the *Accusation* was his only concern. Jesus was *charged* with being a king and specifically the "*King of the Jews*," which usurps the authority of the Roman government that sanctioned the office of many local officials. No contradiction exists between Mark and John because they focused on entirely different aspects.

Actually, it would be suspicious if all four Gospels recorded the very same words and in nearly the same word order. Why would scoffers even anticipate that to be the case? How many present-day homicide detectives receive the very exact words and in the same word order from different people in separate locations? Difference is what authenticates eyewitness testimonies. If every account was exactly the same, a detective would naturally suspect collusion among them. Thus, it is normal to expect differences in multiple accounts.

Matthew and Mark share an abundance of the same material. Mark is thought to have been written first and then expanded by Matthew from his own experiences, since he was one of the twelve Apostles who lived with Jesus for three long years. Still, he adds very little to Mark's account of the crucifixion itself.

Luke bears a resemblance to both Matthew and Mark yet even manuscripts will differ in wording. Some manuscripts reference the three languages and some do not. This is a type of anomaly which Christians need to acknowledge. God inspired the original writers, however not all scribes faithfully copied their source document. It has been the work of dedicated textual experts to reconstruct what they believe to be the original.

OBEY THE GOVERNMENT

It's okay to ask biblical questions of trusted church leaders. That's how we learn more about God and what He expects of believers. It is not okay to question the truthfulness of the Bible yet that is the very thing to be found on many websites of the scoffer. Most are consumed with irrational attacks on the Bible rather than mastering what might be learned. The following two passages appear on a multiplicity of those websites. One could almost be convinced they copy each other because the words are often too similar if not sometimes exact.

1 Peter 2:13 "*The Lord wants you to obey all human authorities, especially the Emperor...*" (CEV)

Acts 5:29 "*Peter and the other apostles answered, "We must obey God, not human authority."*" (NCV)

Does a Christian always need to obey all the laws of a government? It is Apostle Peter who is speaking in both passages. Yes, we should obey government laws until they unreasonable conflict with the laws of God. When that line is crossed, we must stand with God. Ultimately each of us will answer to God, not a government. Eternity will be forever and it is God who will decide our final destiny. Best that we be on His side.

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AGE OF AHAZIAH

How old was Ahaziah when he became king of Israel? Was he 22 years of age or 42? This discrepancy appears in modern Hebrew manuscripts. It is difficult to resolve this one because most older English translations are simply being faithful to the modern Hebrew text.

2 Kings 8:26 “*Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign.*” (ASV)

2 Chronicles 22:2 “*Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign.*” (ASV)

Each verse is a faithful rendering of modern Hebrew manuscripts. This discrepancy is real and should not be ignored by Christians for this time the scoffer is correct. Is there any way to resolve this inconsistency? Well, there is one reasonable approach to resolving it. The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the most ancient Hebrew texts and predates the ministry of Jesus by almost two centuries. Of the more than 290 Old Testament quotes in the New Testament, about two-thirds are quoted from the Septuagint. A number of these manuscripts read twenty-two years as well as most ancient Syriac translations from Greek.

The American Standard Version of 1901 bears the discrepancy in 2 Chronicles 22:2 but the New American Standard of 1995 reads twenty-two as well as other more recent translations. They simply changed the numbers to agree with the more ancient Greek text instead of the later Hebrew text. A scribal error is the most convincing explanation because they occur in several manuscripts. For example, in the New Testament book of Hebrews 1:3, a later scribe of the Vatican manuscript writes in the margin a sharp complaint of an earlier scribe who changed what he did not understand and made it worse: “ἀμαθέστατε καὶ κακὲ, ἄφες τὸν παλαιόν, μὴ μεταποιεῖ” which is translated as “*Fool and knave, leave the old alone, do not change it!*”

Unlike Hebrew scribes who faithfully copied their source for posterity, Greek copyists were not thinking of a future New Testament collection and made some hurried errors, such as losing their place or misspellings. A professional textual expert would closely inspect this first copy. Thus, the Corrector’s corrections actually provided the trusted manuscript. Infrequently a second Corrector would be needed to resolve errors of the first. Several manuscripts have had multiple Correctors rectifying all previous attempts. Normally, four Correctors was the limit. It should be emphasized that God inspired the original authors of the Bible, not the scribes who repeatedly lost their place or misspelled words. Modern textual scholars have spent tireless hours, laboring to ascertain the original words from those copies and have been very successful.

HOW MANY TIMES DID GOLIATH DIE?

Camped near the valley of Elah were the armies of King Saul and the Philistines. Each were on separate mountains with a valley in between. David confronted a Philistine warrior named Goliath from the city of Gath. This encounter is well documented and so widely accepted by people from all walks of life and nationalities that the famous expression “*David and Goliath*” has been applied to many “*large versus small*” confrontations involving corporations, sports, elections, handicaps, construction projects, law suits, marketing, and the list goes on and on. David succeeded in killing his larger foe, but when did the *coup de gras* actually occur and how?

1 Samuel 17:50 “*Thus David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and he struck the Philistine and killed him; but there was no sword in David’s hand.*” (NASB)

1 Samuel 17:51 “*Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it.*” (NASB)

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Is it possible for someone to die more than once? Which of these weapons caused the death of Goliath? Sling or Sword? Both can't be right. A person can only die once and usually it is one weapon that delivers the death blow. This paradox is difficult to explain but one well respected scholar may have the answer.

Old Testament professor Robert Chisholm offers a very convincing explanation in his book: *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture.*

“The alleged ‘double killing’ of the Philistine in 17:50-51 can be explained reasonably when one takes a closer look at the Hebrew text. In verse 50 a hiphil form of מוֹת, ‘die,’ is collocated with ‘he struck down,’ while in verse 51 a poel form of מוֹת is used to describe how David killed the Philistine with the sword. The collocation of verbs in verse 50 has the nuance ‘dealt a mortal blow.’ The poel of מוֹת (v. 51) is used in eight other passages in the Old Testament. In three poetic texts, it appears to mean, simply, ‘kill, put to death’ (Ps. 34:21; 109:16; Jer. 20:17). But in a distinct narrative (all in Judges - Samuel) it appears to have a specialized shade of meaning, referring to finishing off someone who is already mortally wounded (Judg. 9:54; 1 Sam. 14:13; 2 Sam. 1:9-10, 16).

Abimelech’s statement (Judg. 9:54) is particularly instructive. He asked the armor bearer to kill him (poel) because otherwise people would say that a woman killed him (the verb is הָרַג, ‘kill’). So, who killed Abimelech? Two answers are possible and both are correct. The woman because she delivered a mortal blow that made death inevitable, and the armor bearer, in the technical sense, he delivered the death blow (poel). How did David kill the Philistine? Once again, two answers are possible and both are correct. With the sling and stone, David delivered a mortal blow to the head which made death imminent, and with the Philistine’s sword, he then delivered the actual deathblow – in a technical sense (poel).”

In other words, David hit Goliath in the forehead with a stone from his sling which gravely wounded him and from which he would eventually have died, yet at that moment, he was still breathing. Goliath was still alive! David had no weapon to finish the job, so he took the Philistine’s own sword and finished the task by cutting off his head. Thus, Goliath died only once – by his own sword – in the hands of David.

The *New Living Translation* follows the interpretation of Chisholm with the words *triumphed* and *kill*.

1 Samuel 17:50-51 *“David **triumphed** over the Philistine with only a sling and a stone, for he had no sword. Then David ran over and pulled Goliath’s sword from its sheath. David used it to **kill** him and cut off his head.” (NLT)*

VOICE OR NOT A VOICE

Saul (later Apostle Paul) was on his way to Damascus where he planned to arrest Christians and bring them to Jerusalem. While he was traveling, a bright light shone on him and also the men accompanying him.

Acts 9:7 *“The men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.” (KJV)*

Acts 22:9 *“They that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice...” (KJV)*

Did those traveling with Saul hear a voice or not? This paradox just might appear on more skeptic websites than any other verse comparison. They use the King James Version because, unlike other translations, it plainly uses the word voice which makes the conflict appear more obvious. So, how do other versions read?

Acts 22:9 *“Those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice.” (NASB)*

“The men who were with me saw the light but didn’t understand the voice.” (ISV)

“The people with me saw the light but didn’t understand the voice.” (NLT)

This paradox requires inspection of original languages, in this case Greek. Why do so many other translations prefer the word “understand” instead of “hearing?” Words in most later manuscripts are very

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different. In 22:9 the phrase ἀκούοντες μὲν τῆς φωνῆς translates as “*they heard the sound.*” The final word φωνῆς really means *sound* according to Strong’s Greek Dictionary, G5456. What’s the denouement? Men traveling with Saul heard some type of a sound but they did not understand it to be intelligible speech.

Now before attributing a defect to the King James Version, let it also be known that this Greek word is used interchangeably throughout much of the New Testament. Why scoffers keep using this example as a proof text of contradiction only demonstrates their copycat mentality, devoid of true academic scrutiny. Please review the following verse as one example where φωνῆς can be translated differently *according to the context.*

Revelation 1:15 “*His feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice (φωνῆς) was like the sound (φωνῆς) of many waters.*” (NRSV)

After reading these few reasonable explanations, you are either hopelessly in love with God or hopelessly unconvinced of His existence. Either way it will be your eternal decision. If not convinced, then I applaud your interest to this point. If you found these resolutions confirming your faith, then joyfully proceed.

COIN IN THE MOUTH OF A FISH

Skeptics and far too many professors of theology laugh and scoff at this event. “*Ludicrous! Interpolation of the first magnitude! Truly absurd! How could any Christian seriously believe such nonsense that a fish just happened to have a coin in its mouth to pay taxes!*”

Matthew 17:24-27 “*When Jesus and his followers came to Capernaum, the men who collected the Temple tax came to Peter. They asked, ‘Does your teacher pay the Temple tax?’ (25) Peter answered, ‘Yes, Jesus pays the tax.’ Peter went into the house, but before he could speak, Jesus said to him, ‘What do you think? The kings of the earth collect different kinds of taxes. But who pays the taxes—the king’s children or others?’ (26) Peter answered, ‘Other people pay the taxes.’ Jesus said to Peter, ‘Then the children of the king don’t have to pay taxes. (27) But we don’t want to upset these tax collectors. So, go to the lake and fish. After you catch the first fish, open its mouth and you will find a coin. Take that coin and give it to the tax collectors for you and me.’ ” (NCV)*



What are the odds of the first catch having a coin in its mouth? And why would a fish swallow any coin in the first place? Any backwoods fisherman can tell you why a fish might swallow a coin. Some of the best lures you can buy are “*gold or silver*” in appearance and “*spin*” through the water – *just like a falling coin!*

The words of Apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 ring in the ears of Christians who relish the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “*But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; (28) God chose what is low and despised in the world... (29) so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*” (ESV)

IN THE BEGINNING, GOD

What a profound introduction to the Bible, “*In the Beginning.*” These first words taken from the book of Genesis will prepare us for continued discoveries. Exposure to the fundamental truths about God should be thrilling and inspire one to learn even more. Self-discovery always seems to propel a learner into acquiring

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more knowledge than if spoon-fed. Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard began tinkering with electrical components in a rented one car garage in Palo Alto, California, during the 1930's. Hewlett-Packard has now become a multibillion-dollar company. All because of undeterred curiosity. Your personal investment into learning about God will deepen your appreciation and commitment. Learning was interestingly defined by the ancient philosopher Aristotle who postulated, "*Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.*"

The word God itself is so minuscule. How can three small letters adequately reveal the greatness and immensity of who is being presented. How may one even dare attempt to explain the infinite with such finite vocabularies? Etymological inquiries merely grope through European languages in despair. The Hebrew text imparts to us the word אלהים (*el-o-heem'*, Strong's Dictionary, H430) which is the plural form of אל (*El*). What is of particular interest to biblical research is that this plural form is coupled with a *singular* verb and a third-person *singular* pronoun. A unique and novel arrangement unheard of in modern languages.

הָאָרֶץ	וְאֵת	הַשָּׁמַיִם	אֵת	אֱלֹהִים	בְּרָא	בְּרֵאשִׁית
earth	and	heaven	?	God	he created	beginning

In this text God is understood as a plural entity. Trinitarians and Unitarians will have their predictable interpretations, but the fact remains that Elohim is a plural word appearing 2,601 times in the Old Testament. Our appreciation will be delightfully enhanced with the fourth grouping in the first sentence of Genesis 1:1 because it is untranslatable. It has mystified Hebrew scholars for centuries. Why? Because it is not a word. It is composed only of the first letter (א *Aleph*) and last letter (ת *Tav*) of the Hebrew alphabet.

Somewhat astonishingly, Jesus may have given these letters new meaning when He said, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega,*" Revelation 1:8. He was most probably speaking in Aramaic but John records His words in Greek. *Alpha* is the first letter and *Omega* is the last letter of the Greek alphabet just as *Aleph* and *Tav* are the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Was the first biblical writer inspired to place a symbolic acronym for Jesus right next to God? Might this peculiarity lend greater illumination to the complementary natures of both God and Jesus?

John 1:3 "*All things were made by him (Jesus); and without him was not any thing made that was made.*" (KJV)

Colossians 1:16 "*For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth.*" (KJV)

Hebrews 1:2 "*In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.*" (ESV)

Hebrews 1:10 "*In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundation of the earth and the heavens.*" (ISV)

Revelation 4:11 "*You have created all things, and because of Your will, they exist and were created.*" (HCSB)

Proverbs 30:4 "*Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?*" (KJV)

Who is this son? Peter informs us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,*" Matthew 16:16. (KJV) From the very beginning until the present age, Jesus the Christ in union with God the Father has created a magnificent world for us. A precious holy union without parallel.

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RAINBOW

When Noah and his family were permitted to depart from the Ark, they saw something intriguing that had never been seen before. A rainbow across the sky. It was a symbolic promise from God.

Genesis 9:12 *“The rainbow that I have put in the sky will be my sign to you and to every living creature on earth. It will remind you that I will keep this promise forever.”* (CEV)

Scoffers enjoy the opportunity to make fun of God. The rainbow seems to be one of their favorite targets accompanied with belittling remarks such as, *“How can a sovereign God create a universe and not understand the refraction of light?”* Websites of this nature rarely if ever insert disclaimers to inform readers that their allegations might be the result of a simple misunderstanding. No, we are usually presented with one supposed contradiction after another. *“Quantity over Quality.”* When have scoffers exhaustively and scientifically analyzed matters to any degree? When have they appealed to Hebrew or Greek in order to fortify their claims?

God fearing believers need only to suggest a reasonable explanation. In this case, the overall construct of the earth’s environment has not even been considered. Things were completely different at that time.

Genesis 1:7 *“God made the air and placed some of the water **above the air** and some **below it.**”*

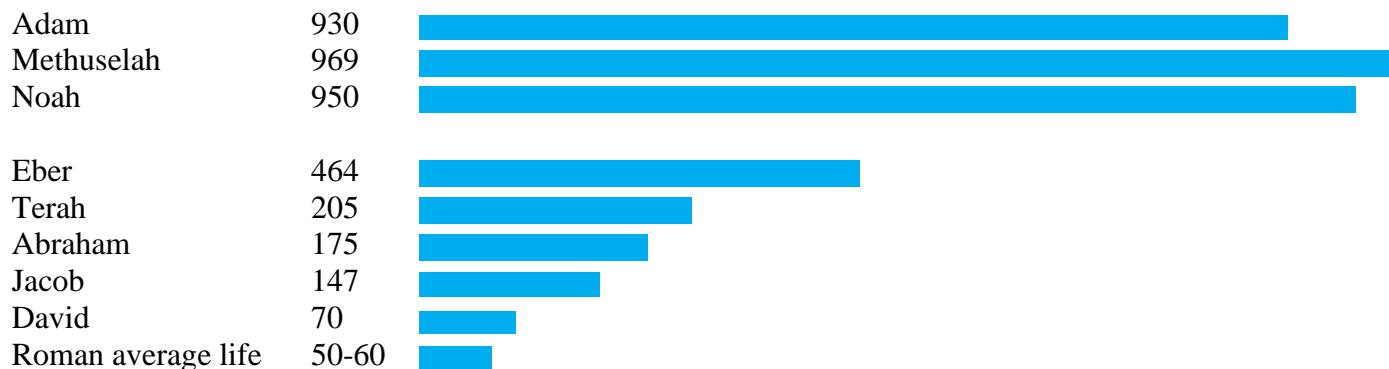
Genesis 2:6 *“A **mist** went up from the earth, and watered the whole surface of the ground.”*

Genesis 1:16 *“God made two powerful lights, the **brighter** one to rule the day and the other (lesser) to rule the night.”*

It seems quite plausible that the atmosphere nearest to the ground was a vaporous mist (2:6) that prevented direct sunlight from reaching the ground. Similar to a cloudy day when the sun appears much brighter than the moon at night. Rainbows need direct sunlight if refraction is to form a bow across a significant expanse of the sky. During this prolonged rainstorm, if the upper waters (1:7) descended to join the lower waters near the ground, there would be nothing to prohibit direct sunlight from refracting light into a bow across the sky.

LIFE EXPECTANCY

Cloudy skies might also explain the longevity of people before direct sunlight and exposure to harmful rays from various sources. This change in age is evident from a simple comparison of Old Testament men. Lifespans before the flood were over nine hundred years but life expectancy after the flood plummets century after century. There could be other unknown factors contributing to this change in ages. Some have suggested that those years may not have the same length as years in the modern era. Still, it remains a novel discovery.



WOMEN DURING THE CRUCIFIXION

There were numerous types of people observing the crucifixion of Jesus: soldiers, temple leadership, mockers, passersby, disciples, and, most of all, friends and family members. Some onlookers were women. They knew Jesus in a more personal way. His own mother was there. A few women had organized an auxiliary

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financial support group for His ministry (*Luke 8:2-3*). Once again in an attempt to build a case against the validity of the Bible and relegate the status of God its author, scoffers will offer tenuous proofs from each of the four Gospels. They suppose from a superficial reading that a contradiction exists between numerous accounts because the very same women were close to the cross yet also standing at a distance from the cross.

Women standing from afar:

Matthew 27:55 *“And many women were there beholding **afar off**, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.”*

Mark 15:40-41 *“There were also women looking on **afar off**: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him; and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem.”*

Luke 23:49 *“And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood **afar off**, beholding these things.”*

Women standing near the cross:

John 19:25-27 *“Now there stood **by the cross** of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.”*

First, Jesus was on the cross for at least three hours. Is it even plausible that the same people would stand in the very same place for that length of time? Nowhere in any Gospel account does it even hint that their location was the same for three long hours. As though their feet were somehow affixed to the ground. This wild assumption simply begs credulity. Second, in context, Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referring to the location of the women **after the death of Jesus** (*Matthew 27:50, Mark 15:39, and Luke 23:46*). John is referring to their location **before the death of Jesus** (*John 19:30*). It would only be natural for people to start leaving an event when their hoped-for outcome did not happen. When it was certain that Jesus had died, His followers decided to leave. But while standing at a distance and watching His body being removed from the cross, it would be entirely plausible that a few women might have returned to see where Jesus might be buried.

GOD SANCTIONED ANNIHILATIONS

On a few occasions God had ordered kings to completely annihilate entire nations without hesitation or exception: men, women, children, and livestock. Scoffers revel at the opportunity to deprecate the loving nature of God and picture Him as unloving enough to sanction the wholesale slaughter of entire nations with impunity. Predictably, scoffers make no effort to understand the full magnitude of the situation by asking the most appropriate question of all. *Why was it sanctioned? What factors influenced God's decision?*

One such example can be found in 1 Samuel 15:3, *“Now go and attack the Amalekites and completely destroy everything they have. Do not spare them. Kill men and women, children and infants, oxen and sheep, camels and donkeys.”* (HCSB) Children? Infants? Animals? Everything? Without reading the entire text it would appear cruel and indifferent. That is precisely the conclusion scoffers desire. What have they forgotten? The entire context! Specifically, the previous verse, *“I am going to punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel: how they attacked the Israelites as they came up from Egypt.”* (verse 2, CEB)

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Israel had been enslaved by the Egyptians for over four hundred years. They were a weakened people, living in a desert with little food or water, trudging on to a better place. The elderly and infirmed could not keep pace with the rest of the group. The Amalekites showed no mercy, fearing neither God nor man. Stragglers were butchered. For this barbarity, the God of Israel promised at a future time this savagery would levy a heavy price.

Deuteronomy 25:17-19 *“Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, how he met you along the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall come about when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget.”*

Deductive Reasoning sheds a far different light. After reviewing all particulars, now who is being unjust? King Amalek picked the fight. Wanton murder was his game. The God of Israel is fair. He remembers and rewards the good. He remembers and punishes the bad. He is consistent. Without partiality God openly manifests an equitable disposition. Christians should take note of this divine proclivity in the following texts.

“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off,” Romans 11:22. (KJV)

“For every one of us will have to stand without pretense before Christ our judge, and we shall be rewarded for what we did when we lived in our bodies, whether it was good or bad,” 2 Corinthians 5:10. (JB Phillips)

Before pointing a finger at God, let us remember that we humans do a pretty good job of annihilating each other. Nazi deathcamps with cyanide gas or the saturation bombing of Dresden and Cologne. Nuclear devastation to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Innocent men, women, children, infants, and cattle. Are we wise to accuse God with blood on our own hands? Each will accuse the other of starting the conflict and deserving the outcome. That is also God’s defense regarding the Amalekites. They slaughtered those who fell behind the main group: the elderly, weak, and diseased. The grace of God is wonderful but the justice of God can be severe. We need to remind ourselves that God is sovereign, which means His rules for us do not apply to Him.

TIMING OF THE CRUCIFIXION

At what time of the day was Jesus nailed to the cross? This one is too easy to reconcile. Perhaps it should not even be included in this exercise, for it was my intention to choose only the scoffer’s *best* examples. However, considering that they place such a high significance on the timing of the crucifixion, let us proceed to unravel the accounts. Following are the two biblical accounts in question.

Mark 15:24-25 *“And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the **third** hour when they crucified him.”* (ESV)

John 19:14-16 *“It was about the **sixth** hour. He said to the Jews, ‘Behold your King!’ They cried out, ‘Away with him, away with him, crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar.’ So, he delivered him over to them to be crucified.”* (ESV)

First, when did a day begin for Jews at that time of history? Papias and Clement of Alexandria write that Apostle Peter was the guiding influence behind the hand of Mark. Also see 1 Peter 5:13 *“Your sister church here in Babylon sends you greetings, and so does my son Mark,”* (NLT) Or Acts 12:12 *“When he (Peter) realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.”* Situated in the northern area of Galilee was Capernaum, the hometown of Peter. In this region the Jewish day began at 6:00 a.m. or at the rising of the sun. Both men were Jewish so predictably their **third hour** would have been three hours afterwards or 9:00 a.m.

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John was also Jewish so why does he state the *sixth hour*? The geographical location of John at the time of his writing is important. Fourth century bishop Eusebius writing in *History of Christianity* informs us that John spent his later years in Ephesus, a Roman city on the western coast of modern-day Turkey. He would naturally have been using the Roman time of day which began at midnight. But when did the actual crucifixion occur? Mark places the event at nine o'clock and John at six o'clock. It would appear that a conflict still persists. Relying on *Deductive Reasoning* as our preferred method of inquiry, let us analyze every detail of both accounts. We therefore shun conclusions until all details have been examined.

If we carefully note each word from John's narrative, he does not write that the crucifixion actually began at the sixth hour. Rather, the trial is already in progress at that hour since Pilate is still speaking to the Jewish authorities who delivered Jesus: "*about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!*" Thus, John is really beginning his narrative at the trial, not the future moment of crucifixion. Specifically notice in his account the word "about" (Greek, ὥσει, *ho-si'*, Strong G5316). Ancient historians rounded off time because they did not possess devices that could measure time in minutes or seconds. John begins his narrative *around* six o'clock during the trial which could have started much earlier. The crucifixion began after the trial so Mark's third hour or nine o'clock is *reasonable*. There is no variance of time between the two accounts.

DEATH OF JUDAS

A woman anointed the head of Jesus with very costly ointment. His disciples exclaimed this was a waste of good money (*Matthew 26:8*) because the ointment could be sold for a significant amount of money and then given to the poor. Judas went a step further than mere disapproval. He went directly to the chief priests and asked, "*What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver,*" (*verse 15*). The real motivation may be explained in John 13:2, "*The devil having now put into the heart of Judas.*" He was complicit with the promptings of Satan. Jesus had earlier accused him of being intimate with the devil. "*Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.*" John 6:70. (*ESV*) He was involved in ministry yet motivated by evil promptings. Judas was more interested in money. He seemed to be ruled by it, "*He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it,*" John 12:2. (*ESV*) Later the next morning when he came to his senses, realizing that Jesus would be put to death, he unsuccessfully tried to return the money. In remorse for what he had done, Judas committed suicide and there are two different accounts of his matter.

Matthew 27:5 "*And he went away and hanged himself.*" (*NASB*)

Acts 1:18 "*Falling on his face, he burst open in the middle, and all his intestines gushed out.*" (*ISV*)

We must carefully examine all pertinent details of these two accounts: every word or subtle difference. This incident was recorded by two different writers and most translators render nearly the same meaning. We may also dispense with scribal ineptitude because there is unanimity among the major manuscripts as confirmed by the United Bible Societies 3rd Edition of the Greek New Testament.

On a first reading of each account it is quite obvious that each author is focusing on different aspects of the same event. Matthew is concerned with the method of death. He hung himself. Luke does not actually tell us how Judas died. He describes a subsequent action, very possibly at a later time. "*Intestines gushing out*" is not a method of death but rather the result of a fall. However, let us examine these two accounts to see if one account might logically follow the other. Is it possible that each writer compliments the other?

We proceed with guarded speculation. Biblical commentators generally arrive at the same conclusion. The rope may have broken. Judas fell onto rocks where his intestines gushed out upon impact. But intestines do not normally gush out from the assumed height that a person would hang themselves. Carcasses of deer have been found at the bottom of quarries, largely still intact after falling from a great height. Deer have also been

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found lying by the roadside, also nearly intact. But there is one important consideration that might account for intestines gushing out of a man or an animal, bloating due to internal gases. If that should be the circumstance then at the moment of impact, internal gases would explode from the middle cavity.

Immediately following death carbon dioxide produces an acidic environment forcing cell membranes to rupture. Enzymes produce many types of gases. Rigor mortis causes muscles to become ridged and the outer skin to loosen because blood is no longer in circulation. If the dead body of Judas hung for an extended period of time, his bloated body could easily explode upon impact from a minimal height. This could explain why the body of the deer did not explode on the quarry floor. It was not bloated at the moment of impact. What caused the body of Judas to fall? The contemporary explanation among many biblical scholars is that the rope broke.

There is also another intriguing possibility if the rope was not defective. At some later time, a devout passerby upon discovering the dead body, intentionally cut the rope since Jews considered it against Mosaic law for the body of a dead person to continue hanging from a tree, especially after dark, "*Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree,*" Galatians 3:13. Even though this last explanation is a bit speculative, it is certainly within the realm of plausibility. In any case, the two accounts do not contradict each other. Matthew describes the method of death and Luke describes the aftermath.

MORNING TREK

Early in the morning on the first day of the week, several women proceeded to Jesus' tomb with spices to anoint his body. Scoffers insist the four gospel accounts are contradictory. John says it was dark. Mark claims the sun had risen. Matthew and Luke refer to the dawning of the day.

Matthew 28:1 "*Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.*" (ESV)

Mark 16:2 "*Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.*" (NASB)

Luke 24:1 "*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.*" (ESV)

John 20:1 "*On the first day of the week, early in the morning and while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and noticed that the stone had been removed from the tomb.*" (ISV)

We need only a bit of common sense to resolve this one. Dawn is that twilight period of the morning when light first appears until the sun rises above the horizon. It varies slightly depending on the latitude and season of the year from around 40 to 50 minutes. In the polar regions it can be more than 70 minutes.

John states that it was *early* and *still dark* when the women began their journey to the tomb. This is the earliest account of the four writers. *In darkness* each left their homes. Matthew and Luke are similar, *toward dawn* and *early dawn* indicates light was now appearing *while on their way* to the tomb. Mark presents us with the final version. *They arrived* at the tomb after the *sun had risen*. It is vitally important to examine every word within the context and intent of each gospel writer. There is no contradiction.

This writer has personally walked the streets of Old Jerusalem and can state that most streets are narrow, inclined, and with numerous curves right and left. Mark informs us (16:3) that uppermost on their minds was moving the large stone that was blocking the entrance to the tomb. Not to mention that it was also sealed by the authorities. If they paused briefly to discuss this matter, it might have taken 40 to 50 minutes, or perhaps even longer. Who says they were walking and talking at the same time? We can *reasonably* suggest that their morning trek could easily have been accomplished in a timespan from complete darkness until sunrise.

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EARTH ABIDES HOW LONG

Some biblical authors seem to indicate that the Earth will last forever while others say it will pass away. I have saved the most challenging paradox for last because a textual conflict seems inexplicable.

Abides forever

Psalm 78:69 “*And He built His sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which He has founded forever.*”

Ecclesiastes 1:4 “*A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.*”

Does not abide forever

Matthew 24:35 “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*”

Revelation 21:1 “*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.*”

Both Old Testament writers chose the word עָלָם (*‘ōlām*, Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary, H5769) which can mean both forever and also a very long time. This word is also found in 1 Samuel 1:22 describing the earthly life of Samuel, “*and he will always live there.*” (NCV) A few translators render such in Psalm, “*There he built his sanctuary as high as the heavens, as solid and enduring as the earth,*” (NLT), and also in Ecclesiastes, “*A generation comes and a generation goes, but the earth remains the same through the ages.*” (NET) Both writers were looking from a human point of view. People come and go but the Earth seems to continue forever.

Our last two authors give us a *prophetic revelation* of Earth in a future state. Jesus’ opinion is the most significant, for it is a prediction of Earth’s final structure. Jesus tells us by way of Matthew that His words are more important than anything else. Divine opinions will outlast everything. John relates a future transforming experience as he personally witnessed it. He presents us with an entirely different concept of the word new.

The word new comes in two Greek flavors: νέος (*neh'-os*, Strong, G3501) and καινός (*kahee-nos'*, Strong, G2537). “*No one pours new (νέος) wine into old wineskins,*” Matthew 9:17. In this context the word new refers to something coming into existence or perhaps very young after having just come into existence. New might also refer to something refurbished as in Revelation, “*a new heaven and a new (καινός) earth.*” The latter means that a pre-existing condition has been given a fresh new look. The former Earth still exists but now has a different appearance. The same appears in Colossians 3:10, “*and have put on the new (καινός) self.*” (ESV)

Someone paints the walls of a room with a different color of paint. The walls existed before but now the room has a fresh new look and sets a different mood. Scoffers fail to see that context plus intent of the authors are different. After scrutinizing grammar and definitions, we see a paradox that has been *reasonably* explained.

SUMMARY

Always trust *Deductive Reasoning*. It is more reliable and the only process of our legal system. In the field of substantive investigation, one needs to collect all the facts relating to the situation, no matter how trivial. Human hair, very small fibers, dental impressions left on cheese were key determining factors in some convictions. Thus, it is the little things that can make the biggest difference. Christians should analyze every aspect of a paradox in order to formulate a sound conclusion. Observe the actual words, cultural influences, original languages, witness locations, and timing of events. Leave no particular unexamined.

Scoffers on the other hand, prefer to use *Inductive Reasoning* whereby a biased conclusion is established first, after which they seek for a premise to support their conclusion. Why then should anyone trust inductive reasoning if a conclusion is established first? Most scoffer websites display biased lists of paradoxes without alternate explanations. One thing you will immediately notice is that each citation involves only a few words per incident. That’s it! Nothing more. As though their mention of only a verse or two should convince you that a contradiction exists, without further inquiry of any kind to ascertain facts, details, aspects, or key elements.

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In comparison, this writer has devoted several paragraphs and even segments of whole pages to exhaustively inspect every piece of information that would contribute to a logical and reasonable conclusion by means of *Deductive Reasoning*.

Please answer this question. If you are on trial for murder and innocent, which of these two methods of investigation would you prefer of the district attorney? Conclusion first, or after gathering all the facts?

Often quoted is the adage, “*A text out of context is a pretext*,” a common mistake of biblical interpreters from all walks of life. The serious Bible commentator must guard against slicing out just a portion of the text to construct an opinion. Scoffers might look at Psalm 14:1, “*There is no God*” and maintain that even the Bible says God does not exist. However, the full context reads, “*The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’*” Pride and presumption often go hand-in-hand. The Psalmist also said in 19:1, “*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.*” Wisdom and praise are the central themes of the Psalmist.

Even a God-fearing Christian may occasionally misunderstand Scripture without first evaluating the proper context. The book of James emphasizes *works* but Apostle Paul repeatedly emphasizes *faith* toward obtaining salvation. Hundreds of years ago Martin Luther wrote in the preface to his German translation of the New Testament, “*James’s epistle is in comparison a real strawy epistle, for it has no evangelical character about it.*” Does James and Paul disagree on prerequisites for justification toward receiving salvation? Paul is referring to justification *privately before God* who understands the true desires of our heart, whereas James is referring to justification *publicly before others* who cannot know the desires of our heart. God is pleased to see our *faith*. That is a private matter. *Works* is a public matter since that is all people can observe. Each author is simply giving us his side of the very same coin. Ultimately it is a matter of context and perspective.

Here is a quick listing of biblical paradoxes to which I have offered reasonable solutions. These do not represent an exhaustive collection of examples that may be gleaned from the Bible. Hopefully it has now been established for Christians that the preferred method of deductive investigation will yield more convincing results. Within this article I have explained paradoxes that I consider to be their best examples. If I can resolve their best ones, you should be equipped to adequately respond to their most insignificant ones.

- ❖ Men accompanying Saul heard a sound but did not understand or recognize it to be a voice.
- ❖ Original authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit, not scribes who frequently lost their place, misspelled words, or unknowingly conflated another source.
- ❖ Goliath died once – not twice. Original languages provide clear differences in meaning.
- ❖ Women at the crucifixion of Jesus. Unless there is assigned seating, people naturally move around during an open-air event.
- ❖ Coin in the mouth of a fish. Any backwoods bumpkin would know that shiny objects spinning through water make the best lures. Horizontal or vertical movement makes no difference to a fish.
- ❖ Was the robe scarlet or purple? It depends on a number of factors such as: *Eye color of witnesses? Location and angle of their view? Same time of day? Hue and tint of available light?*
- ❖ God is fair. He rewards the good and punishes the bad. God is consistent and predictable.
- ❖ When did the crucifixion begin? Around nine o’clock in the morning by today’s reckoning of time.
- ❖ Judas’ death. Matthew describes the method. Luke chronicles the aftermath.
- ❖ Women started in the dark, continued while dawning, and arrived at the tomb just after sunrise.
- ❖ The Earth will receive a fresh new look for Eternity.

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